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Two Big Pictures Make One

Author: Larry W. Wilson

From time to time it is important that we interrupt the normal process of **Bible study** in the *Day Star* and gather up a number of lose ends so that we don't lose sight of the big picture. Since this is our first issue for year 2000, I thought a summary statement about two topics presented in the past might be helpful and encouraging.

The Bible is like a diamond mine, just full of precious gems. Initially, raw gems are not very pretty until each one is cut and polished. Then, when a craftsman places them in a golden setting, the balance and beauty of many sparkling pieces come together to create a dazzling crown of gems fit for a king.

So it is with the Bible. I find that many people are informed on certain gems in the Bible, but they have not seen the glorious crown that contains all the gems!

The wonderful thing about seeing the crown (the big picture) is the balance and contribution that each gem offers to the sum of the whole. Of course, beauty is in the eye of the beholder and my view of the crown may be slightly different than yours, but I will do my best to share with you the big picture as I now understand it.

This summary statement is divided into two sections. The first part has to do with man's desperate need for salvation.

The second part has to do with the oncoming fulfillment of *apocalyptic prophecy*. Hopefully, as the second section reaches its conclusion, you will see how these two subjects converge to make one big picture. Keep in mind that these are summary statements and are meant to be as brief as possible.

If you are a recent subscriber of the *Day Star*, you may want to take advantage of WUAS' web site. It offers more detailed discussions on these and other recent topics.

Part I - Man's Desperate Need for Salvation

Before life on Earth began, a great angel called Lucifer lived in Heaven. Among created beings, He was the finest and most supreme angel. God especially honored him and all the angels adored him. He even stood beside the throne of the Most High.

Over the course of time, he began to covet the higher position of honor and authority held by Jesus. Lucifer's problem began with jealousy and with time, self-seeking ultimately corrupted his affection for Christ. Lucifer grew to hate Jesus and became especially bitter toward the Father when the Father refused to promote him to a position equal to or above that of Jesus. The Father patiently reasoned with Lucifer, urging him to change his heart and thoughts about Jesus, but to no avail.

Lucifer only became more defiant. To further his personal ambitions, Lucifer cleverly deceived a large number of angels using lies, innuendo and suspicion.

Ultimately, open rebellion erupted. It was clear that Lucifer was anti-Christ and one-third of the angels joined him in a failing attempt to usurp Christ's authority. Lucifer and one-third of Heaven's angels were forcibly captured and summoned before the Father.

They were convicted of high treason and sentenced to death because they had knowingly and deliberately committed irreparable acts of rebellion. As convicted felons, they would be kept "on death row" until every appeal to overturn their sentence had been exhausted.

Universal Benefit

Lucifer and the evil angels' execution was stayed because God infinitely saw the universal benefit for allowing them to live until every appeal had been made. God knows what He is doing. He knew the devil could not run nor hide from His omniscience, so escape was not a problem.

God also knew that a number of faithful angels had been affected by Lucifer's malicious claims and they needed time to see what Lucifer's rebellion would produce. God also knew that Lucifer would present himself and his case before the universe in the best possible light.

Thus, Lucifer would make his appeal for justice on the basis of his conduct. So, the universal benefit for allowing the devil to live was much greater than immediate execution. Of course, God foreknew the enormous price He would pay for allowing the devil and his followers to live.

However, He also knew the eternal problem that would develop when He tried to explain His actions if Lucifer was destroyed before everyone understood the nature of sin and rebellion. God foreknew the untold suffering and misunderstanding that sin would bring to His universe, and ultimately to His own Son.

But once sin occurred, God chose to allow sin to continue for a few thousand years so that sin might be seen and understood by everyone for what it really is. Sin afflicts every being the same. Sin is a loss of faith in God's abilities and rebellion against His righteous ways. (Note: When Lucifer finally put Jesus Christ on the cross, he removed any doubts that may have lingered in the minds of the faithful angels that he should be set free of the death penalty.)

Trust and Obey – There is No Other Way

The only way a created being can live with a mysterious and infinite God is through faith. None of God's creatures fully understand Him or His actions. He is infinite and His ways are not our ways. Therefore, it is necessary for us to blindly trust Him during periods of time when there is no understanding.

Faith in God's abilities and confidence in His righteous ways are the bare necessities for living

at peace with God. God always does the right thing for each of His children. God is righteous. God is not righteous because He says He is righteous; instead, God's subjects will declare him righteous at the end of sin's drama.

After a complete review of His actions, they will exonerate Him based on the basis of the evidence presented to them. Even the devil will finally admit that God is righteous at the end of the 1,000 years. (Revelation 20:12; Isaiah 46:23,24)

Likewise, the claims and actions of the anti-Christ, Lucifer, will be seen for what they are and everyone will agree that jealousy and self-seeking reduced him to nothing. He is the father of lies and the mother of rebellion against everything good.

Creation and the Fall

Sometime after Lucifer's eviction from Heaven, Jesus created man on the 6th day of Earth's Creation week. He placed a righteous nature within man and placed him within a beautiful garden home. Jesus also placed man under the obligation of law. He said, **"But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."** (Genesis 2:17)

Lucifer knew about this obligation and also, its death penalty. So, he waited for an opportunity to entice Adam and Eve into rebellion. Lucifer wanted Adam and Eve to disobey their Creator, hoping that Jesus would have to destroy them.

Disguised in the form of a glorious creature, the devil performed a masterful deception and led Eve to eat the fruit. Although Adam knew better, he also ate the fruit. With that act of disobedience, both Adam and Eve came under the penalty of law – immediate death by execution.

Eve had been tricked into disobedience and Adam, out of love for his mate, had chosen to share in her fate. According to the Bible, Adam and Eve were to be executed the very day they sinned. When Jesus saw their disobedience, He knew the Father would execute justice immediately.

Jesus rushed to the Father and offered to die in their place. The Father implemented a Plan of Salvation based on the death of His Son. From that time to this very day, Jesus has "stood in the way" of the angel of execution. But, a day of execution is coming.

Three Serious Losses

After Adam and Eve sinned, three things happened. First, they lost their righteous nature. Once they had a proclivity for right doing, now they had a natural propensity for wrong doing. Second, they were evicted from their garden home, just like Lucifer was driven from his Heavenly home.

God removed Adam and Eve from the garden because He did not want them to continue to eat

from the Tree of Life and live forever. Last, the guilty pair and Earth itself were placed under the curse of sin. The curse of sin is not the penalty for sin. The curse of sin includes sickness, suffering, inequity, injustice, sorrow and deformity throughout nature.

Yes, the curse of sin includes death, but not the second (eternal) death. The penalty for sin (the second death) is total annihilation. The penalty for sin comes by execution. God will execute the wicked at the end of the 1,000 years by calling down fire and brimstone out of the sky.

The death that we currently see, that is, death from cancer, AIDS, heart disease, murder, accidents and other physical maladies, is from of the curse of sin. All humankind is under the curse of sin and in various ways, we experience its consequences.

However, the good news is that no one needs to die the second death. God has made a way of escape. Even more, we can experience God's wonderful salvation and joyful contentment in our hearts right now.

Bottom Line

Here is the bottom line: Whenever a sinner comes to a place in his life where he or she is willing to put total faith in God's abilities and God's will, that sinner is covered by the righteousness of Christ's sinless life. In other words, when a sinner submits or becomes *willing* to go, to be and to do as the Holy Spirit directs in his life, that sinner is no longer under the penalty for sin. He or she receives the full assurance of eternal life on the basis of faith in Jesus.

The Holy Spirit bears witness to this assurance by giving us wonderful joy and peace within our hearts! When one becomes reconciled with God, the Spirit also compels us to be reconciled with each other. God's peace and joy surpasses all human understanding and all sinners can have it if they will open their hearts and surrender all to their Maker. Every born again believer experiences this oneness with God.

Please read the next three sentences carefully:

(a) Even though we receive Jesus as our Savior and accept His sacrifice on Calvary as our substitute, we still remain under the curse (consequence) of sin, but not under the penalty of sin, which is total annihilation at the end of the 1,000 years.

(b) Even though we may accept Jesus as our Savior and have the assurance of salvation, we are not sinless or perfect. Jesus enrolls all born again believers in a finishing school called Sanctification. The purpose of this schooling is to refine and polish our character so that we might enjoy the eternal company of God and angels.

(c) If we willfully choose to reject, neglect or ignore the Lord's sovereign authority over us, we are moving, as did Lucifer and his followers, toward the commission of the unpardonable sin. The unpardonable sin is committed when we shut our heart's door to the Holy Spirit. If a person is sincerely interested in living by faith in God, that is, if he is *willing* to go, be and do all that

God directs, then that person has not committed the unpardonable sin.

However, if at any time we want to stop doing God's will, we have the privilege of shutting God out of our lives, because He never removes our power of choice. Remember, Lucifer and one-third of the angels, as well as Adam and Eve, choose to rebel against God's authority while living in an unfallen state! So, be assured that if a person turns away from submission to God, He will remove the assurance of salvation from that person if he persists in rebellion.

We Can Avoid the Second Death

If you have not surrendered your life to Jesus and escaped the condemnation of the second death, you can do so right now.

Simply turn your heart toward Heaven and tell God three things:

(a) "Dear Lord, I have rebelled against you and I am sorry. Thank you for your promise to forgive me (1 John 1:9) and for the salvation offered through the blood of your Son, Jesus. Thank you Jesus for taking my penalty and dying in my place."

(b) "Dear Lord, through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, I am willing to go, be and do all that you impress upon me. As a steward of all that you have given me, I place my life, talents and assets in your hands. I have chosen to put my faith in your sovereign abilities and in your righteous ways, rather than in myself and my will."

(c) "Dear Lord, send the Holy Spirit to live within me. Open my eyes and guide me into all truth so that I may spiritually mature and walk in harmony with you. I need to love others as you have loved me. I need spiritual healing so that I can rise above my hurtful past and forgive those who have hurt me. I need strength to make my wrongs right. I need insight into the needs of others, so that if possible, I can help them. I need a personal hunger and thirst for your truth so my soul can be filled to overflowing. I need your grace today to resist the devil and experience the fullness of life that you intended for me to have. Amen."

The essence of this prayer, offered each day, will change your life.

Part II - What Does the Future Hold?

The second part of this summary is a brief presentation about coming events as I understand them. This prophetic summary may be considerably different from what you have heard before. If this is the case, I ask readers who are not acquainted with me to give me a measure of grace as I introduce you to an interesting drama that springs from the Bible.

I have chosen to provide only a few Bible texts to support this drama, because the conclusions are based on so many texts that the flow of the story would be interrupted. Also, if I presented 1,000 Bible texts to "prove" the validity of my prophetic concepts, in the final analysis, my understanding of Scripture will not change your understanding of Scripture *unless* your study of

Scripture has produced questions that are satisfied by my answers.

Key Words: Imminent Upheaval

I believe the Great Tribulation will commence imminently, any day now. As I understand the Bible, the Great Tribulation will begin with a global earthquake that has no previous equivalent. (Rev 8:2-5) This earthquake will paralyze the whole world. In rapid succession, four judgments will occur and these will engulf the whole Earth. All travel, communication, banking, commerce, manufacturing and distribution systems will be disrupted. The first judgment after the earthquake is fire.

One-third of the Earth will be set on fire by meteoric showers of burning hail. The second judgment is water. An asteroid impact will occur in an ocean and the resulting tidal waves will destroy millions of people who live along the coasts of affected nations. The third judgment is poisonous waters. A second asteroid will impact a continent. The impact will cause a shift in tectonic plates and large underground aquifers will become contaminated with deadly toxins and bacteria, resulting in contaminated water supplies over a very large geographic area.

Millions of people will drink the deadly water out of desperation and die. The fourth judgment is darkness. The Bible predicts a period of intense darkness will follow. Perhaps the darkness is caused by a large number of volcano eruptions. The light of the Sun and Moon is easily blocked by ejecta and debris from volcanic eruptions. The consequence of the darkness is impossible to calculate. In a word, world famine will begin. Crops cannot grow without a large number of consecutive days of sunshine.

Extended darkness also has a depressive effect on people. Perhaps the coming physical darkness can be compared to the spiritual darkness that presently covers Earth. Certainly, when these judgments of God’s wrath begin, many people will become serious about Jesus’ authority and power. That’s right! Jesus is the King of kings who directs these end-time judgments.

The Gospel Proclaimed

Just before the great earthquake occurs, Jesus will personally select and empower 144,000 people from all over the world and from every religious body. These people will be His "spokespersons" during the Great Tribulation. They will proclaim the eternal gospel through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to the entire world. The 144,000 will present three messages from God that will test and separate the people of the world into two groups. (Rev. 14:6-12)

One group will submit to Jesus, the other will stand in defiance against His authority. The first testing truth will be a mandate to reverence Jesus and worship Him by obeying His commandments. The problem with the worship of Jesus is that the world does not generally respect His seventh-day Sabbath as commanded in the fourth commandment. The second testing truth will be a mandate to resist the laws of the world’s crisis government (Babylon) that forms in response to God’s judgments.

The last testing truth will be a mandate to refuse the mark of the beast. I believe the *mark* of the beast will be a tattoo showing membership in the world union established by the anti-Christ. Of course, many people already know the *mark* of the beast is evil, but few people understand the circumstances under which the mark will be issued. To choose or reject the mark will be a life and death issue. Either a person joins the world union established by the anti-Christ or he will be cut off from every necessity for life.

The righteous will literally have to live by faith alone.

Judgments and Reactions

Because the coming manifestations of Jesus' wrath will inflict a fatal blow on every infrastructure known to man, and because 1.5 billion people will perish within the first few months of the Great Tribulation, there will be a global "knee jerk" religious revolution of unprecedented proportion. This crisis revolution will be propelled by terror and anxiety caused by the events manifesting God's anger. Man's response is well defined in Revelation.

Religious leaders in every nation and culture will clamor for legislation, asking for laws with the severest penalties against those people who do not worship and honor God according to custom. (Sunday laws will be enacted in Christians countries, Saturday laws will be enacted in Israel and Friday laws will be enacted in Moslem countries.) Politicians will have no choice. They will suspend the rights of their citizens and support the claims of clerics because they are too afraid of an angry God.

Clerics will claim that the *only* way to stop these horrible manifestations of God's wrath is to legislate respect for God and His holy day of worship. As a result of martial law enforcement all over the world, the 144,000 and those who believe their message, will soon be identified as outlaws.

They will be portrayed as rebels resisting the sincere efforts of clergy and government leaders who are trying to appease God with repentance. Consequently, the three testing truths presented by the 144,000 will be deemed inflammatory and provocative. It is likely that most of them will be killed in the line of duty for their testimony.

The Anti-Christ

About two years into the Great Tribulation, Jesus will allow the devil himself to physically appear on Earth and he will claim to be God. Jesus allows this because most of the world's inhabitants will have rejected the gospel by this time. Therefore, Jesus turns the world over to the devil to bring the drama to a climax. The devil will deceive a large number of the world's population by demonstrating amazing miracles. He will lead those who refuse to believe the eternal gospel to their destruction.

Within the span of a year, he will gain political and religious control of the world and set up ten kings to rule over the Earth. That ancient serpent, the dragon (the original anti-Christ) will

masquerade as God and he will decree that religious distinctions are obsolete. He will establish and impose a one-world church/state with himself as king of kings (the world's political ruler) and lord of lords (the world's religious leader). To demonstrate devotion and allegiance to his one-world union, members will be required to wear a tattoo (the mark of the beast).

Rations for food, water and medical supplies will only be available to those who belong to the union and wear its tatoo. The tattoo will either be a "666" on the right hand of rank and file members or a tattoo on the forehead of Satan's governors or leaders. The tattoo on the forehead is meant to mock the 144,000, who will eventually wear the name of Jesus and the Father on their foreheads after they are redeemed! (Rev 14:1)

When the mark of the beast is finally implemented, and the devil's world empire is in control of Earth, God's offer for eternal life is withdrawn since every decision has been made.

Wrath Without Mercy

The seven *last* plagues begin to fall after every person has made a decision about the gospel. The plagues last for about 75 days and contain the merciless vengeance of Jesus on the wicked for their defiant rebellion, and their role in killing and torturing His saints. During the fifth plague, Jesus unmasks the devil. The world will finally see who the anti-Christ really is. The wicked will be totally disillusioned because they put their faith in him!

They realize too late that they have been royally duped because they did not love truth and righteousness. They will clearly see how they have become anti-Christ, just like their leader. They will be filled with terror when they hear that Jesus, the Christ, will be appearing in a few days.

The devil will prey on their hopelessness. He will rally the wicked with their only hope of survival. He will urge them to join him and his angel forces in armed warfare against Jesus as He appears in the clouds. Of course, the devil and his army are soundly defeated at the Second Coming.

Jesus slays them with a powerful command that comes from His mouth. Jesus will call the righteous dead to life and the saints who have lived through the Great Tribulation will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. Then, the saints go with Jesus to the New Jerusalem and spend the next 1,000 years in Heaven taking care of business.

Resolution Occurs and Sin is Destroyed

During the 1,000 years, the saints will determine the punishment of the wicked. In God's system of justice, there is judicial equilibrium: An eye for eye, a tooth for a tooth, life for a life. At the end of the 1,000 years, Jesus and the saints will descend within the New Jerusalem to Earth. Then, Jesus will resurrect all of the wicked. Lucifer will lead the wicked hordes in a final effort to destroy it, but Jesus stops them in their tracks. They will stand silent before His glorious white throne for three reasons.

First, Jesus will review and explain to each person why He could not grant them eternal life. Second, Jesus will explain the judgment of the saints. Each wicked person will be told how long he must suffer in the coming lake of fire until restitution for his evil deeds has been paid for in full. Last, Jesus presents a panoramic drama to everyone who has ever lived, the whole story of sin beginning with Lucifer.

When the presentation is finished, every knee will bow saying that God is righteous because He completely demonstrated His righteousness during the existence of sin. Even the devil will confess that God is righteous, not out of remorse for His sin and rebellion, but based on evidence that cannot be controverted. When the wicked finally see the devastating results of their evil choices and compare it with God's righteousness, and when they see with their own eyes all they *chose* to forfeit, the resolution of the sin problem finally occurs.

Fire falls from Heaven and when the wicked have met their debt for restitution, they are annihilated. Sin and sinners will be no more! God will wipe away every tear. Jesus will create a New Heaven and a New Earth and the saints will live happily ever after *with God* because they have *faith* in His abilities and righteousness that will never waver. (More than 500 texts supporting these conclusions can be found in the free e-book, Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled*, or* order a paperback copy by calling (800) 475-0876.

Two Common Bible Questions

Author: Larry W. Wilson

WUAS receives many questions in the mail each week. If several letters repeat the same question, then I like to respond to them in the Day Star and hope the response can benefit all our readers. This month, I have chosen two questions. Keep in mind my answers are summary responses and are not exhaustive in their treatment of the issues.

First Question

Many preachers teach that the saints will rule and reign with Christ on Earth during the 1,000 years of Rev 20:1-4. You, however, say the Earth is desolate and the saints are in Heaven during that time. Please explain why you differ. . .

Part 1: Jesus said, Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am [going], there ye may be also. (John 14:1-3, KJV, insertion mine)

These verses indicate three things:
(1) Jesus departed from Earth to go and prepare a place for His disciples;
(2) Jesus will return to Earth to receive the saints; and
(3) He will take them to Heaven where they will live with Him in His Father's house.

The language Jesus used in these verses indicates the saints are going to leave this planet at the Second Coming. Jesus did not say, I will come again, so that I may be received by you. Instead, He indicated that He would receive the saints unto Himself, so that they could live with Him in the mansions He had prepared for them when He left the Earth the first time.

We know that Jesus ascended to Heaven. (Acts 1:11) The location of God's throne and the Father's house is Heaven. (Matt 6:9; John 14:12; Col 3:1) Jesus will descend from Heaven at the Second Coming and call the righteous dead to life. (John 5:28,29; 6:39,40) The saints who are living at the time of the Second Coming will be caught up together with the resurrected saints in the air to meet the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17)

The saints fly through the air to meet the Lord because the saints are leaving Earth. Their destination is the mansions that Jesus has prepared for them.

Part 2: Revelation 20:3 says, “He [the angel from Heaven] threw him [the devil] into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.” Some people interpret this verse to mean that life on Earth during the 1,000 years will dramatically improve because the devil will not be allowed to deceive the nations.

This would be a reasonable conclusion if it were the only text on the subject, but Rev 20:3 must be aligned within the larger context. Read the context of Rev 19:11 through 20:15 carefully and notice several key points. Before I summarize them, a brief comment is necessary.

The coming Antichrist (alias false prophet, alias lamb-like beast, alias man of sin, alias the beast from the abyss) will be a physical apparition of the mighty angel Lucifer. (See previous Day Star issue: “The Four Beasts of Revelation Exposed!”) When Lucifer and his demons were cast out of Heaven, they were cast into the Earth. (Rev 12:9, KJV) Currently, the devil is “locked up” in the Abyss, that is, he is confined to the spirit realm.

At the appointed time, however, God is going to unlock the Abyss and allow the devil with his angels to gloriously and physically appear before the people of Earth as a miracle working personation of God. (2 Thess 2:1-12; Rev 9:1-11; 13:11-18)

This incredible drama will last for about a year and a half. At the Second Coming, Jesus will destroy the physical personation of Lucifer (the false prophet) and the Beast (the crisis government which Lucifer leads) by casting them into a great lake of fire. Everyone having the mark of the beast will be slain by a command (the sword) that comes from the mouth of Jesus. Then, that same mouth will call the righteous dead out of their graves and they will fly toward Jesus.

The remaining people on Earth, the saints, will join the righteous dead to meet the Lord in the air.

Notice that Jesus destroys everyone on Earth at the time of the Second Coming except the saints and they will be removed from Earth! (Rev 19:15-21) Also notice that the Beast and the False Prophet will be destroyed by fire and the birds will gorge themselves on the flesh of all the wicked. Earth will be desolate during the sabbatical millennium.

Part 3: During the 1,000 years, the saints will be living in their mansions in Heaven. They will also reign with Christ in a court of law. The saints will be given the responsibility and authority to sentence the wicked. The saints will determine the appropriate suffering (as in restitution, see Rom 12:19) that each wicked person must suffer (including Lucifer and his angels). (1 Cor 6:2,3; Rev 20:4)

Part 4: At the end of the 1,000 years, the Holy City (Father’s House) will descend from Heaven with the saints inside. (Rev 21:2) The wicked of all ages will be resurrected, so that (a) they can meet their Maker, and (b) understand the reasons for their upcoming restitution and execution. (Rev 20:5, 12-15) Lucifer will be released from the Abyss at the end of the 1,000 years.

Once again he will deceive the nations and personally persuade them to attack the Holy City. (Rev 20:7-10) God responds to this insolence. Fire falls from Heaven, suffering begins (restitution) that culminates with the complete annihilation of the wicked (eternal death). Then, Jesus will create a new Heaven and Earth and the saints live happily ever after!

Second Question

My church teaches that Jesus was in the tomb three days and three nights that He died on Wednesday at sundown and was resurrected at the end of the Sabbath, just as Sunday was beginning. The Wednesday crucifixion produces three whole days and three whole nights in the tomb. How can you rule out a Wednesday crucifixion?

Part 1: This question has a long history of frustration and controversy. Most of the consternation exists because few people understand the methods used in Christ's day to measure time in months and years. Fortunately, there are two witnesses that resolve this issue the actions of Jesus and the astronomical position of the Sun and moon.

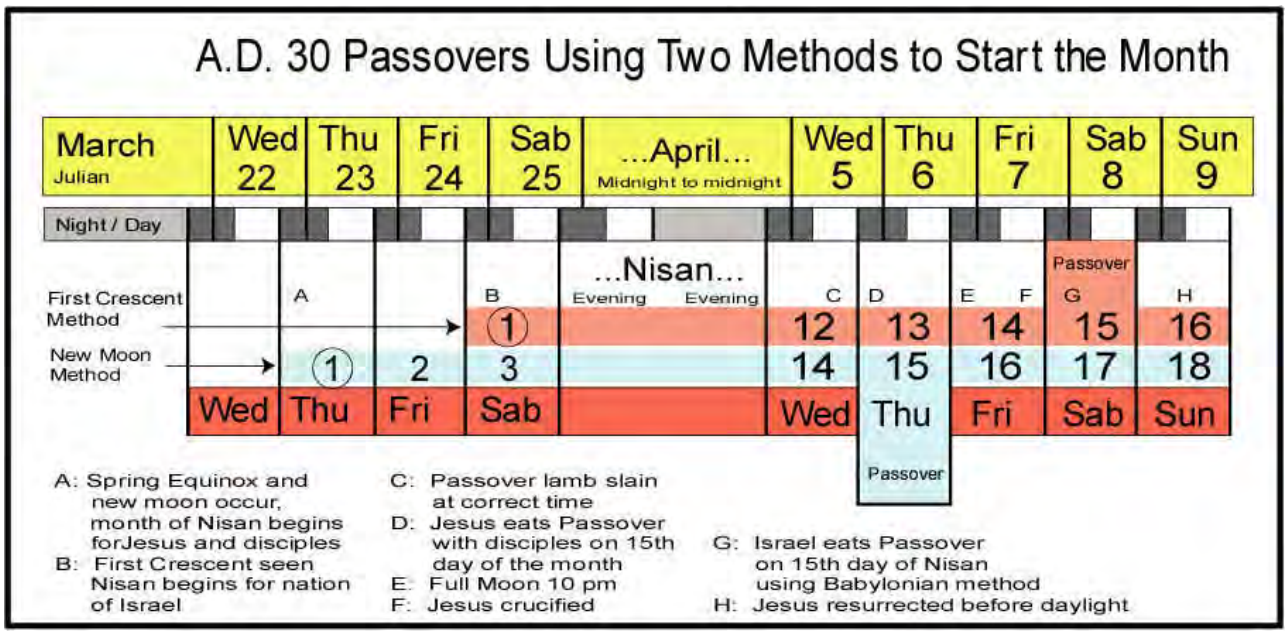
To begin this discussion, let me review the timing and order of events regarding the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread for which there is general agreement:

1. 10th day of first month: Passover lamb set apart (v3)
2. 14th day of first month: Passover lamb slain at twilight as the 15th day begins and its blood is placed on the door posts.
   (v6,7)
3. 15th day of first month: Passover lamb eaten that night (v8)
4. 15th - 21st day of first month: Feast of Unleavened Bread
   begins after 14th day ends. (v12-18)

The importance of the specific timing of these two feasts will become obvious as you read the rest of the article.

Part 2: Based on this information, we face two questions of paramount importance in our quest to determine the specific day of the crucifixion. 1) What year did Christ die, and 2) how does God mark the commencement of a month? To begin, we need to determine the year of Christ's crucifixion, so the position of the Sun and new moon can be determined. The position of the new moon also helps us determine which day of the week the 15th day of the month occurs.

I find, for a host of reasons beyond the scope of this discussion, that Jesus was crucified in A.D. 30, the middle year of the 70th week. The 70th week began in the Spring of the Sunday year, A.D. 27 and ended with the sabbatical year, A.D. 33. Therefore, the middle year of the 70th week is a Wednesday year, A.D. 30. See below:



I also find, for reasons beyond the scope of this study, that God reckons a month from one new moon to the next. (Isa 66:23) In fact, God required Israel to observe new moon feasts at the first of each month, so the first day of each month was prominently known throughout the nation. (Num 10:10; 28:14, Col 2:14-16, NIV) (A new moon is a totally dark moon and is usually unobservable, therefore, the beginning of a new month was determined by calculation about two weeks before it took place.

The first day of the month was determined by subtracting the age of the current full moon from 29.53 days, which is the length of time between full moons. This may vary between 13.91 and 15.54 days.)

Scholars know that the post-exilic Jews abandoned God's method for reckoning new moons and adopted the Babylonian practice of starting a new month with the sighting of a new moon crescent. Using the Babylonian method, the onset of a month is often 2 or 3 days later than God's method.

This difference is why there is so much confusion about the time of Christ's death. Here is the source of the confusion: Jesus and His disciples observed Passover according to God's synchrony for the month, although the nation of Israel at that time was observing Passover according to Babylon's method.

Although gospel writers do not indicate which calendar they used for dating various events, which method they used can be determined by examining the actions of Jesus and the astronomical positions of the Sun and moon.

Part 3: According to solar and lunar tables posted at the U.S. Naval Observatory web site (http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/SpringPhenom.html) for A.D. 30, the chart on the previous page shows the position of the Sun and moon, as well as the course of events during Passover

in April, A.D. 30, using the Babylonian method for starting a month. Notice how our Julian calendar and the Jewish calendar align so that Sabbath, April 8 is Passover.

Part 4: The gospel writers indicate that Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples on the day before His death. The disciples records do not indicate anything unusual about eating Passover or beginning the Feast of Unleavened Bread at a time that is not in harmony with the national Passover. (Matt 26:17; Mark 14:12)

Nor do they offer any explanation for killing the Passover lamb on Wednesday afternoon and eating it on Thursday night, although the national Passover lamb was killed on Friday. The reason for these divergent events stems from the difference in marking the beginning of the month. It would be foolish to assert that the Creator did not know the proper time for Passover. Actually, the actions of Jesus confirm what is Truth, for He is the Truth. (John 14:6)

Jesus correctly observed Passover and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread with His disciples on Thursday, the 15th day of the month using God's method for reckoning monthly cycles. Since the new moon occurred on Wednesday, the same night as the Spring Equinox in A.D. 30, the 15th day of the first month is a Thursday. The actions of the Creator are totally synchronous with the instructions He gave Moses in Exodus 12!

Notice the timing of the events on the chart following God's synchrony for starting the month.

Part 5: The mystery is solved. Jesus celebrated Israel's final Passover on Thursday night, at exactly the right time with His disciples, on the 15th day of the first month. The alignment of the Jubilee calendar, the 70th week, the Sun and moon, plus the actions of Jesus all pinpoint the time of Passover in A.D. 30 as Thursday night. The actions of Jesus and the astronomical position of the Sun and moon are two witnesses that confirm the truth.

No wiggle room is left because no other year provides the precise alignment of the Sun and moon with the evidence recorded in Scripture!

I find three interesting points in regard to the Thursday evening Passover. First, Jesus actions must be interpreted as a confirmation of the synchrony of time according to the calendar that He established at the Exodus. Second, Jesus ended the paschal sacrifice that Thursday night. While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, take and eat; this is my body.

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28) With these words, He announced the end of 1,467 years of paschal lamb sacrifices and initiated the Lord's supper. (John 13, 1 Cor 11) The following day, He brought the Levitical code to an end. (Heb 7:12, Col 2:14-16)

Last, the actions of Jesus confirmed by the positions of the Sun and moon indicate the nation of Israel was not observing Passover on a day synchronous with God's will at the first Advent. It is ironic that now, just before the second Advent, most of the world worships God on days that are

not synchronous with His will either.

Part 6: Finally, Jesus said, For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matt 12:40) Based on the above information, there is no alternative but to interpret the words of Jesus as referring to days and nights inclusively, that is, any part of a day begins and ends the count. (See Genesis 7:12,17 and 2 Kings 20:1-11 for good examples of inclusive reckoning.)

The gospel evidence of two different times for Passover indicate two dating schemes the actions of Jesus and His disciples are in harmony with God's will and the alignment of the Sun and moon is conclusive. Jesus ate the true Passover with His disciples on Thursday night.

According to the Babylonian method for beginning a new month, Jesus died on Friday, rested in the tomb over Sabbath from His work of salvation and was resurrected on Sunday to serve in Heaven's court as man's High Priest (Heb 7:24-26). It appears that Jesus was dead for about 40 hours. More importantly, the Bible also indicates that He is alive forevermore!

I have prepared a study on God's synchrony of time that addresses this topic, as well as the Jubilee calendar and prophetic time-periods in greater detail. A hard copy is available for $5 (includes postage) or you can download it for free at our web site: (Great Clocks Article).

Chronology of The Crucifixion Week - A.D. 30

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The chronology and dating of the crucifixion week has been a matter of intrigue for centuries. A harmonious resolution of this subject is quite simple once the reader understands the synchrony of four calendars. First, the Creation calendar defines the commencement of a day at evening, thus Sunday night precedes Sunday light. (Genesis 1)

Second, the Roman calendar defines the commencement of a day at midnight, the result is that Wednesday night and Thursday morning share the same darkness but midnight splits the night into two dates. Third, the Creation calendar defines the commencement of a month with the conjunction of a new moon. (Numbers 28:14; 1 Samuel 20; Isaiah 66:23)

Fourth, the ancient Babylonian calendar, later adopted by the Jews, defines the commencement of a month with sighting the first crescent of a new moon.

After the Babylonian exile, the Jews were divided on the date of the observance of Passover. Some Jews insisted on following Creation's calendar, that is, Nisan 1 began on the day of a new moon. Jewish leaders, however, insisted on using the Babylonian method for determining the first day of each month. The High Priest waited until the first crescent of the new moon was sighted before declaring the commencement of Nisan 1.

Because the conjunction of a new moon and the sighting of the first crescent of a new moon in Jerusalem is typically 16 to 40 hours later, the celebration of two Passovers on two different days in Israel was not uncommon. In fact, the national Passover usually occurred two days later than the Passover observed by conservative Jews.

For centuries after the resurrection of Jesus, Christians argued over the observance of Easter. Some Christians wanted to observe Easter on Nisan 16 the actual *date* that Jesus arose. Others, especially Roman Christians, wanted to observe Easter on the Sunday that followed Passover to commemorate the *day* of Christ's resurrection. Finally, the emperor Constantine decided to end the controversy by disconnecting the time of Easter from the Jewish Passover.

To defend this position, he contemptuously referred to the practice of the Jews observing two Passovers in a year as evidence that one should not trust their calculations for determining the arrival of Easter. He wrote, "They [the Jews] do not possess the truth in this Easter question; for in their blindness and repugnance to all improvement, they frequently celebrate two Passovers in the same year. (Eusebius, Vita Const., Lib iii., 18-20, insertion mine)

The celebration of two Passovers is odd because God commanded the observance of Passover on Nisan 15! What happened?

The presence of two calendars explains the presence of two Passovers during the Crucifixion week. The Bible clearly states that Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples on Nisan 15 (Mark

14:14-18; Luke 22) and the Bible indicates He died on the cross just before the national Passover which took place on Nisan 15 (John 18:28).

Evidently, the Creator followed the Creation Calendar for determining the date of Passover whereas Jewish leaders used the Babylonian Calendar to determine the date for Passover. Knowing there are two calendars in play in Scripture and these two calendars are two days apart, the following is a presentation of the events that occurred during crucifixion week.

The following outline presents the events of the Passion week in chronological order. Remember, a day begins at sundown and the dates given to each day reflects the presence of two calendars; the Creation Calendar **[C]** and the Babylonian Calendar **[B]**. As you read through the course of events, notice this phenomenon: The chronological order of events is preserved by each gospel writer. There are some slight variations among the gospel writers on the timing of events, but the order of events is not altered.

This is a crucial point. Each writer tells the story in its order and all four agree on the order of events! Because the gospel writers base their statements about timing on both calendars, the timing of events reveals which calendar they are using.

C= Creation Calendar **** B = Babylonian Calendar

	C	**B**		
Nissan	11	9	Sunday Night	
			Sunday Light	Jesus Arrived in Bethany (John 12:1)
Nisan	12	10	Monday Night	Mary washes Jesus' feet at Simon's house (Mark 14:1)
			Monday Light	Jesus goes to temple, publically rebukes the leaders of Israel (Matt 23) Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives – predicts end of Jerusalem and world (Matt 24,25) Judas goes to chief priests offering to condemn Jesus (Mark 14:10, Luke 22:1) So, chief priests hold meeting to plan the death of Jesus (Matt 26:3-5)
Nisan	13	11	Tuesday Night	
			Tuesday Light	Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey (John 12:12-16)
Nisan	14	12	Wednesday Night	
			Wednesday Light	Disciples make

				preparations for Passover meal (Mark 14:12, Matt 26:17)
Nisan	**15**	13	**Thursday Night**	Jesus ate Passover at midnight with disciples (Mark 14:17,18) Jesus predicted His betrayal (Matt 26:20,21) Jesus eager to eat this Passover *before* He suffers (Luke 22:15) Judas leaves after midnight meal to betray Jesus (John 13:30)
			Thursday Light	They sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives (Matt 26:30) Jesus spent the day talking to the disciples. (John 13:36-16:33) Jesus predicted the scattering of the disciples (Matt 26:31,32) Jesus prayed for His disciples. (John 17)
Nisan	16	14	Friday Night	Jesus takes Peter, James and John into Gethsemane. (Matt 26:36) Jesus betrayed and arrested . (Luke 22:44-47) Peter denied knowing Jesus. (Luke 22:60,61)
			Friday Light	Jesus taken before the chief priests and elders. (Luke 22:66, Matt 27:1) Jesus taken to Caiaphas then to Pilate. (John 18:28) Jesus taken to Herod. (Luke 23:7,12) Pilate offers to release prisoner to Jews for their Passover. (John 18:39)
Jesus Crucified:		–		Jesus crucified about the third hour. (9 am) (Mark 15:25)
(April 7, A.D. 30)		–		Darkness covered the land from noon to 3 pm. (Mark 15:33, 34) Jesus died about the ninth hour. (3 pm) (Matt 27:46) Jesus' body was not prepared because Sabbath was so close.

				(Luke 23:55) Jews asked Pilate to have the bodies removed for Passover (John 19:31)
Nisan	17	**15**	**Sabbath Night**	National Passover celebrated. Disciples mourning,, chief priests worried that Jesus' body might be stolen.
			Sabbath Light	Chief priests ask Pilate to seal the tomb. (Matt 27:62)
Nisan	18	16	Sunday Night	Disciples hiding for fear of the Jews.
			Sunday Light	Mary and Mary go to the tomb near sunrise. Empty! (Mark 16:1) Afternoon: Jesus walks with Cleopas and a friend to Emmaus. (Luke 24:13)

The following commentary is provided to assist in the study of the outline above. Carefully note which calendar is being used in each step.

A. Sunday light in Bethany, Nisan 9 using Babylonian reckoning

John 12:1: "Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead."

Since Passover occurs on Nisan 15, six day earlier would be the Nisan 9. John's account is based on the Babylonian (the national) calendar for reasons that will prove to be self evident later on.

After sunset, Monday began. Mark makes the following comments using the Creation calendar. Notice what he says:

B. Monday night in Bethany, Nisan 12, using Creation's Calendar

Mark 14:1-3 Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot." While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head."

According to the Creation calendar (new moon reckoning), Passover [Nisan 15] was two days away from this Monday night service where Mary anointed the feet of Jesus. The two days between this event are Tuesday the 13th and Wednesday the 14th because Passover is to be

eaten on the 15th or Thursday night.

Monday light

(Remember, night comes before light.) So, Monday night passes and on Monday morning Jesus and His disciples go to the temple where He publically rebukes on the leaders of Israel. (Matthew 23) This makes them furious.

Afterwards, Jesus and His disciples retire to the mount of Olives and Jesus predicts the end of Jerusalem and the end of the world. (Matthew 24,25) At the close of this presentation, Jesus foretells His death. He said to the disciples, "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified." (Matthew 26:1,2)

Monday afternoon

That afternoon, Judas went to the chief priests and offered to condemn Jesus. (Mark 14:10) Perhaps the public rebuke against the leaders of Israel offended Judas. Luke 22:1 says, "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people.

Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus."

So, an executive meeting was called by the leaders of Israel. The Bible says: Matthew 26:3-5, "Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill him. But they said, Not on the [national] feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people."

C. Tuesday afternoon, Nisan 13, using Creation’s Calendar / New Moon reckoning

John 12:12-14: The next day [Tuesday afternoon] the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem [from Bethany]. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written..."

D. Wednesday light, Nisan 14, using Creation’s Calendar / New Moon reckoning

Luke 22:7: "Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed." (Nisan 14) Notice the specifications of the law:

Exodus 12:6 "Take care of them [the lambs] until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight [as Nisan 15begins]." Leviticus

23:5,6 "The Lord's Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of that month the Lord's Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast."

Matthew 26:17: "On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread [according to the Creation calendar], the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover [tonight]?"

Mark 14:12 On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover [tonight]?"

E. Thursday night Passover, Nisan 15, using Creation's Calendar / New Moon reckoning

Mark 14:17,18 "When evening came, Jesus arrived [at the upper room] with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me--one who is eating with me."

Matt 26:20,21 "When evening came [Nisan 15], Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."

Luke 22:15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you **before** I suffer." (Clearly, this Passover occurs before the national Passover. John 18:28)

John 13:30 "As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night...." John indicates it "was night" to emphasize the fact that Judas violated the law by leaving the upper room during the night. The law required everyone to stay indoors until light. "Exodus 12:22 Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the door frame. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning." According to the law and Jewish custom, Jesus and disciples spent all of Thursday night in the upper room.

John 13:29 Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the [upcoming national Passover] Feast, or to give something to the poor [who could not afford the perfect lambs required for the national Passover].

Luke indicates that Jesus said the following to Peter *before* going to the Mount of Olives. "Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.... Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him." (Luke 22:34,39) Luke's account differs on this with respect to that of Mark. See Thursday afternoon.

Sunrise Thursday morning:

Matt 26:30 "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." Peter asked the

Lord where He was going. (John 13:36) Jesus spent most of the day on the Mount of Olives talking to His disciples. (John 13:36-16:33) Jesus wanted to prepare the disciples for His arrest that would occur that night.

Thursday afternoon

Matthew 26:31,32 Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

Jesus predicted Peter's betrayal. Mark 14:29,30 Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not." " I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today--yes, tonight--before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

At the end of Thursday, Jesus prayed for His disciples. (John 17)

F. Friday night, Nisan 16, using Creation's Calendar which is Nisan 14 Babylonian Calendar

John 18:1 " When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples."

As the sun set, Jesus knew the time had come for His arrest. He took Peter, James and John into the Garden of Gethsemane. Matt 26:36, 37 says, "Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray. He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled."

Luke 22: 44-47 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow.

"Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him..."

Luke 22:54 "Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance."

Later, Peter denied Jesus. Luke 22: 60,61 Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times."

Friday light, Nisan 14 Babylonian Calendar / First Crescent Starts

Month:

Luke 22:66 "At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. "If you are the Christ, " they said, "tell us." Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me..."

Matthew 27:1 "Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death."

John 18:28 "Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor [Pilate]. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover [that night]. (This is the second Passover.)

Luke 23:1,2 Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king."

Luke 23:7,12 When he [Pilate] learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.... That day Herod and Pilate became friends--before this they had been enemies."

Friday Noon

Luke 23:44,45 "It was now about the sixth hour [noon], and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour [3 p.m.], for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two."

Luke 23:54 "It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin."

Preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread required preparation. A search for yeast was required as well as the killing of the paschal lamb. Therefore, the day before Passover came to be called, "Preparation Day." In A.D. 30, using Babylonian reckoning, Preparation Day was Friday, Nisan 14. Jesus was crucified between noon and 3 p.m.

Luke 23:55 "The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment."

John 19:31 "Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath [because national Passover occurred on a seventh day Sabbath]. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down."

John 19:38. 42 "Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph

was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away... Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there."

Sabbath night

All is quite. Jesus is in the tomb. Disciples are in hiding, worried. Jewish leaders also worried.

Sabbath light

Matt 27:62 The next day [on the day of Passover no less!], the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went [begging] to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

Sunday night

All is quite. Jesus in the tomb. Guards outside the tomb. Disciples hiding. Jewish leaders celebrating.

Sunday light

Mark 16:1 "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb..."

Luke 24:1 " On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb..."

John 20:1 "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance."

Luke 24: 13 "Now that same day [Sunday, the day of resurrection] two of them [Cleopas and a friend] were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened [during the national Passover week-end]. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him."

What Date Was Passover Observed: Nisan 14 or Nisan 15?

Some people dispute that God required the Passover meal to be eaten on Nisan 15. They claim the Passover meal should have been eaten on Nisan 14. This writer finds the Passover meal

was eaten at midnight on the 15th of Nisan. This conclusion is reached from the following five Scriptures.

1. Exodus 12:3,6-12 (emphasis mine): "Tell the whole community of Israel that on the **tenth day of this month** each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.... Take care of them until the **fourteenth day of the month**, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them **at twilight**. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That **same night** they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but **roast it over the fire**--head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. **Eat it in haste**; it is the Lord's Passover. "**On that same night** I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn--both men and animals--and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord."Comment: If this were the only reference in the Bible to the date of the Passover, one might conclude that Passover was eaten on the 14th of the Nisan. However, when we add more Scripture to this study, we will find that preparing the Passover lamb began during late afternoon of Nisan 14 (twilight) and after roasting the lamb, the meal was eaten six hours later, at midnight on Nisan 15. The following text indicates the preparation for Passover began at twilight on the 14th day, but the Feast of Unleavened Bread began the next day, on Nisan 15.
2. Leviticus 23:5,6: "The Lord's Passover begins **at twilight on the fourteenth day** of the first month. **On the fifteenth day of that month** the Lord's Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast."From this text we find that the Feast of Unleavened Bread began on Nisan 15. This is a key point because notice the next text:
3. Exodus 12:17,18: (insertions mine) says: "Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread [on Nisan 15], because it was **on this very day** that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day [as the day ends] until the evening of the twenty-first day [as the day ends]."**Point:** The children of Israel ate the Passover at midnight on Nisan 15 and they were delivered from Egypt at day break on the 15th of Nisan. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was celebrated on Nisan 15 because it was the very day of deliverance. The Feast of Unleavened Bread lasted seven whole days: Nisan 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21.
4. Numbers 28:16,17: "On the fourteenth day of the first month the Lord's Passover is to be held. On the fifteenth day of this month there is to be a festival; for seven days eat bread made without yeast."The language of this text could be made to appear that the Passover was eaten on Nisan 14. However, we have already seen that the children of Israel were delivered from Egypt on Nisan 15. (Exodus 12:17) Therefore, Numbers 28:16,17 has to be understood within the context that Passover began on Nisan 14 (that is, preparations for the meal), but the meal itself is eaten six hours later at midnight on Nisan 15. Notice the following text:
5. Luke 22:1, 7,8: Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching... Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb

had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

Commentary

It would be unlawful for Jesus to send His disciples to slay the Passover Lamb at twilight on Nisan 15 and eat the Passover on Nisan 16 when He Himself had instructed Moses and the children of Israel they were to slay the Passover Lamb at twilight on Nisan 14 and eat the Passover meal at midnight on Nisan 15. This text emphasizes why the whole of Scripture has to be reviewed when searching for truth. The actions of Jesus are not difficult to reconcile with His statute on the timing of Passover if one understands that the Jews killed the Passover lamb as Nisan 15 began (as Nisan 14 ended) so that the Feast of Unleavened Bread could be eaten at midnight on Nisan 15. The flawless behavior of Jesus in this text proves that Passover was eaten on Nisan 15, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The Julian Date of Christ's Crucifixion

"Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble."

(Daniel 9:25)

Four decrees were issued for the restoration of Jerusalem. Cyrus gave the first decree in 536 B.C. (Ezra 1) Darius gave the second decree in 519 B.C.. (Ezra 6) Artexerxes gave the third and fourth decrees in 457 and 444 B.C. (Ezra 7 and Nehemiah 2, respectively) God used the word "weeks" instead of years in this prophecy to indicate a specific synchrony for this all important decree.

In verse 25, God adds another specification that removes all doubt as to which of the four decrees God will use to count off the seventy weeks: **"From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'weeks' and sixty-two 'weeks. . . .'"** With these words, Gabriel points to the public ministry of the Messiah.

Gabriel used seven weeks and sixty-two weeks to highlight the all important synchrony of a decree that would occur in a Sunday year and at the *beginning* of a Jubilee cycle of seven weeks. (See Chart 6.5) By separating the 69 weeks into two smaller pieces – the first of which was a Jubilee cycle, God did everything He could to help Israel identify the right decree.

Notice how this works: In verse 24, God pointed to a decree that would occur during a Sunday year by using the words "seventy weeks." (This is true because weeks of years always begin with a Sunday year.) In verse 25, God indicates the decree will occur at the beginning of "seven weeks" or 49 years. A seven week cycle is a Jubilee cycle of forty-nine years and it always begins with a Sunday year. Only one of the four decrees meets this specification.

The decree in 457 B.C. occurred in a Sunday year which also happens to start a new cycle of seven weeks (Jubilee cycle). Incidentally, because 457 B.C. is a Jubilee year, so is 702 B.C. The Jubilee year of 702 B.C. is the only Jubilee year mentioned in the Bible. (Isaiah 37:30) When pointing to the ministry of Jesus, God used language so plain that wise men from Ur figured it out! But, the religious leaders in Jerusalem never did figure it out.

Note: My book, *"Great Clocks From God,"* discusses the year of the Exodus (1437 B.C.) and a host of other issues that accompany this topic. The synchrony of the Jubilee calendar began with the Exodus and 1437 B.C. is the first Sunday year.

The synchrony of the weekly cycle forces 457 B.C. to be a Sunday year and counting from the Exodus, 457 B.C. is a Jubilee year. From the Bible we learn that on or about the very first day of the very first month of the year of Jubilee (Nisan 1), King Artaxerxes issued a decree providing for the refurbishing of Jerusalem and its temple. (Ezra 7)

We also know that Ezra left Babylon with the decree in his hand on Nisan 12, the twelfth day of the first month! (Ezra 8:31)

The Decree of Artaxerxes, Nisan 1, 457 B.C. – Jubilee Cycle #21 since the Exodus

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sabbath	
457 B.C.	456 B.C.	455 B.C.	454 B.C.	453 B.C.	452 B.C.	451 B.C.	Week 1
Decree							
450 B.C.	449 B.C.	448 B.C.	447 B.C.	446 B.C.	445 B.C.	444 B.C.	Week 2
443 B.C.	442 B.C.	441 B.C.	440 B.C.	439 B.C.	438 B.C.	437 B.C.	Week 3
436 B.C.	435 B.C.	434 B.C.	433 B.C.	432 B.C.	431 B.C.	430 B.C.	Week 4
429 B.C.	428 B.C.	427 B.C.	426 B.C.	425 B.C.	424 B.C.	423 B.C.	Week 5
422 B.C.	421 B.C.	420 B.C.	419 B.C.	418 B.C.	417 B.C.	416 B.C.	Week 6
415 B.C.	414 B.C.	413 B.C.	412 B.C.	411 B.C.	410 B.C.	409 B.C.	Week 7
Jubilee Cycle #22 since the Exodus starts with 408 B.C. -							
408 B.C.	407 B.C.	406 B.C.	405 B.C.	404 B.C.	403 B.C.	402 B.C.	Week 8
Jubilee							
401 B.C.	400 B.C.	399 B.C.	398 B.C.	397 B.C.	396 B.C.	395 B.C.	Week 9
394 B.C.	393 B.C.	392 B.C.	391 B.C.	390 B.C.	389 B.C.	388 B.C.	Week 10

Chart 6.5

Look at Chart 6.5 and count off the "seven weeks" which Gabriel mentioned (457 - 409 B.C.). Notice that the "sixty-two weeks" mentioned by Gabriel began with 408 B.C. and if this chart were large enough, the 69th week would end with the Sabbath year of A.D. 26.

Therefore, the 70th week would begin with the Sunday year of A.D. 27. Notice how 457 B.C. is both a Sunday year and a Year of Jubilee. *None of the other decrees to restore and rebuild Jerusalem can satisfy the synchrony that God indicates.* The decree in 444 B.C. occurred in a Sabbath year (See week two in Chart 6.5), the decree of Darius in 519 B.C. occurred in a Monday year and the decree by Cyrus in 536 B.C. occurred during a Friday year.

These facts prevent the other three decrees from meeting the "seven weeks and sixty-two weeks" requirement that Gabriel specified. If this information does not convince the reader, history also confirms that these three decrees cannot meet the Daniel 9 specifications either. Here is how:

If 457 B.C. is the correct decree and it marks the beginning of the seventy weeks, then we should expect the appearing of Messiah "seven and sixty-two weeks later" (69 x 7 = 483 years), in the Sunday year of A.D. 27. History precisely confirms this to be the case! Jesus waited until His 30th birthday, which occurred in the Fall of A.D. 27., to begin His ministry. (Jesus wasn't born on December 25.)

Notice how Luke documents the year of Jesus' baptism: **"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene. . . . The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ."** (Luke 3:1,15)

Have you wondered why people thought John might be the Christ? I find they were expectant because some of the people knew that 483 years had lapsed since the decree of Artaxerxes. The year had come for the Messiah to appear and John the Baptist, a forerunner of Messiah, was attracting a lot of attention because the power of the Holy Spirit rested upon Him. (Luke 1:17)

Within this context Luke wrote, **"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. . . ."** (Luke 3:21-23)

Tiberius and A.D. 27

Some scholars claim that the fifteenth year of Tiberius could not be A.D. 27. But, it is! The Romans did not date Caesar's rule with regnal years. Rather, the official count of years in Roman service was determined by the years Tiberius held tribunician power.

Therefore, A.D. 27 would have been the 33rd or 34th year of Tiberius' tribunician power (Tiberius was granted power as a member of the tribune in 6 B.C.). I raise this point because Luke dates the 15th year of Tiberius according to Jewish tradition, not Roman tradition. The 15th year of Tiberius according to Jewish tradition began in the fall of A.D. 27. Here's how:

History says that on August 19, A.D. 14, Augustus died. Tiberius stalled the Senate for awhile and he did not allow the members to name him emperor for almost a month, but on September 17, A.D. 14 he became the emperor at the age of 56.

Luke dates the reign of Tiberius using the Jewish tradition of inclusive dating. This means Luke counted the ascension year of Tiberius as "year 1," even though the ascension year was just a few days in length before a new civil year began on Tishri 1.

Josephus also followed this practice when he dated the reigns of the Herods. (Antiquities xv. 5.2; xvii. 8.1) The Mishnah further confirms this method of Jewish regnal reckoning. (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1.1) During the time of Christ, the Jews observed a Fall-to-Fall *civil* calendar (Tishri 1 to Tishri 1).

Therefore: Tiberius ascended to the throne on September 17, A.D. 14, during a Jewish civil year that ended about a month later. (October 12, A.D. 14.) So, Luke counted September 17 to October 12 as "year 1" because it was the year that Tiberius ascended to the throne. Therefore, the Jews regarded the following civil year, Tishri 1 to Tishri 1 (October 12, A.D. 14 to October 3, A.D. 15) as the second year of Tiberius. (See below.)

Luke's Account: The Reign of Tiberius Caesar

Year 1 = A.D. 14/14 (September 17 - October 12)
Year 2 = A.D. 14/15 (Tishri 1 to Tishri 1)
Year 3 = A.D. 15/16 (Tishri 1 to Tishri 1)
Year 4 = A.D. 16/17 Etc.
Year 5 = A.D. 17/18
Year 6 = A.D. 18/19
Year 7 = A.D. 19/20
Year 8 = A.D. 20/21
Year 9 = A.D. 21/22
Year 10 = A.D. 22/23
Year 11 = A.D. 23/24
Year 12 = A.D. 24/25
Year 13 = A.D. 25/26
Year 14 = A.D. 26/27
Year 15 = A.D. 27/28 – Jesus baptized

This chart shows Tishri 1 (October 19, A.D. 27 through November 6, A.D. 28) as the 15th year of Tiberius. According to Jewish reckoning and according to Luke, Jesus was baptized in the Fall of A.D. 27, sometime after Tishri 1. (The length of Christ's public ministry on Earth was almost 32 months.)

Just as Gabriel predicted, Jesus arrived at the banks of the Jordan River where John baptized Him. Jesus began His public ministry in the Sunday year of A.D. 27, which is the first year of the seventieth week! This is not the end of the story. Two additional facts from history confirm this

synchrony of the Jubilee calendar. In short, God's timing is amazing.

The Wise Men

The story of Jesus' birth includes a surprising visit by the magi from the East. Many people do not realize that the magi were careful students of prophecy. Scholars believe they were clergymen from Ur, in the province of Babylon.

Evidently, they had discovered and deeply studied Daniel's writings, as well as other books now included in the Old Testament. The magi understood that the priests and kings in Israel were typically 30 years of age when they ascended to authority. (Numbers 4; Genesis 41:46; 1 Samuel 13:1; 2 Samuel 5:4; 1 Chronicles 23:3)

Using this information, they had calculated the year when the sixty-nine weeks would end, then they subtracted 30 years from that calculation to determine the year of Messiah's birth. When they saw the star appear in the heavens, they knew *that star* was a sign from God that Messiah had been born.

Think about it. The wise men are not called wise men without a reason. Their round-trip journey to see baby Jesus required them to walk more than a thousand miles over a period of a year. The intensity of their desire and their devotion to see the Messiah was obvious.

Their lavish gifts for baby Jesus reveals a love for God that few Jews could understand. (The gifts from the Magi financially sustained Mary, Joseph and Jesus during their stay in Egypt when they escaped Herod's decree to kill all baby boys less than two years of age.) Wise men do not go to these extremes on a whim. Like Simeon and Anna, the elderly prophets of Israel who longed to see Messiah, the wise men longed to see the Savior of the world with their own eyes.

Their visit is a powerful affirmation that the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. is the correct decree for starting the 483 year countdown. Consider their question to king Herod: **"Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."** (Matthew 2:2)

They were not questioning *whether the king of the Jews had been born*. They were wanting to know *where* He had been born. Perhaps they did not have access to Micah's writings. If they did, they could have gone directly to Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2)

Their presence in Jerusalem at just the right time suggests they understood Daniel 9 since *no other prophecy* in the Bible pinpoints the time of Messiah's birth other than Daniel 9.

How could mere "Gentiles" from a distant land be better informed on the timing of Messiah's appearing than Jewish scholars? How did the Samaritan woman at the well know Messiah's coming was near. She anticipated the appearing of the Messiah because she said: **". . . I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming . . . when he comes, he will explain everything to us."** (John 4:25)

The answer is simple. Centuries earlier, the Lord had said, **"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."** (Jeremiah 29:13) Unfortunately, Jewish scholars were not looking for Jesus. They were caught up in their tiny world of pseudo-scholarship. They had nit-picked the Word of God into so many senseless pieces, they could no longer see the big picture.

Even though the religious leaders discussed and debated the prophecies of Daniel between themselves, they could not understand Gabriel's words. Ironically, the same situation appears to be true today. Scholars today still twist and distort Gabriel's words, just as they were during the time of the first Advent. Unfortunately, they have led millions of people to look for a non-existent pre-tribulation rapture.

Jesus Died In The Middle of the 70th Week!

God's timing is always perfect. Let us review the facts. First, 457 B.C. aligns with the weekly cycle of years that began at the Exodus in 1437 B.C. (Exodus 12:1) Second, 457 B.C. also aligns with the Jubilee cycle of forty-nine years that began at the Exodus.

Third, Messiah appeared sixty-nine weeks later in A.D. 27 to be baptized by John the Baptist. Fourth, 457 B.C. is affirmed by the presence of the wise men shortly after Jesus was born. But, the fifth and best proof that the 457 B.C. decree is the decree indicated in Daniel 9, is the timing of the death of Jesus. Jesus began His ministry on time and Jesus died on time.

The death of Jesus not only confirms the synchrony of the Jubilee calendar, but it also confirms the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. as the right decree. Paul was aware of this phenomenon: **"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law . . . You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."** (Galatians 4:4; Romans 5:6)

Gabriel's Statement

Gabriel said, **"After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. . . . He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the** [last] **'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering."** (Daniel 9:26,27, insertion mine)

Look ahead to Chart 6.7. Notice how A.D. 30 is located the *middle* of the seventieth week of years. (Evidence presented later in this study demonstrates that Jesus was crucified in A.D. 30.) Of course, there should be no question among Christians that Jesus *confirmed* the covenant that God first gave to Adam and Eve, as well as Abraham and his descendants, and He put an end to animal sacrifices and ceremonial offerings when He died on the cross. (Colossians 2)

Yet, very few Christians realize that Daniel predicted and Jesus fulfilled the prophecy with His death in the middle of the seventieth week!

Look again at Chart 6.7. Counting from the decree of Artaxerxes, notice that A.D. 30 is in the middle of the seventieth week. Notice also that A.D. 30 occurs in the middle of the 210th week of years counting from the Exodus in 1437 B.C. Also notice that the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 began with the 141st week (7 x 141 = 987 years) counting from the Exodus.

Counting Weeks From The Exodus

(1437 B.C.) And The Decree of Artaxerxes (457 B.C.)

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sab	Weeks Since Decree	Weeks Since Exodus
1437 B.C. Exodus	1436	1435	1434	1433	1432	1431	--	1
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
457 B.C. - 450 Weeks 3 through 68	456 449	455 448	454 447	453 446	452 ---	451 ---	1st 2nd	141 142
A.D. 20	21	22	23	24	25	26	69th	209
A.D. 27	28	29	A.D. 30	31	32	33	70th	210
34	35	36	37	---	---		71st	211

Chart 6.7

Proving A.D. 30 is the Year of Christ's Death

There is sufficient astronomical and Scriptural evidence to prove beyond intellectual debate that Jesus was crucified on Friday, April 7, A.D. 30. If we allow Bible history and the synchrony of God's Great Clocks to resolve the time of His death, all of the data presented in the Gospels concerning Christ's passion week will harmoniously fit together. In fact, A.D. 30 *exclusively satisfies* the synchrony required by all seven clocks which the Creator devised! In fact, A.D. 30 is the *only* year during which all of the events described in Scripture can occur.

How Israel Measured Time

Before we examine the timing of Christ's death though, a few words about how time is measured in the Bible is necessary. The Jews normally measured time *inclusively*. Any part of a year, month or day was counted as a whole unit. Remember how Tiberius came to power about two months before Tishri 1 (the beginning of a new Jewish civil year), but those two months were counted as a *whole year* by Luke. (Luke 3:1)

Similarly, if someone came to your home on Tuesday and left on Wednesday, the ancients would measure the time your guest visited in your home to be two days and two nights – Tuesday and Wednesday – even though the actual time was less than 24 hours. The inclusive

method for measuring time also explains how Jesus was dead for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40), even though the Bible says the Father resurrected Jesus *on* – not after – the third day! (Acts 10:40)

Because of inclusive reckoning, Jesus was in the tomb for three days and three nights: Friday, Sabbath and Sunday. He died on Friday afternoon, rested in the Tomb on Sabbath and was resurrected on Sunday. However, the number of hours that Jesus was dead was less than forty hours (two hours on Friday afternoon, 24 hours on Sabbath and ten to twelve hours on Sunday).

The measurement of time in Bible prophecy is highly important. There are *18 prophetic time periods in Daniel and Revelation and from God's perspective, all of them use inclusive reckoning.* The decree by Artaxerxes is 457 B.C. occurs *during* the first year of the seventy weeks, therefore the year of the decree is *included* in the count of 490 years. (See Chart 6.7.)

The time period of forty years the Israelites spent in the wilderness was measured with inclusive reckoning. (Deuteronomy 2:14; Numbers 14:34) The three days allotted to Pharaoh's cupbearer was measured with inclusive reckoning. (Genesis 40:12,13)

Daniel 9:27 says, **". . . In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering."** Gabriel said Jesus would die in the middle year of the seventieth week. (See Chart 6.7.) Since we know that Jesus died at the time of Passover (John 12) and there is highly accurate astronomical data for A.D. 30 (accurate to within one or two hours), this makes it very easy to determine the precise date of Jesus' death.

One Moon – Two Months

History says the Jews abandoned God's "new moon" synchrony for determining the beginning of a new month. In its place they adopted the Babylonian method of sighting the first crescent of a new moon to determine the beginning of a month. *Even today, Jews and Moslems continue the practice of sighting a new moon to determine the beginning of a religious month.* But, God's synchrony for starting a new month is based on calculation, not observation.

A new moon occurs when the moon intersects an imaginary line between the Earth and the Sun. Since a new moon cannot be seen, the time of conjunction has to be calculated. Calculation of a new moon is not difficult. (See Numbers 28:14; 1 Samuel 20:24-27; Isaiah 66:23)

Of course, when two different methods for starting a given month are used, there are two different results. The difference between these two methods is one or two days. The sighting of the new crescent of a moon typically occurs in Jerusalem anywhere between 16 to 40 hours after conjunction.

Because there are two methods for starting a new month (thus, two calendars) in the New Testament, there is some confusion about the timing of Christ's death.

The Bible indicates that Jesus and His disciples (and other Jews) observed Passover according to the "new moon" calendar even though the nation of Israel observed its corporate Passover according to the Babylonian method for starting a new month. (See Mark 14 and John 13, 18)

Since the moon determines the first day of the month for both groups of people, the position of the moon plays an important role in determining the date for Passover. God commanded the Passover lamb to be slain on Nisan 14 as the day was ending and after roasting the lamb for a few hours, the roasted lamb was to be eaten at midnight on the fifteenth day of the first month. The Lord passed over Egypt at midnight on the fifteenth of Nisan. (Exodus 12; Leviticus 23:5,6)

Therefore, any attempt to determine a date and time for the death of Jesus has to address the astronomical position of a new moon for Nisan 1, as well as the first sighting of the crescent of a new moon.

After the Babylonian captivity, the Jews often observed two Feasts of Passover in the same month. This conflict (and many other contradictory issues) gave the Romans another reason to mock the Jews. Even as late as the fourth century, the emperor Constantine used the competing observance of two Passovers to prove that Christians should not depend upon the Jews to determine the correct time for Easter.

Notice his denigrating comments: "We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews, for the Savior has shown us another way; our worship follows a more legitimate and more convenient course; and consequently, in unanimously adopting this mode, we desire, dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews, for it is truly shameful for us to hear them boast that without their direction we could not keep this feast [of Easter at the proper time].

How can they be in the right, they who, after the death of the Savior, have no longer been led by reason but by wild violence, as their delusions may urge them? They do not possess the truth in this Easter question; for in their blindness and repugnance to all improvement, they frequently celebrate two Passovers in the same year. (Eusebius, Vita Const., Lib iii., 18-20, insertions mine)

Jesus And Two Passovers

When Jesus came to Earth, He came to declare the truth on many issues which the Jews had distorted. The presence of two calendars (and two Passovers) in Israel solves an interesting mystery, namely, how Jesus could observe Passover at its appointed time with His disciples in the upper room (on Nisan 15 – Mark 14:14-16) and within the same year, also die at the time of the national Passover which took place on Nisan 15 (John 19:14-31)!

The solution to this mystery is simple. Jesus and His disciples observed Passover in the upper room according to God’s synchrony for the month (new moon to new moon), but Jesus died on the cross according to the Babylonian method of starting a new month (the sighting of the first crescent of a new moon)! Since the observance of two calendars was a common part of Jewish

life, Gospel writers do not specifically mention that two conflicting calendars existed.

For two thousand years, this silence has caused a lot of controversy over the day and date of Christ's death. I hope the following explanation clarifies the complexities regarding the dating of Christ's death.

Jesus was crucified on Friday afternoon, April 7, A.D. 30 which is the precise year required by Daniel 9! Even though most Christians accept A.D. 30 as the year of Christ's death, few understand that it is in the middle of the seventieth week and even fewer understand how this date is determined.

Step 1

Solar and lunar tables posted at the United States Naval Observatory (USNO) website offer astronomical data covering the years during which Jesus was on Earth. This data has been carefully verified by several astronomers and is accurate to within one to two hours. The published dates and times are given in Universal Time.

Here are the dates and times for three years, especially notice the days of the week:

A.D. 29 Vernal Equinox: Tuesday, March 22, 4 p.m.
First New Moon on or after Equinox: Saturday, April 2, 5 p.m.

A.D. 30 Vernal Equinox: Wednesday, March 22, 10 p.m.
First New Moon on or after Equinox: Wednesday, March 22, 6 p.m.

A.D. 31 Vernal Equinox: Friday, March 23, 3 a.m.
First New Moon on or after Equinox: Tuesday, April 10, 12 noon

Source: http://www.usno.navy.mil/USNO/astronomical-applications/data-services/spring-phenom/?searchterm=spring%20phenomena

Step 2

According to the dates and times from the USNO, a new moon occurred on the same night as the Equinox in A.D. 30. (Jerusalem local time for the new moon was 8 p.m. and for the Equinox, midnight.) Since a new moon and the Equinox occurred on the same day, a new month and a new year began on Wednesday night, March 22, Universal Time. Converting Universal Time to Bible Time: Wednesday night, March 22 becomes Thursday, Nisan 1. This translation is necessary because a day in God's calendar begins at sundown. (Genesis 1; Leviticus 23:32) Notice in Chart 6.8 that New Year's day (Nisan 1) begins on Thursday and Passover (Nisan 15) also occurs on Thursday.

Jesus Ate Passover Thursday Night, Nisan 15, A.D. 30

– New Moon Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sabbath
---	---	---	---	Nisan 1	Nisan 2	Nisan 3
Nisan 4	Nisan 5	Nisan 6	Nisan 7	Nisan 8	Nisan 9	Nisan 10
Nisan 11	Nisan 12	Nisan 13	Nisan 14	Nisan 15	Nisan 16	Nisan 17

If Jesus and His disciples observed Passover according to the new moon calendar, Chart 6.8 indicates that Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover together on Thursday night at midnight. (Remember, in God's calendar the night precedes the light.) We know that God required the Jews to slay the Passover lamb near sundown on Nisan 14. (Exodus 12:6)

At the time of Christ's last Passover, the disciples killed the paschal lamb about sundown on Wednesday afternoon and they roasted it until about midnight on Thursday, Nisan 15. Jesus and His disciples then celebrated the Passover for it was at midnight that the Lord passed over Egypt. (Exodus 11:4)

Mark 14:16 clearly indicates that Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples before going to His death. The sequence of events went like this: Jesus ate the Passover on Thursday night. On Thursday (the light part of Thursday follows the night part of Thursday) Jesus spent the day with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. (Mark 14:26)

As Friday night settled upon them, Jesus and three disciples went into to the Garden of Gethsemane. (Mark 14:32) Jesus was arrested that night while in the garden. His trial began that night and He was crucified at 9 a.m. and He died around 3 pm.

The Jews celebrated their national Passover on Sabbath night, at midnight, while Jesus lay in the tomb. (Remember, Sabbath night comes before Sabbath light.) The textual harmony from the gospels on this matter is presented in my book, *"Great Clocks From God."*

The Bible does not indicate anything unusual about Jesus eating Passover or beginning the Feast of Unleavened Bread at a time that was not in harmony with the national Passover. (Compare Matthew 26: 17 with Mark 14:12.) The Bible also does not offer any justification for killing the Passover lamb on late Wednesday afternoon and eating the Passover on Thursday night, even though the national Passover lamb was killed two days later on Friday.

This silence occurs for two reasons. First, the dating of the Passover was a common conflict, one of many conflicts among religious sects in Israel; therefore, a discussion about the presence of two calendars is not included in the gospels.

Second, the gospel writers did not attempt to include *for our understanding* everything that was common knowledge in their day. However, with a little background investigation, we find that John dates the Passion week of Jesus with the Babylonian calendar (John 12) and Mark uses the new moon calendar. (Mark 14)

This explains why there is an apparent conflict between some of the things Mark and John write. Once we understand which calendar they are using, the writings of Mark and John are in perfect

harmony.

The Bible clearly indicates two Passovers were celebrated during the year that Jesus was crucified. It would be blasphemous to assert the Creator did not know *the true time* for Passover. Actually, Jesus' actions affirm what is Truth, for He is the Truth. (John 14:6)

Jesus correctly observed Passover with His disciples in the upper room on Thursday night, the 15th day of Nisan – using God's synchrony for determining monthly cycles. The Creator's actions perfectly synchronize with the instructions that Moses recorded in Exodus 12. The timing of the new moon (the USNO tables) and the testimony of the gospel writers confirm it!

Step 3

History says the Jewish nation synchronized Nisan 1, at the time of Christ, with the sighting of the first crescent of a new moon. Depending on the visibility afforded by weather, the position of the Sun and the season, the first sighting of the crescent of a new moon in Jerusalem occurs between 16 and 40 hours *after* a new moon.

Since it is impossible for us to precisely determine when the crescent of a new moon was sighted in A.D. 30, we have to let Bible facts help put the pieces together. The following facts help to determine the correct date: 1) Since the sighting of the new moon crescent is most probable two days after a new moon; 2)

Since Jesus was arrested on the night *after* He ate the Passover with His disciples; 3) Since the Jews observed Nisan 15 on a seventh day Sabbath the year of Christ's death (John 19:14-31), this means Nisan 1 (according to the Babylonian calendar) had to occur on Sabbath (March 25). See below. These matters force the sighting of the first crescent two days after a new moon.

Jesus Was Crucified Friday Afternoon, Nisan 14, A.D. 30

– First Crescent Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sabbath
---	---	---	---	---	---	Nisan 1
Nisan 2	Nisan 3	Nisan 4	Nisan 5	Nisan 6	Nisan 7	Nisan 8
Nisan 9	Nisan 10	Nisan 11	Nisan 12	Nisan 13	Nisan 14	Nisan 15

Therefore, the national Passover lamb would have been killed near sundown on Friday, the fourteenth day of the month and the Passover would have been eaten on Sabbath, Nisan 15, about midnight (Friday night).

The important point to remember is that the Lamb of God died on the cross about 3 p.m. Friday afternoon and buried before sundown because a *special* Sabbath was about to begin. Special or *high Sabbaths* occurred when two Sabbaths coincided. When required feasts like the Passover occurred on a seventh day Sabbath, a "high Sabbath" occurred. (John 19:31)

In summary, we know the following facts: 1) We know the astronomical positions of the Sun and moon for A.D. 30; 2) We know that Jesus properly observed the Passover using God's new moon reckoning for the beginning of a month; 3)

We know that Jesus rested in the tomb over Sabbath and rose *on the first day of the week*, (John 20:1; Acts 10:40); 4) We know that A.D. 30 occurs in the middle of the seventieth week. This information leads to a solid conclusion: Jesus was crucified on Friday, April 7, A.D. 30 (or Nisan 14, Babylonian calendar).

The actions of Jesus and the astronomical positions of the Sun and moon are two witnesses that confirm the truth. No wiggle room is left. A.D. 30 is the only year during the seventieth week that will satisfy all the necessary specifications.

The Seventy Weeks Nailed Down

Now that we know the date of Christ's death, the seventy weeks prophecy has no wiggle room left in it. When it comes to locating the seventy weeks of Daniel 9, there is amazing harmony from several issues. Consider the following:

1. The seventy weeks have to begin with a Sunday year. The synchrony of the week of years from the year of the Exodus and the year of Christ's death proves that 457 B.C. is a Sunday year.
2. The seventy weeks have to begin with a Year of Jubilee. The synchrony of Jubilee cycles from the year of the Exodus confirms the "seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks" specification. 457 B.C. is a Jubilee year and Jesus began His ministry 483 years later, in the Sunday year of A.D. 27, the first year of the seventieth week.
3. The appearance of the wise men at the birth of Jesus affirms their understanding about the sixty-nine weeks found in Daniel 9.
4. The baptism of Messiah occurred during the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar which is A.D. 27 – which is the first year of the seventieth week.
5. The Jublilee calendar and the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. forces A.D. 30 to be the middle year of the seventieth week – Jesus died at just the right time.
6. The astronomical position of the Sun and moon in A.D. 30 confirms that Jesus and His disciples ate Passover at the correct time.
7. The actions of the Jews and their use of the moon's first crescent method is consistent with the Bible record, meaning Jesus was crucified at Passover according to their calendar on Friday, April 7, A.D. 30.
8. Constantine also refers to the fact that Jews frequently observed two Passovers in the same year.
9. The four gospels are in perfect harmony on the order of these events.

When these nine points are woven together, all wiggle room concerning the timing of the seventieth week and the death of Jesus is eliminated. **No other time frame can meet or satisfy the prophetic or astronomical synchrony required for the seventieth week. - The overwhelming abundance of harmonious facts supports the conclusion that the**

seventieth week occurred from Spring A.D. 27 to Spring A.D. 34. Jesus was crucified on Friday morning, April 7, A.D. 30 about 9 am and He died for you and me about six hours later.

Note: For more information on this topic, see *Day Star* issue February, 2000. Also, see *Great Clocks from God*, available for free download at Great Clocks From God

Observing the Sabbath Day

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Interest and awareness is growing around the world that Saturday, the seventh day of the week, is God's holy Sabbath. (Gen 2:1-3; Exo 20:8-11; Heb 4:9,10) Within recent months, I have received numerous letters asking, "I want to keep the Sabbath. How should it be observed?"

I have also received letters from people who have been Sabbatarians for awhile, and they question how not to alienate family members, friends and employers who do not understand the Sabbath. There is no doubt about it.

When you choose to observe God's Sabbath, you will face many challenges. To be sure, it is humanly impossible to resolve every issue satisfactorily regarding this topic. However, it is my hope that the next few pages will be helpful if you are dealing with issues regarding Sabbath observance.

Three Simple Points

The word holy means "to set apart." When God created "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," He made the tree holy by "setting it apart" from all other trees. (Gen 2:17) The fruit on that tree did not belong to Adam and Eve.

In a similar way, when God created the seventh day, He *set apart* twenty-four hours of time from the rest of the week that do not belong to us, even though that 24 hour time span was made for our benefit. (Gen 2:1-3; Exo 20:8-11; Isa 58:13,14; Mark 2:27,28) Review the fourth commandment:

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." (Exo 20:8-11)

At the physical level God stipulates three things in the fourth commandment:

1. Six days are allotted for work
2. Work is forbidden on the seventh day
3. Do not allow those under your control to work on Sabbath

The first point is not hard to understand. God says that the first six days of the week *are not* holy. If we claim it does not matter and that all seven days are holy, we have erroneously given

common days the designation of "holy," which lessens the distinction and place of honor God gives to the seventh day. Ezekiel 22:26 recorded how the priests of Israel committed this sin and how deeply it offended God. The second point is not hard to understand either.

God said, **"On it** [the seventh day]**, you shall not do any work."** What does God mean by "work?" Work is continual exertion, whether mental or physical, that is done for gain or an increase of some kind. God forbids this type of exertion on the seventh day.

Last, God tells us not to allow those people who are under our jurisdiction to work on this day either, even including your animals. Your work, your labor, and your efforts for increase must stop on Sabbath, so that everything you own is at rest. God's basic intent for this law is that man should *stop* working and rest. Resting on Sabbath can be a very pleasant "time-out," especially if you love and trust God, and gladly submit to His Sovereign authority.

On the other hand, if our affections are set on the things of this world, 24 hours of mandated "time-out" can be viewed as a great hindrance and a very big obstacle to business, pleasure and leisure.

Every human being is naturally selfish, especially about their time and money, and God challenges our inner being by constantly asking for some of both. It is a contest of wills. The fourth commandment is law, a legal declaration made by our Creator, the King of Kings. The fourth commandment is also a test to see if we will yield and humbly obey God.

The Sabbath has a Legal Basis

The seventh commandment states: "Thou shalt not commit adultery," therefore the commission of adultery is a sin in God's sight. The fourth commandment is also a part of God's decalogue and working on Sabbath is also considered a sin in God's sight. It makes no difference whether we agree with God's declaration or not, Sabbath observance is a legal mandate upon the whole human race. (See Lev 4:13,14.)

Contrary to what most people think and most preachers say, the Ten Commandments are not "ten suggestions" that everyone should consider every now and then. Instead, the Ten Commandments are ten laws which God unilaterally imposed upon the human race and He will judge every person by these ten commandment standards. (Eccl 12:13,14) Men may neglect, reject or deny the obligation of the Ten Commandments, but God reads every human heart. He knows our rebellious ways and He will deal with each of us accordingly on judgment day.

Legalism

Because Sabbath observance is commanded in the Ten Commandments, it makes Sabbath observance a legal matter. In God's sight, disregarding the observance of Saturday is just as wrong as killing, adultery, stealing or lying. In spite of all this, most Christians do not observe Saturday as God's holy day.

To understand how this change occurred, we need to briefly review a bit of early church history. By A.D. 50, the governing Roman's hatred for the Jews had grown very intense and Christians were regarded as a sect of Judaism. To distance themselves from their Jewish roots, Christians in Rome were moving away from Sabbath observance and eventually abandoned the "Jewish" Sabbath altogether.

Over time, the Church of Rome became dominate throughout Europe and Sunday became the official day of worship. Many Christians today erroneously believe that Sunday is the Lord's day and claims of sacredness for Sunday are extracted from "the voided Sabbath commandment."

Obligation of the Law

Since we have determined that the observance of Sabbath is a legal issue, let us review two legal issues that surround this commandment today. First, there are Sabbatarians who defend the obligation of the fourth commandment to keep Saturday holy.

Their antagonists claim they are legalists and insist the Ten Commandments were made null and void at the cross. They also claim that nine of the original commandments (minus the Sabbath commandment) were restored and imposed upon mankind by God in the New Testament. Interestingly, both sides of this argument are legalistic in nature, since Sunday proponents adamantly defend their view.

In the final analysis, the controversy still centers on whether or not the Ten Commandments became nine commandments.

The *Intent* of the Law

The second legal issue surrounding the fourth commandment concerns activities during Sabbath hours. It is this side of the legal issue that so many questions have been asked. Unfortunately, some Sabbatarians have given the Sabbath a bad reputation by imposing more requirements on the Sabbath than God Himself imposed! The fourth commandment only specifies the three items stated earlier, and nothing more.

The fourth commandment requires a higher level of submission to God than the other nine commandments because the fourth commandment requires man to rest at an appointed time. The Sabbath commandment sticks out like a "sore thumb" in a world that never stops.

When God said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery, bear false witness, covet, steal or kill," these laws are self-evident and considered socially reasonable. Most people agree that these are laws everyone should live by. When God said, "Thou shalt not have any other Gods before me," this also seems self-evident within the Christian community since Christianity is a mono-theistic religion. But, when God said, "Do no work on the seventh day," this commandment seems uniquely unreasonable to most people.

Why? Especially in today's society, Sabbath observance forces the believer into a very awkward

position. If a person refuses to work on the seventh day because he wishes to honor God, what impact does that have on his or her colleagues at work? What impact does it have on an employer? What impact does the action have socially? What impact does it have in a home where the spouse or other family members do not understand?

Some Sabbatarians believe that "a cessation" from work is all that the Sabbath commandment entails. In their case, the Sabbath is a free day, a day for doing whatever one wants to do. At the other extreme, some Sabbatarians believe that even the most menial tasks violate the Sabbath. (Mark 2:23,24) The *intent* of the law is missed in both of these cases. The purpose of the fourth commandment is threefold.

First, God wants man to recognize Jesus as Creator, Landlord and Owner of Earth. His laws are above all laws. **"For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."** (Exo 20:11)

Second, God established His Sabbath as an everlasting sign that distinguishes His children from the children of the world. **"The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.'"** (Exo 31:16,17)

Third, God wants human beings to honor Him by worshiping Him according to the fourth commandment. **"Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water. "** (Rev 14:6,7)

God wants us to cease from our labor so that we might demonstrate respect for Him in a world that gives Him no respect! (See commandment number one! Exo 20:3) These three purposes may sound simplistic, but the intent of the fourth law is to have a "time-out" for God.

People who respond according to the fourth commandment make a social statement in their sphere of influence they are standing up for God! Do not forget that the three Hebrews who are remembered for all time in Dan 3, experienced notoriety for standing up when everyone else was kneeling down before the golden image.

Because the Sabbath is a gift of 24 hours, Sabbath observance is a mirror reflecting our relationship with God. Consider this parallel: If a ten year old boy is regularly given $10 each week as a gift, wouldn't his consistent use of the money reflect the desires of his heart? Of course it does. So, what does our use of God's time say about the contents of our heart? God gives the human race a gift every week. It is His Sabbath. (Ezekiel 20:12, Mark 2:27)

He could have given man a ten day week with every day being dedicated to labor, creating endless cycles of work that would weary His children to death with toil. Great God that He is, He

created something much better. Just as He created man to rest in sleep *before* beginning each day of work (the evening precedes the morning), He created the Sabbath so that man could rest and be renewed physically, spiritually and mentally *before* beginning a new week. (Incidently, Adam and Eve's first full day of life was a Sabbath.)

God's yoke is not heavy. (Mat 11:28) One of man's greatest challenges is to be ever alert and on the lookout for selfishness creeping into the human heart. (Jer 17:9) The gift of the Sabbath can be used in wrong ways if our attitudes toward God are not Spirit-led.

For example, if we have allowed ourselves to become overextended with the demands of life for six days, we can end up ***using*** the Sabbath to do things that we did not have time to do on other days. Or, we can ***use*** the Sabbath to physically recover from our previous week's intemperance so we can commit more intemperance in the coming week. Does this use of the Sabbath satisfy God's intent for the Sabbath? Of course not. Which is the best day of the week?

In the beginning, which day did God set apart for oneness with Himself? Which days did God give to us to labor for an increase? It takes six days to prepare for Sabbath if we truly understand that it is our privilege to meet with God on Sabbath!

First-day Christians

It was said earlier, legalism is not limited to Sabbath keepers. Some first-day Christians are as legalistic regarding their beliefs about the sacredness of Sunday as Sabbath keepers. A minority of "Sunday keepers" conscientiously cease from work on Sunday, citing the fourth commandment as their authority for doing so. They believe that even though the day of worship has been changed from Sabbath to Sunday, the sacredness of "the Lord's day" remains.

In general, though, the sacredness of Sunday has lost a lot of ground over the past 50 years in the United States through commerce, communication and travel. At the present time, only 54% of the workforce in the U.S.A. work 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., five days a week. This means that almost half of all U.S. citizens are working all hours of the week, including Saturday and Sunday. Even though most Christians in the U.S.A. believe that Sunday is the Lord's day, they do not conscientiously restrict themselves from doing anything they want to do on Sunday.

I have asked several Sunday keepers about their observance of Sunday and have been told, "If I am required to work on Sunday, then *I must do so* to keep my job." I have also heard, "If I need to go shopping on Sunday, I see nothing wrong with that because it's the only time I can do it." Even if Sunday was the Lord's Day, do these responses justify a violation of the fourth commandment? Not according to the Bible.

Can we violate the holiness which God placed on the Sabbath and expect God to honor us with His presence? (See Neh 13:15-22.) Many Sunday keeping Christians view Sabbath observance with an obvious disdain. They believe Sabbath observance is legalistic because it is their contention that the fourth commandment was abolished at the Cross.

This is such a paradox. How can Sunday be "sacred" if there is no law concerning the sacredness of Sunday? In other words, the observance of a holy day is a legal matter if it is based on law. Since no law is found in the Bible that declares Sunday to be holy, the observance of Sunday is not mandated.

Sabbath observance can be problematic if it creates social and financial problems. The Sabbath can also be a social impediment because Sabbath observance is out of sync with the godless ways of the world. Many people are surprised to learn that from the beginning, God designed the Sabbath to produce obstacles to test our faith and encourage our dependence on Him!

Sabbatical Years

Faith in God is not only the means to salvation, it is the essential experience that every person needs in order to know God. Naturally, we do not like testing and adversity because it is uncomfortable and contrary to our pursuit for gain and happiness. We do not like the storms of life, but smooth seas do not make good sailors. God knows this. Every time we are faced with an overwhelming challenge, we need God.

To develop Israel's faith, God required a sabbatical rest for the land every seventh year. In an agricultural society, the requirement not to plant or harvest crops for an entire year must have seemed outrageous! I am sure many Israelites thought, "How will we eat?" "Ah," said the Lord, "I want everyone to realize that you eat regularly out of my hand because I am faithful. I send the rain. I send the sunshine. I, the Lord, do all these things.

To build your confidence in my faithfulness, I will send you a double portion in the sixth year so you will not have to plant and harvest during the seventh." (See the details in Lev 25.) The point is that God deliberately created the sabbatical year, as well as the Sabbath, to interrupt life on all fronts.

The Sabbath means to stop going in the direction you have been going and rest. There were social, financial and other consequences for resting at the appointed time and Israel learned that living by faith was more difficult than they bargained for. If you will remember, when Israel violated 70 sabbatical years, God killed two-thirds of the people and sent the remainder of the nation into Babylonian captivity. (Eze 5:12; 2 Chr 36:21)

Inherent Need for Oneness

Whether we realize it or not, oneness plays a *very* powerful role in our lives. Oneness means to be included and given respect, acceptance and love. Adults often speak about the strength of "peer pressure during adolescence" without realizing that peer pressures never end, they just change.

Peer pressure occurs when our inherent need for oneness with some person or group of people is juxtaposed against the possibility of being "cut off" or rejected. Some people are very insecure about their social standing within their family, work or church, and unfortunately, they

will compromise their conscience in order to remain within the favor of a person or a group of people which they think are significant. No character trait is more despised in the movies than cowardice.

Yet, only a minority of people in real life actually have the courage to stand up for the right "though the heavens fall." Few people are willing to stand up and singularly bear rejection for the sake of conscience. This is where Sabbath observance comes in.

When God made the Sabbath, He made it for man's benefit. (Mark 2:27) Yes, in the Garden of Eden, the Sabbath was a day of greatest delight. No doubt the Creator Himself came to Earth and visited with Adam and Eve on special Sabbaths. But, God foreknew the rise of sin and when it occurred, He gave the Sabbath a new purpose.

God used Sabbath observance to frustrate man's oneness with the world by offering restoration and empowerment through oneness with Himself. Consider these possible scenarios and notice how oneness with God overcomes the world: If you have been publicly censured by your former church friends because your beliefs about God have changed, you have felt the painful loss of oneness (rejection).

If you have been ridiculed and rejected by your best friends because your beliefs about God have changed your behavior (perhaps your activities on Saturday are now different), you have felt the pain of rejection because you are no longer "one" of the gang. If you have been harassed at work because your co-workers did not understand your commitment to follow your conscience instead of going along with the crowd, you know the stigma of rejection.

These illustrations highlight the importance of oneness and show what a very powerful force it is in our lives. We are always in the process of developing oneness (bonding) with those around us. On a daily basis, we are forced into different degrees of oneness by work, school, church and other social contacts. However, God knew that unless He interrupted our bonding with the world, His children would sooner or later become *one* with the world. (Mat 13:24-30)

We are Invited

God foreknew that Adam and Eve would sin. God foreknew the seeds of rebellion that would grow in every human heart. God foreknew the degenerative process of sin *before* He created the world. So, when He created the world, He created the Sabbath for a number of reasons. The Sabbath uniquely provides *a time* for oneness, as well as *a weekly test* to see who really wants oneness with Him. Oneness with God is only possible when doing God’s will.

Jesus said, **"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me . . . If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."** (Joh 14:23,24; 15:10)

Oneness is the delightful experience of well-being you experience when you are with someone that you really admire. Oneness operates on several levels. For example, intimate oneness with your spouse can be very engaging and fulfilling. Experiencing oneness with someone of exalted stature is wonderful, e.g., your boss, the president of your company, your Senator, etc. Oneness in experience with others can be unforgettable.

Army buddies often experience a type of oneness after going through some difficult and threatening situations together. Successful companies have managers that promote a type of "work-place oneness" through teamwork and mutual respect. A successful lifetime marriage depends, on the effort put into renewing the oneness in the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions. Another type of oneness is the delightful experience of winning.

The fans at the Super Bowl may not know one another, but a type of oneness forms within minutes after the coin toss. Being invited to a party, or simply being invited over to someone's house is a gesture to "come over" and experience oneness with us. In a similar way, this is what Sabbath is all about. God has commanded us to cease from our labors so we can come into His presence and experience oneness. God wants the *whole* day with His children.

He wants us to step out of our existence and into His. He wants to renew our awe of His ways because man's behavior is directly influenced by his perception of God. God invites us to come into His presence and find the transforming power of His love. These examples make the point that oneness in attitude, purpose, plan or action is no small component of human life.

Summary

The starting point for Sabbath observance is found in the fourth commandment: Cease from work. Thereafter, the guideline is quite simple: Pursue oneness with God. Invite others to join you on Sabbath. Study His Word and share experiences of faith. Attend church if possible.

Teach your children that Sabbath is a special day by doing special things with them that keep them directed toward God. The Sabbath experience matures as we go through phases and transitions in our knowledge of God. As we grow, we find ourselves exchanging activities that take us away from God for those activities that draw us closer to God. The Holy Spirit will be heard saying, "This is the right way *for you*, walk in it." Of course, our faith in God will be tested by keeping His Sabbath.

God likes to see if His laws are written in our affections or merely in our customs. If we approach the Sabbath with a healthy attitude, there is a great deal of freedom to define and enjoy a unique oneness with a very personal Jesus. Many Sabbath-keepers do things on Sabbath that I cannot do in good conscience and vice versa. It's supposed to be this way. Each person must discover God for himself. I am in no position to condemn anyone for their actions.

The Sabbath is the reciprocal of what we really want in life. If our heart's desire is oneness with God, the Sabbath will become a timely vehicle that helps us get there. If our heart's desire is "a day off" so that we can have time to pursue a personal agenda, the Sabbath can be *used* as a convenient means for doing this.

No doubt many Sabbath-keepers and Sunday-keepers alike fail to reach holy ground. I say this because I know what it is like to miss the mark. We reach holy ground when we take the time to submit to oneness with our Creator on His holy day.

Therefore, I try to guard my actions on Sabbath so that I do not miss the rest and joy that is possible in God. Each week, I look forward to a Sabbath rest. I am also eagerly looking forward to the commencement of the Sabbath millennium! Whenever I sit down at the keyboard to meditate with music, I like to play this old gospel song written by C.B. McAfee:

"There is a place of quietest rest, near to the heart of God.
A place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.
Oh Jesus, blest Redeemer, sent from the heart of God.
Hold us who wait before thee, near to the heart of God."

If you have comments or questions, let us know. For a more comprehensive study on the history of the Sabbath, see the June 1996 issue of *Day Star*, titled "What happened to the Lord's Day?" For a comprehensive study on God's legal covenants, see the October 1998, *Day Star* article "What Changed at the Cross." Both articles can be downloaded from our web-site at: www.wake-up.org, or call the office to purchase your personal copy.

Teach Me Your Ways

Author: Shelley Betts

In the book of Exodus, Moses describes portions of his life's journey for us. Often, the writings of Moses are considered to be lists of rules and regulations. This is unfortunate, because a careful analysis of his "daily diary" reveals a humble man of profound wisdom and faith.

He was a leader of sterling character, who had a genuine compassion and fervent love for a group of very stubborn and undeserving people. Yet, if you read a description of Moses character as a young adult, it would reveal actions that were fostered by impetuousness, poor decision making, brashness, impatience and anger.

So, what brought about the change? In Exodus 33:13, I believe we find a clue. Moses prayed: **"If you are pleased with me, teach me Your ways so I may know You and continue to find favor with You."** And the Lord replied: **"My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."** (verse 14). I am sure all of us would love to know the Presence of God in our daily lives and the rest and peace that accompanies it. Yet, when we further examine Moses life, the record shows that it was anything but peaceful!

The nation of Israel had a way of standing on every nerve in Moses body, constantly challenging and pushing him beyond the limits of normal human patience, forgiveness and love. Yet, time after time, Moses managed to rise above the situation he was facing, demonstrating wisdom filled with compassionate judgement and leadership. How did He do that? Look again at Exodus 33:13 and ponder this phrase: **". . . teach me Your ways so I may know You . . ."** This is the door that leads to victorious Christian living.

Since this verse is found in Exodus, you might immediately conclude the phrase "teach me Your ways" means rules or doctrine. Yes, it is important to have sound doctrine and a faith based on the solid foundation of God’s Word. God gave the written word to Moses for instruction, however, we have missed the point if our focus is on the rules.

Jesus made that radiantly clear when He addressed the Pharisees (the teachers of the Law), calling them hypocrites, blind guides and whitewashed tombs. (Matt 23) Jesus told them that an outward display of "living by the rules" is not the goal! The Pharisees were proud because they had an extensive knowledge of Scripture and believed they had reached a "higher standard of holiness."

Many people today have fallen into this pit. Unfortunately, they have "woe-fully" missed the point of Jesus’ reprimand and have failed to see the essence of successful Christian living. How ironic that the Pharisees’ quoted Moses to justify their behavior, demonstrating how a carnal heart can turn truth upside down. In fact, if Moses’ life shows anything, it proves how God can internalize His character within a human heart and mind. In spite of all the stresses that constantly assailed Moses daily, I believe he learned how to have "peace" in the midst of a storm.

Moses wanted to know God on a personal, intimate basis. Without wanting to seem irreverent, Moses wanted to know what made God "tick." Sometimes in life, we are privileged to meet someone we admire. We long to associate with them and know them better.

We like their company and are anxious to learn the "secret" of their positive lifestyle. In the same manner, our greatest desire should be to know God. We should be so impressed with His magnificence and graciousness that we long to know what makes Him so loving and fair. We should be so enamored with the attributes of His character that we would do anything to be with Him and model our lifestyles after Him. When we exercise strenuously, our bodies crave water to quench dehydration.

God promises that if we will ***thirst*** after His righteousness, our spiritual cravings will be met and we will be filled with His righteousness, just like Moses was. (Matt 5:6)

In like manner, Paul admonishes us to "be filled with the Spirit." (Eph 5: 18) So, for just a moment, let us reflect on a few attributes of God's character by reviewing what Paul calls the "fruit" of the Spirit. The attributes of God's character are beyond human understanding, but Paul does mention love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal 5: 22,23) This "list" is far more than a simple list of positive traits we should strive for; instead, it gives us a glimpse into the wonderful personality of God.

Isn't it interesting that each of these characteristics listed by Paul are relational? For example, if God's Spirit lives within us, we will be kind and gentle (to others), patient and faithful (to others), etc. These characteristics, by their very nature, indicate that our relationship with God is not a one-sided affair. He is a real being constantly striving to develop a relationship with us. As His children, we are to actively respond to Him and His love. Even more, we are to follow His example and treat people we associate with in a similar manner.

Believe me, there is more truth to the saying "like Father, like son" than a simple human example.

Heading Paul's list of Godlike attributes is love. When Adam was created, he was given a perfect love, just like God. When Adam sinned, however, his capacity to love became limited. Carnal man cannot love his neighbor like himself, but people who are "born again" do have an opportunity available to them to experience that original love.

Jesus said, **"love as I have loved you."** (John 13:34) How does this happen? Romans 5:5 states: **"And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us."** Peter revealed a wonderful insight into God's character when he said: **"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and *godliness through our knowledge of him* who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them *you may participate in the divine nature* and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."** (2 Peter 1:3-4, italics mine) You see, as we study about Him, behold His character, watch how He interacts with human kind, His divine power is passed on to us through the Holy Spirit.

Of course, this is not just a one-sided deal. God will help us, but He expects us to have a compelling desire to be like Him. It takes effort! Peter agrees:**"For this very reason, *make every effort* to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."** (2 Peter 1:5-8, italics mine)

It takes effort to harness our natural carnal nature. We have a natural bend toward sinning – it flows out of carnal hearts almost effortlessly. Habits, good or bad, are formed by repetitive behavior. Unfortunately, by the time most of us realize that we have made a mess of our lives, we have already spent many years forming bad habits and consequently, making bad choices. The only way to stop a consistent habit is to use consistent effort.

We know that successful parenting is the direct result of consistently setting the parameters. Each time the child presses the edge of those parameters, good parents remind the child it is time to change their behavior. God sent the Holy Spirit to help "parent" us. When you make a commitment to become God's child, the Holy Spirit will consistently remind us if we push the edge of inappropriate behavior.

If you are fortunate enough to have a good friend, you know that these types of friendships are usually developed over a long period of time. As you converse and associate with one another, friendships become more intimate as you learn to trust each other and the love you have for one another. A good friend will always caution us if they think we are about to make a bad choice. In a similar way, our relationship with God develops with time.

As we learn that the Holy Spirit's counsel is never wrong, we learn to trust Him more.

Unfortunately, few of us have developed the level of intimacy that allows us to be comfortable when we are alone with God. The Holy Spirit, who enables us to develop coping abilities, has been treated like a silent partner, instead of our constant companion. So, when trials come, we feel uncomfortable running to the Lord for our reassurance and solace. To be sure, if the magnitude of our trial is significant enough and really touches our soul, we may fall to our knees and offer up a one-sided prayer.

How sad that so few of us remain on our knees in the silence, listening for His voice and sensing the Holy Spirit's Presence. What a blessing we miss! Instead, we run to our friends and loved ones for advice and comfort. Truthfully, human help is pitiful at best. People are awkward and rarely say anything that soothes our emotional needs. In fact, many of us know very little about how to deal with stressing situations and would prefer not to face them with a friend.

How long will we chose to struggle on our own? Our Creator, through the Holy Spirit, has been with us from birth. He has seen every emotional upheaval that has shredded our lives and only He can address our emotional needs and frustrations. It is rare to find a person who exhibits true compassion. It is rare to find a person who "has the patience of Job." It is rare to find a person who loves unconditionally and is faithful, trustworthy and honest. Why? Is it that the majority of us are such a miserable group of people? Is it that we really don't care? No, I don't

think so.

I believe that we have gotten the horse before the cart. We live in a society where book learning is highly valued. It is an age where we "run to and fro" making money, keeping appointments, keeping ourselves entertained and in good physical shape. Before the age of technology, there was time to be quiet, gaze at God's marvelous creation, and search your soul. Technology may have eased the drudgery of life in many ways, but it has also created an environment where people are addicted to "noise."

From the moment most people's feet hit the floor after a night's sleep, they are immersed in noise via the car radio or CD, television, phone calls, job-related meetings, conversations and on and on. Satan is clever. He has created the kingdoms of this world and their operating economies. They function in such a way that assures him that most of the human population has very little quiet time to be with God.

He knows that if he can keep us busy and surrounded by noise, few of us will be able to hear God's voice. Job number one for the born-again believer is to spend time meditating on God's character, sensing His Presence, and listening for that still small voice. This was Moses' life line – it allowed him to have peace, even though those around him were constantly complaining, murmuring, and pressing his patience to the limit.

Toward the end of his life, he encouraged Israel, ". . . ***Now choose life*, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, *listen to his voice*, and *hold fast to him*. For the LORD is your life . . ."** (Deut 30:19,20) And Jesus told this parable: **"The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. . . But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."** (John 10:2-5)

We often remember that God's people "hear His voice," but we usually stop reading there. To me, what is even more significant about Jesus' remark is that He reveals to us that if we do this correctly, we will become absolutely familiar with the Holy Spirit's inner voice. Then we will immediately recognize when "another voice" – that of a stranger (the devil) – tries to lead us astray. If we spend time contemplating the ways of God, reading about Jesus' life, learning what the principles of His kingdom are, we will be prepared for Satan's assaults.

You can be sure that if you make a sincere commitment to take time to know God, Satan will press into your personal space. He will do everything he can to distract you. He will send people to take up your "special time" and create circumstances to fill up your days. He will send trials, attempting to fill your mind with fears and anxiety, stealing your peace and faith. 2 Timothy 3:12 makes it clear: **"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."**

That certainly is a backhanded promise, isn't it? Why is it then, that when we make this type of commitment, we seem startled and unprepared for the inevitable. It should not surprise us then, when hardship darkens our door. Jesus tried to warned us, telling us that the world would hate

us. (John 15:19) He prayed: **"My prayer is *not that you take them out of the world* but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. *Sanctify them by the truth*; your word is truth."** (John 17:15-17)

Knowing God, being filled with His truth, is the only way we can survive the devil's attacks. There is no other way! Peter was absolutely right! It will take effort and a heartfelt desire to know God above anything else in life.

For most of us, the thought of persecution or a test takes on very negative connotations. Some people are so afraid of trials that they are afraid to follow Jesus. Yet if we view it appropriately, a test given by a Master Teacher can be a very positive tool, indicating where we may be weak and providing an opportunity to prepare for the next test, until we pass. So, if our weakness happens to be in the area of patience, for example, it is possible a test may come daily.

But if we are serious in our desire to "be like Him," then with each test of our patience, our ability to handle frustrating situations will become more developed. With His guidance, the day will come when we will pass the test and that particular discipline will no longer give us problems.

Luke wrote a profound statement in Acts 4:13. He reported: **"When they** [the elders and leaders] **saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that *these men had been with Jesus*."** (italics mine)

Believe me, if you spend enough time with Jesus, it is self-evident! Just as people were drawn to Jesus because of His character, love and words, people will be drawn to you. There will be something different about you. John 13:34, 35 says: **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, *if you love one another*."**

If a converted Paul had been in the audience that day, he would have shouted a hearty "Amen!" His agreement can be read in Ephesians 5:1, 2 which says: **"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children** [children who are loved by their parents want to emulate their parents] **and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."**

Take just a moment, open your Bible and read James 4:1-12. James was writing to the believers in Jesus Christ and it sounds like they were struggling with relatively the same issues that believers do today – problems with self-control, not enough love and inappropriate motives. Time has not changed much. To be truthful, as sin marches on, I am sure our generation is far more degenerate than our first century counterpart.

More than likely, we are far more intolerant and critical of each others beliefs and actions. But Paul goes on to say, that if you will "decide" to love that person, even if you disagree, you will gain the "fruit" of *goodness, righteousness and truth* (promised traits of God's character) for making that commitment. How critical is it then, to take our eyes off each other and concentrate on reflecting God's character? Is it easy? Not at first. But just as consistency pervades when

raising children, so does consistent decision-making prevail when seeking to model God's characteristics.

Do you see how it works? Each and every time you pause before you act, allowing the Holy Spirit to infuse your mind and heart with a willingness to follow God's lead, your actions to obey will become easier. Eventually, the intense struggle to love those people who misuse you will not be so severe.

Why? Because God will do for you, what you cannot do for yourself. If you are anxious to please God, you will decide, even in the hard times, to rise above the situation (just like Moses) and allow God's character to shine through you. Even in the face of injustice, even in the face of ridicule, even in the face of rejection, the Holy Spirit will give you the grace to rise above your situation and love those who may be hurting you. This kind of lifestyle is unearthly – it is not normal.

Why should it be? **"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men."** (Romans 14:17,18)

There it is again . . . a short summary of God's personality. The Holy Spirit longs to instill and develop these traits within you! Moses knew the secret – "teach me Your ways!" Do you feel like your "connection" with God has become faint? Allow the Holy Spirit to fan the flames of familiarity.

James encourages us: **"Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?"** (James 2:5) Love is developed over time, spending precious time getting to know one another. Now is the time to get intimately acquainted with God, making Him our number one priority.

Then will you be able to say with a heart overflowing with thankful emotion: "How do I love You, let me count the ways!

Jeremiah the Prophet

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Whenever a person is born, he or she arrives in a world that has ongoing processes and issues. It was no different when Jeremiah was born either. His nation was on the precipice of destruction, but very few people realized it at the time. About 200 years before Jeremiah was born, God's patience with the apostasy of both nations of the divided kingdom, Israel and Judah, began to grow thin.

God notified both nations, especially the northern kingdom of Israel, of His weariness with their evil ways by sending more than eight prophets over the course of 120 years. God hoped that His people would repent and change their behavior. However, Israel did not listen. Consequently, in 722 B.C. God sent the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V, to destroy the 10 tribes that made up the northern kingdom of Israel.

The two remaining tribes in the South, Judah and Benjamin, were also on a degenerate course that would ultimately result in destruction if they did not repent. In an effort to save the two Southern tribes from the same fate as their Northern brothers, the Lord sent more than five additional prophets to Jerusalem prior to 605 B.C., the last being Jeremiah.

One day, without warning or expectation, God suddenly burst into Jeremiah's reality. The son of a priest, about 21 years of age, Jeremiah was overwhelmed and bewildered by the encounter and the assignment that God gave him. Jesus introduced Himself to Jeremiah saying, **"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."** (Jer 1:5)

Even though Jeremiah tried to excuse himself from the appointment and assignment because of his age, the Lord assured the young man that He was in the business of qualifying the unqualified. (Jer 1:7) Although the Bible does not tell us how many times the Lord talked with Jeremiah, we do know that Jeremiah remained faithful in his service to God for the rest of his life (about 53 years).

Whereas God required an earlier prophet, Hosea, to marry a prostitute and have children (Hos 1:2), God did not allow Jeremiah to marry and have children. (Jer 16:2) The lives and actions of God's servants sometimes reveal living examples of God's future plans. It is ironic that Jeremiah, the last prophet to speak for God before Jerusalem's complete destruction in 586 B.C., was able to rescue and hide the very thing that condemned Judah.

History claims that Jeremiah took possession of the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets God wrote in His own hand, and hid it in a cave to protect it from Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

When God called Jeremiah to serve Him as a prophet in 627 B.C., another 21 year old sat on the throne in Jerusalem. In a way, Jeremiah and King Josiah shared a common destiny.

Whereas Jeremiah had been appointed as a prophet *before* he was born, Josiah had been appointed king over Judah some 250 years *before* he was born! (1 Kings 13:2)

Josiah came to the throne when he was only 8 years old, and by the time he was 16, the youthful king began a plan he thought would turn the tide of Judah's idolatry. Unfortunately, Judah's problem was not the worship of idols on the surrounding mountains tops or the selling of graven images in Jerusalem.

The root problem was the degenerate and rebellious condition of every heart. One would think that a faithful prophet and a dedicated king could make a big difference, but Judah was beyond the point of recovery. God even assured Jeremiah that He would spare Jerusalem if he could find *one* righteous soul! (Jer 5:1)

This reveals a very important point: The reform Josiah initiated, that is, the desecration of altars dedicated to foreign gods and the imposition of laws forbidding gross sin, did not change the hearts or attitudes of Jerusalem's citizens. Even more, Jeremiah's preaching did not change one heart that we know of.

The failure of these endeavors left God with no other option than to totally destroy Jerusalem. Jesus said to Jeremiah, **"My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good."** (Jer 4:22)

The life of God's Old Testament prophets was always hard and they suffered enormously. Why? To put it bluntly, prophets are sent to identify sin by its right name. Consequently, the prophet was rejected, persecuted, tortured, imprisoned or killed because the prophet spoke against things the people loved and honored!

It seems incredible that God's people degenerated to such a base condition, but it should not surprise us. It is a fact of human life that each generation sets a lower moral stage for the next (even though most politicians will deny this). Therefore, each succeeding generation sees itself "no worse" than the standards it inherited and easily justifies its degenerate ways. However, when decadent behavior is compared to "God's unchanging standard of righteousness," the gulf is very great indeed.

Consequently, God's prophets appear to be madmen or kooks uttering inflammatory words. The world is full of madmen and kooks anyway, so how can we know the difference? There's a profound lesson in this. Truth and nobility of character still pleases God. This has not changed from the beginning of time even though decadence abounds. The malignant power of sin will deaden the most devout Christian's mind if it is not renewed and uplifted to higher standards each day. (Phi 2:5)

The Apostasy of Israel

When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, the young man still lived with his family in the little

town of Anathoth, about three miles from Jerusalem. From his earliest thoughts, Jeremiah anticipated that he would be a priest like his father, for such was the privilege of Levite males. Jeremiah also realized that serving Jehovah would not be easy because Judah had embraced the worship and adoration of numerous gods. (Solomon introduced polytheism to Judah through his 700 wives. 1 Kings 11:3-5)

After Jeremiah's initial encounter with God, he began to speak boldly against idol worship and warned Judah about the coming wrath of God upon Jerusalem. His words were considered blasphemous and inflammatory. Accordingly, most of the religious leaders in Judah, and even his own brothers, schemed to have him killed! (Jer 12:6; 26:11)

At that time, there were many sects of priests in Jerusalem and each sect represented a specific god. (A parallel can be seen today, with many churches in any given city, each having its own clergy defending and defining the doctrines of their God.) In Jeremiah's day, Jehovah God, the ancient God of Israel, was merely one of many gods. God made a point of this when He quizzed Jeremiah, "How could Israel, a nation miraculously delivered from Egyptian slavery by Jehovah, ever come to a place where it could worship other gods?" (Jer 2:11) The obvious answers lie within the following issues:

(1) Spiritual darkness overcame the generations that followed after Solomon's reign because the monotheistic worship of Jehovah was exchanged for the foolish polytheistic worship of the nations around them. Consequently, Israel *became* a nation of darkness rather than a nation of light. (Jer 7:28)

(2) The carnal nature is not opposed to religion, but instead is opposed to divine rebuke. False religion eliminates divine rebuke with pseudo-justification. False religion is a double-sided coin: One side frees the "believer" from careful obedience to God's commandments (lawlessness), while the other side imposes the harshest guilt and penalty for actions that have nothing to do with actual sin (legalism). When lawlessness abounds, people become shameless in their evil deeds. When legalism abounds, religion becomes external, harsh and rigid – people become superstitious and distant from God.

(3) Israel and Judah abandoned God because Jehovah's priests compromised their high calling for power, money and popularity. They failed miserably in proclaiming God's truth. The shepherds of the flock did not teach the people about the consequences of sin, redemption, or about God's restitution and forgiveness. God laid much of Judah's failure at the feet of the priests. (Jer 23:2)

Consider the sins of Judah which God identifies through Jeremiah by checking the following texts – Jeremiah 1:16; 2:28; 2:32; 5:28; 6:10; 7:9,10; 8:7,8; 8:10,11; 9:8; 17:21,22

In Jeremiah 22:3,5 the prophet writes: "This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. . . . But if you do not obey these commands, declares the Lord, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin."

History confirms the outcome. Jerusalem was destroyed *by God* in 586 B.C. The *servant* of God who wrought the destruction was Nebuchadnezzar. (Jer 25:9) Jerusalem was totally destroyed and the land lay desolate for 70 years so that it could receive the rest it was due. In 430 years, the Jews had desecrated 70 sabbatical years, therefore the exile in Babylon was also 70 years in length. (2 Chr 36:21, Eze 4:5,6)

Last Day Parallels

The book of Jeremiah contains a number of parallels with the Great Tribulation. Here are three:

Parallel 1

God explains in the book of Jeremiah why He must destroy His city, His temple and a large number of His people and then send the survivors into exile. It is important to understand that the one problem God cannot fix is *corporate apostasy* and destruction is the only solution to corporate apostasy. Notice that God destroyed *His* people three times in the Old Testament: He destroyed the faithless generation that came out of Egypt; Israel in 722 B.C.; and Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

The irony in each situation is that God's people could not see or understand their apostasy! The religious people wanted to kill Jeremiah because he condemned their actions, their city and their temple! The Great Tribulation is coming and human kind has not changed. Speaking the truth brings the same consequences today as it did in Jeremiah's day. Consequently, God will send a great king and his army (the Antichrist and his angels) against those who bear His name. (Dan 8:23-25; 11:36-45)

The religious people of the world are in apostasy and they too, do not know it, nor will they listen. When love for truth and the distinction between good and evil is lost among those who claim to know God, that generation is the last! (Jer 11:7-13) The destruction of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day parallels the fact that God will not spare from destruction those who "claim" to know Him best!

Parallel 2

God explains in the book of Jeremiah why Babylon must be destroyed at the end of the 70 years of exile. God also explains to Jeremiah the forthcoming destruction of other nations as well. The Old Testament contains many examples of how God destroyed the people who corporately passed the point of no return. For example, God destroyed the whole world in Noah's day. He also destroyed the Egyptians, the Medes and Persians, the Grecians, Sodom and Gomorrah, Jericho and Nineveh.

Just as God used haughty Shalmaneser V and arrogant Nebuchad-nezzar as His servants of wrath upon apostate Israel and Judah (Jer 25:9), God will use Lucifer (the Antichrist) to decimate the wicked of Earth. (Rev 9:4-6) The Old Testament affirms that God grants nations a period of mercy and grace. When a nation becomes corrupt and degenerate, God sends

warnings. When redemptive judgments and warnings have no further effect, God destroys that nation.

By doing this, He cauterizes the degeneracy of sin *for the benefit of future generations*. Using this process, God achieves a higher level of morality for succeeding generations. This also explains why there has to be an end to this world and the creation of a new one!

Parallel 3

In the book of Jeremiah, God reveals some of His future plans for the restoration of Israel and the establishment of His Kingdom. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, God speaks of restoration for His people. Many Christians ignore this point: The promise of restoration in the Old Testament is limited to the restoration *from the Babylonian destruction and the subsequent establishment of God's kingdom at the end of the 70 weeks*.

In other words, the restoration promised in the book of Jeremiah (also Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel) has nothing to do with 1948 and Israel's independence from Great Britain. Rather, the promise of Israel's/Judah's restoration immediately follows the exile in Babylon. Notice these verses (italics mine):

25:9,11,12 "I will summon all the peoples of the *north* and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the Lord, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. . . . This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the Lord, "and will make it desolate forever."

16:14,15 "However, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when men will no longer say, 'As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but they will say, 'As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the *north* and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers."

There are four decrees in the Old Testament restoring Israel back to her homeland. Notice the first one that promptly occurred at the end of 70 years of exile (605-536 B.C.): **"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: " 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you–may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up.' "** (2 Chr 36:22,23)

Summary

The book of Jeremiah offers a number of valuable insights about the ways of God. When the story found in Jeremiah is compared to the story found in Revelation, certain parallels are unmistakable because the actions of God are consistent. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Consider the big picture. God is about to deal with the cumulative guilt of a whole world. This current generation of six billion people is too diverse and apostasy has gone too far to recover; therefore, God's wrath is about to be revealed. He will faithfully deal with every person.

God reminded Jeremiah of His interest in each person saying, **"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."** (Jer 17:9,10)

One final point. Even though the warning about the destruction of Jerusalem was given over a period of about 250 years, when time for destruction came, the armies of Nebuchadnezzar appeared in *one* day. Even though God repeatedly warned His people through His servants the prophets, there was no "heart" change.

Even though God was patient and forbearing, there was no repentance. Even though God was willing to relent of His wrath, Israel and Judah scorned their Benefactor. If God's own people would not change, what is the likelihood of a religiously diverse world of six billion people repenting from their sins if warned of coming judgments?

History says, "Not possible." This is the reason why the coming judgments of God will commence without warning on *one* day in the *very* near future. **"While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."** (1 The 5:3)

The Bible confirms that advance warnings from God did not change decadent behavior in Noah's day or Jeremiah's day, and sadly our generation is no different today.

Foreboding Signs of the End

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Sometime ago I was a guest on a radio talk show. The host was somewhat amused at my boldness in asserting that *we are living* in Earth's final days. He asked, "So, what leads *you,* Mr. Wilson, to believe that *I* am living at the end of the world?" It was obvious from his question that he was taunting me and understandably so!

How many times during the past 2,000 years have Christians cried, "Wolf-wolf?" How many times has it been said, "The end of the world is just around the corner?" I tried to deflect his skepticism by saying there are two kinds of evidence that prove we are living at the end of the world. The first evidence is "general," the second is "apocalyptic."

General evidence is all around us and can be easily observed. Apocalyptic evidence is even more affirming, but apocalyptic prophecy requires study and understanding.

General Evidence

General evidence can be difficult to discuss as *a sign* of the end of the world because human conduct *is* one of the signs of the end. The behavior of mankind has become grossly degenerate, but to the carnal heart it does not appear to be "all that bad." In other words, the stench of sin goes unnoticed in today's society!

It is like the old saying, "Pig farmers can''t smell their pigs". Still, a measurable change in degenerate behavior has occurred during the past 20 years and 16 million deaths confirm how sexually immoral the world has become! AIDS is not like the Bubonic Plague, typhoid fever or tuberculosis. AIDS is a fatal disease that is uniquely conveyed (in all but a few cases) through sexual contact.

On Saturday, April 29, 2000, more than 3,000 homosexual couples gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. for a "marriage ceremony" conducted by Rev. Troy Perry, founder of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. On the following day, thousands gathered in this nation's capital at the National Mall, demonstrating for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights.

The march and the "marriage" of 3,000 couples was carefully planned to emphasize the need for "human rights" for homosexuals and to remind politicians that homosexuals are a significant voting block. "It's a human rights issue, it's just about people being treated fairly in terms of legislative issues. I just think that there's too much hatred and we have to stand up against that," said Mark Halacy from New York. "All we want is the freedom to love, the freedom to love whomever we choose without fear, without bigotry, without discrimination," said Lori Jean, former Executive Director of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center.

From my point of view, AIDS is a verifiable sign of the end. It is an unmistakable sign that

human sexual behavior has ignored the bounds of conduct set forth by man's Creator. God said, **"'Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion. Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants."** (Lev 18:22-25)

These verses indicate why God drove the heathen nations from the land that He had given Israel. Similarly, the rising tide of homosexual behavior in the U.S. indicates that our land has been defiled (or will soon be), and our nation (and all other nations suffering from this defilement) will be punished for this sin.

I know my remarks will be considered offensive to homosexuals. I do not wish to offend a single person. Yet, the Bible is clear and on this topic God leaves no middle ground. The practice of homosexuality puts an impasse between people. On the one hand, homosexuals want acceptance and "freedom" to fulfill any sexual desire, but many heterosexuals want freedom from the immoral influence of homosexuality for themselves and their children. How can the needs of both be met while sharing the same land?

Homosexuality is a deviation caused by the curse of sin. It is real, not imaginary. It is incredibly powerful. I have no doubts that for some, homosexual tendencies began early in life. Homosexuality affects people of every nation, race and religion and this sexual deviation is a behavioral sign of the end. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for defiant sexual immorality, the entire world will suffer the same fate.

Let me make this point clear. A person who is homosexual is not unlike any other sinner. He/she has a soul to be saved and is due Christian kindness and charity. The need of a Savior is no less for the homosexual than any other sinner. However, salvation belongs to those who overcome sin through faith in Christ.

The power unto salvation *includes* power over sin! (Rom 6:9-18, 1 Cor 6:9-11) The *only* cure for homosexuality is the same cure for every sinner – a miracle, the miracle of rebirth! Pray for those individuals who have adopted the homosexual lifestyle. Instead of judging the individual, pray for victory over a besetting sin.

May the Holy Spirit speak to their hearts and help them grasp the divine condemnation that rests upon this sinful course of action!

Another Sign of the End

Another impressive sign of the end is population growth. Even the carnal eye can grasp how the world's population growth is like a runaway train. Researchers warn that the population of Earth will have four billion more mouths to feed within 35-40 years.

Even now, more than three billion people suffer from hunger and the number of malnourished people increases each day. Social scientists speculate that *something* must destroy more than two billion people within the next twenty years or devastating wars over food and water will be inevitable. The Earth can no longer provide food and water to sustain its population growth – another telling sign of the end.

Violent weather and other natural disasters this past century have caused famine, economic havoc and death. The table below shows just a few of these disasters during the past century.

Natural Disasters

Location	Event	Date	Results
China	Drought	1907	24 Million Dead
Ukraine	Drought	1921-22	5 Million Dead
Ohio Valley	Tornados for 3.5 Hrs.	Mar. 18, 1925	695 Dead
China -- Yangtze River	Flood	1931	3.7 Million Dead
India	Drought	1965-67	1.5 Million Dead
Bangladesh	Cyclone	1970	.5 Million Dead (2 Million Homeless)
South Florida	Hurricane Andrew	1992	$25 Million Damage
Central America	Hurricane Mitch	1998	11,000 Dead

Just in the month of January 1999, more than 200 tornadoes were observed in the U.S. – 14 times the average number! At this very moment, 50 million people are currently facing famine as a result of a severe three year drought in two of India's western states. Likewise, the middle East is currently experiencing its worst drought in more than 80 years.

Should we accept violent weather as a natural phenomenon or should we consider these disasters as signs – manifestations of God's displeasure? The Bible indicates how God uses these "natural phenomena." Notice these verses: **"If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land. 'I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country."** (Lev 26:3-6)

God Deals with Mankind

Some people attempt to limit God's words in the Old Testament (OT) by saying they were directed at Israel and not toward mankind in general. I disagree. God's dealings with Israel were based on the *same* principles of righteousness that He now uses for all nations. God is not a respecter of people. (Acts 10:34)

He made all of us and He loves each of us. (Acts 17:26) The OT confirms how God dealt with other nations, using the same standard of fairness He used with Israel. Even more, if God destroyed a nation that He set apart as His ambassadors of grace (Israel), surely He will do no less to other nations who violate His laws.

God deals with all the people of Earth in a consistent manner. By studying His actions and warnings in the OT, we can understand His forthcoming actions against the whole world.

Earth is Defiled by its People

Notice these words from Isa 24:1-6 **"See, the Lord is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants – it will be the same for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor. The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The Lord has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore Earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left."** (Read Deu 11; Jer 14 and Hos 4.)

Is Degeneracy a Valid Sign?

Sin and its resulting degeneracy have been around since the beginning of time on Earth. Humankind became so corrupt by Noah's day that God was left with no alternative against sin's malignant growth but to send a worldwide flood. So, how can degeneracy be a current sign of the end?

The answer lies not only in the depth of degeneracy, but in the breadth of evil. Paul wrote, **"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power."** (2 Tim 3:1-5)

Jesus predicted in Mat 24:12, **"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold."** Paul wrote in Gal 5:19-21, **"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."**

Full Cup Principle

There is a consistent concept throughout the Bible that I call the "Full Cup Principle," which

applies to every nation and city in the whole world. The principle is defined: "When human conduct degenerates beyond the point of redemption and restoration, and subsequent generations are unable to rise above their forefather's level of corruption and cannot meet God's minimum standards for civility, God steps into the affairs of man and terminates that body of people."

The Full Cup Principle explains the destruction by the flood in Noah's day, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel, Judah, Babylon, the Medes and the Persians. It also explains the coming destruction of the world.

Rising Contempt for the Return of Jesus

The passage of time suggests the continuation of time. Unfortunately, some Christians claim to be eager for the Lord's return, but their eagerness is not based on a realistic understanding of His coming kingdom. In fact, many Christians believe they are worthy enough to escape the Great Tribulation via a rapture.

On the other hand, there are other Christians who say, "I am not concerned about the Second Coming. It will happen whenever it happens. All that matters today is that I am right with the Lord." Superficially, these statements sound reasonable, even defensible, but there is an underlying contempt for the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation hidden in these words.

The prophecies reveal what God plans to do and where we are in His divine plan. As Christians we should be carefully examining the prophecies so our faith and spiritual preparation will be adequate for the final exam that lies ahead.

There have been scoffers for thousands of years, but it is the breadth and depth of skepticism among Christians that convinces me we are near the end. Peter said, **"First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."** (2 Pet 3:3-9)

The Gulf Widens

Another sign of the end is how man has become preoccupied with hoarding wealth. A great gulf is widening between the poor and rich of the world as the rich use their power to acquire and hoard even more wealth. Statistics reveal that during the past decade, the world economy has

more than doubled.

The rich received 75% of that growth, the middle classes received 20% and the poor received 5%. The poor are growing poorer and more desperate. Feelings of hatred, animosity, despair and hopelessness are growing in every quadrant of the world.

The misery index is climbing. Listen to James, **"Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you. Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."** (Jam 5:1-8)

Summary

This short presentation has described a few of the general signs indicating to me that we are at the end of the age. Earth is overcrowded and unable to feed or quench the thirst of an accelerating population. The corporate behavior of mankind is dismal. In less than twenty years, sixteen million have died of AIDS in less than 20 years, and some estimates indicate that 30 million more will die within the next ten years!

Unnatural weather phenomena plagues our Earth. 80% of the world's wealth rests in the hands of 6% of the population. The poor have no hope and no future – only slavery and death. Christians have very little interest in the prophecies, nor is there any credible evidence to convince them that Jesus IS coming soon.

When God's judgments (the first four trumpets) fall on the Earth, religious and political leaders will initiate a powerful backlash against wanton behavior, including homosexual relationships. Many "sin-less laws" will be legislated overnight to stem degenerate behavior. Unfortunately, Christians who resist Babylon and its man-made laws will appear to side with those having the deviant behavior.

How ironic! For a deeper presentation, order your copy of my book *The Revelation of Jesus*.

Why Antichrist Must Appear First

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The rumor mill among Christians in Paul's day worked very well - perhaps too well. One persistent rumor that went round and round during the first 20 years of the church's existence was alleged sightings of Jesus. The reader has to understand that communication in those days between distant places was very slow and subject to distortion.

So, rumors originating from Jerusalem about a "Jesus sighting" could have taken several weeks to reach Thessalonica with a high probability of being enhanced by a dozen people along the way. Further, the only way to verify whether a rumor was fact or fiction was to travel to Jerusalem, and that was out of the question because of time and effort. Consequently, correcting a rumor was practically impossible.

Add to this dilemma the vacuum produced by the persecution of early Christians, and any word concerning a possible fulfillment of Christ's words regarding His return for His followers became "truth."

Finally, the apostle Paul addressed this issue and brought the rumors about the appearing of Jesus to an end once and for all. Paul stated that Jesus would not return to Earth *until* two events occurred: **"Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God."** (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4)

Until the Rebellion Occurs

The awesome significance of the phrase "until *the* rebellion occurs" is poorly understood by many people. The rebellion that Paul is referring to is the forthcoming wholesale rejection of the gospel by the vast majority of Earth’s inhabitants. When the Great Tribulation begins, God will empower 144,000 men and women in every quadrant of Earth. These will speak for God and proclaim three clarion messages (described in Revelation 14).

The 144,000 will proclaim, "Submit to God and comply with His commandments"; "Do not submit to the authority of Babylon"; and "If any man submits to the authority of the Antichrist, he will be tortured to death with burning sulfur." (Revelation 14:10)

Jesus has made it clear: **"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."** (Matthew 24:14) Consider this: The events associated with the Great Tribulation provide the only scenario in which the

gospel can be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony for salvation.

Many church groups are doing their best to broadcast their version of the gospel, but when Jesus was looking 2,000 years into the future, He was not speaking of a denominationally oriented broadcast of the gospel on radio and TV. Instead, He was referring to a penetrating presentation of the gospel that transcends every religious barrier. At this moment in time, three billion people have not even heard of Jesus Christ! Even worse, those people who may have heard of Jesus, do not really understand their need for Jesus.

For example, the devout Hindu does not thoughtfully consider the gospel presented by a devout Baptist. Nor does a devout Church of Christ member thoughtfully consider a religious message presented by a devout Moslem. Even among Christians, a devout Catholic does not thoughtfully consider the gospel presented by a Protestant, etc. The problem is that devoutly religious people cannot discuss differing "gospels" because their paradigms about God have little, if anything, in common.

So, broadcasting the gospel, in the manner that is being done today, is the best thing that can be done right now. But, understand that broadcasting the gospel to the whole world (as Trinity Broadcasting Network and many religious groups claim to do) is no substitute for what God is about to do.

God will open the heart and mind of every sincere person with displays of incredible power and authority by sending judgments upon the Earth. God will stop the world in its tracks with a global earthquake, meteoric showers of burning hail, two asteroid impacts and great darkness. This will get everyone's full attention so that *His* eternal gospel can be delivered by the 144,000 and thoughtfully considered by all people, regardless of religious background!

In this setting, the rebellion that Paul speaks about comes into sharp focus. As the truth about God's will (*the* gospel) is being forcefully and clearly set before every person on Earth, a decision will be required. The forces of Babylon (the crisis one world government that forms in response to God's judgments) will be aligned against *the* gospel. Decisions made for God during the Tribulation will not be easy. Much of the world's population will reject the truth about God and will stand in direct opposition to the clearest evidences of truth.

Notice what Paul says about the wicked: **". . . They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."** (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12)

Notice: The wicked will perish because they *refused* to love the truth and be saved. God does not hold a person accountable for something they do not understand. God does hold a person responsible when the Holy Spirit brings conviction about truth and truth is rejected.

In other words, how can we say that a person has refused the gospel until he *hears and correctly understands* the terms and conditions of the gospel within his own religious reality. For example, how can the Catholic condemn the Hindu when the Hindu cannot honestly see things

in the same way the Catholic does, or the Hindu condemn a Baptist because the Baptist cannot honestly see things the same way he does.

In His great mercy, when God initiates the Great Tribulation, He will open every mind for a short season to thoughtfully consider the truth about His will. Every person will be forced, under dire circumstances, to give due consideration to the terms and conditions of His salvation – every person will understand the consequences of refusing to believe the truth. Then, the end will come, just as Jesus predicted, because every person will make their decision for or against the gospel.

God Sends a Powerful Delusion

Paul is very specific about the basis for the appearing of the man of sin (the Antichrist). He wrote: "For **this reason** God sends them a powerful delusion." What reason is Paul referring to? *When a person rejects the Holy Spirit's strongest influence that can be exerted within the soul to submit to the will of God and rejects the clearest evidences of truth that God can set before him, God can do nothing further to save that person!*

This is amazing, so pay attention to how this unfolds during the Great Tribulation: The Holy Spirit will be poured out on every person, good and bad, (Joel 2:28) stirring the soul of every person in a manner never seen before. Further, the global devastations of God's wrath (the first four trumpets of Revelation 8) will cause everyone to consider the presence of the Almighty and the principles that govern His Kingdom during a short period of time.

The 144,000 will clearly and powerfully present the terms and conditions of salvation. As Babylon inflicts persecution, everyone *will be forced to make* a decision to either submit to God's truth or rebel against it. Unfortunately, most of the world will reject the terms and conditions of salvation, crumble under the pressure of persecution and side with Babylon. This wholesale rebellion produces the global rebellion that Paul predicts.

When God has done about all He can to save souls, the Antichrist will be released from his spiritual dungeon to accomplish his heart's desire. God will allow the Antichrist to have great miracle working powers so that those who delight in wickedness will be quickly deceived and thus destroyed.

A Six-Step Process

God always follows a consistent pattern when dealing with mankind. This pattern can be seen clearly as God dealt with ancient Israel. There is a process which is illuminated in the Old Testament that the reader needs to be aware of:

1. When a group of people becomes corrupt and degenerate, God sends warnings through His servants, the prophets.
2. History indicates that typically the degenerate group rejects God's messenger and His message.

3. God responds by sending a destroyer.
4. Then, after the dust settles, God begins the process of restoration.
5. When the destroyer becomes proud and arrogant, then God brings destruction upon the destroyer.
6. It is God's ultimate purpose to bring about everlasting life and joy in an Earth made new.

Notice how this six-step scenario played out in ancient Israel:

North

1. The ten northern tribes of Israel became corrupt and degenerate. God sent warnings of reproof and correction through eight prophets.
2. Israel rejected God's message and His messengers.
3. God sent the king of Assyria as "His club of wrath" to destroy Israel in 722 B.C. (Isaiah 10:5)

South

1. The southern two tribes of Judah became corrupt and degenerate. God sent warnings of reproof and correction through five prophets.
2. Israel rejected God's message and His messengers.
3. God sent the king of Babylon as "His club of wrath" to destroy Jerusalem by 586 B.C. (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6)

Both

1. God begins the process of restoring His people to their homeland (decrees to restore and rebuild Jerusalem).
2. God destroys the destroyers, i.e., the kings of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. (See Isaiah 10 and Jeremiah 25, 43, 50.)
3. God's plan was to ultimately bring about everlasting life and joy. (Isaiah 65)

This six-step process explains the fall of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Grecia, Rome and many empires down through the course of history. These six steps are consistent, even as we review the destruction of Earth during Noah's day or the divine destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God is consistent. He is not willing that anyone should perish, but when decadence and degeneracy reach a point of no return, God steps in by sending a destroyer or destruction.

At the End Time

This six-step process is also consistent as events unfold during the Great Tribulation. Especially notice how the destroyer, the agent of God's wrath, is ultimately destroyed:

1. At the present time, the world and all its religious systems are corrupt and degenerate. Each generation, more degenerate than the last, corrupts God's truth with man-made

ideas and doctrines, until God's will can hardly be recognized.

2. Religion is at a stalemate – the religious diversity of the world prevents one man from proving the superiority of his religion over that of another man.
3. God will devastate the world with judgments so that everyone will be able to discern the truth and intelligently consider the terms and conditions of *the* eternal gospel. Because no denomination has all the truth, God's servants, 144,000 people from all walks of life, will speak for Him during the Great Tribulation.
4. After a period of about two years, when most of the world has rebelled against the gospel, God will send Lucifer, the destroyer. Lucifer (Satan) is the Antichrist and is identified in many Bible texts, so we will not be deceived. He is known as "the king out of the North, the stern faced king." (Daniel 8) He is also described in Rev 13 as the beast having two horns like the Lamb. In 2 The 2, he is identified as the Man of Sin who claims to be God. In Greek and Hebrew, the devil's name means the same thing, the "destroyer." (Revelation 9:11)
   Lucifer is the *angel king* of the abyss and he will be released from the spiritual realm to physically appear before the human race as a great delusion. Remember, the wicked perish because they refused to love the truth and be saved. Therefore, God sends a strong delusion – Lucifer appearing in the flesh – and those who refuse to believe God's truth will believe Lucifer's lies and be condemned.
5. After five months of gross deception, the devil will take control of Earth. (Revelation 9:1-11) God turns the whole world over to the devil and his angels, and they will kill one-third of mankind to gain complete dominion over Earth. (Rev 9:13-21) At that time, the mark of the beast (a tattoo) will be implemented. Only the faithful, those people who have learned to rely on God's sustaining strength, will be able to refuse the mark of the beast.
6. At the Second Coming, the devil and his forces, as well as the wicked of Earth who join their ranks, will be destroyed. Thus, the "destroyer" will be destroyed. After the 1,000 years have expired, God will create a new Heaven and a new Earth for His children, and everlasting life and joy will prevail.

Summary

The Antichrist is coming and he is sent to destroy all people who rebel against the Sovereign God of Heaven and Earth. God sent Shalmanser V as His agent of wrath to destroy Israel's ten tribes in 722 B.C. (Isaiah 10) and He used Nebuchadnezzar as "His servant" to destroy Egypt and Jerusalem by 586 B.C. (Jeremiah 25) God also used Cyrus and Darius to destroy the pomp of Belshazzar, king of Babylon (Isaiah 45).

In a consistent manner, during the Great Tribulation, God will send a great king with his deadly forces to destroy a large number of rebels upon Earth. (Revelation 9:13-21) This great king will be none other than Lucifer, the devil, the Antichrist. Scripture teaches that God brings each destroyer to an end (Daniel 4:17) and yes, the Antichrist will also be brought to a fatal end – and not by human power! (Daniel 8:25; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:19-21)

One last point. As I understand Rev, more than 50% of Earth's population will perish before Christ appears: 1.5 billion will be destroyed by the first four trumpet judgments and 1.5 billion

will be destroyed by Lucifer and his angels. These figures do not include many martyrs for Christ's sake. (Revelation 6:9-11)

The forthcoming carnage is beyond comprehension. The battle between good and evil will be a fight to the finish, but Jesus Christ will triumph for He has overcome the world and sin! Even more, as soldiers of the cross, we have this assurance from the Captain of Hosts: **"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints."** (Revelation 13:10)

In other words, our one and only concern should be to stand firm in Christ and not lose our hope or faith. God knows what He is doing and the role He has for each of us in days to come. We will celebrate the grandest victory with Him and enjoy the greatest homecoming ever seen.

Even if we must perish in the line of duty during the Great Tribulation, the sleep will be sweet, a release from the noise and din of battle. John wrote, **"Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.' "** (Revelation 14:13)

A stupendous crisis is before us. Soon, our faith in God will be severely tested. My prayer is that the Lord will give us experiences today that will purify our faith and deepen our love and our confidence in Him. When the King of Glory finally appears, may we hear the words, "Well done good and faithful servants . . ."

Glory in Suffering

Author: Marty Purvis

For the past two years, a dear friend of our family has been struggling with the advanced stages of breast cancer. Miraculously, she has survived a year longer than her physicians anticipated without surgical intervention or chemotherapy. The faith that she constantly exhibits is a witness to everyone she meets.

She is convinced from the depths of her soul that Jesus will heal her and that ultimately she will be able to testify to His goodness and His ability to restore her to wellness.

The Bible is filled with examples of people who exhibited great faith which led to astonishing miracles that God performed on their behalf. Noah, Moses, Abraham, Elijah, and Elisha are just a few of the great heroes of faith. These examples illustrate the call for each Christian to exercise greater faith in their Christian walk.

In several situations, Jesus Christ admonished His disciples to have greater faith and when they were not able to drive a demon out of a little boy He replied, **"Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."** (Mat 17:20) We are counseled to ask, believe, and claim, and then the Lord will answer our prayers.

Sometimes, we learn about people who are spontaneously healed or other improbable events that could only be classified as miracles. When we find ourselves struggling under the load of adversity, we may consider the disciples' lack of faith and conclude that we must have the same low level of faith, because the Lord does not appear to be exhibiting His miracle-working power in our lives. This could lead us into depression, causing us to question our spiritual walk and why we cannot achieve the obvious faith walk of the Bible heroes.

Of even more concern, may be a perception that the sin in our life is separating us from Jesus and not allowing miracles to happen. It stands to reason that even in the Christian community, many people are diagnosed with terminal illnesses and not miraculously healed. Does this mean that God is only blessing the few people who have had amazing recoveries? Unfortunately, many people conclude that if God has not intervened with a miracle, then that person's faith must not be strong.

Obviously, to maintain an appropriate perspective about miracles and faith we need to consider what the Bible reveals about this subject. While the following points are not all-inclusive, they have helped me to understand the relationship between miracles and faith:

1. God is in control.

God is the all-powerful Master of the universe. The Bible states that He is the end and the

beginning (Rev 22:13); the eyes of the Lord go throughout the Earth (2 Chr 16:9); Christ is the head of every power (Col 2:9) and is sovereign over the kingdoms of men (Dan 4:17); God holds our lives in His hands (Dan 5:23); and He is the Creator who does not get tired or weak (Isa 40:28). It is impossible for created beings to understand all that God has done. (Ecc 3:11)

If I accept that God is in control of the universe, then He must also be in control of my life. If He controls my life, then I must trust that my physical status is also in His hands.

2. God knows the big picture.

The ultimate goal of the entire plan of salvation is to provide life throughout eternity to as many members of the human race as possible. God cares enough about us to number the hairs on our head. (Mat 10:30) If our ultimate destiny is at stake, we need to accept that God's will may allow us to have physical or emotional pain. God understands our needs and desires, but if we are truly living by faith, we will accept what He has in store for us.

The Lord may choose to answer our prayers based on our desires, but pressing to place our personal will above God's will for us can be a risky choice. Remember, King Hezekiah prayed for longer life and the Lord answered his prayer, giving him an additional fifteen years of life. However, the pain and suffering that Hezekiah caused for himself, his children and his country by his disobedience during those fifteen years could have been avoided if Hezekiah had completely accepted God's plan for his life.

God knows the end from the beginning and His primary goal is to have each individual accept His offer of eternal life. Even more, after an individual's salvation is secure, God will use that individual in every possible way to lead others to salvation. I call this concept the "salvation quantity rule." As Christians, we should strive in life or death, to be used as His instruments to illuminate the way for people to know and walk with Christ daily.

For me, this concept addresses the question of what happens at the time of a fatal airline crash. An atheist friend of mine cannot understand why people may testify about God's grace in allowing them to miss that fatal flight. His question is "Where was God for all the people that died in the crash?" Using the "salvation quantity rule," at the time of the crash, the highest percentage of people possible on the airplane had an opportunity to receive eternal life when it crashed.

For the individual missing the flight, the "salvation quantity rule" allowed that person to witness God's protection in his or her own life and use the witness to provide salvation to other people.

3. He is well acquainted with human suffering.

We do not have the capacity to understand what Christ experienced when accepting the burdens of sinful humanity. (A poor example illustrating the gulf between divinity and humanity could be likened to a human being assuming the body and mentality of a pesky insect like a housefly.)

Even more, Christ accepted physical and mental anguish far beyond what we will ever experience on Earth. The Bible says He was a "man of sorrows" and "familiar with suffering. (Isa 53:3) I take comfort in the fact that I am not asked to bear burdens or pain beyond what Christ bore while on this Earth.

Christ knows our pain and His empathy for us cannot be measured in earthly terms. He calls us to know Him and if we are truly called by Him, we will be willing participants in the "fellowship of His sufferings." (See Phi 1:29; 3:10; and 1 Pet 4:12)

4. Bad things happen to good people.

Christians are not given an exemption from the results of 6,000 years of sin at baptism. We live in a world where accidents happen, pain abounds, stress increases, and temptations are constantly accosting us. Individuals, through no choice of their own, are genetically susceptible to life threatening diseases and we should not expect to be sheltered from these conditions because we chose to follow Christ. The story of Job provides a Biblical example of what can happen to the most saintly of God's followers. A genuine hero of faith will testify to Christ's goodness, even in the midst of adversity.

5. Satan attacks those that are living closest to God's will.

Logically consider for a moment how you would manage your resources if you were Satan. Where would you direct your greatest temptations? Who would you choose to afflict with the greatest misery you could create? Where would you strategically place your strongest attacks? Personally, I believe Satan saves the most powerful weapons in his arsenal for the people who are doing their best to exercise God's will in their lives. These attacks are conducted for two reasons.

If Satan can cause spiritual leaders to lose faith or succumb to temptation, then he has achieved the opposite of what God wanted to accomplish. He has removed the leaders from the path of salvation and has also provided a greater potential for failure in the individuals who chose to follow the leaders. Even more self-serving, if Satan can cause a saint to lose their faith, that person will receive the consequences of their sinful life, instead of those sins being transferred to himself.

Satan will use any lie, ruse, or trick to draw people away from God. His goal – to humiliate and cause God great suffering. He is not beyond using serious medical situations to discourage us and limit our faith, if they serve to further his diabolical goals. Nearly every temptation that Satan can throw at a child of God is meant to reduce that child's faith.

However, we can take comfort in the promise that **"God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."** (1 Cor 10:13)

6. Death is not the end, it is the beginning.

For God, Earth's short period of sin is just a blip on the entire spectrum of eternity. From an eternal view of the battle, He is willing to end a few individual's lives prematurely to guarantee their salvation and eternal life. We tend to understand life on Earth because it is the only environment to which we have been exposed. Death is perceived to be the final termination of our existence with no future which can be reached. The reality is much different for a person who has accepted salvation.

When that person dies, the next instant for him or her will be the beginning of eternal life. The new beginning for each individual who has passed over the threshold from this earthly existence to an eternity with Jesus Christ will be incredible to experience.

7. During the potholes of life, works and faith are unrelated.

Most Christians would dispute this concept as not scriptural. For example, James wrote **"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."** (Jam 2:26) Obviously, the exercise of faith is not complete without deeds. However, this expansive relationship between faith and deeds, as well as Paul's connection of the two elements in a Christian's walk, do not provide a complete picture.

Christians often have a tendency to think "I did everything right, so why is God punishing me now." In other words, because they thought they were doing what God wanted them to, they believed they would be sheltered from the rough spots of life. How can this concept be true if Satan is throwing every trial he can at the Christian to bring him or her down. Satan does not play fair and you can be sure that previous deeds will not make a bit of difference in the downtrodden Christian's life.

The only element that will provide sustaining power for a Christian is complete faith and the hope that God is going to use the situation to save the most people possible. This is the faith that the martyrs embraced when they were killed for their beliefs. It is the same type of faith that supports the Christian when it appears there is no way out of a dreadful situation.

8. Miracles and faith are not necessarily related the way we think they are.

Many "faith healers" claim that God can heal individuals of incurable diseases. Of course He has that power, but the temptation for Christians is to believe that if they have enough faith, either in their personal walk with God or in a "faith healers" ability to use Holy Spirit power to heal them, then God will honor their faith and they will be healed.

To be sure, the Bible illustrates many occasions when a person was healed due to the strong faith of either the healer or the person that was healed. There is no doubt that faith was a requirement for many of the miracles performed in New Testament times.

However, I believe miracles were often used as a faith-building exercise for baby Christians rather than to demonstrate strong faith in mature Christians. I would submit that it takes greater faith for a Christian to continue praising God and believe in His power during the worsening

stages of a terminal illness, than to be immediately healed when the disease is diagnosed. God uses the salvation quantity rule in all His works on Earth, ensuring that the largest amount of people will turn to Him.

That is why miracles are more common in missionary environments than they are in the modern Western Christian environment. In addition, a true miracle (or healing) may not contribute to another person's faith in advanced cultures because more often than not, the credit is rarely given to the Master of the universe.

Therefore, I believe it is safe to conclude that even through a Christian's faith may rival that of the Bible heroes, they may not receive a miracle. On the other hand, a baby Christian of limited faith may be subject to a miraculous event making their faith more secure.

9. God gives us the strength we need, one day at a time.

Faith in God is composed of many elements, but one component of faith in God transcends miracles, healings and other visible evidences of God's work on Earth. Not everyone needs physical evidence that God is working a miracle in their lives.

The basic element of living by faith is a unequivocal knowledge that God is ever present and ever able to work within each individual to promote salvation. He has called us to **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."** (Mat 11:28-30)

This is one of my favorite promises in the entire Bible. He calls us to place our burdens on Him and He will give us rest. One of the most simple, yet profound, elements of faith is that each person, no matter what their lot in life, whether they are well or sick, rich or poor, wise or foolish, can, by faith, transfer their burdens to Christ. In return, we receive the Holy Spirit's peace (and power), giving us the strength to deal with the smallest to the largest of life's challenging circumstances.

The challenge for followers of Christ is not to focus on miracles, but instead concentrate our efforts to go where He wants us to go, be what He wants us to be, and do what He wants us to do (GOBEDO) – the walk of faith. In this manner, our relationship with Christ will grow and He will be by our side in times of struggle, pain, and temptation. My prayer is that we will be witnesses for Christ, even in the midst of suffering. In the final analysis, my hope is that, like Job, if asked to suffer more, that I will do it with grace and in the process, give God greater glory.

Glory in suffering - – is there a more noble calling?

Put Your Face to the Wind

Author: Shelley Betts

You Can't Predict the Weather

On July 13, 1995 most people boating on Lake St. Clair, near Detroit, Michigan, did not anticipate the storm that was about to ravage the area. Even the weather meteorologists were surprised by the turn of events. In just minutes, foreboding black clouds rolled and swirled, spewing huge lightning strikes across the sky.

The temperature dropped suddenly. The abrupt cold wind pierced thin summer clothing as people wrestled to get their boats prepared to face the onslaught.

In desperation, people struggled to get their leisure boats into the wind, but with each passing moment the wind shifted, making it impossible for them to control their vessels. Fear gripped their hearts as adrenalin pumped through their veins.

That day, 26 boats capsized on Lake St. Clair. Fortunately, no lives were lost, but many people suffered severe injury and significant damage to their boats. Isn't this the way most tragic incidents happen?

When you least expect it, some "unknown" element enters the picture, bringing chaos to your life.

In last month's *Day Star*, Marty Purvis' article discussed suffering and how it affects us all. This month, I would like to discuss a more personal aspect of this topic. Few people are aware of the fact that last April I had a stroke. Unfortunately, high blood pressure, which is a genetic shortcoming in my father's family, got the best of me.

The stroke was . . . and still is, a significant event in my life.

Unaware of my dangerously high blood pressure, the stroke left me stunned, weak and completely bewildered. Until the moment it happened, I was moving through life, intent on fulfilling all my scheduled "appointments" with effervescence enthusiasm.

Then, in a mere moment in time, my life was turned upside down by a serious health problem that threatened my life. Where did this come from? This was abrupt, without warning and not anticipated!

As I reflect back over the events of that evening, I am not ashamed to admit that in the first moments of this incident, as it began to dawn on me what had happened and what I might be coping with for the rest of my life . . . fear gripped my heart. So, as you can imagine, when I read the account of the incident on Lake St. Clair, my heart raced with familiar emotions as I grasped what those individuals must have experienced.

My stroke had given me a sense of the emotions that must have surged through those individual's minds and hearts. I could relate. Just as they desperately struggled to put their vessel into the wind, I too, realized that God was *expecting* me in my own personal storm, to put my face (faith) into the wind.

Even though four months have passed, many challenges still linger from the results of the stroke. It is difficult for me to write about those initial frustrating days when the right side of my body would not respond to my sluggish mind and my speech was barely intelligible. Much has happened since then and I am happy to report that I am making progress each day. To be sure, any person who goes through this type of experience has a radical change of life, and yes, I am a changed person.

I no longer look at life in quite the same way. Honestly, as great as the struggle has been to regain my bodily functions, it was even a greater challenge to cling to the thought that God is with me, during what I can only describe as a soul ravaging experience.

My experience is not unique. (1 Cor 10:13)

Many, many people have been pressed to the limit of endurance as they struggle with health problems, financial loss, emotional turmoil, death of a loved one, or family problems. Often, individuals are not struggling with simply one issue, but several. In today's society, problems seem pandemic and the accompanying stress severely intense.

Recently, I have asked myself many times "What is going on?" as friends have shared with me their sincerely pathetic plight.

For myself, I have come to terms with this issue using the following rationale. First, it appears that we are the last generation in a long succession of generations who have lived on Earth. Six thousand years of sin have taken a great toll on this planet and human kind.

In some way, each of us has inherited 6,000 years worth of genetic degeneration. Time has been one of our greatest enemies. It has allowed germs to get the upper hand, mutating and fighting the positive effects of some of the strongest medicines. While technology has helped to make the mundane chores of life easier, it has polluted every element of our environment, including our bodies. It should be no surprise then, when our bodies break down, defenseless before the onslaught of powerful diseases.

Second, since we are living at the "end," we can be sure that Satan is moving his forces into a full fledged assault. We are all familiar with the text that goes: **"Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."** (Rev12:12) The devil is doing a "full court press" – using every conceivable means to stress all aspects of our daily lives, hoping we will stumble and lose control of our spiritual walk.

Consider the following text: **"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they**

should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. *However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"* (Luke 18:1-8)

This parable now takes on new meaning from my "wounded-pigeon" perspective. Of course, Jesus (our Creator) foreknew the detestable conditions that would exist on Earth before His incredible rescue mission. He understood, as no other, the "shadow of death," being tempted in every way, just as we are, by the same devil. (Heb 4:15)

Notice how Jesus introduces the theme of this parable by reminding us to pray always and never give up. Jesus concludes the parable, voicing His **greatest concern** in the form of a question: Will He find faith on the Earth when He comes to take us Home?

The devil's goal is not to just make us miserable, although I believe he does get some kind of fiendish delight from seeing us in a helpless, terrified state of mind. Instead, when we find ourselves in a murky pool of misery, the devil hopes to ***sap our faith*** – faith in the great I AM. In the darkest moments of a senseless tragedy, the devil attempts to make us question God's goodness, justice and power. For instance, "If God is so good, why did He allow my loved one to die.

If He is so powerful, why did He not intervene? Evil people are everywhere, openly disobeying God, yet nothing bad seems to happen to them? Where is the justice in all this? I have given my life to God and what has it got me?" I am sure you get my point.

It is not wrong to question God and there are many biblical examples of men and women doing so. (Isa 1:18; Job 26-34, 38-42; Gen 18:20-33) However, in each example, man is no match for God's wisdom and to linger in that realm of thinking can only lead to rebellion.

In a sense, Jesus' parable is a warning, cautioning us just how slippery the slope toward unbelief really is. Paul states this concept even plainer: **"Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering . . .** [Regardless of what happens] **do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."** (Heb 10:32-38 insertion and underlining mine)

Clearly, God is concerned about the depth of our faith

commitment.

Quoting that the righteous live by faith may sound oversimplified, but "living it" is quite another matter. It is a daunting task to confront fear, pain, rejection, terminal illness, or all manner of formidable enemies – whatever the devil brings against us – and not lose our faith. God did not ask His servants to do an easy thing. His intent is clear. He wants your faith in Almighty God to overshadow the fear that inevitably will swell within your heart.

If you have been fortunate and spared a life-shattering misfortune yet, your time is coming. Do not forget, as bad as some circumstances may seem today, it is only a glimpse of things to come. THE "time of the end" will be like no other time on Earth. (Matt 24:21)

The conditions will be so horrific that humankind will prefer death. (Rev 9:6) So it should not surprise us that Jesus seems to be indicating in the parable that the greatest challenge for you and me today, and in the days ahead, is to hang on to our faith in Jesus Christ and His ability to rescue us from this body of death. (Rom 7:25,25)

Let us get real. When you are bone tired and worn to a nub, or dealing with long periods of constant pain, or completely drained by a terminal illness, or struggling with loneliness after losing a loved one, how do you cope? Unfortunately, I do not have a universal answer that will work for everyone.

Each person has a unique personality, surrounded with different strengths and weakness. However, researchers do tell us that in times of extreme stress, our minds and emotions have a tendency to shut down. This was my experience.

This type of reaction is the body’s way of protecting itself when it is the most vulnerable. I believe Jesus created us this way because He foreknew all the devastating effects of sin and the terrible reverberation it would make on human existence.

I also realized that in my time of extreme stress, it was almost impossible to read – in fact, the desire was not even there. I could not keep my mind focused on anything – it was a chaotic mess.

This situation really bothered me. I am an avid reader and prayer warrior. One morning, feeling very sad and particularly agitated, I whispered the name of my Savior – "Jesus." As I did so, the beating of my racing heart began to slow down. I sensed it. So I continued. "Jesus, I know you see every tear.

Forgive me, but I do not feel like reading the Bible or praying right now. I just need to know, will you come and stay here with me?" I cannot begin to describe the sense of peace that came with those words. That was the beginning of a wonderful encounter with my Savior.

The Holy Spirit has never been more intimate in my life. He literally became my "hiding place." I did not spend a lot of time praying, but I did spend a lot of time "resting in Him." At that moment,

it was enough. Eventually, when my mind would allow it, my heart and mind overflowed in gratitude for sparing my life. This I know: **"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted"** [in their suffering]. (Heb 2:18 insertion mine)

In my darkest hour, the Holy Spirit was quick to comfort when I invited Him to do so. When I felt anxious, He was quick to surround me with His peace, but I had to ask. Matthew 14 gives the account of the disciples attempting to cross the lake in a boat, but a threatening wind kept them from accomplishing their goal.

As the waves buffeted the boat, they could see Jesus walking on the water. Immediately, they wanted Him to come into the boat. Instead of complying, He responded: **"Take Courage! Don't be afraid. It is I."** [The great I AM]. We all know about Peter's early morning dip, but notice what Jesus said to him: **"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"** Why do we so readily doubt God's goodwill for us? If you are suffering, let me encourage you. Hold on to your faith in Him and believe He is capable of fulfilling His promise to you – the faith-full will one day live with Him. (Isa 41:10)

Jon Mohr has written a song called *Refiner's Fire*. Jon must have faced some extreme trials in his life to write such words: "There burns a fire with sacred heat, white hot with holy flame. And all who dare pass through its blaze will not emerge the same . . . with great skill all are hammered by their sufferings on the anvil of His will. Each time His purging cleanses deeper, I'm not sure how I'll survive. Yet the strength in growing weaker keeps my hungry soul alive.

The Refiner's fire has now become my soul's desire. Purged, cleansed and purified, that the Lord may be glorified. He is consuming my soul, refining me, making me whole. No matter what I may lose, I chose the Refiner's fire!" No words can describe the sweetness in sensing His Presence within the fire.

We live in this sin-laden world and eventually, everyone will suffer at the hands of the evil one. A season will come when you too, will need to "rest in His Presence." No one is exempt from suffering, so prepare for it. If you have not experienced a soul-ravaging event in your life yet, a gentle admonition.

Please do not criticize the way others deal with their turmoil. Simply put, you are *unqualified* to question or judge a person's response to any devastating event because you lack your own experience. Remaining silent is far better than offering advice by quoting traditional religious cliches.

Instead, be lavish with your compassion, pray fervently and follow the Holy Spirit's lead. The storms of life have a way of draining your energy and beating you against the reef of despair. When it does, God's grace is sufficient – He will help you put your face (faith) into the wind as you battle the storm together.

If you will allow it, the Holy Spirit will use each distressing experience to heighten your sense of His Presence, leaving your life changed forever.

Israel's Prophetic Destiny In End-Times

Author: Larry W. Wilson

I have received many letters asking about the role of Israel during the Great Tribulation. This issue of *Day Star* contains a summary of my conclusions on this topic. Yes, *Israel* will play a very important role during the end-time. But, *as a political entity,* the nation of Israel will experience the Great Tribulation just like every nation on Earth and Judaism, *as a religious system,* will experience the same startling revelations of truth that all religious systems will face during this same time.

Yes, the 144,000 Come From the 12 Tribes!

The Bible indicates that God will select 144,000 servants from the twelve tribes of Israel. (Rev 7:1-8) Obviously, the 144,000 will be Jews, but there is a problem. I find that most Christians do not understand who the "Jews" are! Who are the twelve tribes of Israel from which **the 144,000** are selected?

The apostle James identifies the *twelve tribes* as believers in Jesus! **"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings . . . My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. . ."** (Jam 1:1, 2:1) James wrote this epistle to encourage and instruct fellow Christians who were widely scattered among the nations.

This epistle was also written after the defining church council in A.D. 49 when it was determined that uncircumcised Gentiles were equal members with believing Jews in the family of God through Christ. (See Acts 10 and 15.) Therefore, James, as well as the early church was convinced that the twelve tribes were the "believers in Christ." Before we take a closer look at Israel's coming role during the Great Tribulation, let's review some of the ideas that are widely accepted about the Great Tribulation.

Popular Eschatology #101

Many Christians believe in a "pre-tribulation" rapture. They also believe that 144,000 Jews will convert to Christianity shortly after the rapture occurs. It is also maintained that 144,000 Jews will play a leading role during the 70th week (the time period of the Great Tribulation).

This scenario is tied together by several concepts. For example, some people believe that a portion of the 70 weeks allotted to Israel during the Babylonian exile is in the future. (See Dan 9:24.) Specifically, it is believed that 69 of the 70 weeks have been fulfilled, but the 70th week is yet to come and represents a seven year period for the Great Tribulation.

So, why did God insert 2,000 years between the 69th and 70th week? Adherents to this school of thought believe that God allotted a period "of grace" for the Gentiles – a time when Gentiles can receive salvation through faith in Jesus. (See Luke 21:24; John 3:16.)

This 2,000 years of grace for the Gentiles is called "a dispensation" and its purpose is based on the following concept: Israel's unwillingness to accept Jesus as the Messiah (John 1:11) and proclaim His gospel throughout the world *forced* God to *displace* Israel with a new group of people called "Christians." (*Gentiles* and *Jews* who believe in Christ are called Christians. Acts 11:26; Rom 11:25; Mat 13:11; 28:19,20; John 3;16)

Christians believe *they* were given the gospel commission that formerly belonged to the nation of Israel. (Matt 28:19,20; Act 4:8-13; 13:42-47; 15:1-41) But, over the past 2,000 years, Christians have had mediocre success at evangelizing the world. Today, about 27% of the world's population claims to be Christian, so the evangelism of the world for Christ is far from complete.

Proponents who believe that God is going to rapture "the church" away also believe that 144,000 Jews will suddenly convert to Christianity due to the "shocking proof" of the fulfillment of the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine. With "the church" out of the way, and with the conversion of 144,000 Jews to Christianity, God will revive His "dormant" covenant with Israel. The 70th week will then commence and the gospel will go to the whole world! Not surprisingly, many Jewish people are deeply offended by this scenario.

First, Jews reject the idea that they have been *displaced* by Christians, and second, Jews are offended with the idea that they *must* convert to "Christianity" *before* God will fulfill His promises to them.

Conditional Promises

I find the 70th week scenario just described to be flawed for several reasons. It is a distortion of Scripture to teach that God is obligated to fulfill many Old Testament promises given to ancient Israel during a future 70th week because many of the Old Testament promises given to Israel *were conditional.* God promised to fulfill many promises, **if** Israel "kept faith" with the Lord and loved Him wholeheartedly. (Deu 6:5; Eze 20)

"If" is the key word because God *is not* obligated to keep His covenant with any party that persists in rebellion. (See Lev 26; Deu 28, 31:16-32:52; Rom 9-11; Gal 4.) Bible history underscores this fact repeatedly. For example, the "Israel" that experienced the Exodus and entered into covenant with God at Mt. Sinai (Exo 19:4-8) perished in the wilderness because of rebellion (except for Joshua and Caleb). (See Psa 95:10,11; Heb 3:7-4:1)

Yes, God's plan was ultimately fulfilled, but not for those people to whom the opportunity was first given! (Heb 3:16-19) Furthermore, we cannot overlook God's subsequent actions during Jewish history, either. Because of rebellion God sent the king of Assyria to destroy the northern ten tribes of Israel 700 years later and God later sent King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem and the two southern tribes. Even more, after Israel rejected Messiah, God sent a Roman army to totally destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70. (Dan 9:26; Luke 21:22)

Problem Text

Christians often cite the following text to support the idea that all of God's promises must be fulfilled to a literal Israel. **"For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."** (Rom 11:29) In this text, Paul is saying that God's calling or selection of Israel is irrevocable. However, it is not the selection or calling that is in question, but the *identity* of Israel! Consider how Israel came to be: God made a covenant with Abraham and He promised three things:

1. Abraham would be the father of *many* nations and through him, "all nations on Earth" would be blessed. (Gen 18:18)
2. Abraham and his descendants would be more numerous than the stars in the sky. (Gen 15:5)
3. Abraham's descendants would inherit a particular piece of land. (Gen 15:18-21)

Now, the essential question rises, "Who are the heirs of Abraham?" Both the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac claim to be the heirs of Abraham, but God rejected Abraham's firstborn son, Ishmael. (Gen 17:18-21) Ishmael was a child of "works," whereas Isaac was to be a child of faith. (Rom 9:8)

Paul teaches, therefore, that the heirs of Abraham are those who live by faith, just like their father, Abraham! (Rom 3:29,30; 9:1-8; Gal 4:23-31) This does not mean that God failed to honor Abraham's bloodline through Isaac; actually, He gave Jacob's sons knowledge and possession of His covenant *first*. (Deu 7:6-10; Rom 1:16; 2:9-11) But this honor, like all mutual covenants, must be understood within the context of "good faith."

God abandons faithless people and He destroys people who persistently rebel against Him. Therefore, if God *displaced* the Jews because they rejected the Messiah, how can He fulfill what was promised to Abraham? Many Christians have concluded that the best answer to this question is displacement theology (God substitutes Christians for Jews until the rapture). For me, there is a much better answer. The New Testament teaches that God *redefined* the "heirs of Abraham" after the Jews rejected Messiah.

God now defines "Israel" as any person who believes that Jesus Christ is His Son and submits to Him. (John 3:16) Consequently, **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."** (Gal 3:28,29) Notice in this text who Paul declares to be the offspring of Abraham. Clearly, *if we* belong to Christ, then *we* are Abraham's seed (Greek: *sperma*) and heir.

Paul also wrote, **"A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."** (Rom 2:28,29)

Believer and Non-believer

What has God done? When the Jewish nation rejected Messiah (John 1:11; Mat 23:37-39; Act

3:22,23), God removed all religious distinction between Jews and Gentiles through Jesus. This is good news! (Eph 2; Gal 3; Rom 10:12) Now *anyone* who submits to Jesus is grafted into Abraham's family tree. (Rom 11)

Through faith, Jews and Gentiles alike become *heirs* of Abraham – God sees no difference between Jews and Gentiles who submit to Christ! To make it simple, the only distinction God sees in the human race today is believer and non-believer – sheep and goats. (Mat 25) God's redefinition of Israel enables Him to fulfill all He promised Abraham.

For example, all nations have been blessed through Abraham, for Jesus is a descendant of Abraham! God promised Abraham that he would someday be the father of a numberless multitude who would come from all nations. This promise will be fulfilled when the numberless multitude of the redeemed *from every nation* stand before the throne after the Second Coming. (Rev 7:9) The third promise to Abraham will be fulfilled when God sets the Holy City, the *new* Jerusalem, down on *the specific piece* of real estate originally promised to Abraham! (Zech 14:4)

The land and the city will belong to Abraham's heirs for eternity!!! **"And so all Israel will be saved . . ."** (Rom 11:26)

So, Abraham and his heirs, everyone who is *born again* by the Spirit, will inherit the Earth made new. **"Neither circumcision** [being a Jew] **nor uncircumcision** [being a Gentile] **means anything; what counts is a new creation** [born again by the Spirit]**. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God."** (Gal 6:15,16, insertions mine) Paul has written much on this subject. If we fail to synthesize all that he wrote on this topic, a number of flawed ideas will develop.

Unfortunately, I believe this has happened and many Christians have been misled. When it comes to being an heir of Abraham, Paul summed up the matter saying, **"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision** [being a Jew] **nor uncircumcision** [being a Gentile] **has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."** (Gal 5:6)

The Israel of God are those people who submit to the authority of Jesus and live according to faith in Him. (Joh 3:16; 15:1-27; Rom 3:28-30)

Dispensations

Another presupposition used to support a future 70th week scenario is the doctrine of "dispensations." This doctrine teaches that God has offered different plans or methods of salvation during different periods of Earth's history. For example, people "saved" during the New Testament "dispensation of grace" are saved in a different way than those "saved" during the Old Testament "dispensation of law."

Many Protestant clergy defend the absence of law because we now live during "the dispensation of grace," claiming we do not have to obey God's Ten Commandments

(specifically the Sabbath commandment) because the commandments were made null and void at the Cross. However, this position creates another problem. How does one move 144,000 "Jews" from their "dispensation of law" to the current "dispensation of grace?"

Many Christians answer saying: "When the Christians are raptured from Earth, 144,000 Jews will suddenly become converted to Christianity. These 144,000 Jews will, like the apostle Paul, repudiate the legalism of Judaism and embrace the grace of Christ. They will evangelize the world and countless people will receive salvation. When this is accomplished, Jesus will return and the millennium of 1,000 years will begin and the Jews will rule over the world during the millennium. In the end, God will finally fulfill all He promised to Israel."

I believe the Bible evidence reflects a completely different perspective. We know that Abraham's salvation came through faith in God. (Gen 15:6; Rom 4) The idea that God saves people in different ways, at different times (or in dispensations) is not Scriptural. (Eph 2:8,9; Heb 3:18-4:2)

The doctrine of dispensations appears to be a scheme designed to obscure the obligation that rests upon *all* mankind to obey God's Ten Commandments. Of course, obeying the Ten Commandments does not bring salvation, but obedience does reveal our faith in God. (See Dan 3.) Eternal life does not come through obedience; instead we show our faith by obedience! Paul says that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and so many others in the Old Testament were people of faith! (See Heb 3, 4 and 11, Rom 4 and 5, and Eph 2.)

Their faith was revealed by their obedience. Were they counted "righteous" because they were obedient? No, they were sinners, but God counted them as righteous because they *believed* Him and acted on that belief! (Gen 15:6; Heb 11:13-16) The Bible is also clear that no one, at any time in history, has ever been "saved" by the blood of sacrificial animals. (Heb 10:4,11) So, the doctrine of a "dispensation of law" (saved by obedience or ritual) is a distortion of Scripture.

Salvation has always come through faith alone. (Rom 3:28; Gal 2:16; 3:24; Heb 11; Isa 1:11-13; Jer 7:21-24) Living by faith means submitting to the will of God; to go, to be and to do all that He requires. Living by faith produces good fruit (works), but works without faith is worthless. (Mat 7:17-20; James 2:17)

In fact, works without faith stinks! (James 2:20-26) Living by faith day after day is no small matter. At no time has living by the law saved a person and this shows how faulty the "dispensation of law" is. Israel's inability to keep the law (instead of living by faith) throughout 1,400 years of Old Testament history demonstrates the flaw in dispensational logic.

Good fruit comes only through faith! Without faith there can be no acceptable works! (Heb 11:6; Joh 15:5)

The Weekly Cycle is a Continuum

The last item I want to address is the insertion of 2,000 years between the 69th and 70th week. The Jubilee calendar verifies that the 70th week in Daniel 9 occurred immediately after the 69th

week. The 70th week occurred between A.D. 27 and A.D. 33 inclusively. Jesus, the Messiah, died on Passover in the Wednesday year, or middle year, of the 70th week which was A.D. 30. Astronomical data pinpoints the position of the Sun and Moon in A.D. 30 (published by the U.S. Naval Observatory) and the data properly aligns with the course of events as recorded in Scripture.

A future 70th week is not logical or consistent with the operation of the Jubilee calendar. The calendar does not permit the insertion of several centuries between the 69th and 70th weeks. In fact, it does not permit the insertion of even one second, because time is an unbroken continuum!

No one can insert a space of time between Monday and Tuesday, or between July and August. When one unit of time ends, another begins. There is no space of time between the 7 weeks and the 62 weeks in Daniel 9:25 and there is no space of time between the 69th and 70th weeks in verse 24.

I have written extensively on this topic and encourage the reader to review the appendix in my little book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled* for a longer discussion on this topic. To review a more recent research paper on this topic, go to our web site and download the free article, "Great Clocks from God" at .

Summary

I find the 70th week to be in the past and not the future. I find the heirs of Abraham to be people from every nation who believe in Christ. I find that salvation has always come through faith in God. There are no dispensations or need for them. Today’s popular eschatology is badly flawed. In fact, the Bible points in a completely different direction!

To be sure, Israel has a prophetic destiny. We just have to be clear on who the real Israel is.

Parallels From History - King Solomon

Author: Larry W. Wilson

When King Solomon died, his young son, Rehoboam, succeeded him to the throne. If Solomon was the wisest man to ever live, his son certainly did not inherit his Father's intelligence.

According to some estimates, Solomon's magnificent empire was sustained by taxes exceeding 50% of the Gross National Product! In addition to this, the people paid the required tithes and offerings to God. It is easy to understand why the working people rebelled against Rehoboam's arrogance and insolence. He foolishly announced that he planned to raise taxes again! (1 Kings 12)

The tribes of Israel revolted and eventually, Rehoboam's dominion was reduced to 17% of his former kingdom. The breakaway tribes, ten tribes located in the north, were called Israel and they chose one of Solomon's former officials, Jeroboam, to be their king. The two southern tribes, which included Jerusalem, were called Judah and was governed by a humiliated Rehoboam for about 18 years.

After the nation was divided, **"Jeroboam thought to himself, 'The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their Lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam.' After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' One he set up in Bethel** [the southern part of Israel]**, and the other in Dan** [the northern part of Israel]**. And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there. Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites. He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah** [Feast of Tabernacles was on the fifteenth day of the seventh month]**, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made. On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings. -"**

By the word of the Lord a man of God came from Judah to Bethel, as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering. He cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord: "O altar, altar! This is what the Lord says: 'A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David.

On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.'" That same day the man of God gave a sign: "This is the sign the Lord has declared: The altar will be split apart and the ashes on it will be poured out."

When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he

stretched out his hand from the altar and said, "Seize him!" But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back.

Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the sign given by the man of God by the word of the Lord. Then the king said to the man of God, "Intercede with the Lord your God and pray for me that my hand may be restored." So the man of God interceded with the Lord, and the king's hand was restored and became as it was before. - (1 Kings 12:26-13:6, insertions mine)

About 170 years after King Jeroboam died, God sent His servant, Isaiah, to tell Israel *and Judah* that God was preparing destruction for both kingdoms unless they repented of their corporate apostasy. Isaiah began his ministry at a time when God was particularly angry with Israel, the northern part of the kingdom.

Israel had stubbornly refused to listen to any of God's servants and did not turn away from the evils initiated by Jeroboam. God even required Isaiah to remove his sackcloth and sandals and walk around totally naked for three years. Still, God's messenger and message were ignored. (Isaiah 20)

Finally, God's patience ceased and He sent, Shalmaneser V, Assyria's king to destroy the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. From the time of Jeroboam's death to the extinction of the ten tribes was a mere 188 years.

After the northern tribes were destroyed, Isaiah's ministry continued in Judah for almost 40 years. Every citizen knew about Isaiah and his warning message, but few gave it any heed. About 40 years after Isaiah's death, the prophecy he gave to Jeroboam was fulfilled.

Josiah became king of Judah when he was only 8 years old. His evil father, King Amon, was assassinated by court officials at age 24, after serving as king of Judah for only two years. (Evidently, Amon was about 16 when Josiah was born.)

The officials who were responsible for Amon's assassination were subsequently caught and executed for their deed, so the people made Josiah, the little heir of Amon, their king.

When Josiah was 26 years old, a copy of the writings of Moses was discovered while the temple was being renovated.

Shaphan, the king's secretary, took the manuscript to Josiah and he read the words of Moses to the king. **"When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest . . . 'Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us.' "**

Hilkiah the priest . . . went to speak to the prophetess Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son

of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District. She said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, ‘This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read.

Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.’

Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord.

Therefore I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.’" So they took her answer back to the king." (2 Kings 22:11-20)

The Lord’s message to the king was bitter sweet. Josiah was relieved to learn that God’s anger would not be released during his lifetime, but Josiah was deeply saddened that God’s anger still burned against His people and that someday they would be destroyed. **"Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the temple of the Lord with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets – all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. The king stood by the pillar** [where Solomon had once stood] **and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant. -**

The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts.

He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel [where Jeroboam started the apostasy]**. He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem – those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the Lord to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. He ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people. He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the Lord and where women did weaving for Asherah. -**

Josiah brought all the priests from the towns of Judah and desecrated the high places, from Geba to Beersheba, where the priests had burned incense. He broke down the shrines at the

gates – at the entrance to the Gate of Joshua, the city governor, which is on the left of the city gate.

Although the priests of the high places did not serve at the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, they ate unleavened bread with their fellow priests. He desecrated [the sacred site of] **Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire to Molech. He removed from the entrance to the temple of the Lord the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun. They were in the court near the room of an official named Nathan-Melech. Josiah then burned the chariots dedicated to the sun. He pulled down the altars the kings of Judah had erected on the roof near the upper room of Ahaz, and the altars Manasseh had built in the two courts of the temple of the Lord. He removed them from there, smashed them to pieces and threw the rubble into the Kidron Valley. -**

The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption – the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the people of Ammon.

Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones. Even the altar at Bethel, the high place made by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin – even that altar and high place he demolished.

He burned the high place and ground it to powder, and burned the Asherah pole also. Then Josiah looked around, and when he saw the tombs that were there on the hillside, he had the bones removed from them and burned on the altar to defile it, in accordance with the word of the Lord proclaimed by the man of God who foretold these things.

The king asked, "What is that tombstone I see?" The men of the city said, "It marks the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and pronounced against the altar of Bethel the very things you have done to it." "Leave it alone," he said. "Don’t let anyone disturb his bones . . . "

Josiah slaughtered all the priests of those high places on the altars and burned human bones on them. Then he went back to Jerusalem. The king gave this order to all the people: "Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant."

Not since the days of the judges who led Israel, nor throughout the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, had any such Passover been observed. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem. Furthermore, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem.

This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of the Lord. Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.

Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh [Josiah's grandfather] **had done to provoke him to anger. So the Lord said, "I will remove Judah also from my presence as I removed Israel, and I will reject Jerusalem, the city I chose, and this temple, about which I said, 'There shall my Name be . . . '"** (2 Kings 23:1-28, insertions mine)

The Bible summarizes the 23 years that followed Josiah's death saying, **"Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the Lord, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power."** (2 Chronicles 36:14-20)

Summary

I am impressed with four thoughts from these Bible verses. First, God's patience with sin has a limit. God destroyed Israel and Judah when there was no further remedy for their rebellion.

Second, even the righteous deeds of a zealous king and the testimony of God's prophets could not change the decadent direction of the people.

Third, the people who actually experienced the terrors of this destruction did not understand why God sent the destruction. Last, the degree of sin in the world today has reached outrageous proportions; just like Israel and Judah (and in Noah's day), so it is right now.

The parallel is clear. God's patience with sin has reached its limit. As it was in the days of . . . so it is right now!

What is Wake Up America Seminars?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

This is our final issue for the year 2000 and since we have added many new subscribers to our newsletter mailing list, we thought it was a good time to share information with our readers about Wake Up America Seminars and to say "Thank You" for your support.

What Are We?

Wake Up America Seminars (WUAS) is both a non-profit and a non-prophet organization. With God's blessings and the generosity of many people, WUAS has distributed millions of pamphlets, books and tapes around the world during the past 13 years. WUAS is not a church and is not affiliated, endorsed or sponsored by any religious organization.

WUAS does not have members nor offers any kind of membership. Our mission is not to convert the world to our point of view. Although WUAS has a well defined view on certain Biblical matters, our mission is primarily "seed sowing." We believe in the primacy of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and in His imminent return.

We are doing our best to encourage people with the good news of the gospel and this hope. People are surprised to learn that WUAS is not an outreach program affiliated with a church trying to hide its identity. On the contrary, Larry Wilson, the founder, does not belong to a church and he teaches that salvation is *not* a matter of denominational affiliation.

Since WUAS offers no provision for membership or church structure, people who read and consider the concepts we offer are encouraged to share the message only if they consider it to have any value. We have no plans to form a church – there are more than enough religions and denominations in the world today. Our goal is to educate, stimulate and inspire our readers with a more complete understanding of God and His Word and for this we ask nothing in return. WUAS is unique – we do not ask for donations.

The Beginning of WUAS

Larry began conducting seminars for the public in 1986. The seminars were the result of 15 years of personal Bible study and investigation. At the time he began to conduct seminars, he was employed by a large hospital in the Dayton, Ohio area.

As opportunities for seminars grew, he eventually resigned his "day time" job and devoted himself full time to the promotion of this end-time Bible message, which was unlike anything he had ever heard. Larry smiles when he says that he has not had any dreams, visions or encounters with apparitions. On the contrary, he affirms that his prophetic conclusions are based on the Bible and the Bible alone. When it comes to matters of faith in God, he accepts no authority other than the Bible.

When asked what prompted him to leave the security of a full time position, Larry says the Lord stirred him to begin sharing his understanding of Bible prophecy in 1986. For a couple years, he intensely questioned if the stirring within was a calling from the Lord or a product of his imagination. Finally, Larry prayerfully offered himself to the Lord's service with an agreement that is still binding between them today.

The agreement is this: "Lord, if you are really calling me to this task, then I will resign my job. I will serve as You direct, but with the understanding that You will provide the necessary funds to make this possible. To ensure that you have called me to this work, I will not solicit or appeal for donations, offerings or contributions.

The cattle on a thousand hills belong to you, Lord. So, as long as you make it possible for WUAS to meet expenses, I will do my best to promote and share the wonderful things You have allowed me to discover in your Word." Twelve years later WUAS is still promoting the gospel and the soon return of Jesus. The bills at WUAS are paid on time and the lights at WUAS still burn brightly.

Printing presses and tape duplicators are producing more material every week! "God honors faith," Larry often says. Shirley, his wife of thirty years, firmly agrees, "We continue to see the sustaining power of God in this ministry." To meet living expenses during the first years of WUAS' existence, Shirley worked full time while Larry wrote the book, *The Revelation of Jesus*.

What Do We Teach?

The teaching of WUAS is based on five essential Bible doctrines. Our understanding of Bible prophecy is based on four rules of interpretation (hermeneutics) which are derived from the book of Daniel. Our conclusions about apocalyptic prophecy and the means for reaching these conclusions are quite different from those offered by traditional church organizations.

Some churches claim they have a central role in the fulfillment of end-time prophecies, but WUAS does not believe it has such a role.

WUAS was incorporated in 1988 because Larry believes, by God's grace, that he has discovered four keys which resolve the prophetic mysteries of Daniel and Revelation. Because of this discovery, WUAS is dedicated to sharing a unique prophetic message that explains God's forthcoming actions to save man and to bring an end to sin.

The Five S''s

We believe there are five essential Bible doctrines and we help people remember them by starting each one with the letter "S":

1. Salvation: The assurance of salvation is granted to anyone who surrenders his or her life to the Lord Jesus Christ. A life of faith in Christ begins with an attitude of being willing to go, to be and to do all that Jesus asks.

2. Second Coming: Jesus will return to Earth in clouds of glory and will bestow eternal life upon the faithful. At that time He will also destroy those people who have rebelled against His authority.

3. State of Man in Death: When a person dies, he or she ceases to exist. There is no intelligence during death. Every dead person awaits one of two resurrections. The resurrection of the righteous occurs at the Second Coming. The resurrection of the wicked occurs at the end of the 1,000 years.

4. Sanctuary: The earthly tabernacle that Moses built is a shadow of salvation's process which is carried out in Heaven's temple. As such, the Old Testament sanctuary services on Earth offer a comprehensive teaching model of the Plan of Salvation. A correct understanding of the earthly model eliminates many false ideas about the terms and conditions of salvation.

5. Sabbath: We believe that God established Saturday, the seventh day of the week, as His holy day at Creation. Contrary to most traditional Christian teaching, we believe the Ten Commandments were not made void at the Cross. The fourth commandment is just as binding upon the human race today as the other nine commandments.

Elements of Our Prophetic Message

1. - Everyone living on Earth will experience the Great Tribulation. There is no pre-trib or mid-trib rapture.

2. - The Great Tribulation is not a series of terrible man-made events. Instead, God will inflict the Great Tribulation consisting of 14 terrible judgments. These judgments are explained in Revelation using sanctuary language that originates from services in the earthly tabernacle built by Moses.

3. - Four earthquakes, occurring during a maximum period of 1,335 days, will violently rupture the whole Earth and cause global crisis.

4. - A meteoric firestorm of burning hail will burn up one-third of Earth's trees.

5. - Two asteroid impacts, one hitting a sea and the other hitting a continent, will destroy hundreds of millions of people, especially those people who live in coastal areas.

6. - Many volcano eruptions will darken the sky and cause violent weather patterns for months. There will be no rain for 1,260 days resulting in a great famine and plagues throughout the world.

7. - About two years into the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist will appear. The Antichrist is Lucifer, that great angel who was cast out of Heaven with his followers because of rebellion. The devil will be allowed to "come out" of the spirit world at an appointed time and will physically appear before the survivors of the world and gloriously masquerade as God.

8. - Due to God's judgments, the world's infrastructures as we know them today will be destroyed. Commerce, communication, manufacturing, travel, and shipping will be almost eliminated. In short, the judgments that comprise the Great Tribulation inflict a fatal blow to planet Earth. Jesus will arrive in clouds of glory with salvation at the very last hour.

Bible Predicts Man's Responses to God's Judgments

1. - A worldwide "crisis" will occur in every nation as a result of the devastating judgments of God. As a result, a crisis "one-world" government will form within 60 days. A surprising coalition of religious leaders will unanimously agree on *the* principle solution to appease God's wrath. With one voice, they will appeal to their respective law makers for the immediate implementation of "sin-less" laws so that God's anger will subside, but these laws only escalate the misery index.

2. - The swift enactment of laws mandating righteous behavior will produce a powerful backlash in every nation. The majority religion of each nation will attempt to impose its view of God's will on minority religions. Religious conflict will be worldwide.

3. - Each government will impose martial law for purposes of control when God's judgments begin. Penalties for civil disobedience will be as extreme as the situation. Many human rights will be suspended and religious persecution will commence because of conflicting views on the will of God.

4. - A well defined controversy will grow out of this bedlam. In every part of the world, the question of God's authority, God's will, God's wrath and appeasing God will be central. The issue of worship is central to each of these topics.

The primary question that will rise is this: "How should man worship God so that God is pleased?" During this crisis, God will empower 144,000 spokespersons to speak for Him. They will emphasize man's obligation to obey the Ten Commandments, which includes worshiping God on His holy day, the seventh day of the week. Faith and love are demonstrated by obedience. The message presented by God's 144,000 servants will be confirmed by miracles and signs from God.

Their call will produce a great controversy that ultimately forces everyone into a decision.

5. - About two years into the Great Tribulation, most people will have made their decision about worshiping God. At that time, the Antichrist will be released from the spirit world. He will establish complete world dominion and in the process, kill a third of mankind.

He will set himself up as God and require the worship of all mankind. He will insist that his followers wear an identifying tattoo. The mark of the beast (the beast is the devil) will be a literal tattoo. For ordinary people, "666," will be tattooed on the right hand.

Those who serve in the administration of the devil will receive a tattoo on their foreheads

bearing the name which the Antichrist will use. This tattoo on the forehead is a counterfeit of what God plans to do for the 144,000 after He takes them to Heaven.

6. - Everyone on Earth will either receive the devil's tattoo or the seal of God. When every person has made their decision, the seven bowls of God's fiery wrath will be poured out upon all who received the mark of the beast.

This deadly vengeance is God's response to the behavior of the wicked against Him and His people. During the seventh bowl, Jesus appears in clouds of glory and He resurrects the righteous dead and gathers the living saints to Himself as the wicked watch. Then, He destroys the living wicked with a command.

Summary

In some ways, Bible prophecy is like a road map. The road map is not vitally important until the day comes when a trip to a new and unfamiliar destination is required. Suddenly, the road map becomes very important. Similarly, an understanding of Bible prophecy may seem unimportant *at this time*, but this will not be the case forever.

According to Scripture, the time of God's wrath is near. The world is about to enter a crisis that has no parallel in history. God is about to do certain things that He has not done to Earth before and when His judgments begin, the road map of Bible prophecy will suddenly become important.

Bible prophecy not only reveals what God is going to do, it reveals something even more important! Prophecy reveals "why." Few people appreciate the consistent behavior of God that is carefully demonstrated throughout the Bible. False theology has created a sense of peace, safety and divine tranquility that is totally misleading. Even in this age of enlightenment, God is largely misunderstood. When His judgments begin, ten thousand questions will suddenly rise.

The 144,000 will have a very difficult time convincing misled people that "God is love" when the evidence of God's great wrath is seen throughout a devastated Earth. This is why an understanding of Bible prophecy is important now.

God is love, but God's patience with rebellion has a limit. Blessed is the person who loves and has complete faith in God after Jesus begins what He needs to do to separate the sheep from the goats.

The Sin That Almost Defies Detection

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The Carnal Heart

Jesus said, **"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."** (Matthew 7:13,14)

The road to destruction is broad, has many lanes and is well traveled these days. If we stay in the "I'm real busy" lane, there is danger ahead. It is easy to allow ourselves to speed excessively down the broad road that Jesus spoke of, even though we do it at great peril.

Busyness and sin are like blindfolds and it is impossible to see where we are going if we are blindfolded. Busyness diverts our minds with things that have no real value. Sin deadens our perception for harm. Busyness crowds out spiritual introspection. Sin distorts reality. Busyness produces fatigue.

Sin confuses the facts and makes a lie appear to be the truth. If a person is spiritually blind, he cannot grasp or understand the obligations and accountability God requires of him or her. A blind man cannot see where the curves, potholes and ditches are located.

Consequently, a blindfolded man will inevitably stumble and fall because of his life in darkness. If the majority of a nation's population is blindfolded by the deceitfulness of sin and operates on 24/7's (24 hours a day, seven days a week), it is only a matter of time until that nation morally crumbles, stumbles and falls.

In previous editions of *Day Star*, I have presented Bible evidence showing that God sends destruction on a nation when its cup of iniquity becomes full. God destroyed the world in Noah's day because men's thoughts were continually evil and He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for sexual perversion.

He also destroyed the nations of Israel, Judah, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Grecia, Rome and numerous empires since, but for what purpose? God destroyed those great nations when their majority became morally cold and degenerate. God destroys nations when they become filled with violence and rebellion.

God is sovereign and the Earth belongs to Him. He is keenly interested in the use of His property and He will destroy a degenerate nation so the land can be given to another nation. God is also the Judge of mankind. He who numbers the hairs on our head is also very concerned about our behavior.

Consider this warning and the underlying principle given to ancient Israel: **"Do not defile yourselves in any of these** [sexually immoral] **ways, because this is how the nations that I**

am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you." (Leviticus 18:24-28, insertion mine)

The Sin That Almost Defies Detection

Idolatry is one of the primary causes for moral degeneracy and it seems almost impossible to detect. If Gallup pollsters were to survey 1,000 Americans, I suspect that less than 3% would confess to idolatry. Today, little is said about idolatry from the pulpit.

When was the last time you heard a good sermon on idolatry and its consequences? When the word "idolatry" is used today, many Christians picture in their minds an ancient group of people bowing down before some type of rock or wooden statue as though it was Almighty God. Yes, this imagery is used in the Old Testament several times, but it is only one aspect of idolatry.

Remember, idolaters in the Old Testament did not consider themselves idolaters. *Idolaters* is a term that God uses to describe anyone who worships imaginary gods. Idolatry occurs when we use any type of justification to violate God's will.

Idolaters do not recognize they are idolaters. This is the problem! Ancient people knew their images were made of wood and stone. They also knew their images could not speak or walk. So today we wonder how they could bow down before lifeless statues and believe they were gods?

The truth is, the ancients looked on their statutes as icons (a visual representation) of *real gods* that existed in the spiritual realm. Understand that ancient Israel did not abandon the worship of Jehovah to worship the *statues* of Baal because they were marvelous to look upon.

Not at all! Ancient Israel abandoned the worship of Jehovah (who forbid the making of icons in the Second Commandment) for several reasons, but let us consider two:

1. Israel abandoned Jehovah's commands because Baal's *doctrines* were far more agreeable with the carnal nature. Temple prostitutes, sexual orgies, sensual dancing, ungodly music, feasting, extensive rituals and human sacrifices were far more stimulating forms of worship than listening to an old priest reading the law of Moses every Sabbath. Worshiping the gods of Baal offered a religious experience that was sensual and appealing to the young. Over time Baal's teachings became a religious blindfold that released the Jews from the chaffing accountability required by Jehovah. Within 450 years of the Exodus, the northern ten tribes of Israel had become so detached from Jehovah that no one would listen to any of his prophets.
2. Many ancient civilizations believed that *if* the gods were pleased with their behavior and sacrifices, the nation would prosper and be blessed with fertility, health, prowess and

national sovereignty. Israel was no exception. For example, the Canaanite nations believed that the great god, Molech, could only be appeased through the sacrifice of innocent blood of children. (Leviticus 18:21; 1 Kings 11:4-7) Powerful rulers and nations believed their prosperity and sovereignty came when the gods were more pleased with them than other nations. (See Deuteronomy 28:1-14 and Isaiah 36.) So, when Israel's good fortunes began to fail after the time of Solomon, Israel's kings converted to the religion of the Baals who *appeared* to be more powerful than Jehovah. (2 Chronicles 28:22-26) Of course, the truth is that Jehovah allowed foreign nations to overrun Israel because Israel refused to obey Him (Leviticus 26:14-46; Ezekiel 12:14-21). Unfortunately, the apostate leaders of Israel interpreted their loss of prosperity and sovereignty as proof that Jehovah was weak and inferior.

Serious parallels exist between ancient and modern civilizations. Modern civilizations are convinced that prosperity, prowess and sovereignty are the achievements of man. U.S. citizens may say, "In God we trust," and presidents may invoke, "God bless America," but these statement are meaningless if we refuse to accept the standards of righteousness that God demands.

Second, when religion ceases to aggravate and agitate the carnal nature, allowing the spiritual nature to grow strong and dominant, apostasy becomes inevitable. Rebellion against God is like a tap root that silently, and almost imperceptibly, grows deep and strong. Only when challenged with a plain, "Thus saith the Lord," does rebellion make itself known. Israel's fall into apostasy came through their consistent murmuring and rebellion against God's requirements.

Idolatry Defined

Idolatry is anything that causes a person to distort, compromise or diminish the authority of God. Paul says that idolatry is based on greed. **"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."** (Colossians 3:5,6)

For a moment, let us focus on the aspect of greed. What is greed? Greed is a grasping desire for possession. Greed is an insatiable appetite for "something." Greed thrives in a self-seeking heart and is the basis for self-aggrandizement. Greed is at the root of covetousness.

Greed can be expressed in many different ways and taints every aspect of life. We can be greedy for authority, control, power, money, material possessions, recognition, food, sex, pleasure and anything else the human heart desires. There are no boundaries or limits to greed.

Needy or Greedy?

Every person has basic needs. People need shelter, food, love, clothing, health, happiness, etc. So, how does a person draw the line between needy and greedy? The answer is found in the appetites of the heart. If the Holy Spirit lives within the human heart, love exalts the interests and needs of others above itself.

On the other hand, the carnal heart is assertive, self-seeking, always putting self first. The carnal heart resists authority, it wants to be in charge, like God. *The carnal heart is afraid of two things: the truth and the future.* Preferring darkness over the searching light of truth, the carnal heart always puts a spin on its actions, justifying its gross behavior. The carnal heart is also afraid of the future. The carnal heart justifies today's greed to insure the survival of self in days to come.

Because everyone on Earth has a carnal heart, everyone on Earth has a natural propensity for greed.

Consider the Difference

The spiritual heart realizes that loving and obeying God must be higher than any consequences. (Matthew 22:37,38) Therefore, the law of God must be exalted first and foremost. The spiritual heart knows that concern for our neighbors is as important in God's sight as taking care of ourselves. (Matthew 22:39,40)

We are our brother's keepers. The spiritual heart recognizes that facing the truth with a contrite heart, although sometimes painful, is the only way to please God. (Isaiah 66:2) The spiritual heart is not afraid of the future, since God is already in the future and sustains all forms of life by His mighty power. (Isaiah 41:10)

The spiritual heart does not seek first-place, but instead puts the needs of others first. The spiritual heart does not revel in the momentary applause of men, but focuses its desires on the eternal approval of God. The spiritual heart is more concerned with what is right than with its rights.

Stepping Over The Line

When we become willing to violate the commandments of God in order to have our heart's desire, we step over the line from needy to greedy. The *focus* of the desire becomes the idol. For example, a person may desire money to the point that he is willing to cheat or lie. This is idolatry.

Relationships can also be a form of idolatry. When a person becomes sexually immoral, they violate the will of God and step over the line from needy to greedy. A job or a career can be an idol. A person may justify working on God's holy day because the threat of losing his job has become more important than his or her obedience to God. The carnal nature says, "I cannot afford to lose my job".

The spiritual nature says, "I cannot afford to ignore God's commandment, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.' " Entertainment, food, pleasure, material possessions, work, etc. can be forms of idolatry. If we desire something to the point that we are willing to violate God's requirements, we are idolaters.

What is the benefit in being an idolater? In the long run, nothing is gained through idolatry. We simply wear ourselves out. Solomon said, **"Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle."** (Proverbs 23:4,5) Jesus also encouraged us with words of comfort: **"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."** (Matthew 6:31-34)

Idolaters Have To Be Destroyed

The United States has become the richest nation on Earth, but only because God blessed this country in marvelous ways. If the rapid growth of idolatry continues in America, its citizens will inevitably separate the country from God's blessings.

The U.S. is drifting away from obedience to God at an alarming rate. Television and all forms of media are contributing to this decline. The slippery slope of sin only gets steeper and faster. God deals severely with nations who give themselves over to idolatry.

Destruction comes because idolatry forces a nation to forsake the divine principles necessary for the quality of life that God wants for His creation. Man is accountable to God. The rise and *fall* of many nations during Old Testament times confirms this salient point.

God uses an arsenal of four deadly judgments to destroy nations: Sword, famine, plague and wild beasts. **"The word of the Lord came to me** [Ezekiel]**: 'Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men–Noah, Daniel and Job–were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord. . .' 'For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments–sword and famine and wild beasts and plague–to kill its men and their animals!' "** (Ezekiel 14:12,13, 21)

I believe these same judgments are about to be unleashed upon an unsuspecting world. The fourth seal is the next one to be opened. Notice what the Bible says, **"When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth."** (Revelation 6:7,8)

When God spoke the first commandment from Mt. Sinai, **"You shall have no other gods before me"** (Exodus 20:3), He foreknew the consequences of idolatry.

The Bible confirms that destruction is God's solution for stopping idolatry. **"Outside** [the holy city] **are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."** (Revelation 22:15, insertion mine)

Idolatry can be hard to define because the carnal heart is so devious. Jeremiah said, **"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"** (Jeremiah 17:9) The devil preys upon our carnal nature. A great unseen war is waging – the prize is to take possession of every soul.

The devil and his forces are doing everything they can to entice people into idolatry. Demons have intensely studied us and are highly skilled at influencing people toward evil behavior. Make no mistake about it, the sin that almost defies definition today is idolatry.

In our passionate reach for money, power, pleasure and possessions, millions are defying the commands of God. This is serious! Idolaters do not know they are idolaters unless the Holy Spirit can penetrate our carnal heart and reveal it.

It is imperative that we seek the Lord as we study His Word, asking Him if there is anything in our lives that stands in the way of total submission to His will. Listen for His response. We can be sure that when Jesus appears at the Second Coming, He will be like a roaring lion to idolaters and a gentle lamb to His followers.

The Sin That Almost Defies Correction

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Different parts of the United States have colloquialisms (phrases of speech that are unique to that region). In the so-called "Bible Belt," the phrase, a "come to Jesus meeting," is used in a variety of circumstances. For example, a few months ago my mother's car began to overheat.

Dad took the car to the local Ford dealer to get the problem fixed. A few days later, my parents paid about two hundred dollars for the repair. The following day, Mom drove the car on a short errand and the engine seriously overheated again. Mom called the dealer and a tow-truck carried the car back to the shop.

Needless to say, the shop foreman was surprised and embarrassed to see the car returned for repair. Soon he called my parents, told them the car had a blown head gasket and the repair would cost about $2,400. As an apology, the foreman offered to deduct the previous payment from the repair and also offered a one year warranty.

Mom knew she had almost ruined the engine by driving it, so she asked how the mechanic could have overlooked the possibility of a blown head gasket. The shop foreman said he did not know since shop procedures require a compression check on all cylinders if an engine is overheating.

Then he said, "I cannot excuse the negligence of the mechanic that serviced your car, but I can assure you that we are going to have a 'come to Jesus meeting' and he will not do this again."

A "Come to Jesus Meeting"

A sincere "come to Jesus meeting" is that moment when an individual is compelled by the weight of evidence and looming penalty to admit wrong doing, seek forgiveness and agree to avoid wrong doing again. The origin of the phrase is unknown, but the phrase says it all.

No doubt the phrase caught on in the "Bible Belt" because Christians generally agree that man stands before God condemned for wrong doing. **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:23)

Consequently, every sinner is under the condemnation of God's law. **"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 6:23)

Therefore, the only way to escape the penalty of eternal death is through a "come to Jesus meeting." **"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."** (1 John 5:12,13)

A real "come to Jesus meeting" consists of three things. First, the sinner must admit guilt and

wrong doing. If this admission does not occur, there is no need for a meeting. **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."** (1 John 1:9,10)

Second, the sinner has to sincerely repent and commit to stop doing wrong. **"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."** (Hebrews 10:26)

Last, sinners must attempt to make restitution before God forgives us. **"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."** (Matthew 5:23,24)

Ten Commandments

Many people may know about the Ten Commandments, but few people understand the reach or ramification of these profound laws. Most people incorrectly think the second commandment forbids idolatry, but the commandment that forbids idolatry is the *first* commandment! **"You shall have no other gods before me."** (Exodus 20:3)

Idolatry is the first sin that all sinners commit. Idolatry occurs when a person becomes willing to violate any of God's commandments because of greed or grasping desire. If we desire something so much that we are willing to violate God's law, we have exalted the object above God's requirements and this is idolatry.

Carnal humanity is not interested in repentance or reformation. (Romans 8:1-8) People do not tremble at the Word of the Lord (Ezra 9:4), give due consideration to the destruction that awaits, or concern themselves with the need for a crucified Savior. (Revelation 20:15; Acts 4:12)

So, how do carnal people exalt and worship a righteous God who rebukes sin and declares its harsh realities? The carnal nature rebelliously screams against submission, but it must become willing to submit to the declarations of a righteous God to receive salvation. (John 15:10-14) It is an all or nothing proposition.

Unfortunately we have allowed human concepts to form our ideas about what God requires. To avoid confronting God's demands, carnal Christians have created their own "concepts of god." Contrary to what many preachers say, the Almighty *does not* accept us as we are! We may come to Him as we are, but God will only accept us if we are covered with the garment of Christ's righteousness. (Romans 1:17; Revelation 19:8)

The righteousness of Christ is granted only to individuals who repent and are willing to forsake their sins! (Matthew 22;1-14; Acts 3:19; 17:30,31; Hebrews 10:26) Remember, the rich young ruler had a "come to Jesus meeting," but sadly turned away because he was not willing to do as

Jesus required. (Mark 10)

Nothing deadens the reasoning powers of sinners like constant repeated commission of sin. Sin is like Novocaine, it numbs the conscience to spiritual matters. The carnal heart becomes numb to God's demands and is stimulated by pleasure seeking and gratification. People living in sin do not grasp the foolishness of their ways nor the comprehensive scope of their evil influence until they are confronted with the gospel.

The gospel declares the verdict, the wages of sin are death and God will destroy all sinners by fire unless they repent and forsake their sins. (Revelation 20:11-15) The good news found in the gospel is that there is a wonderful Savior who will forgive us *if* we confess our sins and allow Jesus to empower reformation within our lives.

The process is simple. If the Holy Spirit can find entrance into our heart, He will produce guilt. This is His first mission. (John 16:8) When a person feels no guilt, there is no sense of wrong or a need for repentance. If we respond to guilt with sincere sorrow for the wrong, a change will come as we, through faith, claim the indwelling power of Christ.

If there is no remorse for doing wrong, there is no reason to cease doing wrong. If there is no heartfelt sorrow or guilt, there is no need for a "come to Jesus meeting."

"Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery"

In the January issue of *Day Star*, I presented how idolatry is a sin that almost defies detection. This month, we will consider a sin that almost defies correction. The seventh commandment says, **"Thou shalt not commit adultery."** (KJV, Exodus 20:14)

This commandment is far more comprehensive than sexual intercourse by a married person with someone other than his or her spouse. From God's perspective the seventh commandment forbids *any form* of sexual misconduct. The dictionary definition of *adultery* is any lewd, unchaste act or thought. Jesus agreed with this definition when He said in Matthew 5:27,28 that adultery does not require sexual contact.

Furthermore, the dictionary also says the word *adulterate* means "to corrupt." Therefore, adultery is *any act or thought* that sexually corrupts the human being. God explicitly defined sexual misconduct in the Bible to include many immoral behaviors and He also defined principles for appropriate sexual conduct. (See Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 18 and 20; Acts 15:20; Romans 1; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 13:4 and 1 Corinthians 7:4,5.)

God knows all about human sexuality; after all, He invented sex. Sex has mental, spiritual and physical benefits if used according to God's will. Likewise, sexual misconduct brings a curse that produces depreciation, sorrow, separation and perplexity.

Adultery, in all its variant forms, is a very grievous sin in God's sight because it destroys the

relationships that human beings need. Every child needs two parents, four grandparents and a circle of wholesome friends to surround them. Every child needs the security and discipline of love and respect.

Healthy family relationships produce strong communities and nations. Just one single act of adultery, however, can ruin many people's lives. This is why God hates adultery. In fact, when ancient Israel provoked God's wrath, He often cited adultery as one the primary reasons for His anger! (Jeremiah 3:6-9; Ezekiel 23; Hosea 4)

The devil preys on our sexuality using sensuality and promiscuity to entice people to commit some form of adultery. He knows that adultery begins within the carnal heart and that we all have a certain amount of interest in sexuality. Down through the ages, the devil has closely studied mankind and the Scripture.

He realizes that adultery can begin with a subtle temptation. For example, King David committed adultery after he observed Uriah's wife taking a bath.(2 Samuel 11)

His sexual interest in her started a miserable chain of events for himself and his kingdom. James says, **"But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."** (James 1:14,15)

Nudity leads to lust, and pornography flourishes because it feeds sexual desire. If sexual desire is not governed by self-control, high morals, an appreciation for self-worth and a dedicated commitment to please God (Genesis 39:6-9), an immoral act or thought will be committed given enough desire and time. However, the devil does not just stop with the subtle temptation.

After he has succeeded in leading the victim to commit adultery, the devil works just as hard to expose the act. He knows that once the act is exposed, it will destroy many relationships and the integrity of his victim. The knowledge of sexual misconduct produces denigration, disgust, grief, abandoned children, loss of career, hatred and separation.

Once the act becomes a habit, it is one of the most difficult sins to correct because sexual immorality corrupts the mental, physical and spiritual components of a human being. **Human sexuality has three dimensions: the mental, the physical and the spiritual and if violated, adultery can irreparably damage one or more of these dimensions. - Few people realize that before there is a victim of a sexual crime, there is a victim of adultery. Those who indulge in sensualism or promote sexual misconduct are slaves of sexual immorality. Peter says, "–For a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him." (2 Peter 2:19) Adultery can begin with something as innocuous as a lustful glance. Jesus said, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." (Matthew 5:28,29)**

The Healthy Side of Sexuality

God has given sexuality as a wonderful gift to every human being, but a serious responsibility attends this gift. Every gift from God is for man's benefit when used in harmony with God's will. Parents must inform their children of the purpose and importance of sexuality.

Children need to know that their sexuality is an integral part of their self-esteem. Children need to know that adultery is *any form* of sexual misconduct and it extracts a great loss. Nothing is gained by sexual misconduct except heartache.

Most of all, parents must teach their children that adultery has enormous consequences in all three dimensions of life: mental, physical and spiritual. Fictional stories in books, movies or television rarely reflect the long hard years of grief and self-depreciation that can follow one single act of adultery.

The devil wants young people to see the "joy of sex" without understanding the lifelong "hell" that one foolish moment can produce. Every person needs to know that a person cannot participate in sexual immorality and simultaneously maintain the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote, **"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."** (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

The Church at Corinth

Sexual immorality plagued the Christian church at Corinth. The ancient city of Corinth was noted for its prosperity, promiscuity and sensual pleasures. Because the practice of sexual immorality is so numbing, early converts to Christianity thought little of their sexual misconduct.

Paul realized they needed an attitude adjustment. Notice what he wrote, **"I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you.'"** (1 Corinthains 5:9-13)

To the uninformed reader, Paul may sound very harsh, but he is expressing a principle that God gave Israel. (Leviticus 18:1-29) There are two reasons why God is so harsh on sexual

misconduct. First, promiscuity will eventually breed some form of sexual misconduct. Second, the personal relationships necessary to sustain a persecuted church cannot survive the damning effects of adultery.

Through the years I have been asked why the Ten Commandments say nothing about rape, prostitution, pedophilia, bestiality, incest, sodomy, homosexuality and fornication. The question itself reflects a limited definition of adultery. As far as God is concerned, adultery is *any form* of sexual misconduct.

All sexual misconduct is included under the umbrella of adultery. I marvel at the flagrant way sin is promoted – "Adult" videos, "Adult" book stores, "Adult" entertainment abounds. The irony is in the spelling: "Adult"-ery.

One act of adultery can bring irreparable damage to many members of a family and for that reason, God forbade sexual misconduct in the Ten Commandments. Make no mistake about it, every form of adultery is destructive. Each participation is like another injection of Novocaine.

Soon, the conscience is deadened and wrong appears to be "no big deal." Adultery may be defended as "the right of consenting adults," but sexual misconduct *always* extracts a sorrowful harvest. **"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."** (Revelation 22:14,15) Paul adds, **"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."** (Colossians 3:5,6)

Given the authority of Scripture and the looming penalty for sexual misconduct, a "come to Jesus meeting" is in order if adultery or any other sin is occurring in your life. Come to Jesus confessing your sin, He is anxious to forgive us and to *cleanse* us from evil desires.

Jesus is coming soon and His offer of righteousness (the spotless wedding garment) and eternal life is worth far more than any temporal benefit that sin might have.

Living With Foreknowledge

Author: Larry W. Wilson

From time to time people ask me, "If I believe in the imminent fulfillment of Revelation's story, how should I plan for tomorrow?" This is a good question. The best answer I have found is this: "Allow the Holy Spirit guide you." This may sound like a careless or superficial answer, but it is the *only* answer.

Who has sufficient wisdom to deal with all the issues of life for today, not to mention the future? **"If anyone lacks wisdom,"** James says, **"let him ask of God who gives generously."** (James 1:5) For this reason I repeat, "Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you."

You are not alone in this predicament. The early Christians walked the same path 2,000 year ago when they anticipated the imminent return of Jesus. Notice how strongly opinionated Paul was about how to live during what he thought was the end of time.

Notice what he wrote:

"What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away." (1 Corinthians 7:29-31)

In light of what you know today, did his comments make you smile?

Prophetic beliefs are a type of foreknowledge. As humans, we often allow our foreknowledge to affect our daily lives. This is a part of human nature and we cannot escape this fact. Every mature person is concerned about the future, as well as the present, and we try to manage both accordingly.

This issue of *Day Star* is a little different from previous issues. Instead of trying to provide some answers on various Bible topics, I hope you gain insight from a few Biblical examples about people who were given a limited amount of foreknowledge.

1. Noah Was Given Foreknowledge

- "Then the Lord said, 'My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.' The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth – men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air – for I am grieved that I have made them.' But Noah found favor in the

eyes of the Lord . . . So God said to Noah, ‘I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. I am going to bring flood waters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish.’ " (Selected verses from Genesis 6)

Thought Questions: If you had lived in Noah’s day, would you have wanted to know all that Noah knew? When God told Noah that mankind would be totally destroyed in 120 years, how do you think he felt? How would you deal emotionally with this kind of foreknowledge? (120 years in Noah’s day is equivalent to about nine years in our life span today.) Even more, how do you suppose his wife and sons dealt with this foreknowledge? What did this foreknowledge do to their plans for the future?

2. Elisha Was Given Foreknowledge

- "Elisha went to Damascus, and Ben-Hadad king of Aram was ill. When the king was told, ‘The man of God has come all the way up here,’ he said to Hazael, ‘Take a gift with you and go to meet the man of God. Consult the Lord through him;’ ask him, ‘Will I recover from this illness?’ Hazael went to meet Elisha, taking with him as a gift forty camel-loads of all the finest wares of Damascus. He went in and stood before him, and said, ‘Your son Ben-Hadad king of Aram has sent me to ask, ‘Will I recover from this illness?’ Elisha answered, ‘Go and say to him, ‘You will certainly recover;’ but the Lord has revealed to me that he will in fact die.’ He stared at him with a fixed gaze until Hazael felt ashamed. Then the man of God began to weep. ‘Why is my lord weeping?’ asked Hazael. ‘Because I know the harm you will do to the Israelites,’ he answered. ‘You will set fire to their fortified places, kill their young men with the sword, dash their little children to the ground, and rip open their pregnant women.’ Hazael said, ‘How could your servant, a mere dog, accomplish such a feat?’ ‘The Lord has shown me that you will become king of Aram,’ answered Elisha. Then Hazael left Elisha and returned to his master. When Ben-Hadad asked, ‘What did Elisha say to you?’ Hazael replied, ‘He told me that you would certainly recover.’ But the next day he took a thick cloth, soaked it in water and spread it over the king’s face, so that he died. Then Hazael succeeded him as king." (2 Kings 8:7-15)

God revealed the apostasy of Israel in a vision to Elisha. Elisha also saw the horrible destruction that Hazael would imminently inflict upon Israel and the prophet wept. Elisha knew Israel was going in the wrong direction and he traveled throughout the nation trying to get Israel to repent and reform. Sadly, the nation did not take his warnings seriously and his pleas fell on deaf ears. Not long after Elisha met with Hazael in Damascus, the Lord gave Israel into Hazael’s hands.

- "In those days the Lord began to reduce the size of Israel. Hazael overpowered the Israelites throughout their territory east of the Jordan in all the land of Gilead . . . In the

twenty-third year of Joash son of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahaz son of Jehu became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned seventeen years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord by following the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit, and he did not turn away from them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel, and for a long time he kept them under the power of Hazael king of Aram and Ben-Hadad his son." (2 Kings 10:32,33; 13:1-3)

Thought Invoking Questions: If God had given you this same foreknowledge, would you have wept? If you had been Elisha, what would you have done?

3. Isaiah Was Given Foreknowledge

God told Isaiah that Israel was going to be destroyed. About 160 years before Cyrus, the Persian king appeared on Earth, Isaiah knew God was going to use this king to destroy Babylon. Consider these verses:

- "This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things." (Isaiah 45:1-7)

Thought Questions: If you were Isaiah, what would you have thought about God's plans? How would you have felt about the destruction of your nation and the subsequent destruction of Babylon? Even more, God appointed these men to fulfill his plans. Would you have been inclined to tell everyone that "God is love?"

4. Jeremiah Was Given Foreknowledge

- Jeremiah said, "This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. "'But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,' declares the Lord, 'and will make it desolate forever. I will bring upon that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.' " (Jeremiah 25:11-15)

Thought Questions: If you and all your countrymen believed that Jerusalem was the city of God,

would you be able to tell them that the Lord was going to make the holy city a desolate wasteland for seventy years? Would you have the courage to deliver "the word of the Lord" to the religious and political leaders of your day? How would you live with this foreknowledge? If you had been Jeremiah, how would this foreknowledge have changed your daily life?

Consider Jeremiah's unflinching faith – he knew the destruction of Jerusalem was imminent:

- "The army of the king of Babylon was then besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was confined in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah. Now Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him there, saying, 'Why do you prophesy as you do?' You say, 'This is what the Lord says: I am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape out of the hands of the Babylonians but will certainly be handed over to the king of Babylon, and will speak with him face to face and see him with his own eyes. He will take Zedekiah to Babylon, where he will remain until I deal with him, declares the Lord. If you fight against the Babylonians, you will not succeed.' " (Jeremiah 32:2-5)

Thought Question: Put yourself in Jeremiah's place. What type of courage did it take for Jeremiah to tell the king to surrender his nation to the enemy?

5. The Disciples Were Given Foreknowledge

Jesus told His disciples:

- "All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you." (John 16:1-4)

Thought Questions: If you had been one of the disciples, how would you have lived with this foreknowledge? Would you rush home and tell your wife and children? We now know that nine or ten of the disciples were martyrs for their faith. Do you think their foreknowledge was a comfort to them in their last hours?

Summary

You may recall the children of Israel reached the borders of the promised land about two years after the Exodus from Egypt. When they reached the borders, the Lord told Moses to send 12 tribal leaders into Canaan so they could see with their own eyes what the Lord was going to give His people.

During this inspection, the spies were overwhelmed with what they saw. The bounty of this country was enormous, with crops beyond anything they had ever seen. They also saw great cities like Jericho that were well defended. Even more, they saw the giants, the Anakims, who lived in the land of Canaan.

Israel anxiously awaited their report. When they returned, ten spies were overcome with fear and anxiety. From their carnal point of view, they thought the ragtag army of Israel was no match for the nations that already possessed the land. Only Caleb and Joshua believed that God could do for them what they could not do for themselves.

God wanted Israel to believe in Him for its future, and He wanted its leaders to understand that they could not possess the land on the basis of their own strength! God tried to give the leaders of Israel some foreknowledge, but they crumbled because of their lack of faith in Him. Consequently, God sent the whole nation back into the wilderness. Everyone but the families of Caleb and Joshua would perish there.

The story of the 12 spies offers an important parallel. Today, we have the privilege of "spying into" the things that God is going to do in the future. Like Israel of old, we cannot deal with the future in our own strength. This is why faith and trust in God are essential. Some Christians are afraid of the future, especially if it means going through a tribulation period. The carnal nature is always afraid of two things: the truth and the future. But, let me encourage you!

There is no need to be afraid. God stands in our tomorrows. He currently stands where we are going to be. His foreknowledge is perfect and complete. He ever sees the larger picture and is doing a superior job of managing the sin problem on Earth.

The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation reveal the coming plans of God. Yes, terrible times are coming upon the Earth, but so are the good times. Remember, the Great Tribulation is not the end of the story. The end of one story occurs when sin is destroyed and life without the curse of sin begins! The story that really matters is that soon, everyone will live happily ever after! In the five examples of foreknowledge presented in this study, the news about God’s forthcoming plans was not pleasant.

No doubt each person mentioned who received foreknowledge was overwhelmed at first. But, as the larger picture unfolds, it reveals that God is managing the sin problem for the benefit of man. This is good news. God understands us, He loves us and will do whatever it takes to save us.

The cross proves this beyond a shadow of doubt. If you have recently read my *Warning!* book and are depressed because of future events, consider four things: First, God is in the business of doing whatever it takes to save as many people as possible.

Second, the Great Tribulation will produce a numberless harvest of precious souls. Third, if there was a better way to present the gospel so that mankind would consider the generous offer of salvation, God would not inflict Earth with His horrific judgments.

What does this say of man’s degenerate condition when God is left with no other alternative to get man’s attention than global destruction? Last, the Great Tribulation is short and the eternity that follows is endless. Look on the bright side of prophetic foreknowledge: Jesus is coming soon! Jesus saves!

Soon, the sorrows, tears, pain, sadness, death, suffering, depression and grief will be just a fading memory. This view of the "promised land" and a host of other truths make me happy!

Left Behind - A Movie Review

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Several people have asked me to comment on the recent movie, "*Left Behind*", so I rented and watched the video version of the movie. Before I present my thoughts, I need to make four statements. First, even though the story line in this movie is a work of fiction, it should not be regarded as "just another movie".

This movie belongs in a special category because the story line represents the Biblical beliefs of many evangelical Christians. Second, this movie was produced by certain evangelicals for the purpose of making a religious statement to both Christians and non-Christians.

Unlike "entertainment movies," the mission of the sponsors and producers of "Left Behind" is to inform as many people as possible about their particular view of Bible prophecy. Third, this movie is based on a prophetic schematic that is sometimes called "the pre-tribulation schematic." The term "pre-trib" is used because this view predicts that all born-again Christians will be taken to Heaven *prior* to the commencement of the Great Tribulation in an event called "the rapture."

My fourth statement is the most serious. All claims (including my own) about the future fulfillment of prophecy are a matter of faith, not fact. These claims are not a matter of fact because it is impossible to *prove* the accuracy of a prediction that has not occurred.

For example, no one can prove there will be a Second Coming. Jesus said He will return, but a promise is not evidentiary fact. People may put their *faith* in the promises of Jesus, but faith is not fact. (Joh 14:1-3; Heb 11:1-6) Faith and fact are mutually exclusive.

When something has become a known fact, there is no need for faith. Therefore, all prophetic schematics concerning the future are ultimately statements of faith, not fact.

The truthfulness found in these four statements level the playing field as far as humanities' grasp of God's future plans. *It is important to remember that all end-time schematics are based on faith, and do not have an equal chance of being accurate.* When it comes to the accuracy of prophetic schematics, popularity and scholarly endorsement mean nothing. Noah's "flood schematic" had less than a dozen believers after 120 years of preaching!

So, the prophetic schematic that is proven to be true in the end is the one that accurately explains the intended meaning of God's Word. I believe it is possible to test a prophetic schematic to see if it is true or false before predicted events occur and this is done by using valid rules of interpretation (hermeneutics).

In other words, the key to accurately understanding apocalyptic prophecy is based on understanding and administering valid rules of interpretation that dictate the meaning of prophecy. We know a set of rules are valid if they align past fulfillment of prophecy with

recorded history.

This process helps the Bible student anticipate future events because they harmonize with events that have already been fulfilled. God is consistent and there is a beautiful harmony that is revealed from the sum of all its parts. If a person uses valid keys of interpretation appropriately, that person can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, discover the intended meaning of apocalyptic prophecy.

Keep in mind that valid rules of interpretation do not favor one particular denominational view over another. Valid rules of interpretation are self-evident within the Bible itself.

The Movie

The story line in the movie is based on a series of bestselling books written by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye. I found the movie to be entertaining and enlightening for two reasons. First, this "true-to-life" drama illustrates several prophetic concepts that pre-trib evangelicals believe are true.

It was interesting to see pre-trib views portrayed in "real-life" situations. Second, some evangelicals are using this movie as an "entering wedge" to convey their concepts of God and the necessity for salvation before secular minds. They hope that revenues from this movie will finance the production of additional movies. The basic message of this movie is "Get right with God now – or be left behind."

I do not think we can expect this movie to measure up to Hollywood’s expensive docu-dramas. The special effects are not quite as convincing as some of the more recent multi million dollar Hollywood movies. But as I watched, these deficiencies did not hurt the core message of the movie.

A secular viewer with no previous understanding of the pre-trib schematic may not understand how certain details connect in the story and will probably forget most of the details within a few days. The one element the viewer may not forget, however, is the emotional response of being "left behind".

On the other hand, I believe this movie will have a lasting impact on individuals who sincerely believe in the pre-trib schematic. If the movie is financially successful, I suspect sequels will soon follow that clarify other anticipated pre-trib events during the seven years of the Great Tribulation.

The Pre-Trib Schematic

Perhaps some readers of the *Day Star* are not acquainted with the pre-trib framework, so the following three paragraphs present a brief overview of some of the elements that were presented in the movie:

In the near future, Arab enemies will try to destroy Israel and the Jews (God's chosen people), but God will miraculously protect Israel. On or about the time of this attack, without warning or notice, God will snatch up all born-again Christians from Earth and the wicked will be "left behind." (Hence the title of the movie.)

This event is called "the rapture" and it marks the beginning of a seven-year period called "*The Great Tribulation*".

After the rapture, it is believed that a series of judgments from God will occur on Earth (These events were not presented in the movie). Much destruction and human turmoil will follow. The rapture of millions of Christians will be seen as a powerful fulfillment of prophecy.

Upon witnessing this event, it is believed that 144,000 Jews will convert to Christianity. They will begin to evangelize the whole world like the apostle Paul, preaching the gospel of Christ. (The concept of 144,000 Jews evangelizing the world was not presented in the movie either.)

At this time, many people will give their hearts to the Lord for two reasons: First, the sudden disappearance of millions of people will confirm the pre-trib version of the gospel. (This concept was strongly promoted in the movie.) Second, the Great Tribulation will impose so much suffering on all nations that people will repent of their disbelief to avoid eternal destruction. (This point was obliquely mentioned.)

While the gospel is being heralded throughout the Earth by the Jews, a man from Europe will come to the attention of Earth's inhabitants. This man gains influence and control over the world through the United Nations. Soon, it becomes evident that this man is the dreaded Antichrist.

Some pre-trib believers think the Antichrist is presently living in obscurity in Europe and will quickly rise to fame and popularity on or about the time of the rapture. At first, he will appear to be very effective in his pursuit to restore peace between the nations of Earth.

It is believed that He will gain control over the nations of Europe (presented as ten valuable sectors of the world), but as circumstances change, his masquerade is removed about midway through the Great Tribulation, revealing his true identity as the evil Antichrist.

Continuing in the pre-trib view, the Antichrist will declare himself to be God and establish himself in God's temple. (2 The 2) Pre-trib adherents believe the term, "God's temple" refers to the soon-to-be-rebuilt Jewish temple and they believe the Antichrist will eventually rule the world through a one-world religion from the rebuilt temple. (This idea was emphasized in the movie.) When the midway point of the Great Tribulation is reached, the Antichrist will show his evil side and force everyone to worship him.

The inhabitants of Earth will be forced to receive his mark or suffer the consequence of death. At the end of the seven years, Jesus will appear in clouds of glory with all of the raptured Christians accompanying Him.

They will be met by a great multitude of believers on Earth (the fruit of the work of the 144,000).

Jesus will establish His kingdom here on Earth and the converted Jews will serve as priests over all the Earth. The devil will be put in prison for 1,000 years so he cannot tempt the nations.

Pre-trib proponents believe there will be 1,000 years of peace and righteousness. At the end of 1,000 years, the wicked will be destroyed and eternity will begin.

Commentary

I personally do not believe the pre-trib view is a valid schematic. I do not want to sound critical and I realize my assessment of the movie's message may not be too popular, but I have found numerous flaws in this presentation.

Ironically, the movie and the bestselling books upon which the movie is based may contribute to the undoing of the pre-trib schematic if end-time events do not unfold as the movie predicts. Such is the double-edged sword of interpreting prophecy.

If a widely accepted view eventually proves to be false, where do believers turn when their doctrines fail? Many prophetic schematics have gained notoriety only to be abandoned when the passage of time proved them wrong. A good example of how this process works is the story of Baptist evangelist, William Miller.

He preached that the Second Coming would occur in 1844. When it did not happen, the Millerite movement collapsed. When C. T. Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, claimed that Jesus would return to Earth in 1914, followers then claimed that Jesus returned to Earth in secret. I believe the Witnesses have now discarded this prophetic position.

The Theological Problems

Left Behind - (The Movie) is a story that depicts the end-time scenario as certain evangelicals understand it. Does the Bible confirm this view of end-time events? The answer depends on whom you ask. Do not misunderstand. The creators of this movie have every right to present their views before the world. They did a good job of staying within the boundaries of the pre-trib schematic.

I am not quibbling about the contents of the movie or the freedom people have to present their religious views to the world. I say, "More power to them!" However, I do challenge the Biblical basis for the movie that I find to be inherently wrong.

For example, in the movie, the viewer is informed that those "left behind" have a chance to repent of their sins and become believers in Christ. This implies that if you miss the rapture, there is another chance to be saved. I believe the doctrine of a second chance as presented in the movie to be non-Scriptural.

Consider the problem: A pre-trib rapture mandates an eternal judgment of every living person on Earth *prior* to the rapture. This judgment would be necessary to determine who will be

raptured and who will be left behind. Where is this pre-rapture judgment described in the Bible?

Although the apostle Paul and others describe a time that we will stand before the judgment bar of Christ to receive our reward (2 Cor 5:10), Paul writes nothing about being judged twice. If a person is sentenced to eternal death before the rapture, how can he be sentenced to eternal life later on?

Further, why should people living at the time of the alleged rapture be given a second chance to be saved when previous generations were not given this reprieve? Think of the billions of people who have died since Abel – none of them got a second chance.

Converted to What?

The essential premise of the pre-tribulation schematic is that millions of people will be converted to Christianity because the rapture proves the superiority of Christianity over every false religion of the world. By taking born-again Christians to Heaven *first*, the world suddenly awakes to the realization that God favors born-again Christians and disfavors the rest of humanity!

Pre-trib proponents believe there will be a wholesale conversion of 144,000 Jews to Christ after the rapture. These converted Jews will then carry the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world during the seven years, expecting many converts as a result.

How do Jews today receive this assertion? Not very well, I am told. It is highly unlikely that the rapture of millions of Christians will convert 144,000 Jews. In fact, if there was a sudden worldwide rapture of millions of born-again Christians, the Jews, Arabs, Moslems, Hindus and other religions of the world might all agree, "good riddance."

While "Get right or get left!" may work as a sound-bite, it is not judicially fair for people to be *forced* to accept Jesus as a Savior, based on being left behind if they refuse to accept Christ today. Heaven is no fire escape from hell.

Fear is a powerful motivation for uninformed people, but decisions made under duress or torture are neither valid nor result in a long-lasting decision. Wouldn’t it be much better for people to grasp the gift of salvation through the atoning death of Jesus and let His love draw us to Him? Love should be the motive for marriage and love should be the motive for becoming a follower of Jesus.

True love prompts us to confess our sins and ask forgiveness. Foxhole conversions do occur, but few foxhole converts remain committed Christians for a lifetime.

The Antichrist

The purpose and role of Antichrist as depicted in the movie in my estimation limit his role in end-time events. The coming Antichrist is not a mere man, but is Lucifer, the devil garbed in the flesh of man.

The Antichrist will attempt to mimic Jesus' return, by appearing in clouds of glory and attended by millions of angels. Masquerading as God for a period of time, he will deceive the world into thinking he is Almighty God. He will use miracles to deceive many people and will eventually gain control of the world by killing a third of mankind.

The pre-trib conclusions about the coming Antichrist are grossly understated.

Who is Israel?

My review of *Left Behind* comes to an end with a few words about Israel. Surprisingly, the movie does not present a number of issues concerning the Jews that are core issues to the pre-trib schematic. A large part of the pre-trib schematic is based on the idea of dispensationalism, which claims that God treats Jews differently than Christians.

A quick read of Romans, Ephesians and Galatians defeats the notion of dispensationalism. The pre-trib rapture is based on the idea that God needs to remove all born-again Christians from Earth so He can finish His original plans with a converted Israel.

However, we need to step back for just a moment and ask just who constitutes Israel. As far as God is concerned, Israel is made up of people who put their faith in Christ, just as did Abraham. (Rom 9:5,6; Gal 3:28,29)

In summary, I believe "the movie is worth seeing." It is more than entertainment. It is edu-tainment. If the movie encourages you to get out your Bible and find some answers, the money and time spent viewing the movie could prove to be a great investment.

The Devil is Having a Heyday

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Read the following verse three times: **"The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men."** (Psalm 12:8) I am stunned by the boldness of some people these days. They appear to have no shame, no respect and evidently, no conscience. Without a second thought, they say and do things that God abhors.

They have no regard for God, their family, their nation or anyone! God's patience and long suffering make the wicked even more bold in their vile behavior. Day and night, the media spews out a steady stream of moral garbage. Both young and old spend countless hours watching, listening or reading about repugnant behavior.

Networks have discovered their ratings are higher if debasing behavior is put before viewers in prime time. Of course, higher ratings mean more advertising dollars, but this money comes at a very high price. Example: A twelve year old boy recently killed a six year old girl in Florida. The boy was practicing some of the martial arts he had learned from TV wrestling.

Of course, a great responsibility rests upon media producers and programmers, but whether we recognize it or not, God imposes accountability on each of us for the welfare of our fellow human beings. (Genesis 9:5,6) Cain tried to avoid this accountability, but God would not let him escape. (Genesis 4:9) The responsibility that rests upon the people who work in media is as great as the power that goes with the media.

Consider this illustration for a moment: Suppose a baby boy is born in Kentucky, but is immediately sent to a Chinese couple living in Beijing, China. Within a few years that child would speak fluent Chinese and think and behave as though it were Chinese.

However, if that *same child* was adopted by Palestinian parents in Jerusalem, that child would grow up speaking Arabic and think and behave as though it were Arab. Within twelve years, a child is imprinted with most of the data that he or she will use to form adult life. Within twelve years, one child could be two very different people! This illustrates an important fact. Attitudes and behaviors in children are formed very early in life.

Allowing for genetics, disposition and temperament within each child, human beings cannot escape the first rule of life: "By beholding we become changed." Children imitate and digest what they see. If evil behavior is exalted and honored before youth, a high percentage of youth will become vile. The devil knows this and is having a heyday in the United States with the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

He has twisted the right of free speech and is using it in an evil way. The Bible teaches, however, that speech always has consequences. Words are powerful and free speech extracts a high price when it protects the wholesale promotion of violence, sex, indulgent and degenerate behavior.

Diligent parents struggle constantly with the pernicious presence of evil. Evil is everywhere and in everything. Our nation [USA] is drowning in moral quicksand with no apparent bottom (absolutes). We should not be surprised at the rash behavior of youth when they learn how to do these same behaviors as they watch TV. Today's TV programs not only promote violence, they emphasize it as a means to resolve problems.

TV rarely emphasizes the suffering that results from sin, nor does it faithfully represent the consequences that follow sinful acts. The media glorifies sin in thousands of ways, and unfortunately, we now have a generation of parents in America who dimly understand the properties of sin. If this is true of parents, what can be said of their offspring?

Most Bible students would agree that there appears to be a rapidly growing segment in the United States that mirrors a startling resemblance to ancient Israel.

King David made the following observation: **"In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord. In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies. He says to himself, 'Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble.' His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue . . . He says to himself, 'God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees' . . . The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God . . . ' "** (Psalms 10:2-7,11; 14:1)

David asked a very sobering question: **"When the foundations** [of society] **are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"** (Psalm 11:3, insertion mine) I do not believe a shrinking number of righteous people can stop an accelerating avalanche of wicked behavior – it is too pervasive and widespread.

The Bible does reveal that a city like Nineveh may repent for a season, but it is only a matter of time until total destruction becomes necessary. This has always been the case with all societies! Recorded history indicates that 21 civilizations have come and gone.

Why did they disappear? God destroyed them for their wickedness, just like He destroyed the world in Noah's day. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because these cities had come to a point where extended mercy no longer had a redeeming effect.

True, God's wrath against Nineveh was stayed for a few years, but He eventually destroyed the pompous capital of the Assyrian empire about 160 years after Jonah warned the nation of coming wrath. It is sad, but true – until sin is fully eliminated from the universe, evil cannot be quarantined. God allows cities and nations to fill up their cup before He suddenly acts. Then, He steps in with destructive judgments.

It is necessary for Him to cauterize the growth of sin from time to time so that civilizations can continue on Earth. If it were not for God's timely intervention, man would have been extinct long before now.

Hoof and Mouth Disease

Sin is a lot like hoof and mouth disease that has been in the news recently. The disease is highly contagious and the plague cannot be stopped without overwhelming destruction. Sadly, many non-infected animals have also been destroyed to stop the spread of the plague.

In a similar way, the Bible confirms that God sometimes allows the innocent to perish along with the wicked in order to arrest the growth of sin. Many people may disagree with the previous sentence, but it is true. God sends the sunshine and rain upon the wicked and the righteous (Matthew 5:45), just as God's judgments fall upon the wicked as well as the righteous.

This view of God's love may run contrary to the "prosperity doctrine" that so many Christians have embraced. But, and this is an emphatic "but," God's grace spares every righteous person from the death that ultimately counts – the second [eternal] death.

The prosperity doctrine uses a number of Bible texts to defend concepts that predispose people for spiritual bankruptcy. People believe that God is anxious to prosper them if only they will turn their lives over to Him. Moses told the Children of Israel, **"Walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess."** (Deuteronomy 5:33)

On the surface, the prosperity doctrine has biblical support, but most lies have some truth in them. It is true that if we live in harmony with God's laws, we will be blessed. But do not overlook an important aspect of God's administrative ways. God manages a universe.

He is also The Sovereign of Earth. In times past, he has had to destroy large numbers of people for the benefit of generations to come. He does this to stop the growth of sin when a city or nation passes the point of no return. Sometimes, God spares the righteous from His judgments and sometimes He does not.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah gives an example of God sparing the righteous, but sometimes He also allows the righteous to be put to death.

Nine of the twelve disciples were martyrs for their faith and the Bible predicts that millions of the saints will perish during the Great Tribulation: **"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints."** (Revelation 13:10)

The Bible speaks plainly about this. Sometimes God allows the saints to be martyrs. (Hebrews 11 and 12; Revelation 6:9-11; 16:4-7)

Faith in God, a non-negotiable faith – regardless of circumstances, is a must! We may not always understand God's actions, but we can be sure that He knows what He is doing. It is only a matter of time until we will have the privilege of understanding God's ways on any given matter.

Remember this: Faith is an experience that makes sense when viewed in reverse.

What Do You Think?

Troublesome times are increasing. In the United States, tens of thousands of job cuts have been announced in various sectors of our economy – automobile manufacturers are closing assembly plants, airline carriers are preparing for crippling summer strikes, the Dow-Jones has been sinking like a rock and the NASDAQ needs CPR.

California citizens have suddenly discovered that they cannot meet or pay for their energy needs. Individual state utilities are 14 billion dollars in the red for electricity *already* used and Vice President Cheney recently reported that the United Sates has a deficit of over 400 electrical generating stations at the current time! Natural gas prices are near an all time record high. OPEC has announced plans to reduce oil production this summer and analysts predict soaring gasoline prices for automobiles.

The United States is not the only country having problems. Japan's economy is teetering. Once the most robust economy in Asia, the Japanese economy has been in a steady decline for ten years. Japan's prime interest rate is less than one-quarter of one percent at this writing!

The European Union is hurting, too. Not only have thousands of farmers been financially ruined, but tourists have cancelled plans to go there because of an outbreak of hoof and mouth disease. Elsewhere in the world, ethnic and religious tensions have escalated into war. Russia is hobbled in poverty with a bankrupt economy.

The Middle East is a cauldron of violence and hatred. Deadly earthquakes have been frequent and the weather balance is extreme in some places. With this brief summary of world news in mind, how should Christians interpret these events? Are these man-made problems, freakish coincidence, the wrath of God or an attack by the devil? While you are weighing these matters in your mind, consider this question.

A Tough Question

Using Europe as an example: What does the slaughter of over a million animals and the economic ruin of thousands of families in Europe say to you? Who is to blame for this suffering? Here are four possible answers:

A. This suffering is the creation of man. Man caused this terrible epidemic and subsequent loss.
B. This suffering is "a freak of nature." This epidemic has no known cause.
C. This suffering is a manifestation of the power of the devil.
D. This suffering is a manifestation of God's wrath on Europe.

The Need For Understanding

The loss of anything of value is painful whether it be health or wealth, tangible or intangible. Few circumstances on Earth demand a response like intense suffering. Human beings can withstand some pain without seriously questioning it, but when suffering becomes overwhelming, persistent, intense and life changing, the need for understanding becomes important. If our pain is anatomical or physiological and it is great enough, we seek medical treatment.

If our pain is caused by a failed relationship, a counselor may be necessary. If our pain is spiritual, a member of the clergy may be needed. But to whom does a person turn when he or she has lost everything?

The four answers listed above necessitate some discussion. For example, there are situations when answer "A" fits the incident. A negligent captain can run his oil barge ashore and spill a million barrels of oil. In this case, the direct relationship between "cause and effect" is obvious.

But let us put a twist on this incident that reaches beyond man’s power. Let’s say that high winds push the oil tanker into a hidden sandbar spilling millions of barrels of oil. This event could be explained with answer "B" which says, ". . . a set of random conditions "just happened" and an oil spill resulted." Much of the world relies on answers "A" and "B" to explain the course of human history.

Christians will sometimes select answer "C" to explain suffering and loss, but they usually restrict the use of "D" for large, overwhelming events. A few Christians may think (but not out loud) the fourth answer is the best answer because sometimes God does inflict suffering and loss upon humanity because of our sinful ways.

So, how do you explain the destruction of more than a million animals in Europe?

It seems evident that each of the four answers is appropriate at different times and in different ways because life is full of events. Sometimes there are clear-cut cases of "cause and effect." Sometimes, there are random collisions of freakish events. Sometimes God sends discipline and sometimes the devil pounds on us.

Given these four options and the fact that God is Sovereign, it becomes quite clear that our existence is dependent upon God’s daily mercy. So, how should we understand the outbreak of hoof and mouth and its dire consequences?

I bring this question to the forefront because the misery index is rapidly increasing in many parts of the world. In my estimation, it is only a matter of time until the misery hits home and when it does, people will want an explanation.

Are you ready with some answers?

Does God Demand Worship?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

God Rejects Cain's Offering

A few days ago, the subject of worship came up in a conversation. The discussion became lively when I objected to the idea that man is free to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience. I made the comment, "*The Bible does not support the idea that we can determine how and when to worship God. On the contrary, God tells us how and when to worship Him and willful deviation from God's demand is rebellion*".

To illustrate my point, I referred to Genesis 4. God rejected Cain's offering because Cain rejected God's demand – God *demanded* that a lamb be sacrificed, but Cain presented fruit.

The word *demanded* upset my friends. They thought it would be better to say that God *required* Cain to bring a lamb. I asked "OK then, what is the essential difference between demanding and requiring in Genesis 4?" One person responded, "Maybe the word *required* is not as abrasive and confrontational as the word *demanded*." "All right," I conceded, "It is true that God is tactful and considerate of man. He does not often thrust Himself into our affairs highlighting His demands.

But when God gets no respect, He will rise to the occasion and clearly state His demands." For evidence, I offered this text: **". . . Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."** (Revelation 14:7)

Almighty God has the authority and right to *demand* anything He wants, and further, who can stop Him? (Isaiah 43:13) God does grant freedom of choice. We have the choice to submit to His authority or refuse His demands. Before sin occurred on Earth, God's laws (demands) were not in opposition to the way Adam and Eve lived, because their sinless hearts were in complete harmony with His demands.

However, after sin occurred, God's demands became hard to accept. His laws are not only contrary to the way the world's inhabitants live, but are also contrary to our rebellious nature. (Romans 8:7)

As the discussion progressed, it became apparent that my friends were confusing the topic of religious freedom with the topic of worship. Needless to say, my contribution to the discussion brought some controversy.

After the smoke began to clear, we began to differentiate between religious freedom and the worship of God. Several interesting issues surfaced. We came to agree that "religious liberty" (not worship) is defined as the privilege to worshiping God according to the dictates of our conscience.

In fact, religious liberty is the highest form of freedom *a nation* can offer and how wonderful and precious is this freedom! However, religious freedom should not be confused with the idea that we can worship God according to the dictates of our imagination.

God not only demands worship, but He has also given instructions about worship! (Exodus 20:3-11; 2 Kings 17:15; Psalm 47:2; Malachi 1:14; Luke 4:8) God considers willful deviation from His instructions as rebellion. Notice, I said *"willful."* Cain *willfully* rebelled against God's demand to sacrifice a lamb. Abel, on the other hand, submitted to God's demands and God approved of his offering.

Limited Knowledge

Our knowledge about God is very limited. He is infinite and He made us finite. My knowledge about God and His will for my life has developed over my lifetime, but everything I know about God is less than a speck of sand in the Pacific Ocean. Nevertheless, submission to God's will is usually a simple matter of "one thing at a time."

Regardless of social or financial consequences, if a person submits to the demands of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, that person is living in submission to the will of God, even though that person's knowledge of God's will is far from complete! For example, Daniel's three friends, Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego, knew nothing about the Mark of the Beast, but they did know that God *demanded* no one should bow down to an image, including Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol. (Daniel 3; Exodus 20:5)

Since the laws of God encompass every aspect of life, and since our knowledge of God's laws is limited, it is true that all of us do things that are contrary to the will of God. Sometimes we do these things out of ignorance (Leviticus 4:13-21; 1 John 5:16) or sometimes out of willful rebellion (Matthew 12:31,32; Hebrews 10:26).

Paul wrote, **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:23) God knows our hearts and He also knows what is going on inside our heads, but to Him what counts most is our actions. (1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 15:3) God sees the "inner man" and everything we do. God also knows if we truly love Him with all our heart, mind and soul. If we could see ourselves as God sees us, none of us could endure the horrible sight.

Humans are full of deceit, selfishness and rebellion. (Jeremiah 13:23; Matthew 7:11; 15:19,20) This may sound strange, but each person has three sides. There is the person you think you are, there is the person you want others to think you are, and then there is the person you really are.

God is not fooled. He knows the person we really are even though we may not! (Matthew 26:34) Human beings are scheming, deviant, and self-centered. He knows the *only way* we can change is by forcing us to see our own imperfections reflected in the way we respond to His lawful demands. (James 1:22-26)

This is why God demands (through His laws) things of us, this is the purpose of His truth. God constantly tests our love through conflict. His demands are in direct opposition to the demands of this world. As a result, His tests reveal whether our love for Him is pure or contaminated with selfishness.

We mature spiritually as we learn from these tests of faith. (Exodus 16:4; Ephesians 4:13; Judges 2:22; James 1:1-12)

Rich, Righteous and Rebellious

Remember the rich young ruler story? (Matthew 19) The young man could not see any flaw within himself. (This is the guy he thought he was.) He thought he loved God and had kept all the commandments since childhood. (This is the guy everyone knew.) He was also rich.

The Jews considered riches to be tangible proof of God's approval and the young ruler concluded that he must be close to God. He was content with his position in life and the material wealth he possessed. But, God's view of the young man was very different from what he saw in himself.

The young man publicly asked Jesus what he lacked in order to be saved. He expected that Jesus would praise him before those present for being "such a fine and honorable person." Instead, Jesus placed a simple test before him. The rich young ruler "balked and walked."

His love for God was contaminated by his love for money – he loved wealth more than he loved God. He could not meet the demand of the first commandment, **"Thou shalt have no other Gods before me."** In our materialistic society, are we surprised by his failure or do we make excuses for it?

A Key Point

Even though Jesus knows our innermost thoughts, He does not judge us on the basis of this knowledge. He judges us on the basis of our actions because our actions reflect our choices and our decisions!

This is a key point: God does not judge us on the basis of what we believe, but instead judges us on the basis of what we do about our belief. (2 Corinthians 5:10; Ecclesiastes 12:14) Notice the words of Jesus: **"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."** (Revelation 22:12)

Our actions will be rewarded. A tree is known by its fruit. Our response to God's demands reveals either our submission to God or our rebellion against Him. Jesus made a strange statement when He said, **"You are my friends if you do what I command."** (John 15:14)

To be friends with Jesus, we must submit to His authority. God is not our equal. Obedience is the fruit of love. Jesus said, **"If you love me, you will obey what I command."** (John 14:15)

When we love God, His commands are not a burden. What is more annoying than having to do something you hate to do? Cain, for example, did not love God supremely and *willfully* refused to obey the Lord. He did not bring a lamb for a sacrifice because his heart was rebellious. (1 John 3:12)

Cain *professed* to worship God, but God was not impressed. God rejected Cain's offering on the basis that Cain violated His demand. God is fair, not arbitrary or temperamental. God would have accepted Cain's offering if Cain's heart and actions had been appropriate.

Cain's story, as well as other evidence in Scripture, teaches us that God does not allow anyone to dictate how He is to be worshiped! (Genesis 4:5; John 4:24; Luke 4:8; Mark 7:7,8)

The Coming Antichrist

The worship of God is a legal matter – it is required by edict. (Exodus 20:3-11) Further, God made the seventh day of the week holy at the time of Creation and imposed the perpetual observance of His Sabbath by putting His demand within the Ten Commandments.

The fourth commandment (the observance of the seventh day Sabbath) is as important to God as the first commandment which demands that we have no other gods before Him! The Ten Commandments are actually ten "demand-ments." Yes, the world may treat them as "ten options," but this was never God's intent. (Jeremiah 25:4-7; Ezekiel 20:21)

The Bible predicts that the devil (the Antichrist) is going to appear on Earth during the Great Tribulation masquerading as God. (2 Thessalonians 2; Revelation 13:11-18) The Bible says the devil will exalt himself as God and to prove his assumed divinity, he will call fire down out of Heaven in full view of men! (Revelation 13:13)

The devil will *demand* and ultimately force everyone on Earth to worship according to *his* laws. (Revelation 13:16) Notice I said *demand*. Look at this verse: **"He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed."** (Revelation 13:15)

Worship will become a matter of life or death during the Great Tribulation. On the basis of this and other texts, the Bible suggests the devil will establish a day for worship that will NOT align with Friday, Sabbath or Sunday.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 says, **"He** [the devil] **will oppose** [all religions] **and will exalt himself over everything that is called** [the law of] **God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple** [wherever God is worshiped]**, proclaiming himself to be** [Almighty] **God."** (Insertions mine) In other words, when the devil appears on Earth and exercises the omnipotent prerogatives of God (such as calling fire down out of Heaven), he will not favor the established religions of the world.

Rather, he will force everyone to abandon their former religious systems and participate in his

"new" one-world religion. God has ordained that every religion will be dissolved! God gives Lucifer the power to setup a one-world religion. (Revelation 13:14,15)

A "new day of worship" will force the issue of worship to a level playing field for everyone living on Earth. By mandating "a new day" for worship, a billion Moslems who worship on Friday cannot complain that "God" is favoring a billion Catholics who worship on Sunday, and a billion Hindus who have no particular day for worship cannot complain that "God" is favoring a billion Christians who do.

A Tough Question

When the devil *demands* worship on his chosen day (and he promises death for anyone that refuses), most Christians will not be able to find a reason to object. This will be the case because most Christians believe that the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross. So, when worship is required on the devil's holy day, most Christians will have no lawful reason to object because they believe there is no command (or demand) in the Bible indicating *when* to worship God.

So, the circle of this prophetic picture has been completed. From the beginning, God has demanded worship. He has specified how and when He is to be worshiped. Of course, we can refuse to obey God, but we cannot escape the consequences.

At an appointed time, the devil will be granted total authority to rule over the world. Masquerading as God, the devil will demand worship from everyone. Consequently, a great test of faith is coming. The living will have to make some tough choices and God will judge the living by their actions.

This scenario is a parallel to the story of the three Hebrews standing before the golden image and the fiery furnace. Will we submit to the laws of the devil-king or will we submit to the laws of the King of kings? When worship is reduced to the demands of law, where will we stand? The Bible says *everyone* will be forced into obedience or forced into rebellion. (Revelation 13:8)

How and when is God to be worshiped? His instructions are found in the Ten commandments. The instructions are so simple that a child can understand them – read it for yourself! God is going to test the faith of all humankind to see who loves Him.

This coming test will center on worship and it will separate brothers, just like it separated Cain and Abel in the beginning. The coming test will challenge the faith of every person. In both cases, there will be death: If a person worships the devil and receives his mark, Jesus will kill him or her at the Second Coming. (Daniel 2:44; Revelation 19:19-21) If a person worships Jesus and refuses the mark of the beast, he or she will become a target for destruction. (Revelation 13:15)

Wow! The world is destined for a great controversy over the issue of worship and few have any idea that it is coming. Even worse, many Christians think they are going to view the Great

Tribulation from a safe perch in Heaven.

For additional reading on this subject, review chapter 5 in my book, *"Warning, Revelation is about to be fulfilled."*

The Domino Effect of Terrorism

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 will be remembered as a defining moment in the history of the United States of America. The attack was a horrific event and is proving to have consequences of biblical proportion.

At this writing, two weeks have passed since that horrible day and I am stunned at the domino effect. Who could have anticipated the enormity of the terrorist attacks? When all of the losses are added up (loss of life, freedom, property, financial resources, injuries and collateral damage), this event will be counted as one of the United State's greatest tragedies.

Authorities tell us that the number of dead and missing at the World Trade Center is more than 5,700 people and the number of people injured is more than 8,700. At the Pentagon, the death toll stands at 189.

In Pennsylvania, where the airliner plunged into a cornfield at 528 miles per hour, the death toll stands at 93. Only five people were rescued from the collapsed towers, after two weeks of heroic effort. However, the number of the missing, injured and dead is only a part of the big picture. Consider the domino effect from the events of this tragedy. Relief agencies are saying that more than 10,000 children have lost one or both parents.

Insurance companies and government officials are estimating that the damage and clean up costs will be more than $40 billion dollars in New York City and $500 million at the Pentagon. The costs may be even higher than these initial estimates.

The Impact Continues

The consequences from these events on September 11 will also impact many people who were not even near ground zero. For example, who can add up the financial impact on the families of the victims? Who can measure their sorrow and grief? The problems in corporate America loom much bigger now.

Because the attacks were caused by hijacked airplanes, the nation's airlines had to be grounded for several days and due to safety concerns, fewer people are now flying. Again, notice the domino effect. The airline industry has announced a reduction of more than 100,000 employees and says it will lose more than $7 billion in revenue during the last quarter of 2001 alone.

To keep airlines in business, Congress appropriated $15 billion in emergency relief. This is not the end of the story. People are not traveling, which means travel agencies, hotels, motels, restaurants, cruise ships, theme parks and many other forms of recreation are suffering.

The MGM Mirage complex in Las Vegas has laid off 3,000 employees. Fewer tourists mean

fewer dollars and fewer dollars means loss of jobs in places where the tourist dollar is the primary source of income.

Another domino effect: President Bush has received $40 billion from Congress to help pay for rescue and recovery at home and to declare war on terrorists abroad. Where does this $40 billion come from? More than 27,000 troops have been sent out to find terrorists and their sponsors and more than 17,000 military reserves have been called to active duty.

Who pays for this? It is the United States taxpayer. Another domino effect: Wall Street and the financial markets have been up and down during the past two weeks with an emphasis on "down." The stock market experienced its largest one week drop in its history during the week after the attack.

To bolster an already sagging economy, the Federal Reserve Board lowered interest rates to 2.5%. As people spend less, the economy slows down so tax revenues for the government evaporate. The tax surplus which Republicans and Democrats were haggling over a few weeks ago has been significantly reduced without a single vote! The financial impact of September 11 could reach $200 billion. (One billion is a thousand millions.)

The attack on the World Trade Center has or will affect every U.S. citizen and repercussions will reverberate throughout the world.

The *United* States

Another domino effect: Millions of Americans rushed to church and began to pray as a result of the attack. Prayer services and candlelight vigils were held around the nation. CNN reported that church attendance in some areas of the country was up 300%.

Bible sales during the first two weeks after the tragedy were up 27% and sales on books about prophecy were up 80%. A prayer service was televised from the steps of the Capitol Building (first time I have ever seen this) and contrary to the Supreme Court’s ruling, I am sure many prayers were offered in public schools around the nation.

A sense of sobriety fell on U.S. citizens during the week of September 11, 2001 and for the first time in a very long time, we became *the united* states of America.

Another domino effect: Attorney General Ashcroft is asking Congress to enact and update a series of laws to give police and intelligence agencies greater freedom to infiltrate terrorist cells. The downside to this, of course, will be some loss of civil liberty. Up to a point, Congress seems willing to give the authorities greater freedom to invade our privacy by enacting new laws for the sake of public safety.

Finding an acceptable balance between safety and liberty is a serious matter. The U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights will be challenged and I anticipate a great deal of debate on these and other related matters in days to come.

Peace and Safety

Another domino effect: Every nation now realizes that a relatively small group of terrorists can be responsible for devastating events. Consequently, I expect the merry-go-round of "terrorism then retaliation" to speed up. Every time a terrorist act occurs, retaliation will be swift and deadly.

Giving in to terrorists is not an option for any government. President Bush and a host of nations intend to eliminate terrorism from the world, but I do not think this will be possible. Their attempts may limit terrorism, but evil cannot be prevented.

A free society is a wonderful way of life as long as people live by the golden rule. However, when people take advantage of a free society to kill and maim others, something has to be done.

When the rules of conduct change, everyone loses freedom. There is a minority of people in the U.S. who are opposed to a military response to the terrorism of September 11. As one preacher said on TV, "If we follow ‘the eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth doctrine,’ the world will soon be blind and toothless."

This statement seems to be confusing forgiveness with justice. Christians glorify God when we turn the other cheek and forgive our enemies. We also glorify God when we stand up for righteous principles. God has made provision for the rule of law and the right of governments to defend their citizens. (Romans 13:1-4)

Why the Hatred?

As the 21st century begins, we find that Earth has become very small. There is not enough inhabitable land or resources for six billion people to live together with divergent cultures, languages and religious beliefs.

Many people are asking, what would cause these 19 terrorists to attack the U.S. and cause so much death and destruction? In any conflict, there are always two opposing sides with reasons they feel are valid. For example, some of the Arab hatred toward America stems from two previous wars.

First, after World War II, the United Nations and the U.S. aggressively supported the formation of Israel as a nation. The formation of Israel in 1948 required tens of thousands of Palestinians who had lived in and around Jerusalem for several centuries to be displaced.

They were forced at gun point to abandon their land, homes and property to Jewish refugees. Thousands of Palestinians became captives of subhuman refugee camps with nowhere to go and no one to turn to for help. During the past 53 years, the U.S. has supported Israel with billions of dollars in aid and in weapons which have been used to subdue the Palestinians. In 1967, Israel took even more land from the Palestinians, as well as land from neighboring Arab

states.

To maintain control and "keep the peace," Israeli forces occupied the land they had taken from the Palestinians and imposed its rule of law on them. Needless to say, the bitterness between Arabs and Jews runs so deep that no peace process has been able to find a solution.

Millions of Jews now occupy the property that once belonged to Palestinians. The Middle East is a place where racial profiling, racial discrimination, racial hatred and religious antagonism are part of the human fabric. Fifty-three years of hatred, injustice and thousands of casualties have produced a generation of young people in the Arab world who have no confidence in any peace process.

I have heard it said that hundreds of young Arabs would count it a privilege to terrorize the enemy with their own death, and maybe through terrorism they will succeed where endless talking has been able to do nothing. Many Arabs believe that martyrdom is better than churning in the hopeless and futile state in which they find themselves.

Another reason some Arabs hate the U.S. stems from the 1991 war, "Desert Storm." Although most Arabs did not approve of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, neither did they appreciate American soldiers in Saudi Arabia.

Most Arab nations do not have a sharp distinction between church and state, therefore, finding diversity of religion is very difficult in most Arab nations. Furthermore, many Arab nations are not democratic and the ruling authorities remain in power for as long as they can hold on to power.

These two features dramatically influence how the Koran is used (or abused). Militant Arabs can use the Koran to justify a "holy war," just as easily as peace loving Arabs can use the Koran to claim they are a religion of peace. This divergence on the Koran is not unique to Moslems. In the U.S., we have a similar parallel.

Some fundamentalist Christians are militant about the abortion issue and have declared a "holy war" on abortion clinics, even going so far as to bomb clinics and assassinate doctors. Other Christians, using the *same Bible*, believe a woman has the right to choose.

The salient point here is that Christians and Arabs share similar human characteristics. Although this comparison between Christians and Moslems is not perfect, it still proves the point that people can religiously justify whatever they want to believe.

If a Moslem wants to justify martyrdom and his hatred of the U.S. (the great Satan), he can find religious justification in the Koran to do so. If a Christian wants to justify his hatred for abortion and those who offer the service, he can find religious justification in the Bible to do so.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1991 on the pretext that the land originally belonged to Iraq, the U.S., along with a coalition of other nations, responded to a plea for help from bordering Saudi Arabia. The U.S.A. responded primarily because our country depends on the oil that comes

from the fields of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. It was in our "national interest" to stop the invasion of Saddam Hussein.

But the plea for help came with a series of religious concerns and concessions. Moslems and Christians do not share much in common and the Saudi's did not want their liberators desecrating their holy land. (The two shrines Moslems consider to be the most holy are located in Saudi Arabia.)

To the best of our ability, Americans respected the requests made by the Saudi's and Iraq was driven out of Kuwait in just a few days. However, to keep Saddam Hussein from causing more trouble, American forces have been stationed in Saudi Arabia for the past 10 years. The presence of foreigners in the "holy" land of Saudi Arabia continues to anger a conservative segment of the Islamic world.

They feel that U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia is an abomination to Allah and his prophet, Mohammed. Obviously, the Saudi's who govern the country feel otherwise. The problem stems from the fact that the Saudi's do not "own" the holy shrines. The shrines belong to 1.3 billion Moslems who are religiously required at some point in life, to make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

This is but a short summary of some of the reasons why some conservative Moslems have come to hate the government of the U.S. Many more reasons for this hatred exist, which provide a fertile seed bed allowing terrorism to flourish and grow.

Putting the Attack in Context

President Bush and his staff have done an excellent job of responding on numerous fronts to "the terrorist attack," however, this terrorist attack against America has posed a very interesting problem. America has no choice but to engage in a *new type* of war.

I do not mean new counter-terrorism tactics or a covert war, but a new type of war that could be a religio-political war. The U.S. is trying its best to avoid this type of war, but forces beyond our control could pull the U.S. into a religio-political war pitting Moslem versus Christian.

Unfortunately, there is an inherent antagonism between all of the religions of the world. Each religion has its own view of God and His will. Even more, each religious system has its hierarchy of leaders and scholars and one system will not give way to the other. (When was the last time you heard any religious organization admit that another religion knows more about God?)

This antagonism cannot/will not dissolve until there is a one world religion. Yes, Protestants and Catholics can live side by side if religious differences are not at issue. Yet, we only need to look to Northern Ireland to prove that two similar religions (both calling themselves Christian) can be at war. Will there be peace and safety? Not with the current situation. The road to peace with Arabs will need to address a wide variety of religious and political issues.

Islamic fundamentalists are going to be hard to please as long as, they see (a) the U.S.

supporting Israel in its oppression of the Palestinians, (b) the U.S. westernizing the world with its corrupt morals as it produces an endless stream of degenerate movies and books, and (c) the U.S. continues to desecrate the holy land of Moslems.

The Crossroads

Terrorists are considered both heros and villains. They are heros (or freedom fighters) to people who share their ideology and they are villains to those who do not. Because of population growth, ethnicity is changing the political and religious landscape.

I believe the terrorism-retaliation merry-go-round will speed up because there is no human solution to man's diversity. The most powerful military force on Earth cannot stop terrorism. When human beings become drunk from imbibing an ideology that contains a deadly mixture of politics and religion, there is no way a terrorist can be stopped from killing others in the name of God.

There are ways to limit their destructive abilities, but remember, this also means a loss of freedom for everyone. As the cry for peace and safety escalates in the days ahead, I anticipate that it will take God to step into the conflict on Earth with His own firepower that is described in Revelation 8.

The Apostle Paul wrote, **"While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief."** (1Thessalonians 5:3-4)

Paul says the world will be crying out for "peace and safety" when God sends sudden destruction. The events of September 11 put the whole world into this setting. The world stands at a very interesting crossroad. Will terrorists use some weapon of mass destruction?

Will a world war unfold as the nations of the world are forced into taking sides between those who harbor terrorists and those who are determined to destroy them? What does the future hold? The Bible does not give details about what happens before the Great Tribulation. However, the Bible is a beacon that shows us where the need for "peace and safety" is leading.

In closing, there is one more domino effect the reader should consider. At the end of the 1,000 years, all terrorists will stand before God's great white throne. At that time, everyone outside the holy city will receive his due reward.

The Bible says that all who have committed murder will be destroyed with fire. **"Outside** [the holy city] **are the dogs** [scoundrels]**, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."** (Revelation 22:14,15) Their final reward will be this: **". . . But fire came down from heaven and devoured them."** (Revelation 20:9)

At that time, the last domino (Lucifer, the father of hatred, liars and murderers) will fall.

Lift Up Your Heads

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:28) The recent destruction of the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and related events cast a shadow over the daily decisions that people make.

While the terrorist acts resulted in the deaths of just .0001 percent of the world's population, the majority of the world's citizens has been affected in some way by these evil acts. An even smaller number of people have contracted anthrax, but the results of these deaths have had a psychological effect on other people that far exceeds the direct impact of the attacks themselves. In this respect, the terrorists have already achieved their goals.

The primary goal of any terrorist act is to create uncertainty in people's hearts that outweighs the actual harm delivered. That is why they are called terrorists in the first place.

They are either unwilling or incapable of mounting a direct assault on their enemies, so they attack areas where they believe their enemy is weak or that will cause the most fear.

Their successful strategy is to create uncertainty in the four "W''s.":

Who: We do not know who they might strike next and we really do not know much about who the terrorists are.

What and Where: We do not know what or where they will strike next.

When: Vague security alerts raise awareness, but they do little to calm shattered nerves.

Why: Within a civilized society, it is nearly incomprehensible that someone could hate us so much that they would want to destroy this nation that has done more for other nations than anyone else.

Shortly after the events of September 11, friends of our family contacted us from around the world to express concern about our well-being. During the holiday season of 1999/2000, we had two Korean girls (ages 9 and 11) spend time with us. About 4:30 A.M. on the morning after the attack, we received a call from the youngest Korean girl. She was calling to make sure that we were fine. I do not think she understood that we lived more than 500 miles from New York City.

Last month's *Day Star* gave several religious and political reasons for the clash of cultures, so we do not need to review them this month. But perhaps the most often asked question we have received in the Wake Up America Seminar's office since September 11 has been, "What are the prophetic implications of the terrorist events?"

Our answer has been that we see no specific relationships between apocalyptic prophecy and

the attacks. However, the developing coalitions between nations may have future apocalyptic implications. For sure, this has been a practice run for nations around the world to practice achieving a worldwide coalition in times of stress. It is much easier for us to now imagine how a global government can develop when the seven trumpets begin.

Recently, the United States enacted legislation in an attempt to thwart future terrorist attacks. The legislation may prove to be successful as law enforcement investigates terrorists, but the additional restrictions placed on U.S. citizens cannot help but reduce civil liberties.

However, most people are willing, even anxious, to reduce their freedom if it will result in more safety. The cry of "peace and safety" (1 Thessalonians 5:3) is on many minds today.

Current events provide an excellent backdrop for prophetic study, yet we must be careful not to follow the risky approach of attempting to interpret Bible prophecy through the lens of current events.

Many times, news from the Middle East renews interest in the Bible because evangelical Christians believe that events in Israel have end-time significance. Many prophetic expositors attempt to ride this wave of prophetic interest when political events cause people to ask Bible questions.

Instead of focusing on the political events, the serious Bible student needs to go back to the Bible and study to understand what is written there.

What will be the Sign?

When the followers of Jesus began to understand that He was going to leave them in a short while, the question that burned in their minds was, "When is He coming back?" They asked Jesus the question;
" ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’ " (Mat. 24:3) Jesus responded with a key point, **"Watch out that no one deceives you."** (Mat. 24:4)

With the abundance of religious opinion and immediate access to the news media, Jesus’ warning is especially valid today. A rumor can go around the world almost instantaneously. Did the Taliban shoot down a helicopter or did it just crash in a snowstorm? Did a helicopter even go down? How many civilian casualties have there been? When in history has a conflict been so evaluated, analyzed, and televised?

Jesus referred to these issues in the following verses: **You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. - (Mat. 24:6,7) Note what Jesus says about the rumors. Do not let these wars and rumors alarm you, because the end will come later. In almost the same breath, He speaks of nations and kingdoms rising against each other. Jesus must have had a reason to refer to both**

nations and kingdoms in the same sentence. In fact, I believe he had a very specific reason. The Greek word that has been translated "nation" in almost all Bible translations is *ethnos.* The word "ethnicity" has the same Greek word as a root. It becomes clear why Jesus used this phrase, because He knew there would be ethnic wars, as well as wars between kingdoms.

While many people hope that ethnic wars will not remain a part of modern society, ethnic hatred continues to cause battles both within and between nations. In recent history, the genocide in Rwanda illustrates that this hatred can overwhelm cries for peace and safety.

While the United States government is doing its best to represent the battles in Afghanistan as not ethnically based, on the other side of the world, the Taliban is attempting to spin this war as a battle between the evil West and the Arabic culture.

These representations are a reflection of some of the stark cultural differences between Arabic and Western thought. The United States is based on a wide separation of religion and government (church and state), but for the conservative Muslim mind this is not necessary.

Instead, the government becomes very useful in enforcing religious practices. Countries like Iran and Afghanistan combine religion and government, then when a country like the U.S. attacks Afghanistan, many people within that environment perceive it as also an attack against Islam.

This difference in perception reflects a cultural divide (ethnicity) that causes two people to consider the same issue and come to entirely different conclusions.

Wars are Inevitable

The Middle East contains a cauldron of unresolved issues, any of which may cause a terrorist or government to act. Use of bombs, missiles, biological warfare, nuclear weapons, or even human bodies as weapons, could cause any present coalition to splinter. Political leaders are just as frightened as the citizens about terrorist attacks.

They know a well-planned terrorist could cause war on a global scale. However, Bible students who love God do not have to be afraid. Consider again what was written in Matthew 24:6. Conflicts will happen, but the end is still to come. Over the past twenty centuries, one item has remained constant.

Humankind will always find another war to fight. No wonder Jesus issued this caution – His comments are even more striking today. We should not base our prophetic conclusions on wars or rumors of wars. When God’s appointed time has come, we will have no doubt that He is moving.

A global earthquake followed by asteroid impacts will certainly do more to wake people up to their spiritual need than a few terrorist acts.

Satan is an extremely intelligent being. He knows if he can fill our souls with anything that opposes goodness and light, he is winning the battle. It is all too obvious that Satan is winning when we recognize a heart full of sinful characteristics, like pride, selfishness, addiction, jealousy, adultery, or deceit.

Yes, these are just a few of Satan's front line attacks. But Satan uses many more insidious ways of filling the heart to the exclusion of goodness and light. If he can get to us through busy lives, leaving no time for God, he has succeeded nearly as well. Wars and rumors of wars often cause concern, fear, or complete terror, depending on whether the individual affected is observing, participating, or receiving the impact of war.

One element that the "War Against Terrorism" and the "Great Tribulation" share in common is the ability to cause a Christian to be frightened. When Earth shattering events occur, it is perfectly reasonable for any person to be fearful. In fact, a certain amount of concern in times of stress can be productive.

However, Satan's objective is to move that stress right into our hearts, causing us to be unsettled and filled with abject terror.

Paul writes, **"The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."** (Rom 8:6) So, a mind under the control of the Spirit has peace. It seems obvious then, that if Satan wants to fill our mind, he would do it with something that is the opposite of peace.

A word with an opposite meaning of peace is war, but it is difficult for me to imagine a literal war within the mind. Instead, within the recesses of a sinner's mind fear reigns instead of peace. If the Spirit fills our minds and souls with peace, then Satan accomplishes his goals by filling the mind with fear.

Love Drives Out Fear

How can the committed Christian accomplish the dual purpose of eliminating improper fear from the heart and allowing the Holy Spirit to instill peace? The Bible gives one answer in 1 John 4:18, **"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."** On an emotional basis, a symbiotic process is necessary.

Symbiosis is a close relationship between two different elements that result in mutual benefits. The first step in the process is to develop our love for Christ. As this love begins to grow, the fear begins to ebb. As the fear begins to leave the heart, Jesus sends the peace of the Holy Spirit, which lingers and dwells in the willing heart. **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."** (John 14:27)

He fills the heart with peace and joy that comes from having the stress of a heart of fear

relieved. This can only cause our love for Christ to grow, which completes the cycle. Like the process of photosynthesis, there is not a beginning or ending point in the cycle.

However, if one of the elements of the process, such as love or peace (like carbon dioxide or light) is removed, the cycle comes to an abrupt end. Satan can then come and reclaim territory in our heart. This must be developed before times of great stress arrive.

Faith is another key element that ensures the process continues through wars or tribulation. Faith is like the rain showers that keep the plant growing. Without the showers, the plant will die and photosynthesis will stop. Faith must be developed in the spring of the year when growth takes place so the plant will survive the cold winter months.

In like manner, the peace/love/anti-fear process has to develop when the stress level is low for it to survive in the dark periods of a person's life.

Despite all of the unexpected events that could cause concern, God is still in control. Most of the global population today is not nearly as vulnerable to terrorists as the early American settlers were to either war or infectious diseases. Our sinful human tendency is to become inwardly focused when events like September 11 strike.

By consciously changing our perspective outward to think of others, we reduce the opportunity for Satan to work in a heart of fear. The holiday season is a time of joy and if we use them to share our joy with others, then our own burdens will be lifted! A new year will soon be here and let us resolve in our hearts to share Christ's love with other people.

Attacks on innocent people are never justified. Innocent victims have also felt the results of the bombings and the resulting war in Afghanistan. Remember their families in your prayers too. We should strive, even in the most negative situations to find ways to glorify God. If the terrorist attacks allow us a chance to develop a relationship with Christ that allows the Spirit to move in our hearts, we can be exceedingly thankful. God is using these events to call people to Himself.

A horrific situation often causes people to reconsider their relationship with Christ. Jesus calls all people to **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."** (Mat. 11:28)

He says, **"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."** (Rev. 3:20) He has given us the invitation. Open the door and let Him in, give Him your love, and He will give us His peace. Remember David's psalm, **"When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?"** (Psa. 56:3,4)

With Jesus filling our hearts with peace, we can sincerely sing the song "Anywhere with Jesus, I can safely go. . . ."

The Question of Loyalty

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Someone once said that loyalty is like the juice of an orange; the flavor cannot be determined until the orange is squeezed to the breaking point.

The Bible testifies to the truthfulness of this statement. Loyalty is one of the powerful forces within the human heart. Circumstances can *squeeze* us to a point that our highest loyalties are revealed. Loyalty can produce good results and it can also be used to produce evil results.

For example: Judas Iscariot was loyal to his dreams of self-importance, power and wealth, instead of humility, poverty and service. When he realized that following Jesus would not fulfill *his* dreams, he betrayed the Savior of the world for $12.60 (30 pieces of silver).

For a while King David was loyal to his passions for Bathsheba. He killed her husband, Uriah, who was one of his most loyal soldiers so he could hide his illicit affair with Bathsheba and cover her subsequent pregnancy with the cloak of marriage.

Peter swore his loyalty to Jesus was 100 percent, but when he learned that he might have to share a martyr's death with Jesus he denied three times that he even knew Jesus. The Philippian jailer was loyal to his job until an earthquake destroyed his jail, which suddenly changed his heart.

Saul was loyal to his religion faithfully persecuting apostate Jews (a.k.a. Christians) until Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus. Afterwards, Paul proved to have unwavering loyalty to Jesus. He suffered extreme persecution from Jews and Romans alike, as he preached salvation through Jesus Christ.

Eventually, Nero sentenced him to death because of his loyalty to Jesus. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego chose to be loyal to the God of Heaven rather than worship the golden image, and for their decision, Nebuchadnezzar threw them into the fiery furnace.

John the Baptist was loyal to God's standards when he plainly told King Herod that living with his brother's wife was a sin and his remarks cost him his life. Jonathan was loyal to David's Heavenly anointing, instead of his father, King Saul, who almost killed Jonathan because of it.

Jeremiah was loyal to the Word of the Lord when he told the people the truth about their apostasy, and they threw him into a cistern to die. Job's loyalty to God was tested with some of the harshest suffering ever recorded. Noah was loyal to God's command and suffered an incredible amount of ridicule, but his loyalty and faith saved his family. Ruth was loyal to Naomi and chose to suffer with her in poverty, but this action made her an ancestor of Jesus.

Rahab, the prostitute, was loyal to the spies that entered Jericho, but by doing this she saved her family. Queen Esther was loyal to her people and ultimately became instrumental in

delivering her people from destruction.

The prophet Daniel was another man of loyalty who was *squeezed* hard. He chose to defy the decree of his king by openly praying toward Jerusalem and for this small act, he was thrown into the lion's den. Webster's definition of loyalty states that loyalty means being constant and faithful, bearing true allegiance to something.

The truth is, every human being has loyalties, but the real question is, "To what or whom are we loyal?" *Our highest loyalties are revealed when we are squeezed into a decision that favors one loyalty and harms another.* Thoughtfully review the first paragraph and notice how certain people had to make some very difficult choices. Inevitably, we all face situations where circumstances leave no option, but to favor a higher loyalty and harm a lesser one!

For this reason, it is hard to say where our highest loyalties really lie until we are "squeezed" by difficult choices. (The process of "squeezing" explains why there will be a Great Tribulation. God is going to "squeeze" the loyalty out of every human being to see who loves Him above everything else. See Revelation 3:10.)

Since this month's study concerns loyalty, I thought a Bible study on Daniel and his lion's den experience might prove helpful. Most Christians have rejoiced in the story of Daniel's escape from the lions, but few people know the bigger picture. Daniel's loyalty had a profound impact on two significant nations!

To make this story as compelling as possible, I have added background information to help the reader "stand in Daniel's sandals."

A Prisoner Of War

Daniel was taken to Babylon as a prisoner of war as a result of Nebuchadnezzar's first siege on Jerusalem in 605 B.C. It is believed that Daniel was about 17 or 18 years of age. It was King Nebuchadnezzar's policy to take the best captives and enroll them in an academy to prepare them for government service.

The king had wisely established a school to train captives from various tribal nations, so the captives could eventually return to their homeland and serve the empire of Babylon as rulers who were loyal to the king of Babylon. It was for this purpose that Daniel and some of his friends were inducted into the king's academy. The book of Daniel begins with Daniel and his closest friends asking the king's steward if they could be excused from eating at the king's table.

They wanted to maintain a more simple, vegetarian diet, but the steward refused this first request. He was sure that Daniel and his friends would become sick and feeble if they ate nothing but vegetables and water. If they became sick because of his negligence, he could lose his job or possibly, his head! However, Daniel persisted and eventually, the steward gave in. When it came time for the king to test the trainees, Daniel and his friends were found to be at the top of their class.

In fact, the Bible conservatively estimates their knowledge was ten times better than their fellow students. (Daniel 1) Do you think the success of Daniel and his friends had anything to do with their loyalty to God? I do.

A short time later, Daniel gained world-wide recognition when God used him to interpret a dream that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar. As a result of that incident, Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel to a very high government position and all the *wise* men of Babylon reported to him. (Daniel 2) Do you think the Daniel's success had anything to do with his loyalty to God? I do.

Why Was Daniel Sent To Babylon?

Historians tell us that Nebuchadnezzar set siege to Jerusalem three times. He finally destroyed the city in 586 B.C. because Israel's kings refused to submit to Nebuchadnezzar's "higher" authority. In actuality, God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed and its citizens put in captivity for 70 years because Israel refused to submit to God's "higher" authority. The Bible carefully justifies God's anger with Israel. To understand God's wrath against Israel in 605 B.C., we have to start with Moses. Carefully read these texts:

1. Sabbath Rest Required For The Land - Leviticus 25

A few weeks after the Exodus, **"The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest."** (Leviticus 25:1-5) This text is self explanatory. God required the land to rest every seventh year. Why would any nation refuse a year's vacation every seventh year? The Lord continues, **"You may ask, 'What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?' I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in."** (Leviticus 25:20-22) There is a profound point in these verses: God promised to send a bumper crop every sixth year so there would be enough food to observe a year of rest! Contrary to what many Bible students say, the Sabbath rest for the land was not for agricultural purposes. In fact, God made the land produce its greatest harvest during the sixth year – when the land was in its most exhausted condition! The lesson to be learned from the Sabbath year is simple. God established the Sabbath year rest *to test* His people. There is no other reason. Would they be loyal or rebellious? (See Exodus 16 for a parallel concerning the seventh day.)

2. "If You Don't Keep My Sabbath Years" - Leviticus 26

God also warned Israel: **"If in spite of this** [lesser punishments] **you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I**

myself will punish you for your sins seven times over. . . . I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings. I will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled. I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it." (Leviticus 26:27,28,31-35, insertion mine) It does not take a rocket scientist to understand these words. God said the land was going to rest, with or without Israel. God wanted his people to understand a profound truth: **". . .** [The Lord said] **the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants."** (Leviticus 25:23, insertion mine) God wanted Israel to know that their occupation of His land was conditional on their steadfast loyalty to Him.(Leviticus 18; Deuteronomy 28)

3. Because You Have Rebelled - Jeremiah 25

The Old Testament indicates over and over again that Israel did not remain loyal to God. Their cup of disobedience overflowed and around 615 B.C. God gave a prophecy to Jeremiah: He said, **"I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,' declares the Lord, 'and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,' declares the Lord, 'and will make it desolate forever.' "** (Jeremiah 25:9-12) Notice three things: First, God calls King Nebuchadnezzar "my servant." This is an important concept. God chose a pagan king to be an agent of His wrath against Jerusalem. (Parallel: The Antichrist will be an agent of God's wrath druing the Great Tribulation.) Second, God said that Jerusalem would be destroyed and that Israel would be prisoners of war in Babylon for 70 years. Third, Babylon – for the same sins as Jerusalem – would eventually be destroyed.

4. 430 Years Of Rebellion

During the 70 years of captivity in Babylon, God anointed two prophets. Ezekiel was a prisoner of war like Daniel, but Ezekiel lived among the captives, while Daniel lived in the halls of power. Ezekiel was timid and afraid of public speaking, so the Lord prompted him to "act out" various signs for Israel to watch. Notice this sign: **". . . This will be a sign to the house of Israel. . .** [Ezekiel] **lie on your left side and put the sin of the house of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side. I have assigned you the same number of days as the years of their sin. So for 390 days you will bear the sin of the house of Israel. 'After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year.' "** (Ezekiel 4:3,6, insertion mine) This text is important because God indicates the length of rebellion of the twelve tribes as 430 years. (390 + 40 = 430) This number should catch your

attention because it is the same number of years that Israel spent in Egypt. (Exodus 12:41) These two separate and distinct instances of 430 years have three things in common: apostasy, timing and vigil. First, the apostasy of the Israelites in Egypt is no different than the apostasy of the Israelites in the promised land of Canaan! Apostasy is always the course of fallen man. Second, God's timing is perfect in both instances. The Bible says that God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery according to His promise to Abraham, exactly 430 years *to the very day*. (Exodus 12:41) If God delivered Israel from Egypt on time, then it should be no surprise that He sent them into captivity on time as well. It should be noted that when Israel violated 70 Sabbath years, God sent them into captivity! How do we know this? Ezekiel performed the "430 day" sign for all of Israel to see. There are exactly 70 Sabbatical years in 430 years. In other words, the Babylonian captivity was 70 years in length because that is the exact number of Sabbath years Israel violated. Remember God's threat in Leviticus 26:34,35? **"Then the land will enjoy its Sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the Sabbaths you lived in it."** This text demonstrates the last significant point in common between these separate 430 year periods. God keeps vigil. He does not sleep. He is very much aware of everything that takes place on Earth and He will step into the affairs of men when the timing is just right. He delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt during the right year, and He sent Israel into Babylon in captivity on time during the right year! Even more, the next text demonstrates that God also delivered Israel out of their Babylonian captivity during the right year just on time.

5. Prophecy Fulfilled

The Bible says, **"God handed all of them** [the Jews] **over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah."** (2 Chronicles 36:17-21, insertion mine) Again, the reason for the Babylonian captivity is simple and obvious. God handed Israel over to Nebuchadnezzar because of their disloyalty. They refused to keep His Sabbaths, so He evicted them and the land rested for 70 years.

Zooming Forward

Now that we understand *why* Israel went into Babylonian captivity, we need to zoom forward in time to the fall of Babylon, when Nebuchadnezzar's reign ended. Historians say Babylon fell on Tishri 16 (around October 13), 539 B.C.

Darius came to the throne during that year (his ascension year), so his first calendar year (according to the religious calendar of the Jews) was 538/7 B.C. The first year of Darius' reign is

Daniel's 68th year in captivity.

Daniel was taken captive during 605 B.C., a "Sabbath year," and he calculated that the seventy years of desolation decreed upon Jerusalem would end on the "Friday year," 536 B.C. (Counting inclusively, 605 B.C. minus 536 B.C. equals 70 years.)

Note: When God established the week of years at the time of the Exodus, God required Israel to set their slaves free every sixth or "Friday year." The seventh or "Sabbath year" was to be celebrated as a year of freedom from the bondage of slavery. (See Exodus 21:2 and Jeremiah 34:14-16.)

Daniel was aware of the Jubilee calendar. He also understood how the "week of years" synchronized and knew that 536/5 B.C. was a "Friday year," as well as the 70th or final year of captivity.

The Political Situation in Daniel's 68th Year

It was extremely unusual in ancient times for a conquering king to give a prisoner of war a position of authority in his government. The possibility of rebellion was just too great. Incredible as it seems, this happened to Daniel three times that we know of. Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel to one of his highest governing positions after Daniel interpreted his dream. Belteshazzar promoted Daniel to one of his highest governing positions after Daniel read the handwriting on the wall.

Daniel was also promoted to one of the highest positions in the kingdom when Darius became king. Do you think Daniel's promotions had anything to do with his loyalty to God? I do.

It is my understanding that Daniel believed God had placed him in a very powerful political position within the government of Darius so that *he, Daniel,* might facilitate Israel's release from captivity. However, Daniel was nearing 90 years of age and knew that if he acted on his own wisdom, he could interfere with God's plans, just as Moses did when he wrongfully killed the Egyptian. (Exodus 2:11-14)

Daniel also knew that if his actions backfired, it could result in a lot of suffering for his people, just as it did when Moses and Aaron ordered the Hebrew slaves to rest from their labors. (Exodus 5:5) Daniel was acutely aware that he could dishonor God if his actions to free his people aroused suspicion, jealousy or any hint of rebellion against the Medes and Persians.

Many of the Chaldeans intensely hated the Jews, and any move on Daniel's part to free his people would probably be construed as treason. If this occurred and he was convicted in a court of public opinion, the punishment was sudden death.

Note: Hatred for the Jews erupted on a national scale about 70 years after Daniel died. The noble, Haman, obtained a universal death decree from King Artaxerxes for all Jews in the Persian kingdom, but God used Queen Esther to save her people.

Daniel's dilemma had other ramifications. During the 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the Jews multiplied and integrated into the fabric of the province of Babylon. Some Jews prospered and others remained servants or slaves of the Chaldeans.

When Darius began his reign over Babylon, most of the original captives from Jerusalem had died. Therefore, their offspring who lived in Babylon had little attachment to a place where they had never lived or even seen. In fact, when Cyrus set the Jews free in 536 B.C., Ezra 2 indicates that only a minority of captives, 29,818 Jewish males, returned to Jerusalem.

The Greatest Problems

Politically, Daniel knew that the emancipation of his people after 70 years in Babylon could cause a number of problems for King Darius. If large numbers of Chaldeans lost their servants resulting in financial losses, this could produce terrible social unrest. Daniel was also aware that during the 70 years of desolation, tribal nations had moved into the territory abandoned by Israel and a *returning* Israel could be embroiled in wars and land disputes.

Even more, the greatest cause of concern for Daniel was that Darius did not rule over the land of Canaan where Jerusalem was located. Any decree that freed the Jews from the province of Babylon would also require a decree by King Cyrus who ruled over Canaan.

The ultimate goal, of course, was that the Jews recover the land they had lost and all the circumstances surrounding this situation greatly perplexed Daniel. What could *he* do to facilitate the freedom of his people? Even if they were set free, how could Daniel motivate a majority of the Jews to return to Jerusalem?

Daniel's mind churned over these issues for months because he could see how a significant exodus from Babylon could be a political nightmare for King Darius as well as King Cyrus.

Jealousy Knows No Bounds

From Daniel's point of view, the upcoming 70th year, 536/5 B.C., would not be a very good year to attempt the release of the Jews. Even though Daniel held one of the highest positions in the empire, a new king was on the throne. This meant a new administration was in place adhering to a new set of laws and corporate culture, which included a large group of powerful nobles who hated the Jews.

As Daniel pondered his helpless position, it became apparent to him that Israel's deliverance from slavery would have to be an "Act of God," a miracle as great as the exodus from Egypt. To his credit, Daniel faithfully carried out his responsibilities within Darius' administration.

The Bible says of this time-period, **"Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom."** (Daniel 6:3)

Sometime during Darius' first calendar year (538/7 B.C.) Daniel decided the best thing he could do was seek God through fasting, praying and wearing sackcloth and ashes. Time was running out! The 70th year was approaching fast. So, Daniel sought the Lord in utter humility to see what God wanted of him.

To be seen in sackcloth and ashes was a sign of mourning or extreme humiliation. To the Medes and Persians, Daniel's appearance must have been very odd since Daniel usually wore clothing appropriate for his exalted office. Regardless, Daniel embarrassed (humbled) himself before God as a man in sackcloth and ashes demonstrating that God could use him in whatever meaningful or menial way God desired.

Unknown to Daniel, King Darius had planned to promote Daniel above the other two governors of his empire. Darius decided to do this because He had contracted a degenerating health problem. Darius favored Daniel because Daniel was "pure in heart," a very unusual quality among people in politics, then and now.

Darius also wanted to make Daniel, "the Jew," his number two man in the kingdom because this would strategically protect his throne when he became too weak to meet the day to day needs of his office. Unlike the other two administrators, Darius knew Daniel would be loyal to him instead of an inner ambition to acquire the throne.

Besides, Darius knew that a Jew would not aspire to be king over an empire of Medes and Persians. By putting Daniel in the number two seat, his throne would be safer from the schemes of ambitious politicians and administrators.

Somehow, this information about Darius' plans was leaked to the administrators and they were filled with jealousy and rage. No self respecting Mede or Persian would be subject to a Jew! Jealousy and hatred for Daniel, "the Jew," led them to search for anything they could use to marr Daniel's reputation and disqualify him from such a position of honor.

They studied Daniel's personal history and tried to find a flaw in his character, but were unable to find anything they could use. The Bible says, **"At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, 'We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.' "** (Daniel 6:4,5)

Given the hatred and determination of his enemies and the notorious behavior of politicians down through the ages, these are amazing words!

Putting The Squeeze On Daniel

Finally, the administrators and satraps concluded that the only way to stop Darius from promoting Daniel was to *prove* to Darius that Daniel's loyalty to his "Jewish" God was higher

than Daniel's loyalty to the king. They figured the question of loyalty would prove their point to Darius. When it comes to politics, kings have to be gods. Their ego and government rests upon nothing less than total submission and devotion to their will. If no one wants to obey the king, how can he be king?

Therefore, "loyalty tests" were used by ancient kings to ferret out people with bad attitudes toward the authority of the king. This may explain why Darius did not quibble or hesitate to issue a loyalty decree. Loyalty tests were simple: During the specified month, suspects were arraigned and questioned before a court of political leaders. If the suspect freely confessed allegiance to the king as the highest authority on Earth, the suspect would then affirm his loyalty to the king with an oath.

However, if the suspect was hostile toward the king or plotting rebellion, a "loyalty test" became a life and death issue, even though the suspect may not have been caught doing anything wrong. This is why loyalty tests were so effective.

If the suspect refused to take an oath affirming his allegiance and submission to the king, he was declared a rebel and killed immediately. On the other hand, if he lied about his allegiance to the king and gave an oath of loyalty, his sympathizers would see that he was a common coward and a liar.

Who could respect such a disgusting person? This technique for testing loyalty was simple and effective. Incidentally, the Caesars also used loyalty tests. Thousands of Christians perished because they would not bow down before the "man-god," Caesar. (John 19:15; Romans 10:9) During the Great Tribulation, God will also use a simple loyalty test. A test of worship will put the "squeeze" on every person and our deepest loyalties will be "squeezed out" for everyone to see. (See Revelation 13:8-18.)

The Perfect Plot

The crafty administrators asked Darius for permission to conduct a "loyalty check" for three reasons: First, a loyalty test was a well-known tactic. Since the province of Babylon was a new territory for Darius, a loyalty test appeared to be a "good idea" to help secure his throne. Second, if Daniel should slip through the 30 day decree trap, Darius would never know the real motives behind the administrators request for the loyalty test.

Third, if Daniel was caught in their trap, he would be "legally" killed because the law demanded the sudden death of anyone caught in rebellion against the king. If Daniel was destroyed, the administrators would not be implicated in Daniel's death. The "loyalty test" seemed like the perfect way to eliminate Daniel, or so they thought.

When the administrators asked the king for a loyalty decree, they must have known that Darius did not know about Daniel's current state of humiliation.

If Darius had been aware of Daniel's behavior, praying to his God three times a day in sackcloth

and ashes, this knowledge would have foiled their plot. **"So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: 'O King Darius, live forever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered–in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.' So King Darius put the decree in writing."** (Daniel 9:6-9)

Daniel Springs The Trap

"Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: 'Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?'

The king answered, 'The decree stands–in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.' Then they said to the king, 'Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.' When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him." (Daniel 6:10-14)

Did you notice how fast Daniel *willfully* disobeyed the king's decree? Why did one of the kingdom's highest officials publicly defy the law of the king? The answer lies in the fact that Daniel understood the reasons behind the *loyalty test.*

Daniel remembered his three friends and their fiery furnace test and knew he was being tested just like his three friends. Evidently, notification of the decree came suddenly and without warning to Daniel. I find it interesting that Daniel did not go to his immediate superior, King Darius and plead his case! When Daniel learned of the loyalty test he ran to (not from) his prayer room. This action says volumes about Daniel's loyalty to the God of Heaven!

When Daniel humbled himself before God and man by wearing sackcloth and ashes, Daniel's heart was ready and willing to submit, even to death, if that was God's will. Daniel was willing to do *anything* God required of him to facilitate the release of his people.

Daniel's loyalty to God is extraordinary and God's approval of Daniel is amazing. In fact, Daniel's loyalty became the very tool that God used to glorify His name before the Medes and Persians so that He could deliver the Jews from captivity! If the plot to kill Daniel was clever, God's use of the situation was even more so. God used the administrator's hatred of Daniel, Darius' affection for Daniel, and Daniel's loyalty (and ultimately the lion's den) to set Israel free

from slavery. Watch how these elements combined to accomplish God's plan.

King Darius Humiliated

The next morning, **". . . the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, 'May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!' A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep."** (Daniel 6:16-18)

Daniel was arraigned before King Darius. When the king saw the old prophet in sackcloth and ashes, he became furious with his administrators. He saw through their plot. Daniel, "the Jew," was no rebel and Darius knew that. In fact, Daniel was the only administrator the king could trust! According to law, however, Daniel was subjected to the usual "loyalty" interrogation and without hesitation, confessed to praying to His God three times a day.

Daniel did not offer excuses, plead his case or beg for his life. Even more importantly, he did not swear an oath of loyalty to King Darius as his highest authority. King Darius churned with grief. He condemned himself all night for failing to consider the intense hatred of his administrators for Daniel, "the Jew." How ironic the twist of events.

Darius was planning to promote Daniel, but now he would have to kill him instead. Darius knew Daniel was unjustly condemned, but not even the king himself could change the law of the Medes and Persians. With these words, "**May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!**" Darius bids farewell to Daniel. The king gives the order and with his own ring and the rings of those who hated the old Jew, seals Daniel's fate to be thrown into the lion's den. Daniel was at peace, Darius was in torment, and the administrators were on their way to a secret celebration party.

King Darius Exhilarated

"At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?'

Daniel answered, 'O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king.' The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the

den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land: ‘May you prosper greatly! ‘I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. ‘

For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the Earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.’ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius [the Mede] **and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."** (Daniel 6:19-28, insertion mine) Thoughtfully consider the profound experience of Darius that morning.

Upon hearing Daniel’s voice, a pagan king was given every reason that morning to put his faith in the God of Daniel. The tomb was opened and "a dead man" was received by the living! The king immediately published another decree requiring every person in his kingdom to fear and reverence the God of Daniel, "the Jew." The news about Daniel’s miraculous deliverance was told everywhere!

Only when you consider the Chaldeans intense hatred for the Jews does the significance of Darius’ actions stand out. Because of Daniel’s loyalty, the God of Heaven was exalted to the highest position through the eyes and lips of a heathen king. This demonstrates an interesting point that all religious people would do well to remember. The objective of serving the God of Heaven is to bring honor and glory to God, not to self.

Israel Set Free

The story of Daniel’s miraculous deliverance and the immediate destruction of his enemies by the *same* lions that refused to eat him has been closely examined for some important reasons. First, remember that God’s timing is *always* perfect!

Evidently, the lion’s den episode happened during Darius’ first calendar year, 538/7 B.C. This allowed time for Darius to become acquainted with Daniel and to develop such confidence in him that he wanted to make him the number two man in his kingdom. As we are about to see, the timing of the lion’s den event is also perfect!

God used the hatred of the administrators and the loyalty of Daniel in a way that no one could have anticipated. I believe the events unfolded as follows: When Daniel sought the Lord in sackcloth and ashes for instructions on what he should do to facilitate the deliverance of Israel, God heard Daniel’s prayer and gave Daniel something that Daniel did not know he was about to need.

God gave Daniel *peace* in the face of death. This peace is reflected in Daniel’s courageous action after he learned about the law. God did not give Daniel wisdom to outfox the evil administrators, nor did God rain down plagues on Babylon like He did in Egypt. God had a better plan in mind.

After Daniel violated man's law, God honored Daniel's loyalty to His law with protection and enormous notoriety. (No one had ever spent a night in a den of wild and ravenous lions and lived to tell about it.) Simultaneously, God eliminated a big obstacle that stood in the way of delivering His people.

God granted Darius a *legal* opportunity to purge his government of men who had proven their disloyalty to the interests of the king. Politically speaking, the death of these administrators would make the release of the Jews a manageable problem for the king, even though Darius did not know the Jews were about to be set free. After Darius destroyed the administrators that hated Daniel, the king promoted Daniel to the number two position in his kingdom and no one else complained!

Evidently, King Darius died the following year after the lion's den event and King Cyrus absorbed the territory of Darius into his expanding kingdom. Therefore, the ascension year of Cyrus over the province of Babylon was 537/6 B.C. and his first calendar year was 536/5 B.C.

Because of Daniel's notoriety from the lion's den event and because he was the highest official in Darius' kingdom, Daniel became well acquainted with King Cyrus during his ascension year. During the Spring of 536/5 B.C., which was the 70th year of captivity, King Cyrus met with Daniel. Daniel informed the Persian king that the God of Heaven had chosen him to be a great king before he was even born.

Daniel showed King Cyrus the writings of the prophet Isaiah where Cyrus is called *by name* in Scripture years before Cyrus was born. (Isaiah 45:1-4) When Daniel explained to King Cyrus why he was fasting and praying – the behavior that ultimately sent him to the lion's den – the king's heart was moved at the loyalty and devotion of this elderly man to the Supreme God over Heaven and Earth.

Daniel informed Cyrus that the God of Heaven had appointed the Persian king to set the Jews free, "without price or reward," (Isaiah 45:13) for the purpose of rebuilding His temple. This same God of Heaven had delivered Daniel from the lion's den and the rest of the story is history.

Cyrus issued the decree in Daniel's presence in the 70th year, a Friday year, in the Spring of 536 B.C. The Bible says, **"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: 'This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you–may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.' "** (Ezra 1:1-3)

The timing could not have been more perfect. The decree of Cyrus ended 70 years of captivity (counting inclusively). It is amazing how God took one loyal man through the lion's den so that Daniel could present the will of God to a king who now controlled the province of Babylon, as

well as the territory of Judea!

This decree was possible because Cyrus ruled over the province of Babylon where the Jews were captives, as well as the territory of Judea where Jerusalem is located. The greatest problem was solved. God's timing is so perfect. His ways are so magnificent! Remember, God required the release of slaves during the Friday year (the sixth year) and this is exactly what He did for the nation of Israel. The decree of Cyrus occurred in 536 B.C., a Friday year.

Note: The Bible does not indicate that Darius died in 537/6 B.C. For two reasons, this point is deduced from the course of events recorded in Daniel 6 and Daniel 9. First, even though they are contemporary kings, Darius and Cyrus did not rule over Daniel or the province of Babylon at the same time.

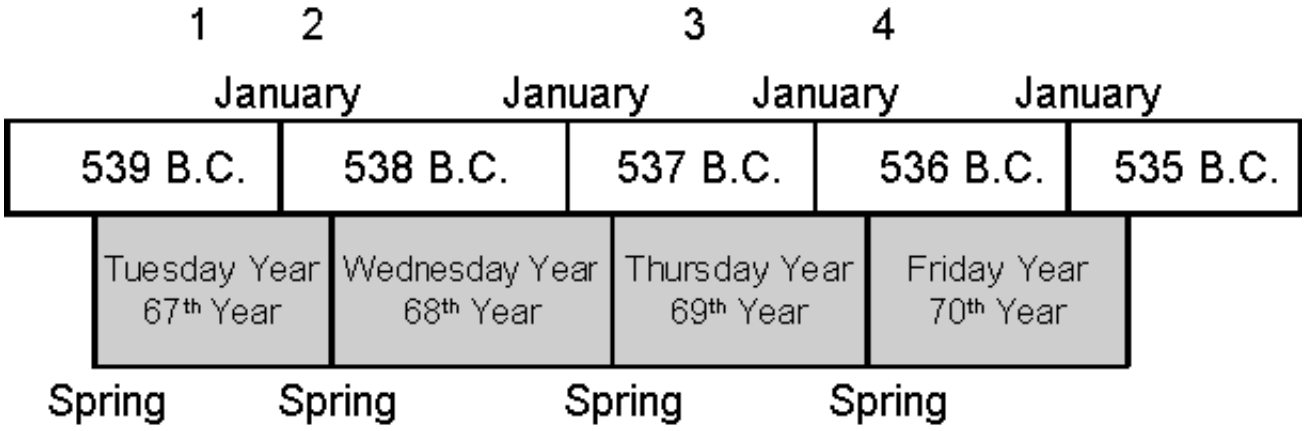
Second, history says that Cyrus had been a Persian king for more than twenty years before his *first* year over the province of Babylon came about. In order for Cyrus to become king over the province of Babylon, death had to eliminate Darius from the throne in 537 B.C. If this is a correct assumption, Cyrus' ascension year over Babylon is 537/6 B.C. and Cyrus' first calendar year is 536/5 B.C.

The Bible confirms this scenario by saying, **"So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."** (Daniel 6:28) This text can be understood from the perspective that Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius which was followed by the reign of Cyrus. Of course, this text can also be interpreted to mean that Daniel prospered during the co-regent reign of both kings, but it seems evident that both kings did not rule over Daniel or the province of Babylon at the same time.

Other facts may come to light in the future that offers a better answer. Ancient history aside, the good news is that we know the 70 years were fulfilled in a timely way. The Bible says, **"The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah."** (2 Chronicles 36:21)

Calendar of Events

Julian Years Chart:



Jewish Years

1. Babylon falls, ascension year for Darius
2. First year for Darius, lion's den
3. Darius dies, ascension year for Cyrus
4. First year for Cyrus, frees the Jews

End Time Parallels

As we see how God used the loyalty test to set his people free, it is easy to compare the parallels of the Great Tribulation. Here are some parallels for you to consider: Revelation 13:8 says, **"All inhabitants of the Earth will worship the beast, all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."**

This text implies that false worship will become a matter of law during the Great Tribulation because all of the world will not voluntarily worship the beast. In other words, when the world is *squeezed* by threats of severe punishment, "all inhabitants of the Earth" will worship the beast, except those who have a higher loyalty to the worship of God.

The human race is about to be squeezed very hard. That ancient serpent the devil, the roaring lion from the lion's den, is about to make war upon the saints. (Revelation 12:17) Revelation 13 predicts the devil will wage war upon the saints for 42 months using the force and penalty of laws. (Revelation 13:5)

The end result is that the saints will be *legally* persecuted! **"He** [the Antichrist] **was given power** [from God] **to give breath** [life] **to the image of the first beast** [the one-world-church-state which the devil will set up]**, so that it could speak** [decree laws] **and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a** [visible] **mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name."** (Revelation 13:15-17, insertions mine) There it is!

The coming loyalty test will boil down to survival. Those people who are loyal and worship God will be hunted down as criminals and shut off from the necessities of life. The saints will be forced to live by faith in God because they will not be able to obtain the necessities of life.

However, those people who have the highest loyalty for personal survival will submit to the mark of the beast, a tattoo that will be placed on the forehead or the right hand. Officials in the devil's government will wear the devil's name tattooed on the foreheads. (This is a counterfeit of what God intends to do to the 144,000.

They will wear the name of Jesus and the Father on their foreheads throughout eternity. See Revelation 14:1.) Ordinary citizens will wear the literal number, 666, tattooed on their right hand. Billions of people will submit to wearing a tattoo that they know is evil in order to survive. This test will prove where our highest loyalties are!

Another parallel between Daniel's experience and the Great Tribulation is timing. Just as God set His people free right on time, God will set the saints free from the curse of sin – right on time. Several prophecies of Daniel and Revelation tell us there are important time-periods during the Great Tribulation. God has predetermined the number of days and we know His timing is perfect!

There are many more end-time parallels between Daniel and his lion's den experience and the Great Tribulation. I have mentioned a few to encourage you to practice putting the Lord first in your life. I encourage you to seek the Lord through prayer and fasting.

For the past two years WUAS supporters have been fasting and praying on the seventh day of each month. Why don't you join us? We want God to use us in whatever way possible to share the good news of the coming King of kings. We pray for the outpouring of Holy Spirit power. We want to be sure that we are willing to do anything that God asks of us. If Daniel had been lax about his loyalty to God, when the test came he would have fumbled, faltered and failed.

Loyalty to God doesn't suddenly spring up when consequences for disobedience against the law of the land is death. Loyalty to God is a way of life that requires practice and determination. Webster describes loyalty as being constant and faithful, bearing true allegiance.

What Webster did not know is that the highest loyalty of every human being is about to be revealed!

A Faith More Precious Than Gold

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Last month, we studied the experience of Daniel in the lion's den and how God used Daniel's faith to set His people free from their Babylonian captivity. This month, I would like to share a story that explains why God put Daniel's three friends in a fiery furnace.

I want to share these stories of faith because they have so much to say about the coming drama predicted in Revelation. As you proceed through this story, see if you can detect any end-time parallels.

God's Agent of Wrath

King Nebuchadnezzar set siege to Jerusalem three times. He finally destroyed the city in 586 B.C. because Israel refused to submit to his "higher" authority. Even though the secular mind might say that Jerusalem was destroyed because of rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, the Bible indicates that Jerusalem was destroyed because Israel refused to submit to God's authority. (See Jeremiah 25 and Ezekiel 14.)

The destruction of Israel by Nebuchadnezzar teaches a profound truth: God's long-suffering and wrath against Israel are but a mirror reflecting how God deals with all nations. (Leviticus 18:28; Jeremiah 25:12; Acts 10:34) God preserved a Biblical record of His actions so future generations could understand why *"He* sets up governments and takes them down."

In this particular story, understand that God selected Nebuchadnezzar to be His servant; His agent of wrath against Israel. (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6; 43:10) In other words, God empowered and enabled the king of the North, Nebuchadnezzar, to destroy His city and His people because of their decadence. (Daniel 9)

The role of Nebuchadnezzar as the king from the North and as the king of Babylon parallels the coming of the Antichrist. During the Tribulation, Lucifer will be the "stern-faced king" from the north (Daniel 8:23; 11:36) and also the king of modern Babylon! (Revelation 17:11) This is just the beginning of end-time parallels.

Three Sins

God's patience with Israel ended because of three persistent sins: Israel violated His Sabbaths, engaged in sexual immorality and preferred to worship idols instead of Almighty God. (Do you see an end-time parallel in this?) Thoughtfully consider the words of God as He laments the apostasy of Israel: **"Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them."** (Ezekiel 22:26, insertion mine)

Also consider God's comments about the clergy of Israel: **" 'And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah . . . For they have done outrageous things in Israel; they have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and in my name have spoken lies, which I did not tell them to do. I know it and am a witness to it,' declares the Lord."** (Jeremiah 23:14; 29:23) **"Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations. Because of all your detestable idols, I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again. Therefore in your midst fathers will eat their children, and children will eat their fathers. I will inflict punishment on you and will scatter all your survivors to the winds.' "** (Ezekiel 5:8-10)

We learn from Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel why God's anger with Israel reached a boiling point. His holy name had been profaned among the nations of Earth by Israel's decadence. As representatives of the Most High God and trustees of the everlasting gospel, Israel's rebellion had degenerated them to such a decadent condition that God could no longer use Israel for the benefit of the world. Destruction was the only solution. Therefore, God Himself chose a "servant-destroyer," the king of Babylon, to destroy His plans, His city and His people.

The Vanished Vision

Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were taken to Babylon as prisoners of war during the first siege of Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. Shortly after they arrived, God exalted Daniel and his friends before King Nebuchadnezzar through a curious turn of events.

One night God gave Nebuchadnezzar a vision that outlined the remaining course of human history. (Daniel 2) Essentially, the vision consisted of a great statue of a man that was made out of various materials.

At the end of the vision, the statue was smashed to pieces by a great rock that came out of the sky. When the king awoke, he became agitated for two reasons. First, Nebuchadnezzar knew that he had received an important vision but he could not remember what it was.

He thought it was from Marduk, the god of the Babylonians. Second, as the king fretted over his loss of memory, he realized that he had no other option but to ask the clergy of Babylon for help. The king did not have total confidence in the "wise men" of Babylon and he anticipated a skirmish with them. To stop this before it started, Nebuchadnezzar made it clear that he would not tolerate any delay or double talk on their part.

Behind the scenes, the God of Heaven was unfolding a plan to exalt His holy name throughout the world. Nebuchadnezzar's vision was from the God of Heaven, not Marduk, and it was the God of Heaven who gave the king amnesia. By doing this, God made fools of Babylon's clergy and at the same time revealed the impotence of Marduk.

Even though the vanished vision agitated the king, the agitation caused by that vanished vision became the very means through which young Daniel became exalted to a position close to the king.

God Is So Clever

After rising from bed and I am sure, pacing the floor, Nebuchadnezzar called an emergency meeting for all the wise men of the palace.

Suspecting lame excuses and weasel words, Nebuchadnezzar confronted his wise men with these words: **"So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, 'I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.' Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, 'O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it.' The king replied to the astrologers, 'This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.' Once more they replied, 'Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.' Then the king answered, 'I am certain that you are trying to gain time** [so that you can create another one of your incoherent riddles]**, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: If you do not** [immediately] **tell me the dream, there is just one penalty for you.** [If you do not tell me the dream, I will know that] **You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things** [during times past]**, hoping the situation will** [favorably] **change** [in each instance to fit your predictions]**. So then** [since you claim to have contact with the god of Babylon]**, tell me the dream, and I will know** [beyond doubt] **that you can interpret it for me.' "** (Daniel 2:2-9, insertions mine)

Nebuchadnezzar was no dummy. Consider his speech to the wise men. If the wise men proved to be a bunch of clever liars, he would destroy them. If they really did have a supernatural connection with Marduk, *as they had claimed*, they would be rewarded.

The astrologers, magicians, sorcerers and enchanters represented Babylon's diverse religion and they claimed, from time to time, to have received visions from Marduk on behalf of the king. *Their claims of contact with Marduk almost led to their demise.*

False Prophets

In ancient times kings often sought the services of clergymen as counselors and advisers. For example, Jezebel employed 450 prophets of Baal. (1 Kings 18:19) Even as late as the fourth century A.D., Constantine depended heavily upon the advice and flattery of the theologian, Eusebius. Clergymen were sometimes deemed important because rulers believed that their prosperity depended on staying within the favor of "the gods." To earn their "salt," clergymen had to walk a fine line.

They had to be very careful with their words. They not only had to say things that bolstered the ego of their employer, they had to say things in a way that could not be proven false. For this reason, "wise men" were notoriously hard to "pin down." They always had an "out" hidden somewhere in their riddles and prophecies.

In ancient times, the highest rank among the clergymen was that of a prophet. (Remember Balaam? See Numbers 22.) Any person who had direct connection with "the gods" was highly honored, respected and paid well. It is ironic that God's prophets in Israel had just the opposite fate.They were often stoned or executed because Israel's kings did not want to hear the truth! (Matthew 23:37)

In most cases, to become "a prophet," all a person had to do was claim that he or she had received a message from one of "the gods." Of course, a prophet was validated when his prophecy came to pass, but this was the point that bothered Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon's prophets presented their messages with such slippery words that they always seemed to come true no matter how the situation unfolded. However, when Daniel stood before the king and repeated the vision and declared its interpretation, the king immediately recognized the veracity of Daniel's words.

Daniel was a "true" prophet speaking clearly and decisively. He did not use weasel words! Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar promptly promoted Daniel above all the prophets in Babylon.

Let me explain one thing. A false prophet is a person who claims to speak for God when God has not spoken to that person. As Israel degenerated, she became full of false prophets and this made God very angry. Prophets were saying "God showed this to me," or "God said this to me," when in fact God had said nothing or shown nothing.

The reason this makes God so angry is because it is only a matter of time until His Word is defamed and considered worthless because of prophetic falsehoods. God feels so strongly about this that He promises to destroy anyone who uses His name for the sake of credibility, when in reality the false prophet is speaking out of his own imagination. (See Ezekiel 13.) Lucifer is called "the false prophet" in Revelation 19:20 for this very reason. He will speak out of his own evil imagination, claiming to be God!

So, in an effort to stay within the king's favor (and earn their keep), Babylon's prophets made up fables and riddles to please and flatter the king. But Nebuchadnezzar was smart enough to know that (a) a dream cannot be validated or studied by other people, and (b) although a false prophet can say that he or she has received a vision, no one can prove otherwise if the message cannot be clearly nailed down? (See also 1 Kings 18:22 and 2 Kings 3.)

So, when Nebuchadnezzar demanded the wise men to reveal the vanished vision, he turned the tables on them. There was no room to deceive. The king reasoned that if his wise men really had contact with Marduk, if they received visions as he had, and if they had the ability to interpret visions from Marduk, then they *should be* able to determine, describe, and interpret the vision which Marduk gave the king.

So, the king was ready to confront his "wise men" and framed his request in a way that left no wiggle room. When the wise men considered the demand of the king, they knew they were in big trouble.

They would not be able to weasel their way out of this confrontation. Consider their defense: **"The astrologers answered the king, 'There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men.' This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon."** (Daniel 2:10-12)

Can you imagine being summoned to the palace for an emergency meeting only to discover that your execution is minutes away? In the presence of Nebuchadnezzar, all of the wise men of Babylon were forced to admit deceit and failure.

How clever of the God of Heaven to have the wise men confess with their own mouths the impotence of the Babylonian religion. When the moment of truth came, the clergy of Babylon were disgraced and the king was justifiably furious with them.

Marduk Is No God

Before God would exalt His holy name throughout the Earth, He chose to demonstrate that Marduk was "no god." It is amazing how a vanished dream turned the world of the clergy upside down. Before the vision took place, the prophets of Babylon were highly paid and widely respected as "wise men." After meeting with the king for only a few minutes, the clergymen of Babylon confirmed with their own mouths they were just "a clutch of liars"with a death sentence hanging over their heads.

I am reminded of Paul's words, **"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong."** (1 Corinthians 1:27) Do you see an end-time parallel here? (Hint: Is it possible that few, if any, of the 144,000 will be theologians?)

Remember, the ultimate point of this story is that God wanted to vindicate His holy name before the nations of Earth. He wanted the whole world to know that He was a God of love and salvation, a God of mercy and justice, a God of fairness and truth, a God of compassion and majesty. Unfortunately, just the opposite had occurred. The Jews had made enemies of almost everyone on Earth, they had slandered and profaned the exalted name of God, trampled upon His law, and rejected every prophet He sent to them.

So, God implemented a plan to restore His good name and He chose to use the mouth of a heathen king to do it! A sovereign God can make a servant out of anyone or anything.

The Death Decree

News of a sudden and unexpected death decree for all the wise men of Babylon flew from the palace of Nebuchadnezzar as fast as a horse could go. The "news media" was on this story in a heartbeat. The threat of death for all the wise men of Babylon did something that Nebuchadnezzar would later regret.

The king had unwittingly informed the whole world of the impotence of Babylon's wise men by putting a death decree on their heads. Even worse, the entire kingdom became eager to know the contents of the vision that had vanished and wondered what was so imperative about the vision that the king intended to kill all of his wise men?

Daniel Exalted

Through a series of providential events, Daniel eventually stood before the king. He not only revealed the vanished vision, but he also interpreted the vision for the king.

This pleased the king more than words can express. When the king heard Daniel's testimony, he was thrilled: **"Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, 'Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.' Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men."** (Daniel 2:46-48)

A few hours later, after pondering the consequences of his rash decisions, the king had a change of heart. He must have grimaced as he faced three sobering truths: First, Daniel had informed the king that Marduk did not give him the vision. *Nebuchadnezzar's* vision came from the Most High God *of the Jews,* those despicable people.

They were the last people on Earth Nebuchadnezzar wanted to have a God greater than the Babylonians.

Second, Daniel told the king that the God of the Jews was sovereign over all the kingdoms of the world, even Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar heard how God sets up kings and takes them down, according to His sovereign authority. Nebuchadnezzar was flattered to learn that it was the God of Heaven who had given *him* a throne.

At the time, the reality of Daniel's words had not sunk in. God wanted Nebuchadnezzar to know that he had not gained the throne by human prowess, but this lesson would not be learned until the king was humbled and spent seven years living as an animal.

The third truth was the most chilling of all. The king was told that *his* kingdom would fall and it would be destroyed in days to come. As the king churned on the vanished vision and the train of events that it produced, he must have thought his vision was more of a nightmare than a revelation from God.

The King Distressed

Nebuchadnezzar's impatience with the wise men had created a political nightmare. The king had publically humiliated and discredited the wise men of Babylon. He had tested the god of the Babylonians and proved that Marduk was inferior to the God of the Hebrews. Worst of all, he had fueled the curiosity of his subjects by putting a death decree on the heads of Babylon's wise men.

Everyone wanted to know the contents of the vanished vision! The seriousness of a death decree for the clergy indicated this vision was not a trivial matter. Furthermore, when the Jewish teenager, Daniel, was promoted above all the wise men of Babylon, it was obvious to everyone that Daniel had successfully recalled and interpreted the vision for the king. So, the vision had been recalled and interpreted, but what did it say?

We know the vision predicted the fall of Babylon and other world empires, but Nebuchadnezzar did not want his subjects to know that the God of the Hebrews had predestined the fall and destruction of his empire. The king knew that if this information leaked out, his government would collapse. A government cannot survive without the submission and loyalty of its subjects. If the news of Babylon's predestined fall reached the ears of his top administrators, Nebuchadnezzar knew he would soon be a king without a throne.

How could anyone maintain confidence in a king that was predestined to destruction by the Most High God? Nebuchadnezzar realized that a long tenure on the throne was only possible for as long as people *were loyal* to him and his regime. If his subjects knew that God had numbered his days, they would rise up in rebellion and he would perish.

Kings may conquer nations and kings may kill thousands to secure their authority, but no king can thwart the God of Heaven. The rumor began to spread that the fall of Babylon was predestined by the God of the Jews. Based on Nebuchadnezzar's subsequent actions, I believe it is safe to conclude that the administrators from the far reaches of the empire must have sent requests for clarification so that they could deal with the rumors about the vision.

As the situation worsened, Nebuchadnezzar consulted with his embarrassed wise men and they decided to dissolve the rumor by mixing error with truth.

Nebuchadnezzar chose to distort the truth that was given to him in the vision for a number of practical and political purposes. The wise men owed their lives to the king (actually to Daniel and his three friends) because the king relented on the death decree. Consequently, they were very eager to help the king solve his political problem.

Nebuchadnezzar and his wise men conspired to tell the world that Marduk had given the king a great vision of "a golden man." The people would be told that the golden man represented the kingdom of Babylon, *which would last forever*. Based on the course of events, Nebuchadnezzar evidently alleged to his subjects that he "was commanded" in vision to empty the golden coffers of Babylon to erect a great golden replica of his vision.

Because the rumor had circulated that Babylon was predestined to fall, the king decided to use the golden image as a way to renew loyalty to his government. He planned to require all of his administrators and governors to travel to the province of Babylon so that they might be present on the day when the vision of "the golden image" would be told by the king and the image dedicated.

The construction of a 90-foot tall golden image of a man began in earnest. (It is believed that a cubit in ancient Babylon equaled 18-20 inches, so 60 cubits [in height] would equal about 90 feet. For comparison's sake, the Statute of Liberty is 111 feet tall, but Lady Liberty stands on a pedestal that is 194 feet high, which makes her total height 305 feet.)

Due to the swiftness of rumors and the irreparable damage they could cause, there was no time for delay. Riders on horses were dispatched to the ends of the Earth calling the administrators and governors to be present on the Plain of Dura at an appointed time. Nebuchadnezzar anticipated some resistence to his plans, so he ordered the giant smelting furnaces that were used to cast the metal man to be kept burning during the dedication service. The loyalty test would be "real simple."

If anyone refused to bow down and worship the golden image, they would be thrown into a furnace. The king calculated his loyalty test would force everyone back into "the fold" if any loyalties had been compromised by the rumor that Babylon was destined for destruction. The immediate death of rebels would reduce potential problems. The king was satisfied that this course of action would protect his throne.

I Did It My Way

Now remember that Nebuchadnezzar believed that he had *earned* his throne through political savvy and military prowess. (Daniel 4:30) He heard, but did not comprehend the words of Daniel, indicating that his kingdom had been *given* to him by the God of Heaven.

Therefore, the king thought a golden image and a loyalty test would bring an end to the rumor that Babylon was predestined to fall. It is possible that this is the most expensive lie ever told. Consider the amount of gold that was required to cast a statue 90 feet tall. Consider the amount of labor for making such an image and the amount of travel and logistics necessary to bring thousands of administrators from the far-flung corners of the Earth to the Plain of Dura.

This whole story highlights an interesting point about the carnal heart: Power can be of greater value than money. Men will go to extremes to gain or hold on to power. (We regularly see politicians spend millions to win a government office that pays very little money. Why do they do this?) To keep his lie covered up, Nebuchadnezzar prevented Daniel from attending the service. He had highly honored Daniel for telling the truth, but now that he was implementing a great lie and he did not want Daniel to be at the service to observe his foolishness.

A Time of Testing

When Daniel was promoted above the wise men of Babylon, Daniel asked that his friends be recognized for their contribution toward solving the mystery of the vanished vision. (Daniel 2:18,49) Their promotion almost proved to be the cause of their death.

The king wanted everyone who was someone in his government to be present at the dedication of the golden image. In a political setting, the question of loyalty is paramount to everything else. *One man can exercise power over others only if the others are willing to submit.*

Daniel's friends, Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego, knew the test of loyalty was coming. What should they do? They could not run and hide because they had been given high positions in the government of Babylon by the king. Furthermore, the impotent wise men of Babylon were jealously eager to have Daniel and these "three Jews" removed from their high offices.

Therefore, if they were to avoid the dedication of the golden image they would show reluctance in honoring the king. Hesitation on this point could be regarded as treason.

As the date approached, I am sure Daniel and his friends met together to ask the Lord for divine intervention. On the basis of their testimony during the dedication service, it is safe to say that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego obediently went to the service expecting to be thrown into the fiery furnace.

What courage! But, this is exactly what God wanted! God needed three young men who were willing to go to their death so that He could exalt His holy name. Remember, this story began when God wanted to correct the impression that the nation of Israel had given of Him.

The Jews had profaned His holy name and God wanted to set the record straight. In order to do this, God needed an expensive golden image, a pagan king who knew the truth, a large crowd of world leaders who were confused by rumors, a very hot fiery furnace and three young men who would be faith-full unto death.

The Moment of Truth

"So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. Then the herald loudly proclaimed, 'This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.' Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews."

(Daniel 3:3-8)

All of a sudden, the dedication service stopped. As far as the eye could see, all but three Jews had bowed down before the golden man. The wise men wasted no time reporting this anomaly to the king. The three men were arrested and presented to the king. The golden image was forgotten. The music stopped. Everyone stood up and turned around to see what was about to happen.

Every eye focused on three young Jews who dared to rebel against the monarch of Babylon! As they approached the throne of the king, the king must have uttered some bad Babylonian words under his breath, "How did *they* get here?" The king was embarrassed and frustrated. The whole dedication service could unravel and the result could be worse than the truth he was trying to hide!

Did you notice who reported the insolence of the three Hebrews? The wise men were the first to denounce the Jews. This is amazing.

The wise men owed their very lives to these three young men and yet, the wise men were the first to report their disobedience to the king. (There is an end-time parallel here.) **"They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, 'O king, live forever! You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.' Furious with** [embarrassment and] **rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, 'Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?' "** (Daniel 3:9-14, insertion mine)

The king personally knew Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. He knew their integrity and loyalty. He knew they were close friends of Daniel, but somehow they had been overlooked. They should not be present. Now, he had no other option but to destroy them if He wanted to protect his throne.

The king was "up the creek." Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Earth, had created a big lie, but the God of Heaven had gathered everyone together to hear and see the truth that was greater than a golden lie. (The truth of God is best seen when it is confronted with a great lie.) The king responded to the rebellion of Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego with feigned generosity, hoping they would humor him on this matter.

The king had a big political problem on his hands (which he had created by threatening the wise men), and he knew he did not need a showdown with the Most High God of these three men. So the king tried to appear generous: **"Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship**

the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" (Daniel 3:15)

The words of Nebuchadnezzar are interesting. The king honestly knew these three lads were not rebellious toward him; after all, they had joined with Daniel in seeking an answer to his vanished vision. But the king was haughty enough to taunt the lads with the remark, **"Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"** The king uttered these words because *he knew* of their loyalty to their God.

He may have even known about the second commandment of their God. The action of the king reveals another interesting fact about the carnal heart: The performance of a miracle does not always change it. (Centuries later, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in the presence of many unbelievers and some of them still refused to accept Christ as the Messiah! See John 11.)

In Nebuchadnezzar's case, the king had personally experienced the vanished vision and witnessed a second miracle when Daniel told him what he had dreamed. But neither event changed the king's heart. When confronted with their loyalty to the King of kings, the king of Earth thought he had the high ground, but as it turns out, he was on holy ground!

To protect his lies, the king had to kill those who *stood* for the truth. He knew that they knew the truth about the vanished vision because he had promoted them.

He also knew that he could never recover from public disgrace if he showed any sign of weakness or timidity in the presence of thousands of his administrators. So, the king did what every carnal heart would do and the young men did what every born-again believer would do. The metal in each heart was revealed.

"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter [because you know the truth and we know the truth about the vanished vision]**. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.' "** (Daniel 3:16-18)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had prepared for this moment. Through prayer and fasting, they had strengthened their resolve to stand firm for God. This event was a showdown between the gold of Babylon and the pure gold of faith in God. When the king saw that these young men were not going to acquiesce and "go along" with his plan, he became very angry.

They had publicly rejected his authority and this was the very thing he was trying to protect with the creation and dedication of the golden image!

"Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be [normally] **heated. And he**

commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen [trousers]**, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace."** (Daniel 3:19-21, KJV, insertions mine)

I used the KJV for these verses because I like the language. The Bible says "the form of his visage was changed." I understand this to mean that Nebuchadnezzar's face turned fiery red (maybe his blood pressure hit 220/160). He was hotter than a firecracker on the fourth of July because his kingly ego had been hammered.

Here is a mystery: *Even though the carnal heart is full of rebellion, the carnal heart hates rebellion more than anything else.* When the carnal heart cannot get its way, its fury knows no limits. The king was rejected and no king or carnal heart can tolerate rebellion. Rejection or the fear of rejection is the underlying basis for peer pressure and a lot of social torment.

To successfully deal with rejection, a person must receive daily injections of spiritual courage and stamina. Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego were at peace with their fate on that day because they had walked and talked with God.

They had practiced obedience in small things; this was not their first test. This is a very important point. Loyalty that can withstand the prospect of a fiery death does not come overnight. Instead, it comes in little steps.

The God of Heaven Takes Over

"The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, 'wasn''t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?' They replied, 'Certainly, O king.' He said, 'Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.'

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, 'Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!' So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them." (Daniel 3:22-27)

The death of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers proved to the vast audience that the heat of the furnace was extreme. The soldiers who threw the three Jews into the furnace went to their death because they were loyal and obedient to their earthly king. The three Hebrews that were supposed to go to their death were obedient and loyal to their Heavenly King. (Exodus 20:4-6) In both cases, loyalty was present, but the greater question is: "Which king deserves highest loyalty?"

While the three Hebrews were being bound and thrown into the furnace, the king's mind was in turmoil. He had to recover from the showdown caused by these three Jews. He watched with interest as the young men were bound and thrown into the furnace.

As he observed their fate and his authority over their life, the king is surprised! Instead of seeing three bodies consumed by fire, he saw *four* men walking around in the furnace. The king jumped to his feet and asked, **"Weren't there three men that *we* tied up and threw into the fire?"**

His attendants assured him this was the case. Then, the king exclaimed, **"Look! I see four men walking around in the fire . . . "** Nebuchadnezzar immediately recognized this had to be the presence of God with the three Hebrews.

Nebuchadnezzar knew the golden image service was a charade. Nebuchadnezzar knew he was in the wrong when he sent Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to the fiery furnace. In spite of knowing these things, the king followed a course of action that protected his material interests. He did this because his highest loyalties centered on himself.

In this sense, Nebuchadnezzar demonstrates a carnal heart that plagues all of mankind. Nothing on Earth is more selfish and self-seeking than the carnal heart. The root of the world's problems today is selfishness.

"Then Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.' Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon." (Daniel 8:29-30)

What does a humiliated king say to an enormous gathering of world governors when his death decree upon three Jews was made null and void by a miracle? The king did not admit defeat, nor did the king offer an apology to the God of the Heaven. Instead, he turned to his impotent wise men and confused administrators and said, "If any of you speak evil about the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, you will be cut in pieces!" Wow!

The king deflects his responsibility once again. The carnal heart of the king rejected another chance to be transformed. Later, the God of Heaven finally got the king's attention by exiling him to the field as an animal for seven years – but that's another story.

The End of This Story

When the administrators and governors returned to their distant homes, they had a story to tell!

In a few words their story went like this, "Yes, we saw the golden man, but let me tell you about the God of the Jews. He delivered three young men out of a roaring fiery furnace. We saw it with our own eyes. The fire was so hot it killed the king's soldiers, but the flames did not hurt those three Jews!

That is some God the Jews have." This story, repeated by a thousand pagans all over the world, exalted the God of Heaven. As a nation, the Jews had profaned the wonderful name of God, but God found three Jews who had a faith of pure gold and He was able to exalt His holy name through their obedience and loyalty.

There are numerous important end-time parallels in this story. During the end-time, there will be "an image to the beast" and all people will be required to worship it or be killed. (Revelation 13) You and I will be players in the drama that is forthcoming. It is possible that we may have to stand before the dreaded king of Babylon (Lucifer).

Will we have a faith of pure gold? **"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."** (Revelation 3:14-22)

Esther - The Beautiful Savior

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Many *Day Star* readers have told us how much they enjoyed the study about Daniel in the lion's den (January 2002 *Day Star* issue) and the study focusing on the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace (February 2002 *Day Star* issue). The Bible is the most amazing book on Earth and it takes time and effort to get acquainted with its treasures.

Pure gold and precious gems do not lay on the surface of the ground and neither do the riches of God's grace lie on the surface of the pages in the Bible. Patient and persistent effort must come first, before the precious nuggets of truth are discovered.

This month, I would like to share another dramatic Bible story that has important end-time parallels for your consideration. It is the story of how God used two beautiful women, named Vashti and Esther, to rescue His people. God included this story in the Bible for several reasons and I would like to share some insights about their story that fascinate me.

This story begins in 483 B.C., during the third year of King Xerxes. I have modified the biblical narrative in the Book of Esther in several places for clarity and brevity. Comments in [brackets or italics] are my insertions.

Part I – Vashti Says "No" [Biblical Narrative]

King Xerxes ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush [Egypt]. [He] reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present. For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.

When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days . . . for all the people from the least to the greatest, who were in the citadel of Susa . . . Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality . . .

[Simultaneously] Queen Vashti hosted a banquet for the [women of Susa] in the royal palace of King Xerxes. On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him . . . to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look upon. But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.

Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the [protocols and laws of the day] . . . "According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?" he asked. "She has not obeyed the command of King

Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her. Then [one of the wise men] Memucan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, "Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes.

For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women [throughout the kingdom because many women are with her at the feast next door], and so they will despise their husbands and say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.'

This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord [toward men]. Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also, let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she.

Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest." The king and his [less than sober] nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memucan proposed. He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, proclaiming in each people's tongue that every man *should be* ruler over his own household." (Taken from Esther 1)

Comments

When Vashti was summoned to the banquet room, she knew the king and all his friends were drunk because they had been partying for seven days. She instinctively knew that to parade before a bunch of drunken men was a recipe for trouble. Vashti was well aware of her beauty and the influence it had on men.

Evidently the king wanted a sensual display of beauty. She knew that if one drunk fool made a suggestive remark about her in the king's presence, the hilarity and high spirit of this grand occasion could suddenly turn ugly into a brawl of rage and violence. She was trapped in a very difficult situation because the women of the kingdom looked to her as an example of what they should do.

She rightly chose to refuse the invitation of the king, even though she knew it would cost her dearly. Contrast the different parties: The king was drinking, feasting, and having a jolly good time. The queen, on the other hand, was in her chamber on the verge of tears.

It would be an understatement to say that King Xerxes was highly embarrassed by his wife's refusal. Each time I read this part of the story I laugh out loud. I can picture a befuddled king consulting with his befuddled advisors – all of them trying to figure out what to do with a woman who just said "No." Judging by the conversation, their biggest fear was that Vashti's example would encourage all of the women in the kingdom to just say "no," to their husband's demands.

How ironic that these mighty men of valor are fearful there will be no end to trouble from women. So, they concoct a plan that is supposed to keep all women in submission. Their advice, inflamed by drunkenness, prompted the king to make a great proclamation in many different languages. In short, the decree said: "Women must obey their husbands." What is so amusing about this situation is that the drunken king issues a decree to 127 provinces that even he cannot fulfill. Xerxes ruled over much of the then known world.

He had power over life and death, but he could not control his wife. (I do not think there is an end-time parallel in this part of the story – I am still smiling.) Even though Vashti wisely refused her husband's command, she was not physically harmed. Perhaps the Lord protected her from the usual punishment issued for defiance.

However, Vashti's refusal did set a sequence of events in motion that eventually propelled a beautiful Jewish girl to Xerxes' side as Queen of the Medes and Persians! Actually, the hand of God caused this episode of musical-chairs. It was God's purpose to move Vashti off the throne and let Esther replace her on the throne because a sinister event was about to unfold.

Part II – Esther Made Queen [Biblical Narrative]

[About three years] later when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her. Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful girls into the harem at the citadel of Susa" . . .

Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair . . . Mordecai had a [young female] cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died. When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls [including Esther] were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai . . . who had charge of the harem. [Esther] pleased him and won his favor.

Immediately he provided her with beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem. Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so . . . Esther was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins.

So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality. (Taken from Esther 2)

Part III – Haman Loathes Mordecai [Biblical Narrative]

[A few weeks after Esther's banquet, Uncle] Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate [when], Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were hanged on a gallows. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king . . .

[Months later] King Xerxes decided to honor [his best friend, a very wealthy man named] Haman . . . elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor. Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply.

Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai [for Haman and all of the nobles hated the Jews]. Instead, Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes." (Taken from Esther 2 and 3)

Part IV – A Universal Death Decree Approved [Biblical Narrative]

[About five years after Esther became queen] "In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, they cast the pur (that is, the lot – see the following note) in the presence of Haman to select a day and month [to kill all of the Jews].

And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar. Then Haman said to King Xerxes [cleverly, without mentioning the word "Jew"], "There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver [about 375 tons!] into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business." So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman . . . the enemy of the Jews. "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with these people as you please . . . "

Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman's orders . . . and sealed it with [the king's] own ring. Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews – young and old, women and little children – **on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month**, the month of Adar [February/March], and to plunder their goods.

A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day. Spurred on by the king's command, the couriers went out, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered. (Taken from Esther 3)

Note: The casting of the pur (or lots) was an ancient method for determining the will of God. The casting of the pur was more than a casual or random decision. For example, we toss a coin at the beginning of a football game to determine who will receive and who will have possession of the football.

The casting of the pur was considered more serious. Gentiles (like Haman and the sailors that cast Jonah overboard – Jonah 1:7), as well as the Jews, used the pur because they believed it revealed the will of God. For example, on the Day of Atonement, the pur was cast in the presence of the Lord to determine which goat would be the Lord's goat. (Leviticus 16:8) When Israel entered the promised land, the pur was cast in the presence of the Lord to determine how the land would be divided among seven of the twelve tribes. (Joshua 18:1-10)

Even the Romans cast the pur to divide up the clothing of Jesus. (Matthew 27:35) The interesting point here is that the **thirteenth day of the twelfth month** was set by the casting of the pur. Because each month begins with a new moon in God's calendar, it is possible for the thirteenth day of the month to be a full moon. (Due to elliptical orbit of the moon, a full moon can occur as early as the thirteenth day and as late as the fifteenth day of a month.)

Having the light of a full moon to finish off the Jews must have been a definite plus in Haman's wicked mind when he saw the results. As it turns out, the Jews were able to use the light of a full moon to finish off their enemies. As you will see, there is more to the date and timing of the universal death decree issued on God's people and it was more than just a random event.

Part V – Esther's Test [Biblical Narrative]

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it . . . Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate.

Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told [Hathach] to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any

man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me.

Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." (Taken from Esther 4)

Commentary

Queen Esther, like Queen Vashti before her, found herself in a very distressing situation. Even though she was *the* queen, the king had young concubines constantly clamoring for his attention. His emotional attachment to Esther was not like that of a typical husband and wife.

She had not seen the king for a month when Mordecai implored her to go before him and plead for their lives! Esther knew that if she imposed herself upon the king by violating court protocol, she would likely die or face the same banishment as Vashti. She also knew that the law of the Medes and Persians, once made, could not be changed.

As a female, she also knew that if she appeared too aggressive, the king might be repulsed. Esther had not forgotten Vashti's experience. These facts motivated her reluctant response to her uncle.

Mordecai responded to Esther with some very sober words: **"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"**

This statement shows how great Mordecai's faith in God really was. He knew that if Esther refused, she too would perish because the law of the Medes and Persians showed no favoritism. Still, Mordecai encouraged her by saying that relief and deliverance for the Jews would arise from another place.

Mordecai sincerely believed that God would not allow His people to become extinct at this time. Mordecai knew how God had promised Abraham that Messiah would come through his offspring and since Messiah had not appeared, Mordecai was 100% sure that God would

deliver His people. The decree sent out by Haman, bearing the name of King Xerxes, was actually a universal death decree. It left no way out – every Jew was to be killed. Period.

Part VI – Esther's Banquet #1 [Biblical Narrative]

"On the third day [of fasting] Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. When he saw queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. Then the king asked, "What is it, queen Esther? What is your request?

Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you." "If it pleases the king," replied Esther, "let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him." "Bring Haman at once," the king said, "so that we may do what Esther asks." So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, "Now what is your petition?

It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted." Esther replied, "My petition and my request is this: If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's questions." (Taken from Esther 5)

Commentary

The timing of these matters is beyond coincidence. For the sake of discussion, let us suppose the first banquet takes place on Monday evening. The king and Haman are present for very different reasons. The king is full of curiosity, and Haman, his best friend, is full of ego. The king knows something is up with his lovely Esther because no one would dare to approach him as Esther did unless there was a serious problem troubling her. Esther is timid and nervous and to get her to divulge what is on her heart, the king generously offers her anything she wants – up to half his kingdom!

Evidently, Esther sensed the mood that evening was not right for her request. So, she stalled by asking for another banquet – the following night. If this stalling technique was planned from the beginning, it surely worked. The king left the banquet more puzzled than before, and of course, Haman was only too highly pleased to attend another banquet. What greater honor could he hope for than to be seen dining with the king and queen once again?

Part VII – Haman Frustrated, The Sleepless King [Biblical Narrative]

Haman went out [from the banquet] happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled

with rage against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home.

Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. "And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the *only* person queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate."

His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a gallows built, seventy-five feet high, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go with the king to the dinner and be happy." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the gallows built.

[Meanwhile] That [same] night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. "What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked. "Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered.

[The next morning] The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows he had erected for him. His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court." "Bring him in," the king ordered. When Haman entered, the king [without giving Haman a chance to speak] asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?"

So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!' "

"Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. A Do not neglect anything you have recommended." So Haman got the robe and the horse.

He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!" Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief, and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him.

His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him – you will surely come to ruin!" While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared. (Taken from Esther 6)

Commentary

Do you sense that the timing of these events cannot be coincidental? The *same* night that Haman decided to hang Mordecai, the king could not sleep, which led to the discovery that Mordecai's faithfulness had gone unrewarded! The next morning, Haman stops by the palace seeking permission to hang Mordecai while the king is searching for a way to highly honor the same Jew who Haman wants to kill! The king knows nothing about Haman's plans and Haman knows nothing of the king's desire!

What are the odds of this happening? Imagine how Haman must have felt escorting Mordecai on a royal horse around Susa for a couple hours crying out, **"This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!"** Haman's country club buddies must have split their sides in laughter when they saw this. How do you think Mordecai must have felt as he watched Haman lead the horse he was sitting on? Do you think a smile crossed his face?

Zeresh, Haman's wife, was insightful. She saw the fate of her proud husband immediately. Perhaps the Holy Spirit caused an utterance to come out of her mouth similar to the utterance that came out of Balaam's mouth when he tried to curse Israel. She said, **"Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him – you will surely come to ruin."**

History reveals that the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, the Grecians, and the Romans all intensely disliked the Jews, as a nation of people. Even though relations between Israel and the Medes and Persians were never good, and even though relations between Israel and God were not as good as they should have been, God did not allow the nation of Israel to perish until He had fulfilled His promise to Abraham. After Jesus' ministry on Earth was finished, God permitted the Romans to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Part VIII – Esther's Banquet #2 [Biblical Narrative]

So the king and Haman went to dine with queen Esther, and as they were drinking wine on that second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted." Then queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life – this is my petition. And spare my people – this is my request. For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation.

If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king." King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?" Esther said, "The adversary and enemy [of the Jews] is this vile Haman." Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg queen Esther for his life.

Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the

couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" As soon as the word left the king's mouth, [fear] covered Haman's face. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai [this morning], who spoke up to help the king." The king said, "Hang him on it!"

So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided. That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. (Taken from Esther 7 and 8)

Part IX – Justice Served [Biblical Narrative]

[Later, Esther went again before the king without permission.] Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman [which the force of law] . . . Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him. "If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman . . . devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces.

For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?" King Xerxes replied to queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have hanged him on the gallows. Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring – for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.

At once the royal secretaries were summoned – on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush [Egypt].

These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king. The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them and their women and children; and to plunder the property of their enemies.

The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was **the thirteenth day of the twelfth month**, the month of Adar. A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

The couriers, riding the royal horses, raced out, spurred on by the king's command. And the

edict was also issued in the citadel of Susa. Mordecai left the king's presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the [Jews in the] city of Susa held a joyous celebration. For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor." (Taken from Esther 8)

Part X – Revenge [Biblical Narrative]

In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them. On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them.

The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those seeking their destruction. **No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them**. And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because **fear of Mordecai** had seized them.

Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful. The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them.

In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. They also killed . . . the ten sons of Haman . . . But they did not lay their hands on the plunder. The number of those slain in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day. The king said to queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman in the citadel of Susa.

What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? It will also be granted." "If it pleases the king," Esther answered, "give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also [because revenge has not been fully accomplished], and let [the bodies of] Haman's ten sons be hanged on gallows." So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa, and they hanged the ten sons of Haman [in the public square to remind everyone of the penalty for mistreating the people of the queen].

The Jews in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa three hundred men, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies.

They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder. This happened **on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar**, and on the fourteenth they rested and

made it a day of feasting and joy. The Jews in Susa, however, had assembled **on the thirteenth and fourteenth**, and then on the fifteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy. That is why rural Jews – those living in villages – observe the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to each other.

Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, to have them celebrate **annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar** as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. **He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.**

So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun, doing what Mordecai had written to them. For Haman, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the pur (that is, the lot) for their ruin and destruction. But when the plot came to the king's attention, he issued written orders that the evil scheme Haman had devised against the Jews should come back onto his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. (Therefore these days were called Purim, from the word pur.)

Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them, the Jews took it upon themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed." (Taken from Esther 9)

Comments

There are several points in this story that have end-time parallels. I would like to share five:

1. - First, Esther's story illustrates how one clever man was able to set up a universal death decree for God's people. There is a direct end-time parallel to this in Revelation 13 and Daniel 12. Revelation 13:15 says, **"He** [the Antichrist] **was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed."** (Insertion mine.)

This verse points forward to a time when a universal death decree will be set up for the saints. This death decree will occur during the Great Tribulation because God's people will refuse to worship the image of the beast (the one-world religion imposed by Lucifer), they will refuse the mark of the beast (the tattoo required by Lucifer), and they will refuse to submit to the laws of the Antichrist (Lucifer) who will be masquerading as God. Eventually, everyone (the saints) who refuse to obey the Antichrist will be condemned to death *at an appointed time.*

Daniel tells us when the universal death decree occurs: **"From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days."** (Daniel 12:11,12) **Note:** A comprehensive discussion on the cessation of the daily and the

meaning of the abomination that causes desolation was presented in the April 1999 issue of *Day Star.* You may download it for free at our web-site: *www.wake-up.org*. The point is that there will be a death decree for the saints! God wants His children to know what is coming so they can hang on in perilous times and have faith in His mighty arm of salvation.

The story of Esther was put in the Bible for the purpose of building our faith. Bible prophecy indicates the **daily** intercession of Jesus in Heaven's temple will come to a close, and this event will be marked by a global earthquake. (Revelation 8:2-5) When that occurs, the saints are to begin counting because 1,290 days later, a universal **death decree** will be "set up." Do not be afraid, because there is good news! The universal death decree will not be implemented because God, as He did in this story of Esther, will overturn the evil scheme of the Antichrist through a mighty display of power and authority.

2. - The second end-time parallel is this: In the story of Esther, God turned the universal death decree around so that the Jews could destroy their enemies without guilt! King Xerxes did not fret one bit that 75,800 people in his kingdom were killed. How marvelous are the ways of God. God created fear in the hearts of the Jews' enemies and they became powerless and easily defeated *at the appointed time*. This "fear thing" needs some emphasis because this feature explains a profound point that is often overlooked in the Old Testament.

When Israel was doing God's will, every battle was the Lord's battle, not theirs. Moses warned, **"**[If you love the Lord and serve him with all your heart] **Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will fear you . . . No man will be able to stand against you. The Lord your God, as he promised you, will put the terror and fear of you on the whole land, wherever you go. "** (Deuteronomy 28:10; 11:25, insertions mine)

Israel was to be the arms and legs of God, and as long as Israel remained faithful to the Lord, the Bible says, **"The fear of God came upon all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard how the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel."** (2 Chronicles 20:29)

When Israel rebelled against the Lord, you guessed it, the enemies of Israel became bold and Israel became weak and afraid. Because a universal death decree was pronounced on Israel in Esther's day, the Jews became humble and submissive, and God honored their repentance.

Did you notice in the story of Esther that many Gentiles became Jews because the fear of Jews was upon them? **". . .And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them."** (Esther 8:17) The same event will happen during the end-time. Many people will repent of their sins and become believers in Christ because they will see the power of God resting upon His people!

3. - The third end-time parallel is this: Mordecai recorded these events. **"He wrote them to observe the days** [of Purim] **as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor."** (Esther 9:22, insertions mine)

This text is very interesting in light of the end-time. To celebrate overwhelming victory over their enemies, the Jews were to perpetually observe the Feast of Purim with **"feasting and joy and**

giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor." Now, compare Revelation 11:7-10: **"Now when they** [the Two Witnesses] **have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss** [Lucifer, the lamb-like beast] **will attack them, and overpower and kill them . . . For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth."** Especially notice the last sentence.

The parallel between Purim and this event in Revelation is easy to see. A time is coming when the wicked will gloat and rejoice over the death of God's Two Witnesses because the Two Witnesses will be silenced. Basically, this text points forward to a time when Lucifer and his followers will gloat, rejoice and celebrate over the fact that God's work on Earth is brought to an end. Of course, this does not mean that God's plans or purposes have been destroyed.

Yes, a time will come when the last of God's 144,000 messengers will be martyred and salvation is no longer offered. It is at that time when the torment of the Holy Spirit will cease. The wicked may gloat and rejoice because they think their torment is over, but that is not the end of the story. **Note:** A comprehensive discussion on the Two Witnesses was presented the April and May 1997 issues of *Day Star* and is available for a free download at our web-site at *www.wake-up.org*.

4. - The fourth end-time parallel centers around the timing of the universal death decree in the Book of Esther. Remember, the date of the death decree in Esther's day was established by casting the pur. **"In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, they cast the pur (that is, the lot) in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar. . . Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews – young and old, women and little children – on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods."** (Esther 3:7,13)

I believe there is an amazing parallel between *the date* of the universal death decree in Esther's day and *the date* of the universal death decree during the Great Tribulation. In short, these two events appear to happen on the same day and in the same month, namely on a full moon in the month of Adar (February)! This conclusion involves a comprehensive study that is covered in my 211 video presentation which was recorded in Dayton, Ohio in August 2001. If you have not had a chance to see that seminar series, I hope you will order a set of video tapes. The series covers several end-time topics that are wonderful to study.

5. - The fifth end-time parallel is found in the lovely person of Esther. She represents Jesus, our lovely Savior in whom there is no defect. When Adam and Eve sinned, a universal death decree was placed upon the human race, but Jesus went before the King of the Universe. Through His intercession, we have been offered an escape from eternal death. Jesus was not only willing to die for His people like Esther, but He also *did die* for you and me.

Even though the Bible predicts a universal death decree will be set up for God's helpless people, it also says the saints have a Savior who is greater than the forces of evil. He will foil the

wicked plans of Lucifer just like He did to Haman. He will turn the circumstances upside down, and God will impose the universal death decree on Satan and the armies of Earth. They will perish by the command (sword) that comes out of the mouth of Jesus at the Second Coming. I hope to see this with my own eyes! No wonder Daniel wrote, **"Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days."** (Daniel 12:12)

The story recorded in Esther tells us that God never sleeps and He always keeps vigil over His people. The story recorded in Esther tells us that God's timing is always perfect, down to the split-second when necessary. The story recorded in Esther tells us that God can turn a universal death decree into a glorious victory, if His children are faithful and loyal to Him.

The story recorded in Esther points forward to a time when we, the last generation, will face the *same obstacles* that God's people faced some 2,500 years ago. I pray that every reader of this *Day Star* will be as faith-full as Mordecai and Esther. Their faith and courage show what God can accomplish *if* we are willing to stand up for what is right!

7 Cycles of "Apostasy, Servitude, & Restoration"

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Israel in the Book of Judges

The book of Judges describes the first 350 years of Israel's experience in Canaan. The narrative begins during the time of Joshua (around 1398 B.C.) and ends just before Saul becomes Israel's king (around 1043 B.C.). During this period, the Lord Himself was Israel's King.

Unfortunately, His people did not give Him much respect. In fact, the last verse in the book of Judges closes by saying, **"everyone did as he saw fit."** (Judges 21:25) After Joshua died, God called various men and women to be judges to guide and govern His wayward people, but they had limited success.

Israel vacillated between submission to the Lord and rebellion against Him. Israel's inclination toward rebellion was a constant problem. In fact, the Bible suggests that there were seven periods of apostasy, seven periods of servitude and seven restorations during the time of the judges!

God is changeless and the carnal nature is predictable. The history between God and Israel was preserved in the book of Judges for thousands of years and is like a mirror, reflecting how He deals with all nations and people. In the same way, Israel's treatment of God reflects, like a mirror, how most of the human race treats God.

Actually, the Bible tells the story of our lives, only it uses different names! If you and I had lived in those days, most of us would have fit right in with Israel's "on again" and "off again" relationship with the Lord! If God had destroyed Abraham's offspring at Mt. Sinai as He proposed to do (Exodus 32:10), and replaced Israel with the offspring of Moses, the results would have been the same only the names would have changed.

The Bible is an amazing book. It describes the present human condition with a thousand parallels from the past!

When I study the Bible, I realize my own human nature is not that different from the antediluvians who scoffed as Noah built the ark. Sometimes, I am rebellious, like Israel. In some ways, I am blind, like the Pharisees. Other times, I am like the disciples, I do not understand the words of Jesus.

In some ways, I am like doubting Thomas and impetuous Peter. When I am totally honest with myself, I realize that I have a lot in common with many Bible characters. In good ways and bad ways, they are like me and I am like them.

Two Nasty Problems

Seven cycles of "apostasy – servitude – restoration" in 350 years says much about the long-suffering of God, and also the inherent rebellion of humanity. Two problems plague the human race: Man's first and greatest problem is his innate rebellion against God's authority.

The second problem is the ignorance between generations. On the topic of rebellion, we are spring-loaded from birth to reject everything that God wants of us. (Romans 8:7) For example, God insists that we rest on His Sabbath.

I have yet to hear a person say upon learning about God's Sabbath, "Wow! Look at the wonderful benefit God's has set up for us! A day of rest each week. Yippee!" Actually, our hearts respond with just the opposite reaction. It typically goes like this: "Whoa! I don't know about this Sabbath rest thing. I have a job, family and friends, etc., to consider . . . ." Israel was no different and constantly struggled with their desire to abandon God's Sabbath rest! (Ezekiel 20)

Truthfully, before you break any of God's commandments, you break the first commandment before any of the others!

So, how is Israel's apostasy different from our apostasy? Refusing to obey God or justify behavior that is contrary to God's commands is the same as Israel's rebellion. God knows that man's propensity toward rebellion can be moderated through punishment, just as a good parent disciplines a child. In fact, if we were truthful, almost everyone will give in and say "uncle" if tortured long enough.

During the time of the judges, Israel experienced God's judgments seven times and repented seven times, but for the wrong reason! Have you ever heard someone say, "Lord, I will do anything you want, just answer my prayer?" This is the religious equivalent to saying "uncle." Again, this response indicates submission to God, but for the wrong reason.

When suffering accomplishes its highest calling, suffering from God brings us into *humble* submission. We will pray as Jesus did when facing death, **"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."** (Luke 22:42)

Of course, God knew that the people of Israel repented because they experienced the hardships of His judgments. This is why God's punishments were redemptive for many centuries. God designed His wrath to bring the nation of Israel to her knees so that she might look up and consider the wisdom of her King.

Good discipline may be punitive, but it should also be instructional! **"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."** (Hebrews 12:11)

Did you notice those last words, "for those who have been trained by it?" Some people are punished, yet they never get the point or learn the lesson. For example, more than 90% of certain classes of felons return to prison after being set free! In this case, discipline does not help if the lessons are not learned.

This is why God has a second type of punishment called destructive punishment. When redemptive judgments fail, destructive judgments terminate the problem. For example, the world's inhabitants went beyond the point of redemption in Noah's day.

If a worldwide, waist-deep flood could have achieved redemptive results, God would not have drowned the whole world and started over. God knew the cancer of sin and that redemption was out of the question, so He killed all but eight people and started over. God disciplined Israel with redemptive punishments for many centuries because He wanted Israel to wake up and observe the deadly consequences of sin.

Eventually, God gave up and destroyed Israel as a nation in A.D. 70. God has a message for everyone on Earth about rebellion: Rebellion begins with forbidden pleasure or profit, which produces a harvest of sorrowful consequences and broken relationships. In the end, sin requires the penalty of death.

If we divide 350 years by seven "apostasy – servitude – restoration" cycles, the average is one cycle every 50 years (which is approximately once per generation). Since generations of people come and go, the second problem God has with man is "the *next* generation." A punished generation may repent and learn from God's discipline, but the *next* generation rarely reaps the benefits of discipline given to its elder generation!

In fact, God has to start over with the *next* generation because it does not understand that God means what He says and is a powerful force. So, the younger generation arrives on the scene and makes the same mistakes as the previous generation and travels down a rebellious road, yielding to the temptations of sin.

Then, the cycle of degeneration starts again. History constantly repeats itself because it is almost impossible for the *next* generation to possess the wisdom and experience of its elder generation! Therefore, the mistakes and the apostasy of former generations are repeated by the *next* generation.

God Keeps Vigil

With these thoughts in mind, I would like you to consider the story of Judge Gideon that includes several end time parallels. The story begins during one of Israel's suffering cycles – a time of servitude: **"Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help."** (Judges 6:1-6)

When the majority of a nation becomes decadent and degenerate, the "Land-Lord of Earth" moves into action. God hates sin and people who insist on rebellion. In Israel's case, God gave His land over to the Midianites for seven years. (If you want to know why the promised land is "God's land" rather than Israel's land, see Leviticus 18:24,25; 25:23.)

God made Israel's defenses weak and her borders porous. Israel's "Homeland Defense Minister" could not stop the terrorists from Midian from entering the land occupied by Israel. The Midianites destroyed their homes, took their crops and killed their animals.

The Midianites decimated the promised land "that flowed with milk and honey" because God was displeased with His people. **"When the Israelites cried to the Lord because of Midian, he sent them a prophet, who said, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. I said to you, "I am the Lord your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live." But you have not listened to me.' "** (Judges 6:7-10)

The words of the prophet address the core problem. Israel had abandoned God and His Sabbath rest and merged with mainstream religious practices. Israel worshiped the hedonistic gods of the Amorites (the Baals) because the Baals, unlike the God of Heaven, gave people freedom to do whatever they wanted.

Sexual immorality was not a controversial issue. In fact, it was considered entertainment, a popular part of fertility cult worship. The religion of the Baals was bewitching; a sensual religion that appealed to the carnal passions of its worshipers.

Restoration

When the seven years of Midianite occupation had been served, *God changed* Israel's desperate situation. Israel was not allowed to weasel out of punishment. "They did the crime; they did the time." The ironic point about this turn of events is that God used the Midianites to punish Israel for their rebellion against Him, and then God used Israel to destroy the Midianites because of their great sexual immorality and depravity!

When the time came to set Israel free from Midianite occupation, God chose the son of a prominent Baal worshiper to be a Judge for Him. (Imagine that!)

Gideon was a timid, but sincere young man, who refused to worship the Baals. When the story begins, Gideon (in his early 20's?) was threshing wheat in his hideout. **"The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, 'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.' 'But sir,' Gideon replied, 'if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, "Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?" But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of**

Midian.'

Note: The Lord offered no explanation to Gideon why Israel was in the hands of Midian. God had already explained this through a prophet.

"The Lord turned to him and said, 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?' 'But Lord,' Gideon asked, 'how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.' The Lord answered, 'I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.'

"Gideon replied, 'If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.' And the Lord said, 'I will wait until you return.' Gideon went in, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast.

Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak. The angel of God said to him, 'Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.' And Gideon did so. With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the Lord disappeared." (Judges 6:11-21)

These verses give me goose-bumps! I can just imagine Gideon running around, trying to get his offering together. Then, returning breathlessly, he puts the offering on a rock. The Lord stretches out His staff and "poof" – fire comes out of the rock and consumes the meat, bread – everything! The Lord suddenly disappears from view, but not from Gideon's presence!

"When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, 'Ah, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!' But the Lord said to him, 'Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.' So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it The Lord is Peace . . . .

"That same night the Lord said to him, 'Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. [Evidently, the first bull was their best breeding bull.] **Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering.' So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him. But because *he was afraid of his family* and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.**

"In the morning when the men of the town got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar! They asked each other, 'Who did this?' When they carefully investigated, they were told, 'Gideon son of Joash did it.'

The men of the town demanded of Joash, 'Bring out your son. He must die, because he has

broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.' But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, 'Are you going to plead Baal's cause?Are you trying to save him?

Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.' So that day they called Gideon 'Jerub-Baal,' saying, 'Let Baal contend with him, because he broke down Baal's altar.' " (Judges 6:22-32, insertion and italics mine)

The Lord used this notable incident to let Israel know that He had chosen the young, timid Gideon as a leader. This action by Gideon was completely out of character! However, when God's Holy Spirit power rests on a willing heart, there is no limit to what God can accomplish! Gideon's father (a member of the elder generation) recognized the power of God upon his son and he successfully defended his son's behavior! (I believe Gideon's father's conscience condemned him in his heart for worshiping Baal.) God chose the weakest man in town to send a signal through the land that He was about to rescue His people. A few days later, this signal made perfect sense!

The Sword of the Lord and of Gideon

"Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. [They were intent on plundering the possessions of the Israelites.] **Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them. Gideon said to God, 'If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised – look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.' And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew – a bowlful of water.**

Note: The ever timid Gideon needs assurance, so he asks the Lord for a sign. God faithfully responds.

"Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew.' That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

Note: Again, the ever timid Gideon needs assurance. God patiently responds.

"Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. The Lord said to Gideon, 'You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, "Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead." ' So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

Note: The ever timid Gideon begins to have heartburn. "Lord, too many soldiers?" How can an army ever have too many soldiers?

"But the Lord said to Gideon, ‘There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, "This one shall go with you," he shall go; but if I say, "This one shall not go with you," he shall not go.’ So Gideon took the men down to the water.

There the Lord told him, ‘Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink.’ Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. The Lord said to Gideon, ‘With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place.’ So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

"Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. During that night the Lord said to Gideon, ‘Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.’ So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp.

Note: An ever timid Gideon needed more assurance. Notice how the Lord assures Gideon of victory over the Midianites and uses an enemy to confirm to Gideon what the Lord is going to do!

"The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore. Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. ‘I had a dream,’ he was saying. ‘A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp.

It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed.’ His friend responded, ‘This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands.’ When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, ‘Get up! The Lord has given the Midianite camp into your hands.’

Note: The ever timid Gideon is now ready to lead 300 men into the camp of the Midianites.

"Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside. ‘Watch me,’ he told them. ‘Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, "For the Lord and for Gideon." ’

"Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch [midnight]**, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right**

hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, 'A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!'

"While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled. When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh were called out, and they pursued the Midianites.

Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, 'Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah.' So all the men of Ephraim were called out and they took the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth Barah. They also captured two of the Midianite leaders, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was by the Jordan." (Judges 6:33-7:25)

End Time Parallels

There are a few end time parallels in the story of Gideon to consider. Here are four:

1. The empowerment of Gideon and his army parallels the 144,000.

First, God chose a timid, self depreciating man. Then, God reduced Gideon's army to a mere 300 soldiers to eliminate any possibility for Gideon or the nation of Israel to claim victory over the Midianites. Similar circumstances will occur during the Great Tribulation. Contrary to what many people believe, God is not going to use a religious denomination to preach the gospel to the world. Instead, He will hand pick a few thousand people like Gideon. God's 144,000 servants will not be arrogant people, nor will they be influential scholars or great preachers. For the most part, they will be ordinary people. The victory they achieve will be the Lord's doing, not theirs! The ratio of God's servants to the population of the world will be about one per 50,000 people. God likes impossible odds. God will not share His glory with man. God is above man. God is omnipotent and He will show His strength through human weakness. **"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."** (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

2. God's wrath parallels the seven trumpets and the seven bowls.

God's punishment of Israel (seven years of occupation by the Midianites) was justified and God's destructive wrath toward the Midiantes was also justified! God gives every nation a measure of grace and a cup to measure iniquity. Grace runs out when the cup overflows with iniquity. When the majority of a nation's citizens conduct themselves in a way that is offensive to the "Lord of the Land," He moves into action. God's actions are redemptive at first. If they fail to accomplish redemption, God's judgments eventually become destructive. Historians may

disagree with me, but I believe war is the handiwork of God. He uses one nation to destroy another when the offending nation fills its cup of iniquity. Then, if necessary, God destroys the destroyer if He deems it appropriate. Nations rise and fall – not by the prowess of man, but by divine decree. (See Daniel 5.)

God's wrath against Israel and the Midianites parallels the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of Revelation, respectively. The seven trumpets will be seven *first* plagues that have a generous measure of mercy mixed in. The seven trumpet judgments are redemptive judgments. This is why the quantity of "one-third" is mentioned twelve times during the seven trumpets. God spares two-thirds! The seven bowls are seven *last* plagues. These judgments have no mercy mixed in. God utterly destroys Earth and everyone on Earth (except the saints) by the time the events of the seventh bowl conclude. We see both types of judgments in the book of Judges. Israel received redemptive judgments and the Midianites received destructive judgments. (Eventually, Israel also received a destructive judgment as well.)

3. The confusion and defeat of the Midianites

Gideon and his army shattered the stillness of the night. Out of nowhere there came "a large army" with lights and trumpets. Generals in ancient times customarily directed their armies by the sound of "a" trumpet. The emphasis here on the word "a" is important. If there were many trumpets, no one would know which trumpet to follow. A soldier would hear multiple trumpets when various battalions converged on a battle. When the Midianites awoke to the sound of 300 trumpets, they had one thought. "We are out gunned and vastly out numbered!" Their resulting panic confirms this point.

When God's judgments (the seven trumpets) begin, the world will be taken by complete surprise. The world will awaken to a new reality. The inhabitants of Earth will realize there is a living God and He is a deadly, formidable force. The ensuing panic will confirm this. To those people who have set their face and lives against God's laws, this will come as a complete surprise – like a sneak attack. God is about to send panic through the camp of His enemies. Eventually, the wicked will be destroyed and the saints of God will at last, have peace on Earth! The occupation of *His* land will be over and the saints will live happily ever after.

4. The trumpets and the lamps

In ancient times, wars were not typically fought in darkness. It was too risky. Warfare was often hand-to-hand and close proximity to the enemy was necessary. In total darkness, it is impossible to tell a friend from an enemy! When Gideon's army startled the sleeping Midianites with shouting, 300 blazing lamps and 300 blaring trumpets, the Midianites instinctively knew they could not survive the battle. The Lord filled the hearts of Israel's enemy with overwhelming panic so that they fled in fear.

This scenario also describes how the wicked will feel when the Great Tribulation begins. Fear will be everywhere. Anxiety will be out of control. Jesus said there will be distress that has no

equal since the beginning of the world! (Matthew 24:21) Paul wrote, **"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."** (Hebrews 10:26,27) During the Great Tribulation, wicked people will have no rest, day or night (Revelation 14:11) because the Lord will fill their hearts with fear and anxiety.

During the Great Tribulation, God will send His servants, the 144,000, to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to every kindred, tongue and nation. People who love the light illuminating the truth will step forward into the light and unite themselves with God's servants. The saints will have peace in the middle of the raging, chaotic storm.

People who love iniquity will run for the cover of darkness so their deeds will not be seen in the light. In the darkness of sin, Paul writes there is a fearful expectation of judgment and raging fire. God will ensure it for He wants everyone to come to repentance. **"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives."** (2 Peter 3:9-11)

The Cycles Continue

"Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon's lifetime, the land enjoyed peace forty years. Jerub-Baal [Gideon] **son of Joash went back home to live. He had seventy sons of his own, for he had many wives. His concubine, who lived in Shechem, also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelech. Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god and did not remember the Lord their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side."** (Judges 8:28-34, insertion mine) As far as I know, Gideon holds the world record for having the largest number of children. (I do not know what happened – he *was* a timid guy at first!)

If Gideon had 70 sons (and 70 daughters), his offspring would number around 140 children! In a way, Gideon's heritage parallels the ministry of the 144,000. Because of their efforts, the seed of Abraham produced during the Great Tribulation will be numberless! **". . .And there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands . . . . Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' "** (Revelation 7:9, 13,14)

Regrettably, this story ends where it began. When Gideon died, the *next* generation prostituted themselves to the Baals *again*. If Israel's history proves anything, it proves how quickly and how easily so many people can turn away from obeying the Lord. We would do well to take note of this fact as we draw near to the Great Day of the Lord! Remember, if we had been there after Gideon died, some of us may have followed the rebellious majority.

Elijah the Tishbite

Author: Larry W. Wilson

A Great Prophet - A Popular Legacy

"Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops." (James 5:17,18)

The Old Testament prophet, Elijah, is mentioned 28 times in the New Testament. He had a popular legacy during the time of the apostles for at least six reasons: First, he was an ordinary man through whom God accomplished extraordinary things.

As a young man, Elijah embarrassed the petulant King Ahab, angered his wicked wife, Jezebel, rebuked a nation almost totally given over to idolatry, and proved that Baal was no god. Second, they regarded Elijah to be a man of valor because he slaughtered 450 prophets of Baal after he proved they were false prophets. Third, Elijah was the first prophet in Old Testament times to raise a person from the dead. Fourth, God took Elijah to Heaven in a chariot of fire without experiencing death.

Fifth, Peter, James and John saw Elijah on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured. Sixth, the last two verses of the book of Malachi end with the promise of a coming Elijah: **"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."** (Malachi 4:5,6)

Elijah's ministry lasted a mere 24 years, but he is considered to be one of the greatest prophets in Old Testament times. His greatness had nothing to do with his family tree, his education, his personal wealth, or assets. In fact, James emphasizes this point by saying, **"Elijah was a man just like us."** Let there be no mistake – Elijah's greatness stemmed from God's greatness. This is because he dedicated his life in service to God and glorified His holy name, especially at a time when such behavior was politically and religiously incorrect! I have selected Elijah for this month's presentation in *Day Star* because Elijah's life story contains certain experiences that have powerful end time parallels.

How It Started

The twelve tribes of Israel were divided into two nations after Solomon died (around 920 B.C.). The popular and talented Jeroboam became king over ten tribes in the North, and Rehoboam, an insolent son of Solomon, was king over two tribes in the South. Both kings were evil minded in God's eyes and Jeroboam was considered more evil than Rehoboam. Jeroboam led Israel to commit great sins against God, the very One who appointed him to be king over the ten tribes! (1 Kings 11:31) Jeroboam did not trust God's leadership.

His goals were self-serving and he did not want the kingdom united. Jeroboam reasoned that Israel would not remain divided as long as the twelve tribes shared the same religion, so he resorted to a scheme to prevent Rehoboam from reuniting the twelve tribes.

All Jews were required by law to go up to Jerusalem three times a year to observe Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. Jeroboam knew that as long as his people regarded the high priest in Jerusalem (who favored the rule of Rehoboam) as their spiritual authority, his control over the ten tribes would not be secure. So, Jeroboam's scheme included displacing the religion of Israel with a "new" religion. Consider these words from the Bible:

"Jeroboam thought to himself, 'The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to king Rehoboam.

' After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there. Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites.

He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made. On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings." (1 Kings 12:26-33)

Amazingly, the people accepted Jeroboam's new religion quickly. It is hard to believe that the Israelites accepted the new changes so readily, but they did. Their behavior demonstrates a profound truth about humankind. People can be led astray very quickly if their religious experience is not based on a personal understanding of God's Word. At the Great Tribulation, the "Jeroboam phenomenon" will occur again when the Antichrist forces everyone to participate in a new one-world religion.

From Bad to Worse

Jeroboam's blasphemy deeply offended God. One day, the old prophet, Ahijah, had a message for Jeroboam and he told Jeroboam's wife**, "Go, tell Jeroboam that this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I raised you up from among the people and made you a leader over my people Israel. I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, but you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes. You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have provoked me to anger and thrust me behind your back. Because of this, I am going to bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every last male in**

Israel – slave or free. I will burn up the house of Jeroboam as one burns dung, until it is all gone.' " (I Kings 14:7-10)

History records that Jeroboam ruled over the ten tribes for about 20 years before he was killed and his whole family slaughtered. After Jererboam's reign, a series of evil kings followed who were even more wicked than he was! Like a roller coaster gaining speed as it rolls down an incline, sin and apostasy continued to accelerate in Israel after Jeroboam died. About 35 years after Jeroboam was killed, a selfish and temperamental man named Ahab became king of Israel. His wife was a Sidonian woman, named Jezebel, who was notorious for her glamor and her ambition.

The Bible says, **"There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel."** (1 Kings 21:25,26) This background information on Israel's descent into decadence is important if we are to appreciate the appearing, loyalty, courage and actions of a young man, Elijah the Tishbite, who seemed to come out of nowhere.

Elijah Called

About 870 B.C., northern Israel's decadence had become so evil that God stepped in. He called a "country boy" from the remote desert territory of Gilead to be His spokesman. (God often chooses the most unlikely people to do awesome work.) As a youth, Elijah did not fill his mind with the foolishness of idolatry nor did he chase after the meaningless pleasures of carnal dissipation – pleasures which idolatry not only approved, but exalted.

Elijah was devoted to God; deeply concerned and grieved by the idolatrous behavior of his people. Elijah knew that God's wrath toward Israel's behavior was long overdue. Elijah wanted to make a difference, but he recognized that he was just a youth and powerless to do anything about it. He had no influence, no pulpit and no money. To him, it seemed as if there was nothing he could do – except pray.

Elijah was a good student of God's Word and was intimately acquainted with the writings of Moses. He knew the covenant which the Lord gave to Moses at Mount Sinai was conditional. At Sinai God said, **"If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit."** (Leviticus 26:18-20)

Elijah was also acquainted with Solomon's published prayer which was proclaimed in Jerusalem when the temple was dedicated about 75 years earlier. Solomon had prayed, **"When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your**

servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance." (1 Kings 8:35-36)

These and other Old Testament references gave Elijah an idea of how to pray for Israel. James writes, **"Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years."** (James 5:17)

God was touched by the sincere prayer of Elijah. God was very aware of Israel's great wickedness, and in Elijah, God saw a sincere young man who was jealous for His honor. One day, God appeared before Elijah and told him that He had heard Elijah's prayers. Consequently, there would be no more rain until *Elijah* asked for it again. In other words, God gave Elijah the authority to determine when the famine would end! Wow! God placed enormous power in the hands of the young man from Tishbe.

The Lord told Elijah to go and inform Israel's king that God had given Elijah authority over the rain. Think about this for a minute. This is like driving to Washington D.C., presuming that you would get access to the President of the United States, to tell him that it was not going to rain until you said so.

Elijah's faith was so compelling that it allowed him to take God at His word. Without hesitation, Elijah set out for Samaria to find King Ahab. Upon finding the king, Elijah approached him without introduction or savvy court etiquette and made this declaration: **"As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word . . ."** (1 Kings 17:1) That said, Elijah abruptly turned and departed. The king was surprised, then bemused.

No doubt some of the king's attendants laughed out loud at the youthful folly of Elijah. "So here's a young man who thinks he can control the rain! Yeah, right!" Laughing and mocking, they joked, "That kid must have been out in the desert sun too long."

The Bible does not mention how long it took for the reality of the situation to dawn on Ahab. Depending on the season, thirty days without rain is not unusual in Palestine. Sixty days without rain is not deadly, but serious. Ninety days without rain and water shortages become a problem.

It only takes about four months for serious signs of famine to appear. When it became evident that a famine was under way, the Holy Spirit brought a memory to the king and his officials of the sudden appearance and bold declaration of the young man. He seemed to come out of nowhere and disappeared just as fast. Where did this Elijah go? How could *he* control the rain? At first his claim appeared to be absolute folly, for no man could control the rain – or could they? As days continued to pass without a drop of rain, it became apparent that *someone* had caused the rain to cease!

End Time Parallel

There is an important end time parallel here. Revelation predicts that during the Great

Tribulation, there will be no rain for three and a half years (the same length as Elijah's day)! A worldwide famine is coming for the same reasons that a nationwide famine occurred in Elijah's day. Consider this text: **"These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will."** (Revelation 11:6, KJV)

Many Christians believe the Two Witnesses mentioned in Revelation are Moses and Elijah. My study has led me to a different conclusion. (Review *Day Star* back issues April and May 1997, on our web site.) During the Great Tribulation, the Two Witnesses will empower 144,000 prophets of God to do miraculous things *just like* Moses and Elijah. Like Moses and Elijah, God's servants will exercise awesome supernatural powers *as they see fit*.

Why will God grant so much power to His prophets during the Great Tribulation? I find there are two reasons: First, when incredible miracles can be performed at will, the miracle working person automatically gets a great deal of respect and attention.

Second, when a miracle working person has something to say that is hard to accept, the miracles give added credibility. During the Great Tribulation, God will grant 144,000 prophets miracle working powers so that their antagonistic message will be carefully and thoughtfully considered by people whose minds are dull and darkened by idolatry and sin.

Notice how God used this identical process during the days of Paul and Barnabas, **"So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there** [among the pagans in Iconium]**, speaking boldly for the Lord, *who confirmed the message of his grace* by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders."** (Acts 14:3, insertion mine, italics mine) Why did God give Paul and Barnabas miracle working powers? God gave these powers to Paul and Barnabas in Iconium to confirm the veracity of His messengers among the pagans.

"You Troubler of Israel"

During the third year of famine, Elijah could see that the famine was causing suffering which was overwhelming the whole land. Illness, malnutrition and death had decimated humanity and beasts. All the vegetation was either dead or dormant. Famine had swallowed up the land that once flowed with milk and honey. Elijah's heart was moved by the suffering of thousands of children. Starvation is a slow death and the untimely death of multitudes of sick people who wasted away with protracted suffering stirred Elijah's compassion.

The fact that he had asked for the famine that caused all this suffering and carnage troubled Elijah's conscience! Incredibly, in spite of the famine and the suffering it caused, Israel still did not repent. When *he* could tolerate the decimation of his people no longer, Elijah petitioned the Lord to send rain. James writes, **"Again he** [Elijah] **prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."** (James 5:18, insertion mine) This is a touching point.

Every now and then, God allows a human being to experience His dilemma. God knows all about pain. When God called Abraham to offer his cherished son, Isaac, on an altar, God

wanted Abraham to feel His own loss when He sacrificed His own dearly beloved Son on the cross. When God granted Elijah the power to control the famine in Israel, He also allowed Elijah to feel what He feels when He is left with no other remedy than to cause extreme suffering in getting humanity's attention. When Elijah had enough, he prayed for rain with the same intensity that he had prayed for famine.

The Bible says, **"After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: 'Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.' So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab . . ."** (1 Kings 18:1,2) As the famine continued, Elijah had become the most wanted man in Israel, dead or alive. In today's terms, Ahab and his cohorts regarded Elijah as a terrorist. To their way of thinking, Elijah had brought great harm to Israel.

Tens of thousands of people were dead and the survivors were quick to blame Elijah! Ahab wanted Elijah captured and ordered that he be put to death at any cost. When Ahab learned that Elijah wanted to see him, he was surprised! The king went immediately so that he could capture the prophet.

"When he saw Elijah, he said to him, 'Is that you, you troubler of Israel?' 'I have not made trouble for Israel,' Elijah replied. 'But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals.' " (1 Kings 18:17,18) As the king approached Elijah, Ahab spoke first, blaming him for Israel's misery. Elijah did not blink, neither did he patronize the king. He simply confronted the king with unvarnished truth.

At that moment, the king knew better than to lay hands on Elijah – he could sense that divine power rested upon the young man. More than three years of suffering kept the temperamental king from doing anything rash. Ahab had enough sense to realize that he was talking to a prophet of the Most High God who had control over the rain.

Think about this story for a minute. Who brought trouble upon Israel? Was it Ahab, Elijah or God? Ahab was exceedingly wicked, Elijah was vexed at Israel's apostasy, and God was angry with the degeneracy of the whole nation. In a sense, all three brought trouble upon Israel!

God wanted repentance and reformation, Elijah wanted the God of Abraham to be exalted, and Ahab wanted relief. The point is that God honored Elijah's prayer *because* Israel violated His covenant! This famine did not occur simply because Elijah asked for it, nor was it just an arbitrary act of God. This famine did not occur because God loved Elijah and hated Israel. God does not work that way. Punishment by famine was a clearly stated provision contained in the covenant given at Mt. Sinai.

When God honored Elijah's prayer, God was lawful and timely in doing so. Remember, this issue is also significant during the Great Tribulation. Famine is coming and the famine will be "just" because God is lawful in everything He does!

End Time Parallel

During the Great Tribulation, authorities will regard the 144,000 servants of God as "troublers of the nations." The 144,000 will be found throughout the world, each in his or her own land and tongue. (Presently, the approximate ratio is one of God's servants per 50,000 people.) As servants of God, they will be hated and hunted for the same reasons Elijah was hated and hunted: First, when God's servants exercise their miracle working powers, death and destruction will often follow.

Remember the plagues that Moses called down on Egypt? Remember when Jesus exorcized the demons out of the two men in Matthew 8? (The demons were sent into a herd of pigs, which ran over a cliff and drowned themselves. Therefore, the owners of the pigs blamed Jesus for the great financial loss they suffered.) Remember when Paul and Silas set a young slave girl free from demonic possession and her owners became furious? (Acts 16) In a similar way, the 144,000 will use their miracle working powers as they see fit to overthrow demonic control.

They will demolish foolish arguments and break the strongholds of demons with God's power! The 144,000 will anger people who love evil and people who are exposed by the 144,000 will hate them. People who try to lie to God, will be struck down by the Holy Spirit, just like Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5) God's servants will have awesome powers during their 1,260 days of empowerment. Please do not forget that God's servants will also perform miracles of healing and restoration.

God's servants will receive a lot of respect from those who love truth, but they will be hated by people who love evil. Jesus said, **"Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."** (John 3:20,21)

The second reason the 144,000 will be regarded as "troublers of the nations" during the Great Tribulation centers around their antagonistic testimony. Because the Great Tribulation begins with several deadly judgments from God (global earthquake, meteoric firestorms, two asteroid impacts, etc.), religious and political leaders in every nation will use their authority of martial law to appease God.

In other words, a time is coming when the religious and political leaders of the world will mandate the worship of God in hopes that He will be appeased and cease His horrific judgments. However, the 144,000 will proclaim God's truth with unvarnished clarity and their opposition to the laws of the land will anger authorities. Like Elijah, God's servants will be regarded as "troublers of the nations" during the end time and the authorities will hunt them down to be jailed or killed.

The Showdown

Back to Elijah's story: When King Ahab approached the young prophet, Elijah did not enter into a conversation with Ahab. There was nothing to discuss. Elijah spoke to the king as though he were a servant. He said, **" 'Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on**

Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.' So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel." (1 Kings 18:19,20) When the hand of God rests upon a person, smart kings pay attention! In this case, the prophet gave the orders and the king obeyed.

When the appointed day came, thousands of people gathered on Mount Carmel for a showdown between Baal and Jehovah. Consider the scene: There stood the king with his 850 false prophets. Elijah, however, stood alone. For three and a half years the prophets of Baal and Asherah had been unable to produce rain!Now, on the mountain top, would Baal respond to the corporate invocation of his prophets to prove his superiority over Jehovah? From a human interest point of view, the contest must have been very interesting to watch. On one side stood 850 prophets holding up religious icons, smoking censers and wearing imposing priestly regalia.

On the other side stood a country boy from Tishbe wearing the course garment of a poor man. **"Elijah went before the people and said, 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.' But the people said nothing. Then Elijah said to them, 'I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire – he is God.' Then all the people said, 'What you say is good.' Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, 'Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not** [deceitfully] **light the fire.' "** (1 Kings 18:21-25, insertion mine)

The prophets of Baal could not weasel out of Elijah's offer or the people would have understood the deception and stoned them. **"So they** [the prophets of Baal] **took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. 'O Baal, answer us!' they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. 'Shout louder!' he said. 'Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.' So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention."** (1 Kings 18:26-30, insertion mine)

Can you imagine how disgusted the people must have been after watching their 850 prophets spend the whole day dancing and shouting – and after it was all said and done, there was not even a spark!

Have you ever seen a person forced into the admission that his religion was false? False religion is vanity, a figment of fallen imagination. Carnal man needs God, but he prefers a god that condones carnal behavior! False religion appeals to the carnal nature because it offers loopholes to justify sin and wrong doing.

The carnal heart is inherently opposed to God's commandments. (Romans 8) The carnal mind thinks nothing of blaspheming God and usurping His authority. The carnal heart does not hesitate to trash God's wisdom by presumptuously thinking it knows more than God and how things ought to be done. False religion accommodates the carnal heart, making it always popular with the masses.

When Jeroboam installed a foreign religion within Israel, the nation went along with the religion because the majority of the nation's population was carnal in nature. When Elijah put the priests of Baal to the test on Mount Carmel, he knew a showdown would not change the hearts of the vast majority of the people. However, he hoped that by proving Baal to be a false god, some people might repent and humbly submit to God's authority.

Elijah's Turn

"Then Elijah said to all the people, 'Come here to me.' They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which was in ruins. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, 'Your name shall be Israel.'

With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs [about 3.25 gallons] **of seed. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, 'Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.' 'Do it again,' he said, and they did it again. 'Do it a third time,' he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. At the time of** [the evening] **sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: 'O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.' Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The Lord** [Jehovah]**—he is God! The Lord [Jehovah]—he is God!' "** (1 Kings 18:30-39, insertions mine)

Elijah was a man of faith. He not only depended on the Lord's response to his prayer, but his faith also anticipated God's response. The bolt of fire that fell from Heaven proved Baal was a false god in a split second. No words were needed. Even Ahab was speechless. What else could the people say except that "The Lord – He is God." **"Then Elijah commanded them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!' They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there."** (1 Kings 18:40)

The only way to eliminate the influence of false religion is to destroy its preachers. (Of course, the same will be said of God's servants during the Great Tribulation. See John 16.) When the people affirmed that Jehovah was God, Elijah lawfully ordered the execution of the prophets of Baal on the basis of God's authority in Deuteronomy 13.

"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you." (Deuteronomy 13:1-5)

Critical End Time Parallel

The fire-from-Heaven display in Elijah's day has a critical end time parallel. In fact, the primary reason for this study on Elijah centers on this fire-from-Heaven parallel. Here is the problem: A time is coming when the devil [the Antichrist] will be allowed to appear on Earth. He will masquerade as God and to prove His assumed divinity, the devil will do many miracles, signs and wonders.

His crowning deception will be his ability to call fire down from Heaven in full view of men! Notice this text: **"And he** [the lamb-like beast] **performed great and miraculous signs, *even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men*. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth** [into thinking he was Almighty God.] **He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived."** (Revelation 13:13,14, insertions and italics mine)

Why is fire-from-Heaven a problem? The problem is that God's servants *will not* be able to respond to this deception! This miracle will trump any miracle which God's servants will be allowed to do. This is God's plan and here is an explanation:

During the Great Tribulation, there will be "a showdown of gods." According to Bible prophecy, the setting for this showdown unfolds like this: A series of devastating judgments from God will cause the Great Tribulation. About 1.5 billion people will be killed by the initial wave of these judgments. At that time, God's 144,000 servants will be empowered to proclaim the gospel (the terms and conditions of salvation).

The 144,000 will testify of the coming kingdom of Christ. The religious and political leaders of each nation will form a crisis government and in an attempt to appease the wrath of Almighty God, they will impose a series of laws upon the inhabitants within each respective nation. These laws will require people to honor and worship God. During this time, the 144,000 will also command the human race to worship God, but the worship required by the laws of men will be contrary to the law of God. This is the setting – a great controversy over worship during the Great Tribulation.

The gospel of Jesus Christ will put the 144,000 servants of God and their followers in a position that will be at odds with the religions and governments of the world. People who accept the gospel presented by the 144,000 will be punished and persecuted for rebelling against the laws of the land.

During the first thirty months of the Great Tribulation, the gospel will go powerfully throughout the world. Most of the world will hear and make a decision about the everlasting gospel. After most of the people have rejected the gospel, the showdown of gods then occurs. It happens this way: God permits the devil [the Antichrist] and his angels to *physically* appear on Earth. Remember, a majority of the world **will have heard and rejected** the truth about the worship which God requires.

Study the words of Paul: **"They** [the majority] **perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."** (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, insertion mine) This verse indicates two things: First, the people of Earth "refused to love the truth." Obviously, you cannot refuse something you have not heard or do not understand.

So, Paul is talking about willful defiance. Second, because people have defiantly rejected truth, God sends a powerful delusion! Why does God send a powerful delusion to the wicked?

God allows the devil to physically appear before the people of Earth because God wants the world to see whom they are actually worshiping if they refuse to worship God. God uses the devil, who masquerades as God, to separate His sheep from the goats. People who love truth and righteousness will worship God.

Those who defy God will be deceived by the fire-from-Heaven miracle, thinking the devil is God! **"Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the Earth . . ."** (Revelation 13:14)

An Angel of Light

When Satan appears on Earth claiming to be God, his radiant countenance will so dazzle the people of Earth that many will believe his claims that he is God based on his appearance alone. Paul says, **". . . for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."** (2 Corinthians 11:14) Revelation states that when Satan appears, he will be so dazzling that most people will be awestruck when they actually see him! John writes, **". . . The inhabitants of the Earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be *astonished* when they see the beast . . ."** (Revelation 17:8, italics mine.)

Satan Works Miracles, Signs and Wonders

Satan's first work after appearing "in the flesh" as a magnificent God-man will be to convince the world that he is divine – that he is actually God. Paul warns, **"Don't let anyone deceive you in**

any way, for that day (the second coming) will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God . . . The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." (2 Thessalonians 2:3,4,9,10)

Calls Fire Down Out of Heaven

The one miracle that Satan will use above all others to convince the wicked that he is God will be to call fire down out of Heaven at will! Because God does not allow His 144,000 servants to call fire down from Heaven, the devil's use of this miracle will make his deception secure for billions of people. John says, **"And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to Earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the Earth . . . ."** (Revelation 13:13,14)

Satan will make every effort to deceive the world into believing that He alone is worthy of worship. This is why God grants the devil the power to call fire down from Heaven. If I summarize what God might say, perhaps He would express the problem this way: If men and women refuse to love and obey the clearest evidences of truth and if they refuse to honor me as their Creator and Redeemer, then I will grant them their evil and rebellious desires. I will send them the "father of rebellion." Let them chase after their miracles instead of truth.

Since humanity loves lies more than truth, I will grant Lucifer, the father of lies, the power to perform the ultimate miracle. The wicked will see fire fall from Heaven upon command and they will receive this miracle as "proof of divinity." By doing this, the wicked will worship and receive Satan as their god of choice and seal their eternal fate.

Then the Rain Came

In Elijah's day, the famine proved that Baal could not send water from Heaven. The all-day service on Mount Carmel also proved that Baal could not send fire from Heaven. The verdict was clear, Baal was no god. Baal was merely a figment of foolish imagination. No doubt, some of the older people remembered the words of the covenant that had been spoken at Mount Sinai.

The Lord said, **"If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land."** (Leviticus 26:3-5) Everyone knew that day that Israel's apostasy and Israel's famine were inseparably linked. In the last days, people who love truth will understand this linkage during the

Great Tribulation.

After the evening service was completed, **"Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.' So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. 'Go and look toward the sea,' he told his servant. And he went up and looked. 'There is nothing there,' he said. Seven times Elijah said, 'Go back.' The seventh time the servant reported, 'A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea.' So Elijah said, 'Go and tell Ahab, "Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you." ' Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the Lord came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way** [about twenty miles] **to Jezreel."**(1 Kings 18:41-46, insertion mine)

Ahab and his entourage must have been astonished to see Elijah outrun their horses all the way to Jezreel! What man can outrun horses for twenty miles?

When Elijah climbed to the top of the mountain to ask for rain, the Lord did not respond to His servant immediately. God tested the faith and endurance of Elijah just like He tested the faith and endurance of Moses when Moses struck the rock. Elijah's faith did not wane. He kept pressing his petition to the Lord to send rain. There is an important parallel for all of us in this story. It is our privilege to press our heartfelt petitions before the Lord and there is good news! God responds. I believe there is a lot of confusion about the purpose and privilege of prayer among Christians. Here are ten short statements to consider:

1. Prayer does not entice God to do things that are not in our best interest.
2. Prayer does not give God permission to do things. God is sovereign.
3. Prayer does not nullify the cause and effect laws that God created because of sin.
4. Prayer does not make God love us more.
5. God will not violate the will of another person because of intercessory prayer.
6. The highest motive for prayer is to be used by God, not to use God.
7. God responds in some way to *every* sincere prayer. Sometimes, it takes a while to figure out how He is responding or how He responded.
8. God closes His ears to our prayers if we defy the convictions of the Holy Spirit.
9. Frequent prayer changes us, not God. Prayer opens our hearts and minds to the greater and wiser will of God. Through prayer God gives us strength to better reflect His character of love when we are tested. Through prayer God gives us courage and peace to trust in His control over matters that are beyond our control. One of the hardest things to believe is that God is intimately involved when everything is going wrong in our life. Prayer can transform doubt into trust.
10. Sometimes, in response to a specific petition, God will dramatically alter the natural outcome of an event to make a statement. (We call these acts of God, "miracles.") But to remain fair to the millions of suffering people who pray for miracles every day, God does not casually alter the rules which He ordained by violating the cause and effect rules. If the cause and effect rules were violated frequently in the universe, there would be unintelligible chaos everywhere! Think about this. If God frequently violated the cause and effect rules, miracles would not be recognized because no one would know if God

had averted a natural consequence or not. Everything favorable would be a miracle and everything unfavorable would also be a miracle, so miracles would not have the amazing effect they have on people today.

I believe the Lord waited to send rain until Elijah prayed seven times in order to humble His servant. God had publicly exalted Elijah, as no other prophet, when He sent fire from Heaven at Elijah's request. Now, God humbled His prophet on the same day by making Him beg for rain. The never-to-be-forgotten point here is that God is not our servant. He is forever God and we never rise higher, even on Mount Carmel, than the position of servant. Elijah was an ordinary man who became great because Elijah's God was great.

Epilog

"Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, 'May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.' Elijah was afraid and ran for his life." (1 Kings 19:1-3)

This study has to close and I could not think of a better stopping place than Elijah running from Jezebel. After running faster than horses for the twenty miles to Jezreel, the prophet probably felt his best defense against Jezebel was running for his life. The contradiction within mankind, even in God's servants, is bravery and boldness for one problem versus weakness and anxiety. May God help us realize that unless we are filled with His presence and strength each day – our flesh is weak, very weak.

John the Baptizer - Cousin of Jesus

Author: Larry W. Wilson

John the Baptist is not the Apostle John

In the previous issue of *Day Star,* we found several end-time parallels in the story of Elijah. This month we will examine the life of **John the Baptist** where we will also find two interesting end-time parallels. It is fitting that we examine John''s life after studying Elijah, because John and Elijah have several things in common.

For example, when it came to speaking boldly against sin, both men were singularly notorious in their day. Both men challenged an apostate church-state system. Both men rose out of obscurity.

Both men grew up in the desert wilderness. Both men were not formally educated nor were any of their writings preserved for us to read. Exceptional Holy Spirit power filled both men and God granted both of them the honor of seeing Jesus with their own eyes!

Some people confuse John the Baptist with the apostle John. They are not the same person. John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus and about ten or twelve years older than the apostle John. The apostle John wrote the Gospel of John, three epistles that bear his name and the Book of Revelation, whereas John the Baptist wrote none of the books found in the Bible.

John’s birth (like that of Isaac) was a miraculous event because his parents were of an advanced age. The Bible record indicates that John''s father was a Levite priest named Zachariah and his mother’s name was Elizabeth. Like the prophet Jeremiah, God chose John, gave him a name, and ordained him as a prophet *before* he was even born! (Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:13-17)

Even more, Jesus selected John to be His forerunner before either of them were born!

To stretch your mind even further, Jesus not only chose Mary and Joseph as His parents, but He also chose Zachariah and Elizabeth to be John''s parents. Because Zachariah and Elizabeth were too old to have children, John''s miracle birth gave added credibility to his message when he began his ministry and became known as the Baptizer.

John was born in the hill country of Judea, but he spent most of his life in the solitude of the desert wilderness. Evidently, his elderly parents died when he was a young man. As in the life of Moses, the wilderness prepared John for his difficult mission.

John carefully studied the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit led him to understand many prophecies in the Old Testament that pointed to the appearing of Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom. John discovered that Messiah would appear *at the beginning* of the seventieth week, which is mentioned in Daniel 9.

Therefore, in the Spring of A.D. 27, at the beginning of the seventieth week of seven years, John began proclaiming *the year had come* for the Messiah to appear and He would establish His kingdom shortly. (Matthew 3:2,11; Luke 3; see also the comments of Jesus in Mark 1:15; Luke 4:18,19)

Of course, the Jews ridiculed John for his beliefs, but many of them listened to John and believed his testimony. There is no record of John the Baptist ever performing any miracles, but many people still regarded him as a prophet of God. (Matthew 14:5)

The Ritual of Baptism

There is an interesting history behind John's title, "John the Baptist." Of course, the title, "the Baptist," was not part of John's name at birth nor was he a member of the Baptist Church, as some Christians naively believe. John lived and died as a Jew.

He was among the few in Israel that believed Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. When John began his public ministry, he became notorious for doing something considered very strange. John insisted on baptizing *Jews* in the Jordan River.

Typically, Jews were not the ones baptized, because they were the descendants of Abraham *by birth*. Conversely, they baptized the Gentiles as "a pledge of allegiance" when they wished to become sons of Abraham. (Few Gentiles converted to Judaism in those days, so baptisms by the priests were scarce. Matthew 23:15)

The Jews regarded the baptism of a Gentile as both a mystical and a practical experience. In a mystical sense, the Jews believed a Gentile's past was "washed away" when he or she was immersed in the river, and emerging from the water, became a new son or daughter of Abraham!

Today, baptism, like the marriage ceremony, is a public declaration. In baptism, you demonstrate your allegiance to God and to the principles of His kingdom before witnesses.

In marriage, you state your allegiance to your spouse before witnesses. Even though the origin of baptism is uncertain, baptism symbolized to Israel its experience as a nation. When God delivered Israel from Egypt (the old life of slavery), they had to pass through the waters of the Jordan River (immersed in the river) and when they emerged from the water, they inherited the Promised Land (the birth of a new nation).

When the Jews baptized a Gentile, they *adopted* him into one of the twelve tribes and his name and they entered the date of his baptism into the genealogical records of Israel.

When John began preaching that Messiah was about to appear and set up His kingdom, John insisted that baptism was a necessary pledge of allegiance. In effect, John was preaching that Jews, yes Jews, needed to convert to *a new and better* religion – a religion centered on the worship of Messiah instead of the slaughter of animals. (The old religion of slaughtering animals

was about to disappear.)

John understood that salvation from sin required an atonement which animals could not satisfy.

When Jesus appeared on the banks of the Jordan River in the Fall of A.D. 27 for baptism, the Holy Spirit gave John utterance and he cried out, **"Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29, KJV)

Why Was Jesus Baptized?

Many people are puzzled that Jesus asked John to baptize Him. Did Jesus need to have His sins washed away? No. Jesus never sinned. (Hebrews 4:15) Did Jesus need to repent of rebellion against His Father in Heaven? No. Jesus and the Father are one in spirit and truth. (John 10:30) Did Jesus have to be born again? No. Jesus did not have a carnal nature. (Colossians 2:9) Then why did Jesus request to be baptized?

Jesus submitted Himself to be baptized by John for two reasons. First, Jesus was born "under law" (Galatians 4:4) and He was subject to the Levitical system He was about to end. (Hebrews 7) By His death on the cross, Jesus terminated the entire Levitical system.

After His resurrection, Jesus planned to establish a new world order on Earth and a new kingdom based on a new and much better covenant. At just the right time, John appeared in the desert proclaiming the arrival of Messiah and His coming kingdom.

John's call to be baptized was an invitation to be part of the new order; it was a pledge of allegiance. *Jesus submitted to John's baptism to declare His loyalty to the principles of His coming kingdom.* This is a profound point about the character of God. The Omniscient Creator of the Universe, is subject to His own laws. Jesus is not arbitrary nor dictatorial. If He were, God would be inconsistent and chaos would fill the universe. God loves order and where there is moral order, there is a rule of law.

Jesus told the timid Nicodemus, **". . . I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."** (John 3:5) Some people distort the words of Jesus to mean that unless a person is baptized he or she cannot be saved. This is not so.

Many circumstances can prevent a person from being baptized. For instance, the thief on the cross was not baptized in his final moments of life, yet he sincerely surrendered his life to Jesus and the Lord Himself assured him of salvation.

Furthermore, the Bible clearly teaches that works or rituals do not save us. (Ephesians 2:8,9) We are saved through our faith in Jesus. When a person lives by faith, he or she is willing to go, to be and to do all that God asks, without compromise.

A life of faith is demonstrated by a loyal life. However, even if a person is baptized, it does not necessarily guarantee salvation. (Matthew 7:20-23) Baptism – like marriage vows – is a public

declaration of loyalty and God requires them for our benefit! Public declarations provide a way to tell others who we are and what we stand for.

For the person who believes in Christ, baptism symbolizes the death and burial of their carnal nature and the resurrection of a new person controlled by a spiritual nature. (John 3 and Matthew 28) Paul elaborates on the beauty of this concept in Romans 6-8. In submitting to John's baptism, Jesus declared His loyalty to the principles of God's coming kingdom. God loves order and where there is order, there is law.

Second, *Jesus was baptized because He does not ask His followers to do something that He has not done first. He is our example.* Remember, Jesus stooped to wash the feet of His disciples and He commanded them to do the same to each other. **"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him."** (John 13:14-16)

Jesus chose baptism, not because He had a carnal past to wash away, but to give us an example of stepping out of our inherited religion and joining in His inheritance!

Jesus affirmed with His baptism that everyone – Jew and Gentile alike – must declare allegiance to the kingdom of God. Baptism is a public declaration of one's loyalty to God and the principles of His kingdom! Baptism is to God's people what the mark of the beast will be for those who worship the Antichrist during the Great Tribulation.

Just before Jesus returned to Heaven, He told His disciples, **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matthew 28:19,20) In a practical way, baptism is *an event* that separates yesterday from tomorrow.

Baptism declares severance – the old life is over and a new life has begun. Baptism should reflect an inner transformation – from unbeliever to believer – from a carnal person to a spiritual person – from dominion by the sinful nature to dominion by the spiritual nature – from being a part of this world to being a part of the world to come.

King James Translators

Because of his urgent message and his strange insistence that *Jews* be baptized into the coming kingdom of God, John the Baptist became known in the Greek language as "John, the one who immerses." The Greek word *baptizo* means to immerse or dunk.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the meaning of *baptizo* presented a problem for the translators of the King James version of the Bible. Most Christians did not practice baptism by immersion in the seventeenth century.

Instead, the ceremony of baptism came to mean the sprinkling of water, most often, the sprinkling of infants soon after birth. (**Note:** The Church of Rome concluded around the third century A.D. that a person could not be saved unless he or she underwent the ritual of baptism.

Since infant mortality was very high in those days, the practice of infant baptism became necessary to insure that all children would be saved. Centuries later, many Protestants carried this doctrine with them when they left the Catholic Church.)

The translators realized they could not translate the Greek word *baptizo* as immersing or dunking without causing a big theological problem for the king, so they chose to transliterate *baptizo* rather than translate it. By placing the English word "baptize" in the Bible without explaining the meaning as the act of immersing or dunking, everyone could interpret baptism as he thought best. The translators also transliterated John's title to "John the Baptist" instead of "John, the one who immerses."

First End-Time Parallel

There are some important end-time parallels associated with John the Baptist. First, the role John the Baptist played as the First Advent approached will be the same role the 144,000 will fulfill as Second Advent approaches. As we continue to examine John's ministry, please keep this in mind.

During the Great Tribulation, God will use 144,000 "Baptizing Johns" to announce the timely appearing of the King of kings and the Lord of lords and the establishment of His kingdom!

The 144,000 will come from every race, language, religion and nation. Assuming there are six billion people on Earth when the Great Tribulation begins, the ratio of God's servants to the population of Earth will be approximately one per 50,000 people.

Assuming God's servants are evenly distributed over the world during the Great Tribulation, China would have about 29,000 of the 144,000, India would have about 28,000 of the 144,000 and the United States would have about 7,000 servants of God. Of course, God will insure that every nation has enough "baptizing Johns" to accomplish the gospel commission during the Great Tribulation.

Elijah-type People

Notice the words of Malachi: **"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."** (Malachi 4:5,6) The prophet Malachi gave this prophecy about 350 years before the birth of Jesus. Jewish leaders during the time of Christ were not certain of its meaning, but they did know two things.

First, they knew that God took Elijah to Heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2). Second, they knew

that the great and dreadful day of the Lord was still in the future. (Joel 2, Obadiah 1, Isaiah 13 and Ezekiel 30) The Jews in Christ's day believed that the great and dreadful day of the Lord came in a two-part installment.

The *great part* would be their exaltation as a nation and the *dreadful part* would be the destruction of their enemies – which by inference were God's enemies. This was the egocentric mind set of the Jewish leaders regarding Malachi 4 when John the Baptist began to preach in the desert.

Many people were drawn to the wilderness to hear John's compelling message because he spoke with unusual clarity and penetrating power. His preaching brought hope, but it also caused fear. When he preached about the imminent appearing of the Messiah, John's careful explanation of the prophecies brought hope to the hopeless.

When he preached about God's love and His willingness to save sinners, there was joy. However, when he preached about God's wrath toward sin, John's sobering words caused people seriously to reflect on their lives and fear often filled the hearts of those present.

People listened and asked, "Who was worthy to receive the salvation of God?" The Holy Spirit's presence and power gave John's words depth and scorching relevance. *All people who listened to John felt the unseen, but obvious presence of the Holy Spirit* – it could be compared with the experience of standing in the authoritative presence of Elijah on Mount Carmel.

With this compelling power and the evidence of Scripture to back his words, John warned men and women to repent or be destroyed. The options were simple. John insisted upon heartfelt repentance, full restitution and baptism for everyone. There could be no love for sin in the coming kingdom of God.

One day, after preaching to a large crowd, John began to answer questions. Notice his answers:

"The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. 'What should we do then?' the crowd asked. John answered, 'The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.'

Tax collectors also came to be baptized. 'Teacher,' they asked, 'what should we do?' 'Don't collect any more than you are required to,' he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, 'And what should we do?' He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.' " (Luke 3:9-14)

John taught that God's kingdom would coexist with a world of evil kingdoms for a time. Eventually, there would be a purified Earth. I can think of at least three reasons why John's message was believable. First, it was based on Scripture. Second, John's message was timely.

He showed from the prophecies that the time had come for the appearing of Messiah. Third, the

Holy Spirit gave John's words great power, clarity and effectiveness. If a person listened, he or she could not help but be moved – either into submission or rejection.

One day, some scribes and Pharisees came, presented themselves before John and asked him to baptize them – just in case John's predictions might come true. Of course, they had no intention of humbling themselves to do what John was proclaiming and be right in God's sight. The Holy Spirit enabled John to see their pretense and his response was harsh. **". . . You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath** [of God]**?"** (Matthew 3:7, insertion mine)

God's Timing

Let there be no mistake – the appearing of John the Baptist was a prophetic fulfillment. His single purpose – assigned before birth – was to prepare people for the coming of the Lord, Jesus Christ. The appearing of John the Baptist should have put the priests on notice that Messiah was not far behind!

For centuries, the Jews had discussed the promise of a Deliverer and in John's day, the promise was so old that many people had begun to question its truthfulness, as if God had forgotten!

At the time of John, the nation of Israel was in trouble because Rome had removed Archelaus, the son of wicked Herod, and many Jews had died during the revolt. The iron hand of Rome rested heavy upon the neck of Israel. The Romans occupied Jerusalem and the occupation provoked their mutual hatred of each other. This tiny tribal Jewish nation, within the vast Roman empire, desperately needed a Savior.

Then came John. Imagine the interest he aroused when he began to preach about the imminent appearing of the Savior. The Bible says, **"The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ."** (Luke 3:15) At this moment in history, people were filled with expectancy.

This expectancy soared as John explained Daniel 9 to his audiences. Daniel 9 predicted that the Messiah would appear in the 484th year after the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. (Daniel 9:25)

John explained how 69 weeks had expired since the decree of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem (457 B.C.). Therefore the actual year for the appearing of Messiah had come and God would establish His kingdom soon afterwards. Many Jews began seriously to consider the possibility of John being the Messiah.

The number of people visiting the wilderness to see John continued to escalate. Concerned, the Sanhedrin sent a deputation of priests to investigate this mysterious man and his message. Note their words: **"Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed**

freely, 'I am not the Christ.' They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet [predicted by Moses]**?' He answered, 'No.' Finally they said, 'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the desert, Make straight the way for the Lord.' "** (John 1:19-23, insertion mine) Did you notice the order of their questions? Did you notice who the priests were expecting? What they believed about Malachi's prophecy prompted their questions.

Why Must Elijah Appear?

Israel's religious leaders talked openly and frequently about the coming of Elijah, although verifying Elijah's identity was always the subject of many discussions. For example, they wondered how they could distinguish someone who may be masquerading as Elijah from the true Elijah, especially if the false Elijah performed miracles?

Would Elijah come down from Heaven in a fiery chariot? Would Elijah appear in the body of a human being? If Elijah came as an ordinary man, how could they positively identify him?

After Peter, James and John had seen Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, they had positive proof that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. They were anxious to share what they had seen, but Jesus forbade them to reveal this information until after His resurrection.

He knew that these claims from His disciples would limit His effectiveness among the Jews. (Matthew 17:9) But, the transfiguration of Jesus did raise a prophetic issue. The disciples wondered why Elijah had not appeared, since this is what Malachi predicted. The disciples knew that John the Baptist was not Elijah. John had clearly denied he was Elijah.

Trying to reconcile the transfiguration experience of Jesus with the prophecy of Malachi, they asked the Master, **". . . 'Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?' Jesus replied, 'To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist."** (Matthew 17:10-12)

These verses contain more substance than most people realize. First, Jesus affirms the validity of Malachi's prophecy saying, **"To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things."** Then, Jesus said, **"Elijah has already come and they did not recognize him."** Even though the disciples understood that Jesus was speaking about John the Baptist, they were still puzzled. They had just seen Moses and Elijah, yet Jesus was saying that John the Baptist was Elijah. Here is the problem:

If You Are Willing to Accept It . . .

A few months before the transfiguration of Jesus occurred, King Herod had arrested and

imprisoned John the Baptist because John had offended him. The arrogant king had taken his brother's wife, Herodias, to be his own and John the Baptist told Herod that he had committed a grievous sin.

Of course, Herod did not want to hear the truth and Herodias was shamed. Herod was so furious with John that he wanted John killed. However, Herod was not stupid. He knew that the people regarded John as a prophet and Herod did not want to jeopardize his position as king by starting another Jewish uprising that might reach the ears of Caesar.

So, Herod did the next best thing and put John in prison. From the silence of his prison cell, John began to reflect on his life's mission, his teachings and beliefs. Yes, Jesus had appeared right on time and Jesus had begun His ministry just as John had predicted.

Yet, he could not understand why Jesus had not declared Himself to be the Messiah, nor had He done anything to establish the kingdom of God! In the darkness of that prison cell, it did not seem to John like events were unfolding as the Scriptures predicted.

Lonely, cold and troubled, John began to question some of his beliefs and his ministry. When some of his disciples came to visit, he asked them to ask Jesus a pointed question.

"When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?' Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.' " (Matthew 11:2-6)

Jesus answered John's question with veiled language.

He knew John was a keen student of the Scriptures, and so Jesus answered John's disciples with words from Isaiah 61. He also knew that His affirming response would give John the assurance he needed to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Other people who were present had no idea that Jesus' response was affirming that He was the Messiah.

Jesus knew it was not time to make this public disclosure. In fact, it was Jesus' desire to keep this fact hidden until He was resurrected, knowing that premature promotion of His identity would thwart His mission. (Matthew 17:9)

"As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see?

A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. *This is the one about whom it is written:* "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not *risen anyone greater than John the Baptist*; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.

For all the Prophets and the Law [the Scriptures] **prophesied until** [about the appearing of] **John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.' "** (Matthew 11:7-14, insertions and italics mine)

In response to John's request, Jesus quoted Malachi 3:1. In this passage, it indicates that God would send a messenger to announce the appearing of Messiah and Jesus was assuring John the Baptist that he was that messenger. Jesus clearly told the crowd that John was "the Elijah to come." However, Jesus phrased His declaration in an interesting way, **"if you are willing to accept it. . . ."**

Why did Jesus say it this way? Jesus had been on Earth long enough to know that "the great day of the Lord" mentioned in Malachi 4 was not going to happen during His lifetime on Earth. In fact, Jesus knew that establishing His kingdom on Earth would not be possible.

Said another way, Jesus was saying to His disciples, *if you can accept this by faith, John the Baptist would have been the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5,6* ***if*** *the nation of Israel had been faithful to the terms and conditions set forth in Daniel 9!*

"Plan A" – "Plan B"

The fulfillment of Malachi 4:5,6 is inseparably connected to "the great day of the Lord." Since "the great day of the Lord" has not happened, some people believe Malachi 4:5,6 still awaits fulfillment. I do not believe this is the case. If the reader can accept the following two statements, there is a simple explanation for the prophecy of Malachi 4:5,6:

1. - Israel knew the redemptive conditions outlined in the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel 9. If they had met these conditions, the plan of salvation and "the great day of the Lord" would have been completed long ago. All of the Old Testament prophecies given by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Amos, Ezekiel, Malachi and others would have been fulfilled just *as they were written*.

"The great day of the Lord" would have happened shortly after the end of the seventieth week if Israel had met the conditions God set forth in Daniel 9. In other words, if Israel had satisfied these conditions, John the Baptist would have fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 4 to the letter and that would have been the end of the story.

2. - Since Israel failed, God's plan for Israel and the establishment of His kingdom on Earth was not implemented at the end of the seventieth week – simply put, Israel rejected the Messiah. This is a profound point: A person must have a Messiah's heart to accept the teachings and truths taught by the Messiah. For this reason, we must be born again. Most of the people in Israel rejected and crucified the Messiah because they did not have a Messiah's heart.

The character and principles of the Messiah's kingdom were foreign to the people of Israel and

they rejected Him. Because God's original plan could not be fulfilled, the prophecies of the Old Testament ("Plan A") **were made null and void**.

To keep His promise and the covenant He made with Abraham, God made several changes. First, He redefined Israel. Everyone who now receives Christ is an heir of Abraham. In Christ, racial origin has no meaning. (Galatians 3:28,29) Second, Jesus raised up new trustees of the gospel.

These trustees became known as Christians. (Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 11:26) Third, God established a new prophetic schematic that is found in the book of Revelation. I call this is new course of action "Plan B." There are many parallels between "Plan A" and "Plan B," **but** these parallels are separate and distinct.

One cannot merge "Plan A" events into a "Plan B" schematic. For example, under "Plan A," Messiah would have governed His kingdom from the City of David, e.g., Jerusalem.

Under "Plan B" Jesus will govern His kingdom from His throne in *New* Jerusalem. (Revelation 22:3) The point is that the appearing of Elijah, predicted in Malachi 3 and 4, was connected to "the great day of the Lord" which was supposed to happen soon after the first advent of Messiah.

However, after the Jews rejected Christ, God scrapped "Plan A" due to Israel's failure to meet the conditions placed upon them in Daniel 9. However, a parallel of Malachi's prophecy remains. The parallel ("Plan B") is found in Revelation 7. The heralds that will appear before "the great day of the Lord" will be 144,000 servants of God!

The Spirit and Power of Elijah

Notice what the angel said about John the Baptist before his birth. **"But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. *He is never to take wine or other fermented drink*, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' "** (Luke 1:13-17, italics mine)

It is interesting that God forbade this all-important herald of Jesus from drinking anything that would alter his mind. God's servants must be filled with the Holy Spirit, not a bottle of spirits.

God gave John the spirit and power of Elijah so he could *turn* the hearts of fathers toward their children and the disobedient toward the wisdom of the righteous – to make a group of people ready for the Lord's coming. How did John do this? John's message explained God's love for sinners, but simultaneously called sin by its right name.

John condemned fathers for bringing children into the world, only to shirk their God-given responsibility to be a loving father and a noble mentor for their children. John also condemned fathers and mothers for their spiritual neglect.

John used Israel's history of apostasy to prove how nations degenerate rapidly, especially if parents do not teach and demonstrate to their children the importance of loving and obeying God. Fathers had been lax about being spiritual role models and they had neglected to maintain the family altar.

Furthermore, they had abdicated their parental responsibilities to religious schools and others. The Holy Spirit's powerful conviction fell upon those who listened. Many fathers repented of their sins, transformed their ways and were baptized! Remember, John was not conducting a baptismal campaign and counting heads. He was preaching a life-transforming gospel that bore fruit and baptism by John was a pledge of allegiance.

John did not neglect to speak to the youth, either. After all, John was a single young man himself – only 30 years of age. As young people listened, the boldness and penetration of his message impressed them. John minced no words when he pointed out that most youth were unfit to participate in the coming kingdom of God.

Their rebellion against their parents and teachers made them essentially worthless for the purposes of God. John was firm, but kind. John used the circumstances surrounding his own birth to impress young people that God had a purpose for each life, but that purpose could be fulfilled only when God had dominion in the heart.

He reminded the youth that God did not agree with their focus on pleasure and the acquisition of money. John's abstemious life in the desert reflected a high calling, and I am sure he asked, "Where are those willing to forsake the world and serve God?"

Malachi 4 and Revelation 7

The parallel between the promise of Elijah ("Plan A") and the appearing of the 144,000 ("Plan B") awaits fulfillment. Revelation reveals the identity of Elijah for our generation! Revelation reveals there will be 144,000 servants of God who will have the spirit and power of Elijah.

This is the *next* prophetic event. Revelation also tells us that God is holding back the four winds of His wrath until His Elijah servants are prepared and ready to do their work. Revelation also reveals that God will empower the Elijah messengers for 1,260 days.

Most (if not all) of the 144,000 will be martyrs for Christ, just as John the Baptist became a martyr for the cause of Christ. The martyrdom of John brings up a good point. Notice the text:

"Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: 'It is not lawful for you to have her.' Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for them and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, 'Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.'

The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother." (Matthew 14:3-11)

Through the years, several people have asked why God did not rescue John the Baptist from prison, like He rescued Peter. (Remember, an angel came and released Peter from chains while his guards slept. Acts 12) Why did God allow the wicked Herodias and the even more detestable Herod to kill one of the greatest prophets?

The best answer I can find is this: When Israel apparently would not accept Jesus as the Messiah and it became impossible for Jesus to establish His kingdom on Earth, the Father allowed John the Baptist to be killed, rather than suffer the humiliation and ridicule of being called a false prophet.

If John the Baptist had lived to be as old as Methuselah (969 years), the things he predicted at the Jordan River would not have happened. This is year 2002 and still these events have not occurred, nor will they ever come to pass!

The provisions given under "Plan A" are dead. John was not a false prophet. The truth he preached was conditional. Israel rejected "Plan A" and God abandoned them. The good news is that "Plan B" is unconditional. All that God has said will happen *at the appointed time*. (Revelation 9:15 shows one example of this.) The Second Coming and the establishment of God's kingdom ("Plan B") is not dependant upon human cooperation.

During the Great Tribulation, the 144,000 will accomplish their mission. **"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."** (Matthew 24:14)

The gospel will be preached to everyone before the end of the world comes, but most of the 144,000 will perish for speaking God's truth before the Second Coming occurs! (Revelation 11:7) John the Baptist was murdered for condemning sin, Jesus was murdered for condemning sin, and the 144,000 will suffer the same fate.

Is the servant greater than the Master? Understand the powers of good and evil: Those who love sin hate the truth, and they will do everything they can to eliminate the condemnation of sin *except to repent*!

People who love truth will do everything they can to remain loyal to it, even if allegiance brings death. Jesus warned, **"Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."** (John 3:20,21)

The Highest Authority

There is one last point in this study that I would like you to consider. When Jesus stood before Pilate, He gave a powerful revelation to Pilate. Consider these words, **"Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.' When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify! Crucify!' But Pilate answered, 'You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.' The Jews insisted, 'We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.' When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. 'Where do you come from?' he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. 'Do you refuse to speak to me?' Pilate said. 'Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?' Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."** (John 19:4-11)

Reread the words of Jesus in the last two sentences again. Jesus told Pilate something very shocking. The Father handed Jesus over to Pilate; otherwise, Pilate would have had no power over Him! This principle reveals that God is intimately involved in the affairs on Earth.

From this statement, I conclude the Father also handed John the Baptist over to Herod. I am not endorsing fatalism – "what will be – will be." Rather, I am saying that when a person surrenders his or her will to God – as John and Jesus did – God uses that person to accomplish His intricate purposes.

When that purpose is complete, God often allows His loyal soldiers to rest in death until the day comes for life eternal.

I am highlighting this point because the Great Tribulation is soon to begin and God's people have nothing to fear as long as they submit to the higher authority of the King of kings. Revelation says, **"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. *This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints*."** (Revelation 13:10, italics mine)

God has a plan for His saints. He already knows where we will end up. The question before each of us is this: "Are we willing to allow God to use us so that He can fulfill the purpose for which we were born?"

Jesus also told Pilate, **"Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."** Jesus was speaking about Lucifer and his demons who were present in Pilate's judgment hall. Ultimately, Lucifer and his unseen demons handed Jesus over to Pilate.

Yes, the Jews rejected Messiah and they handed Jesus over for destruction, but later, their punishment was total destruction in A.D. 70. Lucifer has been and still remains the instigator of

hatred against Christ from the beginning. Lucifer is the original Antichrist.

Lucifer is the father of sin and Lucifer will bear his guilt. At the appointed time, Lucifer and his demons will provide full restitution for their deeds. God will see to it.

144,000 Streets of Gold?

Ultimately, John the Baptist and Jesus met the same fate. God did not establish His kingdom in John''s day. These cousins died for the same reason: They spoke the truth and the world could not bear to hear it. Is it any different today? No. When the 144,000 appear and begin to proclaim God's truth, the results will be the same.

The 144,000 will be harassed and tortured and most, if not all, will perish as a result of their ministry. Nevertheless, the story does not stop there.

God will resurrect and reward every one of them like Elijah! The Bible says the 144,000 will wear the names of the Father and the Son on their foreheads. (Revelation 14:1; 22:4) They will be Jesus' personal attendants in God's kingdom.

The Bible says the New Jerusalem has twelve gates named after the twelve tribes of Israel, and the city's twelve foundations are named after the twelve disciples of Jesus. I just wonder if the holy city has 144,000 streets of gold – each bearing the name of God's loyal servants. Wouldn't it be wonderful if those who received salvation during the Great Tribulation lived on the street named after the servant of God who invited them to receive Jesus?

Jesus said, **"Among those born of women there has not *risen anyone greater than John the Baptist*; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."** This brings our study to a close. John the Baptist was not the greatest prophet to live on Earth because of who he was. John the Baptist was the greatest prophet because he preached the greatest message ever told.

If announcing the first advent was the highest honor that God could bestow upon one person, what honor will be given to those who stand firm against the same rejection to herald the second and more glorious coming of Jesus?

Saul of Tarsus - Good Heart Wrong Head

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Summing Up The Life of Saul

This year, articles in the *Day Star* have focused on Bible characters whose experiences have significant end time parallels. I believe the Great Tribulation is near and feel it is a good time to consider Bible men and women known for their courage and faith. These stories provide helpful insights and prepare us for what lies ahead.

This month, we will examine the life of the Apostle Paul because there are certain aspects in his life that have important end time parallels. To summarize the life of Saul before his conversion into a single sound bite, I would say "good heart, wrong head."

If I were to sum up the life of Saul after conversion, I would say, "whole heart, right head." The story of Saul's transformation has dimensions that every Christian should consider because a complete paradigm shift is no small thing.

Saul As a Child

Bible students know few facts about Saul's childhood. Most scholars believe that he was born about A.D. 12 in the coastal city of Tarsus. Tarsus was near the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea at a location about 250 miles southeast of where Ankara, Turkey is today.

Saul belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, a tribe well known for its fierce and zealous devotion. (Genesis 49:27; Judges 20:15,16) Saul's parents may have named him after the first king of Israel, who was also a descendent from the tribe of Benjamin.

Because Pompey made Tarsus the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia in 67 B.C., Saul came into this world having two identities: He was a Jew by nationality, but he was also a Roman citizen. This unique combination ultimately enabled Paul to travel and speak for God in places and languages that few people could have done at that time.

As a city, Tarsus was noted for its advanced schools, including a respected school in Stoic philosophy. The pride of Tarsus was its academic prowess and this son of Tarsus was no embarrassment.

As a young man, Saul decided to serve God as a rabbi. His passion for learning was as great as his ability to absorb and comprehend. As a lad, Saul probably traveled to Jerusalem with his father for the appointed feasts. It must have been an awe inspiring treat for young Saul to see the grandeur of the temple and the fascinating services the priests conducted.

Perhaps it was these events that inspired Saul to dedicate himself to God's service. Saul was not a Levite, so he could not become a priest, however, he could do the next best thing and

become a member of the Pharisee party.

After completing studies in Tarsus, he was accepted into the school taught by the Pharisee scholars in Jerusalem. There, he studied under the famous teacher, Gamaliel. (Acts 22:3) I believe Saul was about 18 when he arrived in Jerusalem, shortly after Jesus had ascended to Heaven in A.D. 30.

Saul was deeply passionate about his religion and being accustomed to a life of self denial, he paid careful attention to right doing. Saul was totally committed to becoming a Pharisee.

He was a zealot in every detail; energetic, intense and ideological. He was an exemplary student, and because he was intellectually superior, his teachers were confident this young man would have a bright future within their ranks. It has been said that "love is blind."

If this is so, then Saul's love for his religion led him to be totally convinced of the inerrancy of the Pharisaical doctrines and the righteousness of his ways. Years later he wrote, **". . . If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless."** (Philippians 3:4-6)

Religious Parties of Israel

In Saul's day, Israel consisted of several religious sects (or denominations) much like Protestantism today. This diversity is important to remember because the city of Jerusalem did not house one nation living in religious unity and harmony. Tensions between various sects were openly hostile and militant toward each other at times.

Constant friction made it difficult for Rome to govern Jerusalem. Because Jerusalem was a city of *relatives* having competing views about God, it was a contentious place in which to live. No doubt this caustic environment was one reason why John the Baptist conducted his meetings in the desert.

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem for advanced schooling, two religious parties dominated the scene. As you might expect, these two parties represented the liberals and the conservatives. The Pharisee party, to which Saul had pledged himself, was known for its pious commitment to righteousness through austerity and rigor.

As conservatives, they were zealous for righteous living and were quick to condemn anyone who violated *their* rules of righteousness. (Mark 2) They believed righteousness was of utmost importance because they thought unrighteous people could not receive eternal life. Therefore, the Pharisees were constantly codifying righteousness by defining rules for every aspect of life. For example, when it came to Sabbath observance, the Pharisees had codified more than 400 rules for proper Sabbath observance.

The Pharisees were convinced that life in the hereafter was only possible through rigorous obedience to God's laws. Their winning argument was: "Would God grant eternal life to a sinner who chose to live in ignorance and defiance to His laws?" Because Israel had a long history of apostasy, the Pharisees "reasoned" that using a heavy legalistic doctrine would "help" the Jews prevent apostasy from occurring again. (Matthew 23) *It is ironic that the greatest fear of the Pharisees was apostasy.*

The religion of the Pharisees required conformity to rules rather than purity of heart. (Matthew 3:7-10) To them, a zeal for conformity was the evidence of a "new heart" mentioned by Ezekiel. (Ezekiel 18:31; Jeremiah 31:33) The Pharisees loved religion; it was their God.

They believed that if a "righteous person" happened to have any "unknown" sin in his life, the righteousness of Abraham, their father, covered any deficit. (Genesis 15:6; Luke 3:8) Perhaps Saul was attracted to the Pharisees because like himself, they were dogmatic and their thirst for advanced education was insatiable. (John 5:39,40; 2 Timothy 3:7)

The Pharisees considered the Old Testament, plus the writings and traditions of the rabbis to be the "Word of God." Therefore, the Pharisees staunchly defended the traditions and orthodoxy of Judaism more aggressively than any other party in Israel.

The other leading party of the time, the Sadducees, was also legalistic and politically powerful, but in a different way than the Pharisees. The Sadducees did not believe in a hereafter. Consequently, they were self-indulgent and focused on obtaining wealth, pleasure, status and comfort.

Even more, they rejected all but the first five books of the Old Testament. The Sadducees were legalistic pragmatists. For example, they saw nothing wrong with hiring Gentiles to work for them on Sabbath, as long as none of the Gentiles lived within their gates. (Exodus 20:10) The Sadducees despised the austere lifestyle of the Pharisees and they constantly argued with them over theological differences. Overall, it seemed that the Sadducees held control of Israel politically, while the the Pharisees held control over the people religiously.

A.D. 30 - Christianity Begins to Grow

Before we examine Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, we need to highlight developments that happened in Jerusalem while Saul was attending school. After the apostles baptized 3,000 believers into the kingdom of God on that great day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, the Christian movement in Jerusalem began to expand rapidly.

Over the next four years, various disciples of Jesus were publicly humiliated and punished for promoting what was considered an inflammatory religion that was highly critical of Jewish leaders and the teachings of Judaism. As is so often the case, the more Jewish leaders persecuted the disciples of Jesus, the more popular they became!

The Bible says, **"The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the**

people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade [in the temple complex]**."** (Acts 5:12, insertion mine) Proselytizing in the temple and healing the sick on the streets produced a large number of converts. As Christianity grew in popularity in Jerusalem, the Sadducees became highly agitated. Their political support was eroding.

The Pharisees were also alarmed because people called them enemies of God. The Christian movement was different than anything Jewish leaders had ever seen before. The disciples of Jesus were performing *genuine* miracles daily, just like Jesus had done! People who had suffered from lifelong illness were being healed, right before the eyes of people who were intimately acquainted with their illness.

These wonderful and joyous manifestations of divine power were the talk of the town and crowds flocked to hear and see what the disciples of Jesus were doing and saying.

". . . People brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed." - (Acts 5:15,16)

Boldly, Peter and the disciples spoke and performed miracles and Jewish authorities could not rebuff them. Christians were teaching salvation through belief in Jesus Christ.

They were preaching to the Jewish people that Jesus was man's High Priest and that temple rituals were no longer necessary. The Christians exclaimed that Pharisees and Sadducees had slain the Lamb of God! Over the course of time, the Pharisees and the Sadducees held several meetings to discuss proposals that would shut down the growth of Christianity. Christian doctrine and influence was threatening the survival of Judaism and something had to be done.

The Sanhedrin in Israel

The Sanhedrin was Israel's highest court. The 71 members of the Sanhedrin came from all religious parties according to election and/or bribery. The Romans granted the Jews (and other similar tribal nations) a limited amount of civil power to deal with their own people. As far as the Romans were concerned, tribal nations were allowed to impose their cultural laws as long as they stayed within the higher laws of Rome.

Granting this type of authority freed the Romans from the onerous chore of passing judgment on meaningless and disputable matters like religion. However, there was one law above all others that Rome imposed on all tribal nations. The Romans made it clear that tribal nations did not have the power to punish *any* Roman citizen. Every Roman citizen had the right to appeal to Caesar.

You may recall that after Peter denied being a follower of Jesus in Pilate's judgment hall early Friday morning before the crucifixion, Peter's remorse and broken spirit allowed him to have a "born again" conversion that weekend. (John 21:15-19) The Lord restored Peter's credibility

among the disciples by empowering him with enormous Holy Spirit power. Thus, it was Peter who boldly led the way at Pentecost when 3,000 souls were baptized.

Later on, God used Peter again in a powerful way when the Holy Spirit revealed to him the deceptions of Ananias and Sapphira. Their sudden death had a profound impact on the early church. (Acts 5) For all his faults and weaknesses, Peter had certain qualities the Lord could use, but only *after* Peter was converted. Peter became bold in God's grace and strength, no longer depending on his own arms of flesh. Peter was a "black and white" kind of a guy, leaving no gray areas in his mind.

He did not mince words about the atrocities of Jewish leaders, especially when telling the Jews about the murder of Jesus. Peter's boldness had a price for which he was arrested and imprisoned, but an angel miraculously freed him from the chains of his captors during the night. A few days later, Peter rallied the apostles and they went out on the streets of Jerusalem again. No human can thwart this kind of determination and power.

When the Sanhedrin heard that Peter was out of prison and that he and the apostles were healing the sick on the streets of Jerusalem *again*, they immediately sent a captain and soldiers for him. Notice what the Bible says, **"At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,' he said. 'Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.' Peter and the other apostles replied** [in never-to-be-forgotten words]**: 'We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.' When they heard this, they** [members of the Sanhedrin] **were furious and wanted to put them to death."** (Acts 5:26-33, insertions mine)

The Bible record continues: **"But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed them: 'Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.' "** (Acts 5:34-39)

The wisdom of Gamaliel is legendary for good reason. No wonder Saul wanted to sit at his feet. The words and influence of Gamaliel during this meeting brings up a very important point. Consider this: For centuries, Christians have viewed the Pharisees with a certain amount of

contempt.

This contempt rises from the New Testament. Christians believe that Jesus is "God in the flesh." They find the Pharisees and the Sadducees to be so blinded by their religious dogma that they cannot even see that Jesus is the Messiah. Consequently, a certain amount of contempt has been held down through the centuries for those who participated in Christ's death. But is this Christian contempt for the Jews appropriately placed? Consider this:

Confrontation

Jesus came to Earth at God's appointed time. His birth was not a random event. The timing of Jesus' birth and ministry on Earth was *predetermined* so that Jesus could challenge the finest religious system that *man* could produce. (Galatians 4:4) God wanted to demonstrate the reaction and behavior of the world's best religious system when confronted with truth. *In other words, the contest between Jesus and the Pharisees is a parallel of Jesus versus any religious system!*

This is an end time parallel that everyone should consider. Some of the Pharisees, like Gamaliel, were sincere and devout. The Jewish people respected them because they were dedicated to selfless sacrifice for the service of God. The Pharisee party was horribly misguided, but Gamaliel was not an evil man.

He was a spiritual man, a good man in a religious system that co-mingled the doctrines of men with the truth of God. (Mark 7:7) As a Pharisee, Gamaliel had a "good heart" but a "wrong head" when it came to understanding the fulfillment of Scripture. His comments prove that he wondered in his heart if Jesus might be the Messiah.

A Christian cannot appreciate the contest between Jesus and the Pharisees until he/she also discovers that he/she actually suffers from the same problems that afflicted the Pharisees. A blind man cannot see. A blind man cannot see what he should see unless, (a) there is someone to open his eyes, and (b) he is willing to open his eyes. When people are blinded by the certainty of their own religious dogma, they cannot see or understand their own blindness! This is a problem that every human being must wrestle with.

The Pharisees were convinced they were right and everyone else was wrong. Jesus came into their world and spoke truth. The result was a deadly confrontation. Here is a profound thought: Our ability to understand truth is proportional to our willingness to consider truth. We cannot mature in an understanding of truth unless we are willing to submit to what we have learned. We cannot enjoy the freedom and joy of truth until we come to a place in life where we decide to follow truth – no matter what it is, or what it costs.

The Pharisee Test

There are some pharisaical ways in every human being. Here is a short test that demonstrates this. The Pharisees hated Jesus for three reasons: First, Jesus did not show reverence for the

ideas they respected.

Jesus insulted their piety, their culture, their ideas about salvation and their overall view of God. (If Jesus came into *your* church and did this to *you*, how would you react?) Second, Jesus embarrassed the Pharisees by condemning them with their own words.

Jesus caused people to have less respect for the Pharisees with each episode of embarrassment. Jesus continually demonstrated how the religion of the Pharisees was driven by vanity. (If Jesus embarrassed your church leaders every time they made a religious statement, how would you feel?)

Third, Jesus performed miracles every day to back up His outrageous claims. Since the Pharisees could not perform miracles, Jesus' actions further humiliated the Pharisees in the eyes of the people by proving they were spiritually devoid of God's power. (What would your church leaders do with a miracle working person in their midst who taught a strange and different doctrine?)

To be confronted with God and His truth is not a casual experience. During the Great Tribulation, the confronting presence of truth will push every person into either defiant rebellion or complete submission. There will be no middle ground. Jesus told His disciples, **"For whoever is not against us is for us."** (Mark 9:40)

"The Way"

This bold, new Christian belief system threatened the culture and traditional ways of the Jews, so the Pharisees and Sadducees united against a common enemy called "The Way." The Christian movement was initially called "The Way" because Jesus said, **". . . I am *the way* and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6, italics mine) **Note:** As time passed, members of "The Way" became known as "Christians." (Acts 11:26)

During the first four years of Christian growth in Jerusalem, Saul was a graduate student in the school of the Pharisees. As tensions mounted between Jews and Christians, young Saul, a zealous ideologue, came to despise Christians because their actions were tearing down the very institution to which he has dedicated his life.

By the end of A.D. 33, the Sanhedrin was forced to ignore Gamaliel's words. The Sanhedrin finally concluded that the death penalty must be administered to all dissidents belonging to "The Way" or chaos would ultimately bring the wrath of Rome down upon Jerusalem. (The Romans required tribal nations to keep peace in their cities.

If a civil disturbance required the presence and services of the Roman army, the Romans would destroy the entire city. Total destruction was Rome's way. This action prevented many problems from reappearing in the future. Of course, loot from the city was then used to pay Rome's mercenary soldiers.)

Dealing with Dissidence

Every group of people, whether it be religious or political, faces dissidence at some point in time. If the group does not remove *defiant* dissidents, division and dissipation will ultimately occur. Because Christians chose to defy the demands of the Sanhedrin, the Sanhedrin was forced to punish Christians.

They had no option but to destroy the apostles and their followers to protect their religion and their city! There is a powerful end time parallel here. During the Great Tribulation, religious and political leaders will unite and attempt to destroy the opposition created by God's servants.

A Divine Authority

Deuteronomy 13 contains the directions God gave to Moses for dealing with dissident behavior. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part concerns false prophets and the second part concerns misguided leaders or laymen.

The Sanhedrin used Deuteronomy 13 to justify their execution of Jesus and later, they justified their persecution of the apostles with this same chapter. There is also an end time parallel here. During the Great Tribulation, God will confront the great religions of the world with His truth.

These institutions will not be able to accept His truth, without destroying what they stand for, any more than the Pharisees were able to accept the teachings of Jesus. Further, God will confront the governments of the world with His laws and the governments of the world will not be able to deal with the will of the Almighty within the limits of their constitutions. Confrontation and consternation will face everyone.

When Jesus came to Earth the first time, He came to confront with His truth the best religion and the strongest government the world had ever seen. (Matthew 10:34) Neither could accommodate Jesus, but there were individuals within these entities who received Him as their Savior.

To these believers, He gave the privilege of being called "children of God." (John 1:12) Just before Jesus appears the second time, the same will be true again. This world and its organizations cannot receive Christ. He is alien. His gospel and His ways are different. His truth and His law stand in opposition to the religions and governments of men. For Jesus to have complete dominion, men must let go of their power and this loss will not come without a great struggle. However, people who do choose who receive Him will be called the "children of God."

Deuteronomy 13, – Part I - – Prophets

Notice God's instructions to Moses in Deuteronomy 13: **"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the**

words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you. If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods' (gods that neither you nor your fathers have known, gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to him or listen to him. Show him no pity. Do not spare him or shield him. You must certainly put him to death. Your hand must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. Stone him to death, because he tried to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again. (Deuteronomy 13:1-11)

Deuteronomy 13, – Part II -– Any Rise of New Doctrine

"If you hear it said about one of the towns the Lord your God is giving you to live in that wicked men have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods' (gods you have not known), then you must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly. And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you, you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town.

Destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock. Gather all the plunder of the town into the middle of the public square and completely burn the town and all its plunder as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God. It is to remain a ruin forever, never to be rebuilt.

None of those condemned things shall be found in your hands, so that the Lord will turn from his fierce anger; he will show you mercy, have compassion on you, and increase your numbers, as he promised on oath to your forefathers, because you obey the Lord your God, keeping all his commands that I am giving you today and doing what is right in his eyes." (Deuteronomy 13:12-18)

Some people today read these and other verses within the Old Testament and conclude that the God of the Old Testament is not the God of the New Testament! In fact, people often present verses like these to demonstrate that the Old Testament had to be nailed to the cross.

However, it is important to remember that these words *were given and meant to be applied* within the context of a theocracy – that is, during the time when God Himself ruled over Israel. God gave these instructions to Moses because no other gods would be tolerated as long as He ruled over Israel! Therefore, any deviation or allegiance to another god was an act of defiance against Jehovah. In this setting, it is understandable that total destruction was the only solution for open defiance against God.

Unfortunately, the Pharisees in Saul's day presumed they were operating under the principles of a theocracy and they justified their actions toward the Christians with Scripture! The Jews thought they were doing God a service when they persecuted the Christians! (John 16:1-3)

Summary of Saul's Environment

This was the world Saul knew as a young man. The explosive growth of Christianity in Jerusalem became the focal point for increasing frustration of the Sanhedrin. Consequently, the Sanhedrin used Deuteronomy 13 as a basis for divine authority (or so they thought) when dealing with dissident Christians. As the drama unfolds, keep in mind the year is A.D. 34 and Saul has just graduated from the school of the Pharisees. . . .

Stephen Condemned and Stoned

"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith [and disobedient to teachings of the Pharisees]**. Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) – Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, 'We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God.' So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law** [the Pharisees]**. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, 'This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place** [Matthew 24:2] **and change the customs** [the ceremonial system which] **Moses handed down to us.' All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. Then the high priest asked him, 'Are these charges true?' "** (Acts 6:7-7:1, insertions mine)

The members of the Sanhedrin were well acquainted with the disciples of Jesus, but Stephen was a new face. I believe this incident occurred in the Spring of A.D. 34 during the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jews from distant places like Cyrene, Alexandria Egypt, the province of Cilicia and various places in Asia had gathered in Jerusalem because of the required attendance for all Jews during Passover. (Exodus 34:24) In addition to this, the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 ended just 15 days earlier with the close of A.D. 33.

Somehow, Stephen and some of the visiting Jews became engaged in an aggressive religious discussion. When the Jews could not defeat the logic Stephen used from the Old Testament prophecies, they secretly schemed to have him arrested for dissension. When called before the Sanhedrin, Stephen was anxious to present Jesus to the leaders of Israel. Stephen explained why Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple by reviewing why the temple was necessary in the first place.

He started with the call of Abraham, then the call of Moses and then the building of the temple by Solomon. (Acts 7:2-50) I believe Stephen was leading up to the point that Solomon's temple was only a temporary edifice until Messiah appeared. At that point, Messiah would be the temple and the focus of worship, instead of a physical edifice. (See Revelation 21:22.)

Therefore, the destruction of the temple was appropriate because (a) bricks and mortar cannot house a God as great and majestic as Jehovah, and (b) Messiah had appeared. To underscore his point, Stephen quoted Isaiah 66:1,2, **"Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?"** (Acts 7:49,50)

Suddenly, Stephen stopped. He looked around at the 71 members of the Sanhedrin as the power and presence of the Holy Spirit came over him. Stephen was shown that his argument was useless, falling on deaf ears. He knew his death was imminent. The Holy Spirit gave Stephen words and the Spirit pronounced blood guilt upon Israel.

" 'You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him – you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.' When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul." (Acts 7:51-58)

Saul Persecutes The Church

Stephen was the first Christian martyr. He was the first victim of an earlier decision the Sanhedrin had made to destroy all of the members of "The Way." Saul was an observer in the courtroom when Stephen was tried. No doubt Saul was gratified to see Stephen die, because he agreed with the Sanhedrin that all Christians had to be destroyed or they would destroy Judaism. As members of the Sanhedrin began to shed their cloaks to stone Stephen, young Saul saw an opportunity to be of service. He volunteered to hold the garments of the executioners – as I am sure he relished the excitement of killing a Christian dissident.

"While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him." (Acts 7:59-8:2)

It is understandable that at that moment, Saul's heart was not touched by the death of Stephen.

Saul regarded Stephen as a defiant dissident. For just such occasions, Jesus warned His disciples about the blindness of religion, **"They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you."** (John 16:2-4)

Yet in Saul's mind, Deuteronomy 13 left no doubt that the Sanhedrin was doing the will of God. The stoning of Stephen was the fulfillment of what God required.

Saul seized the moment and used the destruction of Christians as a way to quickly advance himself within the Pharisee party. He volunteered to ferret out Christians and bring them before the Sanhedrin. The authorities were quite pleased that this young man was so willing to do the "dirty work."

Saul was an ideologue (a person who follows an ideology in a dogmatic way without compromise), and was perfectly suited to implement Deuteronomy 13 to the letter of the law. The religious leaders gave Saul the necessary permits (to satisfy the Romans if anyone should care to ask) and the Bible says, **". . . Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went."** (Acts 8:3,4)

As a person might expect, the name, "Saul of Tarsus," quickly became infamous among Christians. Saul was fresh out of graduate school. He was bright, and on a fast-track as far as his career in the party was concerned. He was devoted to legalism – always observing the letter of the law. He was so motivated, that the suffering he inflicted on Christians did not bother him. He was willing to do what it took to save Judaism and his tireless actions made him perfect for the job.

Here is another end time parallel. During the Great Tribulation, many good people will commit the same kind of atrocities that Saul did, thinking they are doing a service for God. This parallel is important to understand, because when Stephen fell to his knees, he prayed, **"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."** I find it interesting that these are among the final words of Jesus! **". . . Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34)

Why did Jesus and Stephen say these words when confronting death? I find one answer. When God steps into the affairs of man, there is confrontation. Truth meets blindness, but blindness does not know that it has confronted truth. Human ignorance and arrogance are such that a person with a good heart can do things that are offensive to God. "Good heart, wrong head." Both Jesus and Stephen knew there were a few good people who were sitting in judgment against them.

They also knew that if people, like Gamaliel, who had honest hearts, could understand God's truth as they understood it, they would not be assaulting them. Instead, they would be standing with them. Therefore, both men expressed love for their enemies. They asked God to overlook the ignorance of their enemies because among their enemies they knew there were people with

good hearts. Bible history proves that Saul was one such person!

Saul Meets Jesus

The more Saul chased the Christians throughout Jerusalem, the more the gospel spread as they fled for their lives! Eventually, Saul heard there were a significant number of Christians causing the same kind of problems in Damascus, so **". . . He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.' The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything."** (Acts 9:1-9)

Saul was traveling to Damascus, intent on persecuting more Christians, when Jesus intercepted the young man by knocking him to the ground with a brilliant flash of light. After that brief encounter, Saul was left in a state of shock and totally blind.

He did not know what to think or do. For the first time in his short but intense life, everything that Saul believed in, everything that he had studied, everything that he loved was suspect. Instead of the bright, self-directing, self-important and self-assured young Pharisee with a bright future ahead, Saul was blind and totally confused. All he could think as he stumbled toward Damascus was, "So, Jesus Christ is God!" Saul arrived in Damascus in a very humble state, humiliated beyond words, and confused.

Saul had come to Damascus to take Christians captive, but he arrived a prisoner of blindness. Saul was blind in more ways than one and for the first time in his life, he saw his blindness – a rare experience for anyone.

The Lights Come On

"In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!' 'Yes, Lord,' he answered. The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.' 'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.

And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.' But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must

suffer for my name.'

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus." (Acts 9:10-19)

The sincere words of Ananias touch my heart. He approached the young man and said kindly, "Brother Saul." Let me ask you, what do you call your enemy? How do you address those who would do you harm? How do you respond to those who want to hurt you? Yet, Ananias said, "Brother Saul."

The most amazing feature of true Christianity is the principle of "love your enemies." Nothing reveals the presence and power of God within a human being like the spirit of forgiveness. When a Christian holds no malice or hardness toward an adversary, the love of God radiates from that life. **"No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."** (1 John 4:12)

Saul had spent most of his life in school, preparing himself to be a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Now that he was in Damascus, Saul entered the first grade for a second time. This time he was studying Jesus instead of religion. Once his eyes were opened and his ears able to hear, Saul's new teachers were the ridiculed and *uneducated* disciples of Jesus.

Saul the Evangelist

After spending a week or two with the disciples, Saul was able to quickly align key elements from his formal education with his new spiritual eye sight and presto! Saul began to see that Jesus was the fulfillment of everything promised in the Old Testament.

The young man was so excited he could not contain himself. Remember, all along he had a good heart, but his head was filled with wrong ideas. Now that Saul realized his blindness, his head could be directed toward truth. True to form, Saul was immediately ready to tell the whole world about Jesus! This is the amazing thing about people who are ideologues by nature. They are wholehearted and enthusiastic in everything they do. The Bible says of Saul:

"At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?'

Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. After many days had gone by [about three years]**, the Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city**

gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall." (Acts 9:20-25, insertion mine)

When the persecutor becomes the persecuted, it is apparent that an amazing change has taken place. Saul did not return to Jerusalem immediately after his conversion. The Holy Spirit called him to spend time in the solitude of the desert. Saul had much to unlearn, but he also had much to learn. He shared this experience with the Galatians because he wanted them to know that his understanding of the gospel came directly from Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Holy Sprit.

He wrote, **"For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into [the desert of] Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days."** (Galatians 1:13-18, insertion mine)

Three years after leaving for Damascus, Saul returned to Jerusalem. Since there had not been any news about him and his whereabouts for such a long time, the disciples were not sure what he was up to. **"When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord."** (Acts 9: 26-31)

Summary

The limits of space do not allow me to present the marvelous life of Saul beyond this point. Therefore, I will close with a review of some of the end time parallels that can be found in Saul's life:

1. - During the Great Tribulation, the religious leaders of the world will parallel the behavior of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Conservatives, like the Pharisees of old, will insist that the only way to appease God so that His judgments might stop is by rigorous obedience. The problem is that their idea of how to appease God will be faulty. There is an obedience that stems from legalism (the carnal heart) and there is an obedience that springs from faith (the spiritual heart).

The question is not whether God requires obedience, the question is whether our obedience springs from faith and love! Liberals, like the Sadducees of old, will use their political connections and influence civil powers to produce legislation that attempts to control and thwart the 144,000. As in Paul's day, when Pharisees and Sadducees united against the apostles and early Christians, so in the end times, conservatives and liberals will unite against the testimony of God's 144,000 and end time Christians.

2. - After Jesus went to Heaven, He gave His disciples two great powers. First, He gave them words and wisdom to speak for God. Jesus promised, **"But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."** (Matthew 10:19,20) Second, He gave the disciples Holy Spirit power and enabled them to perform hundreds of genuine miracles.

Jesus promised, **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth."** (Acts 1:8) God granted them miracle working powers so that people would listen to the testimony of the disciples, believe, be "born again," and then spread the message abroad. These two gifts rested upon Paul and Barnabas as well. **"So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there** [Iconium]**, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders."** (Acts 14:3, insertion mine)

This same process will happen again. God will give His 144,000 servants words and wisdom to speak for Him. They will clearly present the terms and conditions of salvation from the Scriptures and the power of the Holy Spirit will rest upon them, enabling them to perform *genuine* miracles on demand. These two gifts are described in Revelation 11 as the Two Witnesses.

3. - The love of religion is blinding, so it is impossible for one man to prove the superiority of his religion over that of another. A devout Christian cannot *prove* to a devout Jew that his or her religion is superior to Judaism. History confirms this. Jesus could not *prove* to the Jews that He was Messiah! Jesus could not prove to His disciples that He was Messiah, either! One day, Jesus asked Peter if he believed that He was the Son of God and Peter responded "Yes." Jesus then said, **"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in Heaven."** (Matthew 16:17)

Given the onerous power of religion, let me ask – what were the chances of young Saul abandoning Judaism and accepting Christianity after listening to Stephen's testimony? Zero. In fact, Saul was so convinced of the accuracy of his religious position that miracles and reasoning from Scripture could not make a dent in his thinking. The same was true of the Pharisees and Sadducees during the days of Jesus. They saw Jesus perform miracles with their own eyes and the evidence of His work was everywhere.

Yet, the only thing they could say was **". . . By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons."** (Luke 11:15) During the Great Tribulation, God will tear down the walls

of religion with a marvelous display of power and *open* the eyes of everyone on Earth to truth for a short time. God will confront humankind with powerful manifestations of truth and power. He will force everyone to make a decision for truth or against truth.

The honest in heart, like Saul, will see the light – discover their blindness and rejoice! People who love religion and power, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, will align themselves with darkness to survive, but will forfeit eternal life. The experience of Saul on the road to Damascus has an end time parallel. Many people on Earth have honest hearts, but wrong heads. At the appointed time, God will allow everyone to see the light. All who receive the truth, like Saul, will be found among that greater number of saints when they go marching in.

4. - The Bible does not tell us how or when Saul's name was changed to Paul. Luke simply identifies Saul was as the one who is also called Paul. **"Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 'You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?' "** (Acts 13:9,10)

I can almost hear the Apostle Paul saying these words – given the fact that he, too, perverted the right ways of the Lord! Although it does not really matter how Saul became known as Paul, I have a possible explanation for you to consider. When the Lord informed Saul that he would become an apostle to the Gentiles, (1 Timothy 2:7) I conclude that Saul converted his Jewish name to a Gentile equivalent, so they would accept him more readily. (The Jews were intensely hated throughout the Roman Empire and very few Gentiles would listen to a despised Jew. See Acts 16:20.)

Even more, a new identity reflects a new life. (Saul abandoned the Pharisees and I am sure the feeling was mutual.) The Apostle Paul had one objective. He wanted everyone to know Christ and the joy of His salvation. He wrote the following: **"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those** [Gentiles] **not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."** (1 Corinthians 9:12-23, insertion mine)

History says that Paul was executed in Rome around A.D. 65 for refusing to worship Caesar. He fought a good fight and he was faithful to the end. (2 Timothy 4:7) After studying Paul's writings and his life of service for the Lord Jesus Christ, I am forever indebted to this zealous man for showing me many wonderful things about Jesus. Jesus halted Saul on the road to Damascus because he was totally dedicated to the service of God (albeit, misdirected).

What is so wonderful about God is that He sees the heart! He knew that once Saul met Jesus, his life would be forever changed. Paul wrote 14 of the 27 books found in the New Testament! Where would Christians be without his contribution to the Bible? Paul's life is a perfect example

of a complete paradigm shift.

What he used to love, he came to hate and what he used to hate, he came to love. **"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them** [my losses] **rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."** (Philippians 3:7-9, insertion mine) May God help each of us to emulate the integrity, love, humility and dedication demonstrated in the life of a dear saint who became known as Paul.

Pontius Pilate's Judgement of Jesus

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The Roman Ways

Jesus was born about 4 B.C. (see Anno Domini). You may remember that after the wise men announced the birth of Jesus to King Herod I, the king ordered that all baby boys in Bethlehem, who were two years of age or less, should be destroyed. Ironically, Herod himself died shortly after issuing this malicious decree.

Augustus Caesar honored Herod's will that stated that his kingdom was to be divided between his three surviving sons. The will gave Antipas a quarter of the realm, (the territory around Galilee), Philip a quarter of the realm (the area around Traconitis and later, Ituraea), and Archelaus the remaining half of the realm (Judea and Samaria). Each son that governed a quarter of the realm was called a "tetarch" (or a ruler of a fourth, see Luke 3:1), and Archelaus was called an "ethnarch" (a ruler of a province).

With the passage of time, Augustus did not think Archelaus was fit to be a king, so he removed Archelaus from his throne about ten years later. Archelaus was exiled and the province of Judea became a third-world Roman province that governors ruled. From A.D. 6 to the Jewish revolt in A.D. 66, governors that came from Rome's middle class ruled Judea. (The exception to this was the brief reign of Herod Agrippa I. (A.D. 41-44))

The first duty of a Roman governor was to maintain order and keep the peace according to the provisions of Roman law. Governors typically had a contingency of Roman soldiers at their command and they used them when necessary to keep order. Governors were also responsible for imposing and collecting taxes for Caesar which was no small task given the intense animosity between the occupied territories and the heavy hand of Rome.

Then as now, people who had political ambitions coveted the office of governor, and yet, with all its trappings, the office was not very glamorous. A Roman governor walked a very fine line. He was trapped between keeping peace in a province who hated to pay taxes to Rome, while simultaneously, meeting all of Caesar’s demands. If the governor offended the people, it often caused an uprising. When this occurred, Caesar would hear about it and question the governor’s ability to keep the peace.

If the governor tried to please the people by softening Rome’s demands, Caesar would fire him in a heart beat and put him to death for insubordination. So, to be a governor in Jesus’ day may have been a powerful job, but it required a delicate political balance.

Pontius Pilate

History says that Pilate was the fifth governor of Judea. Most governors served two to four years, but Pilate served as governor of Judea for about eleven years. (A.D. 26-36) We have no

information about Pilate before he arrived in Judea as governor. If it were not for a few hours with Jesus on one fateful morning, Pilate would have disappeared long ago into the silent hallway of history. Josephus indicates that Pilate's career in Judea ended abruptly when he agitated his subjects one time too many. (Antiquities 18:85-89)

As the story goes, a messianic figure rose in Samaria and formed a group of enthusiastic followers. Problems became serious when they armed themselves in an attempt to deliver their people from the hands of the Romans and establish God's kingdom. To prove his assumed identity as the Messiah, the messianic figure invited his followers to follow him to the summit of Mt. Gerizim, a mountain the Samaritans considered a holy site. (See Deuteronomy 11:29.)

He claimed that Moses had buried sacred vessels on top of the mountain and he knew where they were. (Evidently he believed if the sacred vessels were revealed, it would legitimize his messianic claims.) Pilate learned of this development and sent a platoon of Roman soldiers to block their ascent up the mountain. This led to a bloody confrontation and the Romans killed several Samaritans in the melee that followed.

The Samaritan Council formally complained to Caesar about Pilate's abusive use of power and Tiberius summoned Pilate to Rome. Pilate left for Rome, but reached the city after Tiberius had died. The new emperor, Gaius, did not send Pilate back to Judea and Pilate suddenly disappeared from the radar screen of history.

Eusebius, a spiritual counselor to Emperor Constantine in the fourth century A.D., supports a legend that Pilate committed suicide during the reign of Gaius. The legend maintains that Pilate committed suicide due to his remorse for what he did to Jesus. (Hist. Eccl. 2.7.1)

History does not reveal if Pilate became a born-again Christian. However, it is interesting that Christian churches in northern Africa years later declared Pilate a saint. In fact, Tertullian claims that Pilate was a Christian at heart in a letter he wrote to Tiberius. (Apology 21) I believe that Pilate had a complete change of heart after meeting Jesus, and his actions in the drama you are about to read are quite revealing, when put in context.

Even though we do not actually know what happened to Pilate in the end, we do know what happened on Friday morning, April 7, A.D. 30, when a long sequence of events brought an unsuspecting Pilate face to face with God. All four gospels record descriptions of this unrehearsed confrontation in all four gospels. This will be the focus of this study because there are profound end time parallels between the events that transpired in Pilate's judgment hall and events that will happen in courtrooms all over the world during the Great Tribulation.

Note: To review Pilate's experience, I have taken excerpts from the gospels and attempted to put them in chronological order. You may note some redundancy since each gospel describes the events with a slightly different perspective. It is my hope that this study will reveal something about Pilate that you may not have noticed before. Insertions in brackets [] and italics are mine and are added for clarity or emphasis.

John Begins the Story

"Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas [the High Priest] **to the palace of the Roman governor** [Pilate]**. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out** [of his palace] **to them and asked, 'What charges are you bringing against this man?' 'If he were not a criminal,' they replied, 'we would not have handed him over to you.' Pilate said, 'Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.' 'But we have no right to execute anyone,' the Jews objected. This** [response] **happened so that the words Jesus had spoken** [Luke 18:31-33] **indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.**

Pilate then went back inside the palace, [he] **summoned Jesus and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'Is that your own idea,' Jesus asked, 'or did others talk to you about me?' 'Am I a Jew** [that I should care]**?' Pilate replied. 'It was *your* people and *your* chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?' Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.'** [So!] **'You are a king, then!' said Pilate. Jesus answered, 'You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. *Everyone on the side of truth listens to me*.' 'What is truth?'** [a puzzled] **Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, 'I find no basis for a charge against him.' "** (John 18:28-38)

Commentary:

Pilate's fairness is seen in his first report to the Jews. Pilate knew of Jesus' reputation. He had heard of His miracles and in a secular way, he quickly decided that Jesus was not a common criminal or rabble rouser. Pilate did not have a religious heart, therefore the teachings of Jesus, which infuriated the Jews, did not personally offend him. After listening to Jesus for a few moments, Pilate sensed the Jewish leaders and Jesus were embroiled in a religious squabble "over words" and he really did not want to get involved. Pilate returned to the waiting crowd and *boldly declared Jesus to be innocent.*

Luke Says

"But they insisted, 'He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.' On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction [Herod Antipas]**, he** [Pilate conveniently recused himself on this civil matter and] **sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time** [to observe Passover]**."**

Commentary:

Pilate and Herod Antipas had a long history as political enemies and in the quicksand of this

situation, Pilate saw a golden opportunity. By sending Jesus to Antipas, Pilate flattered the king's ego by showing respect, but Pilate also had a political motive. He was trying to escape further confrontation with his contentious subjects, the Jews.

"When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.

The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate [because Antipas did not want to offend the high priest and because of possible political repercussions, Herod made sure Jesus was Pilate's problem]**. That day Herod and Pilate became friends – before this they had been enemies."**

"[A couple hours later] **Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, 'You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore,** [in an effort to please you, how about this?] **I will punish him** [for stirring up trouble] **and then release him.' " (Luke 23:5-16)**

Commentary:

Pilate declared Jesus was innocent a second time.

Matthew Says

Now it was the governor's custom at the [Passover] **Feast to** [gain the favor of the Jews and] **release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called** [Jesus Barabbas or just] **Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered** [at his palace]**, Pilate** [sought to set Jesus free through negotiation. So he] **asked them, 'Which one do you want me to release to you:** [Jesus who is called] **Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?' For** [now] **he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him."**

Commentary:

At this point, Pilate was convinced that Jesus was innocent of all the charges that the Jewish leaders had brought against him. So, Pilate attempted to reason with them, comparing the worst of society (Barabbas) with the best (Jesus). The hostility directed toward this innocent man amazed Pilate. I believe he sensed there was something supernatural about the intensity of the clamor.

"While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.' But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas

and to have Jesus executed. ‘Which of the two do you want me to release to you?’ asked the governor. ‘Barabbas,’ they answered. ‘What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?’ Pilate asked. They all answered, ‘Crucify him!’ ‘Why? What crime has he committed?’ asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, ‘Crucify him!’ "

Commentary:

The note Pilate received from his wife stunned him. After reading her comments, the truth planted in his mind by the Holy Spirit was confirmed. This was no ordinary trial. Jesus *was* the Son of God, the predicted Messiah. At that moment, the tables turned. Pilate suddenly found himself on trial. What should he do with Jesus? Pilate had the power to set Jesus free and he had the power to crucify Him. If Pilate set Jesus free, the mob would go crazy and Caesar would question his ability to govern.

If he crucified Jesus, Pilate knew an innocent man, even the Messiah, would be put to death. Pilate had to make a choice! In exasperation, Pilate uttered a sentence that every sinner who comes under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit has had to ask: "What shall I do then, with Jesus, who is called Christ?" The mob’s reaction became unreasonable. Pilate raised his voice above the noise of the crowd asking, "What crime has He committed?" The response was deafening. Pilate discovered an awful truth: There is no reason in rebellion.

"When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere [and he had no political options left]**, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’ All the people answered, ‘Let his blood be on us and on our children!’ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and** [after further discussion with the Jews, Pilate] **handed him over to be crucified." (Matthew 27:15-26)**

Commentary:

When the week began, Pilate had no idea what would occur on Friday morning. Suddenly, God powerfully catapulted Pilate to the forefront of an incredible moment of truth and he, the governor of Judea, like the Apostle Peter a few hours earlier, proved to be a coward**.** Pilate had a lot at stake. In order to keep his prestigious job as governor, he had to demonstrate skills worthy of his appointment. In order to satisfy the protests of angry Jews, he had to offer them something.

Pilate was convicted that Jesus was innocent, yet he sought to deflect his guilt by simply washing his hands of this murderous event. Consider the irony of his action. The Jews who were standing before Pilate, believed that they had to be ceremonially clean for the Passover.

To maintain their "cleanliness," they would not allow themselves to enter Pilate’s palace, yet within their own hearts they harbored such hatred and malice toward Jesus, they were willing to murder Him. Neither the Jews’ sanctimonious ceremonies nor the water used by Pilate could remove the stain of sin. The only thing in the whole universe that can wash away the guilt of sin

is the sinless blood of Jesus.

Both Peter and Pilate discovered something about themselves that day. The Apostle Peter discovered the cowardice within his own character when he denied knowing Jesus, just as Pilate also discovered his cowardly character when he allowed an innocent man to be put to death. Pilate thought that if he had Jesus flogged (a punishment of indescribable agony), the Jews would relent and their rage would be satisfied – in which case, Pilate could save Jesus from death.

John Says

"Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again, saying, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ And they struck him in the face."

Commentary:

After the blows and the flogging, I am sure Jesus was barely conscious. He had received the harshest treatment possible this side of death.

"Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.’ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, ‘Here is the man!’ As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, ‘Crucify!

Crucify!’ But Pilate answered, ‘You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.’ The Jews insisted, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.’ When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace [to speak with Jesus]**."**

Commentary:

Every human heart is capable of feeling the hatred the Jews expressed toward Jesus that morning. It only takes the right circumstances and issues to align. Pilate was trapped in a power play between Heaven and Hell. I believe that every demon possible, who had formerly enjoyed the glories of Heaven, was present to ensure that their Creator was destroyed. Lucifer, the anti-Christ himself, was present – using every influence and every power in his arsenal to torture and destroy his holy Adversary.

A watching universe shuddered to see the depths that sin-full hearts can sink. Pilate knew in his own way that Jesus was the Messiah and when the Jews said, "He claimed to be the Son of God," they ironically confirmed a truth that had previously stirred the heart of the governor. At that moment, he became "even more afraid."

During the Great Tribulation, circumstances and issues will align in such a way that everyone on

Earth will be forced into a situation like Pilate faced – not to judge Jesus, but to be judged by Jesus. **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."** (2 Corinthians 5:10) The Holy Spirit allowed Pilate to know the truth about Jesus.

His wife's note was not a coincidence, but instead it was a message from Heaven. *In desperation Pilate declared Christ's innocence a third time, yet he could not bring himself to set Jesus free and face the ridicule for doing the right thing.* This is a parallel of how it will be during the Great Tribulation. The will of God will be set before the world in terms that are as bright as the noonday Sun, yet few will have the strength of character to stand up and take the ridicule for doing God's will.

No wonder Revelation says, **"But the *cowardly*, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."** (Revelation 21:8) Let us be real. Every human being is a coward and will not take a stand for truth unless they are infused with Holy Spirit power, which can help them stand courageously through trials of faith.

"[A troubled Pilate interviewed Jesus again.] **'Where do you come from?' he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. 'Do you refuse to speak to me?' Pilate said. 'Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?' Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' "**

Commentary:

Pilate condemned himself with his own words when he told Jesus that he had the power to set Him free. Jesus, knowing that He had come into the world to set us "free," did not address Pilate's cowardice. Instead, Jesus condemned Lucifer, who truly was responsible and guilty for handing Jesus over to be killed.

When the demons heard these words, I believe they shuddered. The mouth of God declared that He would annihilate Lucifer. Meanwhile, Pilate's consternation was on a different plane. For the first time, Pilate recognized a fatal flaw in his own character. He could not bring himself to do the right thing. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and believed Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah. He also knew that Jesus was hated *for no other reason than declaring who He was.* Jesus was the King of kings!

"From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.' When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha).

It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour [noon]**.** [When the audience became silent, Pilate spoke soberly from a deep spiritual awakening within.] **'Here is**

your king,' Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!' 'Shall I crucify *your* king?' Pilate asked. 'We have no king but Caesar,' the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus." (John 19:1-16)

Commentary:

Believing that Jesus was the Son of God was not enough to stop Pilate from acquiescing to the demands of the Jews. Simply knowing the truth will not prevent you from denying the truth. Peter and Pilate represent both sides of this dilemma. Even though Peter was religious and personally knew Jesus, he still denied him. On the other hand, Pilate was secular, but he knew Jesus was innocent and still sent Him to His death.

In an effort to mitigate his guilt and show some support for Jesus, Pilate did the following:

"Pilate [deliberately] **had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, 'Do not write "The King of the Jews," but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.' Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written** [and it will remain unchanged because I believe him]**.' "** (John 19:19-22)

"Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead [since death by crucifixion usually took days]**. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph."** (Mark 15:43-45)

"The next day [Saturday]**, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 'Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, "After three days I will rise again." So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.' 'Take a guard,' Pilate answered. 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard."** (Matthew 27:62-66)

Commentary:

The Bible does not indicate if Pilate knew about the predicted resurrection of Jesus. Sensing the Jews' desire to cover their deed and keep the peace, Pilate may have cooperated with them. Even better, if Pilate was aware that a resurrection might be possible, *his* guards could validate the event for him if they were present.

"[On Sunday morning] **While the women were on their way** [to tell the disciples about the empty tomb]**, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, 'You are to say, "His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep." If this report gets to** [Pilate] **the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this** [false] **story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day."** (Matthew 28:11-15)

Commentary:

Pilate awoke on that Friday morning only to discover it was *his* day of judgment. Yes, Pilate sat in the judgment seat, but Pilate was on trial. Pilate declared Jesus was innocent three times. Still, Pilate had Jesus flogged and crucified rather than take any ridicule from the Jews and a possible reprimand from Caesar. When that day ended, I am sure that Pilate was not the same. You cannot violate your innermost sense of fairness and justice, and still have respect for yourself. Pilate violated "the right" to keep his job. Peter violated "his loyalty" to keep his dignity. Both men lost the very thing they sought to protect.

Conclusions:

Given the scant history we have about Pilate, I would like to offer the following scenario about the end of Pilate's life. When the guards reported to Pilate their personal experience at the tomb on Sunday morning, inwardly Pilate was overjoyed. Imagine that! Jesus really is the Son of God! When Pilate put the details of Christ's birth, life and death together, he became a silent believer in Jesus.

When Pilate sent his soldiers to intercept the "messianic figure" from Samaria six years later, he gave orders to destroy the movement because it was an insult to Jesus, who according to reliable sources, had ascended into Heaven. The "uncalled for brutality" of Pilate's soldiers aroused the Samaritan Council, who appealed to Tiberius Caesar. He summoned Pilate to Rome for a reprimand. Tiberius died before Pilate arrived in Rome and his successor, Gaius, relieved Pilate of his career. Pilate eventually settled in northern Africa where he confessed to being a believer in Christ.

He found refuge in Alexandria among the Christians who had also found refuge from Rome's hatred there. (This may explain why the Coptic and Ethiopian churches later made him a saint.) In time, Pilate became ill and impoverished. I am sure he often relived that infamous day and probably never forgave himself for having Jesus flogged and crucified. In a depressed and lonely state of mind, he may have ended his life. Ironically, legend says that when Peter eventually faced his own death on a cross, he asked to be crucified upside down, since he was not worthy to die as Christ had died.

Evidently, both men died without being able to forgive themselves of their cowardice. However, the good news of the gospel is that Jesus forgave them both, and because of their faith in Christ

as the Lamb of God, I sincerely hope to see *both* men in Heaven.

Noah and the Pig Pen

Author: Larry W. Wilson

An End Time Parallel

Most Christians already know there is an end time parallel between Noah's day and the end of the world.

Remember, Jesus said, **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:36-38)

These words are a bit of a mystery. What did Jesus mean when He said, **"and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away"**? Peter says Noah was a *preacher* of righteousness. (2 Peter 2:5) If Noah was a preacher of righteousness, then it seems fair to conclude that the antidiluvians were warned for 120 years. How could the antediluvians not have known about what Noah did and said? Think about it! Noah built the most unusual object of his time: a huge boat!

Even more incredible, God mysteriously marched the animals into the ark just days before it rained. It seems inconceivable that the antediluvians did not know anything about what would happen after seeing all of this.

How could they have missed the warning message and basically ignored the physical evidence that a flood was coming? I have a possible answer, but I will withhold it for a moment. Let there be no mistake. God did not put the story of Noah in the Bible to entertain us. Jesus warned that Noah's experience will be paralleled at the end of the world.

The events of Noah's day had dreadful consequences and so will ours.

The Days of Noah

"Now the Earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the Earth had become, for *all* the people on Earth had corrupted their ways. . . . The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the Earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the Earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the Earth – men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air – for I am grieved that I have made them.' But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord." (Genesis 6:11,12,5-8, italics mine)

According to the Bible, there are 1,656 years between the time when Adam and Eve were created and when the Earth was destroyed by a flood. This may sound like a long time, but do not forget, men lived much longer then. Today, it is hard to imagine that the lives of *two* men, Adam and his sixth generation grandson Methuselah, extended through most of this period. In fact, Grandpa Adam lived 243 years *after* Methuselah was born, so he was very well acquainted with Methuselah.

Methuselah died on or about the year of the flood. The horrible state of degeneracy achieved by the antediluvians in 1,656 years demonstrates a very interesting point about fallen man. If God had not dramatically reduced the life span of the human race after the flood, He would have had to destroy the world *several times* during the past 4,500 years. Reducing the length of life has dramatically reduced the amount of evil one generation can perpetuate.

When you ponder God's long suffering, compassion and love and all that He gave to redeem humanity at Calvary, considering that God *justifiably* destroyed the world in Noah's day is an awesome thing. God's deliberate destruction of Earth proves three things.

First, God *closely* observes this planet and its inhabitants. Second, when sin exceeds the threshold of God's wisdom and patience, there is *no* recovery. Third, man's degenerate behavior *always* matures to a point where total destruction is the best solution. These three facts also explain the rise and fall of 21 civilizations on Earth. God raises a nation of people, and when their behavior reaches the threshold of God's patience, they are destroyed. Wake up America (and every other nation)!

It is amazing that many people, even Christians, deny that God was responsible for the flood in Noah's day. They cannot believe that a God of love would deliberately drown men, women and children and wipe the Earth clean of life!

Calvary and other events recorded in the Bible prove that God is love, but His love is poorly understood. God's wisdom is infinite and allows Him to see far into the future. He destroys corrupt and evil nations for the benefit of nations that are yet to come! What would this world be like today if God had not destroyed the antediluvians some 4,500 years ago? The claim, "God does not kill," is a rebellious distortion of God's justice and mercy.

Consider His testimony: **"So the Lord said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the Earth – men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air – for I am grieved that I have made them.' "** Also, notice this statement: **". . . I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things."** (Isaiah 45:6,7)

When people claim that God does not destroy people, we have a perfect example of the same inebriated theology that existed before the flood. God has not changed. He is the same eternal God yesterday, today, and tomorrow. God has always been merciful and just.

He is patient and longsuffering. He generously extends mercy to sinners *until* extended mercy fails to produce a redemptive effect. When it becomes impossible to redeem sinners, God's

wrath against sin is unrestrained and He cauterizes the malignancy of sin by destroying those who refuse to love righteousness. Look at the sordid history of Israel in the Old Testament. God's actions with Israel are a mirror of how He has dealt with all nations from the beginning of time.

Moral Novocaine

God's actions in Noah's day proves that sin is a one-way street to destruction. Our world is becoming like Noah's day once again because sin works like a shot of Novocaine. It deadens our thinking, clouds and distorts our feelings, and colors our understanding of right and wrong.

When sin stupefies the reasoning powers of a person, base passions become dominate. When base passions rule, people commit horrible deeds to satisfy uncontrollable lust or obsession. Day after day, newspapers confirm that we live in an age when carnal passions rule, and it seems that many people are unable to reason. Sin, like its twin sister, the grave, is relentless in its quest – steadily tightening its control over the nations and, ultimately, the world.

Although the first six chapters of the Bible do not give us many details about Noah's situation, we can consider the sinful world today and compare it with what behavior must have been like in Noah's day. *It is an end time parallel in reverse:* Jesus said, **"Now the Earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. . . . for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. . . . people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark. . . ."**

These verses are full of meaning when viewed in the backdrop of Noah's day. Remember that Noah preached his heart out for 120 years and the antediluvians **"knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away."** We have to wonder, "How can this be?"

The answer is moral Novocaine. At first, Noah's preaching was a spectacle, an oddity, a news item, a folly. It did not take long before Noah's peers regarded him as a kook, a doomsayer, a pest, a cult leader and a nuisance. After a few years of sounding like a broken record, no one listened to Noah because the antediluvians had become intoxicated with sin. They became consumed with debasing entertainment, debauchery, sexual immorality, gluttony, greed and the pursuit of every sensual pleasure.

They lived without concern for tomorrow – eating and drinking, giving parties (marriage feasts), etc. The antediluvians lived for hundreds of years and they would not believe Noah's message: Time was limited, and the time for the age of the antediluvians was about to end! Centuries passed and they were lulled into believing there was an endless supply of time.

I do not want to sound like I am saying that life for everyone was pleasant in Noah's day. Corruption brings violence, murder, physical and emotional abuse for children, cheating, lying, stealing, sexual immorality, hatred and strife. Sin has two faces (two-faced). One side may be comedy, but the other is tragedy. In fact, it is the tragic side of sin that motivates sinners toward

comedy.

The truth is that there is no genuine happiness in sin and there is no peace and satisfaction in wrong doing. There may be shallow moments of laughter and hilarity, because sin offers pleasure for a short season. However, sin's comedy and its pleasures are as fleeting as darkness at sunrise. When a person commits a sin, God sends the gift of guilt so that repentance and reformation can occur. Unfortunately, moral Novocaine numbs this gift of guilt. The antediluvians never realized how offensive they were in God's sight.

Jesus said, **"They knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away"** because Jesus Himself was present during the flood. Jesus walked and talked with Noah and commanded him to build the ark. Jesus, the Creator of Earth, sent the flood! As Jesus looked forward to our day, He gave us the warning parallel **"as it was in the days of Noah. . . ."**

Odd-ball Noah

The Bible says, **"But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord."** (Genesis 6:8) Why did Jesus look favorably on Noah? Why did Jesus select Noah to build an ark? **"This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God."** (Genesis 6:9) Noah was a genius. We know this because Noah feared the Lord and the Bible says "the fear the Lord" is the first thing a smart person discovers! (Psalm 111:10)

I believe that Noah was considered an odd-ball in his community because he walked with God. Noah did not participate in the decadent and indulgent behavior of his time. I am sure he was not popular or well liked because God's people are always out of step with the ways of the world. Jesus told His disciples: **"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."** (John 15:19) Light and darkness can never walk together and be compatible.

In my mind's eye, I see Noah and the Lord walking together constantly. In one of these walks, the Lord told Noah that He was going to destroy the Earth. Jesus explained to Noah that He had no option but to cauterize the malignant growth of sin by cleansing the world with a great flood of water. (The next cleansing will be with fire.) The Lord explained to Noah that the survival of animal, plant and human life depended on Noah building a great boat.

I assume that Noah was wealthy, for he must have borne the costs of building the ark. No doubt, Noah was a very knowledgeable man in areas such as engineering, biology, personnel and project management, animal husbandry, botany, nutrition and other sciences.

Even so, given the daunting size of the task, Noah must have been overwhelmed. Although Noah was in the prime of life at 480 years of age when the Lord commanded him to cut the first tree, some of the issues that he may have had to address were:

1. Noah had to methodically exchange or convert his possessions to currency, in order to meet payroll and material purchases.
2. To save as many people as possible, Noah had to give frequent seminars warning the people about the coming flood and the end of life as they knew it. After a while, fewer and fewer people attended, until eventually, no one showed up.
3. I can imagine that Noah hired people to collect and preserve thousands of various kinds of seeds. These would have to be gathered, sorted and cataloged for regeneration after the flood. Containers and food for thousands of insects had to be constructed and arranged. Noah was responsible for gathering samples of every living thing and placing them aboard the ark so that they might survive the flood.
4. Noah hired hundreds of people to cut and transport trees. At the building site, Noah's employees shaped and assembled the trees according to the plans which the Lord had given him. Noah spent many years working with the employees making sure the great boat was built according to divine specifications.

Building the ark was hard work. There was much to do, much to learn and no time to waste. Think about it. All the life that God had created (minus the fish) were reduced to a few thousand samples stored in a wooden boat for about a year. God made the world in six days, but it took Noah and his employees 120 years to gather the sufficient varieties necessary to replenish the world after the flood.

Noah's Family

Noah had a very supportive family. Without a doubt, disposing personal property and cherished possessions was painful. However, this had to be done, because every square inch of the ark was designed for sustaining life and had very little space for personal belongings. It would be fair to say that Noah probably sold everything he owned to pay for the ark. Can you imagine how Noah's wife must have felt when their remaining possessions were sold to cover their last expenses? The good news is that the process of building the ark did not cost Noah his family.

Noah's three sons were married, but none of them had children at the time of the flood. Can you imagine what it must have been like for Noah's daughters-in-law to go to their parents and plead with them to come into the ark for the last time? I can only imagine their heart-felt anguish when their parents and siblings refused to go. Can you imagine Noah's grief when none of his employees would enter the very ark they had helped to build?

If we were to switch places with Noah within the context of our lives today, not very many people would be willing to do what Noah did. Few people in today's world have that kind of faith, character, courage and stamina to deal with the ridicule, threats, sacrifice and toil. Almost no one is up to such a challenge. What does Noah's actions say about his faith in God? As I have considered Noah, I have concluded that even if there had been no flood, Noah would have been willing to build the ark because Noah was willing to do anything that God wanted. *This was Noah's faith.*

A Closer Look At These End Time Parallels

Three things about Noah's life and experience stand out. First, **"Noah did everything just as God commanded him. The Lord then said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation.' "** (Genesis 6:22, 7:1) Noah's faith produced obedience, and when the last day arrived, a compassionate God declared Noah righteous and directed him into *the ark of safety*.

The end time parallel is this: During the Great Tribulation, worshiping God as He commanded, including the fourth commandment, will be a difficult test of faith. True faith in God produces obedience *at any cost*. Remember why Nebuchadnezzar threw Daniel's three friends into the fiery furnace?

They were put in the furnace because they refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's image. (Daniel 3) During the Great Tribulation, everyone who refuses to worship the image of the beast will be threatened with death. (Revelation 13:15) The good news is that everyone who passes the worship test of faith will be declared righteous and sealed with the righteousness of Christ. This sealing will be *the ark of safety* for our day.

Second, the Bible says, **"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."** (Hebrews 7:11) The Bible says that Noah condemned *the* world by obeying God. This means that during the Great Tribulation, some people will submit to the authority of God, and by doing this, they will prove that it can be done!

If it is possible for one faith-filled person to obey God's commandments, then people who refuse to obey them will be condemned because they, too, could have obeyed. This is how Noah condemned the world. God, through Noah, invited everyone to get on the ark, but no one accepted His invitation except Noah and his family.

God drowned every other living person on Earth. The same situation will exist during the Great Tribulation. Through His 144,000 servants, God will invite everyone on Earth to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ by worshiping Him. Many people will submit because of their faith in God, but the rest of humanity will be destroyed.

The last element about Noah's story that stands out concerns the seven days of waiting. **"The Lord then said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. . . . Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.' And Noah did all that the Lord commanded him."** (Genesis 7:1,4,5)

For seven days, the ark sat strangely silent on the hilltop where it had rested during its construction. The townspeople did not concern themselves with the silence. The local "newspaper" mocked Noah saying that he and his family were trapped in the ark with hundreds of animals. An unseen hand closed the giant door to the ark, which no man could move.

I see the gathering of the animals into the ark as very ironic. God wanted to gather people into the ark, but they would not come, so He gathered up the animals. If the antediluvians had not

been so numb with sin, this extraordinary event would have caused sober reflection.

Instead, it became a point of laughter and ridicule. I can hear them taunt, "So, Noah has built a zoo!" As the hours and days passed, the revelers forgot Noah and the ark as they focused on their daily routines. I believe at midnight on the seventh day, a huge bolt of lightning tore the sky from East to West and peals of deafening thunder echoed the end of mercy. Droplets of water from Heaven became torrents driven by powerful winds and the floodgates of the deep were opened producing gigantic geysers.

Suddenly, water was rising rapidly everywhere. How long do you think it took for the numbness of the Novocaine of sin to wear off? Panic and fear filled every house. Noah's testimony was true! Their recognition of truth came too late – forever too late. God had sealed the giant door of the ark and even Noah could not open it to receive desperate passengers.

God had spoken for 120 years and He had nothing more to say. The time had come. All the wicked people must die. God could have motivated every antediluvian into the ark through fear. If He had left a door open, they would have gotten on board. However, in God's economy, a person is not saved by fear. A person is saved by faith or not at all.

The end time parallel is identical. When the events of the seventh trumpet begin, every person alive will have made a choice – to receive the seal of God or the mark of the beast. It is at this moment that God will close the great door of mercy in Heaven. God will terminate His generous offer of salvation.

The wicked cannot harm people who have God's seal. A bolt of lightning will tear the sky from East to West and peals of deafening thunder will signal "salvation is finished." Burning hailstones will rain down from the sky and the a global earthquake will rip the Earth into pieces. (Revelation 11:15-19) Within minutes, a great sign will appear in Heaven. Everyone on Earth will look up and see the Ark of the Covenant displayed in the heavens. *That ark* contains God's holy law. God will show the Ark of the Covenant to the world for the same reason He showed rain to the antediluvians.

Because they refused to believe there was a holy law, the wicked will be condemned. Now that their rebellion has been exposed, the wicked will need to be destroyed. The seven last plagues will fall on them and the wicked will all be destroyed by the time the seventh plague is finished. Once again, unbelievers must perish. God has decreed it.

An Antidote for the Novocaine of Sin

If we do not make a determined effort to pray and search God's Word for greater truth *each* day, it is inevitable that we will become desensitized by sin. I remember the first time we drove through Nebraska. Shirley and I were returning from Seattle and we did not know about the big hog farms located in that state. I was driving along enjoying the open road when suddenly we encountered a overwhelming stench that took our breath away. I looked around expecting to see some big carcass beside the road. I grabbed a tissue to cover my nose.

The smell was overpowering. I had been driving about 70 mph, but I sped up, hoping to escape the odor. I remember thinking to myself, "Man, I don't know what was killed, but it must have been huge to stink this much." The faster we went, the worse the smell became. After a few miles, I saw some signs and I realized the overpowering stench was not from a dead animal, but from living animals – thousands of pigs!

I was surprised their pungent odor permeated so many square miles. I remember thinking to myself, "This must be how this Earth smells to God." No wonder God required the priest to use incense in the earthly temple. I was amazed that local people did not notice the odor! I have since learned that people who live in or near the pig farms do not notice the smell of their pigs unless an unusually strong breeze puts it in their face. Sin has the same effect. The foul odor of sin often goes unnoticed by the people of this world. We have grown accustomed to it.

It is the way of life in every culture. A few months after the smelly incident in Nebraska, I was conducting a seminar in Colorado and mentioned this experience to the audience. During a break in the seminar, a man came up to me and said, "I owned a large pig farm for 30 years and the odor did not bother me until we sold the farm and moved into town. I never understood why people became so aggravated by the smell of my pigs until we moved away and my own nose was cleaned out!"

When the farmer moved away from his pigs, his nose began to work! When we distance ourselves from Sodom and Gomorrah, we see how wicked sin is! Sin, like Novocaine, deadens our senses. The antediluvians did not take Noah's message seriously because they were spiritually numb.

They could not comprehend their offensiveness in God's sight. The same problem exists today. The carnal mind does not realize the strength of its rebellion against God until it is directly confronted with God's will. God confronted Pharaoh with His commands and Pharaoh refused ten times! The antediluvians were confronted with God's plans for 120 years and they refused to enter the ark. During the Great Tribulation, God will confront every man, woman and child with His authority expressed in the Ten Commandments and a majority of the world will rebel. There is an antidote for the Novocaine of sin! We have a Savior from sin and He has sent the Holy Spirit to everyone – offering freedom from sin.

There is a law that says, "By beholding, we become changed." Lot's family became desensitized to Sodom's sinful ways by living in that pig pen for a few years. Unless we fill our minds with God's Word and pray for spiritual discernment each day, the stench of sin will gradually disappear and sin will become tolerable. The antidote for the Novocaine of sin is walking with God. Noah, Enoch, and Abraham walked with God! These men knew that every act of sin gives birth to sorrow, heartache and ultimately death. Sin *can be* so tempting.

Sin may look like a "piece of cake" or in Eve's case, "a beautiful piece of fruit," but sin is an illusion. The devil markets sin with all the glitter and glamour the carnal mind can create, but when sin reaches maturity it is very painful to see. Who feels euphoric after visiting a ward of AIDS victims? Who gets a rush of joy after looking at a rape or murder victim? Who feels great after learning that his or her house has been broken into and the valuables stolen? It is ironic

that sinners dislike the consequences of sin.

We know that sin is powerful because the word "forbidden" means nothing when the passion for sin is roused. If our minds are not renewed by God’s Word and ennobled by God’s Spirit, sin will captivate us, numb us, deceive us and ultimately destroy us. This is why God hates sin.

When Jesus sailed across the Sea of Galilee to the region of the Gaderenes, two demoniacs who were living in or near a pig pen met Him. (Matthew 8:28-32) Jesus could see these tortured men desired to be set free, but He also saw they were powerless against the mighty demons that had conquered them.

Jesus used this occasion to create a wonderful object lesson. *Freedom from the dominion of sin is only possible through Christ.* Because He loved them, Jesus set the helpless men free. He commanded the demons to leave the men and enter a large herd of pigs that were nearby. Immediately the men became joyful and sane, but the pigs became wild and disoriented and they ran into the lake and drowned themselves. An old adage goes like this: "If people do not resist the devil, they become a dwelling for the devil."

Evidently, these two men had not resisted the influence of demons and many demons possessed them. Likewise, demons possessed the antediluvians and ironically, they suffered the same fate as the herd of pigs. There is a sobering end time parallel surrounding Noah and the flood: **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."**

Moses and the Mark of the Beast

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The Moses Murder Mystery

The life of Moses could be divided into three distinct segments of 40 years each: The first segment began with his birth and ended with him murdering an Egyptian taskmaster. The next segment began when Moses escaped from Egypt and ended when he returned to Egypt.

The final segment of his life began with the Exodus and ended when he died.

Except for his miraculous escape from death shortly after he was born, the Bible gives minimal information about Moses' first 40 years. (See Exodus 1 and 2.) The Bible does not reveal how Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses or provide additional insight about his time in Pharaoh's house.

We do know, however, that when Moses grew to be a man, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. (Hebrews 11:24) The reason Moses murdered the Egyptian taskmaster remains a mystery to me. Did Moses kill the Egyptian out of a sense of injustice or was Moses simply looking for a way to gain respect from his Hebrew brothers?

The circumstances surrounding the murder happened this way: One day Moses left the comforts of Pharaoh's palace to see for himself how his Hebrew brothers were fairing under the agony of slavery.

He came upon an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave and believing that no one was watching (Exodus 2:12), Moses killed the Egyptian and quickly buried the corpse in the sand. However, another Hebrew witnessed the event and word of the murder spread like a wildfire through the Hebrew camp. Moses feared for his life and fled to the desert to escape Pharaoh's wrath.

For the next segment of 40 years, Moses lived in the desert as a fugitive. While working for minimum wages (tending sheep) in the hostile environment of the desert, Moses discovered two essential elements of life: A *patient* faith in God and contentment. The stark surroundings of the desert with its unforgiving lessons of survival taught Moses more about depending on the Lord than he could have ever learned while living in Pharaoh's palace. Moses also discovered the power and joy of love when he cared for the sheep.

Ultimately, the first 80 years of his life prepared Moses for the finest and final segment of his life. His education in Pharaoh's schools and his re-education in the desert combined in a unique way to make him one of the world's finest servant leaders.

The Servant Leader

Being a servant leader is quite difficult because the attitudes of a servant and the attitudes of a leader are constantly at war against each other for mastery. The "leader" uses authority and control to meet objectives, but the "servant" uses love to get the job done.

The servant leader exalts the welfare and development of his or her subjects equal to that of the objectives. In other words, the servant aspect of leadership is willing to miss objectives (or profits) to improve and develop the members of the group, whereas the leader aspect of leadership is willing to sacrifice members of the group to meet the objectives!

In practice, this balance is very hard to manage and Moses often failed in his attempt to be a servant leader. Remember the time he impatiently struck a rock to obtain water when God had commanded him to speak to it? (Numbers 20:8-12) That impatient act prevented Moses from entering the promised land. I find it ironic that Moses had to flee from Pharaoh's palace because of an impulsive act and he also failed to enter the promised land due to his impulsive nature.

After Moses was gone for 40 years, God forced him to return to Egypt. The Lord's anger burned against Moses because he resisted God's command at the burning bush to return to Egypt! (Exodus 4:14) Shortly after the burning bush episode, Moses made the Lord so angry that the Lord was prepared to kill Moses.

In that case, Moses' wife, Zipporah, saved him from God's wrath! (Exodus 4:24) When Moses arrived in Egypt, he was a much different man than when he left. Moses had left Egypt with an attitude of a leader, but he returned 40 years later with an attitude of a servant. A tremendous difference lies between the egocentric attitude of the young Moses and the theo-centric attitude of Moses at age 80. It took 40 years of tending sheep to transform Moses into a meek man. When Moses finally learned how to follow The Good Shepherd, God promoted Moses to be a shepherd of God's people.

A Man without a Country

When Moses arrived back in Egypt after his 40-year wilderness sojourn, he did not have the respect of the Hebrew elders. No doubt, some of the elders remembered that Moses was a fugitive from justice. This made it necessary for God to use miraculous signs through Moses in the presence of the elders.

Otherwise, the elders would have rejected Moses and the message he presented. (Exodus 4:30,31) From our vantage point today, it is interesting that even after directing a miraculous exodus from Egypt using great displays of God's power, his people still did not respect Moses. There is a simple reason for this: The carnal mind does not understand the spiritual mind. God used 40 years in the wilderness to transform Moses into a spiritual man. In the carnal world, leaders (politicians) must maneuver so a majority of important people constantly admire them or they will be out of a job.

When Moses returned to Egypt, he did not promote himself to be a savior of the Hebrews, nor did he seek followers or popularity. He did not arrive with an entourage of servants nor did he

command a mighty army prepared to defeat Pharaoh. Moses arrived in Egypt as a servant of God.

Moses explained to the elders that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had sent him back to Egypt to lead Israel out of Egyptian slavery. To verify Moses' claim, God worked several miracles through him. (Exodus 4:29-31) After seeing the miracles, the elders believed.

Background

The story of Moses offers several end time parallels that are important to consider. Interestingly, the parallels found in the lives of Moses, Pilate, Saul, Esther, Gideon, Daniel and others were recorded in the Bible for *our* benefit! (1 Corinthians 10:11)

For a point of reference, our background study on Moses should begin with Jacob – the great-great grandfather of Moses. Jacob had twelve sons and his favorite son was Rachel's first son, Joseph. (Remember, Jacob worked fourteen years to acquire Rachel from Laban. See Genesis 29.)

When Joseph was seventeen, his envious brothers sold him to Midianite merchants for 20 pieces of silver. These merchants took Joseph to Egypt and sold him there as a slave. (Genesis 37:28) In spite of this great injustice, Joseph remained faithful to God, and God wonderfully blessed Joseph through some very tough experiences.

About 23 years after his brothers sold Joseph as a slave, the king of Egypt released him from prison and promoted him to the position of Prime Minster of Egypt. This sudden promotion occurred because God enabled Joseph to interpret a dream that God specifically gave to Pharaoh. Pharaoh's dream predicted seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. God warned Pharaoh of an approaching famine through Joseph, and Pharaoh was so pleased to know the meaning of his dream that he elevated Joseph to his new position.

After seven years of bountiful harvests, the sun began to scorch the Earth and the famine was severe and widespread. The famine also reached Canaan and about two years later, Jacob and his eleven sons ran out of food. In desperation, Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy food. Through a series of events, Jacob's sons discovered their little brother, Joseph, was the Prime Minister of Egypt. Imagine their great fear and panic! In one of the greatest acts of compassion ever recorded, Joseph forgave his brothers and insisted that his father and all of his brothers move to Egypt.

Knowing the famine would last five more years, Joseph moved his father and brothers to the region of Goshen and the children and grandchildren of Jacob (Israel) flourished in Egypt.

One of Jacob's twelve sons, Levi, had a son named Kohath. Now, follow the genealogy – Kohath had a son named Amram, and Amram was the father of Aaron and Moses. This Levi-Kohath-Amram-Moses genealogy is important to this story because Moses knew as a youngster that *his generation – the fourth generation* – was the generation scheduled to be freed from

Egyptian slavery!

Review the original promise that God gave to Abraham many years earlier: **"Then the Lord said to him, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. *In the fourth generation* your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.' "** (Genesis 15:13-16, italics mine)

The Fourth Generation

I hope you have read the Bible account describing how God miraculously used Pharaoh's daughter to rescue baby Moses from the river and adopt him. (Exodus 2) Growing up in the palace of Pharaoh and learning about his miraculous rescue at birth could put all kinds of ideas in a young man's mind.

I am sure that as Moses grew into manhood, he probably concluded that *he* was a man of destiny. Moses could easily have concluded that God had chosen *him* to deliver Israel from Pharaoh's control and lead His people into Canaan to inherit the land God promised Abraham. I believe these ideas were probable because at that time, Moses was the only Hebrew in the world who was not a slave.

Moses also was aware that he belonged to the fourth generation and knew God had promised Abraham that the fourth generation in Egypt would return to Canaan and inherit the land! Evidently these thoughts led Moses to conclude that *he* was the one who would set his people free. However, one pivotal problem with Moses' conclusion was that the slaves had no respect for Moses. They lived in the ghetto of Goshen and every day they endured terrible suffering as slaves. Conversely, Moses had lived in Pharoah's palace and enjoyed the best things that money could buy.

No matter what Moses thought and though Moses refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter (Hebrews 11:24,25), the other Hebrews did not regard Moses *as one of them*! Moses probably knew about this alienation and set out to prove to his kinsmen that he really identified with them and their suffering. Part of Moses' motivation for killing the Egyptian may have been the strained relationship between Moses and his identification with his people. However, the murder was a rash decision and it did not enamor Moses to his people.

In reality, his action ultimately proved to everyone that he was not very smart. The very next day, when Moses realized that (a) his own people had no interest in mounting an insurrection against Pharaoh by following his example, and (b) Pharaoh would probably sentence him to death for unlawfully killing an Egyptian, Moses decided it was in his best interest to disappear from Egypt.

His grand illusion of delivering the Hebrews from slavery simply evaporated as he fled into the

isolation of the desert to save himself from certain death.

End Time Parallel

With God, timing is everything. God did not need Moses to deliver *His* people from slavery. God could have exercised any one of thousands of options to deliver His people. This brings up an interesting point about faith. I believe Moses was like Abraham. Moses wanted to deliver his people from slavery, but God's larger plans for the Exodus included several object lessons between Himself and Pharaoh. Of course, Moses did not know about God's larger picture and Moses' finite view of God's plans led to his failure.

This is always the human problem. - Remember the case of adultery between Abraham and Hagar? Abraham and Sarah schemed to fulfill God's plan by violating their marriage covenant. Moses attempted to fulfill God's magnificent plans by killing an Egyptian. *Like Abraham, Moses sincerely believed in God, but both men failed because they would not wait for God to resolve the situation!* Moses violated God's law by killing the Egyptian and consequently, he had 40 years of solitary isolation! As a fugitive in the harsh setting of a desert prison, Moses learned submission and total dependance on God. Moses discovered the practical meaning of faith and learned *how* to wait so that God could fulfill His higher purposes for Moses. (Waiting for God is one of the most difficult lessons to learn. James 1:4) When God concluded that Moses' spiritual life had reached a satisfactory level of maturity, He called Moses to do a special work for Him and Moses submitted to God's plan.

There is a profound end time parallel here. During the Great Tribulation, each person will face a question of survival. As the issue of survival becomes all-consuming, *the human solution* will stand opposing *the divine solution.* (Our ways are often contrary to God's ways, because God's ways are not like our ways.)

For example, the Bible makes it clear that a severe famine will occur during the Great Tribulation and food supplies will be scarce. So, in the face of death, does hunger justify stealing? The juxtaposition between starvation and stealing forces each of us to take a tough look at the principles we honestly maintain. If we answer "yes" to the question that hunger justifies stealing, then our principles are no different from the principles of thugs who currently roam and loot the world.

They steal because they do not have what they want and do not trust God to provide for their needs. Do not stop there – take the question one step further. Does hunger justify killing? If we answer "yes," then we are no different from Moses whose impulsive act killed the Egyptian.

The point is that submission to God means submission to *God's control of the situation* – and in some cases this means submission to the point of death. (Remember the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace?) Here is a truth to consider: *Calvary proves that Jesus would not participate in wrong doing (unrighteousness) to sustain His own life (and neither should those who honor Him)!* (See Matthew 4.)

The Great Tribulation is just before us, so carefully consider these words from Revelation 13:10: **"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints."**

Reread that last sentence. This text is directed at God's people during the Great Tribulation and it indicates that many of God's people will be imprisoned *without* justification. Also, many of God's people will be killed *without* justification. So, get ready children of God.

This world is full of injustice and it will be directed our way soon! God's Word has declared the course of coming events so that our faith in God might remain steady. God's people need *patient endurance and faithfulness*! God knows the future and He already knows the outcome for each of us.

Obviously, we do not know how our particular future will unfold, but that is not our concern. Our concern is to remain faith-full to God and the principles of His kingdom today – even to the point of death!

Moses before Pharaoh

The first time Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh, they presented a small *demand*. Notice that God did not demand something from Pharaoh that would destroy his nation's economy. God merely demanded a three day leave of absence, that is all. **". . . Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: "Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.' " Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.' "** (Exodus 5:1,2)

Pharaoh's response immediately revealed his heart! Although Pharaoh has been dead for a long time, his words and attitude live on. The *carnal response* of the human heart when brought face to face with the sovereign will of God remains unchanged: **"Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?"**

God did not offer to negotiate with Pharaoh. Instead, God confronted Pharaoh with a direct order, **"Let my people go. . . ."** During the Great Tribulation, God will confront the people of Earth with a direct order, **". . . Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. *Worship him* who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."** (Revelation 14:7, italics mine) Moses and Aaron were to Pharaoh what the 144,000 will be to the world during the Great Tribulation.

God will empower and send His servants throughout the world to proclaim the everlasting gospel. The gospel of Christ commands everyone to worship the Creator. This means that we should structure our lives to incorporate the Ten Commandments, which includes His seventh day Sabbath. God's point-blank declaration will produce a similar response to that of Pharaoh in many people. They will say, **"Who is the Lord, that I should obey him. . . ."**

Remember that it took ten plagues to ravage Egypt before Pharaoh's rebellion temporarily softened. Pharaoh's behavior should hold special meaning for students of Bible prophecy, especially for individuals who want to understand the use of "Sodom and Egypt" in Revelation 11:8. Notice the text: **"Their bodies** [e.g., the two witnesses] **will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified."**

Consider why the Bible refers to Sodom and Egypt in Revelation 11. These two entities, Sodom and Egypt, describe the mind set of the wicked at the time of the seventh trumpet. The seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15-19) marks the close of the offer of salvation.

When the seventh trumpet sounds in Heaven, God will have separated the people of Earth into two groups (sheep and goats). God will seal one group with His seal and the other group will have received the mark of the beast. The group that receives the mark of the beast will have the same defects in their character as the ancient inhabitants of Sodom and Egypt.

Sodom represents a class of people who cannot discern right from wrong. The Sodomites *were inebriated with sexual immorality* and they vigorously promoted their degenerate ways. The consciences of the Sodomites and the inhabitants who lived in the cities around Sodom were cauterized as with a hot iron. As a result, God's patient forbearance with them ended and He burned Sodom, Gomorrah and several adjacent cities to the ground with a meteorite shower of burning hail and sulfur. (Genesis 13:13; 19:24-29)

Egypt, on the other hand, represents a class of people who defiantly refuse to submit to God's authority. Like Pharaoh, Egypt represents a group of people who will refuse to render obedience to Almighty God, even after they have heard God's demands!

The terms, Sodom and Egypt, represent a point in time when divine forbearance with the wicked has no redemptive effect. When God's subjects have reached that point, God can do no more to save them. Therefore, God will destroy the wicked, just as He did in Pharaoh's day. Think about this: A Sovereign is not sovereign as long as rebellion exists! This is why God will ultimately destroy sin itself! (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)

From Pharaoh's Point of View

It is quite possible to read a page in the Bible and overlook some essential points that are on that page. People who have studied the Bible at length know what I mean. Words are a means to convey thoughts and thoughts are the language of the Spirit! I mention this because I would like to present Pharaoh's response to Aaron and Moses from Pharaoh's point of view.

Of course, I have speculated about some details in the story that are not found in Scripture, however, I have conscientiously tried to keep the added information consistent with the historical setting.

One morning, as Pharaoh Amenhotep II was sitting on his throne and overseeing the business of his expansive kingdom, his court secretary informed him that two Hebrews, Aaron and

Moses, were present and wanted to speak with him. The king was pleased to hear that these two men wanted to meet with him. Pharaoh had heard rumors about Aaron and Moses and he wanted to confront them! Pharaoh concluded this was a fine opportunity that was knocking at his door.

Ordinarily, slaves were denied access to Pharaoh, since they belonged to the lowest order of Egyptian culture. In Pharaoh's government, lieutenants who managed slaves reported to governors who oversaw the day-to-day operations of the kingdom. If any lieutenant or governor allowed the king to suffer loss, Pharaoh executed or publicly humiliated them. Such was the harsh, but highly effective management style of Amenhotep II.

Pharaoh wanted to meet with Aaron and Moses because he had received reports that revealed that these two men had convinced many slaves to rest from their labors on the seventh day of the week. Rebellion is an alarming development for any king, but Pharaoh was, for the moment, more curious than furious at this recent development among the slaves. He wanted to know what was going on.

So, Pharaoh invited these two elderly men from Goshen into his court. Evidently, Amenhotep II did not know that Moses had killed an Egyptian 40 years earlier. If Amenhotep II had known, the Egyptians would have arrested Moses on the spot as a fugitive from justice.

Pharaoh had heard rumors that Moses had supernatural powers and that he could perform miracles. Pharaoh wanted to see Moses himself and verify if this was true. (Exodus 4:29-31) Pharaoh also knew about a prophecy circulating among the slaves that their God had given to their patriarch, Abraham, which stated that Abraham's descendants would serve as slaves in Egypt for 400 years.

According to rumor, the slaves believed their 400 years of slavery was about to end. The timing of these reports and the notoriety surrounding Moses aroused Pharaoh's curiosity, so he allowed Aaron and Moses to meet with him.

As Aaron and Moses approached the elevated throne, Pharaoh looked down on two men in their eighties. They were humble and polite; not arrogant or hostile. They respectfully bowed before the king and after expressing appreciation for the audience, they presented the *demand* of their God: **". . . This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.' "** (Exodus 5:1)

Pharaoh was not prepared to hear a demand from two slaves. No doubt he reacted much like any king would have reacted. Kings typically have huge egos and "demands" are something they give – not something they receive. Pharaoh did not expect the sheer boldness of Aaron and Moses.

Pharaoh expected these two slaves to have an attitude closer to begging or groveling. After all, a couple of slaves were talking to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Even more, as a matter of court etiquette, a person does not demand something of a Sovereign. Even Esther humbly *asked* her husband, King Xerxes, to spare her life and the lives of her people from annihilation. (Esther

7:3)

Pharaoh must have smiled or winced at their foolishness. He looked at them for a couple seconds, gathered his thoughts and rose to his feet. He answered their demand with two simple statements. First, he denigrated the God of Israel. **"Who is this Lord, the God of Israel, that I should obey him?"**

As a man-god, Pharaoh believed that he had higher authority than the God of Israel. Before you condemn the pompous king, ask yourself if you have ever stood in Pharaoh's sandals. Have you ever defended a belief that you thought was true, only to learn later the belief you supported was dead wrong?

Among the religions of the world, which one has the greater God? Is Allah greater than Jehovah? Is Buddha greater than Jesus? Of course, the answer you may give to these questions about the superiority of gods will depend on your beliefs about God. Pharaoh worshiped the sun-god, Ra, and he was convinced his god was superior to the God of Israel. The Egyptians believed that Ra appointed Pharaoh himself to rule over Egypt and Pharaoh believed that Ra had divinely empowered him to be Egypt's king.

Pharaoh truthfully answered: **"I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go."** Pharaoh faced the bearers of God's demand and bluntly stated that he would not *obey* the demand. His response was about as direct and to the point as a human being can get – no weasel words from Pharaoh.

In his defense, Pharaoh's response reflected his religious beliefs. From his point of view, Ra, was superior to Israel's God because the Hebrew nation was subservient to Egypt. If the God of the Hebrews was greater than Ra, then let Him deliver them from his hand! Now be honest. If you had been in Pharaoh's sandals that day, would you have granted a couple million slaves time off for a three-day religious service after two elderly slaves, speaking for the God of captives, *demanded* it?

The Fear of the Lord

"Then they said

[to Pharaoh]**, 'The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword.' "** (Exodus 5:3) Moses and Aaron were caught between their fear of the Lord and their fear of Pharaoh. They wanted to be sure the king knew they were not requesting a three-day leave of absence simply as a ploy to escape Pharaoh's dominion.

Rather, they were presenting a demand that the Lord their God had given to them. Moses and Aaron tried to reason with Pharaoh and told him the Hebrews needed to make atonement for their sins with *their* God or *their* God might destroy them!

During 400 years of slavery in Egypt, the Hebrews had largely ignored God because remaining faithful to a God who permits His children to be held captive in a depressing situation that has no apparent end is very difficult. So, God told Israel through His servant, Moses, that His people must atone for their sins, as a precondition for being delivered from slavery. In other words, before a person (or nation) can receive the gift of freedom from slavery (sin), he or she must first make things right with God, then submit to God's demands.

To be honest, I do not think Pharaoh gave their response any thought. He wanted to get down to business. Standing before him were two men who had caused a big administrative problem. Pharaoh said, **". . . Moses and Aaron, why are *you* taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!"** (Exodus 5:4, italics mine) The king had heard that Moses and Aaron were the instigators of a Sabbath rest rebellion and he ordered them to stop resting on the seventh day and get back to work.

This is quite a story. The story started when Moses notified the Hebrew elders that God required the Hebrews to rest from their labors on His holy day, the seventh day of the week, as another precondition for deliverance from slavery. Every slave was excited to hear that deliverance was at hand and of course, everyone welcomed a day of rest from their labors. So, the elders gave the word and the slaves began to keep God's seventh day Sabbath by resting from their labor.

Can you imagine the response of the task masters when they went to work as usual and found no slaves to do the work? So, Pharaoh's lieutenants immediately responded by requiring the slaves to produce the *same* quota of bricks in six days as they had been producing in seven. As far as the lieutenants were concerned, this requirement ensured the same level of production each week as before. The slaves did not complain, even though the observance of Sabbath meant extra hours of work each day – doing the work of seven days in six days.

NOTE:

Scholars have debated whether the work stoppage caused by Moses and Aaron was the observance of God's seventh day Sabbath. Even though Exodus 5 does not specifically say the slaves rested on the seventh day of the week, the harmony of four supporting points adequately resolves this question.

1. From Creation to the time God gave the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai (a period of about 2,500 years), the only day set aside for rest is God's Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. (Genesis 2:2,3; Exodus 20:8-11)
2. Before God spoke the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, He tested Israel to see if they would obey Him by observing His seventh day. (Exodus 16:4.) This test proves two things. First, God's seventh day was holy *before* God gave the Ten Commandments. (Genesis 2:1-3) Second, God required Israel to observe His Sabbath *before* He gave the Ten Commandments.
3. God demands that His subjects observe His Sabbath day as written in the fourth commandment because worshiping God cannot be determined by reason, customs, traditions or culture. True worship is joyful submission to God's *demands*. The Ten

Commandments are not ten suggestions; the Ten Commandments are ten laws. Some scholars argue that Sabbath observance was an idea codified in the Ten Commandments to benefit the children of Israel. If this argument were true, why did God declare the seventh day of the week to be "holy" (or set apart) to Adam and Eve? (Genesis 2:1-3)

4. The word Pharaoh used suggests that Moses and Aaron led Israel to *Sabbath* from their labors. In Exodus 5:5, Pharaoh said to Aaron and Moses **". . . You make them rest from their labor"** (KJV) and **". . . You are stopping them from working. . . ."** (NIV) This verse indicates two things: First, Pharaoh appropriately charges Aaron and Moses for causing the Israelites to cease their labor. Think about this. Did Aaron and Moses cause Israel to rest from making bricks to agitate Pharaoh or did the slaves submit to the Sabbath rest because it was God's holy day? Second, the Hebrew word used by Pharaoh is *shabath* (Strong's #7673). He said, ". . . You make them *shabath*. . . ." This is the same word God used in Genesis 2:2 when He *rested* from His creative work on the seventh day. Furthermore, the Hebrew word for "Sabbath" in the fourth commandment is a derivative of *shabath* — the word Pharaoh used.

The combination of these four points indicates that the Hebrews were not honoring God's Sabbath day as they knew God had commanded, and He told Moses that they must worship Him by keeping His Sabbath day holy if they wanted to be delivered. (See Ezekiel 20:7,8.) So, the slaves obediently began to rest on the seventh day.

Allegiance to God's demand put Israel in direct opposition to Pharaoh's demand! This is exactly what God wanted and the end time parallel to this story will be no different. When it comes to worshiping God – faith, obedience and deliverance are inseparable. It is impossible for a person knowingly to defy God's sovereignty and simultaneously, enjoy God's favor.

Moses informed the Hebrew elders that Israel must prove its faith in God to be delivered from slavery. Their first step in faith was to rest on God's Sabbath. Israel had to submit to God's higher authority to be delivered from slavery. God tested Israel's faith because His higher law conflicted with Pharaoh's lesser law. The distinct end time parallel should be obvious.

Pharaoh Becomes Mean

"That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: 'You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, "Let us go and sacrifice to our God." ' " (Exodus 5:6-8)

After Aaron and Moses departed, Pharaoh reacted hatefully to their visit. God knew this was coming. Pharaoh became mean because he had no intention of losing control of the slaves. Notice how the carnal heart operates: Selfishness is all about getting and gaining, not losing. Ego is all about being in control, not losing control.

The threat of loss produces anxiety and anger in the carnal heart. Aaron and Moses pressed Pharaoh's big red panic button, and his immediate response was to inflict a great deal of pain on his slaves. Pharaoh's response did not surprise God. God knew this was coming.

Please understand three things about living by faith. First, faith in God is much more than believing something about God is true. Agreeing with truth is different from living by faith. (Even the demons know certain truths about God – and tremble. James 2:19) Faith in God means obedient submission to God's will *at any cost*.

Second, a life of faith is a life of testing. God's law is higher than man's law and He seriously tests faith when we are caught between doing right (as man decrees) or right (as God decrees) – especially when the penalty for violating either law is severe. Daniel demonstrated this point when he was lowered into the lion's den.

He violated the king's law and he was to die in the lion's den. (Daniel 6) The story of Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego also demonstrates this point. These men were about to die (or so they thought) for honoring God's law and violating the king's law. (Daniel 3) Many people misunderstand what it means to have faith in God. God's law demands a level of righteousness that no human can achieve. The good news of the gospel is that God has eliminated our condemnation if we are willing to live by faith in Christ Jesus.

This does not mean that God has eliminated His law. Instead, it means that God will cover our imperfections with Christ's righteousness if we are willing to submit to His laws that are above all other laws. (Romans 7 and 8)

The third component of living by faith concerns ignorance. Ignorance is no excuse for disobedience in man's laws. You may drive 65 mph on a highway, honestly thinking that it is the speed limit. Not until an officer of the law stops and tells you that the speed limit is 55 mph and writes a speeding ticket, do you realize your error.

When it comes to God's law, ignorance does not lessen the consequences of sin, but ignorance does cancel the guilt. In this regard, God is much more generous than man because He knows our heart. But, remember that God will not, under any circumstances, pardon a person who lives in a defiant state of disobedience. (Hebrews 10:26) God confronted Pharaoh with the sovereignty of a higher King and his stubborn defiance eventually brought about condemnation and destruction.

These three points are inserted so you can see how God dealt with Pharaoh, who *at first, was ignorant* of God's sovereignty. He honestly believed that the God of the Hebrews was a lesser God than his sun-god, Ra. However, when the evidence of God's superiority became overwhelming, Pharaoh's ignorance did not give way to submission.

Instead, it turned into open defiance. Pharaoh's experience translates into a powerful end time parallel. Currently, billions of people are ignorant of God's demands on the human race. During the Great Tribulation, God will present His demands in the clearest of terms to the human race. Some people will submit to God's demands, but a large majority of people will make the

transition from ignorance to defiance.

Countermeasures

To counteract what he thought to be the religious nonsense spread by Aaron and Moses, Pharaoh imposed his authority on the slaves to painfully remind them of his sovereignty. Pharaoh demanded more work from the slaves than they could produce and his demands translated into immediate suffering.

Pharaoh's lieutenants controlled the slaves through a very clever scheme. Hebrew elders were appointed over family work units. Whenever a work unit failed to meet its quota, the elders were publicly beaten while their family work unit watched. This form of terrorism controlled the Hebrews very well. It was too much for sons and grandsons, daughters and granddaughters, to see their fathers beaten when production was inadequate, so they worked "like slaves" to meet their quotas.

Pharaoh imposed his demand on the Hebrews the very day that Moses and Aaron presented God's demand to the king. What a knee jerk reaction! Consider the developing dilemma: God demanded Sabbath rest as a precondition for deliverance, and Pharaoh demanded greater work and higher quotas from the slaves.

In addition to producing the same quota of bricks as before, they now had to gather the straw — an impossible demand! This meant the elders of each family would be beaten regularly since the quotas could not be met. Suddenly, God's Sabbath became a nightmare. How could the slaves spend Sabbath with any peace of mind knowing that Sabbath rest would produce ruthless beatings?

Even if the slaves did not observe the seventh day Sabbath rest, they now had to gather straw to make their bricks. This chore was not required of them before Moses came to town. So, the work load reached a new high and their despair reached a new low. Their hopes of deliverance were crushed by intense suffering.

"Leave Us Alone Moses!"

A group of elders went to Pharaoh's court and with one voice they begged him to be reasonable and lighten the work load because it was humanly impossible for them to fulfill the demand. The Bible says, **"The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, 'You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.' When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, 'May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.' "** (Exodus 5:19-21) Aaron and Moses must have felt terrible.

A simple demand presented to Pharaoh had turned life for the Hebrews upside down. Of course, God foreknew these events would occur, but He wanted to demonstrate several key

parallels about Pharaoh's carnal heart *for future generations*. People can joyfully declare allegiance to God when there is no contest between the laws of men and the laws of God. Keeping God's Sabbath rest is a joy when there is no threat of persecution. However, sooner or later, God's sovereignty collides with governments of this world.

The Bible says there was war in Heaven over the issue of God's sovereignty. (See Isaiah 14 and Revelation 12.) The struggle for supremacy is the essence of the battle – whether the battlefield is the human heart, the court of Pharaoh, or in Heaven. The battle to control human loyalty has never been more intense than it is right now, and most people are unaware that it is even going on!

The devil knows that his days are short and he is working overtime to keep the minds of people dull with the cares of life. The devil has lured young people into sexual immorality and he has pacified "pew warmers" with entertainers who have no idea of God's coming wrath. The day when God will suddenly step into the affairs of the human race and reveal His sovereignty is almost here. On a single day, life on Earth will change! (Revelation 8:2-5)

God is about to send a series of devastating judgments on the Earth (the seven trumpets of Revelation) and during these judgments, through His 144,000 servants, He will announce His will to Earth's inhabitants. Revelation predicts that most men and women will respond like Pharaoh: **"I do not know the Lord and I will not obey. . . ."**

When Moses saw the elders being beaten because they could not meet their quota of bricks, **"Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'O Lord, why have *you* brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.' "** (Exodus 5:22,23, italics mine) Moses had presented God's demands before Pharaoh just as God required.

Imagine how Moses must have felt when he saw the painful beatings. No wonder Moses cried unto the Lord, "*You* have not helped *your* people! *You* are killing them with the rod of Pharaoh!" If only Moses had understood that this was exactly the situation the Lord wanted. **"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country.' "** (Exodus 6:1)

God's purposes and actions are always manifold. In a spiritual sense, this means that God "kills several birds with one stone." His ways are always higher and grander than our earthly solutions. **"As the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."** (Isaiah 55:9) God is the Master Designer and Moses' story has many lessons and parallels for you and me.

Summary Parallels

1 - The sovereignty of God is a truth and man's awareness of this fact is ever evaporating.

Lessons learned yesterday are forgotten tomorrow. Unless we are careful, we can minimize God's power and like young Moses and Abraham, take matters into our own hands and dishonor Him. The problem with fallen humanity is that we are always trying to assume the prerogatives of God.

To compensate for this sinister process, from time to time, God creates real-life dramas with real-life players to remind every person of His sovereignty. Remember how King Nebuchadnezzar vainly thought he was Sovereign over Earth? After living like an animal for seven years, he finally conceded that God was Sovereign.

Pharaoh, on the other hand, refused to concede that God was Sovereign, even after God horribly decimated Egypt with ten plagues! Pharaoh went to his death (in the middle of the Red Sea) because of his defiant stubbornness. Pharaoh's experience proves that rebellion can be so complete within a person's heart that he or she will never submit to God. The truth remains, however, that no sooner is the knowledge of God's authority established on Earth than it begins to evaporate again.

When God created the seventh day, He had His reasons for doing so. God imposed His Sabbath rest test on the Hebrews to show His Sovereign power to the Hebrews and the Egyptians. It is a mystery that so many people do not want to rest on God's Sabbath. People offer a dozen reasons why we should not observe God's Sabbath, but what are excuses to God?

When God demanded that His Sabbath be observed as a precondition for deliverance, the Hebrews initially complied. When Pharaoh learned that the Israelites threatened his sovereignty, he implemented pain and torture. The slaves were trapped between two great powers and the penalty for defying either was great!

During the Great Tribulation, God will present His Sabbath rest to the people of Earth with the force of law. God's servants, the 144,000, will explain how God's seventh day Sabbath is not a suggestion, nor an option – it is the fourth commandment of God's law. Like Pharaoh, the world does not currently submit to God's law or honor God's day of rest. During the Great Tribulation, a great conflict will erupt over the issue of worship. Bible prophecies reveal how this conflict will occur: God will initiate the Great Tribulation with a series of destructive judgments.

Because these coming judgments will be overwhelming and catastrophic (killing more than 1.5 billion people in a short time), the survivors on Earth will suddenly wake up to the reality that there is a living God and He is angry with man's behavior. To appease God so that His judgments will cease, the religious and political leaders of the world will unite and impose sinless laws upon mankind. Eventually, these laws will include laws *mandating* that God be worshiped, but these laws will directly oppose God's law.

This contest that God has ordained will cause the people of Earth (like the Hebrews of old) to be caught between two powerful forces. If people obey the laws of men, they will receive the seven bowls of God's wrath. (Revelation 16) If people obey God's law and honor His seventh day Sabbath, the governments of the world will persecute, imprison or execute them for rebellion.

This is the coming contest, and the story of Moses offers an end time parallel for God's people so that our faith in God is strengthened for this eventuality.

2 - Remember that God demanded the Hebrews to observe His Sabbath as a precondition for deliverance. God sent this demand through Moses because He wanted to (a) demonstrate man's rebellion by confronting Pharaoh, the most powerful man on Earth at the time, (b) teach the Hebrews their first lesson in faith, e.g., the importance of trusting in God's leading at any cost or suffering, and (c) use Israel and their deliverance as an object lesson for generations to come. Unfortunately, Pharaoh's persecution destroyed the faith of most Hebrews.

They lost confidence in Moses and in God. So, God sent them a message of hope: **"Therefore** [Moses]**, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. *Then you will know that I am the Lord your God*, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.' Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage."** (Exodus 6:6-9, italics mine) Did you notice the last sentence?

The Hebrews murmured against Almighty God, gave Moses a good cussing and refused to go along with God's plans. If the Hebrews could have known all that we know now, they would have rejoiced at God's words! However, no murmuring, faithlessness, discouragement, and bitterness can shut out God's promises and purposes.

There is an end time parallel here. God placed the Hebrews in a tough situation to test their faith and He showed them they had no faith. Unfortunately, they did not catch the vision and they gave up! Most of the Hebrews went back to work on Sabbath because they lacked faith in God.

Do not forget, these same people died in the wilderness because they never overcame their lack of faith. The end time parallel here is so powerful. Believers in Christ are now the Hebrews. We are the children of God! During the Great Tribulation, God will once again set His Sabbath rest up in direct opposition to man's laws.

Everyone who wants to be delivered from the bondage of sin must submit to God as a precondition to being set free! This will cause our faith to be severely tested. Salvation comes through faith and God will test our faith to see where each of us will stand! When people deliberately and intentionally choose to suffer because of their faith in God, He makes their faith pure, like gold. This refining process produces the type of people who will inherit the Earth made new!

God says, **"This third** [the remnant] **I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.' "** (Zechariah 13:9, insertion mine)

3. - This study of Moses and the Exodus gives us one final unexpected parallel. For thousands of years, slaves have been marked with tattoos or hot-iron brands. (For a picture of a hot iron used for branding slaves during the era of African slave trading, see *National Geographic*, September 1992, page 72)

A person cannot remove or lose a brand or tattoo. It is not transferable. Even as late as World War II, Hitler tattooed millions of prisoners in his concentration camps. The reason for marking slaves is simple. The owner/slave relationship is permanent. Children born of slaves are also slaves. Normally, a slave is never freed because ownership never ends. This is the ugly power of slavery (sin). I believe that Pharaoh's adult slaves were marked with tattoos or brands. This mark prevented any possibility of escape from Egypt, for no one would dare purchase property belonging to the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Did God forbid the Hebrews from wearing tattoos because they were no longer slaves? He said, **"Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord."** (Leviticus 19:28) Perhaps the reason behind this command is that God's people are never slaves, because they are always free to exercise the power of choice. God did not want His people to deface their bodies with markings associated with slavery.

The Lord said, **". . . I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians."** (Exodus 6:6,7)

When Pharaoh's firstborn was killed during Passover night, he finally came to the point of temporary submission. He allowed Moses and the children of Israel to leave Egypt at sunrise. To commemorate this marvelous deliverance, God instituted an annual memorial of this event. He told the Israelites, **"This observance** [e.g., the observance of Passover] **will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the Lord is to be on your lips. For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand."** (Exodus 13:9, insertion mine)

Another interesting parallel is that observing Passover (the day their freedom began) *was like a sign* on the hand or forehead. This statement may reflect the fact that Pharaoh's slaves wore a sign (a tattoo or branding) on their hand or their foreheads indicating their status.

I believe a Hebrew *fore*man probably wore the mark on his *fore*head, while the rank and file slave wore their status on their hands. The parallel is that the mark of the beast will be a tattoo or a branding that will be worn on the right hand or on the forehead! **"He** [the Antichrist, the lamb-like beast] **also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the** [Antichrist, the lamb-like] **beast or the number of his name."** (Revelation 13:16,17, insertions mine)

When the devil radiantly appears on Earth (fifth trumpet), he will masquerade as God. He will

establish a new world order and install himself as king of kings and lord of lords. Only those people who unite with his government can conduct commerce, survival buying and selling. (Revelation 13:17)

Anyone who refuses to unite with the devil's one-world government will be killed. The permit to conduct business will be a physical mark on the hand or forehead. The mark will be a tattoo or hot-iron brand. This mark will not be transferable, so it cannot be stolen or lost.

This "proof of membership" in the new world order requires no electricity or computers. This form of identification will work in any village on this planet. Satan's foremen will wear the *name* that the Antichrist will assume on their foreheads, and rank and file members will wear the evil number, 666, on their right hand. To survive, people will submit to the devil's demands rather than submit to the authority of God!

When Jesus comes in clouds of glory, two groups of people will be on Earth: People who chose to receive the mark of the beast and people who are free of Satan's bondage. When Israel finally entered the promised land after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the new generation did not bear the marks of slavery on their bodies. They were truly free!

On the other hand, the same adults whom God miraculously delivered from Egypt died in the wilderness. Even though they were freed of Pharaoh's slavery by God's mighty power, they never did escape the bondage of their carnal rebellion against God. This is a profound lesson from Moses' story: Our escape from the bondage of sin is only possible through a patient faith that produces total submission to God's demands.

What is a Christian?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Welcome to what we hope will be a life-changing Bible study series on the teachings of Jesus. This first lesson examines the challenge of being a Christian in today's society. So, read through this short study without looking back and see if you can answer the questions at the end of the study. Take a few minutes, open your Bible, read every text mentioned, and see what Jesus said.

The Bible Defines a Christian

According to the New Testament, a Christian is a person who:

(a) responds to the Holy Spirit by totally surrendering his or her will to God's will
(1 Thessalonians 4:7,8; John 3:3-21; Romans 2:14,15; Ezekiel 36:26,27; Hebrews 11:6)

(b) joyfully accepts God's gracious offer of salvation from the penalty for sin (John 3:16; Acts 8:26-39; Acts 16:9-40; 1 John 2:12)

(c) regards the teachings and commandments of Jesus as truth (Matthew 28:19,20; John 5:23,24; 14:6,15; 15:14; Revelation 14:12)

(d) understands there will be trials and conflicts for obeying the teachings of Jesus (John 16:1-4; 1 John 3:13)

(e) renews his/her commitment to Jesus daily because of their sincere love for God and other people (Matthew 10:38; 22:36-40;
1 Peter 2:12; Ephesians 4 and 5)

After considering this definition, a reasonable person might wonder, "Who can be a Christian?" The truth is, every Christian falls short in some way. Paul said, **"For *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:23, italics mine) Does failure and weakness mean that we cannot be a Christian?

John answers, **"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. . . . My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."** (1 John 1:8-2:2)

A Whole New Way of Life

The Christian life is a challenging experience. Christian growth and development never end

unless we backslide. When a person experiences the miracle of being born again, life dramatically changes. The things we used to love, we now hate and the things we used to hate, we now love! (Galatians 5:17) Every born-again Christian discovers with each passing day that there are *new* truths to learn, *new* teachings to consider, *new* trials and tribulations to face, *new* joys to share and *new* ways of expressing God's love to others.

This process never ends! Christian living is synonymous with the words "joy" and "new" because life in Christ is a joy-full experience. (The world cannot understand this joy and peace. John 14:27) Notice the excitement in Paul's words: **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old** [way of life] **has gone, the new has come!"** (2 Corin-thians 5:17, insertion mine)

Three Groups

Broadly speaking, three groups of people live on Earth: Non-Christians, Pseudo-Christians and Christians. Non-Christians are people who reject the authority and commandments of Jesus. Pseudo-Christians are people who *pretend* to be loyal to Jesus Christ, but they do not love Jesus with all of their hearts.

The one word that describes the essential difference between a pseudo-Christian and a genuine Christian is love. A Christian loves Jesus with all his heart, mind and soul and his neighbor as himself. (Matthew 22:36-40) A pseudo-Christian loves self, convenience, friends, assets, self-respect and the approval of others more than God's approval. It is possible to be a pseudo-Christian and not know it! The apostle Peter is a good example of this.

Peter thought he loved Jesus supremely, but a *simple test* revealed that he loved himself more than he loved Jesus. You may recall that on the night Judas betrayed Jesus, He told the disciples that He was about to be arrested. He also told them that fear would overcome them and they would run for their lives. Peter contradicted Jesus and boasted that he was not afraid. He further revealed how little he knew about himself when he said that he would be willing to die for His Master, if necessary.

Jesus told Peter the truth and said, "Peter, you are not as brave as you think you are, nor as devoted to me as you say you are. You will deny Me three times before the rooster crows." (Paraphrased from Matthew 26:34,35.) Three different times later that night, Peter fearfully denied to strangers that he knew Jesus.

After the third denial, Peter heard a rooster crowing in the distance. Suddenly, he remembered Jesus' words. Peter looked into the courtyard at the bleeding and bruised face of his Master, and what he saw broke his heart. Jesus was looking directly at him with an expression of sorrow in His eyes. Peter was crushed with remorse. For the first time in his life, Peter realized that he truly loved himself more than he loved his Lord and Master. This stunning revelation was more than Peter could stand and he ran from the courtyard and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:75)

Hypocrites

The worst kind of "Christian" is a pseudo-Christian. Pseudo-Christians are actors. (The Greek word for actors is *hupokrites* or hypocrites.) Hypocrites *attach* themselves to Christianity and call themselves Christian for personal benefit. Even though Peter and Judas Iscariot were pseudo-Christians at one point in time, their experiences reveal one important distinction.

Judas *pretended* to love Jesus, whereas Peter did love Jesus, but with less than a whole heart. When Peter *confessed* the true condition of his own heart, God purified his love. On the other hand, Judas had no love for Jesus that could be purified. When Judas discovered his true condition, he took his own life, rather than face the truth and confess his sin. (Matthew 27:3-5)

Jesus First

Paul saw the pseudo-Christians in Crete and he wrote these strong words to Titus: **"They** [the Cretans] **claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good."** (Titus 1:16) When people choose to become Christians and follow Jesus, we do not realize how serious this commitment is. In fact, a Christian commitment is even more serious than a marriage vow.

Carefully consider what Jesus said: **"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."** (Luke 9:26; Matthew 10:37,38; Luke 9:24) Why does Jesus demand that level of love and honor for Him, even above everyone else, including family members?

Jesus requires that we love Him more than we love anyone else because He is empowered through that kind of love to fulfill the very purposes for which He created us. Think about this. If we do not give Jesus first place in our heart, He cannot accomplish His will in our lives.
Rebellion terminates God's plans.

The wonderful thing about this teaching is that Jesus does not ask us to do something He has not already done. Look at Jesus' love for us: He loved us more than He loved His own life. He gave up Heaven and was willing to give up His eternal life to ransom us. His love for the Father and His created beings allowed the Father to raise Him from the dead. (Galatians 1:4; 2:20; 1 Corinthians 6:19.20; Acts 10:40) The lesson for all of us is to love God completely and follow Jesus' example about loving others. This will allow Jesus to raise us to eternal life!

If we *totally* submit to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and surrender our life to Christ, He will give us two powers: God's love and Holy Spirit power. (1 John 4:12; Romans 8:6) These two powers enable an ordinary person to do extraordinary things. Christians who love God completely will become bold when necessary because God's love and strength will help them overcome their fear of the consequences. (1 John 4:18)

A pseudo-Christian does not have God's love and strength. Like Peter, the pseudo-Christian may boast of undying loyalty to the Lord, but the furnace of affliction is too hot for selfish motives. When pseudo-Christians face harsh consequences for standing loyal to Jesus, they become afraid like Peter and that fear causes them to deny Christ. Remember, *love is a power from God* that separates the Christian from a pseudo-Christian.

Backsliding is so Easy!

The Bible tells us that God destroyed Israel because of perpetual cycles of rebellion and apostasy. God chose Israel to be set apart from all other nation for a simple reason. He wanted the nation of Israel to be a light to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47; Matthew 23; John 1:11)

What a great disappointment Israel was to God! Israel rebelled against God for the same two reasons that Christians do today. Humanity is assailed by two powerful forces every day of our lives. The first assault comes from within. Human beings have a tremendous internal propensity toward sin and rebellion against God's ways. (Romans 8:7) From birth we have a strong inclination toward sinning and even after a person chooses to be a Christian, his or her sinful disposition still struggles for mastery.

Paul had been a Christian for about thirty years when he wrote these words, **"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."** (Romans 7:18-20) What did Paul do about the sin that strove to master him from within?

"I die every day – I mean that, brothers – just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:31) Paul knew that he had to crucify the lust of his flesh through daily communion with Jesus. Through this intimate connection, Paul received power from Jesus to crucify the lust in his flesh. Peter wrote, **"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."**
(2 Peter 2:11,12) A person cannot be a Christian and follow Jesus without having an infusion of Holy Spirit power. Human nature will not allow it. Many Christians compromise Christ's demands because they lose their connection with Him, causing them to backslide into the pseudo-Christian experience.

No one can follow the teachings of Jesus while separated from the power of Christ. Paul makes it clear that each Christian must commune with God every day to have the love and strength necessary to overcome the appetites of the sinful nature. (Romans 8) Unfortunately, the path of rebellion has been well traveled by millions of Christians.

Wearing the name "Christian" is so much easier than following the teachings of the Master. Jesus warned His listeners, **"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad**

is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:13,14)

The second assault against humanity comes from the devil and his demons. They do their best to overwhelm Christians with anxieties, discouragement, discontent, conflict, immorality, idolatry and even the consuming distractions of success.

Paul wrote, **"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."** (Ephesians 6:12) Peter adds, **"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."** (1 Peter 5:8)

Job One

The devil is determined to make every newborn Christian a pseudo-Christian! He knows the best way to discredit the gospel of Jesus Christ is to make hypocrites out of all Christians! It is sad, but very true; hypocrites make Christ's teachings an object of ridicule.

So, Job One for the devil is to be sure non-Christians see pseudo-Christians doing despicable things. This gives non-Christians a reason to ridicule Christ and justify rejecting Him. Notice how well the devil succeeded at this game with the whole nation of Israel. God told Ezekiel, **"And wherever they** [Israel] **went among the nations they profaned my holy name. . . ."** (Ezekiel 36:20, insertion mine)

Every Christian is subject to both sinister forces. We need to test ourselves to ensure we have not drifted away from our commitment to Jesus and His teachings. Being truthful and objective about our own spiritual condition is difficult, but I do not think we want to be a pseudo-Christian. Pseudo-Christians are identified as: **"Having a form of godliness but denying its power.** [Paul told Timothy,] **Have nothing to do with them."**
(2 Timothy 3:5) Paul knew that falling away from God was very easy, so He warned the backsliding believers in Corinth, **"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?"** (2 Corinthians 13:5) Here is one way to examine yourself to see if your faith in Jesus is vibrant: Read the Bible, review what Jesus said and see how you measure up. The Holy Spirit will tell you the truth. (John 16:13)

Study God's Word as you pray for wisdom and strength. This is Job One for every Christian! Failure to keep this spiritual review active will transform a Christian into a pseudo-Christian. John wrote, **"This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome** [when our love for God is foremost]**, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."** (1 John 5:3,4)

Remember, the devil knows that he can make a pseudo-Christian out of any Christian whom he

can separate from meaningful Bible study and prayer. This is not the time to put Spiritual matters at the bottom of your priority list. We are living in the last days of Earth's history. The Word of God is like the bread of life (manna) that fell from Heaven while Israel was in the desert. If they did not gather the manna up each morning, it soon evaporated. (Numbers 11:9; Exodus 16:21)

Take the quiz: Questions and answers from this article:

(click question for the answer)

1. What is a Christian?
A person who surrenders his life to Jesus and loves Him completely

2. What separates a pseudo-Christian from a Christian?
Love for God

3. Why does Jesus require us to love Him more than family?
Jesus can only accomplish the purpose for which He created us if we put him first

4. What was the essential difference between Peter and Judas??
Peter's love for Jesus was purified, but Judas had no love for Jesus that could be purified

5. How does a Christian overcome adversity or temptation?
Through the power of God

6. Name the two powerful forces that Christians have to face?
Human propensity for sin, the devil

7. Name two gifts every Christian receives.
The power of God's love and Holy Spirit power

8. What is Job One for the devil?
Separate Christians from Bible study and prayer Overwhelm Christians with anxieties, discouragement, discontent, conflict, immorality, idolatry and distractions of success

9. What is Job One for every Christian?
Study God's Word and pray for wisdom and strength

Losing Your First Love

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The Way

During His brief ministry (A.D. 27–30), Jesus established a new religion that continues to stand in direct opposition to the other religions of the world. At first, this religion was called "The Way" because Jesus said of Himself, "I am *the way* and the truth and the life . . ." (John 14:6; Acts 9:2; 19:9, italics mine)

As the movement grew in size and notoriety, the Jews and other groups became offended by the name of the movement because the title, "*The* Way," inferred there was *no other way* to God. Jesus underscored this point by making claims that were very hard for people of other religions to believe.

For example, what would you have thought if you were a devout Jew and heard a young carpenter from Nazareth say, ". . . No one comes to the Father except through *me*."? (John 14:6, italics mine) What would you have thought if you were a member of Israel's clergy and you heard the following statement from a young fisherman from Galilee? "Salvation is found in no one else [than Jesus Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Because the name of "The Way" prompted so much controversy during those early years, the name of the movement was changed to "Christians." (Acts 11:26)

Even though the Jews severely persecuted the Christians, Jerusalem served as the headquarters of Christianity for forty years. The Romans considered Christians a sect *within* Judaism due to the similarities between the two religions. (Acts 24:14) Because Rome hated the Jews, they also hated Christians.

To the Roman mind – Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Christians were Jewish sects. When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, they destroyed both the temple of the Jews and "the command and control center" of Christianity. This was God's plan. God destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Matthew 23; 24:2; Luke 21:24) for the same reason He destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Jeremiah 25; 27:6,7) In both cases, the nation of Israel had passed the point of redemption.

After the Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, God gave the temple site to others and the Jews have not been able to rebuild their temple. They cannot rebuild the temple as long as the Arab mosque, The Dome of the Rock, is on the temple mount. (For reasons why the Jewish temple cannot be located elsewhere, see Deuteronomy 16:11; 1 Chronicles 21; 2 Chronicles 3:1)

When God destroyed Jerusalem, He also eliminated the headquarters of Christianity for at least four reasons: First, the fleeing refugees spread the news of salvation through Christ throughout the world. Second, when God removed Christianity from Jerusalem, He established Christianity

as a religion distinct and separate from Judaism.

Third, fleeing Christians carried the love of Christ *into* the cultures of the nations where they fled. This showed that Christianity neither favors, nor is limited to ethnic origin or culture. Last, when God decentralized the authority of the Christian Church, he encouraged Christian doctrine to expand and become more Christ centered than if it had remained within the paradigms of its Jewish origin. God is so wise. Everything He does is timely and comprehensive.

God delayed destroying Jerusalem for forty years after Jesus ascended to give the Christian movement time to mature. If God had destroyed Jerusalem sooner, Christianity may have disbanded. If He had waited too long, Jewish paradigms and customs may have engulfed Christianity.

Pseudo-Christian Churches

Shortly after Jesus returned to Heaven in A.D. 30, God sent the apostle Paul throughout the Roman empire to establish Christian churches. (Acts 13:2) Paul's work among the Gentiles was fruitful and his tireless work proved to be a great blessing for Christians.

When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Christian refugees found a network of helpful brothers and sisters in cities where Paul had established a church! This point is pertinent to this study because some churches in Asia were beginning to slip into apostasy at this time.

About twenty-five years after the destruction of Jerusalem, the apostle John was exiled to the isle of Patmos because of his faith in Jesus and loyalty to the Word of God. (Revelation 1:9) While John was incarcerated there, God gave him seven messages for seven churches in Asia Minor. These messages are recorded in Revelation 2 and 3 and they are not very flattering. Think about it! Jesus established His church before returning to Heaven in A.D. 30 and just sixty-five years later, He threatened to abandon some of the churches in Asia Minor!

In our last study, we learned that pseudo-Christians are people who *pretend* to be loyal to Jesus Christ. The essential difference between a pseudo-Christian and a Christian is the direction of love. A Christian loves in an outward direction – he loves Jesus with all his heart, mind and soul and his neighbor as himself. (Matthew 22:36-40)

A pseudo-Christian loves in an inward direction – he loves himself, his convenience, his friends, his assets, his self-respect and the approval of others more than God's approval. With this definition of Christians and pseudo-Christians in mind, we will examine the message sent to Ephesus in Revelation 2 and discover why Jesus was upset with the church members at Ephesus.

The Vision

"On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: 'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna,

Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.' " (Revelation 1:10,11)

When God gave this vision to John, there were many Christian churches in Asia Minor. However, Jesus chose to address these seven churches because the problems in these seven churches reflect the Christian experience *at all times*. The number seven indicates fullness or completeness.

In this sense, the messages sent to the seven churches are timeless and universal. Every Christian church today reflects, in one way or another, aspects of the seven churches in Asia Minor, therefore, each Christian would do well to consider the words of Jesus. It does not take too much soul searching to discover which church has our "membership."

Ephesus

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you:You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:1-7)

The salutation to Ephesus begins with, "To *the angel* of the church in Ephesus . . ." The salutation to the church at Ephesus was directed *to the angel* of the church in Ephesus because a specific angel was responsible for the church at Ephesus. Notice how this unfolds. When the vision began, John saw Jesus walking among seven candlesticks and Jesus had seven stars in His right hand. (Revelation 1:12-16) Each candlestick represents a church and each star represents an angel assigned to a church. (Revelation 1:20)

These seven angels stand before God (Revelation 8:2) and they are delighted to do whatever God commands. In this case, God assigned each of the seven angels a church and each angel had the responsibility of seeing that his entrusted message reached its destination. In other words, God commanded seven angels to make sure that each church received the testimony of Jesus.

This is not unusual because God uses angels to accomplish specific tasks. The apostle Paul wrote, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14)

Jesus identified Himself to the church at Ephesus as the One "who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands." Jesus used this descriptive language to show that He has authority over the seven angels of the seven churches (they are in the palm of His hand). "Walking among the lampstands" means that though He is not physically present in each church, Jesus is vigilant over His church and He knows the condition of each member.

Jesus commended the people at Ephesus for their perseverance and fidelity to righteousness in the face of persecution. Jesus also commended the people at Ephesus for testing those who claimed to be apostles (the Greek word for apostle means "one sent by God"). The church at Ephesus had tested certain so-called apostles and found them to be infiltrators sent by the devil.

However, Jesus also told the church He was unhappy with them because they had lost their first love for Him. The joy and enthusiasm of their first love had died. The church at Ephesus had become stagnant and ritualistic and Jesus threatened to remove their lampstand from His presence if they did not repent of this apostasy.

A dynamic Christian life can stall and lose its first love experience for Jesus. What causes a Christian to be become a pseudo-Christian? The answer is simple. When the direction of our love changes, a transformation occurs. A Christian loves in an outward direction and a pseudo-Christian loves in an inward direction.

This is a critical point because every Christian faces two deadly forces each day. The first enemy is our carnal nature and the second enemy is the devil. Every day our carnal nature is a self-resurrecting monster which begs for attention. The devil knows this. Our carnal nature constantly asserts itself and demands to be first and the devil preys on this inclination.

Paul said he had to put his carnal nature to death every day. "I die every day – I mean that, brothers – just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:31) The only way a carnal nature can be put to death is through the renewing power of God’s love. If a Christian does not drink in God’s Word, he or she loses touch with God.

If a Christian is too busy to pray about the stressors and temptations of life, he or she becomes weak in resolve and purpose. Christian life is like the banner I recently saw on a church billboard, "One week without Bible study and prayer makes one weak."

Jesus was unhappy with Ephesus because the problem at Ephesus was deadly. For Christians today, the loss of "first love" for Jesus is a telltale sign indicating the carnal nature is dominant and winning the battle for control. If left unchecked, the Christian church at Ephesus would become a pseudo-Christian church.

Think about this. Jesus indicated He would abandon the church at Ephesus. Do you think Jesus has abandoned any church today? Is it possible for people to attend a worship service and Jesus is not present? Do you think Jesus is present every time you go to church? Is it possible for churches to lose their first love? The message sent to Ephesus is a timeless message from

Jesus. If we lose that first love, we lose Jesus.

Jesus said, "But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." Nicolas, of Alexandria, Egypt, was a pseudo-Christian. Nicolas was a very bright philosopher of that time and he skillfully merged some of Jesus' teachings with ideas originating in the philosophies of gnosticism (pronounced nos-ti-cism). Gnosticism is a philosophy or a series of logical beliefs that attempts to explain good and evil through so-called "higher knowledge."

Gnosticism began in the hedonistic philosophies of the Greeks and Romans, as well as the creeds of Plato and Philo. Gnosticism also included many ideas borrowed from the mystical religions of India and Persia. When merged with the teachings of Jesus, gnosticism corrupted the teachings of Jesus to a point where there were few truths and even fewer absolutes. First century A.D. gnostics treated the Word of God as though it were an allegory (or a parable having many shades of meaning).

Even though various schools of thought existed within gnosticism, gnostic philosophy is merely an empty collection of brilliant philosophical justifications for carnal behavior. Today, gnosticism is called "moral relevancy."

We do not know which philosophies of Nicolas the church at Ephesus rejected. However, Jesus commended the church for preventing their subtle invasion. Jesus closed His remarks to the church at Ephesus saying, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." The phrase "He who has an ear . . ." means there is a message hidden in these words that a pseudo-Christian ear will not appreciate. (For this reason, Jesus often spoke in parables when He was on Earth.)

The hidden message for those who overcome the loss of their first love is this: God will enormously reward everyone who overcomes the temptations and cravings of the carnal nature. Overcomers will be given the right to eat from the Tree of Life.

God did not allow Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Life after they sinned because the fruit of this tree perpetually sustains life. (Genesis 3:23,24) All who have the right to eat from this tree will live forever. Even more, the promise of Jesus indicates that overcoming the carnal nature is possible. Through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, we can keep the carnal nature submissive to the spiritual nature. (Romans 8) I cannot think of anything better than overcoming my carnal nature and living in the kingdom of God forever. Can you?

Take the quiz: Questions and answers from this article:

(click question for the answer)

1. Why were the followers of Jesus eventually called Christians?

To reduce prejudice.

2. Why did the Romans hate Christians?
The Romans thought Christians were a sect of Jews.

3. Why did God destroy Jerusalem a second time?
God destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. because of apostasy.

4. What did the destruction of Jerusalem do for Christianity?
The destruction of Jerusalem forced Christians to carry the love of Jesus and the gospel throughout the world. Christianity became distinctly separate from its Jewish origin. Christian doctrine became more Christ centered.

5. What was Jesus' complaint with the church at Ephesus?
Ephesus had lost its first love.

6. What causes a loss of first love?
Allowing the carnal nature to resurrect itself and become dominate.

7. What did Jesus promise to do if Ephesus did not repent?
Jesus promised to abandon the church.

8. What did Jesus promise to those who overcome the loss of their first love?
Overcomers will have the right to eat from the tree of life and live forever.

9. What is gnosticism?
Gnosticism was a faulty philosophy about good and evil that Jesus hated.

10. Identify some evidences of losing that first love for Jesus
Loss of interest in spiritual matters. A greater interest in the temporal things of this life. No time for prayer and Bible study. Compromise with sin and indifference to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

The Devil's Lies

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Here is an oxymoron to think about: The devil is an unbelievable liar! The devil is so good at lying that many of God's glorious angels did not detect his deceit nor understand his manipulative schemes. The devil is a genius and among created beings he has no equal in the universe. When people in positions of trust and respect promote his lies as truth, they especially honor Lucifer. Because Satan's subtle lies gained the stature of truth in some of the seven churches of Revelation, they are the subject for this month's study.

Lucifer was the first liar and with his lies he deceived one-third of Heaven's angels. (Revelation 12:4) This was an incredible accomplishment! The dullest angel is brighter than the smartest human being and yet, Lucifer was able to deceive a minimum of 200 million angels* while living in God's house!

The Bible also says that Lucifer convinced angels to wage war against Almighty God! (Revelation 12:7-9) It would take a very convincing liar to persuade intelligent angels to rebel against Almighty God! If you think this was an amazing accomplishment, the Bible indicates the devil will again convince created beings – mere mortals this time – to wage war against Jesus at the Second Coming. (Revelation 17:14) So, do not be fooled. The devil's lies can be so subtle that they are almost impossible to detect.

(* I conclude the devil deceived "a minimum of 200 hundred million angels" because the Bible indicates his demons number 200 million. See Revelation 9:16.)

The Knowledge of Good and Evil

We can be sure that God's heart was very sad the day He forced His angelic children out of His house. God cast Lucifer and his followers from Heaven because the King of the universe does not tolerate liars or defiance. Surprisingly, God did not destroy Lucifer and his followers when they sinned. Instead, God allowed them to live even though He foreknew Lucifer would ultimately ruin Earth with sin. Because God allowed the devil and his angels to live, the universe has knowledge that only God previously knew.

This knowledge is the knowledge of good *and evil*. (Genesis 2:9; 3:5) The price of this knowledge has been very costly to God and to man, but God allowed Lucifer and his angels to live so that evil might completely mature. God took advantage of sin's presence to show the entire universe what sin was all about. Evil can masquerade as "truth" or something "good and exciting" for a while, but over time, sin's ugly facts and horrible consequences will appear. It just takes time. Because God did not destroy the devil and his angels, the knowledge of good *and evil* will prevent the rise of sin from rising a second time.

Of course, "D-Day" is coming. (Destruction Day) God will annihilate the devil and his angelic followers (now called demons) at the end of the millennium with fire and brimstone from heaven.

(Revelation 20:9-10) This coming event will make God very sad, for He loved Lucifer and all the angels that followed him from the beginning. The devil deceived Eve with a lie (Genesis 3:4) and through Eve, Adam and Eve lost their beautiful home in the Garden of Eden. No wonder Jesus called the devil the "father of lies." (John 8:44)

Because of sin, God will annihilate billions of defiant people in the fire and brimstone that falls at the end of the 1,000 years. (Revelation 20:9,14,15) Wow! What a profound outcome and it all began with a single lie. When we survey the history of sin and the annihilation of angels and human beings at the end of the age, the question that haunts many people is this, "Is it fair for God to destroy people who sincerely believed the devil's lies?"

This question demands a profound response: **God will not annihilate anyone for sincerely believing a lie; however, God will annihilate everyone who defiantly refuses to accept the truth. God determines our love for Him by observing our response to truth. - (1 John 5:3) When Lucifer first began to stray away from the law of love, we can be sure that Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Father tenderly confronted Lucifer about his wayward actions. Ultimately, the Father plainly told Lucifer that he was in error. The Holy Spirit did everything short of violating Lucifer's will in an effort to overcome Lucifer's stubbornness. Jesus did everything He could to renew Lucifer's affection, but Lucifer refused to submit to the plainest statements of the Father because the truth exposed his selfish ambition to usurp Christ's authority. (Isaiah 14:13) This is how Lucifer became God's adversary. (The Greek word for devil is *diabolos* which means accuser or adversary.) Lucifer, the highest of created beings, that glorious covering cherub who stood next to God's throne, committed *the unpardonable sin* by rejecting the Holy Spirit. So Lucifer became Christ's adversary – the first anti-Christ. Everyone who defies the Holy Spirit and the Word of God eventually becomes a devil (*diabolos*).**
(1 John 2:18-21)

God does not condemn any person for sincerely believing a lie because God knows that our knowledge is limited to our education and experience. God winks at our ignorance. (Acts 17:30) Notice what Paul wrote about his own ignorance: **"Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, *I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.* The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 1:13,14; italics mine)

Every person on Earth is either deceived or ignorant in one way or another because no person knows the whole truth about everything! God knows the opportunities we have had to hear His truth and He judges us on the basis of what we know or could have known. (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 2:14-16; James 4:17) Occasionally, God puts *a testing truth* in our path to see if we really love Him. (Exodus 16:4; Romans 16:25-27; 2 Corinthians 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:4; Revelation 2:10; 3:10) The results of the test reveal to God and a watching universe how much we love Him.

Testing Truths

Consider how testing truths will be used to judge the living. During the Great Tribulation, Jesus will present four great truths to the world's inhabitants. (Revelation 14:6-12; 18:1-5) The 144,000 will powerfully proclaim these four truths through the power of the Holy Spirit. (Revelation 11:6) Signs and wonders will confirm the veracity of these four truths just as the gospel of Jesus was confirmed with signs and wonders during the days of the apostles. (Acts 2:43; 6:8; 14:3) This coming presentation of truth will separate the sheep from the goats.

Those who love God will accept His four truths at the peril of their lives and be sealed like the 144,000. (Revelation 7:1-4) Others who do not love God and His truth will reject the truth and, like Lucifer and his angels, commit the unpardonable sin. Ultimately, the wicked will accept the mark of the beast because human means of survival will be impossible without possessing the mark. The people who are alive during the Great Tribulation will determine their own eternal destiny. God does not have to pass judgment on them. Their response to His four truths *during the Great Tribulation* will reveal their love or hatred for truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12)

Lies Replace First Love

Some so-called "teachings of Jesus" that we hear today are the lies of Satan. To make matters worse, these lies are promoted by highly respected people. If you think my statement is an exaggeration, consider the seven messages Jesus sent to the seven churches just 65 years after He ascended to Heaven. The churches of Asia Minor were teaching and accepting doctrines that were plainly contrary to His teaching. Even though the church at Ephesus had detected and rejected the infiltration of Gnosticism, Ephesus had lost its first love.

Jesus knew it was only a matter of time until that church would fall away from truth (become corrupt) because the affections of the heart are constantly changing. *We are either loving God more each day or loving God less.* God has two everlasting commandments: **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 'This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"** (Matthew 22:37-39) Any doctrine that alters this covenant or lessens its claim is a lie!

Jesus, Is That Really You?

When I study the messages sent to the seven churches, Jesus seems more like the God of the Old Testament than the Jesus we hear about today. There is a good reason for this. Jesus *is* the God of the Old Testament! I find that 90% of the references about God in the Old Testament actually refer to Jesus and the remaining 10% refer to the Holy Spirit and the Father. In other words, *Jesus* created Adam and Eve and *He* evicted them from the Garden of Eden after they sinned. *Jesus* sent the flood in Noah's day and *He* destroyed the antediluvians.

Jesus talked with Abraham and He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire. *Jesus* passed over Egypt and *He* killed the first born – both men and beasts. *Jesus* spoke to Moses at the burning bush and *He* descended on Mount Sinai in a powerful display of glory when *He* spoke the Ten Commandments. *Jesus* spoke to the prophets of old and *He* came to Earth to

demonstrate the eternal principle of love.

Heaven's highest law is the law of love. Because God exalts the principle of love above every principle, the Bible declares that God is love. God's love is pure. Everything He does is for the benefit of His creation. There is no self-serving in God's heart of love. Calvary proves that the Father would not violate the law of love.

Man's redemption required the death of a perfect substitute, so the Father gave up Jesus because He loved us. (John 3:16) Calvary proves that Jesus loved man more than He loved His own life. (John 15:13) What marvelous love! Now that we have reviewed God's love and Satan's lies, consider the message Jesus sent to the church at Pergamum. I have inserted some words into the text [marked by brackets] to expand certain statements that Jesus gave:

Pergamum

"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the [deadly] **sharp, double-edged sword** [that comes from His mouth]**. I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city – where Satan lives. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the** [lies] **teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the** [lies] **teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them** [the clergy] **with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."** (Revelation 2:12-17)

When Jesus spoke these words, Pergamum was the cultural and religious center of Asia. Pergamum was an old, highly respected city. At one time, Pergamum had been the Roman capital of Asia. Worship of the Roman emperors began at Pergamum. The city had many pagan temples and Eastern Mysticism was very popular in Pergamum.

Pergamum was a big city and had a large class of educated and wealthy people. In His message to the church at Pergamum, Jesus twice said that Satan had his throne in Pergamum because as a city, Pergamum was the undisputed queen of false religion. Pergamum was the ivory tower of false religion for Asia and it hated the true followers of Jesus. Jesus observed this hatred when He mentioned the death of faithful Antipas. The hatred of Christians explains in part, why some Christians in Pergamum were willing to make so many compromises with the devil.

The Christian church at Pergamum had members who saw nothing wrong with sexual immorality or eating food sacrificed to idols. These members were Gentile converts who brought their pagan ways into Christianity. Jesus referred to Balaam in His message to Pergamum

because Balaam was an Old Testament prophet who agreed to put a curse on Israel for a sum of money.

However, when Balaam spoke curses, Jesus put blessings in his mouth instead. Finally, the distraught prophet revealed to King Balak (the enemy who hired Balaam) that Israel could be defeated if enticed into sexual immorality. After learning this, King Balak gathered up several "truck-loads" of prostitutes and sent them into Israel.

The Israelites fell into temptation. As a result, God became furious with His people and withdrew His protection. (See Numbers 22-25) The point is that the devil again brought "a truck-load of sexually immoral" people into the church at Pergamum to rob the church of its connection with Christ. The devil knows that once the connection is broken, the church will have no power. (1 Corinthians 5:11)

You may recall how the apostles had imposed four specific rules upon Gentile converts at the first general conference of the Christian Church in A.D. 49. At that meeting the apostle James said, **"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood."** (Acts 15:19,20)

When Jesus spoke to the church at Pergamum, He affirmed this Spirit-led decision by threatening to destroy the sexually immoral unless they repented. The words of Jesus leave no wiggle room. Jesus forbade sexual immorality and eating food offered to idols.

Eating food polluted by idols was a superstitious ritual which was supposed to give the consumer the powers of the god to whom the food was first offered. The devil merged this pagan practice with the words of Jesus to create a distortion of His words. When Jesus was on Earth He said, **"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."** (John 6:54-58)

Jesus made these remarks within the context of eating the Passover feast. The lamb (the flesh) eaten at the feast represented Jesus, the wine represented His blood, and the bread represented His broken body. (Luke 22:19) Some members of the Pergamum church, who had pagan backgrounds, ate food offered to idols. The devil used these people and their pagan background, distorting the words of Jesus to justify eating food offered to idols. Very clever.

Jesus also mentioned that some Christians in Pergamum had accepted the teachings of Nicholas. This should not come as a surprise because Pergamum was a center for Gnostic training. The gnostics treated Scripture as though it were "spiritual" or allegorical. In other words, the gnostics put a layer of fuzz between the Word of God and its obvious meaning so that ordinary people could not be confident about the meaning of God’s Word (that is, what is

right and what is wrong). This has been (and continues to be) one of the devil's best tools for leading Christians astray.

How many times have you heard it said, "The Bible does not mean what it says?" Or even worse, how many times have your heard a Bible passage quoted out of context? When lay people begin to believe the lie that "ordinary people cannot understand God's Word," the devil has gained control of the church.

There is no substitute for "a plain thus saith the Lord." Jesus was furious with the clergy in Pergamum because they had accepted the lies of Nicholas. Leaders who had the respect and trust of the laymen were leading them astray. Jesus said, **"Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them** [the clergy] **with the sword of my mouth."**

In His closing remarks, Jesus offered a special reward to those who would overcome the devil's deceptions. Jesus said, **"To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."** The hidden message for those who have ears to hear is that Jesus will give overcomers Heaven's manna to eat. Currently, the food of angels is not available to us (hidden).

Unlike ordinary food offered to meaningless idols, this manna will give God's children all of the vitality that He wants them to have. The white stone Jesus promises will be a precious stone that will have the inscription of a secret God-given name on it. This secret name will serve as a password enabling the overcomer to enter into God's throne room.

Think about it. Every overcomer can enter into God's presence *to hear truth-full answers to his questions*. Contrast this privilege with the gnostic's pursuit of knowledge that leads to darkness and separation from God. The secret password will open doors of light and truth. I cannot think of anything better than having the privilege going before the Father to ask Him a few questions. Can you?

Take the quiz: Questions and answers from this article:

(click question for the answer)

1. Why did Lucifer deceive one-third of the angels in Heaven?
Lucifer came to love himself more than God. He wanted the affection that belonged to God. To achieve his goals, he began lying.

2. What was Lucifer's best tool for leading angels into rebellion against God?
Lucifer's best tool among the angels was deceit because suspicion or scheming did not exist in Heaven until sin arose.

3. Does God condemn a person for believing a lie?
God does not condemn any person for believing a lie. Yes, there are harmful consequences for believing lies, but God does not condemn a person for believing something that is untrue.

4. What does our response to truth tell God?
God does condemn every person who refuses to accept truth. Our response to truth reveals whether we love God or whether we don't.

5. What sins made Jesus angry at the church a Pergamum?
Sexual immorality and the pagan practice of offering food to idols in Pergamum offended Jesus.

6. How does the hidden manna compare to food offered to idols?
The promise eating the hidden manna (the food of angels – Psalms 78:25) in Heaven contrasts the foolish practice of offering food to idols in hopes of eating that food and becoming as powerful as the pagan deity.

7. How does the secret name written on a white stone compare to the secrets of the Gnostics?
The Gnostics believed higher knowledge was the ultimate achievement of life. (See the devil's lie in Genesis 3:5) Jesus offers a password to every overcomer so that he or she can enter into the presence of an Omniscient God.

8. What did Jesus mean in this verse: Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.
Jesus told the Jews that He was the bread of life (a reference to manna which fell from Heaven). He indicated He was represented by the Passover Lamb which was slain at the feast. He told them He had come to give up His life for the world and those who believed in Him and obeying His teachings were observing Passover. (John 6)

9. Why did Jesus say the devil had his throne in Peragmum?
Because Pergamum was the religious headquarters of Asia, Jesus said the devil had his throne there.

10. Can you see through some of the devil's lies that are widely accepted today?
What lies of the devil are you aware of? What do you suspicion could be some of the devil's lies?

Sexuality

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The church at Thyatira had a serious problem. Review the words of Jesus and consider what He said:

"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery, just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 2:18-29)

Did Jesus Really Say That?

Jesus spoke to church members at Thyatira with words of comfort and condemnation - comfort for the believers who were doing right and the threat of death – that is right, death for those who were doing wrong. The BIG problem in Thyatira (as in Pergamum) was immoral leadership.

Jesus was angry with church leaders at Thyatira because they tolerated a woman named Jezebel in their church! (See also 1 Corinthians 5:11.) The devil is particularly gratified when an immoral person holds a position of religious authority because they can do so much damage. The recent child abuse cases affecting Catholic priests have made this point painfully clear. In Thyratira's case, a prominent woman named Jezebel* was leading the church into evil.

(* The Jezebel in Thyatira should not to be confused with Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab who lived about a thousand years earlier.)

Jezebel must have been a very bright and capable woman. She called herself a prophetess, but she was not a representative of Jesus. She prostituted Jesus' teachings by leading others to do the very things that Jesus condemned! She justified sexual immorality through gnostic logic and philosophy. Jezebel taught that sex was not limited to the confines of marriage and she freely

engaged in sexual activities. She also endorsed the popular belief that eating flesh offered to idols insured the blessings of the gods.

The Bible does not reveal everything that Jezebel taught, but we can determine why Jezebel was successful in a Christian church! She promoted and endorsed ideas that gratified the sensual passions of carnal members. It is amazing what lay people will do (or will not do) when someone presuming to speak for God defines right and wrong! In many cases, it is as though the Bible does not exist. For example, after the founder of the Worldwide Church of God, Herbert W. Armstrong died in the 1990's, his successor informed the church that several core doctrines of the church were wrong.

In a few months, most of the lay members agreed and the church imploded. Today, Armstrong's church has all but disappeared. How could this happen? Were the members of the Worldwide Church of God following a religious leader or the teachings of Jesus? Did the Bible suddenly change when Mr. Armstrong died? (Incidentally, the implosion of the Worldwide Church of God parallels the coming experience of all religious systems during the Great Tribulation. God is about to separate people who love truth from those who play "follow the leader.")

Jezebel skillfully merged contemporary pagan practices with Christian ideals. This made the commitment threshold for Christian converts so low that pagans could join the church at Thyatira without having to give up their pagan ways! This is an area where Christians have particular vulnerability.

In fact, many Christians today teach that Jesus will unconditionally accept any person who believes in Him. This understanding is false because it is not completely true. (Ezekiel 14:6-8) The Bible does teach that Jesus will unconditionally accept any *repentant* sinner that comes to Him seeking forgiveness.

The key word is "repentance." The devil believes there is a God and he trembles, but he has not stopped or repented of his evil deeds. (James 2:19) Because Jezebel lowered the commitment threshold in the church of Thyatira, church members were not required to forsake their pagan ways. Thus, false teachings and lower standards allowed the church to grow and prosper. Membership swelled and the church was packed, but the church did not grow in sanctification. The members in Thyatira became more like the devil instead of becoming more like Jesus.

Jesus condemned Jezebel for using "the mysteries of religion" (Satan's dark secrets or superstitions) to manipulate and control an uninformed laity. The "mysteries of religion" is a catchall phrase that describes many meaningless rituals and traditions. (I call it "religious bamboozle.")

Religious leaders have used religious bamboozle for millenniums to sway and control the laity. Invariably, television documentaries about primitive tribes show a witch doctor conducting a meaningless, but grossly expensive ritual to invoke the blessings of the tribal gods. Do not laugh at the poor heathen; similar rituals occur in Christianity today.

For varied reasons, lay people do not study their Bible to understand God's truth for themselves

and they end up playing "follow the leader." Since religious bamboozle does not make sense to the laity, somehow this lack of understanding makes the mysteries of religion sacred. It is so sad. Religious leaders have exerted authority and dominion over their subjects for thousands of years using religious bamboozle and Jezebel was no exception.

Jesus Exposed Jezebel's Nakedness

Jesus condemned Jezebel for four reasons:
a) She led others to commit sexual immorality; b) She led others to eat food sacrificed to idols; c) She was defiant; and d) She used bamboozle or Satan's "deep secrets" theology. Jezebel had been confronted with her errors, but she refused to repent and the religious leaders of the church were not willing to throw her out of the church.

So, Jesus revealed Jezebel's true condition to the church. Jesus said He would turn her bed of pleasure into a "bed of suffering." Jesus also promised to inflict great suffering on her followers who followed her example. In fact, Jesus promised to strike her children dead. Whether the children mentioned in verse 23 were biological offspring or spiritual offspring, the Bible does not say. In either case, Jesus left no wiggle room: Death to all who participate in sexual immorality. (See also Colossians 3:5,6 and Revelation 22:15.)

Another lesson in this series examined some of the devil's lies. We learned how a person like Jezebel can rise to a position of authority in the Christian church. To review, briefly consider how the devil twists religion to corrupt God's efforts to save humanity from harmful ways and religious bamboozle.

When Jewish people converted to Christianity, they naturally carried much of their Jewish culture with them into Christianity. Before Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70, this baggage was a never-ending source of problems for the early church. (Acts 15) Similarly, when Gentiles from various religions became converts to Christianity, they also carried their religious baggage into Christianity as well. (1 Corinthains 5, Galatians 5)

The ultimate result was that the Christian Church became susceptible to corruption. Over time, each region of the world corrupted Jesus' teachings with the religious baggage that crept into the church. (This corrupting process is what caused Jesus to speak to the seven churches in Asia Minor in A.D. 95.)

The devil is a master at gradualism. In fact, most people do not perceive his stealthy efforts. However, over time the separation between truth and tradition becomes great. For example, certain Christians in Rome and Alexandria adopted Sunday observance as the Lord's day in the second century A.D. In both locations, the religious baggage that influenced this transition was the prevailing worship of a Sun god. Many Roman converts to Christianity worshiped Mirthra and many Egyptian converts to Christianity worshiped Ra.

By the turn of the fourth century A.D., the effect of this phenomenon upon the Christian Church was amazing. One eyewitness wrote: "Such is the difference in the churches on the subject of

fasts. Nor is there less variation in regard to religious assemblies. For although almost all churches through the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Rome and Alexandria have ceased to do this." (Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Chap. 22, Ante-Nicean Christian Library, Vol II, (Boston, 1887) p.132)

This is another example of Christians playing "follow the leader" rather than obeying the teachings of Jesus. (For further study on this topic, see my book, *Jesus, The Alpha and The Omega,* chapters 9,10.)

Four Secrets of Sexuality

The churches at Pergamum and Thyatira were infected with the virus of sexual immorality and this greatly distressed Jesus. Jezebel was an agent of the devil and she did not know it. She was deceived. The devil promoted sexual immorality in Thyratira through her because he knew God would not bless the church if sexual immorality was present in it. In fact, God will not bless nations that give themselves over to sexual immorality! Powerful nations have been destroyed because they separated themselves from God's grace through sexual immorality. (Leviticus 18) Consider the devil's crafty process:

When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them a very powerful love for each other. In fact, Adam willfully sinned against God because of his love for Eve. (Romans 5:12) Love is like a prism that has several sides to it and one dimension of love is expressed through sexuality. God gave sexuality to human beings for the purpose of oneness (Genesis 2:24, 1 Corin-thians 6:16) and procreation (Genesis 9:1).

In the beginning, God designed that a man and woman should live together forever. Then sin occurred and human sexuality became distorted. Obviously, in a sinful world, a strong family unit has a better chance of producing a better society than a dysfunctional family. The devil has carefully studied the family structure that God created and has discovered four secrets about human sexuality that enable him to destroy (or severely injure) the family structure.

First, the devil understands that human sexuality is a very powerful force, both in a biological sense and in an emotional sense. Sex sells because sex is seducing. The devil knows that if no one teaches a child respect for authority, reverence, self-control, and self-respect before age seven, that child will be an easy target for sexual promiscuity during the adolescent years. The devil knows that if he can separate children from their parents at an early age, they will not receive the training they desperately need.

The devil also knows that if he can cause a teenager to violate himself or herself in a sexual way, the damage can last a long time, even a lifetime, and the damage is not limited to that teenager. Sexual immorality can affect the teenager's relationship with a spouse many years later. Every time a young person falls prey to the devil's temptation, the devil triumphs by shouting, "Gottcha!"

Second, the devil understands that children involuntarily become young adults with sexual

interest and curiosity when their bodies produce certain hormones. This means that every human being will eventually have some sexual interest during the early years of life, thus every human being is a potential target for sexual immorality.

The devil and his demons have carefully studied the most attractive ways to lure an innocent teenager into his trap. Every time a young person falls into temptation, the devil shouts, "Gottcha!"

Third, the devil understands that promiscuity, pornography and premarital sex can produce an appetite for sex that cannot be satisfied in a monogamous marriage. When a person becomes dominated by sexual desires, often it is only a matter of time until passions for sex will create victims and the victims can be young or old.

In most cases, the victim is unaware of the oncoming danger. In other words, sexual obsession produces innocent victims sooner or later and these victims will suffer for a very long time because of the offender's dysfunction. Every time a sexual offender hurts a victim, the devil shouts, "Gotcha!"

Fourth, the devil clearly understands the ambiance that promotes sexual promiscuity. In other words, the devil knows how to excite our sensual receptors, stimulate the hormones in our bodies, make the sexual experience appear to be a substitute for love, and apply tons of peer pressure.

The devil also knows that once many young males are aroused, they cannot say "no" to sex and that many young females are too starved for acceptance, affection and love to say "no." So the devil has become the world's greatest pimp and billions of young people have bought (and are buying) his pleasures at great price and every time someone enters into a sexually immoral act the devil shouts, "Gottcha!"

The devil uses many tools to create this hellish ambiance and seductive music is one of his best tools for young people. The devil renews the sexually charged ambience of the world seven days a week through a flurry of movies, television programs and publications. He is ruining the world by corrupting God's gift to man. What a devil. One day the Lord is going to put an end to evil caused by the devil and all the saints will shout, "Gottcha back!"

Don't Give Up!

Jesus closed His remarks to the church at Thyatira saying, **"To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' – just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."**

Jesus encouraged the church at Thyatira with two wonderful promises for those who have ears for what the Spirit says. First, overcoming sin is possible through repentance and the indwelling

power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 6) People who endure and fight the fight of faith will reign with Jesus! They will share in His awesome authority and at an appointed time, the redeemed will sit in judgment on those who harmed them. (1 Corinthians 6:1-3; Revelation 20:4) Second, Jesus says every overcomer will be given "The Morning Star."

The Morning Star is Jesus Himself. (Revelation 22:16) Jesus offers every repentant and faithful sinner His perfect righteousness. (Romans 1:17) This is a gift that is beyond measure because His righteousness is our ticket to eternal life! I cannot think of any gift more wonderful than this. Can you?

Take the quiz: Questions and answers from this article:

(click question for the answer)

1. Jesus condemned Jezebel on four points. What were they?
Jesus condemned Jezebel for four reasons: a) She led others to commit sexual immorality; b) She led others to eat food sacrificed to idols; c) She was defiant; and d) She used bamboozle or Satan's "deep secrets" theology.

2. What is religious bamboozle? How is it harmful?
Religious bamboozle is meaningless ritual and ceremony. It is extremely deceptive for people who do not study God's Word.

3. What is religious baggage? How is it harmful?
Religious baggage consists of ideas and cultural patterns about right and wrong, good and evil. The problem with religious baggage in Christianity is that it pulls Christians away from the teachings of Jesus.

4. What four secrets of sexuality does the devil use?
The devil uses these four secrets: a) Human sexuality is a very powerful force; b) Children grow up and become sexually interested; c) An uncontrollable appetite for sex can ruin several lives; and d) Promiscuity flourishes in a sexually charged ambiance.

Hallelujah! Discipleship Hurts

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Some statements in the Bible appear to conflict with common sense *at first*. For example, the apostle James wrote, **"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."** (James 1:2-4) Through the years, I have reflected on these words and it seems as though James said, "Hallelujah! Discipleship hurts. Enjoy it! Get more of it! Be happy when you suffer!"

OK, this paraphrase may be too liberal, but the following question is worth thoughtful consideration. How should life and its trials be viewed? The carnal view is this: Pain is evil and should be avoided at all costs. Pleasure is divine and the pursuit of happiness should be our first priority. The spiritual view is different. God indicates that He gave life to humanity to fulfill a specific purpose. (Jeremiah 1:5; Isaiah 44:28; Job 10:9-12) Does God use trials and perplexities (even if some of them are self-inflicted) to perfect us and train us for eternal assignments?

Or, were we conceived to pursue whatever dreams and ambitions we might desire? Do we own the life within us or did God *loan* it to us? Do we actually own houses and lands or do these things really belong to God? Should the object of life be the pursuit of happiness or should we, like Moses, refuse the pleasures of sin so we might serve God throughout eternity? (Hebrews 11:24-26)

Our response to these questions depends upon the orientation of our heart. If our heart is predominantly carnal (self-centered), our view of life, material possessions and ambitions will be ego-centric. If our heart is predominantly spiritual (God-centered), our view of life, material possessions and ambitions will be theo-centric. *The point is that the heart tells the head how life is to be understood.*

When a person has a theo-centric view of life the words of James make sense! James said, **"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance."** When we receive a spiritual heart, the indwelling fullness of the Holy Spirit gives us joy and peace. The trials and tests that come our way become *important events* through which God purifies our love for Him and our neighbors.

Through fiery trials He refines His children for greater service. This is why James wrote, "consider it pure joy when your faith is tested. . . ." Human beings suffer because of sin, but *God does not permit suffering to occur without extracting something beneficial*. For example, God has used Job's suffering numerous times to reveal important truths for succeeding generations.

God feels our pain. Our Father understands our feelings and through our suffering, He reveals Himself to us in ways we never thought possible. Here are five points about suffering you may

want to consider:

1. - God monitors the life and situation of each person each day. Matthew 10:29-31 **"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."**

2. - God trains, tests and then exalts those who endure His discipline. Hebrews 12:10 **"Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness."** Remember the story of Daniel and the lion's den? Daniel was trained, tested and then exalted.

3. - God understands our carnal nature. He knows how easy it is for us to set our affections on the temporal tinsel of this world. Suffering reminds us that material things are temporary. 1 John 2:15-17 **"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."**

4. - God knows there is unending hostility between His children and the devil's children. God also knows that His children cannot explain spiritual things to people who do not have spiritual understanding. 1 Corinthians 2:14 **"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."** Therefore, Jesus made the following promise. (Matthew 10:17-20)

"Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

5. - Jesus purifies His disciples through fiery trials so the uninformed might see His love reflected through the pure gold of His disciple's characters. 1 Peter 1:6,7 **"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."**

When these five elements are brought together, a spiritual heart sees suffering in a different light. This is why James said, "count it pure joy when you face trials and perplexities." The believer knows that God uses suffering to perfect us for greater service and intimacy with God brings joy! For example, Paul and Silas were beaten and put in prison for their testimony, but they sang for joy at midnight! (Acts 16:25) The believer also knows that God uses the suffering of His saints to bring salvation to others. (Philippians 1:27-30)

For example, God used the sufferings of Jesus to bring salvation to us and He was highly rewarded for His humble submission to death. **"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek."** (Hebrews 5:7-10)

After considering these thoughts on suffering, you can appreciate the words of Jesus to the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia. The members of both churches were suffering for their faith when Jesus sent them a copy of the book of Revelation.

The Church At Smyrna

"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died [for you] **and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich** [in the two things that really count: love and faith]**! I know the slander** [lies and distortions] **of those who say they are Jews** [my people] **and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer** [for I am with you]**. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer** [deadly] **persecution for ten days** [by the emperor]**. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of** [eternal] **life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes** [the fear of losing this life] **will not be hurt at all by the second death."** (Revelation 2:8-11, insertions mine)

There are several points in this message that invite discussion, but we will examine three:

1. - Early Christians (remember, God gave this message to the church at Smyrna in A.D. 95) saw themselves as the Israel of God which had been called out of apostate Israel. (James 1:1; 2:1; Ephesians 2; Romans 11:25) Jesus confirmed this distinction by calling one group of people in Smyrna "the *synagogue* of Satan" and another group "the *church* in Smyrna." A church consists of believers in Christ whereas a synagogue consists of believers in Jehovah. Jesus well understood the conflict between Christianity and Judaism for the Jewish authorities had condemned Him to death. Jesus said, "I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."

Conflict in Smyrna between Jewish converts and Gentile Christians was intense because Christianity declared Judaism obsolete. Jewish converts found it hard to accept that Jesus had terminated their whole religious system *and culture.* The difference in religious perspective was significant. Christians did not have a high priest on Earth. They did not need to perform animal sacrifices, attend feasts, participate in temple services, continue the rite of circumcision, or observe *anything* that Judaism offered.

This freedom from Judaism was an endless source of conflict in Smyrna because Jewish

converts wanted to observe Jewish traditions and Gentile converts refused to go along. (Of course, Gentiles had religious baggage, too.) This conflict was so great during the first century A.D. that God raised up a brilliant student (the apostle Paul) to address this controversy!

2. - Jesus identified Himself to the church at Smyrna as "**the First and the Last, who died and came to life again."** Jesus described Himself with this language because many martyrs would die for His sake in the church at Smyrna. In A.D. 95, Christianity was an illegal religion in some parts of the Roman empire. The evil emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) put many Christians to death before he was murdered. Then, Nerva (A.D. 96-98) ascended to Domitians' throne, but he soon died within two years of illness.

Then, Trajan (A.D. 98-117) came to power and even though he did not actively seek out Christians to kill them, he mandated that if a Christian should be found, he must be arrested and executed unless he immediately renounced his faith. The ten days of persecution mentioned by Jesus evidently refers to an upcoming purge of Smyrna.

Loyalty tests and purges were frequently used by Roman governors to maintain control over their subjects, for no governor wanted to be charged with treason against Caesar and lose his head. Jesus warned the Christians in Smyrna of this upcoming purge and He encouraged them to remain faithful "even to the point of death" because those put to death for His sake would, like Him, come to life again.

3. - Jesus also added, "**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death**." There is a hidden message in this phrase. Overcoming the fear of torture and death is not a normal human instinct.

We instinctively do everything possible to protect ourselves. The hidden message that comes through the Spirit is this: God will give a martyr's courage when a martyr's courage is required. In other words, overcoming the fear of death is possible through God's grace because God's gives us power over our fears!

So, Jesus said, "be firm in your stand for truth and remain loyal to me (even to the point of death) and you will not be hurt at all by the second death." This is good news because the wicked will not receive grace to overcome their fear of the second death! The wicked will be resurrected to receive God's judgment and ultimately annihilated. This coming event is the second death. (Revelation 20:15)

The Church At Philadelphia

We also need to examine the message to the church at Philadelphia because they, like the church at Smyrna, were suffering for their faith. **"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David** [e.g., Jesus has control over the world]**. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.** [Jesus said,] **I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open**

door that no one can shut [because I am not limited by the rebellion of men]**. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."** (Revelation 3:7-13, insertions mine)

The church at Philadelphia struggled in a similar way with the synagogue of Satan, just like the church at Smyrna. In fact, the seven churches were beset with all kinds of problems. Ephesus had lost its first love. Pergamum was beguiled with the devil's lies and gnosticism. Thiratira was corrupted with Jezebel's teachings about sexual immorality. Smyrna was hammered by persecution. Philadephia was weak, but hanging on. Sardis was an active church, but it was spiritually dead, and Laodecia had grown indifferent. As Jesus observed these seven churches, no wonder He was unhappy.

Unfortunately, many Christians distort the message to the church at Philadelphia because they are looking for texts to support their notion of a pre-tribulation rapture, but what Jesus said does not imply a pre-tribulation rapture. Because the church in Philadelphia was weak and suffering from persecution, Jesus told the members at Philadelphia that He had made a way for them to go through their suffering. This is the point of the open door – by His grace they could *go through* this experience and overcome it.

He also told them that He would keep them during the hour of trial that was going to come upon the whole world. Think about this for a moment. Did Jesus offer to protect the people in Philadelphia from the Great Tribulation and allow the other six churches to go through the Great Tribulation? Of course not! Jesus' words have to be understood within their context. They were spoken to the people in Philadelphia in A.D. 95. *Jesus directed His words to them*. He encouraged the weakened members in Philadelphia to hold on to their faith because He would never leave them nor forsake them.

The reason Jesus spoke these words to the church in Philadelphia is twofold. First, they were already hammered by persecution and second, they would be overcome with discouragement after they read John's vision [the book of Revelation] because it predicted even more suffering to come.

Because the church members in Philadelphia were hurting and weak, it is possible that knowledge of the Great Tribulation could cause some members to give up their faith altogether. So, Jesus prepared them for the message in Revelation saying, **"Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold**

on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown." In other words, Jesus promised to sustain the church at Philadelphia with His strength and not theirs. Jesus encouraged them saying, "Hold on to what you have . . ."

These words are crucial when the fires of persecution are hot. It is human nature to give in or give up if it stops the pain. But, those who overcome will be rewarded beyond their wildest imaginations! Another secret message was given to Philadelphia. Jesus promised to give all over comers a special name tag when they get to Heaven. Jesus said, "**I will write on him the name of my God . . . the name of the city of my God**, **and I will also write on him my new name**"

This "name tag" will permit its owner to travel anywhere in God's universe with a hundred angels attending. When you receive this name tag, you will be recognized throughout God's universe as a very special person because YOU were trained by the suffering you experienced on Earth for the exalted role that God has given you. Your victory makes you very special to Jesus and He wants everyone to know it, thus, the glorious name tag. Can you say, "Hallelujah! Discipleship hurts?" When viewed from the eternal perspective, I cannot think of anything better than getting this name tag. Can you?

Take the quiz: Questions and answers from this article:

(click question for the answer)

1. What determines our view of pain and suffering – our heart or our head?
The heart tells the head how to interpret life. (Luke 6:45)

2. Describe the difference between an ego-centric and Theo-centric life.
An ego-centric life is self-centered. The theo-centric life is God centered.

3. Would God permit suffering without extracting something beneficial?
The book of Job teaches that suffering has purpose. The purpose may be hard to understand at first, but there is purpose and God can bring something beneficial out of suffering. Doesn't the suffering a woman goes through giving birth teach us this lesson? (John 16:21; Hebrews 12:2)

4. What was promised to the over comers in Smyrna?
They would not be hurt by the second death.

5. What was promised to the over comers in Philadelphia?
A glorious name tag!

6. When you are discouraged, what helps most: A search and review of God's promises or reciting your problems 10 times to your best friend?
You know the answer.

Church Life is Not Spiritual Life

Author: Larry W. Wilson

As far as the United States is concerned, a new world order was born on September 11, 2001. U.S. citizens were asleep; caught by complete surprise. Without warning or notice, terrorism *within* the United States became a horrible reality on that infamous day. Yes, there were terrorist attacks against the United States before September 11, but not on the same scale. That Tuesday morning was a defining moment in U.S. history. Nineteen young men introduced the U.S. to the ugly face of terrorism.

The U.S. is a different nation now. Its thinking and ways of doing business will never be the same. Americans do not like the new world order, but they have no choice. Terrorism has arrived and they have to face it and deal with it. A demonic genie has been let out of the bottle. Terrorists prey on the unsuspecting; their purpose is to intimidate through fear and anxiety. The terrorist network is like a hydra. When the head of this invertebrate is cut off, it simply grows another one. The demonic power within terrorism is spiritual.

This is why terrorism and religion can be bedfellows. The Bible predicts terrorism will flourish in the last days and the outcry for peace and safety will grow louder and louder until God Himself steps into the fray to arrest our violent planet with an overwhelming display of force.
(1 Thessalonians 5:3)

All governments are worried about terrorism because technology has eliminated the old world order. It is a David versus Goliath situation. A half-dozen terrorists with a suitcase-sized nuclear bomb or a tiny biological weapon can destroy hundreds of thousands of people! Terrorism moves nations to do things they would not ordinarily do. When a minority of people can terrorize a majority of people, something has to be done *to protect the majority from the minority*. This was the argument used to crucify Jesus. (See John 11:50.)

The United States is at war with terrorism and the enemies can be hard to find. To address internal problems of terrorism, President Bush created the Homeland Security agency and Congress passed The Patriot Act shortly after September 11.

The U.S. Congress has given the new Homeland Security agency broad authority to weave all of the various state and federal law enforcement agencies into one giant law-enforcement system. By centralizing information about suspects and criminals from all agencies into a shared database, the government hopes to identify and apprehend terrorists and terror organizations *before* they cause harm. The new world order presents a new challenge to law-enforcement. How can a person be found guilty of wrong doing *before* he or she does wrong?

To empower the Homeland Security agency, Congress passed a series of laws collectively known as "The Patriot Act." The Patriot Act *legally* diminishes the civil rights of individuals or organizations which officials *suspect* to be terrorist related. In short, the war against terror comes with a high price – a growing atmosphere of suspicion and the erosion of freedom.

These well-intentioned efforts may be necessary. But, is it possible that our nation has become something like the burglarized homeowner who covered his windows and door with steel bars only to discover during a subsequent house fire that he had eliminated the possibility of escape?

Considered Reasonable At The Time

The creation of the Homeland Security agency and the enactment of The Patriot Act met little resistance because these actions were widely accepted as reasonable *solutions* to terrorism. The climate of fear, uncertainty and corporate oneness that occurred shortly after September 11 caused partisan differences in the House and Senate to disappear for a few weeks. (This in itself was a historical event!) Republicans and Democrats aligned with the President to do everything possible to restore order and safety.

Given the tensions of those days, few voices argued against the new security measures. In less than sixty days, the U.S. government installed a new agency with a set of new laws to deal with the problem of terrorism. Even though The Patriot Act will have significant ramifications for years to come, it did not take long to become law because there was little resistance.

After surveying the damage at ground zero, who could argue against the need to make the U.S. homeland more secure? After counting the 3,025 bodies of Americans who died that day, who could argue against the need to capture terrorists *before* they could cause greater harm?

A Sobering Parallel

A short reminder of events following September 11, 2001 has been presented in this study because the Bible predicts a similar course of events will occur again. The parallels between our recent past in the U.S. and the forthcoming events predicted in Bible prophecy are stunning. The Bible indicates that God’s patience with violence and degenerate behavior on Earth has a limit. When that limit is reached, God will respond swiftly by sending a series of devastating judgments that will overwhelm *all* nations.

God’s actions will catch most Christians sound asleep. The Great Tribulation will begin with a global earthquake and this will be followed by a series of horrific events including a fiery hailstorm of meteorites that burns up millions of square miles, and two civilization-threatening asteroid impacts.

Because God’s judgments will be overwhelmingly destructive, the world will suddenly discover that God can be a "Terrorist" beyond calculation! The fear of God will fall upon six-plus billion people and the Bible reveals the human response to God’s actions. There will be a fearful religious revival in every nation.

Out of fear, governments will hastily enact a series of new laws (like The Patriot Act). These laws will mandate respect for The Almighty. These laws will be quickly implemented so that God’s wrath can be appeased and His terrors cease. Law enforcement agencies will be

empowered to insure that God is worshiped, and if anyone violates the new laws, he or she will be severely punished for it. (Revelation 13:1-8)

Reconsider these two questions for a moment: "After surveying the damage at ground zero, who could argue against the need that make the U.S. homeland more secure? After counting the 3,025 dead bodies that day, who could argue against the need to capture terrorists before they cause greater harm?"

These two questions have a distinct parallel with coming events. When God's judgments begin to fall and the Great Tribulation begins, the world will be terrorized. At that time, these two questions will be asked: "After one-third of Earth is destroyed by earthquake and fire and 25% of Earth's population is lost, who will be able to argue against man's need to appease God? After counting the dead bodies of 1.5 billion people, who can argue against the need to punish anyone that does something which offends God?"

When the Great Tribulation begins, the Bible predicts a crisis government will form in response to God's judgments. This crisis government will be global and it will focus on measures to appease God's wrath. This crisis government is represented as a beast in Revelation 13:1-10 because beasts do not reason or understand the plans of the Almighty. Beasts react to whatever challenge is put before them to survive. The agenda of the crisis government will be the message, "We must appease God or He will destroy all of us!"

This logic is simple to understand if you can imagine the overwhelming destruction throughout Earth at that time. Because the need to appease God will be obvious, the Bible says the world will go along with the reasoning of the crisis government. **". . . Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?"** (Revelation 13:4) In other words, when the crisis government forms and its laws are imposed upon the people, the reactions of the beast will appear to be the best solution at that time.

Can you image the House and Senate refusing to work with President Bush to address the problem of terrorism on the day after September 11? No! Of course, not! Can you imagine religious and political leaders ignoring God's wrath when God's judgments begin? No! Of course, not!

Wake Up Christians!

The U.S. government was asleep on September 11. Similarly, most Christians will be sleeping when God initiates the Great Tribulation, because Christians have not made serious study of Bible prophecy a priority. Religious leaders have lulled millions of people to sleep with "sweet promises" of things that will not happen.

Church leaders are promoting prophetic schemes that have nothing to do with what the Bible predicts. Millions of people will be disappointed when they discover there is no pre-tribulation rapture. Millions more who do not believe in a pretribulation rapture will also experience bitter distress when they discover their church leaders have also misguided them. Christians are

asleep! They have been lulled into substituting church life for spiritual life and this substitution can prove deadly. Every Christian should know the important distinction between church life and spiritual life.

Church life is social interaction with a group of people having similar religious views whereas spiritual life is the process of maturing in God's truth under the firm, but loving discipline of Christ. Church life can be a real joy, for nothing is sweeter than genuine fellowship with like believers.

Unfortunately, the basis for church life should not be the joy of fellowship, but a love for truth. Many Christians think church life is synonymous with spiritual life, but attending church services and listening to inspiring music and preaching is no substitute for personal study, meditation and prayer. In other words, spiritual life requires time with God and *there is no substitute for this*. For many people, worship is a social occasion; going to church to be entertained with a good sermon and being told what to believe.

However, walking with God and obeying His Word at any cost is the worship that God seeks. Jesus said, **"God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."** (John 4;24)

If church life does not systematically put worshipers through the essential truths of the Bible, if church life does not teach worshipers how to study the Bible, if church life does not produce Christians who love the Lord with all their heart, mind and soul and their neighbors as themselves, the result will be a congregation that seems active and alive, when in reality, it is spiritually dead! This was precisely the condition of the church at Sardis.

Notice the words of Jesus, **"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."** (Revelation 3:1-6)

The church at Sardis was known for its religious zeal. Something was taking place at the church all of the time. They met together several times each week. The church was growing and like many churches today that have concerts, dramas, potluck dinners, revival services, church school, and community programs, they had it all. They prayed, worshiped, worked and played together as one big family. So, what could be wrong with that? Jesus told them, **"I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up!"** (Revelation 3:1)

Jesus said, **"Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and**

repent." (Revelation 3:3) The church at Sardis was on the wrong track. An active church life is not a substitute for spiritual growth. It takes a trained eye and the spirit of discernment to distinguish between the two. The devil was at work in Sardis. The church was active and busy, but it was dead spiritually because it was focused on the wrong thing.

The Christian Church has two objectives: Soul winning (the preaching of justification) and soul building (the teaching of sanctification). The carnal nature does not mind hearing about justification, but it hates to hear about sanctification. Putting Jesus' Sermon on the Mount into daily practice is the hardest thing on Earth to do! When the doctrines of justification and sanctification are out of balance, church life is out of balance.

The church at Sardis was sure of its salvation. Its members accepted the gospel of justification. They loved the freedom in Christ which justification offers. They were happy to hear that Jesus had paid the price for their salvation. But, they were not maturing spiritually, that is, becoming Christ-like. So, Jesus reminded them of the necessity of sanctification saying, "**Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent."** Ouch! I can almost hear church members in Sardis saying, "But Lord, we have been saved. . . . What is with this repentance and obedience business?"

Just like the church of Sardis, churches today have disconnected the gospel of justification from sanctification. Churches like Sardis are everywhere! Many Christians deceive themselves with self-assured salvation even though they are spiritually dead! How deadly! On the other hand, when sanctification is disconnected from the gospel of justification, Christians stop living by faith and follow a destructive course of legalism and self-righteousness.

The narrow road leading to Heaven has two big ditches on each side and the devil is constantly trying to push Christians into the ditch of legalism or the ditch of presumption. The net result in both cases is the same, spiritual death. Jesus warned the dead church at Sardis, "**But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you."**

To Him That Overcomes

There were some faithful members in Sardis. Jesus said, **"Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."**

There is a hidden message in these words and it is different than what you might think at first. The faithful people in Sardis knew that church life was no substitute for spiritual life. Throughout history, people who have had an intimate fellowship with God understand the rigors of discipleship.

Jesus described these people as having unsoiled clothes. In other words, the faithful saints in

Sardis were clothed in His righteousness because they submitted to God's will *every day*. They were willing to go, to be, and to do anything (go-be-do) as Jesus directed them. Therefore, Jesus told the "dead" members at Sardis to wake up or they would be caught by surprise! (See Matthew 24:42-44.) Here is the problem. Left unchallenged, the carnal nature will separate us from God.

To sustain justification we have to be willing to overcome beliefs and behaviors that separate us from God. The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 15:31, that overcoming sin takes determined effort and this is why Jesus demanded that all seven churches *overcome* their deficiencies!

Jesus also said something to the church at Sardis that is widely misunderstood today. He promised that He would never blot out the names of the overcomers from the *Book of Life*. Most Christians interpret the words of Jesus in one of two ways: First, "If a person receives Christ as Savior, he or she cannot be lost because Jesus will not blot any name out of the *Book of Life* – meaning once you are saved, you are forever saved," or second, "If a person overcomes every besetting sin, his or her name will not be blotted out of the *Book of Life* – meaning salvation belongs to those who achieve perfection." There are several problems with both views.

First, the doctrine of "once saved – always saved," or the reciprocal of this doctrine, "some people are destined to be lost," is disputed by the text itself. The Bible teaches that salvation belongs to overcomers. **"For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."** (1 John 5:4)

The Bible also teaches that a person can walk in the assurance of salvation and then lose it by turning away from the Lord and doing wicked things! (Ezekiel 18) Consider the fall of Lucifer and the fall of Adam and Eve. At one time they were perfect, they were "saved," but they turned away from righteousness and fell from God's favor. Jesus made a promise to the overcomers in Sardis. He promised their names would never be blotted out of the *Book of Life*. In other words, once overcomers get to Heaven, their names will never be blotted out of the *Book of Life*.

Take a moment and review the rewards God offered to the overcomers in the seven churches and as you review each reward, ask yourself *when* the reward will be implemented: Ephesus: The right to eat from the tree of life; Smyrna: The second death will not hurt you; Pergamum: The right to eat hidden manna and the receipt of a white stone; Thyratira: You will receive authority over the nations and the Morning Star; Philadelphia: I will write on you the name of my God and the name of His city; Laodicea: I will grant you the right to sit with Me on My throne. In these six churches, the rewards to over comers will be implemented *after* the Second Coming. The same timing applies to the church of Sardis.

The names of the over comers in Sardis will not be blotted out of the *Book of Life* after they get to Heaven. The problem for most people with Revelation 3:5 is timing. Jesus was not talking about entering or blotting people's names from the *Book of Life* at the time He spoke to the church at Sardis. Rather, He promised the over comers in Sardis that He would never blot out their names from the *Book of Life* after they arrived in Heaven. This means over comers will live

forever with Jesus!

This brings me to the second problem. Many people misunderstand God's function and purpose for the *Book of Life*. According to Revelation 20:12, the *Book of Life* is not opened until the thousand years are over. (See *Day Star* back issues, June - August, 2001 for a discussion on this topic.) In fact, the Father wrote the *Book of Life* and sealed it with seven seals before any life was created! This means the names of over comers and sinners were entered into the *Book of Life* before life was created.

This is why the *Book of Life* remains sealed until the end of the thousand years. God does not want the information in the *Book of Life* disclosed until the drama of sin has ended. At that time, God will open the book and reveal what He knew before any beings were given life. When God shows what He foreknew, He will eliminate every accusation against His government and He will remove all doubts about His love for His children.

The third problem concerning the *Book of Life* centers on the fact that the *Book of Life* has nothing to do with man's salvation. The *Book of Life* contains a pre-recorded history of the world which the Father wrote and sealed up with seven seals before any life was created. (Revelation 17:8) Books of records, recorded by angels as events transpire, are used to judge humanity (Daniel 7:9,10), but the *Book of Life* remains sealed until the end of the thousand years.

The last problem with the *Book of Life* is that the message to Sardis does not mandate sinless behavior. No one other than Jesus has lived a perfect life and no one can live a sinless life until the sealing occurs! John tells us there is a sin that does not lead to death. This sin is accidental sin. (1 John 5:16,17; Romans 7:19)

If we say we are without sin, the Bible says we are liars. (2 Chronicles 6:36; 1 John 1:10) So, the promise Christ gave to the overcomers in Sardis has to be kept within the context of His words to Sardis and the other churches. What did the church at Sardis need to overcome? They had substituted church life for spiritual life and as a result, they had become spiritually dead. Jesus insisted they wake up so that He might walk among them and make disciples of them! Everyone who overcomes this temptation will never have his name blotted out of the *Book of Life*. I cannot think of anything better than this. Can you?

Take the quiz: Questions and answers from this article:

(click question for the answer)

1. What justified the creation of the Homeland Security agency?
Terrorism

2. What justified the passage of The Patriot Act?
Terrorism

3. What will justify the creation of a crisis government and the enforcement of laws mandating respect for God?
Terrorism

4. What causes the cry for peace and safety to grow louder?
Terrorism

5. Why did Jesus say the church at Sardis was dead?
They had substituted church life for spiritual life.

6. What are the two objectives of the Christian Church?
Soul winning and soul building

7. When will the over comers from all seven churches be rewarded?
After the Second Coming

8. Name the two ditches on the road to Heaven.
Legalism and Presumption

9. What is the all important difference between church life and spiritual life?
Church life is social. Spiritual life requires an intimate connection with God.

Wars and Rumors of War

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Jesus said, **"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come."** (Matthew 24:6) During the past few weeks, the world has watched a war unfold between the United States and Iraq. While the war has an interesting set of dynamics, we should not overlook the fact that thirty-three* other wars are also currently under way. Man's history is filled with wars and you may be surprised that more than 150 wars have been fought since World War II ended.

Are wars a sign of the end of the world? No, Jesus said, **". . . such things must happen, but the end is still to come."** Will wars cease? No, not until Jesus returns, and even then, at the end of the 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20, the devil will lead "a coalition of the wicked" against the Holy City. The Lord will respond by sending fiery hail down from Heaven. (Revelation 20:8,9,15) After He has burned up sin and sinners, these Scriptures will be fulfilled: **"Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the Earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the Earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. . . . 'Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,' says the Lord Almighty."** (Psalm 46:8,9; Malachi 4:3)

From a human point of view, war occurs when there is a clash of wills. From a biblical point of view, there is another reason for war. God can arouse one nation to engage another nation in war when His patience with the degenerate nation has reached its limit! For example, when the ten northern tribes of Israel became hopelessly decadent, God raised up the kings of Assyria to destroy them. (Isaiah 7,8)

Then, when Assyria became pompous and arrogant, God destroyed it with the sword of another nation. (Isaiah 10) God also sent the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, to destroy Jerusalem and the two southern tribes of Israel in 605-586 B.C. (Jeremiah 25) Then, later on, God sent the Medo-Persians to destroy the Babylonians.

Daniel explained the rise and fall of kingdoms on the night Babylon fell. **". . . The Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes. But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of Heaven. . . . But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN 'This is what these words mean: Mene : God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel : You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.' "** (Daniel 5:21-28)

War is awful, painful, mean, cruel, expensive, destructive and deadly; but as horrible as war is, the outcome of war can be good if the victor exalts righteous principles. For example, war can

cauterize the growth of sin. War can terminate the overbearing rule of a decadent king or a perverted nation. War can liberate an oppressed people.

War can purge the land of evil. (Leviticus 18) Over and over, the Bible indicates that God uses the sword of warfare to terminate degenerate nations. (Ezekiel 14:21) Until Jesus terminates the sin problem, He said we would hear of wars and rumors of wars. This helps to explain why Solomon said, **"**[There is] **a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace."** (Ecclesiastes 3:8, insertion mine)

The War for Your Soul

The stakes in the current war between the United States and Iraq are high and the outcome will, no doubt, affect many nations of the world. Even though thirty-four wars are being fought at this current time on Earth, a war continues that is even more important than all other wars combined. This war is for your soul. Christ and the anti-Christ, Lucifer, are at war and each human being is either an object of affection in the eyes of Jesus or a target for destruction in the cross-hairs of Lucifer. The war for souls has eternal consequences; therefore, the battle is intense.

The Two Natures

When people experience the miracle of rebirth, they awaken to the war for their souls. Every born again person receives a second nature. The first nature (the carnal nature) hates the second nature (the spiritual nature). The carnal nature rebels against the demands of the spiritual nature and the result is war – a clash of wills – within the same person! Paul was well aware of the two natures.

He wrote, **"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."** (Romans 8:6-8) After living the Christian life for about 30 years, Paul realized there was only one way to win victory over his carnal nature and that was through receiving power from Jesus. Paul knew that if He submitted to the Holy Spirit each day, he would receive power that would transform his thoughts and behavior.

He wrote, **"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."** (Romans 7:18-20, italics mine) The war for souls is fought on a tiny but highly important battlefield. This battlefield is the human heart and the only way to be victorious over the carnal nature is through strength derived from Christ! Paul exclaimed, **"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."** (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Paul knew his spiritual nature could flourish if he refused to give in to his carnal nature. Therefore, he wrote, **"I die every day** [to the demands of carnal nature] **– I mean that, brothers – just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (1 Corinthians 15:31, insertion mine) How does a person resist an evil impulse from the carnal nature?

It begins with an exercise of the will. Paul wrote, **"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."** (Colossians 3:5) When Jesus sees us resisting wrong, He sends the Spirit to give us strength so that we can press the battle to victory!

Laodicea: A Church Avoiding War!

Because the topic of war is at the forefront of current events and the topic of spiritual warfare is paramount for Christian living, this is a perfect time for our final study concerning the church of Laodicea. The church at Laodicea was full of Christians *avoiding* war. The church had a deadly problem.

They had muted the power of the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ is like a sword; it causes war. (Matthew 10:34; Hebrews 4:12) Jesus was a victim of this war! The gospel of Jesus is about loving truth. Truth condemns people who reject it and saves people who receive it. The gospel of Jesus liberates people who love truth and this victory produces persecution. Few things can tear families or nations apart like differences in religion, and war always erupts when the advancing gospel of Jesus confronts the establishments and traditions of religion.

The church at Laodicea, even though it was less than 40 years old, was avoiding war. Wealth and affluence had compromised the advance of the gospel in Laodicea. Church members had muted the gospel to protect their jobs and positions of respect in a pagan community. This is an interesting point: *History proves that the gospel of Jesus mutates into various forms of pseudo-Christianity when Christians are not persecuted*. In fact, this explains why Jesus handed the saints over to the little horn power in Daniel 7 for 1,260 years! (Daniel 7:25)

Throughout the Dark Ages, the church in the wilderness maintained faith in Christ because of persecution. Ancient Israel also proved that faith in God mutates into false religion when there is no persecution.

Moses warned the children of Israel at the gates to the Promised Land, **"Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. . . . For I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you. In days to come, disaster will fall upon you because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord and provoke him to anger by what**

your hands have made." (Deuteronomy 8:11-14; Exodus 31:29)

The Old Testament confirms that Israel repeatedly abandoned God every time it became militarily secure, wealthy, and affluent and the same behavior is documented throughout Christian history. What does this say about our carnal nature?

When the church at Laodicea compromised their faith, the church died spiritually. Like the church at Sardis, they thought they were doing just fine even though their condition made Jesus almost vomit! Christians in Laodecia did not recognize their true condition before God. They were not focused on the cause of Christ or the objectives of the gospel. They did not detect the war for their souls. They could not see the sophistry of the devil's warfare. They were preoccupied with making money and spending it.

They were affluent and enjoyed the good life. The gospel of Jesus wars against the acquisition of riches and selfish indulgence because the carnal nature is selfish. Unfortunately, many Christians are living the Laodicean experience today. The gospel of Jesus has become an intellectual assent to truth rather than a life of service for God and man.

Consider the words of Jesus to Laodicea, **"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."** (Revelation 3:14-22)

The church at Laodicea was full of "rich young rulers." (See Matthew 19.) They mistook their affluence and wealth as evidence of God's approval when in fact, this "prosperity doctrine" was (and is) a distortion of God's purpose for wealth. The value of money is determined by the good it produces.

When God gives wealth to people, He also imposes accountability for its use. (This point will be a big surprise for many on Judgment Day!) The carnal heart loves money because money brings power, gratification and selfish satisfaction. Money can buy almost anything. When people have too much money, few will desire or wait to see God's providence. Money can rob us of faith in God. Money can ruin discipline and self-control. Money can distort justice and ruin integrity.

Money is harmful for most people and this is why Jesus said, **"It is easier for a camel to go**

through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Mark 10:25) Self-indulgence and money are brother and sister in the carnal heart. This is why Jesus said, **"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."**

The "rich young ruler" test wars against the core of our carnal nature. Jesus gave up everything He owned to save us and He does not ask less of His disciples. (Matthew 10:37,38) Carefully notice in Matthew 19 that Jesus did not ask the rich young ruler to donate his possessions to the church. Rather, Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. Jesus wanted the rich young ruler to discover the power and joy of giving! However, the rich young ruler did not want to give. He loved money.

His wealth meant more to him than God or those who lived in poverty. This was the basic problem in Laodicea. (Matthew 6:24) The Christians at Laodicea were happy with their money, but they did not realize they were serving money rather than God. This made Jesus nauseous.

The Tables Turned

People victorious over "the rich young ruler" test will reign with Jesus as "rich young rulers" in His universe. (Revelation 1:6; 20:4; 21:24) Jesus can offer no greater reward than what He offered to the Laodiceans. Think about this. Jesus not only gave His life for us, He offered to share His throne with us!

What amazing love! Overcomers of this test will be highly exalted because they loved God and their neighbors more than money *while living with a carnal nature*! The gospel of Jesus transforms an egocentric heart into a Theo-centric heart. The gospel of Jesus subdues the selfish nature so the spiritual nature can grow stronger. Jesus assures victory to all who keep their eyes on Him and their hearts open to the Holy Spirit. **"For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."** (1 John 5:4)

Conclusion

With this study we conclude our study on the messages to the seven churches. Therefore, it is fitting that we review the seven rewards God promised to people who fight the fight of faith and overcome the carnal nature:

1. - To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

2. - He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

3. - To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

4. - To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' – just as I have received authority from my Father.

5. - He who overcomes will be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the Book of Life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

6. - To him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of Heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

7. - To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat with my Father on His throne.

We do not hear much about these rewards because these rewards mean nothing to those who are spiritually dead. Jesus deliberately worded His remarks this way. If the rewards of Heaven appealed to our carnal nature, Heaven would be filled with selfish people intent on *getting* their reward, instead of loving God and serving others! By obscuring these eternally magnificent rewards with spiritual words, Jesus ensured that the carnal nature would not be attracted to them. This is why Jesus emphasized seven times that you have to have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to understand His remarks. Everyone who hears the Spirit can understand these incredible rewards with a little study and effort. The bottom line is that over comers will be exalted as heroes for eternity because, through Christ's strength, they overcame the world and won the war for their soul. I cannot think anything better than this. Can you?

Take the quiz: Questions and answers from this article:

(click question for the answer)

1. What is war?
War is a clash of wills.

2. What is the purpose of war?
Victory.

3. Where is the tiniest battlefield?
The human heart

4. What was the problem with the church in Laodecia?

They loved money and luxury.

5. Why is the rich young ruler test important?
One cannot serve God and money.

6. Which of the seven rewards do you find most interesting?
You are on your own on this one!

Day Star Final Issue

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Change Is in the Air!

After fourteen years of publishing the *Day Star*, we are making some important changes. This is the last issue of the *Day Star* for a while. In its place, we plan to publish a newsletter each month called *The Wake Up Report* and the newsletter will be sent free to those who support this ministry through donations and/or purchases. *The Wake Up Report* will highlight current events that we are watching and it will also include a short commentary on spiritual and prophetic matters. Hopefully, these changes will free us up so that we can take care of several things that have been on the "back burner" for too long!

A growing interest in Revelation's story is necessitating change! For the past nine months we have been processing 400 to 1,000 requests per week for the free book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled*. These requests come from word of mouth, Bible study groups, ads placed in shopping papers like the *Thrifty Nickel*, and the internet. The internet is now connected to 120 million people in the USA and millions of people in other nations as well! This connectivity is producing an increase in interest.

For example, a person can hear about the *Warning!* book from a friend and a few minutes later, go to our web site and read the first chapter of the book. For those who want to study previous issues of the *Day Star,* Marty has placed eight years of previous issues on our web site so that anyone can immediately read and download any issue for free! The internet is fast, efficient and immediate. Of course, millions of people are not connected to the internet and we have not forgotten them.

We will continue to publish books and produce audio and video tapes for anyone who wants to study our unique message. Recently, Shelley created an index covering the past eight years of the *Day Star* and the index is included in this issue. This will be one issue you will want to keep!

New Horizons

We are in the process of putting several video seminars on our web site, www.wake-up.org. Just think, a person with web access can go to our web site and watch a complete seminar by simply clicking a button. Web video is a new technology that has enormous potential, even though currently the video and audio quality is poor when compared to a regular TV.

But, quality is improving and we plan to take advantage of this emerging technology to proclaim the gospel of Jesus! Soon, the 208, 210, 211 and 212 seminars will be on the web and any person in the world can tune in and watch any part of any seminar at any time – for free! Future plans also include DVDs, CDs and tapes for those who want to view the seminars with better quality on their computers or TV. Incidently, these seminar tapes are also indexed in this issue of the *Day Star.* Since we will be creating new video seminars from time to time, we encourage

you to check the WUAS web site for the latest updates.

Some of my books are ready to access on the web, too! The texts of *Warning! Revelation Is About to be Fulfilled, Bible Stories with End Time Parallels,* and *Jesus, The Alpha and The Omega* are available now and soon, my upcoming book, *Daniel, Unlocked for the Final Generation* will also be available!

As you can see, we will be providing a lot of material and information on the web for those who are looking for an understanding of Revelation's story. From the beginning, we have tried to offer our materials at a price that no one could resist. We have distributed millions of brochures, Bible studies, books and tapes and still, we have not even scratched the surface yet!

We thank the Lord every day for making all of this possible! We also wish to say a special "Thank You" to each of you who have generously supported this ministry because *you* have helped us make this information available! Whether you realize it or not, you will share in the rewards of this outreach throughout eternity.

New Tape of the Month Series

Beginning in July 2003, a new *Tape of the Month* series will start. If you have not already done so, I hope you will subscribe to this new series about the prophecies of Daniel. I hope this study will be worth its weight in gold. I have spent the past two years writing a commentary on Daniel (the book will be available in July) and this video series will use the book as a study guide!

The *Tape of the Month* operates in six month segments and, through the Lord's continued blessings, we have been able to keep the cost for July through December, 2003, subscription at $20 for six video tapes or $12 for six audio tapes – if you order your subscription before the deadline of June 10. As you can see from the subscription price, the tape is free; so you are just paying for the shipping and handling of the tapes!

During the past twelve months of the *Tape of the Month* program, we have carefully examined the book of Ezekiel and many subscribers have expressed their appreciation for this study. If you have not seen the Ezekiel tapes, you can order the whole set or in the near future, watch them on the web for free!

The time has come to study Daniel because Daniel was sealed up until *the time of the end.* New information is coming from Daniel that every Bible student living today should consider! I hope you will subscribe to the *Tape of the Month* program! If you are financially unable to subscribe, please let us know. Generous people donate to this program so that people who are in a rough financial situation can receive the tapes. So, hurry, the $20/$12 subscription deadline for the *Tape of the Month* is June 10. After that, the price goes up because we are not able to include your tape in the bulk mail shipment.

New Commentary on Daniel

Remember, my new commentary on Daniel should be available in late July. The book will be identical in size to my book, *Jesus, The Alpha and The Omega* (280 pages). I hope you will order several copies so you can share them with your friends. The introductory price per book will be $10 each with discounts for quantity purchases.

The book of Daniel is a gold mine for the final generation. It was sealed up until the time of the end. Why did God do this? What did He hide in the book of Daniel that is reserved for the final generation? What does our generation need to know that other generations did not need to know? Order *Daniel – Unlocked for the Final Generation* and find out! Better yet, order the book along with your subscription to the *Tape of the Month* series that starts in July!

New Commentary on Revelation

I am hoping, with God's enabling power, to also complete a commentary on the book of Revelation by July, 2004. Time is running out fast, and the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation are a roadmap that reveals God's plan for the final days of Earth. The world needs to know that the King of kings is coming!

A regime change is about to occur that will make the world a better place to live. Today, wars, hostilities and violence never ends. Sincere people are looking for answers from God's Word, and we have some wonderful answers to share. Please pray the Lord will help me to meet this challenge and finish this overwhelming assignment as quickly as possible.

In Memory

Two special friends died this past month. Mrs. Blossom Depas, 89, passed away on the evening of April 16, 2003. Even though she endured three surgeries in rapid succession and suffered a great deal for the past eight months, her love for people, her infectious smile and unwavering confidence in the Lord remained steadfast to the end. I came to know and love Blossom several years ago through her daughter, Crystal Willett. We share the loss with Blossom's family, but we have every assurance from God's Word that we will soon be united with her to meet the Lord in the air! What a glorious morning that will be!

Dr. Allen Craw, 85, passed away on April 7, 2003. Dr. Craw was a scholar and a gentleman. Most of all, he was a humble servant of the Lord Jesus. Allen and Frances, his wife of 60 years, operated "Craw's Lending Library" for about ten years. They sacrificially distributed thousands of books and tapes at significant personal expense. I often referred to them as the managers of the west coast office of Wake Up America! Allen suffered a stroke two years ago and with great sorrow, he and Frances had to give up their library. I miss his soft spoken words and his expressive chuckles.

I have no doubts that Allen will rise to the vigor of immortality when Jesus calls the righteous dead to life! Frances was at his bedside when he breathed his last breath. She borrowed the following words from the apostle Paul and whispered them to her dearest friend and soul mate, "Allen, you have fought a good fight, you have finished your course, you have kept the faith.

Henceforth there is laid up for you a crown of righteousness which the righteous judge will give to you on that day, and not only to you, but me also, and to all those who love His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7)

Proclaiming Revelation's Story

From day one, our motto at Wake Up America Seminars has been, "Proclaiming Revelation's Story." Since this is the last issue of the *Day Star* for a while, I want to end this chapter in our ministry on the same note where it began, heralding the soon arrival of Jesus. I have decided to close with a few short statements about the importance of submitting to Jesus and preparing for His appearing.

1. - A regime change is coming upon Earth. At the appointed time, Jesus, the King of Righteousness will advance with His armies against a world in rebellion to liberate those who *love righteousness and want to be set free from power of sin*. Before Jesus sets up His kingdom of righteousness, He will do several things. He will test the living to see who wants to belong to the kingdom of God. This testing time is called the Great Tribulation and Jesus will use the Great Tribulation to separate every person on Earth into one of two groups.

One group loves righteousness and hates sin, the other group loves sin and hates righteousness. When He appears, Jesus will annihilate the governments of men and birds will gorge themselves on the flesh of the wicked. The righteous, dead and living, will be gathered up from Earth and taken to the Holy City where they will reign with Jesus for 1,000 years. During this time, the saints will sit in court and determine the appropriate punishment for each wicked person. At the end of the 1,000 years, Jesus and the saints will return to Earth.

The wicked will be resurrected to face their sentences and justice will finally be served. The wicked will suffer for their evil deeds and ultimately perish in a fiery furnace of burning sulphur and hailstones. After the Earth is purified of sin and sinners, Jesus will create a new Heaven and a new Earth "and the government will be upon His shoulders."

2. - I believe the next prophetic event to occur will be the selection, sealing and empowering of 144,000 people. These people will come from all walks of life, cultures, religions and languages and they will be distributed throughout the populations of the world. Even though these people will not know each other, they will present the *same* three messages with great power and authority. Their first message will be a clarion call to worship God on His holy Sabbath and their declarations will puzzle most people because God's Sabbath is neither Friday nor Sunday.

Ironically, many of the 144,000 do not know Jesus *at the present time*, but they are intimately acquainted with the Holy Spirit. These people have honest hearts, open minds and a deep devotion to God as they know Him. When Jesus reveals Himself to them, they will be changed in a single day, just like Saul was changed on the road to Damascus.

Because they do not presently know what they will say, they will be given words to speak just like Ezekiel. The 144,000 are very ordinary people until the Holy Spirit rests upon them, like

Elijah and John the Baptist. They are identified as members of the twelve tribes of Israel in Revelation 7 because the offspring of Abraham are believers in Jesus Christ.

They may not be popular or polished, but they will be powerful. To save the maximum number of people during the Great Tribulation, God will select people from each religion and culture to speak to their brothers and sisters within that religion and culture. Watch for the appearing of these people.

3. - The empowerment of the 144,000 and the commencement of the Great Tribulation will be marked by a global earthquake. This earthquake will break up the essential infrastructures of the world such as energy distribution, communication, travel, banking, shipping and manufacturing.

God will arrest the attention of the world with this mighty earthquake. Then, God will send four awesome judgments upon Earth. These judgments will occur in predicted order: (a) Fiery hailstorms of meteoric showers that ignite unstoppable fires which will burn up one-third of Earth. (b) Civilization threatening asteroid impact on an ocean. (c) Civilization threatening asteroid impact on a continent (d) Great darkness will cover the Earth, perhaps caused by the ejecta from hundreds of angry volcanoes. The death toll from these first four judgments will be 25% of Earth’s population.

4. - A coalition of religious leaders from the major religions of the world will immediately form in response to God’s judgments. As each judgment falls, the coalition will demand that lawmakers do more to appease God so that His judgments will cease. (Remember why Jonah was thrown overboard?) Lawmakers and political leaders will quickly respond to the outcry of the coalition. To maintain order, martial law will be implemented overnight and freedoms will be "set aside." Rationing will become necessary.

Because the evidences of God’s wrath will be global, the fear of God will be in every heart and in every land. Man’s fear of God will propel religious leaders to positions of power and influence in an unprecedented way. The clergy will exercise their new-found power by recommending the creation of a series of "sin-less" laws. They will claim the only way Earth can appease the wrath of God is through repentance and reformation. Laws will be implemented in every country.

These laws will be framed by religious "conservatives" who will denounce the decadent and degenerate life-styles and values of "godless liberals." These laws will carry severe penalties and, after surveying the horrific havoc and loss of life that God inflicted upon Earth, who will be able to argue otherwise? Because the coalition of the clergy will be religious in nature, the coalition will not be able to agree on unified measures to worship and appease God. This is one reason why the coalition is called "Babylon" (or confusion) in Revelation.

For 42 months, Babylon will persecute those who love righteousness and people who neither love the Lord nor follow Babylon. Jesus will impose the Great Tribulation on the final generation of Earth to *test* the faith of the living. This coming test of faith is quite simple. By forcing everyone into a vortex of tribulation, Jesus can determine who loves Him supremely. The test will center on worship. Consider how the test will function: If a person obeys the Ten

Commandments (including the fourth), he or she will suffer civil penalties for violating the laws of Babylon.

If a person obeys Babylon's laws, he or she will receive the wrath of God and suffer in the seven last plagues. The Bible calls the Great Tribulation a time of wrath because wrath falls upon everyone. Religious conflict will separate the people of Earth into two, clearly defined groups. One group will obey the Lord and the other group will submit to Babylon's demands in order to survive and avoid persecution. As a result of their choices, the survivors will either receive the seal of God or the mark of the beast.

6. - The sealing of the 144,000 and the numberless multitude that embrace their message is a marvelous study. The sealing process involves four steps. First, each person must hear the terms and conditions of the gospel. Second, each person will have to make a decision – for or against the demands of the gospel.

Third, each person will be tested by persecution to see if his or her decision for the Lord is final. Last, every person who passes the test will have his or her carnal nature removed. Then, the Lord will seal within each saint the "born-again" nature because it has no attraction to sin. The sin problem will be terminated for that person! What a day of rejoicing that will be!

7. - About two-thirds of the way through the Great Tribulation, God will allow the devil to physically appear. He will masquerade as God and he will deceive those who refused to love the gospel messages presented by the 144,000. He will deceive the wicked with signs, wonders and amazing miracles. The devil is the dreaded beast of Revelation 13:11-18, the Antichrist. He will be given control of Earth for a short time and the wicked will serve and obey him – some thinking he is Almighty God and others, out of terror.

He will be ruthless and manipulating. To secure control of Earth, Lucifer's angels will kill one-third of mankind and the wicked allowed to live will gratefully receive his mark in order to buy or sell. The mark of the beast will be a tattoo showing the number, 666 or the name that Lucifer will use.

The wicked will voluntarily accept this tattoo. The number on the right hand, or the name on the forehead, will indicate its owner was spared from death and he belongs to the two-thirds of mankind which the devil allowed to live. More importantly, the mark of the beast will indicate the survivor refused to place faith in God.

8. - According to Daniel 12, The Great Tribulation will last for a maximum of 1,335 days. It be global and it will be horrible, but Jesus and His offer of salvation will provide a sense of joy that will overcome the distress of tribulation. Do not fear The Great Tribulation, fear God! The Great Tribulation will be the worst of times and the best of times – all at the same time! I don't need to elaborate on the worst of times. However, I do need to explain how it will be the best of times for those who love righteousness.

During the ministry of the 144,000, the power of the Holy Spirit will be poured out in an abundance that will exceed Pentecost! The Spirit will greatly distress those that love sin so that

they might be saved. The wicked will have no peace, day or night because of the Spirit. (Remember Pilate's wife?) On the other hand, the Holy Spirit will bless those who love righteousness with love, peace, courage, strength and joy – in the middle of the worst tribulation the world has ever seen! Anxiety, depression, fear of death and survival will occupy the minds of the wicked.

Of course, the saints will have concerns about survival and many will die because of the Word of God and the testimony they maintain. However, the Lord will sustain many saints. As a result, one third of the living will be translated at the Second Coming! God honors faith!

During the Great Tribulation, the saints will experience the joy of apostolic fellowship. They will come from all walks of life and find themselves in one accord. Because they share a common experience and confidence in Christ as their Savior, the religious differences and experiences between the saints will begin to evaporate. In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek. This diverse fellowship, unified by the Spirit, will show the saints the few things that God holds paramount. False ideas that clutter religion and separate people from one another will fade.

The love that will be found among those loving righteousness will be stronger than family ties. The family of God will be bonded together by a love that goes beyond human love. Jesus overcome this world through love and His children will do the same. Love conquers. Jesus saves!

I cannot close this issue without publicly expressing my deepest appreciation to Shelley, Suzy, Marty and Miller Printing. When I published the first issue of *Day Star,* Shelley read it over, made suggestions and corrections and then she processed the mailing by hand in those days. She literally "worked her fingers to the bone." Suzy has also been an essential part of Wake Up for many years. In the early 90's, she volunteered to do some proofreading and when I saw the thoroughness of her work, I asked her to join us.

A few years later, Marty joined us full-time and he wears many hats. Marty is a C.P.A. and the Secretary-Treasurer of Wake Up, but when he joined the organization full-time, he brought a toolbox of skills to the ministry. Shelley, Suzy, and Marty have a combination of talents and skills that are amazing. It is as though they were prepared from birth to bring their unique talents to service for the Lord and each one of them has proven their dedication by faithful service for many years. I would also like to express my appreciation to Miller Printing.

The employees there probably think I am nuts, but they have done a superior job printing the *Day Star*. They have faithfully delivered the *Day Star* on time for many years. They have been helpful and creative as challenges arose and have earned our highest respect. Last, I want to thank all the unnamed people who have generously given their time and/or money to the *Day Star* publication. God knows all about your generosity and He will reward you for it.

Of course, I want to remind you, this is not an obituary for the *Day Star.* Instead, we are just putting this publication on a leave of absence because we have many other projects that need to be accomplished. *The Wake-Up Report* will debut in July 2003 and if you have sent a donation or purchased something within the past two years, you will get the report *for free*! We

are already planning the first issue and hope you will like it. Don’t forget! The new *Tape of the Month* series on Daniel begins in July and *Daniel – Unlocked for the Final Generation* also comes out in July. Why not order both!

God Brings Good Out of Bad

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Ancient Proverb —

"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid." — Proverbs 12:1

God Brings Good Out of Bad

After a couple years of ministry, **". . . Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!' Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.' "** (Matthew 16:21-23)

Jesus rebuked Peter because he was determined to prevent Jesus' death. When Jesus said that He would soon be killed, Peter could not believe his ears. How could Jesus, the promised Messiah, be put to death by Israel's religious leaders? To show his adoration and loyalty, Peter privately informed Jesus that he and the other disciples were prepared to do whatever it took to save Jesus from death.

Peter said, "Never, Lord! [Over our dead bodies!] This will never happen to you!" (Insertion mine) Jesus looked into the earnest face of Peter and said, "Get behind me *you adversary*. You are a stumbling block to me. . . ." Peter must have been stunned to hear Jesus utter these words. Of course, Jesus knew that Peter meant well, but Peter's desire to keep Jesus from death came from human wisdom. Peter did not understand God's larger objectives nor the importance of Jesus' rendezvous with death.

As predicted in Daniel 9, Jesus began His ministry during the first year of the seventieth week (A.D. 27). He came to Earth on a two-pronged mission. Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God on Earth and to pay for the plan of salvation with His own blood. Like most Jews (Luke 3), Peter anxiously anticipated the establishment of God's kingdom, but he did not understand that Messiah must be killed for our sins.

This is paradoxical. Peter must have attended hundreds of temple services where lambs were offered as sacrifices on the Altar of Burnt Offering. How is it possible that he never associated the death of lambs with the death of the Lamb of God? When he assured Jesus that he would not die, Peter's ignorance was exposed and his willingness to thwart the death of Jesus positioned Peter on the side of Satan, the adversary of God's plans. Therefore, Jesus called

Peter, "Satan."

Peter's experience brings up a profound point. God has plans and it can be difficult to tell what God's plan is. Peter thought he was doing good by offering moral support and protection to Jesus, but Jesus shredded Peter's initiative with a simple phrase. ". . . . you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Two thousand years later, these words speak volumes. God's ways are so different than our ways. God's plans are much bigger than our plans. God's view of life is different than our view.

For example, from man's perspective, the death of Jesus was horrible, but God used it to secure salvation for a whole world. From man's perspective, the hostility and rebellion of Israel's religious leaders was horrible, but God used their actions to distinguish truth from tradition. From man's perspective, the persecution of early Christians was horrible, but God used religious hatred to separate converts from their religious baggage. From man's perspective, the apostasy of the Christian Church has been horrible, but God used the blood of martyrs to exalt and hallow the importance of Bible truth.

The objectives of God are quite different than the objectives of man and this difference causes conflict. Life does not always turn out like we think it should because a very observant and interested God rules and overrules for our greater benefit. Sometimes God overrules nations (He sets them up and takes them down) and God sometimes overrules individuals (by turning their plans into rubbish). Remember Pharaoh's plans? Remember Job's questions? Remember Jonah's plan?

God is a Master at working out His plans. **". . . All things work together for good to them that love God. . . ."** (Romans 8:28) This does not mean that all things will work out like we *want* them to work out. Instead, it means that God works through all things for our highest good.

Out of every adversity, God manages to bring forth a higher good. In every death, God manages to bring forth another life. In every loss, God manages to produce a gain. This was the key point that Peter had to learn. God has plans and they do not conform to the thoughts and wishes of men. So, how can we tell when our plans are at cross purposes with God's plans? The answer is simple. Our plans do not work out. I cannot think of any story in the Bible where man succeeded and God failed. Can you?

Fishing for Souls Part 1

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Ancient Proverb —

"As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them." — -Ecclesiastes 9:12

Fishing for Souls

All living creatures experience hunger. This fact is important to fishermen because they know that fish can be caught through their need for food. Those who fish for the sport of it, use devices called *lures* that smell and look like food to attract hungry fish. Of course, trouble begins for the fish when, driven by hunger, it swallows the lure. It is too late when the fish discovers the lure is not edible. Even worse, the nasty barbed hook hidden within the lure won't let go. It's the ultimate sting operation. The fish is tempted to swallow something that ultimately terminates its life.

Fishermen want to know *when and where* fish like to feed. They spend hours discussing this topic because they can save a lot of time and increase their joy by going where fish are known to thrive. When a fisherman hooks a fish, he is inspired to keep fishing even if the fish is too little to eat.

Of course, the bigger the catch, the greater the pleasure. When a fish resists the hook, fishermen love that, too. They enjoy wearing the fish down through fatigue and after a while, the fish gives up the struggle and submits to its captor. Such is the sport of fishing and it has an very painful parallel.

Human beings share some similarities with fish. We, too, are driven by hunger. People have appetites for money, pleasure, sex, food, knowledge, fame, position, etc. and our adversary, the devil, and his demons are expert fishermen. They have carefully studied our appetites and ways and they know where and when to prey on our basic needs to *lure* us into sin.

The devil's demons have a beautiful lure for every hunger and each lure has a nasty barbed hook hidden within it. Unlike the fishing sportsman, demons do not throw the small "fries" back in the water to mature. The devil and his demons play for keeps. They intend to cause permanent injury whenever possible.

The devil wants to trash our self respect. He loves to humiliate and diminish us through guilt and make us feel like garbage. He wants us to loathe ourselves as he loathes himself. The devil hooks his victims with the painful consequences of sin *just for the fun of it* and he enjoys wearing his victims down with their addictions to sin. A "big fish" now and then, really makes the devil happy. When a notorious person falls into a scandal, the devil and his demons jump for joy! Demons are dispatched throughout the world with a tackle box full of lures to catch the

unsuspecting, and they rarely return without a catch. They are good, very good, fishermen.

Jesus also fishes for souls, but in a different way. He uses lures *without hooks* to catch people for the Kingdom of God. His most beautiful lure is love. To love and be loved is a basic need within the human being. This is why the gospel of Christ is encased in a story of God's great love for man.

If God's love and the sacrifice of Jesus do not touch your heart, your heart is too full of self to respond to love. Another lure Jesus uses is the "lure of truth and integrity." People who love truth and integrity find the gospel of Jesus deeply interesting and attractive. Truth sets us free from the darkness of ignorance and integrity brings joy to our lives. Many people do not love truth and integrity. This was the case when Jesus was on Earth. Jesus explained the ways of God to His listeners, but His explanations were so different and so odd that few people could accept them.

Those who loved truth and integrity saw awesome beauty in His words while the others heard awful blasphemy. Jesus also uses the "lure of rescue" to reach people who are hurting. Some people are not attracted to Jesus until their lives are in such a hopeless mess that they need to be saved from their present circumstances.

In short, the Kingdom of God will one day be filled with an odd group of people – people who were lured by God's love, people who were lured by truth, people who were lured by God's integrity and righteousness and people who will be filled with gratitude for all that God has done for them. Jesus, the Fisherman of Galilee, will show His catch to the Father with a great big smile!

Jesus said, **". . . . The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** (Matthew 13:47-50)

You can continue reading part 2 here.

Fishing for Souls Part 2

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Jesus said, "And do not call anyone on Earth "father", for you have one Father, and he is in Heaven. Nor are you to be called "teacher", for you have one Teacher, the Christ." -Matthew 23:9,10

Between A.D. 538 and 1798 the clergy of the Catholic Church lorded "divine authority" over the nations of Europe with three false doctrines. First, the pope claimed to be the appointed successor of Peter and as such, he had the highest position on Earth. The church claimed that God spoke through the pope (this is how the doctrine of the infallibility of the pope came about).

Second, the clergy claimed that Christ had given Peter and his successors "keys of the kingdom." This meant that in matters of salvation, the eternal destiny of each person was determined by the pope or a duly appointed priest. Third, the Church taught that if a person did not receive the sacraments, there was no hope of salvation. The Church aggressively defended these doctrines with distortions of Scripture, especially these words of Jesus.

Carefully consider this text: **"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in Heaven. I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on Earth will be loosed in Heaven.' "** (Matthew 16:13-19)

Jesus queried the disciples about His identity in order to teach the disciples two lessons. When Peter said, "You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God," Jesus blessed the young man by saying, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah."

Jesus used Peter's formal name because He was about to use Simon's surname to make a profound point. While Peter's words were still reverberating in their ears, *Jesus contrasted Peter's humanity with His divinity*. Jesus said, "I tell you that you are *petros*." (The Greek word *petros* is transliterated "Peter," but it means rock or pebble.) Then, I believe, as Jesus paused until every disciple was looking at Him, He pointed to Himself and said, "and on this *Petra* [Greek: *petra,* a huge rock] I will build my church." The disciples understood the contrast.

Jesus was the vine and they were the branches. (John 15:5) The Son of the living God who stood in their presence was the *"Petra"* of the Old Testament. (Genesis 49:24; Deuteronomy 32:4,15; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 18:31; 1 Corinthians 10:4) The disciples were inspired with this truth.

The church of Christ would succeed because it would be founded on Jesus and sustained by His eternal power. The distinction between the pebble, *petros,* and The Rock of Ages, *petra,* was unmistakably clear. (Contrary to Catholic doctrine, there is no evidence in the New Testament indicating the disciples considered the church to be built upon Peter or his successors.)

Jesus continued by teaching His disciples a second lesson. Jesus would give His disciples the keys of the kingdom. Jesus said, whatever you "loose" or "bind" on Earth will be loosed or bound in Heaven. What did Jesus mean? The "keys of the kingdom" is a phrase that means "responsibility."

If you give the keys of your car to someone, they receive the benefit of using your car, but they also receive a serious responsibility. The message is simple. Jesus promised the disciples they would have the privilege of making the day-to-day decisions that would be necessary to advance the gospel throughout the Earth.

He also assured them that He would honor their decisions in Heaven. Of course, there is an implied responsibility. Jesus would go along with their decisions as long as they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit and built upon "The Rock." The terms, "to bind" or "to loose" means "to approve or disapprove." (Isaiah 22:20-23, Revelation 3:7) Jesus did not give the disciples authority to determine the eternal destiny of anyone. That responsibility is not transferrable. It belongs to the Lamb who redeemed us. (John 5:22,23; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 5:9)

If you have a difficult text that you like me to comment on, send it to me! Also, you can find part 1 here if you haven't read it already.

The Ten Commandments

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple." - Psalms 19:7

In August 2003, a controversy erupted in Montgomery, Alabama, over a monument displaying the Ten Commandments in the Alabama Judicial Building. Alabama Supreme Court Justice, Roy Moore, in August 2001, installed a 2.6 ton monument in the middle of the night without notifying anyone of his plans.

According to Judge Moore, he installed the monument "to acknowledge the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men." Later, Stephen Glassroth and Melinda Maddox, filed suit asking the court to remove the monument on the grounds that the Constitution of the United States forbids the endorsement of religion.

Eventually, U.S. District Judge, Myron Thompson, ordered Judge Moore to remove the monument by August 20, or the state would be fined $5,000 per day. Judge Moore appealed the decision to the Supreme Court of the United States, but the high court refused to issue an injunction barring removal of the Ten Commandments. Ironically, the Ten Commandments are displayed in the U.S. Supreme Court Building which was built in 1935. To the dismay of those demonstrating in favor of Judge Moore's monument, it was removed on August 28, 2003, at 9 a.m.

During the past few years, many conflicts over the Ten Commandments have occurred. Prior to the Alabama case, in April 2003, a conflict arose in Lexington, Kentucky when a judge refused to allow the Ten Commandments to be displayed outside the Capitol Building.

The case was appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States and the high court refused to hear it. Earlier, in 2001, the U.S. Supreme Court also refused to rule whether a display of the Ten Commandments outside a municipal building in Elkhart, Indiana was unconstitutional. The Indiana display had been installed in 1958.

Even though many judges have ruled against a display of the Ten Commandments on public property, a 1920 bronze plaque of the Ten commandments found in the Chester County Courthouse in Pennsylvania was recently sustained by a federal appeals court in June 2003, and a 1918 Ten Commandments plaque was allowed to remain on display at the Allegheny County Courthouse in Pennsylvania.

According to a Gallup Poll taken during the last week of August 2003, 77 percent of the 1,009 Americans surveyed did not feel the presence of the Judge Moore’s monument violated the separation of church and state. *Nevertheless, popular opinion was mooted by one man’s view of the constitution when District Judge Myron Thompson agreed with the plaintiffs.*

I have two observations about this controversy that I would like to share with you. First, when God raised this nation and set it on its feet, He gave the framers of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the wisdom and understanding necessary to establish laws that would enhance the development of this nation.

Even though this nation began with a great set of laws and profound respect for our Creator, a great set of laws will not ensure the survival of a nation if it forgets its Creator! The history of ancient Israel proves this point.

The Bible confirms that God takes nations down when they become hopelessly degenerate, and the USA appears to be moving in this direction. Our wonderful Constitution (which has inspired many nations to imitate our form of government) was inspired by Jesus Christ.

It is also important to remember that the Constitution was designed in such a way that we could *legally* remove the memory of our Creator from it. During the past thirty years, it has become evident that this has been America's corporate choice. God is being removed from society in the name of the "separation of church and state."

Our nation has become intolerant toward God and tolerant toward immorality. What began as a Protestant nation, under God with liberty and justice for all, has become a nation of confused, religiously diverse people protesting against God.

The second point is even more interesting. Once Moses put the Ten Commandments into the Ark of the Covenant, they were not viewed again. Even the High Priest did not see them during his entrance into the Most Holy Place once each year. When Israel traveled toward the promised land, they were not permitted to come within half a mile of Ark of the Covenant. (Joshua 3:4) Years later, when Uzzah reached out his hand to keep the Ark from tipping, God struck him dead. (2 Samuel 6:7)

Why did the Author of the Ten Commandments write them down and then hide them from view? Here are a couple of suggestions: God deliberately kept His law out of sight because His law has value only if it is written on the tablets of our heart. (Hebrews 8:10) God knew that mankind would view the Ten Commandments as an external icon rather than the embodiment of truth.

In other words, exalting an icon made of stone is not to be confused with obeying the Creator's ten commands. Exalting the Ten Commandments as a symbol is meaningless. But exalting the Creator and His list of Ten Commandments as rules we must live by, is meaningful.

The 144,000 In The Book of Revelation

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape." -1 Thessalonians 5:3

The Bible indicates the sealing of the 144,000 (Revelation 7) will be the next prophetic event. Currently, the 144,000 are ordinary people going about their daily tasks. They are living in every nation, tribe and language on Earth. One day soon, Jesus will have a personal encounter with them like He did with the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9) After the 144,000 are sealed, the Great Tribulation will begin with a global earthquake. (Revelation 7:1-3; 8:5)

Like Ezekiel and John, the 144,000 will be given words to speak. (Ezekiel 2:7-3:4; Revelation 10:8-11) *Jesus enables the 144,000 to do this because He has something to say to the world.* The world will hear "the testimony of Jesus" coming out of the mouths of the 144,000 and unfortunately, many people will reject it. (Revelation 1:9; 12:17; 19:10)

The Holy Spirit will empower the 144,000 for 1,260 days. (Revelation 11:3) The 144,000 will perform miracles and marvelous signs, and they will speak fearlessly in opposition to the religious leaders of the world, as well as the world's political leaders. The 144,000 will cause all kinds of turmoil and destruction during their three and a half years of empowerment. (Revelation 11:6) The supernatural power that rests on the 144,000 will cause everyone to thoughtfully consider the testimony of Jesus. What will they say?

The noise level in our world is out of control. Consternation, conflict and controversy is deafening. Peace and safety have evaporated. The 144,000 will not have to compete with this "noise" because Jesus will silence this contentious world with a series of sudden judgments. These judgments are described in Revelation 8:5-12.

The global sign marking the beginning of the Great Tribulation will be followed by a meteoric fire storm that will burn up one-third of the earth. Then, two asteroid impacts will follow which cause incalculable damage. As darkness covers the middle third of Earth (where most people live), the world will realize that more than 1.5 billion people have died during these calamities. These horrific events will silence the survivors. Every ear will be listening for an explanation. Into this momentary vacuum, Jesus will send His 144,000 servants. What will they say?

Of all the gods that are worshiped on Earth today, Jesus is despised the most. Hatred against Jesus is great because He has said things that are offensive to Jews, Muslims, Hindus (Eastern Mystics), atheists and pagans. Jesus said, **"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6)

Wow! No one likes to be informed that his religion is false, so non-Christians reject the teachings of Jesus. The American Bible Society estimates that Catholics and Protestants make up 27 percent of the world's population; therefore, 73 percent of the world is not Christian.

(According to Zechariah 13:8,9, two-thirds of Christianity does not follow Christ, so in effect 91 percent of the world is not Christian!)

Because religion is a spiritual, cultural and emotional matter, it is impossible for one person to prove that one religion is superior to another religion. In other words, Catholics are not winning many Baptist converts, Methodists are not converting many Mormons, very few Jews are converting to Christianity, and most Hindus are not interested in becoming Jews.

If the 144,000 were to appear right now, the testimony of Jesus would not be heard. They would be rejected by every religious group on Earth because of what they are going to say. So, what will they say?

The 144,000 will begin their ministry with these words. **"Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. *Worship* Him who made the heavens, the Earth, the sea and the springs of water."** (Revelation 14:7) Guess who made the heavens, the Earth, the sea and the springs of water?

The most hated God on Earth. **"For by Him** [Jesus] **all things were created: things in Heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him."** (Colossians 1:16, insertion mine) Guess who demands worship? The most hated God on Earth.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days [Jesus] **the Lord made the heavens and the Earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."** (Exodus 20:8-11, see John 1:10, insertion mine)

The Creator of mankind, the King of kings and Lord of lords will soon speak to mankind through His 144,000 servants. *When the world experiences the enormity of our Creator's authority, when one-third of "the heavens, the Earth, the sea and the springs of water" have been destroyed by His command, most of the survivors will put aside their religious bias long enough to hear what Jesus has to say.* The 144,000 will deliver the testimony of Jesus. Jesus said, **"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."** (Matthew 24:14)

True Worship

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring – those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. . . . He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation." -Revelation 12:17; 13,7

If you read through Revelation 12, you will discover that the devil was humiliated five times in that chapter. In verse 4, the devil tried to kill Baby Jesus through the sword of King Herod, but he failed. (Matthew 2:16) In verse 5, the devil was able to kill Jesus through the Jews, but he could not keep Jesus in the tomb. (Acts 10:39,40) In verses 6 and 14, the devil tried to destroy the believers in Christ for 1,260 years, but the church went into hiding, and God's Word and His people survived.

In verse 7, the devil tried to hold onto his position in Heaven's senate (Job 1:6,7), but Jesus took his chair. The devil was thrown out of Heaven on Resurrection Sunday! (John 12:31; Revelation 12:8,9) In verse 15, the devil tried to terminate the Protestant Reformation through war in Europe (Psalm 124:2-4), but God opened a place of religious refuge for Protestants which was the United States of America.

So, after being humiliated five times, the devil is understandably furious and focused on the next war. He knows that his time is short (Revelation 12:12), and he is expecting that war number six to begin any day. (Revelation 12:17) This war is described in Revelation 13:1-8.

This may surprise your, but God will allow the devil to win the upcoming war. Read this twice: "**. . . He was given power to make war against the saints and *to conquer them*. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. . . . for forty-two months."** (Revelation 13:7,5 italics mine) How does the devil achieve total control of Earth?

Violence, idolatry, moral degeneracy and sexual immorality have filled up Earth's cup of sin. Since 1994, the four angels (Revelation 7:1-4) have been holding back God's judgments for almost ten years. Soon, Jesus will pummel Earth with a series of devastating judgments. Jesus will startle the world with the reality of His coming kingdom.

Jesus intends to separate the sheep from the goats with a test of worship. His coming judgments will include a global earthquake, a swath of meteoric firestorms (which will dwarf the recent fires in California), two horrific asteroid impacts, and afterwards, great darkness will cover a third of Earth. (This darkness may be caused by ejecta released from many volcanoes.) Altogether, these judgments will cause the sudden death of 1.5 billion people (Revelation 6:8), and as you might expect, the survivors will be frightened and subdued beyond words.

Because the governments and infrastructures of the world will be in shambles, political leaders will turn to their religious leaders for answers. The religious leaders of the world will

unanimously agree that a Crisis Government should be created to appease God so that His judgments will cease – or no one will survive His wrath. (This topic is discussed at length in my November 2003 WUAS Broadcast.) The Bible indicates that political leaders will "go along" and the Crisis Government will demand that everyone worship God.

The word "worship" is mentioned three times in Revelation 13:4 and 8 because the leaders of the Crisis Government will declare worship to be THE solution to appeasing God's wrath and who can disagree? Think about this: When the infrastructures of communication, transportation, commerce, manufacturing and medical care are in shambles, when 1.5 billion people lie unburied in the streets, and when thousands of coastal cities have totally disappeared because of the tidal waves caused by an asteroid impact upon an ocean, who will be able to argue that worship isn"t THE solution?

Desperate circumstances justify desperate actions. Even the 144,000 will be saying, **". . .Worship Him who made the Heavens, the Earth, the sea and the springs of water."** (Revelation 14:7) The Bible says, **"The whole world was astonished and followed** [did not resist] **the beast** [the Crisis Government]**."**(Revelation 13:3, insertions mine) In other words, a time and a circumstance is coming when the diverse religions of the world will agree that worshiping God is THE solution to appeasing God's anger. In this context, a searching argument will rise: What does God require for worship?

By definition, worship is an act of submission, showing respect for God's authority. Remember the story of Cain and Abel? Both men worshiped God, but God refused to accept Cain's worship because Cain did not submit to God's demand for an animal sacrifice. (Genesis 4, 1 John 3:12)

This made Cain angry and he killed his brother who humbly submitted to God's authority. There's an important end-time parallel here. The devil will enable demonically controlled religious and political leaders to enforce laws demanding worship in ways which are blatantly contrary to the law of God.

However, the saints will choose to obey God's commandments (specifically, the fourth commandment) and refuse to obey the laws of the Crisis Government. Consequently, demonically controlled people will persecute the saints *for religious reasons for 42 months.* For fear of persecution, **"All inhabitants of the Earth will worship the beast** [the Crisis Government] **– all whose names have not been written in the Book of Life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."** (Revelation 13:8)

Even though the devil will be successful for 1,335 days, his reign will come to an end. The devil will be soundly defeated in his seventh war against God, and he will be destroyed in his eighth. I will write more about this next month.

Carnal Nature Hates Humiliation

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." -2 Timothy 4:3,4

During the past five years, terrorists have used the murder/martyrdom technique to draw attention to their causes. Of course, murder/martyrdom dates from antiquity (review Samson's death in Judges 16:30), but the frequency of people killing themselves in order to kill others has grown substantially in recent years. Terrorism is a demonic genie that has been let out of the bottle in which no one can put back. The world cannot return to where it was before 9/11.

The war in Iraq proves that even the most powerful and best equipped army on Earth cannot stop sneaky acts of violence against unsuspecting civilians. Every time I hear of a murder/martyr attack, I think of this text: **"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become** [in Noah's day]**, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. . . . So the Lord said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth – men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air – for I am grieved that I have made them.' "** (Genesis 6:5,7, insertion mine)

The bulk of today's murder/martyrdom phenomenon springs from hatred, and as strange as this may sound, humiliation is the root cause. Lucifer was the first to be humiliated when the Father told him that he could not have the exalted position and worship that belonged to Jesus. (Isaiah 14:13-15; Ezekiel 28:13-17)

Deep hatred caused Lucifer to lie and scheme among the angels. He eventually led one-third of the angels to join him in an attempt to murder Jesus so that he could take Christ's place. Murder was the only way he could achieve what he wanted. Centuries later, when Jesus publicly humiliated Jewish leaders with their own words, they wanted to kill Him.

Jesus responded, **"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning** [of sin]**, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."** (John 8:44, insertion mine) Jesus said Lucifer was a murderer from the beginning because hatred is the natural response of the carnal heart when humiliated.

Cain was humiliated when God showed deference to Abel's sacrifice. Instead of asking himself why God did not honor his offering, Cain loathed Abel. He suspected that God would make Abel "the first born of creation" and rather than repent of his arrogance, Cain killed Abel. For similar reasons, the Jewish leaders murdered Jesus.

His wisdom and teachings humiliated them and they did not want Him to take their place. (Acts 10:39; Luke 13:17; John 11:50, 12:10) Hatred rises when humiliation occurs and unless there is a speedy recovery through the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, hatred can fester into a gnawing desire for revenge and retaliation.

Because hatred leads to murder, the Bible declares, **"Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him."** (1 John 3:15) Of course, there are different forms of humiliation, but the outcome depends upon the core attitude of the heart.

If a person has a meek attitude, humiliation is a powerful learning experience. If a person has a proud heart and a stubborn head, humiliation can be devastating. In this latter case, hatred often forms because the carnal nature *hates* humiliation – being made to appear inferior. Hatred starts as a feeling and ends up as an attitude. Jesus said, **"Everyone who does evil *hates* the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."** (John 3:20, italics mine) So, what happens when pride and religious arrogance are humiliated by truth? The murder of Jesus answers this question.

We have entered an age of rage, anger, and hatred. Social tensions are mounting. Economic tensions are high.

Ethnic tensions are growing. Religious tensions are evident. The world is rapidly coming to a boiling point, which brings me to the point mentioned in last month's issue. During the Great Tribulation, there will be a bold and glorious presentation of God's truth. The 144,000 will humiliate the religions of the world with speech inspired by the Holy Spirit, accompanied by powerful signs and miracles.

Hatred will rise up in the hearts of those who hate truth. No wonder Jesus said, **"A man's enemies will be the members of his own household."** (Matthew 10:36) Love for truth is not genetic. Love for truth has nothing to do with church experience or affiliation. Love for truth, like hatred, begins as a feeling and grows into an attitude; but unlike hatred, love sets us free to learn more truth. Love enables us to forgive our enemies and leave revenge in God's awesome hands. (Romans 12:19)

Last month, I mentioned the devil will be defeated for the seventh time at the Second Coming. During the seven last plagues, the devil will be publicly humiliated (fifth bowl). In a rage, the devil will gather the armies of Earth together in a massive attempt to murder Jesus when He appears.

"They [the ten kings] **have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the** [lamb-like] **beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. . . ."** (Revelation 17:13,14, insertions mine) Of course, the wicked will perish, but once again, murder will be seen as the horrible fruit of hatred. If there is any hatred in your heart, ask Jesus to give you victory over it. He will!

Delay Won't Last Much Longer

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The Delay Won't Last Much Longer

"Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." -Revelation 7:3

If you attended or have viewed Seminar #211 (Dayton, Ohio, 2001) you may recall why I believe the Bible teaches that God's patience with Earth expired in the Spring of 1994. I believe the seven angels who stand before God (Revelation 8:2) were given seven trumpets at the end of the "Great Week."*

After receiving the trumpets, four of the seven angels came to Earth to release God's wrath because God's patience with Earth *had expired.* As the four angels were about to hurt this planet, they were told to *wait* until the 144,000 were sealed. (See text above.) I can think of at least two reasons for this delay: (a) God is merciful. When His wrath commences, it is usually overdue, and (b) with God, timing is everything. God has delayed the Great Tribulation until "the fullness of time" arrives.

***Note: The "Great Week" consists of seven Jubilee days and each great day is ten Jubilee cycles in length. (7 x 490) Seven great days of 490 years equals 3,430 years (1437 B.C. - 1994).**

There is evidence in the Bible indicating the duration of sin is 7,000 years. If so, the total duration for sin could be called a "Grand Week."* Both David and Peter indicate that a day with the Lord is like "a thousand years." (Psalm 90:4, 2 Peter 3:8) The idea of a Grand Week is further enhanced by adding the historical record of the Bible to the 1,000 years of Revelation 20. The total number of years for sin adds up to 7,000 years! Will the Second Coming occur at the end of six thousand years? Will the seventh millennium be a sabbatical millennium? I think there is compelling evidence to support these conclusions.

***Note: The "Grand Week" consists of seven grand days of ten centuries each (7 x 10 = 70 centuries), a total of 7,000 years.**

The Bible also indicates the Great Tribulation will be 1,335 days in length. (Daniel 12:11,12) Let's suppose the 6,000th year allotted for sin ends on April 5, 2008 and the exodus of the saints (the Second Coming) occurs on Sunday, April 6, 2008. If this were the case, the Great Tribulation would begin 1,335 days earlier, on August 10, 2004.

I am not saying these dates are accurate (at this time, no one knows the date of the Second Coming); rather, I am presenting a model of "what if." Scientists use "what if" models every day to study the unknown. Intricate computer programs are created to examine a range of possibilities in every science. This is not time setting. This is time study and the Holy Spirit

encourages it! (1 Peter 1:10-12) Consider the chart on the next page and keep it in your Bible for further study.

If "the four winds" of God's judgments (Revelation 7:1,2) have been delayed since 1994, we are living in a short delay. The phrase, "the four winds" is a word-picture of destruction and upheaval. The release of the four winds in Revelation 7 implies a potent, but unseen force that will chaotically scatter and sweep away everything in its path. When God's wrath commences, every survivor will fear God.

When the right day arrives, Jesus will have sealed 144,000 people and He will make a thunderous declaration.
" . . .There will be no more delay!" (Revelation 10:6) Because of space, the solemnity and importance of this verse cannot be examined, but a quick summary might be helpful. When Jesus declares there will be no more delay, the sealing of the 144,000 will be completed, the censer in Revelation 8:5 will be cast down, the judgment of the living will commence, the fourth seal will be broken and the four deadly judgments of God's wrath (four winds) will be released. These events will happen in rapid succession and the whole world will be overwhelmed with the wrath, strength, authority and power of The Lamb. Think about these things. They are close.

Great Week Ends Grand Week Ends

--------|----------**Delay**----------|----------1,335 Days----------|----------1,000 Years----------|

1994 2004? 2008? 3008?

Revelation's Matrix

6000 7000

This chart aligns the first three prophecies in Revelation with respect to time.

Prophecy #1 Revelation 4:1-6:17, The worthiness of Jesus and the six seals

1st seal = Salvation through faith in Jesus alone

2nd seal = Translation and distribution of the Bible

3rd seal = The judgment bar of Christ begins – dead judged

4th seal = The Great Tribulation begins – twenty-five percent of Earth killed – judgment of living begins

5th seal = Martyrdom of the 144,000 prophets and saints

6th seal = Second Coming

Prophecy #2 Revelation 7:1-8:1, The 144,000, the numberless multitude, the seventh seal

A = Four angels from God's throne prepared to harm Earth

Waiting = For the sealing of the 144,000

B = Numberless multitude standing around the throne after the Second Coming

C = Seventh seal broken at the end of the one thousand years

Prophecy #3 Revelation 8:2-9:21, The six trumpets

D = Seven angels given seven trumpets

E = Censer cast down, global earthquake, peals of thunder, sheets of lightning, mysterious voices

1st trumpet = Fiery hailstorms

2nd trumpet = Asteroid impact on an ocean

3rd trumpet = Asteroid impact on a continent

4th trumpet = Ring of Fire erupts – volcano ejecta causes darkness

5th trumpet = Lucifer appears masquerading as God

6th trumpet = Lucifer's four angels kill one-third of mankind

Eternal Gospel Part 1

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Eternal Gospel: No Beginning and No End - Part I

"Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the Earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people." -Revelation 14:6, italics mine

The Bible says the *eternal gospel* will be proclaimed to everyone living on Earth during the Great Tribulation. The eternal gospel is a collection of changeless and eternal truths about the Godhead. The eternal gospel is like a molecule consisting of many atoms and each atom represents a specific truth.

For example, one atom represents this eternal truth: The Godhead will rule over the universe forever. Another atom represents this eternal truth: By right of creation, the Godhead owns everything in the universe. Another atom represents this eternal truth: Because the Godhead knows everything, their laws are perfect. Another atom represents this eternal truth: Because the members of the Godhead are love, they granted the power of choice to their offspring. Many more "atoms" are in the molecule of the eternal gospel, but I hope you can see how *many* truths combine to make up the *eternal gospel.*

During the Great Tribulation, every person on Earth will hear three critical truths of the eternal gospel. These three truths are represented in Revelation 14:6-10 as three announcements given by three angels. Currently, these three truths do not have the power and authority they will have during the tribulation, but this does not diminish the beauty or truthfulness of the eternal gospel. Eternal truths can be hidden for thousands of years and still be true! However, when the appointed time arrives, there is nothing more powerful than a truth revealed.

Soon, the Holy Spirit will empower 144,000 prophets and they will proclaim the eternal gospel with uncommon power. Everyone on Earth, regardless of culture, language or religion, will hear them. Right now, people’s minds are closed by religious arrogance. God loves us and to open our diverse minds and overcome our preconceived ideas, He will traumatize the human race by a global earthquake and four trumpet-judgments. The nations of Earth will be ruined. The infrastructures of life as we know them will collapse.

World order will collapse and a crisis government will take over. Personal beliefs about God and in God will crumble. In the disheveled and chaotic context of the Great Tribulation, the eternal gospel will radiate with unparalleled power and authority. Three "atomic" truths about Jesus will be proclaimed. The world will hear the truth about His divine authority, the terms and conditions of His salvation, and His wrath for defiance.

The first four trumpets of Revelation 8 will (a) darken the Heavens, (b) burn up a third of the Earth, (c) turn a third of the sea to blood, and (d) contaminate a third of Earth’s drinking water.

The 144,000 will point to these judgments saying, **"Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment** [of the living] **has come. Worship Him** [the Creator] **who** (a) **made the Heavens,** (b) **the Earth,** (c) **the sea and** (d) **the springs of water."** (Revelation 14:7, insertions mine)

The call to worship Jesus the Creator will be highly inflammatory to Moslems, Jews, Hindus and other non-Christians who reject the divinity of Jesus. Many Christians will also consider this first call of the eternal gospel to be highly inflammatory because they think they can worship Jesus as they choose rather than according to His laws and commandments.

Jesus is a mystery character. Ask some of your Christian friends if the God of the Old Testament is Jesus or the Father. The fact is, most of the references about God in the Old Testament refer to Jesus. Jesus is Jehovah God, the Yahweh of the Old Testament. Most Christians do not know this. They think the God of the Old Testament is stern, legalistic and deadly, and the God of the New Testament is forgiving, full of grace and life. What a surprise it is to them when they realize that Jesus is the same in both cases!

The Old Testament reveals that Jesus sent the flood that drowned an entire world in Noah's day. He also sent the fire that burned Sodom and Gomorrah because divine justice deemed it necessary. The New Testament also tells us that Jesus will destroy the wicked at the Second Coming. (Revelation 19:19-21) This behavior seems contradictory to the sweet and lowly character of Jesus as He is described in the four gospels. This contradiction occurs because Jesus functions on two different levels.

As a member of the Godhead, Jesus *oversees* the sin problem on Earth. As a man, Jesus demonstrated how God wants us to live in a sinful world. The Creator of Earth came to Earth to show us how to please God, not how to be God. Studying the behavior of Jesus in the Old Testament and studying the life of Jesus in the New Testament is thrilling because the "atomic" elements of the eternal gospel are revealed through the actions of Jesus! This is why the book of Revelation exists.

The book of Revelation brings all of the other books of the Bible together to expose Jesus for all that He is. Everything we know about the *eternal gospel* comes through Jesus. **"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to** [understand] **the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him** [through me]**.' "** (John 14:6,7, insertions mine)

You can read part 2 here, part 3 here, and part 4 here.

The Passion of The Christ

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Thoughts on the Movie "*The Passion"*

Several people have asked for my response on Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion.* So, here is a short summary. Overall, I was very impressed with the movie. I would give it four and a half stars out of five. I am confident the Holy Spirit moved Mr. Gibson to make this movie and if one person surrenders his life to Jesus as a result of viewing this movie, Heaven will rejoice!

Of course, there's much more to the ministry of Jesus than *any* two hour movie can tell and my understanding of the passion of Jesus is somewhat different than Gibson's. However, God has raised up a man with the prerequisite talents and assets to put Jesus on center stage in the United States and I am delighted that Mr. Gibson had the faith and courage to make this movie.

Since much has already been written about the movie in newspapers and magazines, I will limit my remarks to contrasts between certain scenes in the movie and my understanding of what actually took place.

1. - The movie begins with Jesus agonizing in the Garden of Gethsemane. I found the anguish of Jesus to be misunderstood and understated. The Bible says that Jesus was in such anguish that his sweat was like drops of blood. (Luke 22:44) What caused His horrible anguish? Was it the prospect of dying on the cross?

No. Gibson presents the scene as though Christ was tempted by the devil to doubt His mission and identity. I can understand this widely accepted point of view because the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness to doubt His mission and identity. Nevertheless, I think there was a greater temptation.

I understand the anguish of Jesus in the garden was caused by an *eternal farewell* between Jesus and the Father. Yes, Jesus predicted He would be resurrected on the third day (Matthew 17:23), but in the garden, that assurance evaporated when the Father placed the guilt of our sins upon Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21) In the garden, Jesus could not see beyond the grave. It had to be unbelievably difficult for Jesus – as God – to submit to the penalty of sin. As a co-eternal member of the Godhead, the Author of Life struggled beyond human comprehension with the finality of eternal death.

The plan of salvation required a member of the Godhead to die the second death, and after an enormous struggle that nearly killed His flesh (Luke 22:43), Jesus surrendered with these words, **"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."** (Luke 22:42) Think about this: To pay the penalty for *all* sinners at one time, a member of the Godhead had to experience the finality of the second death. Revelation 20 indicates the wicked will be resurrected and informed of God's judgment at the end of the thousand years, and then they will be executed, never to enjoy life again.

The penalty for sin is eternal death and it is marvelous to me that God does not impose a harsher penalty for sin upon any wicked person than what God Himself has first suffered. Jesus (God) received the wrath of God's law against sin, and Jesus also suffered the wrath of men against God. This latter suffering was vividly presented in Gibson's movie, but the greater sacrifice of Jesus was not presented.

2. - I have had some personal experience and association with religious leaders, and I found Gibson's portrayal of the Jewish leaders to be accurate and balanced. I did not see *any* anti-semitism. During the movie, I remember thinking that history is so ironic because centuries later, the leaders of the Catholic Church would treat Protestants the *same way* Jewish leaders treated Christ and His followers during the first century A.D. The pertinent point is that it really does not matter which religion is in control, few religious leaders are godly people.

It is my observation that religious leaders tend to make their religion their god rather than imitating the attitude and life of the humble Jesus who came from God in "Spirit and Truth." Religious leaders are human beings and most of us are dominated by the carnal heart. This is proven by our love for the things of this world. The carnal heart *loves* positions of power, influence, wealth, pleasure, and luxury. Jesus is the perfect model of a spiritual heart.

Out of love for God and sinners, Jesus gave up everything that Heaven had to offer and He condescended to a position of obscurity, poverty, rejection, and suffering to save us. No wonder the teachings of Jesus embarrassed the religious leaders of His day and contrary to the claims of Vatican II, the Jewish leaders intended to kill Jesus. The Apostle Peter was an eye witness. Read his words in Acts 3:13-18. The fact that the state carried out the will of the church does not lessen the guilt of those people who condemned Jesus to death.

Do you remember what God told King David after he put Uriah in harm's way so that he could take Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, as his own? The prophet Nathan told King David***, ". . . .You* killed him with the sword of the Ammonites."** (2 Samuel 12:9, italics mine) Of course, Jewish people today cannot be held responsible for the actions of first century Jewish leaders, but the bottom line remains clear. Religious leaders are often opposed to the teachings of Jesus. This is why Jesus said we are to be wary of religious leaders. The blind can lead the blind into a pit. (Matthew 15:14; 23:16)

3. - And speaking of blindness, here is an eyeopener. As I watched the suffering of Jesus, I remember thinking several times that the penalty for sin is very great. Jesus took *my place* during the scourging and on the cross. **"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."** (Isaiah 53:5)

As I walked out of the theater, I realized that I observed the suffering that belonged to me, but Jesus took my place. It is ironic that very few people actually understand that they *will* suffer the penalty for sin unless they surrender their lives to Jesus as Lord and Master.

4. - I became distressed during the movie with the fact that none of the disciples supported or helped Jesus after He was arrested. Jesus went through His passion alone. I knew this *fact*

before I saw the movie, but I had not absorbed the *reality* of His rejection until I saw how cowardly all of the disciples were.

I became especially disgusted with the Apostle John. He did not even offer to help Jesus carry the cross and John was only a few feet away from Jesus! The Romans conscripted a strong looking man from the crowd, Simon of Cyrene, to help Jesus carry His cross. As a Jew, Simon was probably in Jerusalem to observe Passover and little did he realize that he would have an important part in the sacrifice of The Paschal Lamb of God.

I was touched by the way Gibson showed Simon putting his strong arms around Jesus and the cross, and together, they pressed forward under the heavy load toward the top of Golgotha. Do not misunderstand my comments here. If I had been there, I would have probably abandoned Jesus, too. That was the disgusting part. I saw my weakness and felt ashamed and wept.

5. - The placard on the cross above Jesus' head was not presented correctly (or if it was, I did not read it correctly). According to the Bible, the sign stated "Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews" in three languages. (John 19:19-21) This placard made the Jewish leaders quite angry and they wanted it removed. But Pilate refused. Pilate and his wife were spiritually touched by Jesus and this sign was Pilate's first testimony of his faith in Jesus. That sign also has profound significance to me because Jesus remains the King of the Jews. Everyone who believes in Him is a Jew! See Ephesians 2 and Galatians 3.

6. - Gibson portrayed the devil as a being with a lovely but sinister face. The character was more female than male in appearance, but the voice was more male than feminine. (Actually, I think the devil character was played by a woman who had shaved her eyebrows and hair.) Gibson also portrayed demons as adult-like children (like midgets) or children having gross and abnormal features.

This portrayal of the devil and demons is consistent with Renaissance mythology. No doubt you have seen pictures from that era where good angels are represented as children (or cupids) because good angels were thought to be "children of God." During the Renaissance, evil angels were sometimes painted as grotesque children because they were thought to be "children of the devil." I mention this matter because in the scene where Jesus is stumbling toward Golgotha, the devil was shown in the crowd carrying a strange looking child with a bald head and splotches of hair on growing on its body.

The child looked toward the suffering Messiah with a demonic smile. Perhaps Gibson put these clips in the movie to affirm that the devil is the mother of demons, and they were delighted to see the inhumane treatment of Jesus.

7. - While I am on the subject of demons, a few words about Judas are necessary. The story of Judas was told, but not developed very well. (Remember, this is only a two hour movie.) Yes, Judas received thirty pieces of silver from the priests, kissed Jesus in the garden, and returned the money to the priests when he realized the magnitude of his sin, but Gibson's understanding of the torment that caused Judas to take his life is quite different than mine. In the movie, Judas was harassed and ultimately chased by demonic children to an isolated place.

There, alone with his shame, a tortured Judas discovers the bloated carcass of a dead animal (maybe a donkey) covered with maggots and flies. As Judas reflects on his betrayal of an innocent Jesus, he sees the dead animal who is not disturbed by the vermin eating its body. Judas concluded that he wanted to die so that he might be free of the demons that are eating at his soul. So, Judas took the rope from the animal's head and hung himself from a tree branch overhanging the dead animal.

My understanding of the circumstances that caused Judas to take his life is somewhat different. I do not think Judas was tormented by demons; Judas was tormented by the Holy Spirit. Here is how: Judas loved to be around Jesus. Judas even loved Jesus, but Judas did not love Jesus above himself; his carnal heart would not permit it. Judas wanted to be *somebody*. He wanted the things of this world: money, power, position, luxury and pleasure. When he realized these perks were not part of the kingdom of Christ, he became disillusioned and angry with Jesus.

Judas knew the Jewish leaders were preparing to kill Jesus, and Judas saw an opportunity to make some money. He agreed to show them where Jesus was located that night because Jesus had ruined his hopes of fulfilling his carnal desires. (Judas may have reasoned that Jesus could save Himself from death if He wanted to because He had done that before.) After witnessing the mockery and trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, Judas was overwhelmed with Christ's submission. Judas realized the magnitude of his sin and horrible grief overcame him.

That morning, the Holy Spirit pressed both disciples, Judas and Peter, to surrender their love to God and love Jesus *as He loved them*. Peter surrendered to the love of Jesus and became a converted man that morning even though he had denied the Lord three times. Judas refused to surrender his heart to the Holy Spirit, and to escape his anguish and guilt, he committed suicide.

The experience of these two men represent two groups of people within the human race. Some will confess their sins and love Jesus more than they love themselves, others love themselves so much they would rather die than repent.

8. - The part of the movie showing Pilate's consternation was presented very well. Pilate and his wife were convinced early of Jesus' innocence, but Pilate was not about to sacrifice his coveted office over the fate of a Jewish prisoner. Even though Pilate did not like the Jews, he realized that Jesus was no ordinary man. Almost immediately, Pilate was favorably impressed with Jesus, and he thought that he could pacify the Jews if he had Jesus scourged within an inch of His life. Needless to say, Pilate's efforts to save Jesus only made the passion of Jesus far worse.

As I watched Pilate's behavior in the movie, I saw how hard it can be for a person to go against the tide to do what is right. Pilate knew that Jesus was not a criminal. Pilate knew that Jesus was not an ordinary man, but Pilate had a high position to protect. Ultimately, Pilate came face to face with the Truth, and like the disciples, he failed the test, too. He tried to negotiate his way out of personal culpability by offering the Jews a criminal named Barabbas who had earlier participated in a Messianic revolt and killed some people.

9. - The abuse inflicted on Jesus by the soldiers was sickening, but reasonable. War hardens a

segment of our hearts for strangers. When I was in Vietnam, I saw soldiers abuse their captives. It happens like this: When a soldier loses a buddy to the enemy, revenge becomes personal, and it is extracted without discrimination.

The combustion of warfare is killing without regard, raping women, and tormenting and torturing the elderly. The Romans hated the Jews, and any opportunity to inflict hurt on "another Jew" was gladly received and Gibson presented this in a very believable way – at least to this ex-soldier. Gibson inserted a couple clips during the scourging showing the faces of the Jewish priests and they were not phased in the least by the horrible blows that Jesus received. These clips were very telling I thought. They were so angry with Jesus, that the horror inflicted on Jesus was fully justified in their minds.

10. - As far as I am concerned, the destruction of the temple was not given the significance it deserved. (Again, remember that this is a two hour movie. Smile.) When Jesus died, there was a great earthquake and Gibson showed the temple being damaged by the earthquake. However, the tearing of the temple veil was not shown, and the scandal that overtook Judaism was not presented. History indicates that when the veil was torn from top to bottom, the Most Holy Place of the temple was found to be empty.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of Passover worshipers had gathered at the temple for the slaying of the national paschal lamb that afternoon. When the hour came for the lamb to be slain at the temple, The Lamb of God died on Golgotha. An angel was sent to rip the four-inch thick veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy to signify the termination of the Levitical system.

As the worshipers looked into the Most Holy Place, they were surprised to see the shrine of Judaism empty. There was no ark. There was no Shekinah glory. There was nothing but darkness in that room. How poignant. How telling.

11. - In my opinion, the resurrection of Jesus was not given near enough significance. It appeared anticlimactic, almost an afterthought. Gibson's movie positions *the victory* of Jesus as though going to the cross was the victory. I view the victory of Jesus in a larger frame of reference. Jesus had to live a perfect life, He had to die a complete death, He had to suffer the wrath of God and man, so that He could apply the merits of His righteousness to all who will obey Him. This is why the resurrection of Jesus is so critical – He decides who will receive the merits of His accomplishments.

Paul wrote, **"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."** (Hebrews 5:7-9)

12. - When the movie was over, a reverence was felt in the room. Everyone silently departed. There was no talking. When I stepped into the bright sunlight, it was as though I suddenly returned from a trip to A.D. 30. I was deeply moved. As I drove home alone in my thoughts, I wished the terms and conditions of salvation through Jesus could have been stated in a more

direct way, but I was very pleased that Mel Gibson had been able to present Jesus in such a powerful way.

I have no doubts that God raised up Mel Gibson to tell a segment of the story about Jesus. God gave him courage, God gave him a mission, and God gave him wealth to do it. I think every Christian should thank Mel Gibson for putting Jesus on the big screen. I pray Gibson's movie will be a success in three ways.

First, I hope millions of people will be spiritually moved by the sufferings of Jesus to surrender their lives to Him. Second, I hope millions of people will be inspired to study their Bibles so that the gospel of Christ will transform their lives. Last, I hope Gibson will make another movie about Jesus. How about, "*The Revelation* of The Christ?" Smile. If the Apostle Paul were alive today, I think he would say of this movie, **"For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth."** (1 Corinthians 13:8)

Eternal Gospel Part 2

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the Earth —to every nation, tribe, language and people." -Revelation 14:6

A Gospel with No Beginning and No End - Part II

Revelation 7:1-4 indicates that Jesus will select and seal 144,000 people just before the Great Tribulation begins. When the global earthquake in Revelation 8:5 occurs, these people will begin speaking for Jesus and they will testify for 1,260 days. Jesus will give them words to speak and this is how the whole world will hear the eternal gospel during the Great Tribulation. The global earthquake will fracture the world into "small cells." Travel will be very difficult and I believe each cell will have at least one of the 144,000 in it.

The next events will occur in rapid succession. After the global earthquake, the first trumpet-judgment will occur. (Revelation 8:7) A fiery hailstorm of white-hot meteors will burn up a third of the trees of Earth and all of the grass. The second trumpet-judgment will be large asteroid impact on an ocean, causing huge tsunamis that will destroy *thousands* of coastal cities and sink ships by the hundreds.

Then, the third trumpet-judgment will occur and a continent will be impacted by an asteroid which will kill millions of people at ground zero and it will shatter geological strata allowing sewage and other poisons to contaminate underground springs for thousands of miles. Poisonous water will kill tens of millions of people. Shortly thereafter, the fourth trumpet-judgment will fall and a great darkness will spread over one third of the Earth. This darkness may be caused by hundreds of volcanoes erupting.

As far as I can tell, the first four trumpets will occur within a period of thirty to sixty days. The death toll from the first four trumpets will be a staggering 25 percent of Earth’s population. When these displays of divine wrath subside, the people of Earth will sit in darkness and silence. Every family will be grieving, stunned, overwhelmed and frightened because they have just witnessed the reality of God’s authority.

I believe the 144,000 will predict the date of each trumpet-judgment. This ability will prove they speak for Jesus. The 144,000 will say many things, but the essence of their testimony will be three simple messages which have their origin in the eternal gospel. The first message will be, "Jesus is Sovereign over the nations of Earth.

Submit to His demands. Worship the Creator." The Bible describes this message saying, **". . . Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment** [of the living] **has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."** (Revelation 14:7)

Out of fear, almost everyone will agree "in principle" with the 144,000 at first, because the sudden presence of overwhelming destruction indicates that more destruction will be forthcoming if God's wrath is not appeased. In an effort to maintain some semblance of order, the governments of Earth will impose martial law upon their respective nations. Rationing will be necessary. The leaders of Earth will meet for an emergency summit and the Bible predicts a "crisis government" will be formed quickly.

In light of all that has happened, leaders will conclude that the crisis government must be given authority over *all* nations for the purpose of appeasing God's wrath or more destruction will certainly follow. Because of the pope's worldwide appeal, the Roman Catholic Church will lead a coalition of religious leaders from all religions in this effort to appease God.

The Bible predicts this coming event saying, **". . . .And I saw a beast** [the crisis government] **coming out of the sea** [of humanity]**. He had ten horns** [representing ten political leaders] **and seven heads** [representing seven religious leaders]**, with ten crowns** [diadems of authority] **on his horns** [indicating political leaders will exercise authority]**, and on each** [religious] **head a blasphemous name** [indicating the seven religions of the world are opposed to the authority of Jesus]**.**

The beast I saw resembled a leopard [this parallels the swiftness of Grecia in Daniel 7]**, but had feet like those of a bear** [this parallels the strength of the Medes and Persians in Daniel 7] **and a mouth like that of a lion** [this parallels the prowess of ancient Babylon in Daniel 7]**. The dragon** [the devil] **gave the beast** [the crisis government] **his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound** [the Roman Catholic Church was wounded in 1798]**, but the fatal wound had been healed.**

The whole world was astonished [bewildered] **and followed the beast** [did not resist]**. Men worshiped** [submitted to] **the dragon because he had given authority to the beast** [the crisis government]**, and they also worshiped** [submitted to] **the beast and asked, 'Who is like the beast? Who can make war** [resist the laws of the crisis government] **against him?' The beast** [crisis government] **was given a mouth to utter proud words** [claims demeaning the authority of Jesus] **and blasphemies and to exercise his authority** [on Earth] **for forty-two months."** (Revelation 13:1-5, insertions mine)

Now that you have a short synopsis of how Babylon, the crisis government, will form and what the 144,000 will be saying, you are in a good position to understand the conflict which the eternal gospel will produce. This will be examined next month.

You can read part 1 here, part 3 here, and part 4 here.

Eternal Gospel Part 3

Author: Larry W. Wilson

A Gospel with No Beginning and No End - Part III

"Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before him, and around him a tempest rages. He summons the Heavens above, and the Earth, that he may judge his people." -Psalms 50:3,4

United in an Unthinkable Union

The Bible indicates the first four trumpet-judgments of Revelation 8 will kill more than 1.5 billion people over a period of thirty to sixty days. Because the religious and political leaders of the world do not understand apocalyptic prophecy, they will fearfully anticipate that more judgments will fall if something is not done quickly to appease God's wrath. In panic and "in fear of the living God," the world's religious and political leaders will be invited to a summit to discuss God's horrific actions.

I believe that since the Roman Catholic Church already has relationships with most countries, it will host the summit. The outcome of this meeting will forever change the governance of the world. The book of Revelation predicts the leaders of the world will unite in an otherwise unthinkable union. (Revelation 13:3,4)

When the first four trumpet-judgments destroy thousands of cities and millions of square miles, everyone present at this solemn meeting will be afraid of God. Like Nebuchadnezzar after he recovered from seven years living as an animal, the leaders of the world will humbly acknowledge the sovereign authority of the Most High God. They will notice that God's anger was directed at geographic locations known for degenerate behavior. This will prove in their minds that God observes the ways of man.

Everyone will clearly understand God's wrath against sexual immorality, violence and other forms of degenerate behavior. (2 Chronicles 16:9; Colossians 3:5,6) After a few days at the summit, the leaders of the world will unite on three civilization changing matters.

First, the leaders of the world will agree that all mankind, *as one man,* must appease God through repentance and worship; otherwise, the whole world will be destroyed by God's anger. Second, to guide nations in how to repent and worship God, religious leaders will unite and form a "crisis authority."

Since the world is currently divided into large groups of religiously diverse people, the "crisis authority" will consist of representatives from the seven religious systems of the world. Third, political leaders will agree to follow the counsel of the "crisis authority" in matters of repentance and worship. In an effort to appease the Almighty, these world leaders will believe that if they enforce the mandates of the crisis authority in their respective nations, God's anger will cease.

Of course, these three decisions are unthinkable within today's world context, but the destruction caused by the first four trumpet-judgments will terminate today's context. Consider the fundamentals underlying these three civilization changing decisions and notice how simple they really are: First, all religions believe in some form of repentance and the need to worship God.

Repentance and worship will provide the religious framework for a global effort to appease God. After seeing the sudden destruction of more than 1.5 billion people, kings, prime ministers, presidents, and legislative bodies will not murmur. How can they? Desperate circumstances can make desperate solutions appear very reasonable. (Do not forget, after the World Trade Center disaster, the Patriot Act of 2001 only took 45 days to create and implement.)

Second, the religious leaders of the world will attempt to resolve a very thorny problem, but their efforts will only produce confusion. This one world of human beings consists of seven antagonistic religious systems. The diversity of humanity means that repentance and worship in Islamic countries cannot be identical with repentance and worship in Catholic countries. Therefore, the "crisis authority" will have seven religious leaders (the seven heads) who rule over their subjects.

The mandates emanating from the "crisis authority" will be *adapted* to each nation. For example, Moslems will be directed in ways that are different than Catholics. (Mixed messages coming from the crisis authority explains why this beast is called "Babylon," or confusion, in Revelation.) Third, the political leaders of the world will be forced to admit that God can be appeased only if the "rights of the individual" are subjugated to the "survival of the whole nation."

In other words, if God remains offended by the sinful behavior of a minority (which brought on His wrath in the first place), the majority will continue to suffer more of God's wrath. Therefore, every nation must obey the mandates of the "crisis authority." You may be surprised to learn this development will not be difficult to achieve. Here is why:

When the first four trumpet-judgments occur, martial law will be implemented in all nations. Overwhelming destruction and a disruption of national infrastructures will necessitate most current constitutional rights which many nations grant to their citizens be suspended.

To maintain some semblance of order and to keep gangs from preying upon the elderly and the weak, civil authorities will be granted enormous power (deadly force) with very little legal restraint. Because of the devastation, martial law will already be in place (and constitutional rights suspended) when the summit occurs. The "crisis authority" will be able to direct, without impedance, the governments of all nations on matters of repentance and worship because constitutional provisions will have been suspended due to the extreme state of emergency.

I believe the pope will be elected to serve as head of the "crisis authority." "One of the [seven] heads of the beast [the crisis government] seemed to have had a fatal wound [1798], but the fatal wound had been healed. . . ." (Revelation 13:3) The pope will be elected to lead the crisis government because his church is the only church having diplomatic ties with most nations. The

pope will neither usurp the powers of governments nor will he dictate how every nation must repent and worship. (Remember, there are seven heads.)

Rather, he will lead the world in an ecumenical way toward repentance and worship. His Moslem, Protestant and Jewish counterparts will follow his lead. In this setting, the various religions of the world will tell their respective nations how to govern. Out of fear, "sin-less" laws will be implemented in every land and civil authorities will punish every person who disobeys. The government within each nation will retain its civil power, but the governments of the world will be obligated to carry out the reforms mandated by the "crisis authority" or God's wrath may fall again.

Remember, the clergy will not have to prove that God is angry with the degenerate behavior of Earth's population. Every nation will have sufficient death and ruined infrastructures as evidence. With twenty-five percent of the human race dead, and thirty-three percent of the world destroyed, political leaders will conclude that "the appeasement of God" must be their highest priority.

Thus, Revelation predicts the kings of Earth will "follow" a religiously controlled "crisis authority" and politicians will be forced by circumstances (like Pilate) to carry out the wishes of religious leaders within their respective nations. This explains how the global church-state, the first beast of Revelation 13, which is also called Babylon because of its confusion, will rise. (Revelation 13:1)

As far as I can tell, this beast will rule over the nations of Earth for 1,260 days. (Revelation 13:5) However, at the end of 890 days, Lucifer will physically appear and after dissolving the religions of the world into "a one-world religion," he will set himself up as lord of lords, and king of kings. The devil will masquerade as Almighty God and reign over Earth for a period of about 445 days. In the next Wake Up Report, I will try to explain why the second angel's message in Revelation 14 will be so hard to accept.

You can read part 1 here, part 2 here, and part 4 here.

Eternal Gospel Part 4

Author: Larry W. Wilson

A Gospel with No Beginning and No End - Part IV

"A second angel followed and said, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.’ " -Revelation 14:8

A Horrible Mistake

The Great Tribulation will begin with a global earthquake (Revelation 8:5) followed by a rapid sequence of four divine judgments (the first four trumpets, Revelation 8:6-12). When God’s wrath begins, the Bible predicts the world’s religious and political leaders will unite in an otherwise unthinkable union.

This union or "crisis authority" is represented in the Bible as a composite beast that rises out of the sea. (Revelation 13:1) The union of religious and political powers will be widely accepted at that time as a sincere and desperate effort to appease God through **repentance and worship.** The Bible indicates that all of the world will follow (Revelation 13:3) and worship the beast except those whose names are written in the Book of Life. (Revelation 13:8) The marriage of religion and politics will prove to be a horrible mistake. Ironically, man’s efforts to appease God will accomplish two terrible things – increase human suffering and offend God even more.

Religions Put on Display

God has designed a brilliant process to prove to the honest in heart that all of the religions of the world are blasphemous (opposed to God). To bring this revelation about, Jesus will send an initial volley of four judgments and predictably, the leaders of the world will "come together" in a global effort appease God.

The nations and religions of the world will unite, at least *in principle,* based on the need for repentance and worship. In this setting, the first two messages presented by the 144,000 (Revelation 14:6-8) will have a powerful and stirring context. The first message – "Fear God, repent and give Him the glory He is due, and worship the Creator, Jesus Christ," will *sound* similar to the message that comes from the beast (the crisis authority). However, the repentance and worship which Jesus demands and the repentance and worship which the beast (the crisis authority) demands will be different. This is how the contest between the laws of man and the laws of God begins.

It is interesting to note that a conflict over worship occurred between the first two sons of Adam and Eve and the same type of conflict will be repeated between the last of Adam and Eve’s offspring. God has carefully designed a series of events that will contrast His truth against man’s rebellion.

These events will produce a powerful and telling contest that ultimately separates the sheep from the goats. Several revelations will occur during the Great Tribulation. One revelation will be the blasphemous nature of religion. Another revelation will be man's need to forsake his sins and receive Jesus as Savior, and the greatest revelation of all will be the fact that Jesus Christ is God and He has all the prerogatives and powers of God the Father!

These revelations will be bitter-sweet. For the honest in heart, they will be wonderful to understand, but they will come with a high price. The eternal gospel will separate family and friends. Some people will rejoice and respond to God's call when they hear about the repentance and worship that Jesus wants, but a majority, like Cain, will reject the repentance and worship that God wants. In its place, they will substitute a repentance and worship they prefer to give. Like Cain, when wicked people see God's approval for His children, they will do everything in their power to keep others from obeying God and receiving His approval!

The Second Message

There are seven religious systems in the world (represented by the seven blasphemous heads on the beast in Revelation 13). Hundreds of variations exist within these systems and *every one of them* is false! This fact provides the basis for the second angel's message (Revelation 14:8) which declares three things.

First, the 144,000 will make a startling announcement: "The crisis authority (Babylon) does not represent the interests of God." Babylon does not have the right answer and Babylon cannot appease the wrath of God because Babylon is fallen. The word "fallen" means "brought down" or "exposed as false."

Currently, religious people look "up" to their spiritual leaders for information and truth about God and His will. However, the 144,000 will present a second message which is a declaration that all religions are false and are create by fallen man. (If religious leaders really understood God's plan for the Great Tribulation, they would be able foretell the sequence of events that Jesus intends to follow and would strenuously object to the formation of Babylon, the crisis authority.)

Second, the 144,000 will announce that the union of the religious and political leaders to appease God is a great mistake. When religious and political leaders convene and form the crisis authority, political leaders will "drink" two intoxicating ideas presented by the clergy.

The clergy will convince political leaders that if global repentance and worship are implemented, God will be appeased and His judgments will cease. The clergy will also convince political leaders that the only way repentance and worship of God can be implemented is through the imposition of "sin-less" laws. After viewing and experiencing the overwhelming destruction caused by God's wrath, the political leaders of the world will "buy into" this horrific error. Fear of God and uncertainty about His wrath will make the doctrine (wine) of appeasement appear reasonable (intoxicating), but the results will be maddening and horribly flawed.

Third, adultery is used throughout the Bible to convey the idea of moral corruption and

unfaithfulness. When ancient Israel abandoned the laws of God, He called them adulterers. (Jeremiah 9:2; Hosea 7:1-4) The second message says, **"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."**

The phrase, "the maddening wine of her adulteries," points to the *immoral result* of an intoxicating idea. Political leaders will "prostitute" their appointed purpose (Romans 13:1) when they "get in bed" with religious leaders and impose laws demanding repentance and worship. The last resort of false religion is force. The 144,000 will soundly condemn the maddening wine (the idea that God can be appeased with forced repentance and worship) and the resulting adultery (the union of church and state to accomplish repentance and worship).

I have said many times that the second angel's message could be the most difficult message that the 144,000 gives because people who resist the repentance and worship laws mandated by Babylon will *appear* to be defiant towards God. Because a large majority of people will be in one accord on the necessity of appeasing God and the formation of Babylon, our peers will think that we are opposed to appeasing God when in reality, we will be opposed to the dictates of Babylon!

Because the laws mandating repentance and worship will be uniquely established in different nations, the confusion that results will be maddening. Hapless civil servants will be required to enforce laws that are religious in nature. Thoughtful, good people, will be punished for refusing to go along with the beast (the crisis authority).

For 890 long days, this will be the order (actually, disorder) caused by the formation of Babylon. As a result, humanity's suffering will increase, man's rebellion against God and hatred for His saints will intensify as it becomes clearer and clearer that the formation of Babylon was a horrible mistake. May the Lord give us grace and strength to stand firm for His gospel which has no beginning and no end. Next month, we'll examine the third message which the 144,000 will proclaim.

You can read part 1 here, part 2 here, and part 3 here.

Eternal Gospel - Conclusion

Author: Larry W. Wilson

A Gospel with No Beginning and No End - Conclusion

"A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.’ " -Revelation 14:9

After reading the third angel’s message above, I have three questions for you to consider. First, the Bible indicates that certain people will be tormented at the Second Coming with burning sulfur in the presence of Jesus and His angels. Why does a God of love do this? Second, why would anyone obey the beast and receive his mark? Last, who is the beast that will impose his mark upon human beings so that no one may buy or sell unless he wears the mark?

We will start with the last question. The Bible teaches who the beast that will gain control of the whole world is the fallen angel, Lucifer. The devil himself is the beast that will rise "out of the Earth" in Revelation 13:11. How do we know this? Because Lucifer is the *angel* king who is released from the Abyss in Revelation 9:11. In other words, Lucifer and his angels will be released from the spirit realm and they will be given physical bodies. They will take control of Earth and destroy a third of mankind. (Revelation 9:15)

God sends a "destroyer" when people become hopelessly decadent. For example, when the Amorites filled up their cup of iniquity, God destroyed them with the sword of Israel. (Amos 2:10) When the Amalekites filled up their cup, God destroyed them with the sword of Israel. (1 Samuel 15) When the Israelites filled their cup, God sent King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem. (Jeremiah 25:9)

When Babylon filled its cup, God sent the Medes and Persians to destroy Babylon. (Jeremiah 25:12; Daniel 5) Later on, when Israel filled its cup a second time, God sent the Roman general, Titus, to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70. (Daniel 9:26) During the fifth trumpet, the devil and his angels will be released from the abyss and during the sixth trumpet, they will kill a third of mankind!

Mankind will be powerless. God will permit the devil to destroy a third of mankind so that two distinct groups of people will be left. One group will be worshiping (obeying) the *Lamb* beast (Revelation 5:6; Jesus) and the other group will be worshiping (obeying) the *lamb-like* beast (Revelation 13:11; Lucifer). Lucifer is described in different ways in the Bible.

He is represented as a dragon in Revelation 12. He is represented as the lamb-like beast in Revelation 13:11 and he is described as "the man of sin" in 2 Thessalonians 2. (See Isaiah 14:12-16 and notice how Lucifer is called "a man.") Lucifer is also represented as the King of the North in Daniel 8 and 11:36-45 because divine judgments come from the North. (Jeremiah

1:14; 25:9; 51:48)

The devil is the angel king from the abyss (Revelation 9:11) who rules over a host of demons (represented as a swarm of locusts) and he is the Antichrist that will take control of Earth. (Revelation 17:8) The seriousness of the mark of the beast is found in the identity of the beast who imposes his mark on human beings!

Consider the second question. "Why would anyone worship Lucifer and receive his mark?" In a word, *survival*. No one will be able to buy or sell (survive) unless they submit to Lucifer's authority and receive his mark. The Bible indicates the mark (Greek: *charagma* – means an etching) of the beast is either the number 666 tattooed (etched) on the right hand or it will be Lucifer's assumed name tattooed (etched) on the forehead of his human leaders. (Revelation 13:16-18)

God permits the devil to take over the food supply of Earth for a simple reason: **". . . . The righteous will live by faith."** (Romans 1:17) Because salvation comes through faith in Christ, the faith of the living must be tested to see who will live by faith in Christ! (Revelation 3:10)

Now, we come to the first question. "Why will Jesus torture people who have the mark of the beast with burning sulfur?" Here are three reasons: First, those receiving the mark of the beast will refuse to submit to God and His law. Second, those receiving the mark of the beast will demonstrate they have no morals or conscience.

They will willingly accept the mark, knowing that it is evil, in order to save themselves. Third, those who will accept the mark of the beast will stand in direct and open opposition to the authority of the Sovereign God. In short, everyone receiving the mark of the beast will be a mirror of Lucifer and if they had the powers of Lucifer, they would do the same things that he will do.

God will torture the wicked with burning sulfur because they tortured His saints. God's wrath against violence is called restitution. **"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."** (Romans 12:19, KJV)

Now that we have briefly examined the three angel's messages in Revelation 14, I would like to close this five-part study on "the everlasting gospel" with five salient points: First, the universe is governed by a God of love. Second, God uses His magnificent powers to ensure the principles of love are exalted and honored. Third, because He is a God of love, God gives His children the power of choice. We are free to rebel or submit to His rule of love. Fourth, God has allowed sin to flourish for a period of time so that the consequences of rebellion against the principle of love can be seen. Last, God will destroy all traces of rebellion at an appointed time and His universe will be free from the cancer of sin. I am really excited about that coming day!

Terrorism - A Sign of the End?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Terrorism – A Sign of the End?

The Bible indicates that terrorism is a sign of the end of the world. Notice how Paul associates man's need for "peace and safety" with the Great Tribulation. He wrote, **"While people are saying, 'Peace and safety** [are man's greatest needs]**,' destruction** [from God] **will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."** (1 Thessalonians 5:3, insertions mine)

As I write this report, certain cities in the United States have been put on high alert for a possible attack, and scores of police officers are standing guard at financial targets in New York City, Washington D.C., Newark, New Jersey and other locations throughout the country.

Three years ago, who would have thought that the United States would someday have a national security problem *within* its own borders? Prior to September 11, 2001, Americans did not worry about peace and safety at home. When the Twin Towers fell to the ground on Tuesday morning, September 11, 2001, our sense of security also fell. The United Sates is not immune to the same type of terrorism that other nations are facing. Terrorism is growing and the whole world is becoming less secure.

Ethnic hatred is escalating and unimaginable atrocities are taking place almost every day. Does God notice this violence? Of course, He does. Nothing escapes His all-seeing eyes and every person will be held accountable for their actions. (2 Corinthians 5:10) So, why does Paul associate the Great Tribulation (sudden destruction) with people saying, "peace and safety?"

The answer is quite simple. When the time comes that hatred and hostilities are so great that mankind cannot live in peace and safety, God's wrath will break out and overwhelming destruction on a global scale will *suddenly* change the attitudes of mankind.

Currently, the United States is engaged in warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq. The U.S. has discovered that terrorism is very difficult if not impossible to control. Car bombs, truck bombs, roadside explosion devices, rocket propelled grenades and assault weapons are terrible, but they are nothing compared to the destruction that a chemical, biological or nuclear attack could produce. We know there are people willing to "martyr" themselves to kill as many Americans as possible. This zeal is particularly bothersome because the U.S. is a country without borders.

News reports regularly indicate that millions, yes millions, of people sneak into the U.S. *each month* and there is not anything the country can do to stop it. History indicates that the Roman Empire fell, in part, because of uncontrolled immigration and it appears that history is being repeated. The bottom line is that we have no way to determine how many terror cells are coming into our country each day – and each cell secretly prepares to destroy a portion of our nation. Government officials freely admit that it is only a matter of time until another significant

terrorist act occurs in this country. Will terrorism ever go away? Not a chance. Here is why:

Terrorism is a tool which God uses to destroy a nation when it becomes decadent and degenerate. Of course, God is generous, loving, forgiving and patient. However, God's patience with violence and degenerate behavior has a limit. (Remember Noah's flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, Pharaoh, Jericho and Jerusalem?)

When the limits of His patience are reached, God raises up a destroyer. Nebuchadnezzar was sent to destroy Jerusalem. The Persian king, Cyrus, was sent to destroy Babylon. Alexander the Great was sent to destroy the Medes and Persians, and the Romans were raised up to destroy the sexually immoral Grecians. The Romans became decadent and they were destroyed *from within* by ten ethnic nations. There is a clear cut policy here: God's patience with violent and degenerate behavior is limited. When a world, civilization, nation or city fills up its cup of iniquity, God takes it down.

Consider this: God established Israel as a nation at the Exodus. By working closely with one nation, and giving us His point of view through numerous Old Testament prophets, we can see how God deals with all nations. God is no respecter of persons! Israel's glory (under David and Solomon) and Israel's destruction (under Zedekiah) are mirrors revealing how God deals with all nations. (Ezekiel 14:12-21)

God does not have to publish a book explaining His actions. We only need to read the Old Testament to see how and why God removed nations in the past. This concept should not be hard to understand for God does not change.

Moses understood God's policies toward nations and he warned Israel just before his death: "[If you rebel against the Lord your God . . .] All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you.

They will be a **sign** and a wonder to you and your descendants forever. The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine or oil, nor any calves of your herds or lambs of your flocks until you are ruined.

They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down. They will besiege all the cities throughout the land the Lord your God is giving you. **You will live in constant suspense**, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, 'If only it were evening!' and in the evening, 'If only it were morning!'– because of the **terror** that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see." (Selected verses from Deuteronomy 28:45-67, insertion and bolds mine)

There is a reason why we have become a target for terrorists. His name is God. Because we have become decadent and immoral, our nation's cup of sin has reached the full mark. God is

heartsick with the behavior of Americans (and the rest of the world, too). The end is near for all nations. God will soon send overwhelming destruction because mankind can’t live together in peace and safety.

A Blank Sheet of Paper

Author: Larry W. Wilson

A Blank Sheet of Paper

It is true, nothing has more *potential* than a young person, but do you know what comes in second? A blank sheet of paper is runner-up. A blank sheet of paper has enormous potential for good or evil. For example, a sheet of paper can become a pornographic picture or a page from the Bible. A sheet of paper can become a cashier's check worth hundreds of millions of dollars, a diploma, a speeding ticket, a death sentence signed by a judge, or a sheet of paper can become a small map showing the way to a hidden treasure.

With this last definition in mind, I hope you will find the map included in this *The Wake-Up Report* to be valuable. It points toward *your new home*. I believe the information on this chart is very important because it clarifies mysteries that have been unresolved for more than two thousand years. In a sentence, this chart outlines God's "end time" plan.

For the past few weeks, I have wanted to illustrate the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation on a single sheet of paper so that people could keep it in their Bibles as a reference. (When I was a student, we called a paper like this, a "cheat sheet" because it contained most of the answers to questions that we knew were coming. Later on, cheat sheets were elevated to the stature of "Cliff Notes" and/or other respectable titles. Smile.) Look at both sides of the chart. You should be aware that there is an important difference between the charts.

The book of Daniel contains five prophecies with five prophetic time lines that are associated with Daniel 2, 7, 8, etc. These five prophecies conform to the four rules stated at the bottom of the page and should be easy to follow. On the other hand, the book of Revelation contains twelve prophecies which also conform to the four rules. Unfortunately, there is not enough space to illustrate all twelve time lines, so the Revelation side of the chart is a block diagram showing how the pieces of Revelation fit together.

I hope you will study the chart and examine the prophecies they represent. Especially notice how the rules operate. Since 95% of the book of Daniel has been fulfilled, the validity of the four rules that govern its interpretation can be easily demonstrated! Today, few people understand and appreciate the importance of *valid* rules of interpretation. This is the reason why apocalyptic prophecy has become such a "nose of wax" which scholars and laymen manipulate endlessly.

Unfortunately, millions of Christians are anticipating prophetic fulfillments that will not come to pass. There are a dozen key points which I hope you will examine. Test your understanding of the prophecies by explaining the chart to someone. Be sure to notice these points:

Daniel Side

1. Notice the blue background box indicating the operation of the Jubilee Calendar. This box

begins with 1437 B.C. and reaches to 1994. (See lower portion of the box.) Also notice that we are living "Today" just before the Great Tribulation box begins.

2. Pay close attention to the vertical alignment of the prophetic elements in the five prophecies.

3. Read through each prophecy in the book of Daniel and locate the chronological placement of each element. Be sure you understand the difference between "the apocalyptic sequence" and "the commentary" that follows in each vision.

4. Notice the brown box indicating that the little horn in Daniel 7 persecuted the saints for 1,260 years. Also notice the second smaller brown box indicating that the little horn is heard boasting *after* 1798. The deadly wound will be healed shortly *after* the Great Tribulation begins. Finally, notice that the boasting of the little horn in Daniel 7 ends when the horn power in Daniel 8 appears.

5. Notice how the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 are "cut off" from the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14. Locate 1798 and notice that Jesus was exalted in that year. (See the Daniel 7 time line.) Jesus was given an "empty" kingdom at that time and in 1844, Jesus began to review the books of record to determine who would live in His coming kingdom. (See the Daniel 8 time line.)

Revelation Side

6. Notice how the third seal (the rider with scales in his hand) and 1844 align. Notice how the fourth seal (the rider named Death) and the commencement of the Great Tribulation align. Notice how the sixth trumpet and the fifth seal align.

7. Notice that Babylon rises as a persecuting power as a result of the destruction caused by the first four trumpets.

8. Notice how the devil, the Antichrist, appears at the fifth trumpet. Also notice the asterisk and the list of the various titles given to Lucifer. I encourage you to locate each of these titles in the Bible to see for yourself how each title contributes to Lucifer’s mission and identity during the end time.

9. Notice the period associated with the martyrdom of the saints and prophets (144,000) during the fifth seal. Notice where the mark of the beast is imposed.

10. Notice when the 144,000 are empowered by the Two Witnesses for 1,260 days. Notice when the 144,000 are taken to Heaven.

11. Notice that Jesus appears during the seventh bowl and the sixth seal.

12. After the Second Coming occurs, notice what the saints are doing during the 1,000 years. Notice what happens when the seventh seal is broken.

Of course, this chart will not be helpful to those who do not follow the rules printed on the lower portion of the Daniel side. However, if a person does not follow valid rules of interpretation, there is no other way for the Bible to speak for itself.

These four rules are derived from the book of Daniel and they enable the Bible to interpret itself – *just as it reads*! By the way, if you want to see a short presentation on this chart, you can view the *WUAS Broadcast* for October 2004 on DVD, or you can go to our web-site and view the streaming video.

While I am on the subject of viewing, I would like to encourage you to subscribe to my monthly Bible Study (on DVD, CD or audio cassette). We are doing everything we can to provide materials and information so that you can be prepared to explain God's behavior to others when His wrath begins!

The Day Millions Almost Perished

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The Day Millions Almost Perished

Let me ask you three questions about events that are called "defining moments." Are you old enough to remember where you were on November 22, 1963 when you learned that President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated? Do you remember where you were on September 11, 2001 when you learned that two commercial airplanes crashed into the Twin Towers in New York City? Do you remember where you were on September 29, 2004 at 5:45 P.M. EDT?

You are probably wondering, "Why should I remember that moment?" Here are two reasons. First, September 29 should be remembered as the day that millions of people *almost* perished. If the asteroid, *Toutatis,* had impacted Earth at 5:45 P.M. EDT, the moment of its closest approach, several hundred million people would have evaporated immediately and hundreds of millions more would have died shortly thereafter. *Toutatis*, a three mile long asteroid, whizzed past us at 72,000 m.p.h. – missing Earth by less than a million miles.

In recorded history, nothing this large has ever passed by our planet and in astronomical terms, a million miles is a mere whisker. *Toutatis was* discovered in 1989 by French astronomer, C. Pollas, and he named the odd-shaped asteroid after a Celtic god that feared nothing except the sky falling. If *Toutatis* had impacted Earth on September 29, the global result would have been second only to the destruction caused by the flood in Noah’s day.

It is interesting that this catastrophic possibility did not receive a lot of media attention. Initially, a number of asteroid trackers privately believed that Toutatis had a high probability of impacting Earth. When the asteroid became visible in late July, astronomers concluded that it would miss Earth and this made the "fly-by" a nonevent. September 29, 2004 passed as a normal day and the day *millions almost perished* has been forgotten.

However, there is a second reason why September 29, 2004 should be remembered. This reason can be boiled down to one word, "example." The fly by of Toutatis is a recent demonstration affirming that Bible prophecy will be fulfilled. Twenty years ago, people scoffed at the idea that Bible prophecy predicts two asteroid impacts. The scoffers have been silenced. When Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 broke into 21 pieces and plunged into Jupiter in July 1994, astronomers around the world witnessed impacts on Jupiter so powerful that one crater could hold three planets the size of Earth!

A growing number of people are awakening to the simple reality that God’s Word predicts two asteroid impacts. Two thousand years ago, the prophet John wrote, "The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea.

A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a

torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water– the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter [poisonous]." (Revelation 8:8-11, italics and insertion mine)

If you are not familiar with the use of Old Testament language in Revelation, you might wonder how a huge mountain and blazing star could destroy a third of the sea, a third of the living creatures, a third of the ships, a third of the rivers and springs of water. The answer is relatively simple.

It was customary in ancient times for kings to destroy *two-thirds* of the people who rebelled against them. (2 Samuel 8:1,2; Ezekiel 5:12; Zechariah 13:8) This imagery is used in the seven trumpets twelve times! The idea is that God would be justified in destroying two-thirds of Earth because of our rebellion against His authority. Because God is a very generous king, He will destroy one-third and spare two-thirds. So, the seven trumpets (seven first plagues) will be a time of seven judgments mixed with mercy.

Conversely, the seven bowls (the seven last plagues) will contain no mercy. When the first asteroid impacts an ocean, the resulting tsunami will destroy millions of people living near the ocean. When the second asteroid impacts a continent, the resulting ground waves will fracture the geologic strata which will contaminate underground aquifers. Thus, survivors living long distances away from the impact zone will die after drinking the poisonous water.

God sees the violence, hatred, sexual immorality and dishonesty taking place on Earth. He has something to say to mankind, but unfortunately, the only way He can get mankind’s attention is by destroying a third of our physical world. The books of Daniel and Revelation contain a compelling story for this generation and unfortunately, few people are interested enough in God’s Word to take the time to understand His prophecies.

As I see it, *Toutatis* was a shot across Earth’s bow that meant very little to most observers. For this reason, September 29 was not a defining moment. But, be assured that a defining moment is coming. Soon, out of the clear blue sky, a great pair of asteroids will reach their destination and I am sure the survivors will never forget where they were on that awesome day.

Was the December 26, 2004 Tsunami an Act of God?

Author: JADE Computer

I have received numerous emails asking two questions. (1) If God is a God of love, and if God is in control of this world, how could He permit 150,000+ people to perish in the tsunami that swept over southern Asia? (2) Is *this* 9.0 earthquake prophetically significant? Is *this* the earthquake mentioned in Revelation 8:5?

The answers to both questions are: (1) There is no evidence that God caused this earthquake or the resulting tsunami, and (2) This earthquake is not prophetically significant. This earthquake should be considered a prophetic *sample of things to come*. Please consider the following thoughts:

Kindness Has Limits

God has perfect foreknowledge. He knows the end and the beginning of everything. (Isaiah 46:10) The Bible says our Heavenly Father knows every sparrow that falls to the ground and the number of hairs on each of our heads. (Matthew 10:29,30) The Bible also says that God is love. (1 John 4:8) God has demonstrated His love for mankind by giving up Jesus to die in our place. (John 3:16) God says that He is patient, forbearing and generous.

Notice the words He spoke to Moses about Himself: "Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord [Jehovah]. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." (Exodus 34:5-7, insertion mine) Later on, the apostle Peter wrote, "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat." (2 Peter 3:8-12)

The Lord told Moses that He does not leave the guilty unpunished. Bible history affirms this. God’s patience with sin and sinners has a limit. God cast Lucifer out of Heaven because of sin!

(Ezekiel 28:17) God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden when they sinned. (Genesis 3:23)

God deliberately drown all but eight people in Noah's day. (Genesis 6:7; 7:4) God deliberately burned up the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of sexual immorality. (Genesis 13:13; 18:26; 2 Peter 2:5,6) God deliberately destroyed the nations of Canaan because of their sexual wickedness (Leviticus 18:24,25) and God will deliberately burn up the wicked at the end of the thousand years. (Revelation 20:12-15)

So, it is true that God destroys people when the limit of His patience is reached. "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand. I lift my hand to heaven and declare: As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me." (Deuteronomy 32:39-41) (For a substantive presentation on the topic of God's patience, see Chapter 2 in my book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled.*)

God's Wrath Is Consistent

God's wrath comes in two forms. The first form is redemptive, the second is destructive. In other words, Bible history affirms that when the limit of God's patience has been reached, He sends redemptive destruction *first*.

There is a reason and a purpose for His actions. He wants the objects of His wrath *to know* that they have exhausted His grace, and He wants them to repent of their wicked ways and do what is right. If repentance and reformation does not occur, His subsequent punishments will be totally destructive. God wrath and His judgments are not random nor arbitrary. God does not throw tantrums. God is patient and generous, but He is firm and *consistent.* Like a good parent, He is deliberate and purposeful when it comes to punishing His children.

Randomness

Randomness is a interesting component of Creation. The word randomness means "uncontrolled order." God has put a small amount of randomness in every aspect of life. For example, look at the DNA selection that makes up human beings. Two children from the same two parents can have very different characteristics.

Randomness produces good things and bad things. We see randomness throughout the universe. Asteroids randomly collide with the moon, and stars are randomly captured by the gravitational pull of black holes. These events indicate that randomness exists throughout the universe. I believe that God deliberately put a small amount of randomness within His creation to make life interesting. Snowflakes are not identical and fingerprints are not identical because of randomness. People don't look alike because of randomness.

In fact, randomness makes every human being unique!

Randomness can produce disastrous results. Cars randomly collide and people get killed. Accidents happen because of randomness. Not long ago, I was talking with a man who had been in a car wreck and he was impressed by the precise timing of the accident. He spoke about the exact moments that he and the other man had left their respective houses and driven down different roads through town.

He mentioned how they had stopped at different stop lights, only to collide at the intersection where they met. After thinking about his comments for a moment, I said, "If you had driven through the intersection at 8:01 A.M. without incident, would your passing through the intersection have been a random event?" He said, "Yes, probably so." I said, "So, you and the other man, and a dozen other cars, randomly passed through this intersection at a moment in time, but two of you attempted to do so while going in different directions.

You experienced a random collision." Some people have summed up the disastrous properties of randomness with two words: "Bad Luck."

Geological Randomness

Geologists tell us that all of Earth's tectonic plates are moving. On December 26, huge geological forces caused tectonic plates under the Indian Ocean to break loose. This caused a random earthquake, and a tsunami followed which brought much destruction. Death can occur from randomness.

Does God permit earthquakes to happen? Sure. Does God permit tsunamis to occur? Both of these events are consistent with the laws of physics. The point is that God put some randomness within the movement of Earth's tectonic plates. This is why it is fair to say that God did not create the tsunami, nor did God destroy 150,000+ people. Unlike Noah's flood, randomness caused this terrible tragedy.

But, in a strange way there is *very* good news within this horrible tragedy. Death is not a big deal to God. One day, God will speak the word and He will resurrect the dead and He will give eternal life to those who were faithful and true to all they knew to be right. The Bible teaches that God overrules every tragedy. He does not prevent it (for example, look at the death of Jesus), but He does bring good out of it! Already, good is rising from this horrible tragedy.

Fractious nations are working together for the sake of compassion! Kindness is being extended to the helpless and homeless, and this is a sample of God making lemonade out of a random lemon.

The Global Earthquake in Revelation 8:5

The book of Revelation predicts three global earthquakes are coming. The third one occurs at the Second Coming of Jesus. (Revelation 16:18) The second one occurs at the end of the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:19) and the first one marks the commencement of the Great Tribulation.

The first earthquake occurs just before the first trumpet judgment begins. (Revelation 8:5-7) I believe this earthquake will happen any day now. These three global earthquakes will not be random events caused by nature. They will be deliberate acts of God. He has warned us about them in the Bible and each of them has a reason and a purpose. When the first global earthquake occurs, the whole world will be awakened to the reality of God because God's servants, the 144,000, will begin to speak with great power and authority. These earthquakes will have reason and purpose. (For further discussion on this subject, see Chapter 1 in my book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled.*)

Yes, the earthquake and tsunami on December 26, 2004 were very powerful and deadly events. Yes, the destruction is horrible and very sad. But, a brighter day is coming. The dead will surely live again. The global earthquake described in Revelation 8:5 will dwarf the earthquake in the Indian Ocean and I am sure that we could see more prophetic samples in days to come. Jesus said, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed.

Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains." (Matthew 24:6-8)

Larry Wilson

The Sacrificial Gift

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Abraham and Sarah were childless and they desperately wanted a son. In those days, a son was the most important asset parents could have. Sons were highly valued because the family name was perpetuated and expanded through the sons. Big families (dynasties) could dominate the land. Big tribes ruled over smaller tribes making large families an economic force, as well as a form of territorial defense.

I am sure Abraham and Sarah loved children and their inability to produce a child made them very sad. Perhaps the heartache that Sarah and Abraham experienced is best understood by parents who have tried and tried, but are unable to have a child. After waiting ten years for God to fulfill His promise to give them a son, Abraham and Sarah agreed that Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian handmaid, could give them a son. So, Abraham slept with Hagar and Ishmael was born when Abraham was 86 years old.

For years, Abraham foolishly rationalized that God's promise of a son had been fulfilled with Ishmael's birth. He loved Ishmael with all of his heart and he lavished every good thing upon the lad that he could offer. When Abraham was 99, the Lord appeared to him and Sarah, telling them that against all odds, Sarah would have the promised son in the following year.

Sarah laughed at the prophecy, but when Abraham was 100 years old, Isaac was born. Tensions between Hagar/Ishmael and Sarah/Isaac escalated very quickly. Abraham knew he had to do something, but the situation seemed impossible to fix. He loved Ishmael too much to send Hagar and Ishmael away. In fact, I am persuaded that Abraham would not have sent Hagar and Ishmael away from his home if God had not intervened in the family dispute.

"The child"

[Isaac] **grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the** [fourteen year old] **son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, 'Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.' The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son** [Ishamel]**. But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."** (Genesis 21:8-12, insertions mine)

After Hagar and Ishmael were sent away, Abraham and Sarah lived in the land of the Philistines for several years. One day, God came to Abraham and said, **"Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."** (Genesis 22:2)

Two things stand out in this verse. First, God called Isaac Abraham's "only son." Why did God

say this when Abraham was also Ishmael's father? Evidently, God called Isaac Abraham's "only son" because Isaac was the son of Abraham and Sarah. The point is that God viewed Isaac as the one entitled to the posterity and property of his father. Because God had given Abraham three perpetual covenants, Isaac would be the son through whom those promises would be honored. Consequently, God called Isaac Abraham's "only son."

The second thing that stands out in this verse is that God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as "a burnt offering" on a mountain. Why did God test Abraham in this fashion? Here are three reasons:

1. God did not command Abraham to kill his son, as in murder, but Isaac was to be presented to God as a burnt offering to atone for Abraham's sin with Hagar. God commanded Abraham to give up his legitimate son (the one through whom the promises would be fulfilled) as a test to see if Abraham loved God more than he loved his only son.

Abraham knew that Isaac was the "son of promise." Abraham obeyed the Lord because he believed the Lord would *somehow* bring a glorious end to this terrible test.

2. God tested Abraham AND Isaac. Isaac's test would be to see if he would be as submissive to God's demands as his father. In other words, God tested Isaac to see if his faith in God was like that of his father. The point to remember is that Abraham had two sons.

One child came through the works of the flesh, the other child came through faith. God's children are people of faith like Abraham. Isaac proved his worthiness to be called a son of Abraham because he was willing to submit to the death which God demanded.

3. God used this test on Abraham because He wanted someone to understand His own gift to save man. Furthermore, Abraham, Sarah and Isaac were to be great examples of faith to their offspring. God intended to use the story of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac as a model of Messanic faith for generations to come. Notice how the story of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac parallels circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus: Sarah's conception was miraculous. Mary's conception was miraculous.

The death imposed upon Isaac parallels the death that was imposed upon Jesus. Isaac was willing to die to atone for the sin of his father and Jesus was willing to die "as a burnt offering" in order to redeem sinners. Last, Abraham was willing to give up his only son because God demanded it. Our Heavenly Father was willing to give up His only begotten Son because sin demanded it. Both fathers, Abraham and our Heavenly Father, were willing to sacrifice their greatest treasure to atone for sin. Think about this.

The wages of sin is death and the price of atonement for sin is an innocent death. Which is more difficult – giving up your son to atone for sin or receiving the gift that cost God everything He could give? Perhaps this is the question that should be pondered during the Christmas season.

Celebration and Praise No Substitute for Worship

Author: Larry W. Wilson

After descending from Heaven and speaking the Ten Commandments to Israel from Mount Sinai (Exodus 20), the Lord called Moses to a summit on Mount Sinai. (Exodus 24:12) During this forty day visit, God gave Moses various instructions and the Ten Commandments which Jesus had written with His own finger on two tablets of stone.

Moses left his brother Aaron, and Hur* in charge of the camp as he and his young aide, Joshua, departed. The Bible says, ". . . the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days [Moses and Joshua waited near the summit while] the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud.

To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights." (Exodus 24:16-18, insertion mine)

While Moses was visiting with God in what looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain, the Hebrews camped at the foot of the mountain became bored. The Bible says, "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods [a god**] who will go before us.

As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him [he may have perished in the fire].’ Aaron [who tried to thwart their evil request by demanding their precious jewelry] answered them ‘Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.’ So [to Aaron’s dismay] all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron.

He [obligingly] took what they handed him and [he had it] made it into an idol cast in the shape of a [male] calf**, fashioning it with a tool. Then they [the metal craftsmen] said, ‘These are your gods [This is your god**], O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’

When Aaron saw this, he built [tried to sanctify the situation by building] an altar **in front** of the calf and announced, ‘Tomorrow there will be a festival [a celebration] to the Lord.’ So the next day the people [were excited and they] rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry [wild dancing and singing].

Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down, because **your** people, whom **you** brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf.

They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods [This is your god**], O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’ ‘I have seen these people,’ the Lord

said to Moses, ‘and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them.

Then I will make you into a great nation.’ But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. ‘O Lord,’ he said, ‘why should your anger burn against **your** people, whom **you** brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?’" (Exodus 32:1-11, insertions and emphasis mine)

Did you notice the way the Lord tested Moses? The Lord identified rebellious Israel as Moses’ people, but Moses reminded the Lord that the Israelites were *His* people and that *He* had brought them up out of Egypt! This banter about ownership says much about the character development that took place during the forty years Moses spent in the desert herding sheep.

When Moses was a powerful member of Pharaoh’s court, the Israelites were *his* people and he thought of himself as "their deliverer." Now eighty years old, Moses understood the truth. He was a servant of the Owner and Deliverer of the sheep.

As Moses and Joshua descended the mountain, a loud sound could be heard. "When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, ‘There is the sound of war in the camp.’ Moses replied: ‘It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear.’

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain." (Exodus 32:17-19) "And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them [dance and sing] naked unto their shame among their enemies:) Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, ‘Who is on the Lord’s side?’

‘Let him come unto me.’ And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, ‘Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor [that is naked].’"

And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men [and in addition to this, many women]." (Exodus 32:25-28, KJV, insertions mine) "And [after thousands of naked revelers were slain] the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made. (Exodus 32:35, insertions mine)

No Substitute for Worship

Three thousand men and perhaps as many women were killed that day, and perhaps thousands more perished when God sent His plague upon the camp. This is a powerful object lesson. The worship of God is a very serious matter and God is angered by idolatrous revelry and dissipation.

From God's point of view, there is a sharp difference between true worship and false worship. True worship occurs when a person approaches God to humbly and obediently submit to God's commands. Celebration and praise **are no** substitute for worship. Of course, it is appropriate to praise God in a worship service, but our praise falls on deaf ears if we have not humbly and obediently entered into worship.

The primary reason for worship is the renewal of submission to God and His authority. God calls us to worship to break up our selfishness. The carnal heart is like jello; if it gets cold, it will congeal. True worship renews our understanding of God and commitment to His Word.

True worship warms the heart and makes it turn to putty in the Potter's hand. If submission is not the design of every worship service, the service itself becomes a stumbling stone. False worship can be inspiring and comforting and false worship is popular and fulfilling to the carnal nature because it satisfies the carnal nature. Billions of people are following in Cain's footsteps.

They are telling God how He will be worshiped rather than humbly submitting to God's commands. I have said many times, if we leave a worship service without being brought into a deeper sense of God's love and our need to obediently submit to His authority, we have not worshiped – we have been entertained.

Aaron knew the price of true worship because he had been on the mountain in God's presence just a few days earlier. (Exodus 24:1) He tried to weasel out of the request to make an idol by demanding they give up their precious golden earrings – and to his surprise, they gave them up.

Then, at the feast, he demanded they dance naked – and to everyone's amazement, they gave up their clothes. This is a powerful object lesson. The carnal nature would rather give up possessions and decency than to submit to God's authority.

The revelry at the base of Mount Sinai is very revealing (pun intended). Aaron failed to stand up for the honor of God whose cloud of burning fire was clearly visible at the top of the mountain because he was afraid the people would riot and ultimately kill him. Aaron tried to rectify the idolatry of Israel by putting an altar to the Lord *in front* of the golden calf, but that did not stop them.

Aaron should have boldly refused to build the idol and suffered the hostility of the Israelites. Aaron's weakness is seen today. Many preachers, to keep their jobs, give their congregations what they want rather than what they need. Thus, Israel's descent into apostasy is like ours.

Israel's long history is one of rebellion against the Lord. About 700 years after the golden calf incident, just before the northern ten tribes were to be destroyed in 722 B.C., the Lord said to Israel through Isaiah, "The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me?" says the Lord.

'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations – I cannot bear [to listen

to] your evil assemblies.

Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen.

Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.' " (Isaiah 1:11-17)

What is the point of attending a worship service if God will not accept our worship? Those who approach God must do so with clean hearts and hands.

Jesus told the woman at the well, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." (John 4:23) The phrase, "worship the Father in spirit and truth" means submission.

Worship is a humble surrender to God's authority. Worship services should renew our devotion to God because our carnal nature is hostile toward God (Romans 8:7) and the law of sin is at work in our bodies. (Romans 7:23) However, we will be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit **if** we wholeheartedly worship God and submit to His authority. (2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 4:1,2)

About 100 years after the ten northern tribes had been destroyed because of rebellion, the Lord told Jeremiah that the remaining two tribes of Israel were about to be destroyed.

Notice the words of the Lord: "For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about [temporary] burnt offerings and sacrifices, but I gave them this command: **Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. - Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you. But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts [and even though they never failed to have worship services, they rarely worshiped me].**

They went backward and not forward . . . . Therefore say to them, 'This is the nation that has not obeyed the Lord its God or responded to correction. Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips. Cut off your hair [Jeremiah] and throw it away; take up a lament on the barren heights, for the Lord has rejected and abandoned this generation that is under his wrath.' " (Jeremiah 7:22-24, 28,29 insertions mine)

After reviewing Israel's idolatry at the foot of Mount Sinai and 1,500 years of failures, I hope you will be awaken to the fact that the true meaning of worship has been largely lost today. True worship comes with a price, the price of submission.

A strong current of false worship is sweeping the world away from God and when the first angel's message in Revelation 14:6,7 is given, the call to fear God and worship Him will be

stunning!

* Hur was probably one of the seventy elders because he was the head of the tribe of Judah which was the largest tribe.

** See Psalm 106:19,20.

Celebration and Praise No Substitute for Worship

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Appeasement is No Substitute for Worship

Eli was a direct descendent of Aaron, and on the basis of ancestry, he became the high priest in Israel around 1080 B.C. Unfortunately, Eli was unfit for his high calling. He was an indulgent father and a gluttonous high priest who regularly stole choice portions of meat that belonged on the Altar of Burnt Offering. (1 Samuel 2:29)

Eli's sons, Hophni and Phineas, also became priests and judges on the basis of ancestry and they distinguished themselves with acts of sexual immorality, accepting bribes and gluttony. (1 Samuel 2:12-17) During Eli's tenure, the nation of Israel was in rebellion against God, and as you might expect, God was angry with Israel and its leadership.

One day the Lord sent a message to Eli through a prophet. (God would not speak directly to Eli, even though he was the high priest because of his sins.) The prophet told Eli, "....the Lord, the God of Israel, declares: I promised that your house and your father's house [the line of Aaron] would minister before me forever. But now the Lord declares: Far be it from me!

Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained. The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your family line and you will see distress in my dwelling [temple]. Although good will be done to Israel, in your family line there will *never* be an old man. Every one of you that I do not cut off from my altar will be spared only to blind your eyes with tears and to grieve your heart, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.

And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you they will both die on the same day. I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his house, and he will minister before my anointed one always. " (1 Samuel 2:30-35, insertions and emphasis mine)

Some time after the prophet spoke to Eli, a Levite woman who could not conceive miraculously had a baby. She had earnestly prayed for a son for many years, and she had promised to give up her son to God's service if He would hear her prayer. Eventually, Hannah became pregnant and Samuel was born.

When Samuel was weaned, Hannah kept her vow to God and gave her child to Eli for training. Early on, God began to speak to the "baby priest" and it soon became evident to all that little Samuel was the Lord's anointed. "The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. (1 Samuel 3:19,20)

One night, God told young Samuel that He was about to fulfill the prophecy that had been given

to Eli. (1 Samuel 3) When the time had come, the Philistines attacked Israel and killed 4,000 men. "When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from [the temple in] Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies." (1 Samuel 4:3, insertion mine)

"So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. When the ark of the Lord's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp? When they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid.

A god has come into the camp, they said. We're in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert. [A warrior silenced the Philistines saying,] Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight! So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died." (1 Samuel 4:4-11, insertion mine)

When this second battle took place, Eli was 98 years old and blind. When the news reached Eli that his two sons had died in battle and that the Ark of the Covenant had been captured, he fell backwards out of his chair, broke his neck and died. "After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from [the battlefield at] Ebenezer to [their temple city] Ashdod. Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon.

When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained." (1 Samuel 5:1-4, insertion mine)

The Philistines were distressed. The chief god of the Philistines had twice fallen before the ark of the God of Israel and now, Dagon's head and hands were broken off. The Philistines did not realize that even though they had defeated Israel and captured the Ark of the Covenant, they had not conquered the God of Israel.

Then, things got much worse. "The Lord's hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation [a plague of infectious rats] upon them and afflicted them with tumors [possibly, the bubonic plague]. When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god. So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and asked them, ‘What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?

They answered, [this is just a coincidence,] Have the ark of the god of Israel moved to Gath. So they moved the ark of the God of Israel. But after they had moved it, the Lord's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of [rats and bubonic] tumors. So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people."

So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, "Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people." For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was very heavy upon it. Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven." (1 Samuel 5:6-12)

"When the ark of the Lord had been in Philistine territory *seven* months, the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us how we should send it back to its place." They answered, "If you return the ark of the god of Israel, do not send it away empty, but by all means send a guilt offering to him. Then you will be healed, and you will know why his hand has not been lifted from you." The Philistines asked, "What guilt offering should we send to him?"

They replied, "Five gold tumors and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers. Make models of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying the country, and pay honor to Israel's god. Perhaps he will lift his hand from you and your gods and your land. Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When he treated them harshly, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?" (1 Samuel 6:1-6)

There are five interesting points in this short study that should be thoughtfully considered:

1. God terminated the ancestry of Eli from the priesthood of Israel because he and his sons became evil beyond recovery. The moral of the story here is that God will terminate His covenant with rebellious people and destroy them. When this happens (as it did when Israel wandered in the wilderness), He raises up another group of people to enter into His covenant. Again, after the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, God *redefined* Abraham's offspring. Paul wrote, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29)

2. The second lesson that needs to be learned from this study is that Israel foolishly rejoiced when the Ark of the Covenant was brought onto the battlefield. They thought Jehovah would give them victory over their enemy because no one can defeat Jehovah. The problem here is that they did not realize that Jehovah was their enemy! (More about this in a moment.)

3. Then, the Philistines were elated with their victory over Israel. They had killed 34,000 of their enemies because (they foolishly thought) their god, Dagon, was more powerful than the God of Israel. In the pagan world, military superiority affirms which god is the most high god. However,

the outcome of the war was not the victory the Philistines sought.

God had stirred up the Philistines to destroy and humble a rebellious Israel. He empowered the Philistines to kill 34,000 of His chosen people because Israel was in rebellion against Him. There is no strength outside of God's will. He is sovereign over the kingdoms of Earth and he sets up kings and takes them down according to His divine purposes. (Daniel 4:17)

4. When the Philistines went to the temple of Dagon and saw their chief god lying on the ground with his head and hands broken off, they should have realized that the God of Israel was more powerful than Dagon. Then, when rats, infectious tumors and death filled the cities of Ashdod and Gath, they should have realized that the God of Israel was angry with them. During the seven months the Philistines had possession of the ark, five cities were decimated by rats, tumors (probably bubonic plague) and death.

Ironically, the war trophy (the Ark of the Covenant) proved to be a *destroyer* of the Philistines. The Philistines did not know that besides Jehovah, there is no other God, and second, He is no respecter of persons. God used the Philistines to destroy Israel, and then He used their possession of His ark to destroy thousands of Philistines.

The point here is that God punished both Israel and the Philistines for the same reason! Yes, the level of accountability between the Philistines and Israel was different because Israel knew more about God's will, but God considers man's knowledge base and then judges and inflicts destruction fairly. (This is an eternal policy that God follows.)

5. After seven months (notice the perfect number) of rats, relentless tumors and death, the Philistines were humbled. The ark, once thought to be a trophy of victory, had to be returned to Israel. They called their priests together to see what should be done. They answered, "If you return the ark of the god of Israel, do not send it away empty, but by all means send a guilt offering to him. . . ."

Paganism is a religion based on fear of offense and acts of appeasement. The priests insisted that the Philistines send a "guilt offering" of five gold rats and five gold tumors with the ark as a way of saying, "Jehovah, please accept our gifts of gold and don't hurt us any more." Consider this future parallel: When God's judgments begin (the first four trumpets of Revelation 8), the religious leaders of the nations will convince their respective legislators that God's wrath will only be appeased if "sin less" laws are imposed upon the people.

In other words, when God's wrath against evil is revealed, a religious reformation will sweep over the whole world like a global tsunami and its purpose will be the appeasement of God's wrath! **But, appeasement is no substitute for worship! True worship is wholehearted submission to God's will & appeasement is an offering of something other than total submission. - (Remember Cain's offering?) After seven months of divine destruction, why didn't the Philistines bow down and submit to the God of Israel who broke off Dagon's head? Why will the religious leaders of the world insist that God can be appeased through the enforcement of "sin less" laws? In both cases, the answer is the same: The clergy of false religions do not know the Most High God, His will or His ways.**

Isn't it amazing that a 3,000 year old story can be so relevant?

"Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart." (Psalms 119:33,34)

Why Will the Censer in Revelation Be Thrown Down

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake." -Revelation 8:3-5

John saw an angel conducting a service at the golden Altar of Incense. Then, John saw the angel take the censer and after filling it with fire, hurled it to the Earth "and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake." What service did John see? What is the meaning of this event?

John saw the termination of "the daily" in Heaven's temple, that is, John saw the termination of *corporate* intercession on behalf of Earth. The termination of corporate mercy may be a new concept for some people so we are going to examine this important topic. Many Christians are not aware of the fact that the plan of salvation operates on two levels: the corporate level and the individual level. When most Christians read John 3:16, "For God so loved the world . . ." they don't realize that is a corporate statement.

God deals with Earth as a single unit. Jesus reconciled the world to the Father through His death. (1 John 2:2) God also deals with people as individuals. The point is that a day is coming when the limits of God's patience with Earth's violence and decadence will be reached. When that day arrives, Jesus will stop interceding on behalf of the world as a corporate body and God's wrath against all mankind will break out. This wrath will come in two phases: the seven first plagues and the seven last plagues.

During the seven first plagues, salvation will be extended to the people of Earth, but corporately speaking, Earth itself will be doomed for destruction. To understand the importance and seriousness of the angel hurling the censer to Earth, we need to examine six biblical concepts that flow together to make sense of this highly important service.

1. Full Cup Principle: God grants a *period of grace* to every group of people throughout history. However, if that group fills up its "cup of sin" with degenerate and violent behavior, God acts and destroys that group of people. The action He takes is fair and just. It is not an arbitrary act; instead, it is based on eternal law. This law mandates that when a group of people (even angels) reaches the point where they will no longer submit to the demands of the Holy Spirit, that group must be destroyed.

Review this text: **"Then the Lord said** [to Noah]**, 'My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.' "** (Genesis 6:3, insertion mine) The Lord told Noah that His patience with mankind had reached its limit because

He **"saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."** (Genesis 6:5) So, the Lord told Noah that the end of the world would occur in 120 years – and it did.

Many groups since the days of the antediluvians have filled up their "cup of sin" and God destroyed them. (Please see Chapter 2 in my book, "Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled" for a comprehensive discussion on this topic.)

2. Jesus' Present Role in Heaven: Review these verses: **"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven. . . . Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. . . . The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. . . . If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."** (Hebrews 1:3, 7:25, 8:1,2, 4, 5)

The author of Hebrews says that Jesus became our High Priest and sat down at the right hand of the Father after He "provided purification for sins." Presently, Jesus serves in Heaven's temple, "the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man" whereas the temple built by Moses was "a copy or shadow of what is in Heaven."

This is why Moses was *warned* that he must not deviate from the pattern that God gave him because the services conducted in the earthly temple must accurately parallel certain processes in Heaven's temple. God has given us a model of the processes that occur in Heaven's temple and we need to understand these processes in order to appreciate the dimensions of salvation.

The wisdom of using models is simple and powerful. In fact, NASA does this regularly. Many of the satellites circling Earth have identical models sitting in special clean rooms so that if a problem occurs out in space, scientists can accurately diagnose the problem by examining an identical satellite on Earth. Similarly, once we understand the fundamental operation of the earthly temple, we can understand the services in Heaven's temple. (Please see Chapters 11 and 12 in my book, "Jesus, The Alpha and The Omega" for a comprehensive discussion on this topic.)

3. Salvation's Model: The earthly temple model had two altars to teach mankind that salvation requires two levels of atonement. The golden Altar of Incense was placed inside the first room of the temple (called "The Holy Place") and it served as the corporate altar. Israel's priests conducted atonement services for the sins of the whole camp at this altar each evening and morning. The bronze Altar of Burnt Offering was located outside, near the entrance of the courtyard. This altar was used to atone for the sins of individuals. (Leviticus 4) So, God set up two altars in the earthly temple, each with a different purpose – one for corporate atonement

and one for individual atonement.

Most Christians understand the role of the bronze Altar of Burnt Offering because it is easy to understand that Jesus died in our place and is our flawless Lamb of God substitute. (Deuteronomy 15:21; 1 John 3:5) However, most Christians do not understand that God's law demands the *immediate* execution of sinners – on the very day they sin (Genesis 2:17) and the atonement offered on the golden Altar of Incense represents a stay of execution. Think about this: Sinners are not killed on the day they first sin because Jesus began corporate intercession on behalf of Earth before anyone was born!

4. How Individuals Become a Corporation: Adam and Eve were created as separate and distinct beings. (Genesis 1) Each person was endowed with half of the power needed to procreate. (Genesis 1:28) After their marriage they did not lose their individuality, but instead, they became officers in a corporate unit called "family." No person loses his or her identity or accountability to God in marriage. In fact, the Bible teaches that two people can be married and one be lost and the other saved. (Luke 17:34) Similarly, one spouse can go to jail and the other remain free.

So, a family unit, according to God, requires the union of two individuals, a man and a woman. The Bible says, **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."** (Genesis 2:24) The union of a man and woman reflects the image of God. The Godhead is a corporation made up of three Gods – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They make up a family unit called "God." (Deuteronomy 6:4) Their threesome as one God parallels the twosome of a husband and wife becoming one flesh.

5. Sudden Death: God warned Adam, as president of the human corporation, that no one should eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The penalty for violating this law, God said, would be death by execution on the *very* day that sin occurred. (Genesis 2:17) Because no one died that day, Genesis 2:17 has been distorted in many different ways. Nevertheless, the scriptures are clear – the penalty for sin is sudden death. This law is eternal and it cannot be changed. However, on the day Adam and Eve sinned, their execution was temporarily postponed by special circumstances.

Let us consider the special circumstances that permitted their stay of execution. Eve's sin was a third degree felony. She was led into sin through deception. Adam's sin was a second degree felony, since he willfully sinned because of his love for Eve. Lucifer's sin was a first degree felony because he defiantly sinned.* Lucifer's angels also defiantly sinned. Because there is no atonement for a first degree felony, an offer of salvation was not extended to Lucifer and his angels. They had committed the unpardonable sin. (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:12-18; Matthew 12:31,32)

For a legitimate reason, God did not kill Lucifer and his followers the day they sinned either. Instead, God cast them out of Heaven, allowing them to live so that sin might flourish for a predetermined period of time. Of course, at the end of the age of sin, Lucifer and his followers will be annihilated. Similarly, Adam and Eve were not killed on the day they sinned. However, at the end of the age of sin, all of the wicked will be annihilated. The law cannot be changed. However, these two temporary stays from execution demonstrate that the Father is purposeful

and merciful in His administration of law.

* Note: The Bible teaches there are three types of sin and three degrees of guilt in God's sight. Briefly, the three types of sin are sins of ignorance (Leviticus 4:13,14), accidental sin (Romans 7:19; 1 John 5:17) and willful sin (James 4:17; Romans 5:12). Of course, the penalty for sin is death and this explains why two goats were used on the Day of Atonement. One goat died to pay the penalty for those who had faithfully transferred their sins to the temple. The other goat, the scapegoat, died as the one responsible for the presence of sin in the temple.

Someone has to pay for sin. On the other hand, the degree of *guilt* is determined by circumstance. For example, if a person is enticed to sin, the guilt of the tempter is greater than the guilt of the victim. (Matthew 18:6) So, Lucifer's guilt in leading Eve to sin was greater than Eve's guilt. This also explains why Adam's guilt was greater than Eve's guilt. (Romans 1:32) Adam was not deceived by Lucifer as was Eve. Out of love for Eve, he choose to suffer her fate. Adam did not stand before God and defy an order.

Adam tenderly loved Eve and when he saw that Eve had been deceived, he chose to suffer her fate. Adam willfully sinned, but he did not defiantly sin. This is why God permitted the plan of salvation to be invoked on Adam and Eve's behalf. On the other hand, God patiently dealt with Lucifer's growing disaffection for many years until the day came when Lucifer defied God's direct order. The possibility of salvation was not extended to Lucifer and his angels because their sin was premeditated – openly defiant.

Even in our own courts, we differentiate the sin of murder by *degrees* of guilt. For example, first degree murder is premeditated murder whereas third degree murder is defined as having no intent to murder. Like first degree murder, second degree murder is premeditated murder, but the penalty for second degree is lesser than first degree murder because circumstances determine the *degree* of guilt. (See 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.)

The laws created by an all-knowing God cannot be changed. Ask the people on death row in any prison; a stay of execution does not change the demands of the law. Rather, a stay of execution is a legitimate delay in executing the demands of the law. Because Jesus offered to die in their place, God stayed the execution of Adam and Eve and their future offspring. This is the meaning of corporate intercession. The Bible says that Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world. (Revelation 13:8)

Jesus was as good as annihilated from the beginning of the world, but He came to Earth 4,000 years later to actually die. Jesus died when the Father decided the timing was perfect. (Galatians 4:4, Romans 5:6) There should be no question about God's character of love. The Father is not arbitrary. He is committed to the rule of law in His universe and the death of Jesus proves that His laws cannot be changed.

Sin has been permitted to exist for a short season (6,000 years is a minuscule slice of time when compared to eternity) because Jesus was allowed to corporately intercede on behalf of the human race the day that sin began. The Father granted a stay of execution so that He could demonstrate the horrific properties and consequences of sin. Everyone in the universe has the

knowledge of good and evil. Of course, wicked people cannot understand the properties of sin because these matters are spiritually understood. (Daniel 12:10; 1 Corinthians 2:14) God's biggest problem at the moment is not the presence of sin; God's biggest problem at the moment is preventing the second rise of sin.

Think about this. After sin has run its course, and the differences between good and evil are clearly understood, what virtue could there be in permitting sin to exist within God's kingdom for a single day? Will God remove the power of choice from His children to prevent sin from happening again? No! God is a God of love! So, how does God prevent His children from sinning again? This is a serious question. God's laws are not righteous just because He says so – they are righteous because they have been demonstrated to be so!

Carefully consider this: After sin has been destroyed and the sin problem has been fully resolved, the penalty for any future sin will be carried out on the very day that it occurs. If sin occurs and the sinner is immediately annihilated, everyone will clearly understand the necessity for destruction and the righteousness of doing so! It will be as though God said, "We've been there, done that – and I am not allowing sin to contaminate my house and hurt my children anymore."

Contract

Because their sins were not first degree felonies, Jesus offered to die in Adam and Eve's place, and not only for them, but for the sins of their corporation – the generations of offspring that would be forthcoming. (Romans 5:12) The Father accepted Jesus' offer. (Psalms 2:7-12) A "blood contract" between the Father and Jesus was signed. In essence, the contract contains these provisions:

(a) At an appointed time, Jesus would die. As an eternal member of the Godhead, He would give up His everlasting life and cease to exist so that all submissive sinners could have His life. Thus, the demands of the law, a life for a life, would be fulfilled.

(b) Because of Adam's sin, Earth itself must be cursed so that man's environment would correspond with man's decline in health and longevity.

(c) Because Adam and Eve were put under the curse of sin, every child (with the exception of Jesus) has come from the womb with a rebellious nature. Fallen man cannot give birth to unfallen children. This means that **before** anyone was born into the human corporation (the family of Adam and Eve), he or she was cursed with a sinful nature.

(d) If Jesus was successful in redeeming man (and there was a possibility of failure), the Father promised to resurrect Him from the dead and as a gift, the Father would give the world and everything in it to Him. (John 17:4-8; Hebrews 1:2) Note: A number of pastors claim that Jesus did not die on the cross because divinity cannot die. Jesus disagrees. (Revelation 1:18)

Atonement

On the *very* day that Adam and Eve sinned, Jesus came looking for the guilty pair offering the plan of salvation instead of the sword of justice. Keep in mind, the sword of justice will surely come because the stay of execution is not indefinite. The bad news for Adam and Eve was that they had lost their righteous nature, their garden home, their face to face communion with their Creator, and the access to the Tree of Life which enabled them to live endlessly.

The good news was that their execution had been stayed, and even better, the restoration of everything that had been lost was possible! Jesus carefully explained the situation to two "naked" felons. To make life on Earth possible, Jesus terminated the perpetual forces of life which He established at Creation (this is the meaning of a curse), so that the cycles of sin's consequences might be shortened. Last, Jesus explained that He was their only hope. If they wanted to regain all that had been lost, they had to put their faith in Him and surrender to His commands.

I can imagine Jesus saying, "If you trust me and believe in my future sacrifice for your sins, then you must show your faith by killing an atonement symbol (a lamb) at the times appointed." Jesus then showed a naked Adam how to conduct a worship service. Adam transferred his sin and the sin of Eve by placing his hands on the head of the lamb and confessing their sins. Then, Jesus* killed the first lamb and took the warm skin of the lamb to cover their nakedness. (Genesis 3:21)

Through this marvelous demonstration Jesus helped the pair to understand the plan of salvation. The penalty for sin, which Adam and Eve were supposed to suffer, immediately was transferred to the lamb. The nakedness of the first two sinners was covered with a robe representing the righteousness of Christ, which would be provided by His future sinless life. I imagine that when Jesus closed this tearful meeting, He summoned two attending angels to immediately escort Adam and Eve out of the garden. The only things they carried out of the garden were their memories and the robes that Jesus gave to them. As the guilty pair walked away from their their lovely home, I am sure they were bent over with anguish and tears of remorse. That first night outside the garden must have been more sorrowful than anything we can imagine.

* Note: It is my understanding that Jesus, on behalf of the Father, killed the first lamb. I offer this explanation because the Father required the life of Jesus for our atonement. (Adam and Eve did not negotiate with God on the plan of salvation.) Jesus is called "The Lamb of God" because the Father required the death of a perfect substitute. On the cross, the life of Jesus did not end because of the weight of sin, or the punishing treatment of Jews and Romans, even though that was their murderous intent.

The Father actually took the life of Jesus after Jesus submitted His life to the Father. (Consider these texts! Men did not kill Jesus. Luke 23:46; John 10:18) This matter is wonderfully paralleled in the sacrificial story of Abraham (the Father) and Isaac (the son) on Mount Moriah. (Genesis 22)

Of course, the sacrifice of a created animal cannot atone for sin, nor can animal blood wash away the guilt of sin. (Hebrews 10:4) From the beginning of sin, the killing of a lamb was a

required **object lesson** demonstrating what Jesus would do for the human race at the right time. Jesus was The Lamb of God and the Father required everyone, who wanted salvation, to kill a perfect lamb at appointed times to demonstrate faith in His promise to give us Jesus! (John 3:16)

Many Christians have been led to believe that during a "dispensation of law," animal sacrifices atoned for sin. The Bible does not teach this. The killing of a flawless lamb was an act of submission to God's demand and this act, if accompanied with heartfelt sorrow for sin and restitution to the victim, showed faith in God's promise. (Hebrews 11:4)

How Corporate Intercession Works

Adam and Eve's first son was named Cain. On the basis of Jesus' contract with the Father, Cain was not killed on the day that he committed his first sin, nor was Cain killed when he murdered his brother, Abel. Let us be clear about this. Corporate intercession was put in place BEFORE Cain was born and this is why sinners have been able to live a natural life span without being destroyed ever since.

Unfortunately, our stay of execution has led millions of Christians to believe there will be no execution! This is a great deception. Execution day will surely come. **"If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."** (Revelation 20:15)

Back to the Two Altars

Previously, the presence of two altars in the earthly temple was discussed, which explained the necessity of two levels of atonement for man's salvation. The golden Altar of Incense was the corporate altar. The priests did not place offerings for an individual's personal sins on this altar.

The bronze Altar of Burnt Offering was for the personal sins of individuals. The value of these two altars is seen in their metallic construction. Gold is of much greater value than bronze, so the service at the Altar of Incense is of utmost importance! Both altars were designed as object lessons or teaching aids. (Galatians 3:24) The sacrifices placed on the bronze Altar of Burnt Offering pointed *forward* to the death of Jesus for individuals. The daily offering of incense and occasional blood* on the golden Altar of Incense pointed *backward* to the day when Jesus became Intercessor for the whole world – before the first sinful child was born.

* Note: The Bible does not clarify whether blood from the morning and evening sacrifices was applied to the horns of the golden Altar of Incense each day. However, the Bible does reveal that blood was applied to the golden Altar of Incense at special times (Leviticus 4), and that the Altar of Incense was cleansed on the Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 16) We also know that a special incense with a delightful aroma was used on this altar each day. This is why it was named the Altar of Incense. (Exodus 30:37)

6. Holding Back God's Wrath: The only thing that is holding back the wrath of God against the

whole world is the corporate intercession Jesus executes at the golden Altar of Incense. John saw an angel, representing the ministry of Jesus, standing at the golden Altar of Incense.

When Jesus is "taken out of the way," (2 Thessalonians 2:7) the censer at the golden Altar of Incense **in Heaven** will be thrown down. This indicates that no further atonement will be offered on that corporate altar. God's wrath will then break out on mankind and hundreds of millions will suddenly perish in the global earthquake and the judgment events that follow.

"Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake." (Revelation 8:3-5)

The easy part to understand in these verses is the physical part. When the censer is cast down *in Heaven's temple*, the whole world will experience four physical phenomena. There will be deafening peals of thunder, rumblings [loud voices heard speaking], flashes of lightning all over the sky and a global earthquake. The terror caused by these phenomena and the destruction caused by this global earthquake cannot be calculated. This earthquake will mark the beginning of the Great Tribulation, so the casting down of the censer in Heaven's temple signals the end of corporate intercession.

Of course, Jesus does not suddenly annihilate everyone. Instead, He will use His wrath, mixed with mercy, to rescue as many people as possible during the 1,260 days that follow. Then, at the close of mercy (the seventh trumpet), services at the bronze Altar of Burnt Offering in Heaven will also be terminated and every sin will have been assigned – either to the head of the sinner or to the head of the scapegoat.

Summary

This study has examined six topics that enable us to understand why the censer at the golden Altar of Incense will be thrown down:

1. The full cup principle

2. Jesus' present ministry in Heaven's temple

3. The necessity of two altars and two levels of atonement in the temple

4. Individuals can become a corporation

5. God granted a stay of execution the day Adam and Eve sinned

6. The wrath of God has been restrained because of the corporate intercession of Jesus at the

Altar of Incense on behalf of the entire world.

If you understand these six concepts, then you will understand **why** the censer will be thrown down and what the consequences will be. One more question. Would you like to know when it will be thrown down? Here is the answer: **"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come** [to the close of corporate intercession] **at an hour when you do not expect him** [to do so]**."** (Matthew 24:44, insertions mine) Please think about this: The casting down of the censer (for corporate Earth) is the equivalent to the door closing on the ark in Noah's day.

This is why Jesus said, **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:37-39) According to Daniel 12:11,12, the Second Coming of Jesus is an event that lasts 1,335 days. The casting down of the censer marks the beginning of this event. So, do your best to be watching, working and waiting.

When Will the Censer in Revelation Be Thrown Down

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given even trumpets." -Revelation 8:2

In the previous issue of the Wake Up Report, we examined the question, "Why will the censer in Revelation 8:5 be thrown down?" In this issue, I would like to discuss *when* the censer will be thrown down. People often use Jesus' remarks in Matthew 24:36 as though these words pertain to the Second Coming – His appearing in clouds of glory during the seventh bowl (See Revelation 16:17-21; 6:12-17), but this is not the case! I believe that when Jesus said, **"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father,"**

He was referring to the *commencement* of the Great Tribulation. It is important to remember that the Second Coming will be a procession of many events that take 1,335 days to complete. Jesus said, **"For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:38,39)

Did you notice that Noah and his family entered the ark and no one was aware of it? The antediluvians "knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away." Were the antediluvians forewarned about the flood? Yes, Noah had preached for 120 years. Were they caught by surprise? Yes! They were totally distracted by the affairs of life *on the day* that Noah and his family entered the ark. The great door of the ark was shut and they did not have a clue that *God's mercy* had run out. This is Jesus' point in Matthew 24.

The parallel in our day will be just as sad. God's corporate mercy for Earth is about to run outand the censer will be cast down. Who understands the nearness and gravity of this matter? Just before Jesus ascended to Heaven, His disciples wanted to know the timing of His return. Notice this text: **"So when they met together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.' "** (Acts 1:6,7) Here is a question for your consideration: When Jesus spoke these words to His disciples, were His words a perpetual decree for Christians in all generations or was it meant to be a timely statement?

In other words, was Jesus really telling His disciples that none of His future followers know the times and dates which the Father has set? As you consider the answer for this question, you also have to address the fact that the books of Daniel and Revelation contain 18 prophetic time periods in them. Even more, at this time in history, we know that several of the 18 prophetic time periods in Daniel and Revelation occurred *after* Jesus spoke those words to His disciples. Knowing all this, His words have to be understood in this way: When the time comes for the fulfilment of prophecy, God sees that His children are given an understanding of the times and

dates He has set by His own authority.

The reason this understanding is important is because at this very moment, no one knows the day and hour when the censer will be cast down and the Great Tribulation will begin. The censer will come down like a thief in the night – at an hour when we "think not." (Matthew 24:43,44)

However, the date of the Second Coming is clearly stated in the book of Daniel! **"From the time that the daily sacrifice** [the service at Heaven's golden Altar of Incense] **is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation** [the universal death decree for the saints] **is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days. 'As for you,** [Daniel] **go your way till the end. You will rest** [in the grave]**, and then at the end of the** [1,335] **days you will rise** [in the glorious resurrection of the righteous] **to receive your allotted inheritance.' "** (Daniel 12:12,13, insertions mine) Remember, the date of the Second Coming cannot be known until the censer is cast down, but when it happens, we can start counting.

A Punctiliar Moment

John wrote, **"And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets."** (Revelation 8:2) The Bible indicates that seven mighty angels stand before God's throne. They are eager servants of the Most High, ready and capable to fulfill any mission that He might command. As a group, these seven angels are mentioned three times in Revelation. They are the seven angels of the seven churches (Revelation 1:20), the seven angels of the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:2) and the seven angels of the seven bowls (Revelation 15:1).

At a point in time, these seven angels are given seven trumpets. Can we know the date of this event? For many years, I have pondered this question because the enormity of events accompanying the seven trumpets is so serious. The seven trumpets are the seven *first* plagues that precede the seven *last* plagues! Here is a point for you to consider. Keep in mind, I do not have the final word on Bible prophecy. I, too, am a Bible student searching for answers. It is my studied conclusion that the seven angels were given the seven trumpets on April 11, 1994, and my reasons for this conclusion are as follows:

First, I believe God's patience with Jews and Gentiles alike ended when the Jubilee Calendar expired on April 11, 1994**.*** Since I cannot begin to explain the "Great Week" in this short article, I will present this abbreviated observation. It appears that God granted three Great Days (1470 years) for the Jews. Sunday, Monday and Tuesday of the Great Week were granted to them as trustees of the gospel. Each Great Day is 70 weeks (490 years) in length and the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 make up Great Day of Tuesday.

Then, God granted four Great Days as the time of the Gentiles (1,960 years). Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sabbath of the Great Week were granted to Gentile believers as trustees of the gospel. (Luke 21:24) Thus, the probationary time allotted to Jews and Gentiles, as

trustees of the gospel, has been completed.

Since April 11, 1994, the cup of God's patience with mankind has been full. Today, that cup is overflowing with guilt and the absence of God's judgments has puzzled thoughtful men like Dr. Billy Graham who once said, "If God doesn't send judgments upon the United States of America soon, He will owe an apology to Sodom and Gomorrah." I believe the reason God has not sent judgments is found in Revelation 7. Because mankind has not been able to fulfill the purposes of God, He is about to select 144,000 people from all over the world to accomplish what has not been done.

1437 B.C.	Jubilee Calendar	1994
Noah's Day		Our Day

* Note from Above:

God instituted the Jubilee Calendar at the Exodus. (Exodus 12:1) During the operation of the Jubilee Calendar, God used the weekly cycle of seven days to translate a day for a year. (See the first chart above.) So, every seventh year, counting from the year of the Exodus, was a Sabbath year and He commanded the land to rest as a test of faith for the Jews. (Leviticus 25: 4)

The presence of this calendar explains why the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 have to be translated as 490 years and the 2,300 days mentioned in Daniel 8:14 have to be translated as 2,300 years. However, the time periods mentioned in Daniel 12 (1,260 days, 1,290 days, and 1,335 days), **are not** translated as a day for a year because the Jubilee Calendar ended in 1994. Here are two reasons: First, a week is limited to seven days. The Great Week of 3,430 years ended with the Great Day of Sabbath. (Similarly, the Grand Week of 7,000 years will end with the Grand Day of Sabbath.)

Second, there are numerous time periods in Daniel and Revelation which are not subject to the day/year translation that still need to be fulfilled. This necessitates the termination of the translation of a day for a year, which the Jubilee Calendar demands. So, I conclude that the Jubilee Calendar ended in 1994. For a comprehensive discussion on this topic, you may want to view the *March, April, May and June, 2004 Broadcast* DVDs about the "Jubilee Calendar." A large Jubilee Calendar with key dates is also available. Also, you can watch a low resolution presentation of this study for free at our web-site: www.wake-up.org.

Second, a delay of God's wrath is described in Revelation 7:1-4. The Bible indicates that God's wrath is delayed until the 144,000 are sealed. (See pages 159-166 in my book, *Daniel Unlocked for the Final Generation.*) God wants us know about this delay because He wants us to understand that His wrath is due long *before* the 144,000 are sealed. In other words, Earth's cup of iniquity becomes full before the Great Tribulation begins. The sequence of events flows together very easily.

Suppose the seven angels were given seven trumpets in 1994 because God's patience with mankind reached its limit. However, before the first four angels can inflict harm to notoriously

wicked places on Earth, destruction is delayed because Jesus is waiting for the arrival for a specific time, an appointed time (Daniel 8:19) to select and seal the 144,000. In other words, Jesus is waiting to align coming events with the synchrony of the "Grand Week." The Grand Week consists of seven days – each day is a thousand years in length.

When all of the data is brought together, it appears that the Second Coming will occur at the end of the 6,000th year of sin – the year that marks the end of the Friday millennium. If this conclusion is correct, the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 will start on time when the "Great Day" of Sabbath begins, and Earth itself will rest from the works of sin. It appears that Jesus has delayed the commencement of the seven trumpets since 1994. We are living in this "delay" right now. Jesus is waiting for the 6,000th year minus 1,335 days to terminate His corporate intercession for Earth.

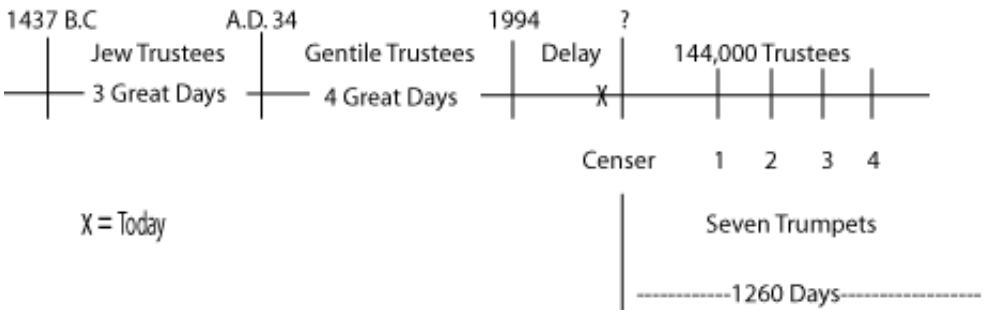
When the appointed hour arrives, the censer will be thrown down, the global earthquake will occur and the seven trumpets will follow. With God, timing is everything. (See Revelation 9:15.)

Last, the prophetic matrix produced by the four rules of interpretation that I follow forces the seven angels in Revelation 8:2 to receive their trumpets *shortly* before the censer is thrown down. After the seven angels receive their terrible assignments, the next prophetic event is the casting down of the censer. Notice the progression of these matters.

First, God's patience with Jews runs out. Then, God's patience with Gentiles runs out. The Great Week of God's mercy ends (3,430 years) and seven angels that stand before Him are given seven trumpets. (April 1994) Then, before the first four angels can hurt the Earth, they are told to wait until the 144,000 are sealed. This introduces the delay described in Revelation 7:1-4.

When the appointed time arrives, 144,000 people will be selected and empowered, and Jesus will terminate His corporate intercession for Earth. Then, the censer at the Altar of Incense will be cast down (Revelation 8:3,4) and the global earthquake will occur. (Revelation 8:5) I believe there is a very short space of perhaps thirty to sixty days (Revelation 8:6) before the fiery hailstorm of the first trumpet occurs. (Revelation 8:7)

Overview of the Trusteeship of the Gospel



Waiting and Watching

The Great Tribulation has not begun. The 1,260 days, the 1,290 days and the 1,335 days mentioned in Daniel 12 have not yet begun. The 1,260 days of the Two Witnesses have not begun. The 42 months in Revelation 13:5 have not begun. The five months in Revelation 9:5 have not begun. The 1,000 years of Revelation 20 have not begun. However, each of these time periods will occur on time. I suspect these events will transpire soon, very soon. **"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."** (Matthew 24:44)

Why Will False Prophets Appear? Who are the Elect?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Why Will False Prophets Appear? Who Are The Elect?

"For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible." (Matthew 24:24)

The prophecy in Matthew 24 is not understood very well because it contains two distinct but parallel prophecies. Sitting on the Mount of Olives, Jesus told His disciples about Jerusalem's coming destruction (A.D. 70) and also the destruction of the world at His Second Coming.

Jesus combined these two events into one discourse because there are ominous parallels. **However,** it is very important that we do not merge these two prophecies together because the specifications about the destruction of Jerusalem do not apply to the end of the world and vice versa. If you study Matthew 24 closely, you will discover that Jesus introduced the "end of the world" portion of His discourse in verse 21: **"For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again."**

This is important to observe because it is within the context of the Great Tribulation that Jesus said: **"For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible."** (verse 24)

In the near future, 144,000 people will be selected and empowered to speak for Jesus. When the 144,000 begin their work, the devil will also be allowed to empower a large number of false messiahs and false prophets. These evil people will perform marvelous signs and miracles, just like the 144,000. These manifestations will be so convincing that if possible, Jesus said, the elect could be deceived!

Of course, the ability to work a miracle does not mean that God is the source of power behind the miracle. Jesus said, **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' "** (Matthew 7:21,22)

So, two issues in Matthew 24:24 need to be considered. The first issue is this: Why will God allow false prophets to appear – performing marvelous signs and miracles to deceive people? The second issue is this: Who are the elect?

False Prophets

An entire book could be devoted to the question, "Why does God allow the devil and his representatives to lead the world astray?" Because this is a short study, please consider the

following summary: With infinite wisdom, God did not immediately destroy Lucifer and his followers when they first sinned because He wanted His children to obtain a thorough understanding of good *and evil*.

By allowing Lucifer, the highest and brightest of created beings, to develop an opposition government, the all-knowing Father allowed His children to see and understand the differences between a government of selfishness and a government of selflessness. God knew that allowing two opposing governments to exist over an extended period of time would clearly demonstrate the superior government. So, He permitted Lucifer and his followers to live until this demonstration will be finished.

In making this decision, God also foreknew that Lucifer's stay of execution meant that His only Son must be executed. So, the decision to allow Lucifer to live for a season also came with a great price to God. God always sees the big picture and He foreknew that His best defense throughout eternity against a second occurrence of sin would be to allow His children to have a comprehensive understanding of good *and evil*.

For the past six thousand years, this fallen planet has been like a "theater" in God's universe. Heaven's angels have closely studied Lucifer's actions and the actions of human beings. After Lucifer led Eve, and then Adam into rebellion against God (ironically, at the Tree of *the Knowledge* of Good and Evil), the battle between Jesus and Lucifer began. This battle, which began in Heaven, intensified here on Earth. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, is pulling on the heart strings of each person, encouraging each one to submit to the will of God.

On the other side, Lucifer is pulling on our carnal hearts, pushing us to rebel against God. The Father serves as a referee of sorts in this tug-of-war. He will not allow Jesus or Lucifer to have a clear and decided advantage over the other. Whatever Jesus does, Lucifer gets to do and vice versa. The Father insists on this balance because human beings were given the power of choice and by keeping the powers of Jesus and the powers of Lucifer in "a divine balance," the each person is truly free to choose whom he or she will serve.

Notice how this balance is maintained in various ways. Jesus took on the form of a man to save man. To balance this aspect of Jesus' ministry, Lucifer will be allowed to take on the form of a man to lead the world into destruction! Because God maintains a balance between the forces of good and evil, the prophets of Jesus (the 144,000) will compete with the wicked prophets of Lucifer during the Great Tribulation. An Old Testament parallel of this competition was when Moses and Aaron competed with Pharaoh's magicians.

Another parallel was when Elijah competed with 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. This "balance" explains why Jesus warned His disciples that false messiahs and false prophets would appear during the end time and perform great signs and miracles to deceive mankind. Lucifer's prophets will perform signs and miracles that appear so genuine and marvelous that if possible, the very elect could be deceived!

Since God will allow both true prophets and false prophets to perform signs and wonders during the Great Tribulation, an interesting effect will occur. The miracles of the prophets of God will be

superior to those of false prophets (the miracles of Moses, Aaron and Elijah were superior to their counterparts). God allows true prophets a small degree of superiority because Lucifer has one advantage that Jesus does not have. Lucifer's advantage is humankind's carnal nature which is naturally inclined toward rebellion against God.

Signs and miracles will be everywhere and wicked people, who have rebellious hearts like Pharaoh, will justify their rebellion against God's demands with inferior miracles! Signs and miracles do not produce sorrow and repentance, but signs and wonders do produce credibility. Sincere and honest people will be able to detect the difference, but wicked people will harden their hearts and will reject the obvious and accept lesser signs and miracles to defend their rebellion. (Daniel 12:10, Matthew 12:39)

This is why the appearing of Lucifer, masquerading as God, will become so important. When a majority of the world has rejected the truth, God will allow the devil to physically appear before mankind. (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12) Masquerading as God, the devil will work the ultimate deceptive miracle (which the 144,000 cannot reproduce). Lucifer will call fire down out of Heaven to prove that "he" is God. (Revelation 13:13) When wicked people see this miracle, many of them will be totally convinced that Almighty God lives among men!

The Elect

Now, we need to consider the second question. Who are the elect – that if possible, could be deceived during the Great Tribulation?

Every four years the United States elects a president. The United States *chooses* its president and we call him an elected leader. The word "elect" stems from the idea of being chosen. Christians are widely divided on the definition and the identity of God's elect.

Some Christians say that "the elect" are selected individuals whom God has arbitrarily chosen for salvation (that is, God predestined selected people to be saved and all others to be destroyed). Naturally, those who advocate this view are confident that they have been predestined for salvation.

Another group claims that "the elect" are members of God's true church which people are free to join (that is, salvation comes through accepting the teachings of the true church). Naturally, those who hold to this view are convinced that their church is the true church of God. Another group believes "the elect" are the Jews (this is based on God's original promise to Abraham's descendants). Each of these views has some good points, but I think the Bible defines "the elect" in a different way. I believe the Bible indicates that everyone who elects to accept the penalty for obeying God during Great Tribulation will make up the elect of God.

Consider these verses (insertions and italics mine):

"He[the beast] **was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of**

the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone [among the saints] **is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone** [among the saints] **is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This** [agony] **calls for patient endurance and faithfulness *on the part of the saints*."** (Revelation 13:7-10)

"I saw that the woman[harlot, Babylon] **was drunk *with the blood of the saints*, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished."** (Revelation 17:6)

"Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: 'You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; *for they*[the recipients of this plague] ***have shed the blood of your saints and prophets*, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.' "** (Revelation 16:5,6)

"And he will send his angels and *gather his elect* from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens." (Mark 13:27)

When these four verses are aligned, I believe the elect will be those who remain loyal to Jesus when faced with death. In other words, God elects those that choose to put their faith in Him and obey His commands. In other words, if we choose to vote for God, He chooses us for eternal life!

What Is Your Purpose?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"You[Timothy]**, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, *my purpose*, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings . . . ."** (2 Timothy 3:10, italics mine)

Have you lifted up your eyes from your day to day rut and noticed just how stressed and tense "our world" has become? Distress is everywhere. More and more people are doing stupid things. People are hurting themselves and other people because there is no rest – day or night. Every minute is crammed full with something. Our brains are overstimulated and our senses overloaded. The whole world seems to be going crazy. Road rage and excessive speeding tells me that people in America are frustrated. But wait! This problem is appearing in national politics as well!

The leaders of the United States government are also showing signs of frustration and distress. The Senate has reached a place where it can barely function. The rancor between the two parties is truly horrible. Political interviews are full of bitter disagreement at a time when the U.S. is confronted with problems that threaten its very existence!

Ironically, the problems are getting larger and the nation's ability to work together is getting weaker. The leaders cannot agree on a solution to stop hordes of illegal immigrants from entering the country, porous borders, a stalled economy, the out-sourcing of millions of jobs to China and India, the costly war in Iraq, a crisis in Social Security entitlements, and the escalating energy prices. I do not think we will ever return to the peaceful and genteel time we remember from the past. Human nature will not allow it. Our inability to control ourselves or the technologies God has given us is leading to our own destruction.

For many reasons and excuses, we convince ourselves we cannot take time to rest and recuperate. We go - go - go, buy - buy - buy, sell - sell - sell, work - work - work and play - play - play. There is no interest or time to rest - rest - rest. We have become like little gerbils who run their tiny legs off on a spinning wheel that goes nowhere. No matter how hard we keep running, there is no end in sight. Isn't it time to begin asking, "Why are we killing ourselves?"

Carnal Religion Is Not Helping

"For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." (2 Timothy 4:3,4)

It is paradoxical that religion, for the most part, is not helping. One would think that advanced knowledge of God would produce a better world! Actually, religion is magnifying the problems we face. Religious differences have caused tensions between Islam and Christianity that have become very strong. Even though the world has seven great religions and an infinite number of

deviations within each of them, there are only two kinds of religious experiences: internal and external. I define the external experience as a carnal commitment to defend, to the death if necessary, our love and knowledge of God.

A good example of the external experience is Peter's statement: **". . . Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death. Jesus answered, 'I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.' "** (Luke 22:33,34) Under the right circumstances, Peter would have been willing to die for Jesus because Peter loved Jesus as he loved himself. The problem is that Peter could not love Jesus more than he loved himself because he had not surrendered himself to God's will.

We know that it was God's will that Jesus die on the cross and Peter was not willing to allow it! This is why he drew his sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Words are cheap. Only a test will reveal the true motives of the heart and Peter's first test came in the form of humiliation. Peter denied that he knew Jesus because he did not want to share in the shame and insults that Jesus received. The external experience is so human – so universal.

I define the internal experience as a miraculous transformation that enables us to fulfill the purpose for which God has called us. Here are two examples: **"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of *his reverent submission*. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."** (Hebrews 5:7-9, italics mine) Jesus was submissive to His Father and because of this character trait, He was willing to die on the cross if that was the Father's will! (Luke 22:42)

Similarly, Paul became submissive to Jesus and this is why he wrote, **"You** [Timothy]**, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me**. . . ." (2 Timonthy 3:10,11) Paul wrote that a total submission to God's will must occur before the internal experience of transformation can take place!

As a young man, Paul loved the external religious experience. He wrote about his external religion saying, **". . . If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless."** (Phillippians 3:4-6)

Later in the same chapter, Paul reflected on the days after he met Jesus and wrote that his religious achievements meant nothing. You know how it happened. One day, while zealously persecuting Christians, Jesus Himself confronted Saul on the road to Damascus. That meeting shattered Paul's arrogance. Blinded by the glory of Christ, Paul soon discovered that he was truly blind about the ways of God. Then and there, Paul surrendered to Jesus and was inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit. As a result of this experience, Paul became a champion for the cause of Christ. In fact, no human being has influenced the development of Christianity more than Apostle Paul.

Submission

Jesus invites us to enter into a deep and abiding relationship with Him. The terms and conditions of His invitation are simple. Jesus says, "Come unto me and I will give you rest. . . Walk with Me, spend time with Me, learn from Me, obey My commands, study My Word, submit to My wisdom, allow Me to work out a great plan for your life, for no one loves you more or has your best interest at heart!" We respond, "But Lord, I have too many things to do! In fact, I have so many things to do that I can't sit still!"

The problem with this response is the issue of submission. We are really saying, "Lord, I cannot say 'no' to all the things that I want to do. I *like* going here and there, I *like* doing this and that, even though subconsciously, I know they are killing me."

Jesus does not propose to come down to our level, He proposes to lift us up to His. Jesus requires total submission every moment of every day. (John 15:14) His **purpose** for our life can only be fulfilled if we consistently submit to His authority! True, no one but Jesus has been able to live in perfect submission to the will of God *every moment of every day*, but Paul makes it very clear that through the power offered by Jesus, we can grow into the character of Jesus. (Ephesians 4:11-32)

So What Is God's Purpose for Your Life?

Perhaps you have heard about the book by Pastor Rick Warren titled, "The Purpose Driven Life." His book has sold more copies than any other religious book ever written – except for the Bible. I think the book is so successful because Pastor Warren has been gifted by the Holy Spirit with the ability to explain the Christian experience in a way that has changed thousands of lives. Although I cannot agree with everything that Pastor Warren has written in the book, I believe he is a godly man and I have found a marvelous blessing in his book.

During April 2005, I was in Round Rock, Texas visiting with the Kincaid family. As you may recall, Letty has been conducting Daniel and Revelation seminars on behalf of Wake Up America for a few years, and she has also conducted three or four seminars on "The Purpose Driven Life." I asked Letty to present a summary seminar on the book and she agreed. We audio taped our discussion and it is available on audio tapes and audio CDs. If you have access to the internet, you can also listen to the whole seminar for free. Our discussion took place over a few days and the recorded portion is seven and a half hours in length.

Letty put the salient points together, describing how God works out His purposes within us. It is a tremendous presentation. I was truly blessed. I went away realizing that God has many things to teach me. As we progressed through the discussion, I was impressed that I need to surrender to the will of God in ways that I had not thought about. I am sharing my experience with you because I hope you will be able to listen to Letty's presentation. Let me repeat this statement again. Jesus says, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest.

Walk with Me, spend time with Me, learn from Me, obey My commands, study My Word, submit

to My wisdom, allow Me to work out a great plan for your life for no one loves you more or has your best interest at heart!" So take heart. Jesus said of Pharaoh's rebellion, **"But I have raised you up for *this very purpose*, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the Earth."** (Exodus 9:6, italics mine) Now, think about this. If Jesus had a purpose for hardheaded and hardhearted Pharaoh, don't you think He has an even higher purpose for every person who surrenders to Him?

Demonic Possession

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, 'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!' 'Be quiet!' Jesus said sternly. 'Come out of him!' Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him." -Luke 4:33-35

How Can a Person Become Demonically Possessed in the 21st Century?

From time to time, I have received questions about demonic possession and even though I do not fully understand this subject, I thought I would share with you what I have learned. Hopefully, it will be helpful. I believe this topic warrants attention because I am convinced that demons are increasingly taking possession of people!

Human beings need a Savior because we are no match for our supernatural adversary, the devil. His tremendous powers and energies are devoted to the ruin and destruction of every human being and he is determined to lead the whole world into open rebellion against the laws of God. Because the Prince of Darkness is steadily strengthening his grip on this planet, we need to understand how he works. Peter wrote, **"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."** (1 Peter 5:8)

I find it very interesting that the term "demonic possession" is not directly mentioned in the Old Testament, but it is mentioned numerous times in the New Testament. Consider this one Old Testament text because some people think it indicates demonic torment: **"Saul's attendants said to him, 'See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the harp. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes upon you, and you will feel better.' So Saul said to his attendants, 'Find someone who plays well and bring him to me. . . .' Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him."** (1 Samuel 16:15-17,23)

Years ago, this text puzzled me. How could the Lord send an "evil spirit" (that is, a demonic spirit)? Later, I discovered my perplexity was due to a problem with language. The Hebrew word "rah" translated "evil" in this passage has numerous meanings such as vexing, bad, miserable, heavy or troublesome – thus "rah" is translated evil in these verses.

However, once I understood how the Hebrew word was used, it became clear to me that the troublesome spirit sent from the Lord was actually the Holy Spirit doing His best to bring King Saul to repentance. Even though David's inspiring music would soften the king's rebellious heart so he felt better, the efforts of the Holy Spirit and David's music proved to be in vain. King Saul eventually committed the unpardonable sin and the Holy Spirit no longer spoke to him. (1

Samuel 28:6)

I believe the absence of any mention of demonic possession in the Old Testament could be due to two things. First, when the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land, they were a very healthy group of people. They had been eating angel food called manna (Psalm 78:25) for forty years and illness in Israel was rare. Second, prior to Israel's exile in Babylon (605 B.C. - 536 B.C.), the Jews measured prosperity and misfortune with a very simple formula. If a person pleased God, then God blessed that person with health and prosperity.

If a person sinned against God, then that person received a curse from God. (See Deuteronomy 28.) This simple formula was presented to Jesus one day. **"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.' "** (John 9:1-3)

The point is that prior to the Babylonian exile, the Jews regarded misfortune as a curse from God. They erroneously believed God sent Satan to hurt or harm those who displeased Him. Ironically, this faulty concept is discussed at great length in the book of Job, which many scholars believe was the first book of the Bible to be written. Scholars generally accept that Moses wrote the book of Job during his forty years of tending sheep. The irony is that Job's three physician friends slandered God by insisting that Job deserved what he got.

At the end of the book, God spoke to Job and told him that He was angry with his friends. (Job 42:8,9) Given the fact that Job was an early book in the Old Testament, it is baffling why the Jews ultimately adopted a "prosperity theology" anyway.

After the Babylonian captivity ended, the Jewish nation became corrupt, broke their part of the covenant with God and did not receive the prosperity which God had conditionally promised through Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Israel became physically and spiritually weak.

The necessity and importance of physicians and medicine became more important and respected within Israel. In fact, the healing ministry of Jesus brought more attention to His presence, His mission and His message than anything else! I believe that illness and birth defects had become so prevalent during the time of Jesus, that some of the medical problems described in the New Testament are labeled "demonic possession" because the underlying medical problem was not understood. In other words, it is possible that some disorders, such as epileptic seizures, were probably mislabeled "demonic possession" because there was no understanding of the illness. (See Matthew 17:15-18)

Since illness and physical defects were considered to be a curse, the Jews reasoned that demons must be responsible. We see this type of thinking in this passage: **"While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.' But the Pharisees said, 'It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons.' "** (Matthew 9:32-34)

Even though "demonic possession" may be a misnomer for certain illnesses, I do not want to diminish the fact that there were several genuine instances of demonic possession in the New Testament. Consider these two instances of demonic possession, and notice in both cases that the demon spoke: **"Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, 'In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.' Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?' Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor."** (Acts 19:13–17)

In this passage, the demon challenged the seven sons of Sceva and then the demon empowered its host to attack these seven men and rip off their clothes! It's interesting that demons are always after our clothing. Keep this thought in mind as you read this next text.

"When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!' For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man.

Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss." (Luke 8:27-31)

These two passages (and there are several other instances of demon possession in the New Testament) indicate that demons can and will take up residence within people. The all important question is how do they do it? I believe demon possession can occur several ways. Space limits me to three:

1. If a person repeatedly and willfully violates his conscience, his sense of right and wrong will fade. In a morally confused and darkened condition, the door for demonic possession opens. Over time, the victim will be manipulated and ultimately controlled by demonic impulses. The obvious indication of a possessed person occurs when there is no longer any concern for right and wrong and the person inflicts crimes of passion that are unimaginable.

2. If a person is sexually and/or emotionally abused during childhood, studies indicate a strong possibility that the victim will grow up with thoughts and behaviors that are harmful and self destructive. These behaviors can range from self-loathing to bursts of hostility and hatred toward anyone who may innocently hurt their already hurting heart. Whether the rage is directed inwardly or outwardly, rage and frustration left unchecked can open a door for demonic possession. The battlefield is often in the mind and the devil can wield a strong influence over our minds using fantasies and hateful desires that demand a horrible and depraved fulfillment.

3. There is a subtle form of demonic possession that is not easily discernable. We tend to think that demonic possession means that someone is out of control, irrational, out of their mind, or convulsing from a seizure. The devil is clever and highly sophisticated and he also has many very brilliant demons working with him. They know that we have been given the power of choice, and in order to possess us, all they need to do is gain control of that power. Demons have a wide range of tools to break down our power of choice and they prey upon our inherent rebellion against God's laws.

For example, demons have convinced a large number of young people that substance abuse is no big deal. Methamphetamines may offer an "ecstatic experience" for the moment, but the consequences of that first incident can (and often does) turn into addiction. Thus, substance abuse can be an entry point for demonic possession. Demons have also led millions of people to believe there is nothing wrong with sexual immorality. This too, can be a door to addiction and ultimately, demonic possession.

But what about those of us who shun drugs and sexual immorality? Does the devil have a plan for us? Very few people understand the addiction that comes from materialism. When we are not able to say "no" to gratification, we have an addiction.

This is a growing problem which leads many people into bankruptcy. To avoid bankruptcy, many people make their jobs more important than God, family and health. Sadly, some people are driving themselves beyond exhaustion to get more money so they can buy more things. In this materialistic era, the love of money is an open door for demonic possession. Anything that has power over us can be used to pry open the door of our heart to Satan's demons.

We live in an age of over stimulation. We are constantly busy and our brains are constantly processing some kind of data. Consequently, our brains are imploding because of over stimulation. Billions of dollars are spent each year on psychotropic drugs because people are unable to deal with the demands of living. Harmful behaviors are causing us to lose control of ourselves. We cannot focus, we cannot tolerate silence and we cannot rest. If the devil is a formidable adversary when we are at our best, what does he become when we are at our weakest?

Jesus said, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."** (Matthew 11:28-30)

The Great Prostitute and Armageddon

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. . . . The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire’. . . . The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. . . . Then they [the demons] **gathered the** [ten] **kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon."** (Revelation 17:1, 16, 16:12, 16, insertions mine)

These important Bible verses will be fulfilled during the last thirty days of the Great Tribulation. The great prostitute is a forthcoming one-world-church-state. At a place called "Armageddon," the kings of Earth will make war against Jesus as He and the Father appear in clouds of glory. This explanation may seem fictitious because currently, a one-world-church-state is impossible because (a) we are a world of diverse religions and diverse governments, and (b) no one on Earth has enough power to capture the whole world. Nevertheless, the book of Revelation predicts these events will transpire and we can be sure that everything God has said will occur.

Before we examine the formation of the great prostitute and the battle of Armageddon, we need to understand that some basic behaviors are *very important* to God even though they do not appear to be very important to a growing number of human beings.

For example, God has said that He will judge us with the same attitude and standards that we judge others. If we are critical of others, God will be critical of us. (Matthew 7:2) God requires us to be fair in our business dealings. If we cheat in business deals because we can get away with it, God considers that stealing. (Leviticus 25; Matthew 7:12; Luke 3:14; Proverbs 16:11) If we defraud others, commit violent acts against others or if we live sexually immoral lives, God will not permit us to enter Heaven. (Revelation 21:8, 27)

God has also promised to extract restitution from everyone who refuses to make restitution to those they have wronged. (Romans 12:19; Revelation 2:23; 2 Corinthians 5:10) God also commands us to love our enemies. (Matthew 5:43-45) This commandment cannot be fulfilled without God’s help. In fact, all of God’s commands require God’s help because our carnal natures are degenerate.

These principles matter to God and they should matter to us because God holds us accountable for our actions. You might ask, "So, what does our treatment of others have to do with the Great Tribulation?" The answer is quite simple: The Great Tribulation will be a thorough test of character.

God commands us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39) and the Great Tribulation will reveal our love (or lack of love) for others. Distressing situations bring out the best or the worst in people. Thus, the Great Tribulation will reveal our true character. During the

Great Tribulation, the necessities of life will become scarce, and survival will be questionable. In this context, our love for others, including our enemies, will be tested and everyone, including God, will see the results..

Loving Truth Matters Most

The first and greatest commandment is that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind and soul. (Matthew 22:37) Is there a difference between loving God and loving religion? Although most of the world does not see any difference between the teachings of their religion and the will of God, there is one critical element that keeps God and religion separate: *truth.* Man's understanding of truth is ever advancing and the issue that matters most to God is our response to advancing truth.

God is totally honest and He *demands* the same from His children. (1 Chronicles 29:17; Matthew 5:8) God looks in our hearts and sees our commitment to honesty. He knows if we are pure in heart. He knows if we are scrupulous about being honest. God hates dishonesty, and He detests hypocrites pretending to be honest but are liars and thieves. (Proverbs 6:16-19; Matthew 23)

You may be wondering what our conduct toward others and our honesty have to do with the great prostitute and the battle of Armageddon. Actually, a great deal. The great prostitute in Revelation 17 represents a great multitude of selfish and dishonest people who will unite with the devil to save their lives.

The honest in heart will not compromise and will not go along with the devil's schemes. As a result, the honest in heart will be torn between loving their own lives and their love for truth. (John 12:25) Honesty opens the door to eternal life. When a sinner honestly confesses sin and becomes willing to go, to be and to do all that God requires, the sinner receives an assurance of salvation because Jesus has paid the price for sin. Salvation begins with honesty. Honesty is an attitude about life, and truth and our honesty determine the nature of our relationship with God.

Honestly Wrong

God knows that we live in a world of "developing truth" because God alone possesses absolute truth. Our limited knowledge of truth is not a problem for God because He is ultimately concerned about our *response* to what we *believe* is truth, not our possession or acceptance of absolute truth. In other words, when a person lives up to all that he or she *honestly* believes to be God's will – God is pleased with that person's honesty. God knows that if an honest person discovers more truth, he or she will joyfully conform to it because honest people love truth and honest people want all the truth they can find!

The apostle Paul is one of the best examples in the Bible of a misguided person who was *honestly* wrong. Paul zealously lived up to everything he thought was God's will (Philippians 3), and in fact, he believed that he was doing God a service by persecuting Christians! After meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul saw his misdirection and he immediately became

a follower of Jesus Christ. I believe that Jesus confronted Paul on the road because He knew that Paul was unusually honest in heart.

Jesus knew that Paul loved God and His truth with all his heart, and Paul's behavior after meeting Jesus leaves no doubt about his love for truth. Consider this statement carefully: It is no sin to be mistaken, but it is a sin to refuse to accept advancing truth that God has revealed. (2 Timothy 3:1-7; James 4:17)

Jesus told Nicodemus: **"Everyone who does evil hates the light** [of truth]**, and will not come into the light for fear that his** [dishonest] **deeds will be exposed. But whoever** [loves and] **lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been** [honestly] **done through** [the power of the indwelling Spirit of] **God."** (John 3:20,21, insertions mine) This is a profound declaration! The great difference between those who love truth and those who do not is a commitment to honesty.

Honestly people seek truth, they love truth, and they are open to the increasing demands of truth as their understanding of truth unfolds. Honesty is so important to God because people cannot live happily throughout the corridors of eternity without being honest with God, self and others.

Honest people are transparent people. They do business in an open and honorable way. Their word is their bond. They do not have anything to hide. They are willing to confess their wrongs and to make amends when necessary. Honest people are concerned about things that matter most in life: walking humbly before God and serving others with integrity, loyalty and faithfulness. If we *love* truth, we make God happy because He can accomplish great things through every person who is willing to advance with greater truth.

Jesus promised His followers: **"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. . . ."** (John 16:13) A simple test to tell if we love truth is our reaction when we are confronted with more truth. If we are convicted by God's Spirit that it is truth, we will obey it regardless of the consequences that may come.

This brings us to the poignant question that Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18:38) *Truth is a verity, or a fact, that is confirmed by the harmony that comes from the sum of all its parts.* In other words, truth can be as simple as a statement of fact or it can be a complex collection of interrelated facts. The Bible contains simple statements of truth such as, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), as well as complex statements of truth such as the doctrine of parallel temples. (Hebrews 8:1-5)

As a matter of non-negotiable faith, I accept as fact that the Bible is the Word of God. I believe the sixty-six books of the Bible are consistent with the will of God. Whenever God's Spirit affirms the veracity of advancing truth in my heart (that is, the Spirit puts the weight of conviction in my heart that something is truth), that verity becomes a *testing truth*. God watches to see whether I will implement advancing truth and walk in the greater light of God's Word, or if I will resist truth and remain in darkness to avoid change.

God wants to see if I am willing to endure the social, economic and familial consequences that advancing truth can cause. In a fallen world, the price that truth requires can be serious. Jesus said, "the truth will set you free." (John 8:32) His words are true. The truth can set you free of your friends, your job, your family and your church, but the truth also gives you a new set of friends, a better job, a larger family and membership in the body of Christ!

Human beings do not have access to absolute truth. This is why there can be different opinions and views about truth. Two honest people can have opposing views! Man's diversity is not a problem because God alone knows and possesses absolute truth. God wants us to love honesty and truth as He does so that our relationship with Him can grow. We are finite, God is infinite. Therefore, the only way we can grow in love and appreciation for God is through adopting more truth because His truths are ever expanding!

Conflicts over Truth

We live in a diverse world. We live on several continents, we speak hundreds of different languages, we worship different gods, we are citizens of various governments, and we come from many races and cultures – yet, we make up one world. God is not perplexed by our diversity because He is responsible for it.

When He scattered the inhabitants of Earth at the tower of Babel some 4,500 years ago (Genesis 11), He foreknew the diversity that would occur. As a matter of fact, He intends to use our global diversity at the end of Earth's drama to demonstrate some amazing facts. Here is one such fact: **God intends to show the universe that there are people within every religion, culture, nation and tongue who sincerely *love* truth and if necessary, they would sacrifice life itself because of their love for truth. - The interesting thing about these people is that the only thing they have in common is their *love* for truth because the verities they presently exalt as truth are as diverse and conflicted as mankind! Even though two honest people can believe opposite things about the will of God, this does not present a problem for God because He can see that both people *love* truth. God knows that if He gave these two diverse people a clear and definitive presentation of His will, both would receive it and joyfully obey it because they love truth!**

Consider how God will separate His sheep from the goats in all religions during the Great Tribulation. God will send a clear and powerful testimony of truth through His servants, the 144,000, during the Great Tribulation, and all who love truth will receive their gospel!

The rest of mankind will reject it. Before you say to yourself, "I love truth and I will certainly take my stand on the side of truth when the time comes," you need to understand that the 144,000 will present a gospel to the human race during the Great Tribulation within a context of severe persecution. Accepting God's truth will come with a price. Even though demonic forces will do their best to thwart the advance of the gospel, everyone on Earth will hear the everlasting gospel, and it will be contrary to everyone's religion!

This is how God will level the playing field for the whole world. God is about to trap everyone

between the demands of truth and the demands of false religion to see who loves truth and who is honest in heart. Our diversity is no obstacle for God because He will test our love for truth. The people of Earth will hear three testing truths, three simple truths (Revelation 14:6-13), and those who love truth will receive these truths and obey them. The rest of mankind will rebel. Thus, the sheep will be separated from the goats in all religions.

The Great Tribulation

The Great Tribulation will begin with a global earthquake that will dwarf the 9.3 Richter Scale earthquake that caused the deadly tsunami in southern Asia in December, 2004. (Revelation 8:5) Shortly after the earthquake, a trumpet will sound in Heaven's temple and the seven trumpet-judgments will begin to fall. It appears that the first four judgments will occur during a period of 30-60 days. The first trumpet-judgment will be meteoric showers of burning hail which will burn up a third of Earth.

Next, the second and third trumpet-judgments will occur and there will be *two* civilization-threatening asteroid impacts. The fourth trumpet-judgment will produce a period of extended darkness. Crops around the world will wither without sunlight and global famine will set in. (Revelation 8:2-13)

Twenty-five percent of the world's population (1.75 billion people?) will perish as a result of the first four trumpets, and every survivor will tremble at such an awesome display of God's wrath. Everyone on Earth will stop, look and listen. Billions of people will wonder, "What does God want?" "What should we do to appease God's wrath so that His horrible judgments will stop?"

As the dust from the first four trumpet-judgments begins to settle, the clergy of the world will rush to form a crisis organization. On that day, all the religions of the world will unite around the obvious necessity to appease God's wrath. The clergy of all religions will agree that God's wrath can only be appeased through repentance and worship. This "common cause" will enable diverse religions to unite, and in Revelation, this organization is called "Babylon" because the diverse coalition of religious leaders will be very confused. (Incidentally, the word Babylon means confusion.)

How can diverse religions agree on repentance and the worship of God when each religion has a different view about sin and the proper worship of God? To solve this problem, the clergy will ask their respective governments to make and enforce a series of "sin-less" laws.

The compelling rationale behind these laws will be to immediately appease God. The clergy will reason that our decadent and sinful behavior made God angry; therefore, righteous behavior (founded on principles of repentance and worship) will please Him. Political leaders in each government will survey the overwhelming destruction, and they will have no reasonable option but to go along with the requests of the united clergy.

In spite of the sincere efforts, the religious leaders of the world will not be able to unify the world in matters of repentance and worship, and the numerous "sin-less" laws will not make the

nations of the world righteous. Instead, man's religious and political response to God's wrath will only cause the misery index for humanity to climb higher.

This sequence of events will reveal an interesting point: Moral legislation does not produce righteousness. At first, the decadent behavior will cease because of the fear of God, but as time passes, humankind will return to previous behaviors. When religious leaders see people doing evil again, they will ask for even tougher laws which will result in the clergy punishing sinners through the power of the state.

The fifth trumpet-judgment will be the physical appearing of the devil (the Antichrist), and he will appear on or about the 890th day of the Great Tribulation. (The Great Tribulation will last 1,335 days - Daniel 12:12). In other words, God will hold back the appearing of the devil until *two-thirds* of the time allotted for the Great Tribulation has expired. God delays the appearing of the "Great Deception" so that most of the inhabitants of the world can receive or reject the everlasting gospel on its own merits. This is a key point. The devil *is not* allowed to appear until most of the inhabitants of Earth have had a chance to make *an informed and intelligent* decision about the truth sent from God.

After the devil is released from the abyss, the spirit realm where he is presently confined (Revelation 17:8), he will physically appear before billions of people masquerading as Almighty God. The devil will travel throughout the Earth for five months.

He will attract huge crowds and gain followers through amazing signs and miraculous wonders. He will also inflict painful intimidation on wicked people who refuse to obey him. (Revelation 9:1-11) At the end of his five months of self-promotion, the devil will declare that Earth is his kingdom. Speaking as God, he will *demand* that a one-world-church-state be established, which he will claim will last for a thousand years.

The apostle Paul says the devil will declare himself to be God and he will have the miracle working powers to prove his deceitful claim. (2 Thessalonians 2) Because honest people love truth, it can be said that dishonest people love lies. Therefore, God sends the wicked "a great lie" so that they can unite with the father of lies (John 8:44) and be destroyed. The devil's appearing presents an interesting fact. God *is not passive* about our rejection of truth. If we reject the clearest evidences of truth, then God permits the devil to sweep us away with lies. In other words, God permits those who refuse to love the truth to be deceived by their love for lies!

The Bible predicts that a large majority of the world will be deceived by Lucifer's miracles and misled by his lies. (Revelation 13:8) They will believe that the devil is Almighty God! Paul wrote, **"The coming of the lawless one** [who claims to be God in verse 4] **will be in accordance with the work of Satan** [for he is Satan] **displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because** [they heard the truth and] ***they refused to love the truth*** **and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."** (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, italics and insertions mine) Keep this thought in mind: *God does not condemn people for honestly believing things that are not true; however, God*

does condemn those who refuse to embrace the clearest evidences of truth.

After the devil appears on Earth, no one will be able to refuse the Antichrist without suffering a terrible penalty. (Revelation 9:6;13:15) Standing for truth will be painful, but going along with the devil will also prove to be painful, especially during the seven bowls. This is why the Great Tribulation is called "a time of wrath." (Daniel 8:19; 11:36) Everyone will suffer. Eventually, the devil will divide the people of Earth into ten sectors and he will set up ten kings to rule over them. Lucifer will also choose a large number of people to serve as officials in his new government.

No Room for Diversity

As King of kings (the chief political ruler of the world) and Lord of lords (the chief religious leader of the world), the devil's demand for a one-world-church-state will seem very reasonable to his followers. Think about this statement very carefully: **When "God" lives among men, there can be no room for diversity within religion or government. - When the devil lives among men, he will be able to speak for himself which will eliminate any question or ambiguity about "the will of God." The devil will demand there must be "one Lord, one faith and one baptism." The devil will quote the Bible and other sacred writings with marvelous ability to support his claims. The serpent has no equal when it comes to deception. He will be successful for a time. (Daniel 11:36) He will set up a one-world-church-state and rule Earth. His one-world-church-state is called "an image to the beast" in Revelation 13 because his government will be "a likeness" of previous fallen governments that have ruled on Earth. Calling the great government of Lucifer "an image to the beast" is a veiled denunciation of Lucifer's government because the government of Jesus Christ, which He will set up on Earth after it is purified by fire, will be totally *unlike* the governments of fallen man. In other words, God's government will not be an image of man's fallen ways. God's government is based on love, righteousness and truth. Lucifer's government is based on force, evil schemes and lies.**

How the Beast Rises

Now that we have considered several parts of the story, let us take a moment and review the sequence of prophetic events that leads up to the establishment of Lucifer's one-world-church-state (the image). Revelation 13:1 predicts that a beast that will rise from the sea shortly after God's judgments begin to fall. Although Revelation 13:1 does not say what causes this beast to rise from the sea, the Bible does address the identity, the timing and purpose of this beast. The beast that rises from the sea represents man's organized response to the overwhelming death and destruction caused by the first four trumpet-judgments. The first four trumpet-judgments will destroy one-fourth of the world's population and one-third of the world's oceans, land mass and rivers. As a result, the inhabitants of this diverse planet will quickly find a *united way* to respond to God's wrath.

The Bible states that the beast from the sea will have seven heads and ten horns, and it will exercise its authority for forty-two months. I call this a *crisis* government, a union of diverse

churches and diverse states, that will form shortly after the judgments of God begin to fall. (Remember, the devil is not allowed to physically appear on Earth for approximately 890 days, so the one-world-church-state will be a later development.) At first, this crisis government will be a coalition of the world's religious leaders who will agree and unite in a common cause to appease God.

They will implore their respective governments to implement laws demanding repentance for sin and the worship of God, and fearful legislators will respond in unity. The seven heads represent the seven religions of the world: Atheism, Heathenism, Eastern Mysticism, Judaism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. The problem with this religious coalition is that each religious group views God's will in a different way, resulting in a great deal of confusion about repentance and worship. This is why the beast is called Babylon – because the word "Babylon" means confusion.

The head that received the deadly wound (in 1798) represents the papacy, and the healing of this deadly wound indicates the pope will lead the world as chief spiritual advisor until the devil appears masquerading as God. After Lucifer appears, he will abolish all of the religions on Earth as quickly as possible because he will not tolerate diversity when "God" lives on Earth. After Lucifer convinces enough people that he is God, he will demand that an *the image* or likeness to the diverse sea beast be established.

In other words, the devil will consolidate the religions and governments of the world into a one-world-church-state that does not have to deal with the confusion caused by man's diversity. The book of Revelation gives Lucifer's one-world-church-state three titles because each title amplifies the character and actions of his one-world-church-state. These three titles are; "the image to the beast," "the great prostitute," and "the great city that rules over the kings of the Earth."

We know that God permits the devil to physically appear to lead the world into destruction. There are several reasons why God permits the devil to abolish the religions of the world, but this is the one that I find most interesting. Revelation 13 and 17 indicate the seven heads (the seven religions of the world) are blasphemous in nature (Revelation 13:1; 17:3), signifying that they have usurped the prerogatives of God. The religions of Earth are offensive to God because **all of them** are false and arrogant.

When false ideas about God are merged with man's fallen nature, religious organizations become arrogant and unwilling to change. Somehow, most clergy view religious change as a sign of weakness when in reality, truth is ever unfolding.

Even worse, lay people typically exalt their religion as though it were God! So, God permits the devil to eliminate the religions of the world which will have the calculated effect of putting millions of people in a great predicament. If people cling to their old religion, which will be outlawed, the devil will kill them for rebellion.

If they join the devil's new religion, they will have to sell their soul to the devil in order to survive, even though they may disagree with the demands of the new religion! This conflict will open up

the minds of devoutly religious people, and for the first time, they will thoughtfully and intelligently consider the annoying testimony of the 144,000. I say "annoying" because the testimony of Jesus Christ will stand in direct opposition to all of the religions on Earth including Lucifer's one-world-church-state!

Sixth Trumpet

When the appointed hour, day, month and year for the sixth trumpet-judgment arrives (Revelation 9:15), the devil will declare sovereign authority over all of Earth. This declaration will force everyone – on a single day – to take sides. People standing in opposition to his one-world-church-state will be targeted for destruction. (Revelation 13:15) The challenge on that day will be very simple. "Worship God or die." The problem, of course, is that the being claiming to be God is the devil.

The Bible indicates Lucifer will divide the population of Earth into groups of one thousand and his angels will kill one-third of mankind. The survivors of this global purge will be forced to *wear* one of two marks of the beast. The non-government survivors will wear a tattoo showing the number "666" on their right hand.

The government workers will wear a tattoo on their forehead indicating the name that the devil will use. (Revelation 13:16-18) These tattoos will serve as a non-transferable I.D. card and will be placed on the two-thirds of mankind who have joined Lucifer's one-world-church-state. Now you know why the mark of the beast is a number: 666 is two-thirds of 1,000. Of course, the devil's angels will be unable to locate and kill *all* of God's saints, but they will destroy several hundred million of them during the fifth seal. (Revelation 6:9-11;16:4-7;17:6)

The seventh trumpet-judgment in Revelation 11:15-19 occurs on Sunday, the 1,264th day of the Great Tribulation. At that point, the inhabitants of Earth will either have the mark of the beast or the seal of God. Jesus' final offer of salvation will have been terminated, and He will begin to avenge the suffering of His innocent saints by forcing the wicked to drink the bitter dregs of His wrath poured out of seven bowls – the seven last plagues. I believe the seven bowls will last about seventy days with each plague averaging ten days.

These seven bowl-judgments, unlike the seven trumpet-judgments, will fall upon the wicked without any mixture of mercy. The first four bowls will fall only on people having the mark of the beast, and the last three bowls will include Lucifer and his angels.

The Fifth Bowl

"The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done." (Revelation 16:10,11)

The fifth bowl-judgment will turn everything upside down for the wicked. This plague falls upon

the throne of the devil, and the administration of his one-world-church-state will be plunged into a dense darkness and a painful experience. Keep in mind there will be no electricity in those days.

This darkness will be similar to the darkness that plagued Pharaoh. (Exodus 10:22,23) A plague of painful sores will also befall the devil, his kings and priests. This series of events turn everything upside down for the wicked because this plague unmasks the devil. The wicked will understand that the glorious being sitting on the throne is not Almighty God as he claimed. Too late, the wicked will realize that they have been worshiping and obeying the devil because no one but a higher authority could impose this painful suffering and darkness on the devil's throne and kingdom.

The fifth bowl unmasks the devil by proving there is a higher power that is a sovereign power. (I find it ironic that the wicked discover this light while sitting in the dark.)

When this realization occurs, the one-world-church-state will immediately break down and implode because people who have the mark of the beast will learn that their God is no god after all. This is when the punishment of the great prostitute (the one-world-church-state) begins. The huge administration and world government which Lucifer assembled will be filled with people loathing the one-world-church-state they built. The devil's deception will be exposed and the wicked will be totally demoralized and disgusted.

Every wicked person will remember how he sold his soul to the devil to survive. Every wicked person will recall what the 144,000 had said. The fifth plague will provide unmistakable evidence to the wicked that their doom is near. They will hate the one world-church-state, they will loathe themselves, and the devil's great government will implode.

Sixth Bowl – Twenty Days to Go

"The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East." (Revelation 16:12) The kings (plural) from the East are the Father and Son. They will appear together in clouds of glory at the Second Coming. (See Matthew 26:64 and Revelation 6:16,17) They will come from the East because anything approaching our planet from space appears to come from the East because of our planet's clockwise rotation.

The drying up of the great river Euphrates takes a little explanation. God established the great river Euphrates as Israel's northernmost boundary when He gave the land of Canaan to Abraham. (Genesis 15:18) This great river served as a natural barrier against invading forces *from the North*. Because the great river Euphrates is fed by snow-melt from several mountains, the river overflows its banks from time to time, and the destruction left in the wake of this unstoppable flooding "in the north" became legendary.

God sometimes paralleled His wrath against Israel with the flooding of the great river Euphrates. (See Isaiah 8:7,8 and Jeremiah 47:2). God also paralleled His wrath against Israel as coming

out of the north. (Ezekiel 1:4; Jeremiah 1:14) To the ancient nation of Israel, "the flooding of the Euphrates" meant one thing: Oncoming and unstoppable destruction from the north. Once this ancient figure of speech is understood, the release of the four angels at the river Euphrates in the sixth trumpet becomes easier to understand. When the sixth trumpet-judgment occurs, an oncoming and unstoppable destruction will befall the whole world. In fact, the devil's angels will kill one-third of mankind! (Revelation 9:15)

It is interesting to notice that the sixth trumpet-judgment concerns the great river Euphrates and so does the sixth bowl-judgment. The drying up of the great river, to prepare the way for the kings from the East, means this: No barrier protecting mankind from God's wrath is left. The kings from the East will cross "the river" without resistance. The kings from the East will be unstoppable and their global destruction will be swift and complete. (See Job 37:22.)

Three Frogs

"Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty." (Revelation 16:13,14) John saw three miracle working demons that looked like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon (Lucifer), the beast (the sea beast with seven heads and ten horns, also called Babylon) and the false prophet (the devil's personation of God). This language requires some explanation.

When Lucifer is permitted to appear before the people of Earth during the fifth trumpet-judgment, the devil will present himself as a glorious *being of light*. (2 Corinthians 11:14) The devil and 200,000,000 of his angels (Revelation 9:16) will take on physical forms that humans will be able to touch and see.

This concept can be difficult to understand at first because the devil and his angels will not be human beings. Perhaps the easiest way to understand this is through the use of a hand puppet. When a capable artist puts his hand inside a hand puppet, the artist can make the hand puppet *appear* to be alive even though everyone knows that it is the hand *inside* the hand puppet that is alive.

When the fifth trumpet-judgment occurs, the glorious body masquerading as God will be a hand puppet. This is important to know because Jesus will destroy the glorious bodies which Lucifer and his angels inhabit at the Second Coming. The devil and his angels will be returned to the spirit realm for 1,000 years. (Revelation 20:1-3)

Lucifer's apparition is called a "false prophet" three times in the book of Revelation because Lucifer is a liar and he will lead the whole world astray with his lies. (Revelation 12:9) The devil will be able to deceive billions of people because they never loved truth. Thus, the devil will *earn* the title, "false prophet." Notice how the world will be tested during the Great Tribulation. Everyone will hear a call to obey God and exalt His truth. God's true prophets will proclaim God's Word.

The wicked will hear God's servants, but they will accept Lucifer's lies, and unfortunately, most of the world's clergy will unite with the false prophet! Surely, the whole world will stand in the valley of decision! **"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel."** (Joel 3:14-16)

We have already discussed how God will unmask the devil during the fifth bowl-judgment. Finally, the wicked will understand their great deception. The wicked will realize their stupidity as well as their impending doom because their protection (the one-world-church-state) turns out to be a great deception.

The implosion of the great prostitute is represented as the drying up of the great river Euphrates. Now that you understand this setting, consider the following: When the sixth bowl-judgment is poured out, the devil will acknowledge his clever deception and inform the wicked that his and their destruction is imminent. The wicked will have no place to turn. Everything they trusted in was either a lie or a calculated deception.

At that time, the devil will set out to achieve one last deception. (The devil does not give up.) He will send three miracle working demons throughout the world with the news that Jesus Christ is about to appear and that Jesus intends to destroy every wicked person. The devil will tell the wicked that they have no other option but to join with him in destroying Jesus as He nears Earth. The devil's demons will work great miracles before the kings and rulers of Earth to convince them that they have a ghost of a chance at saving themselves.

Perhaps one of the reasons that John describes these three demons as frogs is found in Psalm 78:45: **"He** [God] **sent swarms of flies that devoured them, and frogs that devastated them."** Remember that Pharaoh's magicians were able to convince Pharaoh that his God was as great as the God of the Hebrews because they could also call up frogs from the Nile River. (Exodus 8:7) However, this was the **last deception** that Pharaoh's magicians were able to reproduce before their rebellious king.

In other words, the imagery of demons as frogs in Revelation 16 parallels the **last deception** of Satan, and the devastation that follows for the kings and armies of Earth parallels the destruction of the king of Egypt and his soldiers. Because the three frogs (three demons) come out of the mouths of the dragon, beast and false prophet, these demonically controlled entities are in perfect agreement with each other. They know their only remaining option is to destroy Jesus as He arrives. How low can evil minds sink?

Who could think of actually entering into combat against Almighty God? Truly, the carnal heart is hostile toward God and His laws: The carnal heart would rather die than surrender to God's authority and given half a chance, it would kill God.

"'Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.' Then they gathered the kings together

to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." (Revelation 16:15,16)

Remember, the seven bowls will last for a period of seventy days, and each plague will last ten days. This means the 1,290th day (the date for the universal slaughter of the saints – Daniel 12:11) occurs during the third bowl-judgment. The devil will rally the wicked to kill every saint they can find. The good news surrounding this event is that (a) God responds to this evil tactic with a horrible plague for the wicked, and (b) the wicked will not be able to find nor kill a single saint. (Daniel 12:1)

Notice what happens to the wicked at this time: **"The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: 'You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets** [during the time of the seven trumpets]**, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.' And I heard the altar respond: 'Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.' "** (Revelation 16:4-7)

The sixth bowl-judgment (demonic deception) begins twenty-five days after the 1,290th day. At that time, the saints will be hiding in remote places, desperate for the appearing of Jesus, and they will be clinging to life through faith in Him. This is why Jesus speaks to the saints saying, **'Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.'**

Armageddon

John concludes the ten days of the sixth bowl-judgment saying, **"Then they** [the demons] **gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon."** (Revelation 16:16, insertion mine) This text has puzzled Bible students for almost 2,000 years, but I think the meaning is quite simple. The word *har-megiddon* is mentioned once in the Bible, so a word study on "Armageddon" is not practical. To be accurate, *har-megiddon* is not even a Hebrew word!

However, in Old Testament times it is well known that the Hebrews would join words together to create names as circumstances warranted. For example, when God called Abraham to offer his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, the Lord intervened. The Lord cancelled the sacrifice of Isaac because He provided a ram that was caught in a thicket. Abraham named that place "Jehovahjireh" by putting two Hebrew words together. Jehovahjireh means "Jehovah will provide [the sacrifice]" or "Jehovah will see to it [that the sacrifice will be provided]." (Genesis 22:14)

The word Armageddon appears to be a combination of two Greek words: *har* and *Megiddon*. The Greek word *har* means mountain. The word *Megiddon* refers to a battlefield where kings Ahaziah and Josiah died. (2 Kings 9:27; 23:30) The interesting thing about Josiah's death is that he foolishly went against God's command. He foolishly made war with Pharaoh Neco who was passing through the land, and Josiah was killed. (2 Kings 23:29; 2 Chronicles 35:21,22) In other

words, the association with Megiddo is that of a battlefield where kings die.

The kings of Earth will foolishly make war with Almighty God at the mountain of God and they will be destroyed. At the end of that day of battle, "the King of the mountain" will be Almighty God. The kings of Earth will perish. The wicked will be killed, the glorious but evil apparitions of the devil and his angels will be consumed with fire and returned to their spirit realm. The battle of Armageddon occurs during the last ten days of Earth's history.

"The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'It is done!' Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city [the throne, the buildings and offices of Lucifer's one-world-church-state] **split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible."** (Revelation 16:17-21)

Great Tribulation Will Be a Test of Character

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The August 2005 issue of *The Wake Up Report* focused on the importance of making a personal commitment to be honest in every aspect of life and the necessity of standing on the side of righteousness and truth *at any price*. Within this context, the identity of the Great Prostitute in Revelation 17 was discussed because she represents a great horde of people who will prostitute themselves with the devil to survive during the Great Tribulation.

The Battle of Armageddon was also discussed in last month's study because it exposes the logical end to which every carnal heart will go. *Every* carnal heart would destroy God in order to save itself because the carnal heart loves itself more than it loves God. (This is why the wicked have to be annihilated at the end of the 1,000 years – God's universe cannot be free of sin until every carnal heart is destroyed.) From birth, our carnal nature stands in opposition to loving God with all our heart, mind and soul. (Romans 8:5-7)

This is why we have to be born again. (John 3:3) Of course, God does not have any carnal propensities in His heart. He has proven that He loves us more than He loves His own life and He requires the same of us. (Matthew 22:37,38; John 10:11-17)

Have you ever found yourself in a sudden and unexpected situation where you were challenged to be honest? I have. My failures remind me of Paul's words in Romans 7. Even after Paul had been a Christian for 30 years, he wrote: **"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me."** (Romans 7:15-17)

Have you ever found yourself in an ongoing situation where you tossed and turned with the consequences for being honest? I am speaking of situations where dishonesty *appears* to resolve or make the best of a bad situation. Should situations determine our commitment to honesty? No.

Being honest at *all costs* produces peace and even though there may be serious consequences for telling the truth, there is joy in having done the right thing. Honesty may produce an immediate problem, but honesty also enables God to accomplish objectives that go far beyond our knowledge. (Remember how Joseph went to prison for refusing to have a sexual affair with Potiphar's wife, only to become the second highest ruler in Egypt? Genesis 39)

Honesty Caught by Surprise

For an example of how the carnal heart works, let us examine Peter's boasting. **"Peter declared, 'Even if all fall away, I will not.' 'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'today – yes, tonight – before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.' But Peter insisted emphatically, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.'**

And all the others said the same." (Mark 14:29-31)

Most Christians are aware that Peter denied the Lord within a few hours of his empty boast. I think there are two reasons that Peter denied Jesus. First, when Peter said he would never disown Jesus, he was thinking about being brave *alongside* Jesus as Jesus moved to establish a kingdom on Earth, but the capture and humiliation of Jesus separated Peter from Jesus. When Peter saw Jesus in chains, Peter was defeated because he thought Jesus had been defeated. In a matter of a few hours, Peter's world imploded.

When the young girl identified Peter in the courtyard, fear had pushed his emotions totally out of control, leaving him an emotional "basket case." Second, I am sure that Peter *honestly* thought when he declared his loyalty to Jesus that he would be loyal to Jesus "no matter what," but Peter was not aware of the strength of his carnal nature. When circumstances forced Peter to consider the painful ramifications of being associated with a defeated Jesus, he lied to escape *the sufferings of Jesus*.

Make no mistake about it. Circumstances during the Great Tribulation will produce a sharp test of character. **"He** [the beast, the crisis government, the pre-cursor to the great prostitute] **was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation** [including the United States, Russia, China, etc.]**. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. He who has an ear, let him hear."** (Revelation 13:7-9, insertions mine)

God will thoroughly test the honesty of every human being. He will separate the sheep from the goats by testing our honesty and our love for Him, as well as our love for our neighbor. I am discussing these important and timely matters because I believe that this generation will soon experience the Great Tribulation and I want to encourage everyone who is willing to listen.

God will, at the right time, give His children the necessary strength to stand for truth and righteousness and be victorious over the forces of evil. Notice what Revelation says about the 144,000 who will die and be resurrected during the Great Tribulation: **"And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: 'Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.' "** (Revelation 15:2-4)

Abandon the Human Point of View!

When we study the cause and effects of the Great Tribulation, we have a tendency to examine this topic from a human point of view instead of looking through "the eye of faith." God has a number of important goals to accomplish during the Great Tribulation and we are much better

off when we focus on God's objectives and God's power rather than trying to save ourselves. Hopefully, the following parallel will clarify what I mean.

Remember the incident in Numbers 13 when God directed Moses to send twelve leaders from Israel into Canaan to spy out the promised land. At that time, God was ready to move His people forward. He was ready to fulfill one of His promises to Abraham – to give the land of Canaan to the descendants of Israel.

Of course, God knew the giants who lived in Canaan by name and He knew about the great walled cities - but what are these measly things to Almighty God? God told Moses to send twelve leaders from Israel to gather information about the land of Canaan because He wanted His people to hear from their own leaders about the treasures and goodness that would soon be theirs!

God wanted to encourage and delight His people. He also wanted to give them a "heads up" on the obstacles which they would face so that there would be no overwhelming surprises. (Incidently, this is also the reason why the books of Daniel and Revelation were put in the Bible. God wants us to understand His plans.) However, when the twelve spies returned from their investigation of Canaan, the Bible indicates that ten spies were *overwhelmed with the magnitude of suffering that would be necessary to conquer Canaan.* Ten leaders presented a human point of view and two leaders, Caleb and Joshua, presented God's point of view.

"At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land. They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. They gave Moses this account: 'We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.

We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.' Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.' But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are.' And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored.

They said, 'The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak [the giant] **come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.' That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, 'If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?' And they said to each other, 'We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.'. . . The Lord said to Moses, 'How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all**

the miraculous signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they.' " (Numbers 13:25-14:4, 11,12 insertion mine)

The Lord became furious with the nation of Israel when He heard His people grumbling. He had performed hundreds of miracles for them. He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and had taken them through the Red Sea. He was providing water and food from Heaven each day!

His cloud over the tabernacle was a shelter from the desert sun and a glowing light at night. He was taking care of His people on a day-to-day basis and they still did not trust Him enough to go forward. That is the nature of the carnal heart. It is so concerned with its convenience and comfort and so afraid of suffering that no amount of divine kindness is ever enough. So, the Lord condemned that hopeless generation to death. They all died in the wilderness, except Caleb and Joshua.

Same Song, Second Verse

We can be sure that when the Great Tribulation begins, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. When God's judgments begin to fall, billions of people will curse God and give up hope when they see their security and cherished possessions destroyed. Yet, this will not be the worst thing to happen. Prior to the seven bowls, the greatest suffering during the Great Tribulation will not be caused by God's judgments, but rather, the suffering that men will inflict on each other!

The Bible tells us how this will happen. Revelation predicts that the religious and political leaders of the world will interpret the horrible manifestations of God's wrath as a wake-up call having biblical proportions. The leaders of the world will conclude that God is demanding repentance and worship. As a result, the countries of the world will rapidly transition from nations consumed with endless wars and internal bickering into a coalition of nations trying to appease God *with their manmade solutions*.

Fear of the Almighty will shatter diverse religious barriers that currently exist. This is precisely what God wants. He intends to set up global circumstances so that the things that He values most will conflict with the things the carnal nature values most. In other words, when God's wrath is released and life is reduced to a day-to-day survival mode, we will soon discover what matters most to each of us. In this context, honesty, faith and love will be tested. God will do this by sending a clarion message of truth into the world through His 144,000 servants.

God's truth-filled demands, if obeyed, will put the honest in heart in direct conflict with the authorities of this world. We will not be able to obey God and man. This conflict will produce pain. *This is how our love for honesty and truth will be tested.*

I hope you understand that God has deliberately and carefully designed the events of the Great Tribulation to test mankind. God is about to sort the living into two camps and a harvest of people who are pure in heart will be found! **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see**

God." (Matthew 5:8) By God’s grace and with His help, I plan to be in that number and I know you do, too! Heaven will be cheap enough.

Hurricane Katrina - Another Birth Pain

Author: Larry W. Wilson

At 10 pm CDT on Saturday, August 27, 2005, the National Hurricane Center issued a hurricane warning for the north central gulf coast from Morgan City, Louisiana, eastward to the Alabama/Florida border including the city of New Orleans. A hurricane warning means that hurricane conditions are expected within the next 24 hours and preparations to protect life and property should be rushed to completion.

At the time of the warning, the center of Hurricane Katrina was located about 335 miles south-southeast of the mouth of the Mississippi River. Tens of thousands heeded the warning and the highways going out of New Orleans were choked with cars alternating between stop and 10 mph.

Hurricane Katrina arrived at 6:30 Monday morning, August 29, 2005, as a category four hurricane. A couple of days later, people began to realize that it was one of the greatest natural disasters that has ever occurred in United States history. The swath of destruction covered 90,000 square miles (about the size of Kansas).

As this article goes to press, more than 300,000 people have lost their homes. Engineers estimate that as much as eighty percent of New Orleans flooded because the levees and water pumps failed. The damage caused by wind and water could total more than 100 billion dollars. The area between New Orleans, and Mobile, Alabama clearly resembles the destruction caused by the tsunami that hit southern Asia in December, 2004. Given the biblical proportion of this event, here are some thought questions to consider:

1. Was Hurricane Katrina an act of God that is, a deliberate punishment?

2. Did God time the arrival of Hurricane Katrina so that the Southern Decadence convention could not be held? (The Southern Decadence convention is a gay and lesbian version of Mardi Gras that has been ongoing in New Orleans since 1972. This orgy and drunken celebration lasts four or five days and more than 120,000 revelers attended last year.)

3. Did God target New Orleans and the cities of the gulf coast because the citizens there are more wicked than other cities in the United States? Is it possible that New Orleans and the gulf coast cities had exhausted God's grace and protection?

4. Are a majority of the victims of Hurricane Katrina evil people?

5. Were you surprised at the lawlessness and looting that occurred in New Orleans?

6. What will be Katrina's influence on the United States' economy in days to come?

7. As you watched Katrina's drama unfold, did you think about coming events?

Commentary

I believe Hurricane Katrina, like the tsunami in southern Asia in December 2004, was another "birth pain," and you need to be aware that several more "birth pains" are coming. As the Second Coming of Jesus draws near, events of biblical proportion will escalate in severity and frequency, and their purpose is fourfold: First, disasters forcibly remind us that material things are temporal. The things in life that matter most are the people around us – loved ones and neighbors. Second, disaster bring out the best and worst in people.

True character is revealed in anarchy. Caring people respond to the needs of those around them and selfish people think only of themselves and their survival. The problem with the carnal nature is that a large number of people (both rich and poor) are law abiding only because they are *forced* to be so. Price gougers, thieves and looters are of the same ilk. Third, the economic ripple caused by huge disasters *forces* those who were unaffected to sympathize with those who lost everything. Last, horrific events are *prophetic samples of things to come*.

They make the scope of Revelation's story easier to comprehend. The powers of nature are truly awesome and in this light, "birth pains" are for the benefit of the current generation.

According to His sovereign authority, the Father predetermined long ago that *random and violent acts of nature* would sharply increase near the end of the world. Terrible events will grow in frequency and strength as we draw closer to the Second Coming. The forces that create these natural events were "built in" from the beginning of creation. God designed that nature itself would draw attention to the fact that this planet is predestined for destruction. The cancer of sin is about to be eliminated and the appointed hour for the total destruction of Earth is near.

You may ask, "How do we really know the end of the world is near?" Basically, there are three ways to know that the time of the Second Coming is near. First, the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation prove that the end is near because they are chronological in nature. Remember, the book of Daniel was sealed up **until the time of the end** (Daniel 12:4,9), and now that we understand the four rules of apocalyptic interpretation that were sealed up in Daniel, we find that Daniel and Revelation chronologically chart the progression of time from 605 B.C. to the Second Coming.

In other words, the sequence of events presented in Daniel and Revelation means there is no other possible conclusion than we are near the end. Second, the frequency and intensity of "birth pains" indicates the Second Coming is near. Sooner or later, the whole world will be affected by these catastrophic events and as a result of these calamities, many will awaken to the fact that planet Earth itself is dying. Third, the degenerate condition of people indicates the Second Coming is near.

Paul wrote, **"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather**

than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them." (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

The Beginning of Birth Pains

Just before His death, the disciples of Jesus asked about signs that would herald His return and the end of the world. Jesus said, **"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are *not alarmed*. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of *birth pains*."** (Matthew 24:6-8, italics mine)

The apostle Paul also associated "birth pains" with the Second Coming. He wrote, **"For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying** [we need]**, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as *labor pains* on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."** (1 Thessalonians 5:2,3, italics and insertion mine)

Calamitous events are often blamed on God (called acts of God) because God is sovereign. Many people believe that God controls everything that happens, but this is not the case. If this were true, then sin itself would never have happened. However, Bible history does indicate that God does destroy nations and punish people. He even destroyed the whole world in Noah's day. There is one major difference between violent acts of nature and God's wrath. God lets people know what He is about to do before He does it!

This is a crucial point. In fact, this is why the book of Revelation demands understanding. There is a specific warning for Earth's final generation in the book of Revelation. This warning can be understood before the Great Tribulation begins and if people choose to reject it, they do so at their own peril. **"Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets."** (Amos 3:7)

Hurricanes, tsunamis, famines, earthquakes and runaway fires are not necessarily a deliberate punishment sent from God. God has used and will use such events as punishment, but when He does, He sends a specific warning. In today's context, calamitous events that come without divine warning should be understood as "birth pains." God has not yet punished New Orleans and other notoriously wicked places on Earth, but that day is coming.

Currently, God is trying to speak to our generation, but unfortunately, too few people listen to His Word. For example, millions of Christians are acquainted with the term, "The Great Tribulation," but the irony is that very few people believe it applies to them. Most Christians fall into one of two categories.

The larger group believes they will be in Heaven when the Great Tribulation begins because of a so-called pre-tribulation rapture. The other group believes the bulk of Revelation happened in the past, that is, it is historical in nature. The net effect in both cases is the same – Christians

conclude the seven trumpets of Revelation will not affect them! How sad. How delusional. Jesus said that birth pains will indicate the end of the world is coming and the good news is that birth pains will eventually give way to the creation of a new order. Like Abraham, let's keep looking for the city whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:10)

Lovers of Pleasure More than Lovers of God

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Lovers of Pleasure More Than Lovers of God

"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. -2 Timothy 3:1-5

I would like to discuss a behavior that is caused by our carnal nature. This behavior can become a big problem if we aren't careful. Untreated, this behavior can develop into an addiction (an addiction is a behavior which cannot be controlled by its victim). Of course, this problem is easier to overcome if it is detected at its onset than after it has gained control.

This is why people should be aware of this disorder and its symptoms. I call this disorder "spiritual-obsessive-compulsive-disorder" or SOCD.* Obsession begins when a person becomes excessively concerned or focused on something. An obsession can grow to the point that it begins to cause harm to its victim and/or those around him. Compulsive behavior, the twin sister of obsession, is an unwanted response (the loss of restraint) to the obsession. If an obsession becomes strong enough, a victim of SOCD will do whatever it takes to gratify the obsession even though he intellectually knows that his actions will bring harm to himself and/or others around him.

*SOCD is not to be confused with OCD. Mental health professionals have narrowly defined OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) as a involuntary disorder that is caused by various types of anxiety. Victims of OCD require specialized treatment by trained professionals.

To the untrained eye, people suffering from a mild case of SOCD look normal, they act normal (at least in public) and they seem to be getting along with the challenges of life as well as anyone else. However, those who are well acquainted with victims of SOCD sense that "something isn't right" even if they don't understand what is going on.

They realize that the victim of SOCD is not balanced, that is, using good judgment in a particular way. They detect the victim is making foolish decisions in some area of life and they can see that these decisions are producing serious and unnecessary consequences. Victims of SOCD will admit that their behavior is "not good," but they are powerless to stop their obsessive compulsive behavior. Those who live with or work around victims of SOCD know that the victim is likely to become hostile if his obsession is criticized or condemned.

Therefore, it can be very difficult to discuss an obsession with a victim of SOCD because the victim is often frustrated with himself. He knows that he is out of control, but he also knows he cannot stop what he is doing. Even though a victim of SOCD has every intention to do the right

thing, he is unable to follow through. Ironically, victims of SOCD often justify and/or rationalize their behavior – even after it is clear to them and others around them that the obsession has become harmful.

Before you say to yourself, "Wow! I'm happy that I don't have SOCD," let's examine one of many progressions that can lead into SOCD. Please consider these two simple statements: First, everyone on Earth loves pleasure. (Even a masochist gets pleasure out of suffering.) Second, few people are truly content. Because these two statements are true, most everyone is a candidate for SOCD.

Here's a short test and see if you are spiritually progressing toward SOCD: Do you love something or someone too much for your own good? Do you love something so much that it is hurting you and/or those around you? For example, do you love food so much that you constantly overeat? Do you love your work so much that you don't have time to rest, to worship God or to associate with your family and friends? Do you love your job so much that it is more important than anything else in your life?

Do you love money so much that you can't bear to part with it? When was the last time you gave cash as a gift – not counting obligatory gifts such as birthday, Christmas, anniversary, etc.? Do you love sex so much that you think about it constantly? Do you love your children so much that you can't discipline them for their own good? Do you love your pet more than the people around you? Do you love fashion so much that you spend hours shopping or looking through catalogs? Do you love sports so much you can't bear to miss a game when your team plays?

Do you love your car so much that any flaw is distressing? Do you love the praise of others so much that you actually think of ways to get praise? Do you love taking first place in a contest more than those participating with you? Do you love your home and furnishings so much that you spend every available dollar for more stuff to put in your house? Do you spend more than you should on things that bring you pleasure? These simple questions should give you an idea of how SOCD can begin – it can begin with loving something so much that it causes harm.

But Wait! There's More.

The devil and his demons study each of us very closely to see what inherited predispositions we have. They constantly stress test our "want gland" to see if they can create discontent. After they determine our weakness and the state of our discontentment, they get together and come up with a series of tailored temptations to induce us into pursuing a life of leisure and pleasure. Often, the first temptations into pleasure (self-indulgence) are not sinful, and this fact makes the devil's effort to stimulate the "want gland" very successful. After all, there's nothing wrong with wanting – is there? But, after we have participated in a *little* pleasure and discovered what a good thing that was, it only stands to reason that more pleasure is better.

As a lifestyle of finding pleasure develops, the devil positions us where he can finally begin to work us over. By leading us into an acquired taste for pleasure, he has gained control without

causing us to actually violate our conscience. Very clever. When the time comes to induce us into sin, the devil tempts us with a pleasure *and the initial price for this pleasure is* a small sin. The devil is a master at gradualism. He is also a master at diminishing the penalty for sin. In other words, the devil is a master at making sin look insignificant.

He knows that if he can create an appetite for pleasure, then he has won a big battle *before sin begins* because he knows that it will be very difficult to say "no" later on to his temptations. Have you experienced this chain of events?

To illustrate how the pursuit of pleasure can lead into the grip of SOCD, please consider this sad illustration. Ted Bundy, the infamous serial killer who was executed in 1989, confessed that he became a sex addict when he was a young teenager. It is believed that he killed a minimum of thirty-six women. (Even on his dying day, he could not remember exactly how many women he had killed.) Shortly before his execution, I saw him interviewed on TV and I heard him express the following thoughts to a TV reporter: "I am a victim of pornography.

Pornography took control of my life at a young age and it created an insatiable desire for sex that could not be satisfied. Desire for sex burned within me every day and my need for sex was so overwhelming that it destroyed every female relationship that I managed to start. Sexual deprivation turned into sexual frustration which turned into sexual rage. I vented my sexual rage on unsuspecting women because I knew I could get away with it. I found relief in raping and killing because it produced sexual gratification.

Violence became the only way I could silence the churning desire for sex within me. " Homicide investigators have known for years that Bundy's chilling words are all too true. They call this type of murder "a crime of passion." Actually, Bundy's horrible crimes should be also be called "crimes caused by SOCD."

I have chosen Bundy's testimony to make three points about SOCD. First, as a young man, he became engrossed with pornography because it offered some "harmless" pleasure. But, pornography's pleasure isn't harmless, it eventually demands a sexual experience with someone. I have heard Christian men claim that there was nothing wrong with "a little porn to keep the bedroom interesting." They believe that nude pictures can't hurt anyone, but this is not true – ask the families of Ted Bundy's victims.

Second, Ted became obsessed with sex through pornography. He fantasized about sex and he sought out relationships with females for the purpose of having sex. Because he was obsessed with sex, no female wanted to be around him for very long. Consequently, he could not sustain meaningful relationships and his failure at finding happiness and contentment caused endless frustration which eventually turned into loathing for women. The very thing that Ted loved ruined his life and it eventually led him to commit thirty-six murders to achieve sexual gratification!

Third, Ted became compulsive about sex. He could not restrain himself. Ted Bundy had a very high IQ. He eluded capture for many years. The point here is that passion can overrule intellect. After raping and killing his first woman in order to have sex, he discovered a demonic sense of pleasure and the rest is history.

Ted Bundy became obsessed with sexual pleasure. Yes, he knew what he was doing was wrong, but he could not control his passion for sexual pleasure. Because everyone wants pleasure, everyone has a weakness for too much pleasure. Is the devil tempting you with pleasure? Ask yourself (and if you are married, ask your spouse) is there anything that I love that is causing harm to myself and/or those around me?

Keeping Balance

The human experience is made up of many facets. God wants us to be accountable, responsible and self-controlled. He wants us to be good stewards of the assets He has put in our hands. God wants to live within us and give us joy. If our life is balanced, the joy that comes from the sum of all of its parts will fill our life with contentment and happiness – a genuine happiness that produces health and well being for ourselves and those around us. On the other hand, the devil is constantly moving the world away from God and toward more pleasure so that he can tempt us into sin with excessive pleasure. **"For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world."** (1 John 2:16)

The devil will do his best to get us to obsess over something that appears to be innocent at first, but it can become something that will eventually take control of our life if we don't watch out! The devil wants to control us through an appetite for pleasure and once he gains control, he can use our obsession to destroy us and the happiness of those around us. He loves to see SCOD victims imposing suffering on innocent people around them. You may not be tempted with porn magazines, but are you tempted with fashion magazines or catalogs?

You may be not tempted with over-eating, but are you tempted with the pleasure of eating out more than you should? You may not be tempted to gossip, but are you tempted to watch the gossip shows on TV? You may not be tempted with stealing money, but are you tempted with gambling, overworking or overreaching to make more money? Which produces greater pleasure: Watching a movie for two hours or studying God's Word for a couple hours? How do you want to spend your retirement years: Serving God or enjoying a "self-indulgent life on easy street?"

Ah, the temptation for pleasure is so easy – so pernicious. No wonder the apostle Paul wrote, "**But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money**. . . . **lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power."** The highway into SOCD is broad and many are traveling down that road without realizing their destination. Unchecked, the power of sin will overpower us! Paul wrote, **"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me."** (Romans 7:15-17)

We have to be on guard against the devil's tactics. Paul wrote, **"But godliness with contentment is great gain."** (1 Timothy 6:6) At this time, our nation is consumed with the pursuit of pleasure – "eat, drink and be merry" – just as it was in Noah's day. Pleasure is

momentary, but true joy springs from knowing God, living the life that He has called us to live. Yes, a measured amount of pleasure is important in every life, but when we become hooked on pleasure, we're in trouble. Too much pleasure deadens our spiritual interests.

Too much pleasure is intoxicating. When separated from God and His peace, it becomes easier to experience obsession and an obsession can lead to compulsive behavior which, in the end, is harmful and destructive.

The world offers more entertainment, bigger thrills and chills, extreme pleasures and greater luxury to satisfy discontentment, but the Lord offers a peace that passes understanding. Which do you want? Jesus said, **"Come unto me . . . .and I will give you rest."** (Matthew 11:28) He is looking for disciples – those disciplined by His teachings and matured by His grace. The apostle James wrote, **"Consider it *pure joy*, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."** (James 1:2-4, italics mine) If you want to be free of discontent and obsession, turn to Jesus, the King of Peace.

Ask Him to give you the power to overcome. His truth and calling will set you free.

The Rapture Doctrine - Fact or Fiction

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The widely popular doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture hinges on four basic doctrines:

(a) Even though the Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah, they are still God's chosen people. Therefore, God has to fulfill all of the promises that He made to ancient Israel because God *always* keeps His promises.

(b) Salvation has occurred in different ways at different times (dispensations). Therefore, Christians are saved today in a different way than the Jews and other people were before the cross.

(c) The seventieth week of Daniel 9 points forward to a period of seven years during which the Great Tribulation will take place, and

(d) God will not allow the church to suffer His wrath during the Great Tribulation. He will take it to Heaven.

Advocates of this theory weave these four concepts into a divine conflict which God resolves with a pre-tribulation rapture. Basically, the scenario is this: Israel's persistent rejection of Jesus Christ as Messiah prevents God from fulfilling His promises to them. Therefore, when the time allotted to the Gentiles ends, God will suddenly remove the church from Earth.

When the Jews discover that hundreds of millions of Christians are missing from Earth, 144,000 Jews will convert to Christianity and they (12,000 for each of the 12 tribes) will go throughout the world proclaiming the gospel of Jesus during the Great Tribulation.

Thus, many unbelievers will receive salvation through the Jews and be saved by Jesus at the Second Coming. To many people, this scenario makes perfect sense. Everything works out so completely: The church will not participate in the Great Tribulation, Israel will convert to Christianity after the church is raptured, and God will be able to fulfill all of the glorious promises that He originally made to the nation of Israel.

Before we go any further, I need to make four statements. First, as a follower of Jesus Christ, my prayer for many years has been, "Lord, I don't care what the truth may be, I just want to know it. I don't care where the truth may take me or what it costs; I just want to understand your Word and your teachings." In other words, as I approach this subject, I want you to know that I do not have any reason to exalt or diminish the rapture doctrine. I do not represent a religious organization nor do I belong to one, so I do not have a position to defend or assert.

The Bible says that we are to test "all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21) to determine whether they are fact or fiction and this is a summary report of my investigation.

Second, after studying the Bible for 35 years, I have to say that the Bible is not an easy book to study or understand. Biblical themes are huge and intricate, and various elements in each theme are scattered from one end of the Bible to the other. Because the Bible is comprehensive and complex (actually a library of 66 books), much confusion and antagonistic diversity about its teachings exist among Christians.

The fact that there are more than 220 Christian denominations in the United States today, each claiming to have and teach pure Bible truth, proves this point. So, given the breadth and scope of the Bible, I think a good student should study through the whole Bible a few times before taking a strong position on some of its more difficult concepts.

Over the years, I have observed that new converts find it helpful "to be led" through the Bible by those they trust, usually the pastor(s) of the denomination who brought them to Christ. While there is nothing wrong with this process, the problem is that few believers continue to *search* the Scriptures for truths greater than what their denomination offers. (Paul also observed this problem. See Hebrews 5:11-6:3) In other words, many Christians confuse "arriving at the truth" with joining a church.

The end result is that many Christians grow complacent after "getting saved" and they believe learning more about Jesus and His Word is optional. This mind set is unfortunate, but common. When I hear a Christian say, "The only thing that matters is my relationship with Jesus," it translates to me, "I have my ticket to Heaven." More often than not this indicates the spiritual problem that the Christian has closed his mind to greater truths and has essentially terminated his investigation of God and His Word.

Third, everyone (including myself) approaches a study of the Bible with bias and predisposition. For example, bias can be cultural (this means that our basic views about God were absorbed from the people who live around us), bias can come from religious training (this means that we were raised by parents who belonged to a particular faith, so we are more likely to adapt religious ideas that align with the views of our parents), and bias can be as simple as arrogance and ego (this means that anyone who does not understand the Bible as we do is hopelessly stupid).

The problem with bias is that most of us do not recognize our bias. Consequently, many people approach the Bible to prove their views instead of permitting the Bible to teach them things that they do not want to believe. Furthermore, many people do not have the courage to stand alone in their beliefs and suffer the social consequences that comes from being religiously different. The end result is that most people tend to stay within or near the religious ideas into which they were born. This too, is unfortunate, but understandable.

Last, truth is proven by the harmony that comes from the sum of its parts. This statement is an unimpeachable verity within all sciences (including theology), but the problem in all sciences and the Bible in particular, is the presence of *apparent* contradictions. For example, at first glance some passages in the Bible suggest that people will burn in hell "forever," and other passages indicate the wicked will be burned up and the saints will walk upon their ashes!

Many Christians fall into the trap of exalting the passages they like and diminishing or distorting the passages they dislike. This is foolish. There is a divine purpose for *apparent* conflicts. God wants us to dig deep into His Word to find the truth.

Digging takes time and it is a lot of work, but mining for truth is rewarding, and searching for harmonious answers endears the Bible to us in a way that would otherwise be impossible. The deeper we dig, the more we discover! Often, the subject becomes larger and more comprehensive than we first thought, and finally, perfect harmony rises from the sum of all the parts. Of course, God is not in conflict with Himself nor His Word, but there are *apparent* conflicts in the Bible which make perfect sense once the *whole truth* is known.

If the Bible student understands from the beginning there are *apparent* conflicts in the Bible, he is more likely to give every passage equal weight when trying to resolve his questions. In short, I have found that *the Bible will only yield its intended meaning when the sum of all of the parts becomes harmonious.*

Why am I elaborating on these four matters? In a nutshell, I believe the four underlying doctrines that support the rapture theory are flawed and incomplete doctrines. There are passages of Scripture that stand in opposition to the fundamentals on which these four doctrines are built. I am convinced the rapture doctrine, as wonderful as it sounds, is "a fragile house of cards" simply because it is not harmonious with the sum of **all** that the Bible has to say about these matters.

World Events

Putting theology aside for a moment, many Christians have begun to question whether there will be a pre-tribulation rapture. They are wondering if a pre-tribulation rapture is too good to be true. Why should the final generation escape the Great Tribulation when all other generations of Christians have suffered in the extreme for their faith? History says that nine of the twelve disciples became martyrs, Romans slaughtered tens of thousands of early Christians, and millions of Protestants suffered persecution and death during the Dark Ages.

Even more compelling is that today, everyone sees tribulation escalating in the world around us.

On the morning of December 26, 2004, approximately 275,000 people suddenly perished in southern Asia. A great earthquake under the Indian Ocean caused a huge tsunami to form a 40 foot wall of water, drowning a quarter million people. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated 90,000 square miles along the U.S. Gulf coast and more than a thousand people perished. A few weeks later, Hurricane Rita ripped up the coasts of eastern Texas and western Louisiana.

Then, near the end of October, Hurricane Wilma, the most powerful hurricane ever recorded, devastated the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico before pounding Florida and putting six million people in the dark. On October 8, 2005, a great earthquake occurred in the region of Kashmir where the boundaries of India and Pakistan meet. This earthquake affected the lives of five

million people, and approximately 80,000 died, 60,000 were seriously injured, and 800,000 people had no shelter from winter weather.

If this is not enough, people continue to be concerned about a possible outbreak of viral bird flu because epidemiologists are very concerned that the whole world could be on the edge of a great pandemic of influenza. Scientists say that if the H5N1 avian virus mutates and becomes communicable between people, influenza could kill 100 million people within a mere twenty-one days! In 1915-1918, there was a global outbreak of influenza that killed approximately 40 million people worldwide and there are several factors indicating that Earth is primed for another devastating outbreak.

The intensity and frequency of natural disasters are making some pre-tribulation believers nervous because growing numbers of people are suffering hardship and tribulation now. Many rapture believing preachers say that recent hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes are judgments from God, but the problem with these horrible events is that the victims are both Christians and non-Christians alike. This is unsettling.

If Christians are supposed to escape God's wrath with a pre-tribulation rapture, the question begs to be asked, "Why aren't Christians escaping God's wrath now?" If we are honest, we must admit that Christians have been persecuted for the past 2,000 years. Will there really be a pre-tribulation rapture for the last generation of saints? In a word, the answer is "no." The Bible repeatedly indicates there will be one gathering of the saints which occurs at the Second Coming. Notice Paul's words:

"According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we [the believers] **who are still alive, who are left** [on Earth] **till the** [second] **coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those** [we will not go to Heaven before those] **who have fallen asleep** [temporarily died]**. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left** [on Earth] **will be caught up together with them** [that is, the living will join the righteous who were resurrected from their graves] **in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we** [the dead in Christ and the believers who were living on Earth at the time of the Second Coming] **will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words."** (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, insertions mine)

Points to Ponder

I cannot begin to address the flaws with the four doctrines upon which a pre-tribulation rapture is based in this short article. However, I can make a few comments on each of the four doctrines. If you care to investigate my findings on various aspects of this matter, please look up the references provided.

Doctrine #1: Even though the Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah, they are still God's chosen people. Therefore, God has to fulfill all of the promises that He made to ancient Israel because God *always* keeps His promises.

LW: The Bible teaches that God changed the definition of Israel by creating a new covenant. Galatians 3:29: **"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed [sperm], and heirs according to the promise."** Ephesians 2:19: **"Consequently, you [Gentiles] are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household."** These two verses indicate that yes, the Jews are still God's chosen people, but the "Jews" are no longer a race of people, but instead a group of people who have accepted Christ!

All that God promised to Abraham will be given to those who believe in Jesus. For more information on this topic, please see: Chapter 11, *A Study on the Seven Seals and the 144,000*.

Doctrine #2: Salvation has occurred in different ways at different times (the doctrine of dispensationalism); therefore, Christians are saved today in a different way than Jews and other people were before the cross.

LW: The Bible teaches that salvation has always come through faith. There are no dispensations with respect to salvation. According to Hebrews 11, the first man to die (Abel) was saved by faith! Paul clearly says that salvation did not come to the Jews through the slaughter of animals "for it is impossible for the blood of animals to take away the guilt of sin." (Hebrews 10:4) For more information on this topic, please see: Chapters 7 and 8 of my book *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega.* here: Chapter 7: *What Was Nailed to the Cross?* and Chapter 8: *God's Covenants*

Doctrine #3: The seventieth week of Daniel 9 points forward to a period of seven years during which the Great Tribulation will take place.

LW: The Bible teaches that the seventieth week immediately followed the sixty-ninth week. The seventieth week began in A.D. 27 and ended in A.D. 33. As predicted, Jesus died on time, in the middle of the seventieth week (A.D. 30). Furthermore, the Bible teaches the Great Tribulation will last 1,335 days (3 ½ years, not 7 years). (Daniel 12:12) For more information on this topic, please see: Chapter 6, *Daniel, Unlocked for the Final Generation*.

Doctrine #4: God will not allow the church to be on Earth when His wrath against unbelievers is poured out.

LW: The Bible teaches that believers in Jesus will not suffer the penalty for sin (the wrath of the law) which is eternal death. The Bible also teaches that the disciples of Jesus will be persecuted and many will be martyrs. Jesus said, **"They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God."** (John 16:2) Millions have died for Jesus in ages past, and millions of Christians will soon die for Him! **"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained."** (Revelation 6:9) For more information on this topic, please see: Chapter 10, pages 111-114, *A Study on the Seven Seals and the 144,000* (Search for "Three types of Wrath") and Chapter 14, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega*.

There are three more items that need to be addressed in this examination of a pre-tribulation rapture:

Item #1: The Bible teaches that God will judge the living **during** the Great Tribulation. (Revelation 3:10; 14:7) A pre-tribulation rapture presupposes a pre-tribulation judgment of the living to determine who will be raptured. Once God's judgment of the living is conducted, there will be no second chance for salvation. For more information on this topic, please see: Chapter 13, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega*.

Item #2: Apocalyptic prophecy lays out a very concise sequence of coming events. There is no mention or description of a pre-tribulation rapture in Revelation. Claiming that John's trip to Heaven in Revelation 4 symbolizes the rapture is a distortion of Scripture. Paul was also taken to Heaven to see marvelous things! (2 Corinthians 12:4) We cannot overlook the fact that Revelation clearly predicts that the saints will be persecuted during the Great Tribulation. **"He** [the beast] **was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation."** (Revelation 13:7) **"I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished."** (Revelation 17:6) For more information on this topic, please see: Chapter 9, *A Study on the Seven Seals and The 144,000*.

Item #3: Earlier, we read from 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18. The Bible teaches that Jesus will resurrect the righteous dead at the Second Coming and after they are called up into the air to meet Jesus, the living will then follow. In other words, there is one gathering of the saints, both dead and living, and this occurs at the Second Coming. At that time, all of the wicked who are alive on Earth will be slain. (Revelation 19:19-21) For more information on this topic, please see: Chapter 14, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega.*

Item #4: After reading this article, many people call the office with questions on topics related to the pre-tribulation rapture and the state of man after death. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is often used as support to prove that man is conscious after death. A very interesting study on this parable is available to read, please see: The Rich Man and Lazarus.

When these issues are harmoniously synthesized, there is only one conclusion possible for me: I am convinced the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture is fiction. Of course, time will tell.

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Unfulfilled and Forfeited Prophecies

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Prophecies That Cannot be Fulfilled and Promises That Have Been Forfeited

Many Christians have been misled on a very important matter causing a great deal of confusion. Here is the problem: Other than the book of Daniel (which was sealed up until the appointed time of the end), the Old Testament says nothing about the last days or the Second Coming.

In other words, the Old Testament does not speak about events that will transpire in our day or at any time in the future.

All of the promises and prophecies presented in the Old Testament would have been fulfilled soon after the seventy weeks expired in A.D. 33 *if* Israel had repented of its rebellion during the seventy weeks and honored the covenant which God gave it. In short, the Old Testament contains many prophecies that *cannot* be fulfilled and many promises that *have been* forfeited.

Christians have been misled on this matter for several reasons. First, many Christians have not studied the Old Testament thoroughly and lack a working knowledge of what actually transpired between God and Israel, so it is easy to be misled.

Second, many Christians do not understand the profound difference between a unilateral and a bilateral covenant. In other words, Old Testament promises are either "one-sided" (unilateral) or "two-sided" (bilateral).

Very few promises in the Old Testament are unilateral; in fact, most of them are bilateral. Knowing the difference is essential if you want to understand the ways and actions of God. Third, many Christians do not realize that there are five types of prophecies that exist in the Old Testament.

Further, they have no idea about the hermeneutics (rules) that specifically govern the interpretation of these five types of prophecy.

Mixing and/or merging the rules for each type of prophecy produces insurmountable confusion. Last, many Christians believe that everything God spoke must come to pass. This is a true statement, but not in the way that most Christians think.

It is true that when God makes a promise, He will certainly keep that promise. However, we must remember that a *conditional* promise has *two* possible fulfillments.

For example, I might promise my daughter $50 if she gets an "A" in Biology. Suppose she gets a "B" and I give her nothing. Was my promise fulfilled? Yes!

The point is that many Christians read promises in the Old Testament without understanding the *conditional basis* on which the promises were made. They erroneously think, "Since the provisions in a particular promise have not been fulfilled, the fulfillment must be forthcoming!"

This reasoning is flawed because most of God's promises and prophecies in the Old Testament were conditional (bilateral). For example, notice this promise God spoke to the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai: **". . .You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.**

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. . . ." (Exodus 19:4-6) Did you notice the *terms and conditions of this covenant*? Did you notice the word "if" in the text? "Now **if** you obey me. . . . then. . . ."

The point is that God keeps His promises. Israel rebelled against Him, and true to His word, He rejected them as trustees of His gospel. (Leviticus 26; Romans 9-11) Years later, **"Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures:**

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. . . .

Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' " (Matthew 21:42,43; 23:38,39)

Think this through very carefully: God rejected Abraham's rebellious offspring **as promised** because His covenant with them was "two-sided" (bilateral).

How can a marriage survive if one party is constantly unfaithful? God's covenant with the nation of Israel was based on the condition of loyalty and obedience. (Exodus 19, Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28) On the other hand, God's promises to Abraham were "one-sided" (unilateral).

This means that God promised Abraham that He would do certain things and God's fulfillment of those promises was not based on Abraham's actions. The problem can be stated this way: God's promises with Abraham were one-sided, but God's promises with Abraham's offspring were two-sided.

Therefore, God had to make a change after Israel refused to cooperate with Him. God had to introduce a new covenant in order to fulfill His "one-sided" promises to Abraham. This change is called "the new covenant."

When God declared to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations (this included Jews and Gentiles), God's promise was based on the success of Abraham's offspring.

God's plan was that ancient Israel would be a light to the Gentiles and people from all nations until they came to know and love God as did Abraham. But, Israel refused to be a light unto the

Gentiles. To make His unilateral promise to Abraham come true, God created a new covenant which redefines Abraham's descendants.

Under the new covenant, God declared that believers in Christ are Abraham's seed (Greek: sperm). The end result is that trustees of the gospel are not biological, but spiritual!

God has grafted Gentiles into the unilateral covenant given to Abraham. This is why Paul wrote, **"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."** (Galatians 3:29)

Plan A / Plan B

Under the "new" covenant, there is a "new" Israel. This is a "new" sequence of prophetic events that will culminate during the "end time."

To help clarify this, I like to say the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation concern "Plan B." In other words, God has implemented a "new" covenant or Plan B, because "Plan A" (the original promises and prophecies given to ancient Israel) could not be accomplished because of Israel's apostasy.

Plan B is a bigger and better plan. Plan B contains a brighter set of promises and prophecies and unlike Plan A, it is unconditional! This time around, God is not waiting upon a group of people to get their act together or is He depending on a particular religious body of people to accomplish the gospel commission.

At the appointed time, He will bring His work to completion by hand-picking 144,000 people from all over the world. These servants of God, having Abraham's faith and love for God will accomplish all that God wants done in a mere 1,260 days!

Once a person understands the sharp distinction between the "Old Testament Plan A" and the "New Testament Plan B," the Bible becomes much clearer and easier to understand.

Plan A events are not to be confused or mingled with Plan B events. God wants His children to clearly understand the intended meaning of Scripture. The Bible is consistent. It does not suffer from internal conflict once you understand what is being said.

Rule Three

The book of Daniel provides four rules which govern the interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy. Rule Three states: "Apocalyptic language can be literal, symbolic or analogous.

To reach the intended meaning of a prophecy, the student must consider: (a) the context, (b) the use of parallel language in the Bible, and (c) relevant statements in the Bible which define that symbol if an element is thought to be symbolic."

The following words need at least five seconds of serious thought: The books of Daniel and Revelation are cryptic and short for two reasons. First, God wanted these two books preserved for the final generation.

Given the fact that copies had to be transcribed by hand for thousands of years, these two mysterious books had to be kept short in order to maintain their internal integrity. (Ancient scribes would have asked, "Why spend hundreds of hours making a copy of a huge book that no one understands?")

Second, the end time story contains a huge revelation of many things about God and this story takes several hours to tell. How can a huge story come from two short books?

God has done a very clever thing. He created Plan B using some parts from Plan A. The all important difference is that Plan B contains an *unconditional* sequence of events.

To fully appreciate Plan B we first need to understand Plan A. In this sense, the prophecies and promises in the Old Testament are indispensable! By closely studying the Old Testament's Plan A, we can understand God's plans better because there are many parallels between Plan A and Plan B.

Keep in mind that Plan B lays out an unconditional order of events and this highlights why Rule Three is so important. By comparing parallel language found in Daniel and Revelation with "Old Testament Plan A" language, we discover many marvelous elements which these two short books do not directly address.

The bottom line is this: The better we correctly understand the prophecies and promises made in the Old Testament, the better we will understand the prophecies and promises in the New Testament.

For example, many people have asked me if I think the Jews will rebuild the temple in Jerusalem because the Old Testament indicates the temple would be rebuilt.

Let me clarify the facts about this issue. The Old Testament does indicate the temple would be rebuilt, but the Old Testament is not talking about a third temple! Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first temple (Solomon's temple) in 586 B.C. and Artaxerxes issued the decree to rebuild it in 457 B.C.

The Romans completely destroyed the second temple in A.D. 70. There is no prophecy in the Bible indicating a third temple will be built and the reason for this silence is simple. God abandoned the nation of Israel at the end of the seventy weeks (Daniel 9) and He has no need for a third temple.

Jesus told the Jews, **"Look, your house** [your temple] **is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"** (Matthew 23:38,39) Jesus declared the temple of Israel, which was designed to be His dwelling place, to be desolate.

Jesus declared it desolate because Israel had rejected Him and He had rejected Israel. Second, Jesus made it perfectly clear that He would never dwell in Israel ever again. The next time the nation of Israel would see Him would be at the Second Coming.

Another interesting point: The temple mount was permanently removed from Jewish control in A.D. 684 when the Dome of the Rock mosque was built on the temple mount. It seems evident that God gave His site to the Moslems so that another Jewish temple could not be built.

The presence of the mosque frustrates a lot of Christians who do not understand Plan B, but it shouldn't. There will not be a third temple.

The temple that we should be studying and understanding is in Heaven! (Hebrews 8:1-5) That is where Jesus intercedes for us. Soon, Jesus will call for the seven trumpets to begin! (Revelation 8, 9) When that day arrives, the present confusion over rebuilding a temple in Jerusalem will vanish.

The Greatest Deception of All Time

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Yesterday, I turned on the TV to watch the evening news and instead of viewing Channel 40, my regular news channel, the TV had reset to Channel 4 because the electricity had gone off. So, imagine my surprise when I saw Benny Hinn instead of Brit Hume!

Since I had not heard Benny Hinn speak for some time, I thought I would watch his program for a few minutes to see why he was so excited. He was animated about recent developments in Israel.

From what I gathered (I missed the first part of his program), he was overjoyed at the preparations made by a group of Jews who *intend* to rebuild their temple. Evidently, a number of Jewish "rebuilders" are ready to go to work at a moment's notice – if and when a political solution or military action makes construction possible.

To demonstrate the passion of the rebuilders, Benny Hinn showed a video clip of four men carrying a golden replica of the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders. He also mentioned that schools have been set up in Israel to train priests for the sacrificial rituals that will be conducted once the temple is rebuilt.

Benny Hinn said that Bible prophecy predicts the temple **will be** rebuilt and he was excited about developments that were quickly moving toward that great day. I know, from watching other broadcasts by Benny Hinn, that he also believes the efforts of the rebuilders in Israel indicate the rapture of "the church" is very near.

During the program, Benny Hinn showed a video clip that particularly fascinated him. The video clip showed a rabbi standing before a crowd of people making a declaration that went something like this: "We [the Jews] believe in a coming Messiah. If it turns out that the Messiah is Jesus, we will accept Him."

Benny Hinn said he "shivered all over" when he heard these words. Perhaps he shivered because he believes that 144,000 Jews will indeed become believers in Jesus *after the rapture* and millions of Jews (and others) will be given a second chance to receive Christ as Messiah and Savior during the Great Tribulation.

The willingness of a Jewish Rabbi to accept Jesus as the Messiah gave Benny Hinn the shivers because he sees a shift in Jewish attitudes and he thinks this is a prophetic fulfillment in the making.

One of the Last Prophetic Signs

For millions of Christians, the rebuilding of the Jewish temple is one of the last prophetic signs that occurs about the time the seventieth week begins. These Christians have a prophetic

schematic that makes the nation of Israel central to end time events.

They believe the temple in Jerusalem has to be rebuilt for several reasons, and here are two. First, they believe that Paul predicted the Antichrist will physically enter the Jewish temple and declare himself to be God. **"He** [the Antichrist] **will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God."** (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

Second, they also believe that the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:15 point to the Antichrist standing in the rebuilt temple: **"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."** (Matthew 24:15,16) (The abomination that causes desolation, they say, is the Antichrist.)

The "Rock" of Impasse

The Most Holy Place of Israel's first temple was built on the same rock where Abraham offered up Isaac. God specifically directed King David to this rock when the time came to build the first temple. (1 Chronicles 21)

This rock is 39 feet by 56 feet in size and it is the highest point on the temple mount (2,450.42 feet above sea level). Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple Solomon built on August 10, 586 B.C. A second temple was built around 515 B.C., but the construction was nothing compared to that of the first temple.

The second temple was "reconstructed" several times and the Romans eventually destroyed it on the *same date* the first temple was destroyed, A.D. 70, August 10. Roman soldiers pulled the great stones of the second temple apart to find the gold that melted and ran into the cracks during the great fire that consumed the temple.

For centuries following A.D. 70, the temple mount laid in ruins and Jerusalem was ruled by various Arab caliphs. In A.D. 692, Abd al-Malik completed the construction of The Dome of the Rock. It is believed that The Dome of the Rock was built by Abd al-Malik for political reasons.

He wanted to relieve a rival caliph in Mecca of some of his influence and authority. So, Abd al-Malik built a beautiful edifice that would serve as a holy shrine for Moslems and it would also serve as a place of prayer for Jews and Christians.

To make The Dome of the Rock a "holy" shrine for Moslems, Abd al-Malik made the claim that Mohammed was taken up into the seventh Heaven from this rock one night to meet with Allah.

When Mohammed returned to Earth, he was anointed to spread the teaching of Islam and tell everyone that one prayer was better than many. Thus, Abd al-Malik hoped to draw pilgrims away from his rival's Kaaba Shrine in Mecca by offering another holy shrine, or place of the Hajj.

About 20 years ago, two attempts were made to prove that the Holy of Holies, the most sacred room in the Jewish temple, was not located on the rock where The Dome of the Rock now stands.

If it could be proven that The Dome of the Rock is not sitting on the site of the Holy of Holies, a third temple might be built on the exact site required by God without disturbing a sacred shrine of the Moslem world. Dr. Asher Kaufman, a Jewish physicist, presented a theory that the original site of the Holy of Holies was some 300 feet northwest of The Dome of the Rock.

Conversely, a Jewish architect, Tuvya Sagiv, presented a theory that the site of the Holy of Holies was located to the south of The Dome of the Rock. Archeologists have not widely accepted either of these views.

Archeology aside, putting the Holy of Holies on a mountain prominence that is physically *lower* than The Dome of the Rock would be the equivalent of putting the God of the Jews in a lower position than the God of the Moslems, and human nature predicts this is not going to happen.

Of course, the Jews remain perplexed about rebuilding their temple. If possible, Israel would be willing to pay a very great price for possession of the rock (or the Holy of Holies as they call it).

This point was underscored in July 2000 when Palestinian Yassar Arafat and Israel's Ehud Barak met with President Bill Clinton at Camp David to see if peace could be negotiated. The world watched anxiously to see if peace in the Middle East would be forthcoming and after several days of negotiations, the three leaders found that peace was not possible.

Shlomo Ben-Ami, Israel's top negotiator during the Camp David summit, expressed Israel's desire for possession of the rock in an interview on September 13, 2001, when he said: " The Temple Mount would be under full Palestinian sovereignty, with Israel getting the Western Wall and the Holy of Holies."

Moslems are the world's largest religious group and in an interesting way, they have a very powerful influence over the world's economy because of oil. Currently, there are more than 1.3 billion Moslems and hundreds of millions of them would immediately go to war if they thought that the Jews would defile The Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

The size (and ferocity) of the Moslem world is important because it is important to remember that The Dome of the Rock is *religiously* connected to 1.3 billion people. This rock is not a geographical matter over which the Palestinians have control, and the Jews know the Holy of Holies is not just limited to Palestinian control.

I may be wrong, and this is speculation on my part, but I believe that Iran's unstoppable efforts to produce atomic bombs is a response to Jewish and Christian overtures for rebuilding the temple.

Do you remember Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's recent remarks on October 30, 2005 saying that "Israel should be wiped off the map," and then again, on December 14, 2005

he said that the Holocaust was a "myth."

I think these inflammatory statements (which received worldwide attention) are calculated to forcibly remind Jews and Christians alike that The Temple Mount is non-negotiable. Evidence abounds indicating that President Ahmadinejad is a deeply devoted Moslem. He takes his religion seriously. He lives modestly, and he recently banned Western style music in Iran because he believes it is decadent.

Is he telling the world in veiled language that any efforts to rebuild the temple will have to take place over the dead body of his nation?

If the legacy of President George W. Bush is a "war on terror," is it possible that the legacy of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's will be the "destruction of Israel" if anyone attempts to defile the third holiest shrine of Islam?

I do not know what Ahmadinejad's thoughts are, but it is widely known that Israel has atomic bombs and I would not be surprised if Ahmadinejad is determined to have "atomic parity" with Israel because he feels The Dome of the Rock is threatened by talk of rebuilding the Jewish temple.

Summary

Last month, I made a comment in this publication that the temple in Jerusalem will not be rebuilt. I believe that God has set an airtight seal on The Temple Mount that cannot be broken by political or military means.

For reasons presented in recent issues of *The Wake Up Report!*, I believe the pre-tribulation rapture schematic, which millions of Christians have embraced, is fatally flawed. The rules of interpretation they use to arrive at this conclusion are not valid or warranted.

There will not be a pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture. The seventieth week is not in the future. The Great Tribulation will not be seven years in length because Daniel 12:12 says it will be 1,335 days. You may ask, "What difference does it really make if a person believes in the rapture or not?"

Actually, there is a huge problem lurking within Christianity. Millions of Christians believe that Plan A* events will occur during the fulfillment of Plan B and the consequences from believing this will be terrible. For example, under Plan A, Jesus would have stood on the Mount of Olives and divided the mountain. **"**

On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south." (Zechariah 14:4)

Under Plan B, this will not happen! At the Second Coming, every island and mountian will be

moved from its place! However, when the devil appears masquerading as God, I believe this is one of the things he will do! In fact, the devil will do many things that were predicted under Plan A.

With cunning deception, he will lead the world into the greatest "con" the world has ever known using the same Bible that explains God's plans!

* For a discussion on the concept of Plan A and Plan B, please see the January 2006 issue.

Sadly, people fail to understand that the Jewish roll (Plan A) in end time events is over. The New Testament Plan B actually tells us when the Antichrist, the devil, will appear. Unfortunately, when the Jews see the devil's glorious appearing, they will receive him as the anticipated Messiah.

What else can Benny Hinn's Rabbi say when this event occurs and he sees such power and dazzling glory? When the Moslems behold the glorious appearing of the devil, attended by millions of angels (albeit fallen angels), what else can they say except the promised "Deliverer" has arrived?

When confused and bedazzled Christians see the glorious appearing of the devil, when they hear him quoting lengthy texts from the Bible and fulfilling them right before their eyes, they will believe that he is Jesus! In short, the greatest deception ever to occur is coming and few Christians have a clue.

The devil will expertly use the Bible and the Koran (and other holy writings) to prove that he is God. The devil knows how to twist and distort these books very well.

He has had centuries to study them. These matters should make us very sober. Every seeker of truth should be carefully searching and researching the Bible. The Bible and the Bible only gives a correct view of coming events.

Marriage After the Second Coming

Author: Larry W. Wilson

What Happens to Marriage after the Second Coming?

A few months ago I received a letter from an elderly man who had some searching questions. He had promised his wife before she passed away that he would start attending church so they could be united in Heaven. One day, after her passing, he was thumbing through her Bible and he came across Mark 12.

This man had been married three times and even though he was dutifully going to church, he was not particularly religious. After reading Mark 12, he became concerned about something Jesus said. He wanted to spend eternal life with his third wife whom he dearly loved, but he didn't want anything to do with his first two wives, even if they made it to Heaven.

He asked me to review Mark 12 and answer some questions. Here is the text to which he referred: **" 'Teacher,' they said, 'Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children.**

The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?'

Jesus replied, '"Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.' " (Mark 12:19-25)

The letter began by asking, "If all four of us make it to Heaven, what will be our relationship? Will we know each other? Will we have physical bodies or spiritual bodies? I know Jesus said that people will not marry or be given in marriage, but will previous marriages be recognized?

Will I have to live with all three women or the woman of my choice? Will we be sexual beings in Heaven? What should I expect to find if I get there?" He closed by saying, "Thank you in advance for your response. Your answers will help me decide if I want to go to Heaven."

I had to smile at his final comment because this sentiment is not that unusual. Many people make the mistake of weighing the value of Heaven with an earthly mind. How can the value and experiences of eternal life be understood unless we have heavenly minds?

How can God's character, God's love, God's grace and God's wisdom be appreciated unless a person is born again? Nevertheless, the man asked some practical questions and although the Bible does not say much about life in the hereafter, it does reveal certain important things. Here

is the short list:

Will we know each other in Heaven? Yes, we will know and recognize one another in Heaven! Paul wrote in
1 Corinthians 13:12 **"Now we see but a poor reflection** [of the future] **as** [looking] **in a mirror;** [however, after Jesus gathers up the saints] **then we shall see** [the glories of God's creation] **face to face. Now I know in part** [small snippets about eternal life]**; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known** [by those around me]**. - (Insertions mine)**

What type of bodies will we possess? Paul writes: **"I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."** (1 Corinthians 15:50) Does this text indicate that we will be spirits floating around with the clouds? No, the redeemed will not be ghosts. They will have physical bodies.

The phrase "flesh and blood" is an ancient idiom. It is used sixteen times in the NIV and five times in the KJV. This phrase is meant to contrast the temporal body of fallen man (earthly order) with the glorious order of beings who live in Heaven (heavenly order).

Mankind is made of dirt and our bodies are sustained by the life-giving properties found in our blood (Leviticus 17:11). The term "flesh and blood" indicates that we are of this world, and Paul used this well known expression to make a sharp distinction between man's present condition and **the glorious change that *physically*** occurs at the Second Coming.

Will we have physical bodies in Heaven? Yes, every saint will be given a perfect body! Paul wrote, **"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep** [some saints will be alive at the Second Coming]**, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.**

For the trumpet will sound, the [righteous] **dead will be raised imperishable, and we** [that is, the living saints] **will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality."** (1 Corinthians 15:51-53, insertions mine)

Consider this contrast. When Lazarus was resurrected from the dead, he was not given a new body. (John 11) However, when Jesus was resurrected, He came from the tomb in a new physical body that would last forever. He was not immediately recognizable in this new body. (Luke 24:31; John 20:15,27) The *same* Jesus who ascended to Heaven will also return to Earth! (Acts 1:11)

When Moses and Elijah were taken to Heaven, they were given glorious bodies. When they descended from Heaven to meet with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James and John recognized them. (Luke 9:30,31) The twenty-four elders sitting around the throne are *real* people with crowns on their heads, redeemed from Earth. (Revelation 4:10, 5:9)

Furthermore, the Bible indicates that Heaven is a physical place! The Holy City will descend from God out of Heaven, and the dimensions of the Holy City are literal! (See Revelation 21:2-17.)

I would not be surprised to learn that Heaven (the place of God's Great Throne, Headquarters of the Universe) is located on a planet that God moves around from place to place as needed. If true, the Father and the Son are always able to "camp" close to their children wherever they may be. Isn't that amazing?

Now, on to the real concern of my friend's letter. What will be the relationship between previously married people in Heaven? This is a double edged question. I have a number of dear friends who suffer from a terrible sense of loss because their life-long spouse – their soul-mate – has passed away.

I also have friends who enjoy a sense of freedom since the death of their spouse because it brought a difficult marriage to a close. Married people understand that marriage can be holy wedlock or wholly deadlock. So as we proceed, let us keep the implications of good marriage / bad marriage and endless years of eternal life within view.

Paul wrote, **". . . . 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.' The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God."** (1 Corinthians 2:9,10)

To help us understand the issues surrounding this topic, I need to present a short parable: "One day, a gorgeous butterfly landed beside a caterpillar, named Glenn, who was busy eating the last leaf on a shrub. Even though the caterpillar saw the butterfly, he did not acknowledge its presence.

Eventually, the butterfly spoke. He simply asked the caterpillar how he was doing. The caterpillar continued to chew because he had nothing but contempt toward butterflies. After a few moments of silence, the butterfly flew to a position directly in front of the caterpillar to confront him.

This time, the butterfly said, "Glenn, I'm your brother, Randy! Don't you recognize me? I've been transformed into a butterfly and I have come back home to see how you are doing." Glenn snapped back, "Well, good for you! Why don't you run along and leave me alone." The butterfly said, "Glenn, I have come to tell you that someday you *will* become a butterfly.

You will soar with the wind and gather nectar from beautiful flowers! You won't live as a hairy caterpillar *forever*." The caterpillar responded, "I don't want to become a butterfly. Butterflies don't eat shrubs, and I love shrubs. Besides, butterflies don't live very long.

Have you ever looked at car bumpers or under the hoods of cars? They are full of dead butterflies. Nope, I love going to caterpillar parties and eating everything in sight. I enjoy dancing and drinking and I really enjoy cocoon parties. Floating around in the sky as "bird food" doesn't appeal to me. So, good-bye and don't mention the subject to me again."

The moral of this parable is this: The caterpillar and butterfly are the same insect. The caterpillar represents our present earthly condition and the butterfly represents our heavenly condition *after* we are changed at the Second Coming.

Many people dislike the ways of God because they have the caterpillar mindset, the earthly mind. God has purposefully kept mankind from knowing very much about the glorious form of life that is coming because there is no similarity between the life of a caterpillar and that of a butterfly, even though they are the same creature!

In other words, how can caterpillars get excited about life as a butterfly if their affections are centered on the things caterpillars do? Heavenly minded people know this world is not our home! Heavenly minded people are caterpillars with butterfly minds – waiting for their butterfly body!

A few years ago, a recently married young woman said to me, "If my husband doesn't make it to Heaven, I don't want to go!" On another occasion, a young married man confided to me, "If there is no sex in Heaven, I really don't want to go!" My response to both individuals was the same.

You say these things because you have an earthly mind. If God took you to Heaven and replaced your marriage and/or your sexuality with something better, you would not want to come back here. The young man thought about it for a moment and said, "What could be better than sex?" I said, "You err, not knowing the power or the plans of God for His children."

Since the Bible does not answer every question we may have about the future, I will close this discussion by making two comments. First, after studying the ways of God for almost 35 years, I have no doubt that eternal life will be more glorious and all of our relationships more fulfilling than anything experienced on Earth.

Second, I suspect the redeemed of all ages will live together as one family – as though we were all married to each other. By removing the issues of sexuality and sinful propensities, sinless people will be able to progress through many intimate relationships throughout eternity without violating God or themselves; and each special relationship will ennoble and enrich each saint.

God's family is huge and every saint will have billions of delightful and loving companions. I think it is safe to assume that each saint will also have favorite relationships for a few million years and these favorites may change from age to age, and from assignment to assignment.

I think this is how the angels presently live. This arrangement would keep life very interesting and very satisfying. We can be assured of this – there will be joy and happiness in Heaven. There will be no place for marital discord. Doesn't this sound like Heaven?

A Ten Commandments Day?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14)

You may recall that Chief Justice Roy Moore, a member of the Supreme Court of Alabama, was removed from that state's highest court in November 2003 because Moore refused to remove his personal Ten Commandments monument from the state capital building. (The monument was removed eventually, but not by Judge Moore.)

Then, in June 2005, the Supreme Court of the United States took a position on the Ten Commandments that upset a number of Jews and Christians. The court ruled that the Ten Commandments could be displayed in public places as long as no religious significance was attached to them.

Later that year, Ron Wexler (a real estate developer from Israel) and Pastor Myles Munroe (Bahamas Faith Ministry International – a Pentecostal organization) organized "The Ten Commandments Commission." Their stated objective is to elevate the importance of the Ten Commandments by placing monuments, plaques and symbols throughout North America.

Many nationally known preachers, pastors and evangelists are supporting the objectives of the Ten Commandments Commission and together, they are calling for a nationwide "Ten Commandments Day" on Sunday, May 7, 2006. Thousands of pastors and rabbis have been asked to host special celebrations on that day and to deliver stirring messages centering on the enduring value of the Ten Commandments.

Why are they doing this? I think a number of honest and sincere Americans from all religious backgrounds are concerned about America's rapid descent into Godlessness. They see degeneracy rapidly overtaking our nation and they know it will not be long before America careens into total anarchy if something is not done to revive our religious values!

Even though I am fully persuaded that the Ten Commandments are extremely important and obligatory, and the goals and purposes of this endeavor might sound like a good idea to most Christians, I cannot support this particular program. Let me clarify the problem and use an illustration to make my point.

I believe everyone reading this *Wake Up Report!* realizes that the United States has been fighting a so-called "war on terror" ever since the United States invaded Afghanistan in October 2001. The "war on terror" significantly escalated in March 2003 when the United States invaded Iraq.

Now that a few years have passed and we understand the issues more clearly, I believe the

phrase "war on terror" has become misleading and inappropriate. Our "war on terror" has turned out to be a war against certain Moslems who are determined to stop the spread of western decadence. Islamic fundamentalists view the United States as "the Great Satan."

They believe we are a nation of infidels and that we are a corrupt and immoral people. They see our foreign policies as self-serving and unfair. To a great extent, the Moslem world forms its attitudes toward the United States when they see American TV programs and movies.

They also see the results of our foreign policies – particularly our contribution to unrest in the Middle East through our support for Israel. They often regard our charity to third world countries as bribery or as "buying influence."

The point I am making is that the *secular* term, "war on terror," has become a misnomer. The United States is fighting certain Moslem zealots who are willing to die for God's honor. In other words, the "war on terror" has become a war against a specific religious ideology and honestly, it should be represented that way.

The United States may think it is fighting a secular war, but let us be clear – our enemy is fighting a religious war. In my opinion, the core conflict in Iraq today centers around religion. Some Moslems want a "church-state" (which is popular among Moslems) and the United States is trying to set up a secular state.

Similarly, the Ten Commandments Commission appears to be after one thing, namely, religious revival and unity. However, with the passage of time, I suspect their endeavor will morph into political power. (Yes, I know I could be wrong.)

Legislative elections in the United States are coming this fall and in two years, we will vote for a new president. Unfortunately, the Ten Commandments Commission has a similar ring to it as Jerry Falwell's "Moral Majority." Why am I suspicious? I believe there may be a hidden agenda within the Ten Commandments Commission.

From its inception, the Ten Commandments Commission has not been primarily concerned with what the Ten Commandments actually say. The Ten Commandments are not an icon and should not be used as a banner for political power and influence.

God wrote the Ten Commandments by His own finger and the commandments declare His sovereign will for mankind. If a group of people want to exalt the Ten Commandments by encouraging people to obey them, I could certainly support that!

Think about this for a minute. The Ten Commandments Commission was organized by a Jew and a Christian. I can understand how a Jew would want to uphold the obligatory nature of the Ten Commandments, but I cannot understand how hundreds of Christian leaders can participate in a "Ten Commandments Day" when these *same* religious leaders teach that the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross.

I believe our nation is in moral trouble largely because pastors have led their members to

believe that the Ten Commandments are no longer obligatory!

How can there be a lawful society when the prevailing theology of that society is lawless? Bible history indicates that once a majority of people within a nation become rebellious toward God's laws, that nation cannot recover. (See 1 & 2 Kings.) Can sinful man cure his own degeneracy?

America is like a termite damaged house – still standing, but seriously weakened. If China and other nations were not investing heavily (buying our assets) in the United States, this nation would be bankrupt. Our enemies have become more numerous and more powerful than ever before.

As this nation turns further away from God, I guarantee that it will face increasing perplexities. These matters should not surprise us, since they clearly parallel the fall of ancient Israel.

Let me ask you – are the Ten Commandments observed in politics or big business today? Consider the corruption in Washington D.C. that has recently surfaced about the Abrahamoff scandal or the eight-year jail sentence of Congressman Duke Cunningham for bribery.

Consider the corruption that was swirling around the Enron Corporation and the various banks that participated in its fraudulent schemes. Consider the demise of WorldCom and the 25-year jail sentence imposed upon its CEO, Bernard Ebbers.

These situations make me wonder just how much corruption is occurring that we do not know about. Have we come to a moment in United States history when the relentless forces of moral degeneracy, false religion and powerful special interest politics are causing compromise for expedient purposes?

Do we want a decadent nation promoting the Ten Commandments as an icon or do we want a nation that loves and obeys God's Ten Commandments?

Let me be clear. I do believe this nation would benefit from obeying the Ten Commandments. If people honestly wanted to obey the Ten Commandments, we would have a "Ten Commandments Day" every Saturday. God has commanded mankind, in the fourth commandment, to rest from our work just as He rested from His. (Genesis 2:1-3)

This is why the apostle Paul wrote, **"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."**

Questions About the Law

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:
I have read a number of your articles on the web and I am confused by some of your conclusions. In your article, *What Changed at the Cross,* you claim the laws of Moses were nailed to the cross, but you maintain there remains a difference between clean and unclean foods.

This seems contradictory. If the laws of Moses were abolished at the cross, then the difference between clean and unclean foods has to disappear. The apostle Paul agrees: **"For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving because it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer."** (1 Timothy 4:4,5)

Second, in your article, *What happened to the Lord's Day?*, you claim that Saturday, the seventh day of the week, is God's holy day, but Paul says it doesn't matter which day of the week we keep holy.

"One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God." (Romans 14:5,6)

Please explain these conflicts. I want to know more of God's truth and I am searching for answers.
Sincerely, Abbie"

Dear Abbie:
Thank you for your e-mail and your questions. You are to be commended for your research and surprisingly, you have correctly stated my position on these matters. I will offer two short responses to your questions and then I will provide substantial responses for deeper study.

Clean and Unclean Animals

God made a sharp distinction between clean and unclean animals about one thousand years *before* Moses received the law. At the time of Noah's flood, God sent into the ark seven pairs of each clean animal and only one pair of each unclean animal. (Genesis 7:2)

The greater question that needs to be addressed is: Why did God make some animals clean and others unclean? Unclean animals were created to be scavengers. They eat the refuse of Earth and God declared them unfit for human consumption.

When God delivered Israel out of Egypt, He wanted His people to be a healthy nation. So, God gave them dietary restrictions that were based on His design and creation, and forbade the eating of unclean animals. (Leviticus 11) Even though the laws of Moses were discontinued at the cross (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 7:12), unclean animals are still scavengers and remain unfit for human consumption.

The consumption of unclean food is not an unpardonable sin, but it is foolish to rebel against God's wisdom. God wants His children to enjoy good health and long life.

Since diet affects our well being, God has generously revealed what is good to eat and what is not. Paul refers to the body as God's temple, therefore, we should be thoughtful about our diet! (1 Corinthians 3:16,17) A longer response to this matter will be presented later, but for now, consider Paul's words to the church at Corinth [insertions mine]:

" 'Therefore [children of God] **come out from them** [the heathen] **and be separate** [from the pagans]**, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.' Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."** (2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1)

The Seventh Day Sabbath

You also asked if the observance of the seventh day Sabbath is necessary since the laws of Moses were nailed to the cross. I know that many people use Paul's comments in Colossians 2:14-16, Ephesians 2:15 and Romans 14 to nullify the fourth commandment which commands us to keep the seventh day holy, but I think this is a distortion of Scripture.

There is nothing Jewish or Levitical about the seventh day Sabbath. God's seventh day Sabbath predates Abraham (the first Jew) by 2,000 years! The seventh day was declared holy at Creation. **"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.**

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." (Genesis 2:1-3)

The first full day of life for Adam and Eve was God's seventh day Sabbath. You might be surprised to know that Adam and Eve understood the holiness of the seventh day and they faithfully observed it while they were in the Garden of Eden. We know this because the Bible describes the first sin of Adam and Eve.

This sin was not the desecration of the seventh day. (Genesis 3) We can also conclude that Adam and Eve passed this knowledge to their offspring. This is demonstrated by the fact that some 2,500 years after Creation, God tested the nation of Israel to see if they would keep His seventh day holy **before** He gave them the Ten Commandments. God would not test Israel's willingness to observe His Sabbath if they did not know about it. (See Exodus 16.)

A few weeks after the Exodus, God Himself descended from Heaven and personally spoke the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai. At that time, He declared the seventh day had been made holy during Creation week – as a memorial to His Creative works. (Exodus 20:8-11) The first word of the fourth commandment is "remember." Since the seventh day is a memorial to God's Creation week, why should this memorial be discontinued at the cross?

The Ten Commandments were widely known by the people who lived before the flood because God's law was passed down from generation to generation by oral tradition.

Think about this: When God delivered the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai, murder did not suddenly become wrong, adultery did not suddenly become wrong, taking God's name in vain did not suddenly become wrong, and the holiness of the seventh day did not suddenly begin!

How do we know this? In Noah's day, prior to the flood, mankind lived in defiant rebellion of God's commandments. Look at this text: **"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain."** (Genesis 6:5,6, emphasis mine)

The point is that the antediluvians were destroyed because of wickedness. The biblical definition of wickedness is defiant rebellion. Paul says, **". . . And where there is no law, there is no transgression."** (Romans 4:15) God destroyed the antediluvians because they rejected His authority. As a God of love, He had no choice but to destroy the people who were destroying succeeding generations.

The Ten Commandments define sin. They are God's declaration of right and wrong to man. Contrary to many claims, the Ten Commandments **were not** discontinued at the cross and the apostles never suggested this was the case. (Romans 3:31; 7:7; James 2:10,11)

Paul's comments in Romans 14, about one man regarding a particular day as a holy day while another man regarding that same day as a common day, have nothing to do with God's seventh day Sabbath. Romans 14 concerns the observance of six annual Jewish feast days which were also called Sabbaths even though they fell on various days of the week. (Leviticus 16:31)

Paul's comments in Romans 14 were limited to a specific controversy. Jewish and Gentile converts in Rome were arguing over the consumption of clean meat that had been presented before idols. This act, Jewish believers argued, polluted clean meat – making it unclean.

Some of the Jewish believers wanted to observe Jewish feast days and Gentile believers argued this was not necessary since the laws of Moses had been discontinued. Paul's position on both of these "disputable" matters is clear: If a Jewish convert wants to observe a feast day because he thinks it is a holy day, then give that believer the freedom to do so.

There is no harm done. Likewise, if a Gentile believer wants to eat clean meat that has been offered to an idol, then give him the freedom to do so. An idol is nothing, so no harm is done. But, Paul makes it clear that believers cannot use their freedom from the laws of Moses to

offend the sensitivities of new converts who are weak and immature in the faith!

I know that my explanation of Romans 14 will not be acceptable to many people. So, let's take Paul's words in Romans 14:5,6 at face value by asking a question. "If the holiness of Saturday, the seventh day of the week, was terminated at the cross, where does God Himself say this is so?

Please bear with me for a moment regarding this question. This world was created by speech. The Creator spoke and it appeared. **"And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. . . . 'For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.' "** (Genesis 1:3; Psalm 33:9)

How can mere mortals undo these commands? The Ten Commandments were so important to God that our Creator did not permit Moses to speak them to Israel. God Himself descended from Heaven to declare His Ten Commandments and there is no evidence in the Bible that He has declared them null and void.

If Romans 14 gives human beings the right to arbitrarily determine which day of the week is holy, this would make every day of the week holy. Some people would choose Sunday to be holy, some would choose Monday, some would choose Friday, etc. *Was this world created in six days by men?*

Do men have the authority to convert one of God's work days into a holy day? Isn't man made of dust? How can he presume to redefine God's memorial to the incredible and unparalleled event called the Creation of Earth? Many Christians fail to understand why God created the seventh day and this allows them to casually dismiss or diminish the importance of it.

When Jesus was on Earth, the Pharisees falsely accused Him of violating the Sabbath commandment. Jesus never sinned (Hebrews 4:15), so Jesus did not break the Sabbath. Instead, He broke the Pharisees' rigid and distorted views.

Jesus responded to their accusation saying, **"The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath."** (Mark 2:27) The seventh day was established at Creation for our benefit because God wants human beings to rest from their work on the seventh day just as He rested from His work.

God has given mankind a day of rest so that we can thoughtfully consider the creative works of our Creator. If mankind did this, the truth and glory of God would fill the whole Earth today!

One last point. The Bible teaches the Ten Commandments are just as obligatory today as they were at Creation. (I will demonstrate this point in my longer response.) God winks at the ignorance of billions of people who currently do not understand their obligation to obey the fourth commandment. (Acts 17:30)

However, a time is coming when God will notify the whole world that everyone is required to worship Him on His seventh day Sabbath. During the Great Tribulation, God's 144,000 servants

will proclaim that everyone is commanded to worship the Creator on "His" holy day. (Revelation 14:6,7)

Of course, many people will rebel against God's demands just like they did in Noah's day and they will be very shocked when God confronts their rebellion. Revelation 11:19 points forward to a day near the end of the Great Tribulation when the Ten Commandments will be completely visible in the sky.

God will show the wicked the very law they rejected and the law by which they will be judged. For now, you have my short responses to your questions and I hope you will continue reading and investigating these interesting matters in greater detail.

Early Christian Conflicts

Many Christians unknowingly manipulate and distort the Scriptures, particularly the writings of Paul. Textual distortion occurs when a person lifts a text out of its context and applies it to an issue that has nothing to do with the original context or setting of that text.

When people offer Scriptural support for conclusions that stand in opposition to the body of Scripture, distortion occurs. The Bible is not internally conflicted. Textual distortion has been a problem ever since Moses wrote the book of Genesis. Jews and Christians alike have been guilty of distorting Scripture. The apostle Peter noticed how Paul's writings were often distorted.

He wrote, **"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."** (2 Peter 3:15,16)

If Peter's words were true during the first century A.D. when specific controversies in the early church were ongoing, how much easier is it to distort Paul's writings today now that we are removed from both the setting and circumstances of Paul's day by two thousand years?

Bible history indicates the Christian Church began *within* Judaism in A.D. 30. For many years, there was very little difference between Jews and early Christians. In fact, the Romans considered Christians to be a sect of Judaism – just as the Pharisees were a sect of Judaism.

The extraction of Christianity from Judaism was painful, slow, full of intense feelings, and grievous conflict. Jewish leaders hated the Christian movement because they saw Christianity undermining their religious control and considered it an apostate offshoot.

The Romans hated Christians because they thought they were Jews. To make matters worse, early Jewish converts found it difficult to worship with Gentile converts because of their "disgusting" ways, and Gentile converts had a difficult time being around Jewish believers because Jewish believers insisted on maintaining their Jewish traditions.

If it had not been for the powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit and the dedication of the apostles, the early Christian church would have died in the graveyard of controversy by the end of the first century A.D.

Everyone reading the New Testament needs to understand that Jewish converts came into the early church with strong Jewish paradigms. They were ninety-five percent Jewish in their thinking and ninety-ninety percent Jewish in their behavior.

The same was true for Gentiles. The theological ramifications of the ministry and death of Jesus took several decades to understand. Old habits and cherished beliefs die hard and it took a few generations before Christians and Gentiles became a unique and cohesive body of believers.

To keep the Christian church from imploding after His ascension, Jesus gave the apostles many revelations which spurred them to develop Christianity. To make matters worse (or so it may have seemed at the time), Jesus appointed Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

The addition of Gentiles into the Jewish/Christian conflict that already existed added another level of confusion for early Jewish converts. All of these conflicts were timely and important because God wanted church leaders (which were former Jews) to carefully research and clarify Christian doctrine.

A survey of Paul's fourteen books in the New Testament reveals an interesting fact. The first century Christian church faced many well-defined problems because any assembly of Jewish and Gentile converts always produced the *same* controversies.

These controversies included topics involving the law of Moses, the pollution of food which had been offered to idols, the drinking of animal blood, the subject of circumcision, fornication, the observance of feast days and other religious customs.

The Babylonian Captivity

First century Jewish converts came into the Christian church with a particular mindset that we must comprehend today if we are going to understand Paul's writings. This mindset began forming after the Babylonian captivity ended (605 - 536 B.C.).

There were various sins which devout Jews avoided at all costs since they did not want to provoke the Lord's anger again. One such sin was that of worshiping graven images and eating food that had been offered to idols. (It is important to note that as a nation, Israel never returned to worshiping graven images after the Babylonian captivity.)

After their captivity, devout Jews also did not want to neglect performing ceremonial rituals. The Jews became very intense about obeying the Ten Commandments, and also the laws of Moses, which included numerous rituals like circumcision, hand washing, the observance of feasts, etc.

The avoidance of sin (that is, perfect obedience) became particularly important to the Pharisees,

who developed as a conservative sect within Judaism after captivity.

The Pharisees concluded that God had raised up King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem and the temple because Israel failed to keep His commandments. (Jeremiah 25:7-12) Therefore, they believed that keeping God's laws should receive the greatest attention.

Actually, Israel's offense toward God *prior* to the Babylonian captivity and Israel's offense toward God *after* the Babylonian captivity remained the same, although Israel's behavior shifted 180 degrees, from that of lawlessness to legalism.

Israel's offense toward God can be summarized in one sentence: Most of the Jews never experienced rebirth or experienced the inner transformation that God offers and requires.

Jesus said that the kingdom of God will only consist of people who have been born again, because attitude is everything to God. (John 3:3) I believe the first sermon of Jesus (Matthew 5-7) centered on attitude because the "be-attitudes" (as they are called) are more important to God than all religious doctrine.

It was Israel's uncircumcised heart (carnal heart) that made God angry *prior* to the Babylonian captivity (Isaiah 1:11-13; Jeremiah 4:4) and it was their uncircumcised heart that caused them to reject Jesus as the Messiah *after* the captivity (Acts 7:51).

Religious ritual means nothing to God unless there is a genuine love for God and man in the heart, sorrow for sin and a willingness to humbly walk in His righteous ways.

While in Babylon, the Lord spoke to Ezekiel many times about Israel's hard heart. On one occasion, **"The Lord said to me: 'Son of man, will you judge** [arrest these two prostitutes] **Oholah** [who represents Samaria, the capital city for the ten tribes in the north] **and Oholibah** [who represents Jerusalem, the capital city for the two tribes in the south]**?**

Then confront them with their detestable practices, for they have committed adultery and blood is on their hands. They committed adultery with their idols; they even sacrificed their children, whom they bore to me, as food for them.

They have also done this to me: At that same time they defiled my sanctuary and desecrated my Sabbaths. On the very day they sacrificed their children to their idols, they entered my sanctuary and desecrated it. That is what they did in my house.' "
(Ezekiel 23:36-39, insertions mine)

"Say to the rebellious house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Enough of your detestable practices, O house of Israel! In addition to all your other detestable practices, you brought foreigners uncircumcised in heart and flesh into my sanctuary, desecrating my temple while you offered me food, fat and blood, and you broke my covenant.

Instead of carrying out your duty in regard to my holy things, you put others in charge of my sanctuary.' 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and flesh

is to enter my sanctuary, not even the foreigners who live among the Israelites.

The Levites who went far from me when Israel went astray and who wandered from me after their idols must bear the consequences of their sin.' " -Ezekiel 44:6-10

Food Offered to Idols

Many Christians do not understand how ancient Israel (or any nation) could even think of worshiping graven images or offering food to idols, not to mention offering children as human sacrifices. If we had lived in those days; however, there would be no mystery to this behavior.

In ancient times, the nations of the world believed that good fortune and misfortune were not random events, but divine acts (Acts of God). For example, when a nation won a war, that was not coincidence; it was an act of God.

Sennacherib became king of Assyria about 705 B.C and soon began to consolidate his power and expand his kingdom. He prepared to attack Jerusalem during the reign of King Hezekiah and sent a military commander down to Israel "inviting" them to become subjects of Sennacherib or perish.

Study this taunt spoken to Israel by Sennacherib's commander: **"**[The commander said to Israel's elders:] **Do not let** [King] **Hezekiah mislead you when he says, 'The Lord will deliver us.' Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of** [Sennacherib] **the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim?**

Have [these gods of the Samaritans] **they rescued Samaria from my hand? Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me?** [Since the god of the Assyrians is greater than your God] **How then can the Lord deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"** (Isaiah 36:18-20, insertions mine)

Now, look at this text: **"Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses.**

And the Lord was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him." (2 Kings 18:5-7, emphasis mine) On the surface, this text could be interpreted to mean that God blessed King Hezekiah with victory over Sennacherib *because* Hezekiah obeyed the laws of Moses! What do you think?

Did God bless King Hezekiah with victory over Sennacherib because he obeyed the laws of Moses or did God bless Hezekiah because he loved the Lord with all his heart, mind and soul, and obedience was the result? Bible history reveals a simple, but profound truth: God loves everyone who sincerely loves Him and man's love for God is shown by submission to His commands.

People who sincerely love God are humble people. They are not self-righteous. They love their neighbors, they confess their sins and make restitution when needed, and they are concerned about the welfare of the poor.

God is not fooled by religious people who like to show off, nor is He impressed with rituals or flattering lip service. God sees within our hearts and He understands our motives and our carnal nature. Religious externals do not necessarily mean anything to God. (Isaiah 1:13-17)

There was a great deal of ignorance about God in Bible times. (Even in the 21st century, this has not changed much.) In Bible days, polytheism (worship of many gods) was widespread. People believed in hundreds of gods and each nation worshiped several.

If a person was blessed with a good harvest, he might think he had been blessed by a rain god or a harvest god (for example, Baal). If a person was blessed with prolific herds or a large number of children, he might think he was blessed by one of the goddesses of fertility: Ashtoreth, Artimes, or Venus. Of course, these "gods" were nothing, but how do you displace powerful religious concepts that coincidence and superstition produce?

The last thing any person wants is misfortune. So, to avoid misfortune, the ancients appeased their gods through sacrificial offerings (a distorted form of tithing). The ancients offered food because food was as precious as gold. There were no supermarkets, truck farms, tractors, refrigerators or freezers.

There was very little minted money. Food was often the currency of that day. Do you remember that Esau sold his birthright for a single meal? (Hebrews 12:16) Do you remember that Solomon used food to pay Hiram, king of Tyre, for materials to build the temple in Jerusalem? (1 Kings 5:11)

Food (usually, the meat from choice animals) was set before an idol for the purpose of keeping that particular god happy (in times of good fortune) or for the purpose of appeasing that god in times of misfortune. Either way, the priests of that particular god received the food and they ate it. Naturally, the priests did everything possible to keep the choice cuts coming.

If people were threatened by a disastrous event, they might resort to desperate means to avoid destruction. Situations like a terrible plague which could kill many animals or people, a small tribal nation facing destruction from a huge multi-nation army, or a severe famine could cause desperate people to even sacrifice their children as food offerings to the idols.

They hoped to appease their god’s wrath through the most expensive gifts they could provide. On March 20, 2006, *Reuters News Service* published an article by Tim Gaynor titled "Mayan Underworld Proves Researchers’ Dream." This article summarizes research that is currently underway in Mexico on a large number of sinkholes.

Keep in mind as you read this excerpt that the author is writing about an ancient civilization in Mexico that is far removed from the customs and cultures of the Middle East. "The ancient Maya once believed that Mexico’s jungle sinkholes containing crystalline waters were the

gateway to the underworld and the lair of a surly rain god who had to be appeased with human sacrifices. . . .

The region's 7,000 to 8,000 cenotes were formed when caves collapsed in on themselves. The resulting sinkholes became a vital water source and a focus for Mayan sacrifices to honor Chac, the volatile, crocodile-like rain deity." Isn't it interesting to discover that civilizations the world over adopted the idea that human sacrifices were necessary to appease the wrath of God?

I believe this phenomenon exists because the devil distorted the promise of God. Instead of God generously providing His Son to atone for our sins, parents had to offer up their own children to atone for their sins. How horrible!

Now that we have reviewed a little background on the importance of food and the worship of idols, let us return to the mind-set of the Jews after the Babylonian captivity.

Devout Jews avoided the worship of graven images at all costs. They were anxious to avoid sinning or offending God. They also believed that when clean meat was offered to idols, the meat became unclean or polluted. (Acts 15:20; 1 Corinthians 8:7)

When we understand something of the mind-set of Jewish and Gentile converts, we better understand why food offered to idols was a recurring point of controversy in the early church. The apostle Paul spent considerable effort trying to get Gentile converts in Rome and Asia Minor to terminate their past beliefs.

He wanted them to give up their superstitions about their former gods and to put their faith in Jesus. On the other hand, Jewish converts (who insisted on maintaining their traditions) found it difficult, if not impossible, to associate with disgusting Gentiles who drank animal blood and ate food offered to idols. (Gentiles often drank animal blood thinking it would give them the strength of that animal.)

These background matters are important if you want to understand Paul's writings. In his writings, Paul typically focused on three problems that afflicted the early church:

1. The foolishness of trying to earn salvation through obedience

2. The primacy of being born again and the role of faith and love

3. Disputable conflicts between Jewish believers and Gentile converts

If you understand how eating food offered to idols, circumcision, observance of rituals and Levitical feasts were frequent points of contention within the early church, then the writings of Paul on these matters will make a lot of sense *just as they read*. Otherwise, they will become very confusing.

Think about this: Gentile converts came into the Christian church with superstitious beliefs and religious baggage. Jewish converts came into the Christian church with superstitions and a

thousand traditions. Furthermore, each group had a long history of dislike for the other.

Is it any surprise that within twenty years of Christ's ascension, conflicts within the Christian movement became so tense that the apostle James called for a meeting of the apostles and elders? James knew that if the Christian church did not deal with these controversies, it would fall apart.

The First Church Council

The thorny question which forced the elders and apostles to meet in A.D. 49 was, "What should we do with Gentile converts." Should Gentile males undergo circumcision and should the laws of Moses be obeyed? This conflict was pressed hard by many well-educated Pharisees who had converted to Christianity!

"Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.' The apostles and elders met to consider this question." (Acts 15:5,6, emphasis mine)

It is interesting to note that it took approximately twenty years after Jesus ascended before the church answered these questions. Do not forget, the apostles and elders were Jewish converts themselves and now Paul's success among the Gentiles forced them into deciding, once for all, whether male Gentiles would have to be circumcised and if the laws of Moses should be obeyed.

The apostles and elders thoughtfully and prayerfully agreed that circumcision was not necessary – not on the basis of a majority vote, but rather on the basis of God's actions. In other words, the apostles and elders did not construct a new church doctrine by their own "authority."

Rather, they listened to the revelations given to Peter (Acts 10) and Paul (Galatians 1:12; 2 Corinthians 12), and after considering the details and miracles that confirmed these revelations (Acts 14:3), the council concluded that the "everlasting covenant of circumcision" given to Abraham (Genesis 17) had been terminated.

They reached this conclusion on the grounds that (a) the biological offspring of Abraham had clearly rejected Messiah (John 1:11; Acts 3), and (b) they had broken the covenant which God had made with them. (Exodus 19:5,6; Leviticus 26; Matthew 23:37,38)

Therefore, since circumcision was a sign of the old covenant, circumcision could not be required under the new covenant! (Luke 22:20; Hosea 8:1; Hebrews 8:8; 1 Corinthians 11:25) When you consider the Jewish origin of the elders and apostles, this was a huge decision.

Christianity was based on a *new covenant* (Hebrews 9:15), and because God had declared that Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ are heirs together in the promises He gave to Abraham (Ephesians 2:11-20; Galatians 3:28,29), the elders concluded that as far as God was

concerned, circumcision of the heart was all that mattered. (Romans 2:28,29)

They concluded that God redefined Israel when He established the new covenant and James acknowledged this transition at the beginning of his epistle.

He addressed Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ calling them "the twelve tribes." (James 1:1; 2:1) For these and other reasons, the elders and apostles concluded that God no longer required circumcision of the flesh.

The council also discussed certain life-style issues as they pertained to exalting the name of Jesus. They decided that certain behaviors were important for Christian conduct and important for Christian living.

Therefore, in an effort *to keep peace* between Jewish and Gentile converts, the council agreed that incoming Gentiles must adhere to four rules if they wanted to become members of the church. These four rules are recorded in Acts 15:19 and they are:

1. - Abstain from food polluted by idols

2. - Abstain from sexual immorality

3. - Abstain from the meat of strangled animals

4. - Abstain from drinking animal blood

When you review this list, consider the nature and seriousness of these four rules. They reflect four serious problems which faced the early church. Other than sexual immorality, Christians *today* are not widely troubled with the other three problems mentioned in this list.

Why is this an important point? Many Christians read the New Testament without any knowledge of these problems that have just been considered, so when they read Romans 14, it becomes easy to lift Paul’s words out of the specific controversies occurring within the early church and place them within current issues today!

The result is that the intent of Paul’s words is grossly distorted. Paul ends up "saying things" that he never intended to say!

Two more points need to be highlighted before we continue. First, these four rules did **not** represent the totality of Christian doctrine nor did the elders attempt at this council to define the totality of Christian beliefs.

Revelations were still coming from Jesus (for example, the book of Revelation and the gospel of John had not been written yet), so this short list was a beginning place for order within the church.

The apostles and elders said nothing in Acts 15 about obvious issues such as believing in

Jesus, using God's name in vain, loving their neighbors, murder, dishonoring parents, clean and unclean food, stealing or lying! This short list of four rules simply represented a threshold on *disputable matters.*

New believers were required to meet these obligations to become a part of the church. The bottom line was blunt and simple: Christians could not live like pagans or barbarians and remain members of the church. (See 1 Corinthians 5; Revelation 2:12-16.)

There was no room in the church for superstition, defiling conduct or sexual immorality. Second, it is important to understand that the elders did not impose these four rules on the Gentiles *for the purpose of granting salvation to the Gentiles*.

Rather, these four rules were stated for the purpose of fostering spiritual and physical health, peace and social harmony within a growing, but diverse church. The apostles and elders understood that no one but God has the authority to set the terms and conditions for salvation. They also knew that no one but Jesus can save a sinner.

The Church at Corinth

The council meeting in A.D. 49 was pivotal. For the first time, Christians had taken a corporate position that circumcision was unnecessary. This was truly a landmark decision when you consider the biological heritage of the leaders of the church.

Second, the council ruled that the laws of Moses were no longer obligatory. This was another landmark decision. However, at the grass roots level, these decisions did not go over very well in various churches (Ephesus, Galatia, Colossae, Corinth, Rome, etc.). Controversy sprang up because many Jewish converts were not so sure the elders and apostles had made good decisions.

After the council, Paul traveled throughout Asia Minor defending the decisions of the council and this conflict made him a target for hostility.

Paul found himself constantly dealing with Pharisees in every church. Many devout Pharisees had joined the Christian church because there was advancing truth and there were miracles. The miracles were compelling evidence that "the way of Christ" was the work of God.

However, the Pharisees brought into the church a host of theological problems which Paul was constantly opposing. Paul had established a church at Corinth and two books of the New Testament are directed to this church because of certain controversies that simmered between Jews (the Pharisees) and Gentiles in Corinth. Here are two passages that need our attention [insertions mine]:

"[As believers in Christ] **Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom** [from the law of Moses] **does not become a stumbling block to the weak** [new converts to Christ]**.**

For if anyone with a weak conscience [for example, a recent convert who formerly worshiped idols] **sees you** [doing the very things that he once did] **who have this knowledge** [of freedom in Christ that] **eating in an idol's temple** [is nothing]**, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols** [all over again]**? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died,** [will possibly return to his old superstitions and pagan ways because he will lose his faith in Christ. See how he] **is destroyed by your** [freedom and] **knowledge.**

When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

Therefore, if what I eat causes my [weaker] **brother to fall into** [the] **sin** [of worshiping idols]**, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall. Am I not free** [from slavery and don't I have the rights and privileges of a Roman Citizen]**?**

Am I not an apostle [appointed by the Lord Himself]**? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord** [in person]**? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? . . . Though I am** [truly blessed and fully] **free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible** [to Christ]**. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews.**

To those under the law [of Moses] **I became like one under the law** [of Moses] **(though I myself am not under the law** [of Moses]**), so as to win those** [who unfortunately continue to live] **under the law. To those not having the law** [of Moses] **I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's** [Ten Commandments, His moral] **law but am under Christ's law** [that we love one another as He loved us]**), so as to win those not having** [any knowledge of] **the law** [of Moses]**."** (1 Corinthians 8:9-9:1; 19-21)

After making it clear to the church in Corinth that no one should use their freedom from the law of Moses in an offensive way [that is, Jews who knew that idols were nothing, should not torment new Gentile converts who were turning away from past superstitions and idol worship; and conversely, Gentiles should not torment Jewish converts who were concerned about eating something unclean], Paul went to the core of the food problem:

"You cannot [come to church and] **drink the** [communion] **cup of the Lord and** [then go to various temples and drink] **the** [communion] **cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table** [in church] **and** [also drink from] **the table of demons** [at their temples]**. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy** [by serving other gods]**?**

Are we stronger than he? [Because we are now free from the obligations stated in the law of Moses] **'Everything** [that God has declared moral] **is permissible'– but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything** [that God has declared to be moral] **is permissible'– but not everything is constructive** [to the mission and goals of the church]**.**

Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. [When you get together for lunch] **Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience** [that is, don't ask if the meat was offered to idols]**, for, 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.** [We know that an idol is nothing and an idol owns nothing. We have this superior knowledge

through Christ our Lord, but new believers do not understand these things.]**'**

If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice [to the gods]**,' then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake – the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours.**

[Consider this conflict from a practical point of view] **For why should my freedom be judged** [be condemned] **by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal** [without asking where the meat came from, but I receive it] **with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for** [since I know that an idol is nothing. Why should I be concerned about eating food that is permissible unless it causes my weaker brother to stumble]**?**

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or [within] **the church of God."** (1 Corinthians 10:21-32)

Sixty-five years after Jesus returned to Heaven, the church was still struggling with the problem of food offered to idols. Today, this ancient controversy is not significant in the United States because the controversy does not exist.

However, it was a significant problem in the early church and you have to understand the seriousness of this problem to properly understand the writings of Paul. If Paul's words are lifted out their context, Paul's counsel becomes distorted.

To some extent, Paul's efforts to correct the ways of the early church went unheeded. The issue of food offered to idols was not completely terminated until Jesus spoke to the seven churches of Asia Minor through the apostle John in A.D. 95. Jesus told the church at Pergamum: **"Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality."** (Revelation 2:14)

When the message to Pergamum was published among the churches, the controversy finally died. Jesus Himself had spoken. I hope you understand by now that this topic created a lot of friction in the early church. The antagonism between Gentiles and Jews made the early churches contentious.

Paul appealed to both sides that they love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul knew that if the members of the church would just be patient with each other, the church would eventually overcome these conflicts because they were *disputable* matters that the Holy Spirit would resolve.

When in Jerusalem, Do as the Jews Do

Paul's efforts to steer the Christian movement away from Jewish traditions eventually created a

backlash among the brothers in Jerusalem. From Paul's point of view, it began to look as though a Christian version of Judaism was developing, and of course, Paul, a former Pharisee himself, was strongly opposed to that. (Galatians 2)

Eventually, Paul returned to Jerusalem. He wanted to meet with the elders, encourage them with his reports on church growth and explain some of the controversies in which he was embroiled. Paul realized the church at Jerusalem was not moving forward with Christian doctrine as it should because there were too many Jewish paradigms controlling "the headquarters of Christianity."

So, he went to Jerusalem to "help the brethren" align their gospel with revelations that had been given to him, and during this visit, the four rules imposed on the Gentiles in A.D. 49 were reviewed. (See Acts 21.)

Because Paul was a controversial figure at the headquarters church (Jerusalem), the elders encouraged Paul to show some Jewish solidarity. They wanted Paul to participate with some Jewish believers in "an old fashioned" Jewish cleansing ritual which required going into the temple of the Jews.

The elders thought this act would assure the church leaders in Jerusalem that Paul had not abandoned Jewish customs altogether. Although Paul knew this ritual could not purify the soul or the flesh, he had no problem going through the ritual to demonstrate one of his most controversial doctrines: "As far as possible, in matters of conscience toward God, when in Rome, do as the Romans, and when in Jerusalem, do as the Jews."

One day, while Paul was in the temple participating in the ritual with Jewish believers, he was recognized by some Jews who were also worshiping there. They shouted, **"Men of Israel, help us** [catch this man]**! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought** [uncircumcised] **Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place."** (Acts 21:28, insertions mine)

Paul was immediately arrested by temple guards and later, handed over to secular authorities because he was a Roman citizen. Eventually, he ended up in Rome because he had the right, as a Roman citizen, to have Caesar review the details of his arrest.

Paul's appeal to Caesar was his best hope for freedom. He had been arrested on religious charges trumped up by religious zealots, but he had done nothing against the laws of Rome. Instead of being set free, Paul was beheaded. Legend says that he was beheaded by Nero, an avowed enemy of Christians and Jews alike, because in order to appeal to Caesar, one had to first confess that Caesar was God.

The apostle Paul left behind an incredible legacy for Christians. He wrote fourteen of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament. He did not teach that "unclean" meat (as defined in Leviticus 11) became "clean" meat after the cross. Paul does say that idols are nothing, and clean meat offered to idols is not contaminated. (1 Corinthians 8:4-8)

However, if immature believers in the local church are offended by those who eat clean meat offered to idols, then stop eating the meat for their sake! If Paul, "a Pharisee of the Pharisees," had known that foods such as pork and shrimp became permissible after the death of Jesus, he would have plainly said so – just as he clearly said that circumcision became unnecessary after the cross. (Galatians 5:2-6)

Paul never condoned lawless behavior, but his writings are often used to defend lawlessness. Many Christians think that the Ten Commandments *and* the laws of Moses were nailed to the cross because Paul says so. This is not true. Some Christians distort Paul's writings with purpose.

They want to eliminate the "Jewish Sabbath" and the only way to do this is through the elimination of the other nine! Often, when Christians say the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross, they turn around and assert that nine of the commandments should be obeyed.

Paul knew the laws of Moses had been nailed to the cross and he plainly said so in Colossians 2:14 and Ephesians 2:15. Paul also knew the Ten Commandments had not been nailed to the cross and he said so. **"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments** [which God Himself spoke]**, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."** (Romans 13:8-10, insertion mine)

Paul had been a devout legalist. As such, he earnestly sought salvation through perfect obedience. After he became a Christian, Paul did not abandon the necessity of obeying the Ten Commandments. Rather, Paul put obeying God's commandments into proper perspective.

Paul found that salvation comes through faith in Christ and love for God and man. Faith and love do not eliminate God's law. No, the law remains and love fulfills the intent of the law.

Extracting Christianity from Judaism was a complicated process, but God raised up a brilliant man to explain the process. For this reason, surface readers of the Bible find Paul to be confusing and conflicted.

However, in his defense, you would have had to live at that time to appreciate the obstacles he faced. I will close this segment with Paul's counsel to the Romans (which is consistent with everything he said to the troubled believers in Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus and Colossae):

"Accept him[new converts] **whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters** [such as food offered to idols or the observance of feast days]**. One man's faith allows him to eat everything** [that is clean]**, but another man, whose faith is weak,** [avoids meat that may have been offered to idol and] **eats only vegetables.**

The man who [knows that idols are nothing and] **eats everything** [that God allows] **must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything** [that God

allows] **must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge** [condemn] **someone else's servant?**

To his own master he [the servant] **stands** [justified by his actions] **or falls** [condemned by his actions]**. And he** [the sincere servant] **will stand** [justified]**, for the Lord is able to make him stand** [justified]**. One man** [for example, a Jewish believer] **considers one day** [like Nisan 15, the date for Passover] **more sacred than another** [day]**; another man** [for example, a Gentile has no regard for Passover. He] **considers every day alike.**

Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats [clean] **meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains** [from clean meat because it may have been polluted by idols]**, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God."** (Romans 14:1-6)

"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God [the establishment of the church] **for the sake of food. All food** [which God allows] **is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat** [any] **meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."** (Romans 14:19-21)

"For everything God created [to be eaten] **is good, and nothing is to be rejected** [even if offered to idols] **if it is received with thanksgiving because it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer."** (1 Timothy 4:4,5)

Feast Days and Sabbath Days

The Jews observed the seventh day Sabbath and they also observed six annual feasts, also called Sabbaths, which could fall on any day of the week.

It was mentioned in my short response that the seventh day Sabbath was made holy at Creation (Genesis 2:1-3) and the remembrance of the Sabbath was commanded in the Ten Commandments. On the other hand, six Sabbath-feasts were created for Israel's benefit shortly after the Exodus and the specifications for each feast were defined in the laws of Moses. (Exodus 12:14-17; 34:23; Leviticus 16:29-31;23:16, 24, 34)

The Jews regarded the convergence of a Sabbath-feast and a seventh-day Sabbath as a "high Sabbath" or a "special Sabbath." (John 19:31)

The laws of Moses were not an extension of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are a timeless and unilateral *covenant* between God and man (Deuteronomy 5:3-22; 4:13), whereas the laws of Moses were written by man and were based upon a mutual agreement or bilateral *covenant* between Israel and God. (Exodus 19:5,6)

From their inception, the laws of Moses were temporary laws – they were designed to end when Messiah died. To emphasize the difference between the laws of Moses and the Ten

Commandments, the laws of Moses were written on parchment.

The decalogue (Ten Commandments written on stone) rested inside the Ark of the Covenant, but the laws of Moses were kept "in a pocket" outside the Ark. (Deuteronomy 31:24-26)

The use of the word "law" can be confusing in the New Testament. Sometimes, the word referred to the Ten Commandments. (Romans 3:31; 7:7) On other occasions, the word referred to the laws of Moses. (Acts 21:20; 23:3) And sometimes, the word "law" referred to the first five books of the Bible. (John 12:34; Luke 24:44)

The Jews often debated the differences between the Ten Commandments and the laws of Moses. Some Jews thought that all of God's laws were equal in nature. Other Jews disagreed. One day, Jesus was asked, "Which is the greatest commandment in the law?" and Jesus answered saying,

". . . 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40)

People in the United States should find it fairly easy to understand certain differences between laws. For example, the Constitution is the highest and most important law in the U.S. However, the Constitution permits the fifty states to make laws as needed as long as they are in harmony with the U.S. Constitution.

State laws vary from state to state. For example, the speed limit in one state may differ from that of another state. Ohio has a state income tax, but Texas does not. State laws are not an extension of the U.S. Constitution. State laws cannot trample on the rights which are protected by the Constitution, but state laws are just as obligatory as constitutional laws.

The Royal Law (that is, the King's law which is the highest law) is fulfilled through love. (James 2:8; Romans 13:10) Paul wrote, **"The entire law** [that is, the entire second tablet of the Ten Commandments] **is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' "** (Galatians 5:14, insertion mine)

Of course, Paul is not saying that we should love our neighbor more than we love God. He would never say that. Paul spoke as he did because loving God above everything else was not part of that discussion. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Love for God and love for our neighbor is defined by the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments define how love is to be expressed to God and the last six commandments define how love is to be expressed to our neighbor. You might ask, "How is love defined in the commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal?'"

The answer is simple: When we come to a place where we love our neighbor more than anything he possesses, the intent of "thou shalt not steal" is fulfilled. When we refuse to take

something that belongs to another person because of love, God is pleased (and so is our neighbor).

The Ten Commandments represent God's will for all mankind at all times. The King's law reaches beyond the highest human thought. (Isaiah 55:9)

The Ten Commandments are stated in the negative because we live in a carnal world. The carnal nature is diametrically opposed to the spiritual nature. (Romans 8) In other words, God wrote the Ten Commandments in such a way that even carnal minded people can benefit from them.

For example, if a carnal person refrains from stealing because God said it is wrong to steal, then it is good for everyone. Society requires law and order. However, if a spiritual person's motive not to steal is because he loves his neighbor as himself, then this is much better because the glory of the law is fulfilled.

When the Ten Commandments are written in the heart, they reflect the behavior of a born-again person. In other words, when a spiritual person loves God and his neighbor as himself, the Ten Commandments "in action" become how love is expressed.

Christian Squirming

Most Christians are caught in a difficult situation with respect to the Ten Commandments. They widely accept nine of the commandments as the will of God; however, the fourth commandment is a totally different story. Thousands of books have been written on this topic and the defense always builds its case on textual distortion.

This is so foolish. What is wrong with the fourth commandment? Why is it so undesirable? Why do people hate the idea of giving God the respect He is due on the day that He has made holy?

Let me be clear: Compliance with the Ten Commandments does not bring a human being into favor with God. The Pharisees were careful to obey the Ten Commandments, but that did not draw them close to God! Obeying the seventh commandment will not merit salvation and neither will observing the seventh day.

Obedience merely brings the person into favor with the law. If the law is good and beneficial, the obedient person becomes the beneficiary of that law. If everyone obeyed the letter of the law as written in the Ten Commandments, planet Earth would be a much improved place to live!

There would be no killing, stealing, adultery, or cursing, and furthermore, there would be a wonderful day of rest each week! God gave the Ten Commandments to humanity for the benefit and welfare of the nations.

Paul experienced the difference between living under the law as a means to achieving salvation versus living under the law to discover the enabling power of God's grace.

As a Pharisee, Paul had been rigorous in his obedience to the Ten Commandments and the laws of Moses because he believed that salvation was achieved through perfect obedience. After he was converted, he discovered a profound truth. His efforts were in vain.

Salvation comes as a gift from God, granted to everyone who is willing to trust and obey God. Does faith eliminate God's law? Yes and No. Yes, faith eliminates the law as the way to salvation. No, faith does not eliminate our obligation to obey the law. Paul wrote, **"Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."** (Romans 3:31)

After Paul came to know Jesus and the plan of salvation, he began to understand the higher purpose of the Ten Commandments. He saw everything in a totally different light. In fact, he saw that instead of being the perfect Pharisee he thought he was, he was actually a corrupt human being! Notice his words [insertions mine]:

"For when we were controlled by the sinful [carnal] **nature,** [we were not aware of] **the sinful passions** [that controlled us until they were] **aroused by** [a true knowledge of] **the law** [of God. Then we discovered that evil passions] **were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death** [even though we thought we were pleasing God]**.**

[I was persecuting Christians thinking I was doing God a service. I was totally ignorant, blinded by my religion, but I didn't know it then.] **But now,** [after hearing the gracious offer of God, I reject my former ways] **by dying to what once bound us** [the foolishness of rigorous obedience that merits salvation]**, we have been released from the** [sinless perfection demanded by the] **law so that we serve** [God and man] **in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of** [trying to work our way to Heaven by obeying] **the written code.**

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin [a transgression against mankind]**? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law.**

For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law [the tenth commandment] **had not said, "Do not covet."** [After I began to understand my evil passions with respect to the spiritual goal of the law, I saw my weakness within.] **But** [my attraction and propensity for] **sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the** [knowledge of the tenth] **commandment, produced in me** [a conflict. I discovered] **every kind of covetous desire** [within me, whereas, I had thought I was in perfect compliance with the law]**.**

For apart from law, sin is [non-existent] **dead.** [In other words, where there is no law, there is no sin!] **Once I was alive** [my self-righteousness was very pleased, but I was] **apart from** [truly understanding the spiritual nature of God's] **law; but when** [my heart was changed and a spiritual understanding of] **the** [tenth] **commandment came,** [my self-righteous nature was offended because the power of] **sin sprang to life and I** [willingly] **died** [to my self righteousness].

I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life [in the Spirit] **actually brought death** [to self-righteousness]**.**

For sin [within me]**, seizing the opportunity afforded by the** [tenth] **commandment, deceived me** [I thought I was a good person before God since I had not violated the law]**, and through** [a correct understanding of] **the commandment** [the Spirit] **put me** [and all of my self righteousness] **to death.**

So then, [I now see that] **the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death** [the end of me] **to me? By no means!**

But in order that sin might be recognized as sin [within my carnal heart]**, it** [the law] **produced death in me** [by killing my self-righteousness] **through what was good, so that through** [a spiritual understanding of] **the** [tenth] **commandment sin might become utterly sinful."** (Romans 7:5-13)

Paul wrote this passage after he had been a Christian for about 30 years. His words reveal two profound points. First, Paul chose the tenth commandment to make his point because he discovered that he had a serious weakness for coveting.

As a young man, Paul coveted the praise and adulation of the Pharisees. Once he understood the spiritual value of the law, the tenth commandment proved that he was a common sinner. Second, Paul insists that apart from law, there is no sin!

Again, it seems so silly for Christians to nail the Ten Commandments to the cross and then revive nine of them for the purpose of having some definition for sin.

John wrote, **"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness."** (1 John 3:4) James adds, **"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."** (James 2:10) Again, I have to ask, "What is wrong with the fourth commandment?"

Sabbath Feasts

There is a big difference between observing a weekly seventh day Sabbath and an annual feast day Sabbath. The fourth commandment forbids work on the seventh day.

From a carnal point of view, that is the sum and substance of the fourth commandment. Feast day laws were entirely different. They required many specific activities internal to the observance of the feast.

For example, the law of Moses stated that Passover observance required selecting, slaying and roasting a lamb at a certain time on certain days. (See Exodus 12 and Numbers 28:16-25.) The Day of Atonement required sacrificing a young bull, one ram and seven male lambs that were one year old. (Numbers 29:8)

The Feast of Tabernacles required a very intricate series of burnt offerings for eight days. (Numbers 29:12-40) The Feast of Pentecost also required a specific series of burnt offerings.

(Numbers 28:26-31)

Now that we know what the Mosaic law required with respect to the feasts, I have to ask: "Where in the Bible does it say that you can observe a feast day **without** meeting the requirements of that feast day?"

When Israel was in Babylonian captivity, feast days were not celebrated because the exiles could not carry out the specific requirements of the feast days. (See Hosea 2:8-11.) Some people argue at great length that the commands establishing the observance of the feast days are separate and distinct from the commands requiring certain activities on those days.

This is nonsense. Such a division is fabricated and a distortion of Scripture. *God never separated the observance of a feast day from the activities required of a feast.*

The annual feasts cannot be observed without obeying all that the law demands. Remember, James said if we break the law on one point, we break the whole thing. This is true for the Ten Commandments and it was true for the laws of Moses.

The Feasts Were Temporary

Unlike the seventh day of the week, which is a memorial to Creation, each feast day was an object lesson that pointed forward to the ministry of Messiah and His execution of the plan of salvation. For example, the first Passover was an object lesson about judgment day.

Moses told the people to kill a lamb and put the blood on the doorposts of their house. If a "believer" obeyed, the death angel "passed over" that household. If a person did not believe Moses and did not do what was required, the death angel killed the first born.

The object lesson to which this event pointed is huge and wonderful to understand. A day is coming when God will "pass over" the household of each heart and if the blood of the Lamb of God is on the doorpost, he or she will escape the penalty of sin, which is death by execution.

With the passage of time, the apostles clearly understood how the feasts were shadows of things to come. When they began to understand the object lessons to which the feasts pointed, they refused to impose the observance of the feasts upon new converts.

The shadows in the laws of Moses disappeared in the wonderful light of truth. After his conversion, Paul did not observe the feast days. For example, all Jews were required to go up to Jerusalem to attend three feasts per year. (Exodus 23:17) Paul ignored going to the feasts for at least three years! (See Acts 18:11, 19:10.)

When he was with those who observed the feasts, he participated – not because they were obligatory, but out of deference to his brothers who felt compelled to continue with "tradition." Paul’s respect for those who were weaker in the faith is clearly seen in Romans 14:1-5.

(It was considered highly offensive for a Jewish Christian to antagonize his Jewish brothers. For this reason, Paul was accommodating in practice, but not in principle. See Galatians 2:11-13.)

Paul specifically addressed a controversy over the observance of Passover in Corinth. The Pharisees were doing their best to get the Gentiles to observe Passover. Paul wrote, **"Get rid of the old yeast*** [that is, your sinful past] **that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are** [justified through the sacrifice of Jesus, our Passover Lamb]**. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.**

[The laws demanding the slaughter of the Passover lamb and the observance of the feast died with Him.] **Therefore let us keep the Festival** [in our behavior toward each other]**, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness** [for one another]**, but with** [better] **bread without** [the] **yeast** [of this world]**, the bread of sincerity and truth."** (1 Corinthians 5:7,8)

(***Note:** Prior to observing Passover, the Jews were commanded to remove all yeast from their houses. The first day of Passover was the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which lasted for seven days.

The object lesson for the Feast of Unleavened Bread is beautiful: If you want the death angel to pass over your house, purify your heart by removing anything sinful! **"Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."** (1 Corinthians 7:1))

Some people distort 1 Corinthians 5:7,8 to make Paul appear as though he is endorsing the observance of Passover. This is not true, for if he had, Paul would have insisted on obeying the law and going to Jerusalem as God required. (Exodus 23:17; Deuteronomy 12:13,14)

Perhaps the best evidence of Paul's attitude about observing the annual feast days is found in Galatians. Paul sternly rebuked the church at Galatia for backsliding into Jewish customs. He wrote, **". . . how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles** [listed in the laws of Moses]**? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you."** (Galatians 4:9-11)

On another occasion, Paul addressed the church at Colossae. Church members were upset because Pharisee believers insisted on the necessity of circumcision and observing the laws of Moses.

Paul told the church that the laws of Moses commanded Israel to observe certain feasts, but these were *shadows* of Jesus and His ministry. **"**[There is no further need for the circumcision of the flesh because] **In him** [Jesus] **you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried** [into his death] **with him in baptism and raised** [out of the water] **with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.**

When you were dead in your sins [to spiritual things] **and in the uncircumcision of your sinful**

nature, God made you alive with Christ [God circumcised your hearts]**. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code** [of Moses]**, with its** [many] **regulations, that was against us** [contrary to our carnal hearts] **and that stood opposed to us** [condemned us]**; he took it away, nailing it to the cross** [with Jesus]**.**

And having disarmed the powers [authority of the Jews] **and** [Roman] **authorities, he made a public spectacle of them** [showing their weakness]**, triumphing over them by** [using] **the** [despised and degenerate] **cross.**

Therefore [since Jesus has come from the tomb and you have come to life with Him] **do not let anyone** [among the Pharisees] **judge you** [condemn you] **by what you eat or drink** [we know idols are nothing]**, or** [condemn you] **with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration** [Numbers 10:10] **or a Sabbath** [feast] **day.**

[All of] **These are a shadow of the things that were to come;** [now that He has come] **the reality, however, is found in** [ministry of] **Christ."** (Colossians 2:11-17)

At Calvary, the shadows to which the laws of Moses pointed disappeared. The practices of an entire religion became obsolete on a single day – although it took many years to figure this out.

Now that Jesus has ascended, says Paul, the laws of Moses are impossible to observe. (Hebrews 7:12) The Mosaic system was only a shadow of things to come. The sacrifices of sheep and goats never atoned for sin – they too, were object lessons. (Hebrews 10:4)

Paul came to understand that obedience was not a prerequisite for salvation. Obeying God's Ten Commandments will not produce salvation, but faith in God for salvation does not eliminate the demands of the Ten Commandments.

God gave the laws of Moses to Israel as a vehicle to teach *how* the plan of salvation would be implemented. (Galatians 3-4) God personally spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel to declare His sovereign will for all mankind.

After Jesus died on Calvary, the "schoolmaster" (the laws of Moses, Galatians 3:24,25, KJV) was no longer needed because human beings, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, have enough information to figure out the dimensions of the plan of salvation.

Works and Salvation

Many people have a hard time sorting out the relationship between faith, works and salvation. The road to Heaven is lined with two ditches. On the right-hand side of the road is the ditch of fanaticism and self-righteousness. Some people, like Paul, are born in this ditch and they may never climb out.

Some may jump out of this ditch only to land on the other side of the road in the ditch of affluence, indifference and neglect. These ditches exist because *it is far easier to be casually*

religious or a religious zealot than to practice the principles of faith and love. The devil is pleased to have us in either ditch.

I once asked a young man, very zealous about the law, if he sinned anymore. He said "Oh, no." I asked again, "Do you knowingly commit sin?" Again, he said "Oh, no."

Then, I said, "Your righteousness is man made because the moral law of God reaches beyond your ability to recognize sin. Once you have learned what is wrong, then you must learn what is right!" In other words, sin is more than commission, it is also omission. **"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."** (James 4:17)

For this reason, **"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:23) John wrote, **"If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. . . . If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."** (1 John 1:10; 4:20)

God's requirements for the human race are surprisingly light. His yoke is easy. (Matthew 11:30) You may ask, if this is the case, then why did Israel constantly fail? The problem is love. The carnal heart loves itself more than it loves God and others. Unless we are born again, the kind of love that God wants is missing.

The gift of salvation is free, but obeying God costs everything. (Matthew 7:21) The rich young ruler could not follow Jesus because he could not let go of his money. (Matthew 19:16-22) He loved wealth more than God! He was in the ditch on the left side of the road.

The problem with ancient Israel remains the problem with Christians today. We do not love God enough to live by faith. We either want to make up our own rules for salvation or we want to "improve" on God's requirements by adding 2,000 more. God says that ten rules are enough for born again people.

Are the Ten Commandments binding? Yes. Will obedience save me? No. Will my faith in Jesus save me if I following His calling? Yes.

The Great Tribulation

Previously, I wrote that a time is coming when God will notify the whole world that He requires us to worship Him on His seventh day Sabbath. This may sound farfetched at the moment, but the book of Revelation predicts that God is about to send a series of fourteen destructive judgments upon the Earth (seven trumpets and seven bowls). The first four judgments will kill 25% of the world's population. (Revelation 6:7,8)

At that time, a politically and religiously diverse world will awaken to the reality that God is angry and, corporately speaking, the world will conclude that God's wrath must be appeased or everyone will quickly perish.

To appease God, the nations of the world will, among other things, enact a series of laws that will require everyone to worship God. (I have discussed these matters at length in my book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled.*) A great controversy regarding worship will materialize during the Great Tribulation. (Revelation 13)

During the Great Tribulation, God's servants, the 144,000, will call mankind to worship the Creator as He commands. (Exodus 20:8-11; Revelation 14:6,7)

A conflict arises because God demands that we rest on His holy day, Saturday, the seventh day. This will be in direct opposition to the "worship laws" which the religions of the world are supporting. Through this controversy, the enduring nature of the Ten Commandments – particularly the fourth commandment – will surface. Everyone on planet Earth will be talking about this matter.

Of course, many people will defiantly rebel against God's commandments, just like they did in Noah's day. Revelation 11:19 points forward to a day near the end of the Great Tribulation when God will literally present the Ten Commandments to a rebellious world.

The whole world will see the tablets of stone written by the finger of God. The wicked will see the very law they refused to obey. What greater evidence can there be than to literally see the law that so many people refused to acknowledge?

I hope you will prayerfully consider these matters. I also hope you will examine two articles on the web which I have written on the Sabbath. They are titled, *What happened to the Lord's Day?* and *From Sabbath to Sunday.* (These articles are also found in my book, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega.*)

Let me conclude this study with a summary text that everyone should respect: **"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."** (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14)

I hope this has been helpful!

Women in Ministry

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:
I came across your website and after reading some of your articles, I would like your response to a matter that bothers me. My church does not permit women to become pastors or to speak from the desk during the divine service. However, women are allowed to teach Sunday school classes for the children.

I have read Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12 and although Paul leaves no doubt about his feelings on the role of women, does God actually forbid women from serving as a pastor or religious leader? If so, where is the text? I would like to read it. Thank you in advance for taking time to answer my question.

Sincerely,
Tangie"

Dear Tangie:
Thank you for your email. You have asked a good question and this topic continues to generate considerable controversy. The Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Jews and numerous Protestant Churches will not allow women to serve as priests, rabbis or ordained ministers.

Furthermore, most if not all sects within the Islamic faith will not permit women to serve as religious leaders. Historically, religion has been a male dominated business for thousands of years.

(One could say that religion is where it is today because it has been dominated by males for thousands of years, but that is another matter. Smile.) So, your question goes to the heart of a long standing controversy: Does God forbid women from serving as pastors and religious leaders?

There is no specific text where God Himself says that women are forbidden from serving as pastors or religious leaders unless the two texts you mentioned are treated as God speaking directly through Paul.

However, if we treat everything that Paul wrote as God speaking directly through him, a number of insurmountable textual problems will arise. For example, look at 1 Corinthians 7:29 and Romans 13:12. These two texts indicate that Paul sometimes spoke for himself.

I mention this phenomenon because some people treat the Bible as though it were a book of divine "proof texts." This is not the case. The Bible requires investigation, line upon line, and precept upon precept. God's ways are intricate and expansive.

If you can accept the concept that there is a difference between God's **intended will** and God's **permissive will**, you may find my conclusions to be helpful, even surprising. So, please give the following response to your question some prayerful consideration.

Definitions

By definition, God's "intended will" is a process or behavior that God initially prefers. Bible history proves that unfortunately, God's intended will is rarely achieved. The problem is mankind. We are rebellious toward God by nature.

Human beings can choose to rebel against God's authority and this explains why God does not often get the response that He seeks from us. I like to think of God's **intended** will as "Plan A." However, when people rebel against "Plan A," God eventually abandons "Plan A" and implements another course of action that I call "Plan B."

Ultimately, the will of God cannot be thwarted because **God will find someone** to accomplish all that He wants accomplished. Keep in mind, "Plan B" only becomes necessary when rebellion makes "Plan A" unattainable. There's one more point about "Plan B" that I need to make.

When God puts "Plan B" in motion, the outcome is even larger, grander, and better than "Plan A!" There are many "Plan A – Plan B" stories in the Bible. Please consider these two examples:

1. When God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He **intended** for them to enjoy life to the fullest. There was no sin, so there was no death, suffering, sorrow or pain. Everything that God created for Adam and Eve was perfect and beautiful and God made it possible for the parents of the human race to live happily ever after — as long as they did not sin.

For some length of time, Adam and Eve were filled with joy beyond words. Because there was no rebellion in their nature, they were in perfect harmony with each other. Differences of opinion were easily resolved because their love and respect for each other was not tainted with any hint of selfishness.

The Garden of Eden sums up God's **intended will** for mankind, or, as I call it, "Plan A." But, Adam and Eve sinned. They rebelled against God's law. Accusations started, then sorrow, suffering, pain and death appeared. For no reason other than love for mankind, God implemented "Plan B."

The *plan* of salvation is the first "Plan B" to be implemented in the Bible and it was put into effect because of God's **permissive** will. God did not intend that Adam and Eve should sin. God did not make them sin. Eve was deceived by Lucifer and Adam willingly chose to sin.

Jesus loved Adam and Eve more than we can imagine. When they sinned, Jesus asked the Father if He could die in their place so that they might live again. The Bible says, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only son...." Four thousand years later, Jesus came to Earth and He was executed for our sins.

The death of Jesus was a "Plan B" operation. "Plan B" became necessary because Adam and Eve rebelled against God, but God has a permissive will. God has made a way possible for mankind to regain all that was lost. But wait! There's more.

One day, the Garden of Eden will be restored and when it is, the redeemed will know and understand things about the love and character of God that could not have been known if sin had not happened. Thus, under salvation's "Plan B," God initiated a course of events that will have an even greater and grander outcome than the original Garden of Eden "Plan A!"

2. After Moses killed the Egyptian taskmaster, he fled into the desert for fear that Pharaoh would kill him. Forty years later, God sent a reluctant Moses back to Egypt to lead His people out of slavery. I'm sure you know the story of the Exodus.

It is a magnificent story, but here is a component of the story that most people never think about. All of the adults who were miraculously delivered from Egypt were put to death in the wilderness, except Caleb and Joshua and their families.

Did God know what He was going to do the Israelites before they left Egypt? Yes. Did God deliver Israel from Egypt so that He could kill them in the wilderness? No. How do these facts align with God's intended will and God's permissive will?

Of course, God has perfect foreknowledge, but He will not use His foreknowledge to manipulate the outcome of any event. God can be trusted to keep His foreknowledge separate from His love! (That's what the book sealed with seven seals is all about. But that is another story.)

God can't manipulate our choices and declare that we have free will. (John 3:16; Revelation 22:17) Would a God of love miraculously deliver Israel from Egypt only to kill them in the desert. No! God fully **intended** to take Israel into the promised land within two years after leaving Egypt.

That was "Plan "A." However, at Kadesh Barnea, when the twelve spies came back from Canaan, they led the Israelites into rebellion against God by giving a faithless report. God said, "very well, then you shall all die in the wilderness because of your rebellion" (Numbers 4) and they did.

During this forty years of wilderness exile, God raised up a new generation of people which He took through the Jordan river and into the promised land. Thus, a "Plan B" was implemented.

After reading these examples you may be wondering what God's intended will and God's permissive will have to do with women serving as pastors, priests, rabbis, etc. Actually, this: The role of women as pastors, teachers, evangelists, priests, etc. falls under God's permissive will, "Plan B."

When the work of God languishes because there aren't enough qualified men, God calls and qualifies women to serve. This is true of prophets as well as pastors! Here are three women whom God called to serve as prophets: Anna, Luke 2:36; Huldah, 2 Kings 22:14 and Deborah,

Judges 4:4.

The point here is that the office of prophet is higher than that of a pastor. In other words, if it was permissible for God to call women to serve as prophets, it is permissible for God to call women to serve as pastors. (More about this in a moment.)

God's Intended Will: Male Dominance

Some theologians argue against having women pastors on the basis of "created order." Catholic and Protestant leaders also base their "male only" position on Paul's writings (including the texts you mentioned earlier).

They claim the words of Paul affirm the will of God which was first declared in the Old Testament and they have a very good point. From the beginning, God imposed a spiritual responsibility on men that He didn't give to women! Please study the following paragraphs and as you do, keep **God's intended will** in the back of your mind. (A whole book could be written on this topic, but I will make this short.)

1. Before there was sin, Adam did not "rule" over Eve as lord and master. Adam and Eve were male and female, both individuals were created in the image of God. Adam and Eve were united like the members of the Godhead are united, they were one in purpose, plan and action. Sin ruined this.

Because sin transforms the attitudes and natures of sinners, God declared that men would have authority over their wives. Eve's sin forced generations of women into a role that might be described as slightly more elevated than that of a servant.

"To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

I know that these words offend a lot of women today, and I know that some Baptists distort the intent of this text, but given the nature of sin, this text is profound and beautiful. Here's why: After the fall, Adam and Eve changed. Both of them became naturally rebellious – toward God and one another.

The carnal nature rebels against authority *naturally*. To deal with our inner rebellion, God established two governments in the psyche of mankind. The first government occurs within the family unit and the second government becomes necessary when two or more families live in close proximity to each other.

(Think of the second government as local, state and national governance.) Both levels of government are divinely appointed. (Genesis 3:16, Romans 13:1) Each requires an executive officer. And interestingly enough, both governments *naturally* rise from within mankind. Every household has some form of government and so does every nation.

At the family level, each husband was appointed by God to be the trustee of his family. The male is accountable to God for the well being of his family – both spiritually and physically. From God's point of view, every man who takes a wife also receives a serious responsibility for the spiritual and physical well being of his wife and any offspring they may create.

When a man and woman are married, they form a single corporation and the male becomes its chief executive officer. **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."** (Genesis 2:24)

(At this point, I need to make a few general statements and of course, general statements are not true in all cases.) Because God knew that males would have a tendency to ignore, abandon or distort their spiritual responsibilities, God made the hearts of females *naturally* submissive not only to their husbands but to the Holy Spirit. Think about this, if a man and wife are equally dominant, the marriage can't last.

No corporation endures if there are two competing chief executives. Because men are *naturally* more analytical than sensing, God has helped males to maintain their higher position by making females *naturally* inclined to defer to male leadership (if present) in matters of religion and government.

You have to remember that Lucifer studied Adam and Eve for some time before making his move to deceive them. Lucifer did not approach Adam because Adam was too analytical. Lucifer's sophistry would have been discovered and his lies exposed if he approach Adam, but Eve was more trusting and less suspicious than Adam.

She found it quite easy to trust the beguiling words of the serpent. As I said, general statements they are not always true, but they do generally reflect a "created order" that is found throughout the world.

Because God appointed males to be the spiritual head of the house, God spoke mostly to males in the Bible times. God told "the man" not to eat of the tree. (Genesis 2:16) God spoke to the patriarchs – not to their wives. Noah was commissioned to build the ark.

The birthright was passed down from father to son – however, under the right circumstances there was a "Plan B", the birthright could be transferred from father to daughter. (Joshua 17:4) Last, in the Old Testament, God is often called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – never the God of Sarah, Rebekah and Leah/Rachel. Why is this? God established an order of male dominance.

In terms of establishing a family, men ask women to marry them, not the other way around. Why? Because there is created order. Men are physically capable of providing for a family. Men can defend their families in battle and they afford greater protection for the family than women can offer.

Men have been given survival abilities to a greater extent than women. These general statements testify that there is a "created order" or a "Plan A" and this was the order of life for

thousands of years.

Peter affirms this saying: **"For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."** (1 Peter 3:5,6)

2. The estate of women has been very sad for thousands of years. Most women have been poorly treated, poorly educated and held in low esteem ever since sin began. In fact, women in the United States only gained the right to own property and vote during the 20th century!

It would be fair to say that the status of women in third world countries today is deplorable. The point here is that every male-dominated culture tends to perpetuate itself by constantly denigrating women, depriving women of education and business opportunities and this continues largely because (a) men don't respect women as equals and (b) men don't want female competition.

In ancient times it was not uncommon for one man to have many wives. (Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines! 1 Kings 11:3) However, there are only a few instances in recorded history where one woman had many husbands simultaneously.

For better and worse, this has been a male-dominated world ever since sin began. So ladies, if there is any satisfaction with male dominance, it is that men are mostly responsible for the condition of the world. Smile.

3. Paul's counsel to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:34) and to Timothy (1 Timothy 2:12) reflects God's **intended** will. Male dominance was clearly imposed upon Israel at the time of the Exodus. **"Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal."** (Exodus 13:2)

Paul's training was that of a Pharisee. He appeals to the unspoken doctrine of male dominance when instructing Timothy about church operations. Paul wrote: **"A woman should learn in quietness and full submission** [to men]**. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.**

And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who [being weaker] **was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing** [raising a family] **– if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."** (1 Timothy 2:11-15, insertions mine)

Now, look at this passage written by Paul to the church at Corinth. It sounds harsh in today's culture of equality for women, but you must remember that Paul's view of women was consistent with Israel's male dominance culture of fifteen hundred years.

Israel's priests were males. Israel's teachers were males. Israel's elders were males. Furthermore, women worshiping alongside men in church was a recent transition in Paul's day.

In Judaism, women were not allowed to enter into the inner court of the temple for worship!

However, women could worship in the synagogues where they were required to sit segregated from men. Once these background matters are understood, Paul's words to the church in Corinth are to be expected: **"And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down** [in the meeting]**, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.** [In other words, prophets must exercise self control.]

For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law [of Moses] says. If they [don't understand something and] **want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak** [up] **in the church** [service]**."** (1 Corinthians 14:30, insertions mine)

4. One could conclude, and many women do, that Paul disliked women. I don't think Paul disliked women. Actually, I think Paul is more concerned about upholding male dominance and this position appears to put women down unless "Plan A" is understood. It is true that no ship can have two captains.

Someone has to bear the ultimate responsibility for the management of the ship. Every marriage has to have a leader, someone who oversees the business and direction of the family. Every government has to have a leader. It is **true** that many women are smarter, brighter and more capable as business heads than their husbands.

Should these gifts nullify God's order of male dominance? No. Should women rule over their husbands? No. Should a man thoughtfully consider the counsel of his wife? Yes. Should a man abdicate his responsibilities and turn them over to his wife? No. Should a man consider his wife to be "a voting member of the board?" Yes. Should the wife feel free to express her thoughts?

Yes. If the husband is inept or negligent should a capable wife step in and take the helm of the family? Yes! It is better for the marriage to succeed than to fail. The survival of the family unit is a high priority for God. That's why he established male dominance in the first place.

Someone has to be accountable, someone has to lead and take responsibility, but when the male is unable or unwilling to carry out his responsibilities, God is pleased to have the woman takes over. (1 Samuel 25; Proverbs 31:10-28) This is His permissive will.

Church Government

5. What does God say about women serving as pastors? Before I fully address this question, I would like to present a profound truth. During the Great Tribulation, God will have 144,000 servants speaking for Him all over the Earth. For reasons beyond the scope of this study, these individuals will be both males and females.

"Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." (Joel 2:29-31) The point here is that God does not view women as lesser human beings. On the contrary, in the last days, God will speak equally through women and men.

It is true that God put males in charge of things until the time comes for the restoration of Earth, but in many cases, men have neglected, distorted or rejected this responsibility and they have not produced the fruit which God desired. This male-dominated world is in a big mess.

Conclusion: When God separates a male or female from ordinary people to serve as a pastor, the evidence of that calling will be seen – even if the organization itself fails to recognize it. Eventually, the calling of every pastor, teacher or evangelist can be measured (quantified) because that person *will produce fruit that proves their calling*!

In many situations, if God calls a woman to serve as a pastor, teacher or evangelist, it make take a few years before her church family recognizes that God has truly called her to serve. It takes time for fruit to mature and develop and it takes time for those around her to admit that yes, she is truly called of God.

However, once the elders of a church body recognize God's calling in their midst, the right thing to do is to affirm it. They should support God's servant for He called her! We have already noticed in Joel 2 that God's final servants on Earth will also include women! Why? Because God calls women when there are not enough men to accomplish His will.

In closing, I would like to offer an interesting parallel. As the Christian faith invaded Judaism, the leaders of Israel became very angry and they did everything possible (including murder) to stop Christianity from spreading. One day, the apostles were arrested for preaching in the name of Jesus and they were handed over to the Sanhedrin who were ready to kill them.

"But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him.

He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone!

Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." (Acts 5:34-39)

I hope this helps!

PS: Here's seven "sound bites" that I have created for fun. Use them if you see fit:

"During the days of Esther, God used a woman to save the entire nation of Israel, so what's wrong with God using a woman to save a few souls?"

"If there were enough men -- humble and willing to serve the Lord, He wouldn't be calling on women."

"It's interesting that Christian husbands are very pleased to have dedicated wives teaching their children the essentials of life, things like morals, honesty, integrity and Bible stories. But let a woman speak on these matters publically, and they get furious. Makes me wonder about men."

"If you believe that Paul's comments about women speaking in church is God's truth, then you're going to have to accept Paul's comments about taking your wife to bed: Leave her alone!" 1 Cor 7:29

"It's true that a woman can't always do a man's work. But, when it comes to answering the call of the Lord, what is a woman supposed to do? Send her husband?"

"Yes, this is a male dominated world. Do you see anything that needs improvement?"

"The Bible warns in Revelation 14 that if any *man* worships the beast, he will receive the wrath of God. It's interesting that God chose to warn *males* this way."

A Word About Prayer and Fasting

Author: JADE Computer

A few years ago, I began promoting a monthly day of fasting and prayer. The seventh of each month was arbitrarily chosen because it is easy to remember and seven appears to be a number that God particularly likes.

The larger purpose behind fasting and prayer is "showing God the strength of our desire." Fasting and prayer does not make a person righteous or holy. Fasting and prayer does not make God love us more -- He loved us before we knew Him.

Willfully abstaining from food for a whole day is somewhat difficult to do. (In fact, certain health problems may prohibit total fasting, but fasting can be as simple as skipping one meal or some kind of dietary denial.) Willfully entering into fasting for a specific purpose shows God the strength of our desire. For example, suppose a person is praying for wisdom or courage on a particular matter. Abstaining from food is a way of saying to the Lord, "Lord, I desire wisdom or courage on this matter more than I desire food."

God sees the intensity of our desire. Every hunger pain is a physical alarm clock to stop and pray again, asking God for wisdom or courage.

In Luke 2, the prophetess Anna spent much of her life at the temple, fasting and praying, asking God to grant her the great privilege of seeing the Messiah with her own eyes. Her humble prayer was answered when she was 84!

In Mark 9, the disciples tried to cast a demon out of a child but they could not. When Jesus returned to them, He discovered their failure, ".... He rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, `Why could not we cast him out?' And he said unto them, 'This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.' (Mark 9:25-29, KJV)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:17, 18) The point here is that fasting is to be conducted silently; it is not a religious ritual or something that God demands.

Because the Wake-Up "family" is widely scattered over the Earth, I have been promoting a day of fasting and prayer for the past few years because I believe that all of God's children need to focus more on God and His Word. We need to meditate more on His love, His character, His power, His mercy and justice.

We need wisdom for the times in which we live and we need direction from our Father. We need to behold a higher purpose for life and we need greater opportunities to share the gospel. We need to walk more closely with God -- in spirit (a humble attitude) and in truth. Of course, everyone has a list of personal matters that also concerns them.

During the day of fasting and prayer, these personal petitions can be presented before God, too.

In closing, I would say a day of fasting and prayer is something like a number of people climbing up a great mountain to see God. The climb will be physically strenuous and the rocky way will make the journey difficult, but what can compare with kneeling before a kind and loving Almighty God to present your concerns?

There's nothing on earth like communion with God and those who love Him. I have discovered that if we show God strong desire, He responds with strong presence. God is very much alive.

Heb 11:6: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Larry Wilson

World War III is Coming

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Last week (mid-July 2006), as I was preparing my presentation for the September *WUAS Broadcast* on the topic of the seven trumpets, several prophetic elements "snapped together" in a way that I had not seen before.

This new discovery leads me to conclude that World War III is on the horizon and a nuclear exchange is likely. To help you appreciate how this conclusion comes from Scripture, a little background information is presented.

Notice Paul's words: **"Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, '**

Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly [e.g., destructive judgments from God]**, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief."** (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4, underline and insertion mine)

As you know, many Christians believe in a pre-tribulation rapture. They believe the phrase, "the day of the Lord," refers to a specific moment in the future when Jesus will rapture the church. They use Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 5 to prove that the rapture will occur without warning, "like a thief in the night."

They believe that Jesus will quietly and secretly come to Earth. He will snatch up righteous people and disappear with them. Then, God's wrath will fall on wicked people who are "left behind."

The problem with this conclusion is that the Bible mentions "the day of the Lord" eighteen times. In all these cases, the phrase "the day of the Lord" indicates a *span of time*. In fact, apocalyptic prophecy indicates "the day of the Lord" contains fourteen predetermined events which will require 1,335 days to complete.

Compare Isaiah's words with those of Paul: **"Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. Because of this, all hands will go limp, every man's heart will melt. Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor.**

They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. See, the day of the Lord is coming – a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger – to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light.

The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless." (Isaiah 13:6-11, underlines mine)

If you are acquainted with the experience of the saints during the seven trumpets of Revelation, you will also notice a parallel between the words of Isaiah and the prophet John. (Revelation 13:7; 13:10; 14:12; 17:6)

Second Coming Will Not Come As a Surprise

Here is another problem with the pre-tribulation rapture concept. Many people believe that the Second Coming will catch the human race by surprise, but the book of Revelation indicates otherwise. For example, the wicked kings of Earth will know and anticipate the date of Jesus' appearing.

They will be united and prepared to make war on Jesus as He approaches Earth in clouds of glory. This final war is called Armageddon. Armageddon will not be a war between nations; it will be a war between an angry God and His enemies, namely, Lucifer, the Antichrist, and all who follow him.

Everyone who has the mark of the beast will unite with Lucifer for the express purpose to physically destroy Jesus as He approaches Earth. The Bible speaks clearly about the timing of Armageddon.

Preparation for Armageddon occurs during the sixth bowl and the war itself occurs during the seventh bowl. Interestingly, Paul indicates "the day of the Lord" will come as a surprise to many people, but John indicates the "Second Coming" *will not.* (See Revelation 17:13,14; 16:12-21.)

God is so good. He put the date of Christ's return in the book of Daniel, and then He sealed up the book of Daniel until "the appointed time of the end."

Once the censer in Revelation 8:5 is cast down and the Great Tribulation begins, the date for the Second Coming will no longer be a secret for those who love God and want to understand His Word. The date of the Second Coming can be calculated. **"Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days."** (Daniel 12:12)

Because they know the date of our Lord's appearing, the saints will be encouraged as they languish and suffer through the 1,335 days of the Great Tribulation.

Peace and Safety

Paul's comment about "peace and safety" in 1 Thessalonians 5 is connected to the end of the world because he is specifically talking about "the day of the Lord." During the past century, Earth has experienced two world wars. During those times of war, people the world over were crying out for "peace and safety."

However, neither WWI nor WWII was interrupted by sudden destruction from God. With another *world war* on the horizon, we must wait to see if this is the moment in history when God will suddenly step into the affairs of man with His destructive powers.

We know that the human race cannot survive very long without peace and safety. The current situation in Iraq is a prophetic sample of things to come for the whole world. Iraq hopelessly languishes because there is no peace and safety.

Even the world's most powerful military can do little to impose peace and safety in this unstable environment. Paul's comments in 1 Thessalonians 5 indicate a time is coming when the *whole world* will reach a hopeless state of violence and unrest, like Iraq is today.

People will be saying "peace and safety" because there is none. When the world reaches this point, look out! God will rise up and take matters into His own hands.

The time period designated "the day of the Lord" will begin with the casting down of the censer in Revelation 8:2-6. This is the event that will catch most people on Earth by surprise.

Jesus said, **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day**

Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. . . . So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." (Matthew 24:37-39, 44)

The antediluvians were aware of the coming flood. Noah had warned them for 120 years and the construction of the ark was well known and widely ridiculed ("Noah's folly"). So Jesus' words must mean that the antediluvians did not know *how* or *when* their mercy would end.

This is the ominous parallel for our day. On the tenth day of the second month, Noah and his family quietly entered the ark, then an angel closed the great door, the doorway to salvation, and the antediluvians did not even notice. They were unaware that mercy had ended.

However, the antediluvians did notice that rain began to fall on the seventeenth day of the second month and this is how end time events will be. Corporate intercession will end in Heaven's temple and most of the people on Earth will not understand the seriousness of this event; however, the whole world will be shaken by the horrific judgments that follow.

Discovery

Apocalyptic prophecy consists of an intricate matrix that is based on the Jubilee Calendar. I assume you are acquainted with the Jubilee Calendar and the seven trumpets. I believe the seven angels who stand before God in Revelation 8:2 were given the seven trumpets in the

Spring of 1994 – at the end of 70 Jubilee cycles.

Corporately speaking, God's patience with our degenerate world ended on that date. At that time, four angels with four trumpets came to Earth, fully prepared and empowered to harm this planet with God's judgments, but Jesus stopped them by a command. (Revelation 7:1-3) He told them to wait until the 144,000 are sealed. Thus far, this delay has been holding for 12 years.

Why did an all knowing God create this delay in the first place and why did He inform us about it? These are critical questions because God is very deliberate and purposeful in everything He does.

In short, God wants the final generation to know that even though His wrath is overdue, He is waiting for something that is *more important* than releasing His wrath. With God, timing is everything. He is waiting on "the perfect time" to start the 1,335 days of the Great Tribulation.

Jesus will appear on Earth the second time just as He did the first – at the perfect time. Paul wrote, **"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."** (Galatians 4:4,5)

For reasons beyond the scope of this article, it appears that Jesus will gather up the redeemed of Earth on a Sunday, the very first day of the seventh millennium. (See Exodus 12:41 for a beautiful parallel on deliverance. Israel was freed from Egyptian bondage at the appointed time – to the very day, and I believe that God's people will be freed from Earthly bondage at the appointed time – to the very day.)

Apocalyptic Order

Consider the sequence of events in this section from Revelation 8: **"And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne.**

The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake." (Revelation 8:2-5)

Now, please consider four points:

1. Assume the seven angels were given the seven trumpets in 1994.

2. After 1994, an angel came to the Altar of Incense to offer up much incense, together with the prayers of *all* the saints. This service happens *before* the censer is cast down in verse 5. What are all of the saints on Earth praying for or praying about after 1994?

3. For thousands of years, the saints of God have been petitioning God for various things. So, the varied petitions and prayers of saints have been ascending for a long time.

The problem is that the prayers in Revelation 8:3,4 have to occur after 1994. Furthermore, the language in Revelation 8:3-5 suggests that *all* the saints on Earth are praying for the *same* thing at the *same* time. What on Earth would cause *all* of God's children to pray for the same thing at the same time?

4. The use of incense at the Altar of Incense dates back to the wilderness tabernacle. Special incense was offered each evening and morning on the Altar of Incense to predispose God to be generous and favorable toward "stinky" (highly offensive) sinners.

The service at the Altar of Incense teaches us that a holy and pure God could only dwell among offensive sinners if there was continual intercession rising from this altar. This fragrance used in the Old Testament masked man's "stinky" condition before God, just like the righteousness of Jesus masks our sinful condition in the New Testament.

The use of the fragrance of incense illustrates the wonderful doctrine of justification. In Bible times, people with serious concerns would gather around the temple during the evening and morning services to have their earnest prayers ascend with the incense – hoping and trusting the Lord would be favorably moved to grant their petition.

Thus, the use of incense in Heaven's temple, *together* with the prayers of all the saints, indicates the saints are imploring God to do something. What is it?

Now that these things have been asked, consider how the mystery could be resolved:

Summary Answer

Suppose a great war breaks out somewhere in the world (Middle East?) and this war escalates until an initial nuclear strike. As each nuclear exchange occurs, allies will be forced to take sides. Suddenly, the whole world is drawn into World War III.

Two atomic bombs were used in WWII, but a nuclear exchange has never occurred. Because nuclear bombs are so devastating and ruinous, every nation suddenly finds itself wondering if its enemy will annihilate another city with the push of a button.

At this extreme moment in Earth's history, man will be powerless to stop the carnage. *All* of God's saints on Earth will be praying for the *same thing at the same time*, namely, peace and safety.

The saints will petition the Almighty to quickly step into the affairs of mankind or mankind will self-destruct. Of course, the world's religious and political leaders will be loudly calling for peace and safety, too, but what can they do? The United Nations is impotent.

If this World War III scenario were to unfold, we can be sure the Almighty will understand the dire situation on Earth. Suppose He calls an angel before His throne and this angel does something that has never been done before in Heaven's temple.

He is given much incense and the smoke, together with the prayers of all the saints, ascends before the Lord. The Lord hears the cries of His children to do something quickly and He approves their request. The angel at the Altar of Incense is told to throw down the censer because intercession on behalf of Earth has just ended.

The timing is perfect. The seven trumpets begin. *These seven judgments are the sudden destruction that comes from God while people on Earth are desperately calling for peace and safety.* In the middle of what could be several nuclear exchanges, God Himself steps into the affairs of mankind with destructive power that exceeds all atomic bombs combined.

Overpowered by God's arsenal of destructive judgments, angry nations forget about the war. Suddenly, a world in conflict discovers that man's greatest concern isn't man – it is our Creator.

God's servants, the 144,000, selected and empowered by the Holy Spirit for this grand occasion, proclaim in unison the world over: **"Fear God and give Him glory for the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the fountains of waters. . . ."** (Revelation 14:7)

In this study, three things really stand out to me. First, the verses in Revelation 8:3,4 make sense just as they read within the context of a nuclear world war. If a nuclear exchange were to occur, *all* of God's people would be praying for the same thing at the same time.

Second, it seems clear that God responds to the prayers of the saints by casting down the censer. If this is not the case, where in Revelation's story is any answer given to their petition? Even more, what is the point of having Revelation 8:3,4 inserted into the story of the seven trumpets?

These two verses have puzzled me for many years. Last, I am impressed with the timing of several pieces within this scenario: Man releases atomic power on his enemy and God releases His wrath on man and all of this occurs a mere 1,335 days before the seventh millennium begins! Wow. With God, timing is everything!

You know, the closer we get to the commencement of the Great Tribulation, the easier it becomes to understand Revelation's story. I'm excited!

Peter and the Rooster

Author: Larry W. Wilson

On August 14, 2006, Steve Centani, an American reporter working for Fox News, and his camera man, Olaf Wiig, a New Zealander, were captured in the Gaza Strip by a formerly unknown group called The Holy Jihad Brigades. A day or so later, a video tape surfaced showing the two men were alive. Certain demands were presented by the hostages on the tape as a condition for their release.

Neither Israel nor the United States would consider the demands. For 13 days, recovery efforts proceeded in two directions.

Many volunteers tried to locate the missing men by interviewing various militant factions in Gaza, while at the same time Palestinian authorities pursued diplomatic efforts. Ultimately, the two hostages were released unharmed on August 27 and as you can imagine, it was a day of rejoicing for the families and employers of the two captives.

There is an interesting twist to this otherwise happy ending. On the day before their release, the captors told the two hostages they had three choices. They could: (1) Make a video tape denouncing the policies of the United States in the Middle East, convert to Islam and be set free; (2) Pay a tax (a jizya, a significant ransom), which Moslems can impose on infidels, and be set free; or (3) Suffer a jihad against infidels and die.

The hostages chose option one. Steve Centani and Olaf Wiig denounced America’s policies in the Middle East, they professed a conversion to Islam and took Muslim names – all done while guns and a video camera were pointed at their heads.

Note: To become a Muslim, a person has to say the following words with sincerity: "Ash-hadu an la ilaha ill Allah." (I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah.) "Wa ash-hadu ana Muhammad ar-rasullallah." (And I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.)

Understand that Muslims do recognize and accept forced conversions. The following statements are taken from the Hadith, a collection of sacred writings concerning the teachings of Mohammed:

"If a protected person [Dhimmi] is forced to convert to Islam, his conversion is valid. If a Harbi [non-Muslim alien] is fought against and converts to Islam – it is valid. . . . If the [same] Dhimmi returns [to his former religion], he is not killed [like an ordinary apostate], but imprisoned until he converts to Islam [again], because there is doubt regarding his belief [when he was forced to convert].

There is a possibility that it [i.e., his forced conversion] was sincere, so he is to be killed as an apostate. It is [also] possible that he did not believe [in Islam while having been forced to convert] and then he [should] be a Dhimmi and shall not be killed." — pp. 168 (Azharite)

"A female apostate is not to be killed [unlike the case of a male apostate]. She should be imprisoned and beaten every day until she becomes a Muslim [again].

It means that Islam should be offered to her and if she refuses it, she should be flogged. Then Islam should be offered to her [again] and if she refuses it, she should be imprisoned.

And there is a version according to which she should be taken out every day and beaten as we have described, because it is not permissible to kill her. She has committed a gruesome crime that has no fixed punishment [hadd] for it, so she is punished by a non-fixed punishment [ta'zir], that is - beating and imprisonment." — pp. 371 (Azharite)

Did the Hostages Do the Right Thing?

The decision the hostages made has stimulated considerable discussion on the internet. In short, the discussions I have studied boil down to three general views:

1. A forced conversion is no conversion. This school of thought believes that a religious conversion is only genuine if the conversion is an expression of *free will*, sincere intent and belief. Because Centani and Wiig were forced at gunpoint to say certain words (both political and religious) to save their lives, their words and deeds cannot be interpreted to be a conversion.

This school of thought concludes, "Satisfying a ragtag bunch of armed teenagers with forced words is better than having a bullet in your head."

2. A forced conversion to Islam denies the deity of Jesus Christ. This school of thought believes that if a Christian succumbs to force and goes through the motions of converting to Islam, he betrays the deity of Jesus Christ and rejects the Bible as the Word of God.

Therefore, advocates of this view believe that if Centani and Wiig were Christians prior to their kidnapping, they should be ashamed of their cowardice because they betrayed the Lord Jesus when they converted. Advocates of this view believe the hostages should have boldly refused to convert, choosing death instead.

3. When life threatening circumstances exist, a person is permitted to do anything and everything possible to save his life. This school of thought believes that God permits a person to use self defense. Self defense can be words, as well as actions.

This principle is revealed in Exodus 22. **"If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; but if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed. . . ."** (Exodus 22:2,3)

In other words, under the right circumstances, a person can kill an intruder in darkness without incurring guilt because deadly force can be used in self defense. However, after sunrise the owner of the house is not permitted to use deadly force – at least this was the case in Old

Testament times when guns did not exist.

Now that you know the details of this hostage situation, their three options, and the three schools of thought which I have summarized, to what school of thought do you belong? Of course, this is a highly personal matter and each person has to choose for himself or herself.

Personally, I believe the Bible teaches that God permits a certain amount of self defense. This is true of nations and for individuals. So, if God permits self defense, what about Peter and the rooster?

Peter's Declaration

How does the hostage situation in Gaza compare with Peter's denial of Jesus in Jerusalem? Please study the following passage: **"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' '**

But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.' " (Matthew 16:13-17) When Jesus queried the disciples about His identity, Peter spoke with assurance and bravado because he was very sure of two things.

He was sure of himself and he was sure that Jesus was the Son of God, the promised Messiah. Peter was a natural born leader and his self assurance was both an asset and a liability.

Prior to the cross, the disciples often discussed the coming kingdom of God, which they believed Jesus was going to establish. Being human, they argued among themselves about the highest positions. Who would get them? Peter made no apologies.

He was sure that he would inherit the highest position because he was a leader of men and one of Jesus' closest friends. Peter had a high regard for himself and his opinions, because among men, he was physically powerful, talented and highly intelligent.

Peter knew that he was a notch or two above the other disciples and the other disciples usually deferred to Peter because *he was gifted* with a forceful personality and natural leadership. Jesus knew that Peter was egocentric. Jesus also knew that Peter was especially vulnerable to arrogance and the trappings of power.

So Jesus took the opportunity to highlight Peter's flaws in front of the other disciples during yet another argument on who would hold the highest office. **"Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles** [are arrogant little men, they] **lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors** [and you know how empty but lavish this boasting is]**.**

But you are not to be like that. Instead, [if you are have a place in my kingdom] **the greatest among you should be like the youngest** [who is not permitted to voice an opinion in the presence of elders]**, and the one who rules** [must be humble] **like the one who serves. For who is greater** [in this world]**, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?**

Is it not the one who is at the table? But [learn from me, your Lord and Master] **I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom** [of suffering]**, just as my Father conferred** [this] **one on me, so that** [when the time comes for the kingdom of God to be established] **you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**

[Now,] **Simon, Simon,** [my dear, arrogant and egocentric friend, who has laid claim to the highest position in my coming kingdom, because your thinking and behavior is of this world] **Satan has asked to sift you as wheat** [the devil has accused you before my Father, saying that your aspirations were no different than the devil's, and argues that you should be not permitted to have a part in my kingdom because he has no part in God's kingdom]**.**

But I have prayed [to the Father] **for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back** [repented of your sins and abandoned your carnal ways]**, strengthen your brothers.' But he** [an embarrassed Peter] **replied, 'Lord,** [look at me, I am a capable fighter]

I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.'" (Luke 22:24-34, insertions mine)

Early Friday Morning

"Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee,' she said. But he denied it before them all. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he said.

Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.' He denied it again, with an oath: 'I don't know the man!' After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, 'Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.'

Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, 'I don't know the man!' Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: 'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly." (Matthew 26:69-75)

Why did Peter deny that he knew Jesus three times? Many people believe that Peter denied Jesus in order to save his life (self defense).

They say he was afraid of the consequences of being associated with a condemned man. This argument does not make sense to me because Peter was not afraid of men or conflict. Wasn't it Peter who bravely wielded a sword and cut off the ear of a man in order to save Jesus from arrest?

Wasn't Peter the *only* disciple prepared to die defending Jesus? I believe that Peter sincerely meant all that he said, **"Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death. -" Peter truly loved Jesus. Because of this love, Peter was willing to die for Jesus because Jesus was Peter's God, the Messiah, the Son of the living God!**

So, why did Peter deny Jesus? Peter denied Jesus that morning because Peter had a major paradigm shift. When Peter saw the object of his worship and loyalty, his God and Messiah humbly submitting to gross injustice, Peter's understanding of Messiah's predicted power and His coming kingdom fell apart.

Everything Peter lived for – power over the Jews and Romans, the prestige of a high office, exaltation as a hand picked disciple of Jesus, bravery, valor, courage and victory over the enemies of Jesus – evaporated right before his eyes. Peter saw a sickening sight – Jesus being led away to die as a common criminal. There would be no kingdom of God. There would be no high position.

Realizing this, where was the bravery, valor, courage and victory that men of renown are known for? Jesus showed none of this! (Remember, Peter did not understand there would be a resurrection at this moment.)

Peter felt completely betrayed by his Lord and Master, because everything that he had anticipated of Jesus and everything he had lived for was not going to happen.

Being a disciple of a dead man who had no kingdom was more than Peter, a natural born leader of men could swallow. *It was bitterness toward Jesus that caused Peter to deny that he even knew Him.*

When the rooster crowed for the third time, Jesus turned and sadly looked at Peter. Suddenly, Peter remembered the words of Jesus and a great epiphany occurred.

Peter realized that his bitterness toward Jesus was totally misdirected. He realized that his bitterness sprang from carnal ambitions and self seeking, and these character traits had no place in Christ's kingdom.

The Holy Spirit overwhelmed Peter with the realization that Peter, like Lucifer, wanted to be in God's position. Peter was not into submission.

Instead, Peter was all about "my will be done." However, after the rooster's third call and that look from Jesus, Peter realized that Jesus was doing the will of the Father. Jesus, the Lamb of God, had surrendered His will to the Father so that the Father's will might be done through Him. **"And he went outside and wept bitterly**." This event dramatically changed Peter for the rest

of his life.

Summary

When it comes to denying Jesus (whether forced or not forced), I conclude that each situation has to be evaluated on its merits. I think the Bible supports this conclusion. A certain amount of wisdom and discretion is needed.

For example, if I was snatched off the street and taken as a hostage and held for political purposes, I would have probably done the same thing as Centani and Wiig. On the other hand, if I had been arrested and held captive *because of my faith in Jesus Christ*, that would be an entirely different matter.

I have shared my thoughts on this topic in hopes they will make you think about this. When the Great Tribulation begins, I believe a lot of Christians will find themselves standing in Peter's shoes. Everything they once believed will fall apart and the temptation to be angry at God will be overpowering.

Babylon: A Government Created to Appease God

Author: Larry W. Wilson

". . . . And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name." -Revelation 13:1

The first four trumpet judgments described in Revelation 8:2-13 will produce death and destruction on a biblical scale that exceeds human measurement and calculation. These judgments will have global impact and will occur during the first 30 to 60 days of the Great Tribulation.

Most survivors will seriously question whether survival on planet Earth is possible. The first four trumpet judgments will destroy thousands of cities. Earth's infrastructures will be in ruin and twenty-five percent of Earth's seven billion people will die as a result of these judgments.

Two painful observations will traumatize the inhabitants of Earth: *First, they will tremble at the reality of a living God, and the power and scope of His wrath. Second, they will take note that these judgments fell on cities and places that were well known for wickedness.*

Since very few people understand the book of Revelation, most of the survivors will logically think that more judgments from God are imminently forthcoming. This anticipation will induce panic and this panic will prompt world leaders to rapidly and radically transform their governments. Desperate situations require desperate solutions.

A short review of the scope and nature of the first four trumpet judgments will assist us as we begin this study. The first four trumpets will come as judgments of fire and water. The first trumpet judgment (meteoric firestorms) will burn up a third of Earth. Fiery hail falling from Heaven, just like Sodom and Gomorrah, will destroy thousands of cities and millions of people.

The second trumpet judgment will be a great asteroid impact in an ocean. This impact will create a super tsunami that will sink ships, destroy sea creatures and wash away thousands of wicked coastal cities, just like Noah's flood. The third trumpet judgment will be another great asteroid impact.

This horrific asteroid will impact a continent and the resulting ground waves will cause underground aquifers and rivers to become contaminated. Millions of people who live hundreds of miles from the impact site will die from drinking poisonous water.

The fourth trumpet judgment will likely be a series of huge volcanic eruptions. The darkness caused by the massive amount of ejecta and ash blown into Earth's atmosphere will obscure the Sun, moon and stars. Large cities close to these explosions will either disappear or become uninhabitable.

The Bible states this darkness will cover the middle third of our planet and during this time of

darkness, **a crisis government** will form. The religious and political justification for the crisis government will be simple: *"Earth must immediately appease God through repentance and worship or everyone will perish."*

Recent Parallel

Given the religious diversity and antagonistic nature found in our world today, the sudden rise of **a crisis government** that will rule the whole world may be hard, if not impossible, to conceptualize. So, a few words about this amazing development might be helpful.

The first four trumpet judgments will cause global destruction. Mankind will respond to God's overwhelming wrath by forming a worldwide **crisis government** to appease God. Revelation 13:1-10 represents this crisis government as a *composite* beast for at least two reasons.

First, all nations and religions will voluntarily participate in this coming government (that is the composite part). Second, this government is represented as a beast because beasts cannot reason. Beasts are creatures of instinct. They react to threats, doing whatever they can to survive. So, think of this crisis government as *mankind's response* to appease God so that His judgments will cease.

This coming **crisis government** will be something like the Taliban government which came to power in Afghanistan in 1996. The Taliban movement began when thousands of young Islamic *students,* who had grown up in Pakistani refugee camps, decided to return home to Afghanistan and take control of their war torn country.

From the start, the Taliban movement was a Sunni Islamist nationalist pro-Pashtun movement (that is, it was a mixture of religious ideals, tribal loyalty, and national ambitions). The Russians had driven most of the *students* and their families from Afghanistan in a war that lasted about ten years.

Many of the *students* passed their days in exile studying at a Madrassas (an Islamic school) and as the young men matured into adulthood, they became eager to return to their homeland and establish an Islamic nation. Thus, this government became known as the Taliban, because the Arabic word for "students" is *taliban*.

After the Russians were driven out of Afghanistan, the students armed themselves with whatever weapons they could find, and with the help of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and local militia, they overcame warlords who had taken control of various parts of the country.

Eventually, the Taliban government emerged as Afghanistan's government and it soon became notorious for its emphasis on piety, austerity and male responsibility. The Taliban banned all forms of television, imagery, music, and sports. Women were required to wear burqa's (a gown that totally covers the face and body) in public. The idea of a "pure" Arab nation where the Koran was rigorously obeyed and Shariah law (Islamic law) reigned supreme attracted many young men who had illusions of an Islamic utopia.

Many Afghans embraced the Taliban government because it brought peace and stability to the region. The Taliban did many good things for Afghanistan. However, they also took many actions that hurt Afghanistan using religious intimidation and fear of punishment.

The penalties for violating the rules of the Taliban were not commensurate with the crime. This injustice put everyone on edge and people became afraid of sharing their true feelings. After five years of power, the Taliban government was toppled in 2001 when U.S. forces invaded the country and established a secular government; however, the possibility of the Taliban returning to power remains to be seen. (This possibility exists because many Moslems [and certainly, the Taliban] prefer an Islamic church/state.)

I have presented a brief background about the Taliban government because I see a parallel between the Taliban situation and the coming **crisis government.** The Taliban believe that rigorous compliance with the Koran will bring the blessings and favor of Allah.

Through humble and sincere obedience to Allah, they believe their endeavors will establish a pure Islamic nation. Similarly, when the first four trumpet judgments occur, the world's survivors will conclude that they must rigorously comply with the will of an angry God to restore His blessings and favor.

Therefore, in the context of overwhelming death and destruction, appeasing Almighty God will not be an option – it will be mandatory – or everyone will die!

Consider this: When God gave Nebuchadnezzar the vision of the metal man in Daniel 2, God accomplished several things simultaneously. First, He showed the arrogant Nebuchadnezzar that Babylon was temporal. This truth negated everything Nebuchadnezzar had worked for!

God told the king that various empires would follow Babylon until the time came for God Himself to establish His eternal kingdom on Earth. Second, God used the vision of the metal man to expose Nebuchadnezzar's clergy. When the king's trusted clergy could not tell him what he had dreamed, he discovered that his diviners, soothsayers, and astrologers were a bunch of liars and con-artists.

This deception made him furious – even to the point of wanting to kill them. Third, God used the vision of the metal man to lift a Jewish captive, Daniel, into a extremely high position within Babylon. Later on, Daniel was given a very high position in the Medo-Persian empire, as well. Fourth, God used the vision of the metal man to exalt Himself above the gods of the Babylonians.

Do you remember that Nebuchadnezzar built a metal man of *solid* gold? The king did this to hide the truth. He did not want anyone believing that Babylon, the head of gold, would someday fall to an inferior kingdom of silver. Consequently, the king built a huge image of gold and invited all the leadership of Babylon to come and participate in a great lie.

God stepped into the situation and ruined the king's boasting with a miracle that dwarfed the golden image. Daniel's friends walked out of a fiery furnace unharmed. Everyone watching

knew that the furnace was extremely hot because the heat killed the soldiers who threw Daniel's friends into the furnace! The important point I am making is that God can accomplish divine objectives without violating the will of a single person.

So, what does the ancient story of the metal man and the modern rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan have to do with the composite beast? God is going to turn the world upside down with His first four trumpet judgments and, in the process, the religious leaders of the world will come out on top!

They will be promoted to higher positions than political leaders because they claim (and billions of people will believe) they know the will and ways of God! This "fruit basket upset" enables religious leaders to insist that **a crisis government** be created to deal with God, and at the same time, it humbles politicians so they must go along. Remember the panic statement,*"We must appease God through repentance and worship or everyone will perish."*

As political leaders survey the expanse of global death and destruction caused by the first four trumpets, and when they realize that God has specifically targeted places well known for wickedness, they will be willing to do whatever religious leaders require.

Once empowered, religious leaders will attempt to appease God through the formation of **a crisis government** that resembles the former Taliban government of Afghanistan. Sins of all kinds will be outlawed, morality will be legislated, and offenders will be severely punished – all this to avert God's wrath. With this overview in mind, let us examine some details.

The Composite Beast Rises to Power

The composite beast will not arise from an existing nation. Instead, it rises from "a sea of peoples, multitudes and nations." (Revelation 13:1-8; 17:15) This beast will have seven heads and ten horns. For reasons beyond the scope of this article, we know this beast does not exist yet.

We know it has to rise *after* the French Revolution because when the beast rises from the sea, one of the seven heads of the beast "had been healed." (Revelation 13:3) The *head* that was wounded was the Roman Catholic Church. The power of the Roman Catholic Church was seriously wounded during the French Revolution (1789-1799), and only in recent years (due to the popularity of Pope John Paul II) has the church regained some of the influence and respect that it once enjoyed.

However, the deadly wound *will not be healed* until the papacy gains credible authority over nations as it did prior to its injury in February 1798.

Like the Taliban government, the composite beast will be a ruthless monster – driven by misguided religious zeal and false theology. The Bible is clear, the composite beast will persecute the saints of God for 42 months. (Revelation 13:5) During this time, the composite beast will have authority over *all nations* (Revelation 13:7) and Jesus will destroy it at the

Second Coming. (Revelation 19:20,21)

This beast is called Babylon (Revelation 14:8, 17:5) because it will mirror ancient Babylon – both in arrogance and ignorance. Ironically, Babylon will claim to speak for God, but in reality, it blasphemes God and misrepresents Him. Babylon has not yet formed, even though all of the players are present.

As the first four trumpet judgments wreak chaos and destruction, this coming government will rise to power. The fear of God will be global and overwhelming. The nations of Earth will look to their religious leaders for instruction and direction, but most religious leaders will be equally surprised by the global destruction.

Political leaders will ask their religious leaders, "What does God want us to do?" and religious leaders will say, *"We must immediately appease God through repentance and worship or everyone will perish."*

Someone Must Mediate Between One God and One World

The first four trumpets will create a global crisis. In a vacuum of fear and uncertainty, it is likely that the Roman Catholic Church will step forward with leadership and an elegant solution. Since the Catholic Church is the one organization that has been politically active in seeking world peace, the pope will invite religious and political leaders from all over the world to a worldwide council.

Three amazing decisions will come from this council that would otherwise be unthinkable. (1) Given the religious diversity of mankind and given the fact that there is **one** angry God, this council will unanimously agree that all nations must unite as one man to appease God.

This union will be possible because everyone will agree that certain principles of righteousness should be imposed upon the whole world. Amazingly, two principles on which the diverse religions of the world agree are repentance and the worship of God! *The council will adopt these two principles as the basis for world unity and the appeasement of God.* (2)

Because everyone will know that God's anger was directed toward places well known for wickedness, every nation will agree to legislate "sin-less" laws so that the wrath of the Almighty might be appeased and His judgments cease. Further, world leaders will recognize that they cannot disregard this unified effort to appease God. To do so would risk the possibility of God's wrath breaking out against the world once again.

Therefore, political leaders from every nation on Earth will agree to the directives of **a new crisis government** which will be established to manage the current crisis between God and man. (3) The leaders of the world recognize that every government requires leadership.

This council will therefore create an executive congress of religious leaders from all of the religions of the world. (This supreme council will be something like the United Nations, except it

will be religious in nature and far more effective.) I believe the pope will be *selected* as the leader of this council and given the authority to oversee and direct the process of appeasing God on a global basis.

The Roman Catholic Church is uniquely prepared to serve the world in this role because it is both a spiritual and a political organization having diplomatic relations with more than 170 nations of Earth.

(**Note:** Understand two things at this point. First, according to the third vision of Fatima, a number of high ranking Catholic scholars anticipate a global crisis. They believe this crisis will catapult the Church onto a stage of global leadership. (See *The Keys of This Blood*, published by Simon and Schuster, 1990, author, Dr. Malachi Martin, Chapters 32, 33.)

Second, the pope **will not** be elected to a position to impose Catholic doctrine on the nations of Earth. The diversity of the world's religions will not permit this. Rather, the mission of the pope and his council of diverse religious leaders will be limited to overseeing and directing *a united effort by all nations to appease God* through repentance and worship. These two principles will be applied according to the prevailing religious beliefs within each nation.)

The Composite Beast: A Hand Puppet

Revelation 12 describes Lucifer, the devil, as a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns. The composite beast also has seven heads and ten horns, but the composite beast is not the devil. The composite beast will be the crisis government created by religious and political leaders from all walks of life.

This diversity within the beast is indicated by the fact that this beast is a *composite* beast. The composite beast is part lion, bear and leopard – remnants of the ancient empires presented in Daniel 7. This composite beast, called Babylon, will eventually become the devil's hand puppet.
". . . .The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority."
(Revelation 13:2)

The composite beast has seven heads and ten horns, just like the great red dragon, because the devil will infiltrate the crisis government and become the power *within* the composite beast. In other words, when the crisis government forms, men will respond out of a legitimate fear of God.

Understand that these leaders do not comprehend what God is actually doing. However, as time passes, the **crisis government** will eventually become totally corrupt. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. I like to describe Babylon, the composite beast, as "a human glove" which mankind will create, but the devil will use.

The devil will insert his power and work through this human glove to persecute God's saints. For example, if you put your hand into a glove and then you hit someone with your gloved hand, who is responsible for the pain you caused – your glove or your hand?

Once mankind exalts religion over politics and creates this crisis government, the devil will quickly enter through the back door to take control of the world. **" . . . And he** [the composite beast] **was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship** [obey] **the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb. . . ."** (Revelation 13:7,8, insertions mine)

When the governments of the world submit to the demands of **the crisis government,** they will be, in effect, worshiping the devil because the concept of appeasing God through forced obedience is false from the start. The devil will be delighted with the crisis government's decision to enforce its "laws" because he has been preparing to make war on the saints for a long time. (Revelation 12:17)

The devil *now* has an opportunity to make war on the saints and destroy them. **"He** [the composite beast] **was given power** [by the devil] **to make war against the saints and to conquer them. . . ."** (Revelation 13:7, insertions mine)

Now you can understand why the description of the devil in Revelation 12 and the anatomy of the composite beast in Revelation 13 is identical (both having seven heads and ten horns). God represented these matters to John in this way so that we can trace the devil's hidden role and evil activities as he "enters" the human glove.

The devil's ultimate purpose is to destroy God's people and he will make the most of the 42 months he has to wage war against the saints. Do not lose your faith! God will give His people grace to deal with persecution and death. As in the story of the metal man, God has a purpose for all of this!

He will use the first four trumpets to show the human race that all religions of the world are false. To do this, the religions of the world must become very important and more powerful than politics! The devil will jump on this transition and use it to his advantage to persecute the saints. In spite of the devil's plans, God is poised and prepared to rescue many wonderful people who are trapped inside false religions.

Seven Heads

The composite beast has seven heads. Notice these nine specifications.

Revelation 13 says:

1. Each head has a blasphemous name. (v.1)

2. One of the heads had been wounded and healed. (v.3)

3. The beast was given a mouth to blaspheme God. (v.6)

Revelation 17 says:

4. The seven heads are seven hills. (v. 9)

5. The seven heads are seven kings. (v. 9)

6. Five have fallen. (v. 10)

7. One is. (v. 10)

8. One is yet to come. (v. 10)

9. The beast that ascends out of the abyss [the devil] will be the eighth king and is a companion of the seven heads. (v. 8,11, insertion mine)

Summary Explanation

The composite beast has seven heads at the end of time. Seven is a perfect number – a whole number. Because there are seven of the same thing; namely, seven heads, each head must symbolize the same thing. From Revelation 13 we learn that each head has a blasphemous name on it.

This means that even though the seven heads are religious in nature – they are opposed to God's authority. According to Webster, blasphemy is defined as assuming the prerogatives of God. The composite beast will be given a mouth to speak blasphemies against God. (Revelation 13:6)

This means the composite beast will speak (make laws) that are contrary to God's laws which is blasphemy. For example, God has declared in the fourth commandment that the seventh day of the week is *His* holy day, a memorial to *His* creation of Earth. Satan has led the religious systems of the world to think that the fourth commandment has been terminated or even worse, that man has the authority to declare which day is holy to God.

Seven Mountains

Revelation 17 says the seven heads are seven hills (or mountains, KJV). How can seven religious systems also be seven hills? In ancient times, highest hills and mountains were reserved as places of worship or the dwelling of deity.

Notice this passage: **"Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places.**

You must not worship the Lord your God in their way." (Deuteronomy 12:2-4) Ancient temples or shrines were placed on prominent places high above ordinary terrain because these

locations were believed to be God's dwelling places.

King David wrote, **"Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?"** (Psalm 15:1) Israel's temple mount is often referred to as "Mt. Zion" and Bible writers often spoke of the temple mount as "God's holy hill." (See Daniel 9:16,20; and Micah 4.)

In the United States, we refer to the official building of the U.S. Congress as "Capitol Hill." The point of association is that the seven heads are seven hills. People look *up* to their religious authorities for knowledge and instruction on the will of God. This is why every religious system has clergy (men and/or women who speak for God).

Seven Kings

Revelation 17 says these seven heads are also seven kings; that is, the seven heads have subjects. Do religious systems have subjects? Yes! People submit to the demands of their religious systems thinking they are obeying God.

When confronted with a spiritual question or problem, to what authority do religious people submit if not their religious leaders? Billions of people go through religious rituals every week for no other reason than their religious leaders tell them it is necessary.

Five Are Fallen

Perhaps the most revealing specification about the seven heads is timing. The angel said to John, **"This calls for a mind with wisdom. . . . Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while."** (Revelation 17:10)

This conversation took place around A.D. 95. The statement by the angel, "five heads have fallen" is stated in a past perfect tense – indicating that as of A.D. 95, five of the seven heads had fallen. According to Webster, the term "fallen" can mean "brought down" or "proven false."

The word "fallen" is also used in Revelation 14:8 when the second angel says that "Babylon [the crisis government] is fallen." In both cases the word "fallen" means "proven false."

So, looking at the end of the first century A.D., we find a historical explanation of what the angel meant when he said that five heads had fallen. When Jesus became flesh and dwelt among men, five religious systems were exposed as false. The ministry and teachings of Jesus caused five religious systems to fall:

1. Heathenism

2. Atheism

3. Judaism

4. Eastern Mysticism

5. Islam*

*Note: The label "Islam" came into existence during the sixth century A.D. as a result of Mohammed's influence and is used here to identify the ancient religion of Arabs prior to Mohammed. Many Christians erroneously think that Mohammed is the founder of the Arabic faith.

This is not the case. Mohammed united, organized, and expanded the beliefs of the Arabs. Even though he is considered by the Moslems to be the last and therefore the greatest of God's messengers, Arabs trace the origin of their faith back to Abraham through Ishmael's 12 sons. (See Genesis 21:13.)

How did Jesus expose these five religious systems as false?

1. Heathenism is a religious system that does not have valid knowledge about the God of Heaven. This religion creates its own super-gods and religious rules according to superstition. Jesus declared this religion false. (John 10)

2. Atheism denies the existence and reality of God. Even though it denies the existence of God, it is a godless system of religious thought. Jesus said this was false. (John 17)

3. Judaism believes that salvation comes through obedience and ceremonial rituals. Jesus declared that man cannot save himself through obedience or rituals. (John 3; Matthew 5:20)

4. Eastern Mysticism teaches that man can become God. This is the inverse of truth. God became man to save us from the penalty of sin. (John 1)

5. Islam denies that Jesus is deity, the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. This makes Jesus a liar. (Luke 22:70)

But wait! There's more!

Keep in mind that the angel told John that "five heads have fallen, one is, and one is yet to come." In John's day, five heads had been exposed as false by the teachings of Christ. The sixth religious system was just beginning to develop *at that time,* and according to the angel, a seventh head would appear later on and it would only last for a short time.

The sixth head or religious system that was developing in John's day began as Christianity and today, this religious system is known as Catholicism. John was a charter member of this new religious system. We know from church history that Christianity rose to power and fell from grace as Satan entered through the back door and gained control of the church.

Centuries later, the Reformation produced the seventh and last religious system. The angel said

the seventh head would only last for "a short time." This religious system is called Protestantism.

Looking back over the landscape of history, Protestantism is a "newcomer" to the religious world in terms of existence. Since we are near the end of the world, it can only last for a short time!

The essential problem with all seven heads is that they are blasphemous. This means they teach things that are contrary to God's will! Of course, no person believes that his or her church teaches blasphemy. Everyone thinks that what he or she believes is the truth about God, but this is where the problem lies!

So, God is going to turn the world upside down. God is about to tear back the veil of religious beliefs and the sincere in heart will discover the truth about God – the rest will reject it! In other words, when repentance and worship become matters of persecution, the sheep will be separated from the goats in all religions!

Because the first four trumpets will induce global panic, everyone will thoughtfully consider God's will for a season! To help people make the right choice, God will empower 144,000 people to speak for Him.

This brings us to a very interesting point. When Babylon, full of false doctrines and demonic power, is given absolute control to manage the crisis between God and man, the head that had been wounded will be healed!

Once again, the papacy will lead the world into apostasy through blasphemy. So, the seven heads of the composite beast represent the seven religious systems of the world! They are:

1. Heathenism

2. Atheism

3. Eastern Mysticism

4. Islam

5. Catholicism

6. Protestantism

7. Judaism

Think about this: Can you identify any person on Earth who does not belong to one of these seven systems? Next month, I will write an article about the beast from the abyss because it intimately relates to the seven heads and the ten horns.

The ten horns are ten "puppet kings" which Lucifer will appoint to rule over the world once he

physically appears. Please make copies and share this article with all your friends. They need to know.

Babylon: A Government Created to Appease God - Conclusion

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"[The angel said to me, "John,] **The** [great red dragon] **beast, which *you saw*** [cast out of Heaven in Revelation 12:7-9]**, once was** [in Heaven]**, now is not** [in Heaven because he was cast into the Abyss]**, and** [at the appointed time, he] **will come up out of the Abyss** [e.g., the spirit realm where he has been confined] **and** [after a great display of authority and force for about a year will] **go to his destruction.**

The inhabitants of the Earth whose names have not been written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they [actually] ***see* the** [great red dragon] **beast, because he once was** [a glorious angel in Heaven]**, now** [is confined to the Abyss and] **is not** [visible to human beings]**, and yet** [during the fifth trumpet] **will** [be permitted to] **come** [out of hiding and masquerade as Almighty God. He will astonish the wicked with incredible glory, counterfeit wonders and miracles!]**. . . .**

The [great red dragon] **beast who once was** [in Heaven]**, and now is not** [in Heaven]**, is an eighth king.** [This stern-faced king is called an eighth king because he will rule over the seven heads as the eighth horn ruled over the seven horns in Daniel 7.] **He** [the great red dragon] **belongs to the seven** [heads because he opposes God's authority and truth. The great red dragon is the dreaded anti-Christ] **and** [even though he will appear to be invincible for a while, you can be sure that he] **is going to his destruction."** (Revelation 17:8, 11, emphasis and insertions mine)

Last month's *Wake Up Report!* examined the identity of the composite beast in Revelation 13. This composite beast represents "a crisis authority" that will form shortly after the Great Tribulation begins and it will impose itself upon the nations of Earth with increasing authority during a period of 42 months. (Revelation 11:2) The composite beast has seven blasphemous heads (representing the seven religious systems of the world) and it also has ten horns (representing ten future kings who the devil himself will appoint as "taskmasters" over the human race).

When it first appears, the composite beast will function as a *religious* authority. It will represent all mankind and its objective will be to appease an angry God. Recorded history affirms over and over that force is always the last resort of false religion, and history will clearly be repeated during the Great Tribulation.

The composite beast will also use force to accomplish its purpose. It will force the inhabitants of Earth to "repent" and worship according to its dictates. If people dare to oppose its laws, harsh penalties will be enforced. Eventually, the devil will cause the composite beast to morph into a global church/state.

Three key points were discussed in last month's study and a short review of these points should

make this concluding study a little easier to understand. (1) Bible prophecy indicates that God's patience with mankind's degeneracy and decadence will soon end.

He will surprise the nations of Earth with four trumpet-judgments. (Revelation 8:2-13) Thousands of wicked cities will be destroyed and one fourth of Earth's population will perish when God's wrath is released. (Revelation 6:8) (2) The first four trumpet-judgments will come as a complete surprise for most people. (1 Thessalonians 5:3) The enormity and universal scope of God's wrath will exceed human calculation.

Global terror will evoke a global response from mankind, and religious and political leaders of the world will humbly unite. Together, they will form a crisis authority to appease God's wrath that would be otherwise unthinkable. Since it is likely that the first four trumpet-judgments will destroy places that are widely known for sinful behavior, repentance and worship will become matters of paramount importance during the Great Tribulation. (Rev 13:7,8) (3)

God's anger will be widely evident all over the world. Political leaders will meekly subjugate their legislative powers to the demands of religious leaders who will claim to have the solution for appeasing God's anger. Actually, the religious leaders of the world will know nothing about God's plans.

They will only make matters worse by demanding an ever increasing number of "sin-less" laws – thinking these laws will appease God and stop His judgments. The composite beast will not displace nations' governments that are in place when the first four trumpet-judgments occur.

Instead, it will *direct* the political leaders of each nation to enact and enforce numerous "sin-less" laws in an effort to keep people from sinning. Thus, they reason, God's wrath will cease.

Obviously, after the horrific destruction caused by the first four trumpet-judgments, martial law will be implemented. Political leaders will readily violate the constitution of their nation to comply with the religious demands of their clergy – and who will complain?

Fearing that God's anger could flare up again and cause more destruction, political leaders will have no choice! *Man's response to God's wrath explains how worship will become a matter of persecution.* Laws will be enacted in every nation declaring a day of worship.

People who observe the Ten Commandments will be persecuted because the fourth commandment declares the seventh day of the week is *God's* holy day. The composite beast (the crisis government) will mirror the ancient government of Babylon, both in arrogance and ignorance. It will "set up an image" and blaspheme God by usurping His prerogatives. This is why the book of Revelation calls the composite beast "Babylon."

The Appearing of the Antichrist

I assume you are acquainted with the physical appearing of the devil (the Antichrist) during the fifth trumpet judgment. (Revelation 9:1-11) If not, please read Chapter 5 in my book, *Warning!*

Revelation is about to be fulfilled. About 890 days after the censer is cast down (Revelation 8:5), the devil will physically appear.

This is the fifth trumpet-judgment. He will claim to be Almighty God, Ruler of Earth, but in fact, he is the Antichrist. At first, attempting to disarm the world's skepticism, he will speak kind words, perform wonderful miracles and offer hope to a world in utter despair. However, as time passes, the devil's charade will fail.

He will prove to be the meanest and cruelest taskmaster the world has ever known. The devil will take control of the composite beast (the crisis government) and through it, he will impose even greater suffering upon humanity. Two statements about this terrifying event are necessary because the devil and the composite beast will work together like a "hand in a glove."

Several passages in the Bible describe the physical appearing of the devil. Tragically, very few people understand the seriousness and enormity of this event because these passages are usually misdirected and/or misinterpreted. For example, the man of sin or lawlessness mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2, the horn power/stern-faced king in Daniel 8, the king of the north in Daniel 11:36-45, the two-horned beast ascending out of the Earth in Revelation 13:11, and the beast ascending from the Abyss in Revelation 11 and 17 are all descriptions of the physical appearing of the devil.

The world has not witnessed anything comparable to the physical appearing of the devil and this is why the Bible has so much to say about it! This compelling event is described in diverse ways in the Bible because there are numerous issues involved with the physical appearing of Lucifer who is the *Anti*christ.

Surprising as it may seem, Lucifer's activities will cause greater destruction and suffering than that caused by the first four trumpets. The devil will inflict irreparable destruction on three fronts. First, he will destroy the governments of all nations.

Second, he will destroy all of the religious systems of the world. Third, he will destroy one-third of mankind (the non-religious wicked and many of the saints). This is why the devil's name in both Hebrew and Greek is *Abaddon and Apollyon*, which means destroyer.

It is impossible to describe the agony and suffering that will be caused by Lucifer, so think about his actions for a moment. Once the devil gloriously appears, attended by his 200 million fallen angel followers (Revelation 9:16), the usual order of world governance (our political and religious systems) will be useless.

The devil, masquerading as Almighty God, will perform incredible miracles such as calling fire down out of Heaven perhaps destroying rebellious cities. Billions of people will either be intimidated or deceived into believing that God Himself lives among men. Ultimately, the devil will demand that all religious diversity be eliminated – and naturally so. The devil will proclaim himself to be God and, as such, his word is *the* law.

Once the devil has gained enough followers, the Bible predicts the devil will terminate the seven

religions of the world by setting up a new one-world religion.

This new religion is called "an image" or likeness of the composite beast in the book of Revelation. In other words, the composite beast will be modified so that there will be "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" instead of seven opposing religions claiming to have the truth about God.

The Bible also predicts the devil will eliminate the governments of Earth. He will do this to gain absolute control over mankind. Consider this: When the devil first appears, he will lead the world to believe that he (as God) has come to establish a thousand years of peace on Earth and all of the destruction caused by the first four trumpets must be rebuilt or repaired.

Like Pharaoh of old, everyone will be *forced* to work hard to speed Earth's recovery. (Of course, the devil knows there will be no recovery from God's destruction, he just uses this *false hope* to "wear out" and torment the people of Earth.)

The devil will divide Earth into ten sectors and will appoint ten kings as "taskmasters" to oversee Earth's reconstruction. Make no mistake. Lucifer will not be a benevolent king. All who stand in opposition to the devil's heavy and harsh demands will be targeted for elimination.

On the other hand, everyone who believes the devil is God will be treated as a slave. By the time the seventh trumpet sounds, the great red dragon, the eighth king, will reign over Earth as "King of kings (politics), and Lord of lords (religion)."

The government of Earth will rest on his shoulders and Lucifer will "sit in the heart of the seas," an ancient phrase that means "ruler of all nations." (Ezekiel 28:2)

God permits the devil to physically appear for several reasons. Here are two: (1) The devil is not allowed to physically appear until the work of the 144,000 stalls. (See 2 Thessalonians 2:10,11) In other words, most of the people of Earth will have heard the gospel and made their decision about whom they will worship *before* the devil is allowed to physically appear.

After the devil is released from the Abyss, and people begin to discern the true character of Satan, God extends a final offer for the wicked to reconsider their decision. As people observe the torture which Lucifer and his angels inflict on human beings during the fifth and sixth trumpets, perhaps some of the wicked will repent of their rebellion, reject the lies and authority of the devil and submit to the joy of serving Jesus Christ, "whose yoke is easy and burden is light." (2)

Lucifer is permitted to physically appear before the inhabitants of Earth so that Earth's religious gridlock can be eliminated. Because religion is a highly sensitive matter involving personal persuasion and cultural heritage, it is almost impossible for one religious person to convince another person from a different religious system that his understanding of God is better and more comprehensive.

God understands this gridlock. (It has been said that less than 5% of the world's population

change religious systems.) Therefore, God allows the devil to physically appear so that the many religious systems existing throughout the world can be eliminated.

Suddenly, the religious wicked will discover a great void and this void will enable many to thoughtfully and intelligently consider the true gospel of Jesus Christ for the first time. But wait! It only gets worse.

The devil will demand the death penalty for anyone who refuses to participate in his one world religion and this decree will force everyone into one of two camps: worship the devil and live or worship Jesus and be killed. This will be the ultimate test of faith.

"He [the devil] **was given power** [authority from God] **to give breath** [life] **to the image** [the one-world religion] **of the first beast** [composite beast]**, so that it could speak** [make laws] **and cause all who refused to worship** [according to the demands of] **the image to be killed."** (Revelation 13:15)

Remember, the Bible predicts the devil will divide the world into ten sectors and place ten "taskmaster" kings over these sectors. Since the Bible doesn't reveal the geographical boundaries of these ten sectors, they may conform to general geographical and cultural boundaries.

For example, the ten sectors could be (1) North America, (2) Central and South America, (3) Africa, (4) Europe, (5) China, (6) India, (7) Russia, (8) Asia and the Middle East, (9) Australia, and (10) The Pacific Nations. Of course, time will tell how the world is divided.

Ultimately, the composite beast and the devil will *appear* to succeed. Those who love lies will submit to their demands. Those who love truth will be despised. It is ironic that the world will end just like sin began; believing the devil's lies.

"[John,] **The ten horns you saw are ten kings** [these kings are also represented by the toes of the metal man in Daniel 2] **who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour** [Greek syntax: *for one hour* does not mean 60 minutes, but at an appointed hour] **will receive authority as kings along with the** [great red dragon] **beast.** [As the taskmasters of mankind]

They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the [great red dragon] **beast.** [At the Second Coming] **They** [the ten kings] **will make war against the Lamb** [as did Lucifer and his angels thousands of years ago]**, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is** [the true] **Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."** (Revelation 17:12-14, insertions mine)

Preparation for Great Tribulation

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:
A few weeks ago I discovered your free book offer on the internet. I received your book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled* and I'm not sure that "thank you" is an appropriate response. Your book has created a deep stirring within me that is hard to explain and difficult to live with.

I am afraid and excited at the same time. I know I am better informed, but I feel like I know nothing. I find myself wondering if I am even a Christian. The returning Jesus that you talk about is very different from the Jesus I have known. I have been a Christian for 24 years. I have been a sincere student of the Bible (the New Testament) and I conduct a weekly Bible class in my church, but I am blown away by the concepts presented in your little book. I've never heard anything like this.

At first, I thought you were seriously misguided, but I could not put your book out of my mind. After a few days of trying to forget about your book, I decided to reread it with an open Bible. I wanted to prove you wrong. As I finished Chapter 2 on the full cup principle, a light came on.

For the first time, I saw some divine wisdom and justification for the Great Tribulation. I am beginning to see how the Great Tribulation is harmonious with God's character. I also see the need for a global process to separate the sheep from the goats. I can see how the seven trumpets are redemptive in nature and will awaken the whole Earth to the fact that Jesus Christ is Sovereign Lord, returning to Earth to terminate the curse of sin on mankind. Your book indicates that God's people will be on Earth during the Great Tribulation.

This may sound strange to you, but I have had lingering doubts about a pre-tribulation rapture. The media shows how millions of people on Earth are suffering to the point of death *right now. So, why should I expect to escape the Great Tribulation?*

Although I do not worship on Saturday as you do, I can see how worship could become a testing experience during the Great Tribulation. My church, like most Christian churches, treats the seventh day Sabbath as a Jewish custom that was nailed to the cross.

I believe the fourth commandment requires resting from work on a seventh day, so I *literally* rest from work each Sunday. You, however, make a distinction between "a" seventh day and "the" seventh day. This idea is new to me and I plan to investigate it further.

I am writing for two reasons. First, I want to know more about God and His Word and at the back of your book you have some Bible study helps listed. What do you recommend I read next? Second, how do I prepare for the Great Tribulation? How do I deal with my fear of God's judgments and persecution?

How can I be happy and joyful in the Lord with this great cloud of doom hanging over me? What do I tell unsaved friends and family members? What do I tell those who attend my weekly Bible class? I hope you can see that I am in an uncomfortable position and it's all your fault! (Grin) I know the Holy Spirit is at work in my life because my prayer is that He will guide me into all truth. Please help me put these matters within a context where I can "rejoice in the Lord always." I don't want to live in fear or ignorance.

Sincerely,
Joann"

Dear Joann:
Thank you for your e-mail. I sincerely appreciate your honesty and search for truth. Your love for God and His Word rings true. I do not know if this helps, but your email mirrors hundreds of sincere letters and phone calls. Your reaction to the *Warning!* book is appropriate and to be expected. A certain amount of fear and confusion usually rises when sincere people first learn that the events described in Revelation are about to be fulfilled. You asked two questions and I hope my responses will be helpful:

Question 1: "What should I read next?" This is a tough question since I don't know you personally. If you are upset and worried about the oncoming Great Tribulation to the point that it constantly robs you of your joy and peace in the Lord, then I recommend reading the book, *Bible Stories with End-Time Parallels.* I wrote this book in 2002 to encourage God's children. I took ten well known Bible stories of faith and paralleled each story with the Great Tribulation.

If we "put on the sandals" of those saints who lived in Bible times and examine their lives and experiences, our faith in God will increase because God is changeless! When early Christians in Corinth became discouraged with persecution, Paul encouraged them to read stories from the Old Testament! **"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."** (1 Corinthians 10:11) So, if you need some faith-building stories, you can read this book for free on the internet. Just go to this link: http://www.wake-up.org/daystar/DSIndex2002.htm (Editor's note: This book can also be obtained by calling the WUAS office at 800-475-0876.)

On the other hand, if you are not overwhelmed with fear or dread to the point of distraction, you should continue to expand your theological framework so that you can better understand the love, the ways, the plans, and the character of God. Every human being, including me, has a flawed view of God.

This is why faith in God is eternally important for angels as well as humans! Our finite minds are too small to comprehend the works and plans of an infinite God, so He asks us to obey His laws and patiently wait upon Him until knowledge and understanding arrives.

God may take several thousand years to work something out or He may take one second. While we are waiting for God to accomplish His corporate purposes or plans for us as individuals, we

have to trust and obey. Eventually, we will see His wisdom, His love, and His ability to make all things work together for good! (Faith, when viewed in reverse, always makes sense.)

No person can surround all who God is. In fact, the Bible has more than 40 authors and it took some 1,500 years to write! I am constantly learning more about God, and during the past 35 years, I have had to make major changes in my theological framework.

I have learned that if we will allow it, the Bible speaks clearly, just as it reads. This may surprise you, but God has put a number of *apparent conflicts* in the Bible. He did this for at least two reasons. First, surface readers of the Bible will quickly choose one side of a conflict and ignore many verses that conflict with their conclusions.

This foolish behavior quickly exposes surface readers for what they are to those who have spent hours searching for truth. Second, God has put apparent conflicts in the Bible to draw His children into deeper study and discovery. A born again Christian knows the Bible is not in conflict with itself because God is changeless. So, resolving these apparent conflicts requires digging and searching for truth. While pursuing "an apparent conflict," new discoveries will occur. Soon, the Bible becomes an amazing universe of information about God.

On occasion, I have had to let go of flawed concepts in order to embrace a larger harmony that comes from the sum of all the parts. As you already know, renouncing a theological concept like "the pre-tribulation rapture" can be very difficult on a theological level, as well as a social level. So, to help others understand the elements of Bible prophecy more clearly, I wrote the book, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega.* This book presents five essential Bible truths which every student of Bible prophecy should know.

I am convinced that a person has to know these five essential truths before the books of Daniel and Revelation make sense just as they read. I feel so strongly about this that I have made this book available to read for free on the internet. I encourage you to read the chapters in their order because there are certain things that must come first. Go to this link and you will see the chapters listed: http://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Subjindex.htm

Joann, I hope you will eventually read both books, but you will have to decide which one should come first.

Question 2: "What do I tell my friends, my family and my Bible class?" Again, this is a very tough question since I do not know you personally. As a general rule, I tell people to remain silent about their discoveries until they have a fairly good grasp of what they have discovered. As a Bible teacher, you know that once you start raising people's interest with something *different*, you will immediately create opposition and when you face opposition, you need to be ready to respond with, "But the Bible says this . . . ."

Of course a person cannot keep silent about everything he is learning. I hope you have a trustworthy friend that will listen to your comments, probe your thoughts, and kindly challenge your thinking. Over the years, I have seen people make a serious mistake. They do not realize the power of religious ideas. They get excited about some aspect of Revelation's story before

they have done their homework, and they begin to tell friends and family things that friends and family do not want to hear. In short, this excitement soon backfires and the advocate of a new understanding is shunned or rejected. Social rejection is powerful and it is also very discouraging. Just remember, Jesus understands.

If you feel compelled to say something during the early phase of your Bible discovery when you speak to your family and Bible class, you might find it helpful to speak in generalities. For example, instead of confronting your Bible class with a statement like, "OK, everybody, listen up: I am renouncing the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture.

The saints are going to be right here during the Great Tribulation." You could say, "OK, Bible class, when I read Hebrews 11, I marvel at the faith of God's people when faced with persecution and death. When I read Daniel 3, I marvel at the faith of Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego when they were thrown into the fiery furnace. I marvel that ten of the twelve disciples were martyrs for their faith! When I study the life of Jesus, I marvel at His life-long anticipation and submission to dying on the cross!

When I look at Christian history, I marvel at those martyrs who chose to die rather than compromise their faith. So, here is my question: Do you think that God could give His saints the same kind of courage and faith to endure the Great Tribulation if there was no pre-tribulation rapture?" Of course, someone will speak up and say, "Sure, God can do anything, but we don't need to worry about this because the saints will be in Heaven during the Great Tribulation!" Then, you can say, "

I'm not so sure. The Bible indicates there will be saints on Earth during the Great Tribulation! Consider this text: **"He** [the composite beast] **was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."** (Revelation 13:7,8, insertion mine.)

Joann, I hope this has been helpful. As you begin this new year and a new understanding of God's Word, I want to share three passages from the Bible. First, please consider the last words of Jesus recorded in Matthew, **" . . . and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."** (Matthew 28:20, KJV)

Second, here is a blessing from God spoken to all who love Him: **"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."** (Numbers 6:24-26) A few hours before His death, Jesus told His disciples, **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."** (John 14:27)

With best wishes,

Larry Wilson

What Will the Kingdom of Heaven be Like?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent[change your attitudes and ways]**, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’" -**Matthew 4:17(insertion mine)

For many people, the word "Heaven" refers to an ideal place or a state of perfection. Of course, different people have different views on what constitutes perfection and this explains why there is differing opinions about the kingdom of Heaven. The Bible reveals many interesting things about the kingdom of Heaven and you should consider them if you plan on living in Heaven someday. Nothing on Earth is more important than entering the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said, **"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"** (Mark 8:36)

Here are a few of my favorite texts describing the kingdom of Heaven. Review each text and consider the short commentary that follows:

Matthew 5:3 **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

The kingdom of Heaven will be filled with people who are "poor in spirit," that is, humble and teachable. People who will have the heart of a child and the mind of a servant will rule the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus warned His disciples: **"But you are not to be** [exalted above one another with titles] **called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers** [equals]**. And do not call** [a priest or a church leader or] **anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.**

Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ [you must forever remain a student] **for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself** [on Earth] **will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted** [in Heaven]**."** (Matthew 23:8-12, insertions mine)

Matthew 5:20 **"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."**

A sinner cannot produce the righteousness required to enter Heaven. Period. A sinner can never be good enough or righteous enough to achieve Heaven. Sinners must be born again to receive the garment of Christ’s righteousness – a righteous robe which Jesus created for us when He came to Earth and lived a sinless life. Christ gives His righteousness to the people who surrender their will to Him. **"For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’ "** (Romans 1:17)

Matthew 22:2-14 **"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell**

them to come, but they refused to come. Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

But they paid no attention and went off– one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.

Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without [putting on the] **wedding clothes** [which I provided]**?' The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth** [much agony]**.' For many are invited, but few are chosen."**

The moral of this parable is quite simple. The wedding guest was thrown out of the wedding party because he assumed his wedding garment (his own righteousness) was good enough. That was a fatal assumption.

Matthew 5:10 **"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

God honors people of integrity. He loves people like Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego (Daniel 3) who stand up and speak up for the right, even though the consequence could be death. God knows that human beings prefer joy and peace over pain and suffering, but God also knows that we live in a world of numerous collisions.

Evil people are constantly causing problems. God looks for people who will stand up for the right though the heavens fall and He is delighted when we put our faith in Him and do the right thing. (2 Chronicles 16:9) The lesson of Daniel 3 teaches us that faith in God means doing the right thing and leaving the consequences in His hands.

This text is a promise. Everyone suffering for the sake of righteousness will have a place in the kingdom of Heaven. **"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. . . ."** (Revelation 21:8)

Matthew 13:33 **"He told them still another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.'"**

This parable illustrates the point that once a person has been born again and tasted the joy and peace that comes through faith in Jesus, *every aspect* of this present life will be affected.

Matthew 13:47-50 **"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

This parable affirms a profound truth: Everybody wants to go to Heaven, even the "bad fish." However, many people are unwilling to prepare for Heaven. Jesus said, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."** (Mark 8:34,35)

1 Corinthians 2:9,10 **"However, as it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. . . ."**

Somehow, verse 10 is often overlooked. The kingdom of Heaven is a real place with houses, streets, vegetation and rivers. It is a lovely place with happiness beyond human imagination. Once sin is eliminated, sorrow, sickness and death will be gone forever. The promise of living there is more precious than fine gold to those who have been *enlightened* by the Holy Spirit.

Luke 7:28 **"I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."**

John the Baptist was divinely "set apart" at birth to herald the arrival of Messiah. John was also given the honor of baptizing Jesus. From God's perspective, no one on Earth was greater than John and Jesus drew this comparison to make a profound point: People who may be considered "least" in the kingdom of Heaven will have greater standing in God's sight than John the Baptist had on Earth. **"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."** (1 John 3:1, KJV)

Matthew 19:24 **"Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."**

For protection from war lords and foreign armies, ancient cities closed their massive gates at sundown. However, most cities had a small door where people arriving after sundown could enter the city and be safe. This small door was known as "the eye of a needle." Getting a camel through "the eye of the needle" was almost impossible.

The camel had to be stripped of everything he was carrying and the animal had to lie down on ground. Then, a team of oxen inside the city would literally drag the camel through "the eye of

the needle." No doubt some camels got stuck and you can imagine the grief that produced. So, the point is simple: Getting people to dedicate their wealth to God's service is more difficult than dragging a camel through a small hole in the wall.

Galatians 5:19-21 **"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."**

This text teaches us two things. First, the sinful nature is drawn toward the muck and mire of "pig heaven." Second, people enjoying "pig heaven" would not be happy in the kingdom of Heaven. If a person enjoys sexual immorality, debauchery, idolatry, orgies, drunkenness and selfish ambition, living in Heaven forever would be worse than hell.

To live throughout eternity in a happy and joyful state, the saints must be free of sin. This is why sanctification is so important. I believe Heaven will not only be a time to worship and sing praises to God, but it also will be a place where we will study new subjects, research God's creations, build homes or work on intricate projects with technologies that humans presently know nothing about. As the saints go about their heavenly business, they will joyfully worship a God who is grander and greater than finite knowledge can understand.

1 Corinthians 15:50 **"I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."**

This text is often mistreated. Some people try to make this text say that everyone in the kingdom of God will be a ghost or a spirit who does not have flesh and blood. Actually, this text says that human beings, in our present mortal state of flesh and blood, cannot live in the kingdom of God. T

herefore, when the time is right, God will give us new bodies so we can live in His kingdom. **"When the perishable** [body] **has been clothed with the imperishable** [body]**, and the mortal** [man who was subject to death is clothed] **with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'"** (1 Corinthians 15:54, insertions mine) Heaven is a real place and we will know each other just as we know each other now. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Revelation 21:1-5 **"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea** [or lake of fire]**. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them.**

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy

and true.'"

God Himself has spoken and His promise will certainly come true. Everyone is invited. Don't miss out! **"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."** (Revelation 22:17)

Larry Wilson

The Seven Bowls - Part 1

Author: Larry W. Wilson

I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues – last, because with them God's wrath is completed. (Revelation 15:1)

The seven last plagues (the seven bowls) are a fascinating study. Every discussion on the character of God should include Noah's flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of Jerusalem, the death of Christ on the cross, and the seven bowls because all of these events highlight certain components of God's character.

Yes, a God of love has vengeance. Paul wrote, **"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."** (Romans 12:19) Vengeance is defined by Webster as retribution (justifiable action) for a wrong or injury. In this sense, the seven last plagues will be justifiable and they will be poured out without mercy.

The seven bowls will be God's response on people who (a) willingly and knowingly rejected truth and righteousness and chose to do evil, and (b) approved and/or participated in torturing and hurting people who stood for truth and righteousness. The seven last plagues will be indescribably painful and they will befall every person who receives the mark of the beast. Before we examine these horrible plagues, here's a short overview.

I believe the seven last plagues will last seventy days; that is, each plague unfolds over a period of ten days. The phrase, "seven *last* plagues" suggests the presence of "seven *first* plagues." Indeed, the seven *first* plagues of the Great Tribulation are called seven trumpets.

There are two essential differences between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls. First, the seven trumpets are redemptive in nature, whereas the seven bowls are totally destructive. People can repent and be saved during the seven trumpets; however, salvation will not be possible during the seven bowls because the offer of mercy closes on the 1,260th day of the Great Tribulation.

Second, the seven *first* plagues are called "seven trumpets" in Revelation because these redemptive judgments are designed to shatter the religious paradigms of the world much like a military trumpet shatters the silence of early dawn with *Reveille*.

The seven trumpets will enable people to thoughtfully and intelligently consider the testimony of Jesus which the 144,000 will give. On the other hand, the seven last plagues are called "seven bowls" because people receiving the mark of the beast will be forced to "drink and swallow" their medicine, the bitter dregs of God's wrath that comes in each bowl.

The seven bowls are punitive in nature. God will force the wicked to suffer, in part, for the suffering they imposed upon His innocent people. There will be no mercy from God when the

seven bowls are poured out because the wicked will knowingly reject the demands of the Holy Spirit.

Each of them committed the unpardonable sin. Furthermore, the people who receive the mark of the beast will become the property of demons and like them, they will be cruel and violent. Get this straight! There will not be any "good people" having the mark of the beast. When the seventh bowl is completed, God's wrath will be completed. Earth will be left in a desolate condition – the saints will be with Jesus in Heaven. All of the wicked will be dead and birds will eat their flesh. (Revelation 19:19-21)

Last, but not least. When the seven bowls begin, the devil will be on Earth masquerading as Almighty God. The devil will sit on his throne claiming to be God, and billions of wicked people will believe that he is God. The Antichrist will urge his wicked followers to continue destroying God's saints because he will claim, "they are of the devil." How clever!

Understand that billions of wicked people will believe the devil is God and that the God of the saints and 144,000 is the devil. Keep this twisted deception in mind as we examine the specific purpose and nature of each dreadful bowl.

1. Rev 16:2 – The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

The first plague is the outpouring of painful boils. Remember Job's boils – huge, tender, inflamed, puss oozing sores – all over his body? These sores will befall *every person* who receives the mark of the beast. There are two great ironies here.

First, many people will receive the mark of the beast thinking that they can avoid further suffering, but the first bowl inflicts a suffering on them that is beyond description! Here's the scenario: When the composite beast (Babylon) rises from the sea, it will demand obedience to its laws.

Anyone who dares to rebel against Babylon's authority will suffer the severest of penalties. During this time of persecution, billions of people will hear the testimony of the 144,000 which requires everyone to reject the demands of Babylon, but few people will have the courage to stand for righteousness and truth. Many people will capitulate to avoid suffering and separation from their families. They will obediently submit to the blasphemous and arrogant laws of Babylon.

Then, when the devil physically appears – masquerading as God, the wicked will easily submit to the devil's authority in an effort to save their lives! But, their escape from suffering will be temporary because everyone who worships "the devil and receives his mark" will receive the first bowl!

There will be no escape from the first bowl. Painful boils will cause the wicked to writhe in

relentless pain and this is the second irony. When the first bowl is poured out on the wicked, they will be engaged in an intense campaign to find and kill the few saints of God who remain alive. The first bowl painfully interrupts their plans. Evil men and women, covered with boils from head to foot will not be able to stand or sit, much less chase after a few saints who are hiding in remote places.

2. Rev 16:3 – The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

The second bowl is awesome. Every living thing in the oceans of the world dies. I can think of a three-fold possibility why God would pour out His wrath on the oceans of the world. First, the oceans are Earth's source of fresh water. The Sun evaporates millions of square miles of ocean water each day.

This sterile vapor rises and becomes clouds. Winds move the clouds over land and distilled water falls in the form of rain as condensation occurs. By turning the sea into a substance like the clotted blood of a dead man, there will be no more rain. Earth itself will die without this regular cycle of water.

Earth is doomed, the stench of death and decay will be everywhere. Second, because a third of the trees and all of the green grass (including crops) were burned up during the first trumpet, seafood will likely become a main source of food during the Great Tribulation. If so, the destruction of everything that lives in the oceans means total famine.

Again, life on this planet is doomed beyond recovery. Last, two-thirds of the world's population lives near an ocean. When the wicked behold this awesome judgment, you would think that some will question the powers of their God. This silent plague speaks with deafening authority. It says, "The glorious and majestic being which you worship is not God. He can not protect you. He can not prevent the destruction of Earth."

3. Rev 16:4 – The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: 'You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.' And I heard the altar respond: 'Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.'

The third bowl will force people having the mark of the beast into a sickly spiral that ultimately leads to an agonizing death. There will be no recovery from this plague. Human beings cannot go very long without water. Everywhere the wicked look for water, but find blood instead. Picture this if you can. Millions of thirst-driven people drinking blood in order to survive! It's a repugnant

thought, but it is a true picture. Helpless people will turn to their God, the Antichrist, for miraculous help, but none will come.

Lucifer will be powerless to turn the blood into water. Jesus will not have mercy upon these demon possessed people. Every wicked person was given a lengthy chance to know God's will and worship Him. However, they willfully aligned themselves with the forces of evil; therefore, they must suffer the consequence.

The angel that delivers this horrible judgment declares God to be fair for giving blood-thirsty people blood to drink! Even the martyred souls under the altar agree saying, "True and just are your judgments." (Of course, martyred souls don't actually talk, but personification allows their innocent blood to cry out for justice as did Abel's blood. Genesis 4:10)

4. Rev 16:8,9 –The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him."

At this point, thirty days have passed since the seven bowls began. The misery index is climbing fast and the wicked people on Earth are struggling in a great quandary. Why doesn't our God (actually, the Antichrist) stop this? They reason, "Our God can do anything!

He even called fire down from the sky, therefore, he must immediately stop these awful judgments!" Then, the fourth bowl is poured out. Is it possible that the fourth bowl will be caused by a catastrophic solar flare from the Sun or perhaps a very brilliant gamma-ray burst coming from the direction of the Sun?

Either way, the net effect is intense, searing heat. Think about this plague for a moment. If the ambient temperature stays above 150 degrees for several days, what would be the effect? There will be no electricity on Earth at this time since Earth was badly broken up when the seventh trumpet occurred. (Revelation 11:19)

So, there will be no mechanical relief from the heat. Furthermore, all of the oceans and rivers smell like blood. Billions of dead sea creatures have washed up on the shores. There is no water to drink, only blood which smells so badly it causes people to vomit.

In this setting, the Bible predicts two interesting things. First, the wicked will curse the God of the 144,000 and the saints (who they believe is the devil). They will do this because Lucifer (masquerading as Almighty God) and his angels will tell the wicked people of Earth that these plagues are from the devil! Think about this: When God becomes the devil and the devil becomes God, Lucifer's deception is complete!

Second, even though the wicked are suffering in the extreme, the Bible says they will refuse to

change or repent, revealing the depth of their degredation. They cannot change because there is no desire within them to change. Torture does not change the heart!

At this time, every wicked person will have committed the unpardonable sin and the Holy Spirit has abandoned them. This brings us face to face with a very stark fact: Unless we give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to change us, we cannot come to repentance or reformation on our own. The carnal nature will not permit it.

We will conclude our study on the seven bowls next month.

The Seven Bowls - Part 2

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, ‘Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.’" -Revelation 16:1

Is it possible to reconcile God’s wrath toward man as seen in the seven bowls with God’s love for man displayed by Jesus on the cross? Yes, but it takes a few minutes! The Bible says, **". . . God is love."** (1 John 4:8) Webster’s Dictionary has nine definitions for the word "love." Love can refer to "a deep devotion or affection," or "a score of zero" in tennis. The word "love" can also mean unmerited kindness, generous charity, deep affection, sexual passion, secret benevolence, or loyal commitment.

From a human point of view, these definitions are practical and realistic; however, they are inadequate when it comes to understanding God’s love, and the devil knows this. Since many of us do not correctly understand the principles of God’s love, the devil capitalizes on our ignorance to make God’s character seem evil and disgusting. For example, the doctrine of an eternally burning hell is a false doctrine which many Christians have naively accepted as truth. Through the centuries, I believe this doctrine has done more damage to God’s character than any other.

I have heard people say, "I want nothing to do with a so-called ‘God of love’ who would torture people with fire for billions and billions of years." The root problem of defining God’s love is that God is infinite. His ways and purposes are higher and larger than our finite minds can fathom. No created being can understand God in totality and we cannot understand the totality of the vast dimensions of His love. However, we can understand and reconcile a number of essential truths about God because God has given us a means to do so.

The fact that the Bible exists today is a miracle. It is the oldest book in the world today. In terms of translation and distribution, it has no equal. Men have tried to destroy and discredit the Bible, but it remains intact because God sustains it. God wants us to know about our origin, the problem of sin, our accountability to Him and of His plan to save sinners and eliminate evil from His universe. God also sustains the Bible because He wants us to have a *truthful* report on His character, ways and love. God wants us to know Him and to submit to the same principles by which He lives.

God tells us that He is changeless. (Malachi 3:6) This declaration is important because this means that everything we read in the Bible about God is consistent with divine love, even though we may not be able to reconcile everything we read at first. The Bible reveals that God is faithful, deeply affectionate, and unbelievably generous.

It also points out that God has wrath. He destroyed all living creatures with a flood in Noah’s day and completely destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. God even destroyed His own people as a nation in A.D. 70. This may seem strange at first, but love compels God to destroy evil. For

example, it was God's love for *future generations* that moved Him to destroy a hopelessly decadent and totally defiant generation that lived on Earth in Noah's day. Even though He destroyed the world with the flood, He gave each person a generous opportunity to be saved. Unfortunately, only eight people went into the ark.

Love's Balance

The United States has different levels of government: federal, state, county, and city governments. This is because different groups of people require different levels of government so that everyone can live together harmoniously and in a beneficial way.

When government is based on righteous principles and properly managed, it becomes a wonderful servant of its people. When government is based on ego and the best interests of a few, government becomes a horrible master. When everyone within a government exalts religious principles, various levels of government will function together harmoniously. Federal, state, county, and city governments would be unnecessary if the population of the United States was twelve people.

Man's need for different levels of government is determined by the presence of different groups of people – more groups of people necessitate more levels of government. The same design holds true in God's universe. God has different levels of government and His managers and management are consistent with His laws of love.

For this reason, God's actions on a *corporate level* can appear to conflict with His enormous love for individuals*, but the problem lies within our understanding of God's love. He is consistent and changeless. *At all levels of government, God's love is always expressed in a perfect balance of justice and mercy.*

* **Note:** Consider this disturbing text: **"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'"** (1 Samuel 15:2, 3)

Many people read these verses and wonder how a God of love could demand this of King Saul. Why should men, women, children and infants be put to death for something that happened 500 years earlier? As a nation, the Amalekites had become totally defiant and rebellious toward God. Their cup of sin was full, and God – Who had given that nation 500 years of grace – demanded their total extinction so that their land could be given to Israel. This does not mean that every Amalekite child and infant will be lost!

God does not hold children and infants accountable for the sins of their parents. (Ezekiel 18) Do not forget, God sent Israel to destroy the Amalekites because the Amalekites had filled up their cup of grace with evil, and Israel also did the same thing! Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Israel about 400 years after King Saul, and the Romans did it again in A.D. 70. God imposes justice

on *all* nations when His extended mercy does not produce repentance and reformation. God consistently follows this policy to cauterize the growth of sin and to give the land to other people whom He loves. Remember, God loves the whole world.

God directed Moses to build the Ark of the Covenant which represents a balance of God's love and mercy. The "mercy seat" or "atonement cover" (representing God's mercy) and the Ten Commandments (representing God's justice) are inseparable and harmonious. Mercy and justice do not diminish nor negate each other. God's love consists of both! These are the foundations of His government. (Psalm 89:14)

The Bible declares that a day is coming when the whole world will see the Ark of Covenant. Evidently, God took the Ark of the Covenant to Heaven for safekeeping sometime after Jeremiah hid the Ark from Nebuchadnezzar's advancing troops. (605 B.C.)

We know that the Ark of the Covenant is in Heaven because it will be shown to the world on the 1264th day of the Great Tribulation – the same day the seven bowls begin. (See Revelation 11:19.) God will visibly display the Ark of His Covenant in the sky because He wants each wicked person to understand the mercy he rejected, as well as the Royal Law, written in stone on Earth, that condemns him to become a recipient of the seven bowls. On the other hand, God wants all the righteous people to see the mercy they accepted and the law they have chosen by which to live.

Since God's love operates on different levels (mercy and justice for individuals, as well as groups of people), the Golden Rule becomes a profound statement for individuals. Jesus said, **"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."** (Matthew 7:12) The Golden Rule is a profound declaration of an everlasting principle. The Golden Rule means that God uses justice and mercy to judge us. *"As we did unto others, the same will be done unto us."*

God's justice demands reciprocity. If we cheat someone out of something, then God will take from us. If we steal things from others, God will also take from us. However, if we make our wrongs right, God will not require anything further because restoration has been made. God's keen sense of justice and mercy does not allow Him to ignore *one* evil deed. Conversely, if we have shown mercy and kindness to our enemies, He will show the same mercy and kindness toward us. If we forgive our debtors, He will forgive us. The Golden Rule is a sobering, but awesome rule.

Notice how the Golden Rule is applied. **"If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."** (Exodus 21:22-25) When it comes to pure justice what could be more fair than injury for injury?

Most Christians read Exodus 21 and say, "Jesus abolished those laws when He died on the cross. He taught that we are to turn the other cheek." Jesus did abolish the Levitical system at

the cross, but God's everlasting principles of mercy and justice were not abolished at the cross.

Jesus affirmed this. He said, **"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."** (Matthew 7:2) *The Golden Rule stems from the fact that justice requires restitution and mercy requires forgiveness. God will not accept anything less.* Notice how this works: If a person refuses to make restitution for the wrongs committed in this life, then God avenges the recipient of the wrongs by extracting restitution from the sinner at the end of the 1,000 years. If a victim shows mercy to those who harmed him, then God extends mercy to the victim when he is judged because he has shown mercy. Again, the Golden Rule is sobering, but awesome!

Jesus said, **"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."** (Matthew 5:38,39) This command does not nullify the operation of justice or imply that Christians are to simply tolerate injustice! Jesus made this declaration in His Sermon on the Mount to restore a balance to life which the Jews had badly distorted.

The Jews could not reconcile the concept of an eye for an eye and loving their enemies as themselves. When Jesus said that we are to turn the other cheek, He addressed two key points. First, we are to show kindness to our enemies as God shows kindness to us. (Romans 5:10) Second, we are supposed to forgive those who violate us* and wait for God to administer justice because He will certainly avenge every wrong act. (Romans 12:17-19)

* **Note:** Because this discussion is larger than the scope of this article, a few words follow for the sake of clarity. The Bible says that God has set up human governments. Their purpose is to *temporarily* deal with matters of justice and mercy. (Romans 13:1, 2) Because the governments of this world are managed by finite human beings whose knowledge, commitment and understanding of righteousness are imperfectly balanced, human beings often fail to resolve matters in a totally fair way.

The Bible teaches that in due time, everyone will stand before the judgment bar of Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:10) He who knows our actions, reads our hearts and sees our motives will pass judgment on us. His righteous investigation will resolve and restore all matters to God's perfect balance.

If justice is necessary, then injury for injury will be applied. If mercy is necessary, then mercy will be applied. God gave us legal systems to seek temporary relief or justice. He also gave Israel a judicial system for this very purpose.

The human dilemma is that we cannot love our enemies, as God loves us, without a miracle occurring. Unless the Holy Spirit enables us to forgive people who have done us wrong, we cannot love or forgive them! The carnal nature cannot forgive an injury.

The carnal heart is not a generous heart of love, instead it is stingy, selfish, arrogant, and easily offended. The carnal nature is impetuous and prefers to speedily avenge itself for wrongs done to it. Ruled by passion, the carnal heart delights in speedy revenge rather than fairness.

However, Jesus affirms that God, in due time, will ensure that justice is fully satisfied for everyone. **"It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their** [your enemies] **foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."** (Deuteronomy 32:35; also Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30)

Seven Bowls

This presentation on the various levels of God's love has been necessary because you must understand that the seven bowls originate from a God of love. When the time comes for the seven bowls to be poured out, God's love for His suffering saints demands restitution.

The wicked will be forced to drink the bitter experiences contained in the seven bowls because they must suffer *in proportion to the suffering they imposed on God's innocent people. Even more, the wicked must also receive the consequences of willful and defiant rebellion against the clearest evidences of God's will.* No king can tolerate open defiance and expect his subjects to maintain respect for his laws and throne.

Finally, the seven bowls also serve a cosmic purpose. The universe will see the hatred that *every* defiant sinner has toward God when they are confronted with the righteous principles that govern God's universe. By the time the seven bowls end, every wicked person would kill Jesus, if that were possible, because this is the response of the carnal nature when confronted with God's sovereign authority.

Therefore, when the seven trumpets end, God will use the seven bowls to avenge the martyrdom and torture of His saints, punish defiant rebels for high treason, and demonstrate the extremity to which a carnal heart will go by confronting the wicked with His higher authority.

5. "The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done." -Revelation 16:10,11

The fifth bowl serves two purposes. First, Jesus unmasks the devil. (In this passage, the beast is a reference to the lamblike beast. See Rev 13:11.) When the fifth bowl begins, the devil will have been masquerading as Almighty God for about a year (since the fifth trumpet).

Second, God imposes painful and agonizing sores on those who have inflicted great suffering on the saints. These sores will suddenly "pop up" on everyone who serves in Lucifer's global government – from the lowest paid clerk to the ten kings. Even though their suffering will be off the chart, the wicked will still refuse to repent of their evil deeds. They will remain loyal to the devil to the bitter end. (This proves that loyalty can be totally blinding, since it even transcends intelligence.)

Here is a scenario: When the fifth bowl is poured out, Jesus silently turns everything upside down within Lucifer's government. Suddenly, the devil and his angels, those glorious beings

who deceived the whole world with blinding glory, become demons of darkness. The devil, who is thought to be Almighty God, is no longer the glorious being that he once was. His brilliant glory completely disappears, his throne room becomes pitch dark, and everyone who serves in his evil government will be afflicted with horrible and painful sores.

People who received the mark of the beast (but not employees of the devil's government) will watch this mind boggling phenomena. They will ask each other, "Why would God suddenly lose His glory? Why would God curse everyone who works for Him with these horrible boils?"

An involuntary answer will soon form on their lips. "Uh oh . . . the 144,000 were right! This is indeed the devil! This dark being is not God! We were deceived! But, we can't call him 'the devil' or we will be killed just as the saints and the 144,000 were killed! What should we do now? Oh, no . . . ." This is one of those moments in Earth's history when the truth really hurts and nothing can be done about it.

6. "The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. 'Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.' Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." -Revelation 16:12-16

The meaning of this bowl is not too difficult if you understand the context and setting of this future event. The drying up of the great river Euphrates is an ancient phrase that means the *arrival* of the two kings coming down from the North (the Father and the Son) is unstoppable.

In other words, ancient kings could cross through the river bed of the Euphrates because the great river itself was no longer a barrier. I believe the *sign* of the Father and Son will first appear in the sky during this time. This sign will be a small cloud drawing near to Earth. (Matthew 24:30) Remember, divine destruction in ancient times always came out the North (Jeremiah 51:48, Job 37:22), but physically, because of the rotation of Earth on its axis, the Father and Son (the two kings) will appear from the East. (Matthew 26:64)

By the time the sixth bowl is poured out, the wicked will be suffering in the extreme. (The saints do not suffer from the seven bowls. Daniel 12:1) Every wicked person will be wearing the devil's inescapable tattoo. Even more, the world will know that the devil and his demons are not Almighty God and His angels, contrary to the devil's claims.

Wicked people realize they are looking at the embodiment of evil. Emotionally speaking, they will be at the point of utter discouragement. Everything they wanted to avoid during the Great Tribulation has happened to them. Then, with his incredible deceptions exposed and the wicked recognizing who he really is, the devil plays his final card.

It is a pathetic situation. Even though Lucifer knows the outcome of this drama, he will demonstrate his evil character one last time by sending three miracle-working demons with a pack of lies to visit the ten kings of Earth. (Frogs catch their prey with their tongues.)

Lucifer, who is the dragon, the lamblike beast and the false prophet, sends these powerful demons out. The Bible uses these three descriptors of Lucifer because these three caricatures describe him with perfection. As the great red dragon who was cast out of Heaven, he is the original Antichrist. As the lamblike beast who rose up out of the Earth, he is the final Antichrist. As the false prophet who led the whole world astray, he is the father of lies.

Their message to each king will be simple and direct: "You have but one chance to save yourselves from the approaching cloud in the East. If you will join with us in destroying Jesus and the Father as they draw near Earth, we can defeat them. You have atomic bombs. We have the power to work miracles. Do we have a deal? If so, arm yourselves for immediate battle." The only option is to trust in human might and the miracle working power of these demons. They prepare for battle.

"They [the kings of Earth] **have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."** (Revelation 17:13,14)

7. "The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’

[I believe this voice comes from one of the four living creatures. See Rev 8:13.] **Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake.**

The great city [Babylon the Great] **split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible."** (Revelation 16:17-21, insertions mine)

When the seventh bowl is poured out, the ten kings, encouraged and emboldened by the lies and miracles of the three demons, are armed and ready to destroy the Father and Son with all of the nuclear power they can muster. But, before they get the first missile in the air, the entire planet goes into a violent spasm.

A global earthquake rips up the Earth and the devil’s empire is torn into three parts.* The islands and mountains are moved out of their places as Earth vomits from the nausea of sin. The cities of Earth collapse into rubble and hailstones weighing a hundred pounds each fall on the enemies of the Lamb.

"They called to the mountains and the [falling] **rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from** (a) **the face of him who sits on the throne** [the Father] **and** (b) **from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their** [plural] **wrath has come, and who can stand?'"** (Revelation 6:16,17, insertions mine)

*__Note:__ The phrase, **"The great city split into three parts"** is significant. It means the complete destruction of Babylon, the global city whose citizens make up the harlot. God will divide and totally destroy the city. No mercy will be shown to the evil empire. Throughout the Bible, language describes the use of one-third and two-thirds.

For example, David killed two-thirds of the Moabites when they refused to pay tribute. (2 Samuel 8:2) God killed two-thirds of Israel when they refused to keep His covenant. (Ezekiel 5:12) In these situations, David and God mercifully spared a remnant. The idea in Revelation 16 is that there is no mercy for Babylon. Babylon will cease to exist. Three-thirds will be destroyed. (Revelation 19:21)

"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)

"Then I saw the [false prophet/lamblike] **beast and the kings of the earth** [composite beast with ten horns and seven heads] **and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the** [composite] **beast was captured, and with him the false prophet** [who is also the lamblike beast] **who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf.**

With these signs he [the lamblike beast] **had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them** [lamblike beast/false prophet and composite beast/ten kings/seven heads] **were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them** [the wicked of Earth] **were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh."** (Revelation 19:19-21)

Jesus calls the saints from their graves. Together with the righteous living, they meet the Lord in the air while the wicked watch. Then, a sword comes out of the mouth of Jesus. This sword is the command, "death to the wicked." The seventh bowl marks the end of human life on Earth for 1,000 years. The saints leave Earth to spend the next 1,000 years living and reigning with Jesus in their Father's house. (John 14:1-3)

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Mr. Wilson:
I recently landed on your website while doing a Google search. After reading some of the articles on your website, I have a question. You say there is no eternal burning hell, so please explain the story of the rich man and Lazarus.
Sincerely, Robert

Hello Robert:
Thank you for your e-mail. Before I respond, let me say that the words of Jesus are deep and sometimes difficult to understand. He is called "The *Word* of God" in Scripture for good reason. His ability to put spiritual concepts into words has no equal.

So, let us review the story from Scripture and then I will try to explain it: **"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side.**

The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers.

Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:19-31)

The first thing I like to do after reading *any* passage from Scripture is to ask myself a few questions. What is the setting of this passage? Who is talking to whom and under what circumstances? Is there a contest or conflict going on? In this particular story, who is the beggar named Lazarus?

Who is the rich man who had five brothers? Were both people identifiable to the listeners? What effect was this story supposed to have upon the listeners? What did the listeners know then that we need to know now so that we can properly frame and understand the story? Ultimately, what is the focal point of the story? With these questions in mind, please consider the following:

Conflict! Conflict!

Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus in the presence of His disciples and a group of scoffing Pharisees. (Luke 16:14) He created this illustration because the Pharisees refused to believe anything that He said. They had seen many miracles and they still refused to believe He was the Messiah, so Jesus gave them a prophecy in the form of a story.

As the story unfolds, Lazarus and the rich man die and their eternal rewards shock the listeners. The rich man goes to hell and the beggar goes to Abraham's side. This was the *exact opposite* of what the listeners expected. Jesus did not confront the Pharisees with loud words nor did He engage them with 100 proof texts from the Old Testament proving that He was the Messiah. Rather, Jesus created a small bomb which He planted in their minds. The story would be memorable because well known people were used and the destiny of both was totally different than what the listeners expected.

It is possible the Pharisees found this story a bit amusing at first, but the story probably made them angry once they figured out its meaning. So, Jesus created a story that begins with Middle East intrigue and it ends with a condemning knockout punch.

Errant Theology

Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees believed in a hereafter. They believed in eternal life and an eternally burning hell. They also believed that blessings and prosperity came from God as a reward for rigorous obedience to the law. (Philippians 3:6, Deuteronomy 28:1-14)

One of their favorite texts was, **"Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord."** (Leviticus 18:5) The Pharisees also believed that poverty and illness were the results of sinning against God. **"Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out. . . ."** (Deuteronomy 27:26; 28:15-68) So lepers, beggars and poor people *deserved* to suffer. Simply stated, such people were under a curse because either they or their parents had sinned against God. (See John 9:2.)

Since most Christians are not well informed on the Pharisees' beliefs, they just read how Lazarus went to Abraham's side and the high priest went to hell as though that was the way it should have been. **Not so!** The Pharisees believed just the opposite and this conflict in the story puzzled them.

Simon Lazarus

There is only one person in the Bible having the name Lazarus. He lived in Bethany. Most

Christians have heard of him because he was the brother of Mary Magdalene and Martha. But many Christians do not know that Lazarus had a first name! His full name was Simon Lazarus and he was a leper. (John 12:1-3; Matthew 26:6)

Jesus knew that His listeners were acquainted with Lazarus' leprosy and this illness explains the presence of his sores in the story. Lazarus was reduced to a position of begging when he became leprous and the Pharisees had no sympathy. They regarded him as one condemned by God – a cursed sinner. (**Note:** Mary Magdalene, Lazarus' sister, was the prostitute who Jesus rescued from stoning. (John 8:3-11) Whether she turned to prostitution to provide for herself, her brother and sister after Lazarus contracted leprosy is not known.)

Caiaphas

Jesus could not speak the name of the rich man with five brothers for a simple reason. It would have been considered blasphemy by the Pharisees to say anything less than honorable about him. (John 18:22) Nevertheless, everyone present knew who the rich man was because he wore purple and fine linen every day (an elegant robe), he lived large (spent a lot of money) and fared sumptiously (ate too much), and he was Israel's religious leader. The rich man who had five brothers was the high priest of Israel, Caiaphus.

As a young man, Caiaphus married into a family of high priests. (John 18:13) Thus, Caiaphas became a son-in-law of Annas (a former high priest) and Caiaphas served as high priest in Jerusalem between A.D. 18 and A.D. 35. Because of marriage, Caiaphas had five brothers-in-law and each of these men eventually served terms as high priest in Jerusalem.

Josephus wrote, "Now the report goes, that this elder Ananus proved a most fortunate man; for he had five sons, who had all performed the office of a high priest to God, and he had himself enjoyed that dignity a long time formerly, which had never happened to any other of our high priests. . . ." (*Antiquities*, book XX, chapter IX, paragraph 1, p.423, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 12th printing, 1974) Their names and years of service follow: Eleazar A.D. 16-17; Jonathan A.D. 36-37; Theophilus A.D. 37-41; Matthias A.D.41-43; Annas the Younger A.D. 62.

Confrontation

At this point in our analysis of the story we can assemble four important facts:

1. The Pharisees knew about Lazarus and his leprosy, and they knew that the rich man was Caiaphas because he had five brothers.

2. The Pharisees *did not know* at the time the story was told, that Jesus would soon raise Lazarus from the dead. (John 11) Further, the Pharisees could not know that once Caiaphas learned about the resurrection of Lazarus, he would recommend to the Sanhedrin that Jesus be put to death. (John 18:14)

3. Since the Pharisees were convinced that eternal life came through rigorous obedience to the law, it had to be distressing for them to hear Jesus put the leper at Abraham's side and their high priest in hell.

4. In the story, Abraham refused to honor the request of the rich man. The high priest asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his family so that they would not end up where he was and Abraham refused saying, "They have Moses and the prophets" (the Old Testament) to guide them. This feature of the story indicates that the Word of God has greater authority than a resurrected dead man.

So, what is the focal point of this story? Jesus predicted the Jews would not believe that He was the Messiah even if a dead man was resurrected. **". . . .** [The rich man said] **'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He** [Father Abraham] **said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"** (Luke 16:30,31, insertions mine)

Does this story "prove" there is an eternally burning hell? No. Jesus used the errant theology of the Pharisees to highlight the point that even if a dead man was brought to life, the high priest would not believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

Jesus used their twisted logic about salvation and the hereafter to underscore the point that miracles will not soften or change a person's heart. Only the Holy Spirit can bring transformation. This prophecy also reveals that a person's mind and heart can be so blinded by religion that even if a dead person were raised up to speak to them, it would not make any difference.

Think about this. The testimony of Lazarus had no effect after he was raised from the dead. But Lazarus wasn't the only resurrected voice affirming that Jesus was the Messiah! Look at these verses: **"At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people."** (Matthew 27:51-53)

In closing, notice what Caiaphas and his associates did after they learned that Jesus had been resurrected: **"When the chief priests had met with the elders** [of Israel] **and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, 'You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day."** (Matthew 28:12-15, insertion mine)

Robert, I hope this short explanation helps. If you have read my article titled, "What Happens When We Die?" you will find that this story is not in conflict with soul sleep. Jesus just used the false teachings of the Pharisees to predict His rejection. The Bible confirms this prophecy was fulfilled. **"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."** (John 1:11)

The Two Witnesses

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Mr. Wilson:
I watched a portion of a video seminar on your website and I quit because you are grossly distorting the Bible. How can you say the Bible and the Holy Spirit are the Two Witnesses when the Bible *clearly* says that the Two Witnesses will be two prophets that torment the people of Earth during the Great Tribulation.

The Two Witnesses will be killed by the beast at the end of 1,260 days and their bodies will lie in the street for 3.5 days. Afterwards, they will be resurrected and taken to Heaven while their enemies look on. The Bible and the Holy Spirit aren't prophets and they can't be killed. Haven't you read Revelation 22:18,19? God says that if anyone distorts the book of Revelation he will receive the seven last plagues. Consider yourself warned.
Joe"

Hello Joe:
I have been a diligent student of the Bible for 36 years. I love God's Word and would not intentionally distort it. I have carefully read and considered Revelation 22:18,19 many times and I believe the threat stated in these two verses applies to a time period that is in the future. Here is the scenario as I understand this topic: During the Great Tribulation, God's Two Witnesses will plainly and powerfully place three compelling messages from Him (Revelation 14:6-10) before the people of Earth.

These three messages will test the inhabitants of Earth to see who will put their faith in Jesus and obey His commandments. (Revelation 3:10; 6:9; 12:17; 20:4) These messages from God will be so obvious and direct there will not be any wiggle room.

Therefore, Jesus warns that if any person attempts to distort or diminish these three testing messages, he or she will participate in the seven last plagues. God knows that because people will be persecuted for obeying the commandments of Jesus, some people will attempt to distort His Word to escape suffering.

A simple survey of Christian history reveals that hundreds of honest and sincere students of prophecy have presented diverse interpretations on the Two Witnesses and other topics over the past 2,000 years. Are these people to be condemned for honestly trying to put the pieces of Revelation together?

Of course not! Therefore, these two verses have to apply to individuals who will live during the Great Tribulation and will receive the seven last plagues because that is when the temptation to distort the plain truth will be desirable.

Joe, I would like to write a few words about the Two Witnesses in an effort to help you sort out a few issues. Millions of people believe the Two Witnesses will be two men sent from Heaven. These men are supposed to arrive at the midway point of the Great Tribulation and prophesy for the remaining 1,260 days (3.5 years). It is commonly believed that the Two Witnesses will join forces with converted Jews (the 144,000) in preaching the gospel of Jesus and warning people about the deceptions of the Antichrist (the beast).

Many Christians believe these two prophets will severely torment the people of Earth by causing famine (no rain for 3.5 years) and will call down curses and judgments upon unbelievers at will. They will even have power to devour their enemies by having fire come out of their mouths! Somehow, these awesome displays of destructive power are supposed to produce more converts for Christ. Some people believe the Two Witnesses will be Enoch and Elijah because these two men were taken to Heaven without seeing death.

Further, once Enoch and Elijah are killed at the end of the Great Tribulation, they believe everyone redeemed from Earth will have experienced death. Finally, they claim that after the Antichrist kills the Two Witnesses, their bodies will lie in the street for 3.5 days and then they will be resurrected and taken to Heaven in the presence of their enemies.

Even though millions of people may believe as you do, I hope you will agree that popularity does not make every idea true. For example, there was a time when everyone believed the Sun moved and Earth stood still, but scientific discovery proved this idea was false.

Today, billions of people reject the claim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, so truth is not necessarily on the side of the majority. I believe there are many issues surrounding the Great Tribulation and the Two Witnesses that most Christians have overlooked, and once these issues are resolved, a better schematic and a better set of conclusions become possible. Since my paradigm on the book of Revelation is very different than yours, please consider the following:

1. Pre-tribulation Judgment:

For reasons beyond the scope of this brief response, I have rejected the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture. You might wonder, "What does the pre-trib rapture doctrine have to do with the Two Witnesses?" Actually, there is a very important link. If there was a pre-trib rapture, God would have to pass judgment on *all mankind before* the rapture so that He could determine who should be taken to Heaven and who should be left behind.

Then, He would have to pass judgment a second time on those left behind to see who can be saved.I do not find any mention of a pre-trib judgment in the Bible. However, the Bible does teach there is one pre-Advent judgment of mankind. Everyone has to stand before the judgment bar of Christ before he can receive his reward. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

One of the primary purposes of the Great Tribulation is that of testing. God will test us during the Great Tribulation to see who can be saved and who cannot. Using three powerful messages

and severe persecution, God will separate His sheep from the goats. Jesus will acknowledge this separation at His appearing. (Matthew 25:32)

The Bible says much about this topic. Remember, the five foolish virgins did not get a second chance to be saved, the rich man and Lazarus did not get a second chance, the people in Noah's day did not get a second chance, the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah did not get a second chance, and Joe, your deceased relatives did not get a second chance at salvation because *there is no second chance!*

The Bible says "today" is the day for salvation. (Hebrews 3:7-11) So, I cannot accept the idea that the 144,000 and the Two Witnesses will be working together to give the people who were "left behind" a second chance. Instead, I believe the 144,000 and the Two Witnesses will be working together to save everyone on Earth during the Great Tribulation because the living will be tested during the 1,260 days the Two Witnesses are testifying.

2. - Why are there Two Witnesses in Revelation?

Many people just accept the presence of the Two Witnesses in Revelation's story without stopping to consider the primary need for **two** witnesses during the Great Tribulation. What can the Two Witnesses do that the 144,000 can't do? God inserted the Two Witnesses into Revelation's story because the Great Tribulation is a courtroom drama. During the judgment of the living, God requires the testimony of two witnesses to condemn a person to death.

God told Moses, **"On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness."** (Deuteronomy 17:6) Paul wrote, **". . . Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."** (2 Corinthians 13:1) This point is an interesting one. No one will be lost during the Great Tribulation because he or she rejected the testimony of the 144,000. Instead, a person will be condemned for rejecting the testimony of God's Two Witnesses. As I said earlier, all people must stand before the judgment bar of Christ before they can receive their reward and the Two Witnesses will testify about each person.

3. The Unpardonable Sin:

Jesus said: **"And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."** (Matthew 12:31,32) During the Great Tribulation, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on mankind with even greater power than during the time of the apostles. (Compare Joel 2:28-32 with Acts 1:8)

The Word of God will be proclaimed in every nation with power and authority. (Matthew 28:14, Revelation 14:6-10) The 144,000 will serve as God's spokespersons because the Spirit of prophecy will rest on them and the outcome will be rather simple.

The gospel of Jesus will be presented straight from the Bible and the Holy Spirit will deeply impress everyone to surrender to the gospel. People who refuse to submit to the authority of God's Word and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit will be condemned to death. They will be condemned because they rebelled against the Word of God and committed the unpardonable sin.

4. - **Olive Trees and Lampstands:** The Bible uses personification to describe the Two Witnesses. The use of personification emphasizes the fact that the Two Witnesses are not two people. One of the Two Witnesses is inanimate (the two lampstands) and the other witness is two olive trees. (There is no text in the Bible indicating the two olive trees symbolize a person.) The Bible says: **"These** [witnesses] **are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth."** (Revelation 11:4, insertion mine)

Most Christians do not understand these two symbols, but Zechariah 4 explains this matter. The context of Zechariah 4 encompasses the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem around 520 B.C. King Zerubbabel was having a very difficult time getting people to work on the temple, so God gave a vision to the priest, Zechariah, to encourage the king:

"He [the angel] **asked me, 'What do you see?' I answered, 'I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.' I asked the angel who talked with me, 'What are these, my lord?'**

He answered, 'Do you [Zechariah, a priest of God] **not know what these are?' 'No, my lord,' I replied. So he said to me, 'This** [imagery you see of the lampstand and the olive trees] **is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by** [human] **might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty** [the temple will be rebuilt and the gospel shall go forth from Jerusalem once again]**. . . .' Then I asked the angel, 'What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?'**

Again I asked him, 'What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?' He replied, '[How can you – Zechariah – a priest of Almighty God, not understand these things] **Do you not know what these are?' 'No, my lord,' I said. So he said, 'These are the two** [witnesses] **who are anointed** [chosen] **to serve the Lord** [throughout] **of all the earth.' "** (Zechariah 4:2-6, 11-14, insertions mine)

In other words, God showed Zechariah that His work on Earth was not sustained by human prowess and strength. At the time of this vision, the single lampstand represented the Old Testament. Israel was the trustee of God's Word and God wanted Zechariah to understand that His Word was perpetually sustained by the golden oil that flowed from two living olive trees. The two olive trees represent the two functions of the Holy Spirit. The first work of the Holy Spirit is to bring us into a born-again relationship with God. (John 3)

The second work of the Holy Spirit is to bring us to maturity in Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13) The golden oil that kept the lamps burning represents the energy that comes from God so that the light of His Word never goes out. Today, there are two testaments in God's Word, the old and

the new.

Thus, the two witnesses are the Word of God (the old and new testaments – two lampstands) and the Holy Spirit (the two olive trees representing the two works of the Holy Spirit) continues without change.

Joe, I hope you will consider these concepts. I hope you will go back and take another look at all of the seminar segments on the Two Witnesses. I think you will find that many of your objections will be addressed. The concept of the Two Witnesses is not easily understood because God uses personification. However, if you persist in searching for truth, I believe you will find the Bible and the Holy Spirit meet every specification given in Revelation 10 and 11!

The Mystery of Mary Magdalene

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Since the four gospels were canonized in the fourth century, there has been an on-going debate among Christians about the identity and character of Mary Magdalene. Was she a prostitute, was she the woman caught in adultery in John 8, or was she the woman with "a sinful past" who washed Jesus' feet in Luke 7?

In A.D. 591, Pope Gregory I attempted to settle the debate. He announced that Mary Magdalene was in fact the woman caught in adultery in John 8, the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet in Luke 7 and was the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Seventeen centuries later, the debate has resurfaced. Certain Catholics say that on April 3, 1969, Pope Paul VI quietly reversed Pope Gregory's decision by creating three separate versions of Mary in a papal *Missale Romanum.*

I have reviewed this *missale* and I saw nothing about Mary Magdalene. (Perhaps there is an oblique statement in this *missale* that changes her status and I missed it.) Nevertheless, Mary Magdalene's identity has become a topic of controversy once again. Some people have claimed that Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute, but instead was a wealthy woman who was married to Jesus.

Others have suggested that she and Jesus were lovers – and the speculation goes on and on. Given the controversy, I decided to take a look for myself. I find Bible sleuthing fascinating and if a person is willing to dig beneath the surface, it is amazing how many facts percolate to the surface. I hope you will consider the conclusions of my study:

Here Is the Woman, but Where Is the Man?

(Key words have been underlined for the purpose of discussion.)

I will begin this investigation with a review of John 8: **"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.**

In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now, what do you say?' They were using this question as a trap to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'" (John

8:3-11, emphasis mine)

This passage presents a number of issues that are important to our quest. To fully appreciate these issues though, we have to take off our Nike's and stand in the ancient sandals of the accused. The first issue that we need to address concerns the Law of Moses.

To which law are the Pharisees appealing? Is it the law that condemns two married people for committing adultery (Leviticus 20:10), or is it the law that condemns a woman for being promiscuous? (Deuteronomy 22:13-21) Limiting our choices to the evidence stated in John 8, it appears that the teachers and Pharisees appealed to the law that condemns a promiscuous woman. I conclude this because (a) the woman was known for her life of sin, (b) stoning is specifically stated in the law for promiscuous women, and (c) an adulterous man is not present nor mentioned in John 8. Given this legal setting, here are four points that warrant further discussion:

Point 1. - When it comes to sexual immorality, God's Word indicates there is one difference between fornication and adultery. Fornication occurs between unmarried people, whereas adultery occurs when a married person has a sexual experience with someone other than his or her spouse.

When adultery occurs between two married people, the faithful spouses become plaintiffs (that is, the parties seeking restitution). If a single woman is caught having a sexual relationship with a married man, there are still two plaintiffs – the faithful spouse or the next of kin, and the witnesses who caught the pair in the act. This woman was caught in the act of adultery and there was no husband seeking justice. Since there was no mention of an adulterous man in John 8, it appears the witnesses were her plaintiffs.

So, on the face of what is reported in Scripture, it appears the woman was likely an unmarried prostitute, and it is quite possible that the teachers and Pharisees knew of her promiscuous life (her past life of sin) prior to this event. If this is indeed true, the teachers and Pharisees had an airtight case for testing Jesus on the Law of Moses because at the time of this test, stoning a prostitute was legally defensible in Israel. The teachers and Pharisees concocted this test because they wanted to see if Jesus would uphold or subvert the Law of Moses. If Jesus said the woman should not be stoned, then Jesus would be found guilty of blasphemy (diminishing the Law of Moses). How clever of them!

Point 2. - How did Jesus silence His adversaries? The answer to this question becomes obvious as we investigate the story. Jesus wrote the names of His adversaries in the dust and beside their names, He itemized their sins. The list started with Israel's elders (men of rank and position).

This is why they walked away first. Self-righteous, externally pious and esteemed elders of Israel could not condemn a common prostitute when their own sins were exposed for others to see. The teachers and Pharisees were speechless. How did Jesus know their sins?

Then, when Jesus stood up and said: **"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to**

throw a stone at her," Jesus terminated their trap without saying one word about the demands of the law. Embarrassed and humiliated, the teachers and Pharisees slipped away because they knew they could not condemn this woman without embarrassing themselves. How clever of Jesus!

Point 3. - As I calculate it, this test occurred about six months before Jesus was crucified. Even then, the teachers and Pharisees were already scheming to put Jesus to death because they thought Jesus was undermining their religious and national interests.

The easiest way to condemn Jesus to death (they thought) was through a charge of blasphemy. They wanted to force Jesus into a controlled setting where they could catch Him subverting the Law of Moses. So, they carefully planned this incident to entrap Jesus.

It was not necessary for the teachers and Pharisees to sneak around Jerusalem peering into bedrooms to find someone having unlawful sex. Hiring a prostitute and positioning witnesses so that she could be caught in the act was all they needed to put Jesus to the test. They were so determined to entrap Jesus that they did not care that this prostitute would have to die in the process. To make this a case of "adultery," I suspect a married man was found and granted immunity for his cooperation. This could explain why no adulterous man was mentioned in John 8.

Point 4. - Finally, we come to a substantial issue that might help us move from the unnamed woman to a specific person. Consider this: When confronted with the guilty woman and the witnesses, why didn't Jesus just agree with the Pharisees?

If Jesus had agreed, He would have terminated the Pharisees' trap and silenced them because it would have proved that He supported the Law of Moses! After all, Jesus knew this woman had lived a life of sin and that she had been caught in sin again. So, again I ask, "Why did Jesus refuse to condemn her?" This is not a rhetorical question.

Consider that Jesus was not above the law of Moses. (Galatians 4:4; 1 Peter 2:22) His actions had to stay within the bounds of the law at all times or He would have sinned. Jesus Himself had crafted and delivered the law concerning promiscuous women to Moses at Mount Sinai, so why didn't Jesus uphold the demands of His own law? This is a thorny question, but the answer produces an important clue in our search for the identity of the woman caught in adultery.

Loophole

There is only one loophole that I can find that lawfully justifies Jesus' actions. As God, Jesus did not condemn the woman to death because she was demon possessed. Yes, she was guilty of sin. Yes, she had broken the law. Yes, she was caught in the act of committing adultery, and according to the law, the penalty for promiscuous behavior was death by stoning.

However, Jesus knew about her demonic possession and He could not condemn the woman to death because her life of sin was involuntary. The Bible teaches that God does not condemn a

person to death for involuntary sin! (Leviticus 4:13,14; Numbers 15:22-28; 35:22-25; Romans 7:14-19; 1 John 5:16,17)

In today's justice system, this is similar to an insanity defense. If it can demonstrated in court that a man is impaired to the point that he cannot tell right from wrong when he breaks the law, he can be found "not guilty by reason of insanity."

For another example, consider a person with an addiction. Can an addict "just say no" to their addiction? Of course, not. Without external help, an addict cannot stop doing the very thing that controls him. (Do not confuse addiction with the unpardonable sin. They are not the same. Given genetic and hereditary weaknesses, it is possible to become addicted to a substance or obsessed with something without committing the unpardonable sin.)

So, what does demon possession have to do with the woman's identity? We know from Scripture that seven demons controlled a woman named Mary Magdalene. (The number seven indicates totality and completeness.) In other words, Mary Magdalene could not control herself because she was totally possessed.

Let us assume, for a moment, that the woman caught in adultery proves to be Mary Magdalene. If so, consider her dilemma: (a) Mary knew that she was guilty of sin and worthy of death, (b) Mary also knew that she could not sexually control herself, and (c) Mary heard Jesus say that she must leave her sinful life behind. Given these parameters and her gratitude to Jesus for saving her life from stoning, what else could a prisoner of Satan do but ask Jesus to set her free of "her demons" so that she could live a life pleasing to God?

I believe the woman caught in adultery asked for deliverance and Jesus granted her wish – even though John's account does not mention this. (However, Mark 16:9 and Luke 8:2 tells us that Jesus did cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene.)

Summary on John 8: The evidence presented in John 8 suggests the woman caught in adultery was an unmarried prostitute, since the plaintiffs were witnesses instead of a spouse and she had a history of sinful living. The woman was unwittingly caught up in a sting operation that was designed to kill her and condemn Jesus.

When she was "caught in the act" by the religious police and turned over to the authorities, she must have had a sickening realization that she had been duped and that she was about to be stoned to death. Given the sudden gravity of her situation, it would be reasonable to conclude that she was overwhelmed with gratitude when Jesus saved her from death by silencing her accusers.

Staying within the bounds of the Law of Moses, Jesus did not condemn the woman for her past life of sin because He knew that she was demon possessed – she was not guilty of sin by reason of demonic possession. After saving her from physical death, Jesus told her to leave her sinful life behind, but how could she possibly do this on her own?

Jesus Gets Acquainted with Martha

(**Note:** In an effort to keep this investigation as simple and straightforward as possible, let us continue this investigation as though the woman caught in adultery was Mary Magdalene, even though the supporting evidence has not been completely presented. By using this approach, maybe the details in this investigation will prove to be easier to synthesize.)

Unbeknown to the Pharisees, they chose the wrong prostitute to condemn Jesus. The woman caught in adultery had a legal defense that permitted Jesus to *lawfully* spare the woman from death. Jesus did not usurp the Laws of Moses or the Law of God – in fact, He brilliantly demonstrated how the laws should work! (In God's order, mercy does not negate the demands of the law.) This loophole indicates that Mary Magdalene could have been the woman caught in adultery because Mary Magdalene was totally evil.

I have no doubt that when divine joy displaced demonic depravity within her body, Mary worshiped at the feet of Jesus. Furthermore, consider the behavior of Mary Magdalene. After Mary became a free woman, she reciprocated in three ways. First, Mary Magdalene anointed the feet of Jesus with the most expensive perfume money could buy. Second, Mary Magdalene bravely stood at Jesus' feet as He hung on the cross. And finally, Mary Magdalene was at the tomb Sunday morning when Jesus arose.

I think Mary's gratitude toward Jesus is displayed by her actions. On the very day that Jesus cast out the demons, I am sure that she invited Jesus to come to her home and meet her sister. It makes sense that Mary's gratitude to Jesus and her miraculous transformation paved the way for Martha to also become a devout believer in Jesus. (Martha's faith and devotion is revealed in John 11:20-27)

The next question we need to address is this: Could Mary Magdalene have been a sister of Lazarus? I think the Bible affirms this, but the evidence comes in small steps. First, review this passage: **"Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one you love is sick.' "** (John 11:1-3)

(**Note:** John wrote this account many years after the fact and even then, John makes it clear that Mary, the sister of Lazarus, was the same Mary who poured perfume on the Lord's feet. But, was she Mary Magdalene?)

Prior to his death from leprosy, Lazarus did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. I make this assertion based on four reasons. First, as a leper (Matthew 26:6) Lazarus was forced to live in isolation (Leviticus 13:45,46), and therefore, he could not live with his family. So, it seems reasonable to conclude that most of the knowledge Lazarus obtained about Jesus came through hearsay. Second, the Bible does not indicate that Lazarus was acquainted with Jesus prior to his resurrection.

When Martha called for Jesus to come to Bethany because Lazarus was near death, she referred to Lazarus as "the one you love." Many commentators have interpreted this expression to mean "your very close friend." However, I think there is a more poignant explanation. First, there is no indication in the Bible that Lazarus and Jesus were close friends unless we treat Martha's invitation to mean such. Second, Mary and Martha knew that Jesus came to seek and save the lost sheep of Israel. (Luke 19:10; Matthew 18:12-14)

In other words, Jesus came to love the unlovely – the prostitutes, tax collectors and lepers. Therefore, we should understand the phrase, "the one you love" as meaning the one lost sheep whom Jesus came to save. Mary and Martha wanted their brother to accept Jesus. In this light, Martha's request for Jesus was directed at Christ's mission, not His friendship with Lazarus. (Smart woman.) Third, since Lazarus was a Pharisee (Luke 7:36), it is quite likely that his religious beliefs blinded him to the divinity and mission of Jesus.

Fourth, Lazarus must have been a leper for some period of time before he died. If they had been such good friends, why didn't Jesus heal Lazarus of his disease earlier? We know that the disease eventually killed Lazarus and we also know that leprosy is not a short term illness. When these four considerations are harmonized, I conclude that Lazarus and Jesus probably knew of each other, but I do not think Lazarus became a believer until Jesus resurrected him.

Jesus Honored

After Jesus resurrected Lazarus, Lazarus held a feast at his house to publically honor and thank Jesus for healing him and restoring him to life. This feast was particularly offensive to the teachers and Pharisees because Lazarus was a Pharisee. This made the Pharisees so angry that they schemed to kill Lazarus, too. (John 12:10)

According to Matthew 26:6 and Mark 14:3, Lazarus had a surname. He was called Simon and "Simon the leper." (See Matthew 26:6; Luke 16, also *The Wake Up Report!,* May, 2007 titled, "The Rich Man and Lazarus.") When Simon Lazarus held this feast, he did not know that Jesus had set Mary free of seven demons some months earlier. This ignorance could be due to several reasons such as his isolation while suffering from leprosy, the final months of illness, and/or his refusal as a Pharisee to tolerate anything said about Jesus. With these things in mind, consider this passage from Luke 7:

"Now one of the Pharisees [Simon Lazarus] invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears.

Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner.' "

(**Note:** Even after Lazarus had been resurrected by Jesus, did you notice the skepticism that remained in Lazarus' heart? Lazarus said to himself, **"If this man [Jesus] were a prophet, He would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner."** Simon's skepticism affirmed two points. First, Lazarus and Jesus had not been the best of friends as many people claim. Second, Lazarus had evidently not been close to his sisters, perhaps due to illness or religious views, because during the past six months they began to believe that Jesus was the Son of God.)

The Bible discusses this feast in four places – Matthew 26, Luke 7, Mark 14 and John 12. Because there are differences in the details, some people conclude there are two or more feasts. I am convinced the verses refer to one event. Four different writers wrote the gospels years later and this is why their perspectives are somewhat different.

According to John 11:1-3, the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus was Mary, the sister of Lazarus. According to Luke 7:37, the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus had lived a sinful life in that town and Simon Lazarus was well acquainted with her past. According to Mark 14:3, Mary anointed the head of Jesus instead of His feet. I do not believe Jesus was anointed several times with very expensive perfume by different women. Jesus was anointed one time with the most expensive perfume money could buy.

"Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.' 'Tell me, teacher,' he said. 'Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.' 'You have judged correctly,' Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house.

You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' "

(**Note:** At the feast, Jesus assured Mary that her sinful past has been forgiven. Why did He need to assure her of this? After Jesus set Mary free of demonic possession, she felt the heavy burden of guilt and worthlessness. Her sense of unworthiness overwhelmed her every time she thought about her sordid past.

Mary's past could not be changed, but her soul had been freed of demonic control. Consequently, Mary was full of sorrow realizing that Jesus had come to die for her – one of the lost sheep in Israel. She loved Jesus as she loved God – in the highest and holiest sense. As a healed prostitute, her love for Jesus had nothing to do with sexual attraction. As she anointed Jesus with expensive perfume, her tears and the great sorrow she felt flowed from a genuinely repentant heart.

On the basis of her genuine sorrow for her sins, Jesus lawfully forgave her! [Ephesians 2:8,9; 1

John 1:9] Meanwhile, a resurrected but self-righteous Pharisee named Simon Lazarus was talking with Jesus, but he did not really love Jesus as Mary did. At this time, Lazarus did not yet realize his need for a Savior. He was happy to be alive again, and he was happy to be freed of leprosy, but Lazarus had not come face to face with the condemnation which God's law imposes on sinners. This is why Jesus said to Lazarus, "But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Pharisee paradigms die hard.)

The Anointing

When the day of the feast for Jesus drew near, I am sure the Holy Spirit inspired Mary to do something that would never be forgotten. Mary purchased the most expensive perfume that money could buy. Three gospel writers agree that the perfume came in an alabaster bottle.

She bought the perfume to "anoint" Jesus before His death, even though it was Jewish custom to anoint the bodies of people after they had died. (John 19:40) In this case, the Holy Spirit prompted Mary to anoint her sacrificial lamb before He died. As the magnificent scent wafted through the crowd at Simon's house, the fragrance caused everyone to stop and notice that Jesus was being anointed by a woman who had lived a very sinful past. One of Jesus' disciples expressed disgust at Mary's extravagant actions and complained about the money wasted, but Mary did not notice.

Her own soul had been set free from guilt. She was forgiven and she wanted the world to know that God Himself was in their midst. Obviously, Mary's actions had touched Jesus and He promised her that whenever this story was told, she would be remembered for what she had so generously done. (I have often wondered if the scent from the perfume remained on Jesus for a few days and if the fragrance was detected as He prayed for all of His disciples in the garden. - John 17)

"The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.' After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means." (Luke 7:36-8:3)

Conclusion

Contrary to what some people may say, whether or not the woman caught in adultery is Mary Magdalene is not a "serious" theological matter. I base this on what the Bible teaches; that it is wrong to worship dead people. The Bible declares, "Worship God!" (Exodus 20:3; Revelation 19:10)

So, I would include this study in the category of "interesting topics." Nevertheless, I will close

with four conclusions. First, I am 95% convinced that Mary Magdalene and the unmarried prostitute caught in adultery were one and the same person. I say this for the following four reasons. 1) The only way that Jesus could have upheld the Law of Moses and saved the woman caught in adultery from certain death was because she was demon possessed. We know that Mary Magdalene had seven devils cast out of her, even though there is no record of Jesus doing so. 2)

I also believe that Mary Magdalene was a sister of Lazarus and she was the woman with a sinful past. Because Jesus set Mary free and forgave her, out of gratitude she spent a fortune on perfume. 3) Mary Magdalene became a very bold woman for Christ and she stood bravely with the mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross.

She was also the first person to see Jesus after His resurrection because she no longer feared the religious police after she saw Jesus deliver her from their schemes. 4) The Bible is clear that Mary and other women who loved the gospel supported Jesus and His disciples out of their own means because they wanted everyone to know the joy and freedom that comes through Christ.

Mary Magdalene's story is a beautiful one illuminating the love of Jesus and the power of His gospel. This story is important because it continues, even today, to mirror two types of people. Mary Magdalene was in bondage to seven demons. Her soul was dead until Jesus gave her life and set her free.

She was condemned to die as a prostitute, but Jesus lawfully extended grace. Similarly, Lazarus was also in bondage. His body was covered with leprosy and his mind was corrupted by the ideas of the Pharisees until he died from the disease. Then, Jesus called him forth to life and I am sure that Lazarus eventually received Christ as His Savior.

As interesting as all this is, remember that our Heavenly Father also called Jesus to life so that Jesus might continue to implement the magnificent plan of salvation. All this so that one day, all of God's children can sit together under the Tree of Life and ask Mary Magdalene, in person, if she was the woman caught in adultery who Jesus set free!

Is Perfection Possible?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Mr. Wilson:
My pastor just finished a four-week series of sermons called, "Be ye perfect." His theme was taken from the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:48, **"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."** To be honest, I had not given much thought to the necessity of perfection until I heard his sermons. My pastor says that we must overcome *every* sin in order to be saved. What do you say? Do you think it is possible to live without sinning? Thank you in advance for your response.
Terri"

Dear Terri:
Thank you for your e-mail. I am happy to respond to your question. Even though entire books have been written on this question, I will be as brief as possible. You may already know that Christians have debated the topic of perfection for centuries. There are more than 200 different Christian denominations in the United States and each one claims to know the way to Heaven. It is no wonder that people are confused about the requirements for salvation. I find that when it comes to the topic of perfection, Christians range between two extremes.

At one end of the spectrum, some Christians have no concern for perfection. They believe that our ticket to Heaven comes through performing rituals and/or sacraments. For example, some people believe that salvation is as simple as this: **". . . if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."** (Romans 10:9,10) This approach is similar to that of becoming a Moslem. To become a Moslem, a person has to sincerely say three times, "There is no deity but Allah and Mohammed is His messenger."

At the other end of the spectrum, some Christians insist that salvation comes through rigorous obedience to God's laws. They claim that a person must overcome every sin (Matthew 5:48; 1 John 3:6-9, Hebrews 10:26) and that person can live without sinning if he or she is properly connected to Christ. When everything written about salvation in the Bible is put on the table, I believe that victory over any sin is possible, but sinless living is not possible until the carnal nature is removed. (Hebrews 8:8-11, 1 John 3:2)

God has a very practical and inspiring way of saving sinners which can be compared to a coin. "The coin" of salvation has two sides. One side of the coin is our ticket to Heaven (justification) and the other side of the coin is our preparation for Heaven (sanctification). We respond to God's love when we accept His offer of salvation and we show our gratitude to God by allowing the Holy Spirit to test us, discipline us, teach us, and prepare us for Heaven.

The Father has made the coin of salvation available to the whole world through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. The Father wants all human beings to accept the coin of salvation, but there is a caveat. (Isn't there a caveat when accepting a free kitten?) Before people can receive the coin of salvation, their whole orientation to life has to be changed. This transformation is so dramatic that it is called "rebirth." **"In reply** [to Nicodemus] **Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."** (John 3:3)

In other words, a person cannot enter the kingdom of God by being "a good person" or by doing good deeds. Human goodness does not impress God. Jesus said that even the pagans do good deeds! (Matthew 5:47) The root problem is not sinlessness, but it is selflessness: **"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."** (Romans 8:5-8)

Man's number one problem is his sinful nature. (The devil holds second place.) Parents do not have to teach their children to lie, cheat or steal. Sinning comes naturally and when a person experiences rebirth, the carnal nature does not go away. In fact, the carnal nature becomes aggravated by the presence of the spiritual nature and it constantly wars against the spiritual nature which God places in every born again heart. (Romans 7)

Some people believe that it is possible to silence the carnal nature and be free of its sinful tendencies. I believe these people are misled. Paul had been a Christian almost thirty years when he wrote, **"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do."** (Romans 7:15)

Consider this scenario: At a point in our lives, the Holy Spirit begins working on our hearts, trying to get each of us to surrender to the gospel of Jesus Christ. If a person stops resisting and surrenders his life to Jesus (a surrender to Jesus means a willingness to go, to be and to do whatever Jesus commands in His gospel), a real miracle called rebirth will occur. The evidence of rebirth is a complete change in orientation. The things we once hated, we now love and the things we once loved, we now hate. (1 John 2:15-17)

The Holy Spirit tirelessly promotes the gospel of Jesus because it contains several important truths about God and man. For example, the gospel reveals a sinner's true state before God. The gospel declares the penalty for sin and it reveals the good news that man has a Savior in Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus also declares that God freely offers every submissive sinner "a robe of righteousness" which Jesus Christ Himself created when He lived on Earth. (Matthew 22:1-14)

The righteousness of Christ is also illustrated as a wedding robe because God will clothe our lives of sin with the perfect life of Christ in exchange for our totally submissive hearts. When a sinner receives the robe of Christ's righteousness, the sinner is justified in God's sight (this means, justice has been served, the sinless life of Christ has been exchanged for the sinful life of a sinner, and God's law which demands "a life for a life" is fully satisfied).

This legal standing occurs in Heaven's court at rebirth and this is the ticket that enables sinners to enter through the pearly gates. Tickets to Heaven are not available through any other means than justification. (Romans 1:17)

Meanwhile, down here on Earth, the born-again sinner is a different creature. Every born-again person is changed by God's divine power. Each day, a new infusion of power is available to each born-again sinner so that he or she can maintain an attitude of love toward God and man.

In addition to this power, God sends a willingness to serve others and a desire to be honest, forthright, generous, fair, and forgiving. (These are God's attributes.) Of course, our ability to use this power to glorify God in words and actions is not perfect and our deficiencies will be noticed as we undergo tests at various times and in different ways.

The Holy Spirit uses a variety of tests to reveal to us our flaws, defects of character, wrong attitudes, and inherited weaknesses so that we might grow up and spiritually mature in Christ. Because God is preparing us for eternal life, the process of sanctification is an ongoing process until we die or experience the removal of the carnal nature.

In reality, after a few years of intensive sanctification, a spiritual plateau is reached. The sinner has gone about as far as possible in terms of learning and doing God's will. The remainder of his life will be spent applying the things that he has learned, making amends for his mistakes as they occur (1 John 2:1), and praying for strength to do what is right as tests come and go. Learning to love God and others, in every possible way, takes a lifetime. This is why sanctification occurs and this also explains the limits of sanctification. However, a thousand years of sanctification will not silence the carnal nature. (Romans 7)

When most people hear Matthew 5:48, they don't stop to realize that verse 48 is preceded by 47 other verses! Jesus said, **"Be perfect, therefore, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect,"** within a specific context. Review Matthew 5:1-47 and remember, this passage is called "The Beatitudes" (the be-attitudes) for a reason. Jesus summed up His sermon saying, "Be perfect, therefore. . . ." because it is possible for us to be perfect in our grade even as the Father is perfect in His grade!

The school of sanctification is similar to a school of education. First graders and twelfth graders are schoolmates because they attend the same school! They may not be in the same class, but they are in the same school. The same is true in the school of sanctification. Some people are in the first grade and others are in the twelfth grade and the Father has a graduate degree. The playing field in school is level because the tests and responsibilities for each grade are commensurate with the abilities of the students.

Using this example, you can see that a perfect score in handwriting for a first grader is quite different than a perfect score in calculus for a senior, but a perfect score is a perfect score regardless of the year in school! Of course, if a student does not pass his tests, he has to stay in that grade until he does. Once the student reaches a certain age, he can choose to drop out if he wants. If a person chooses to drop out of the school of sanctification, that is his choice, but remember, he cannot keep his ticket to Heaven.

When a person returns to a life of rebellion he loses his ticket because there is no place in Heaven for one rebellious saint. God has purchased tickets for every person on Earth through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, and God wants every human being to accept a free ticket, but remember, there is a caveat. We have to enter and remain in the school of sanctification to keep the ticket. (Ezekiel 18) If we stay in school, we will be blessed. If we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, we can perfectly maintain the attitudes that Jesus defined in His sermon. Bad attitudes stem from everything the carnal nature produces: selfishness, injury, abuse, etc.

Born-again people can and do fall into sin, but Jesus offers forgiveness if the sinner will confess his sin and allow the sanctifying process to continue. (1 John 1:9) Because born-again Christians are carnal, they are special targets of Lucifer. Jesus knows that no Christian can live very long without slipping into some kind of sin. (1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 2:1; 5:17) However, born-again sinners know that we have an advocate with the Father and Jesus will speak in our defense if we are repentant (willing to make things right and forsake our sin).

If anyone says that he is without sin, he is a liar. (1 John 1:10) Remember, sin comes not only through deeds of commission, but also through deeds of omission. (James 4:17) Therefore, there are only three ways we can be set free from sin:

1. If we persist, Jesus will set us free from a particular sin – but this freedom is not necessarily permanent. In other words, we can fall back into that same sin if we are not careful. (Matthew 12:43-45)

2. At death, our choices end so there is no further temptation to sin. Death seals the record of our life and this record is used when we stand before the Judgment Bar of Christ. (Ecclesiastes 12:14, Daniel 7:10, 2 Corinthians 5:10)

3. During the Great Tribulation, those passing tests of faith will have their carnal natures removed and they will be sealed in a state like that of Adam and Eve before the fall. The first to have their carnal natures removed will be the 144,000. (Revelation 7:3, see also Chapter 6 in my book, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega*)

Terri, the only person to ever live without sinning is Jesus. (Romans 3:23, Hebrews 4:15) Sinless living for born-again people is not possible. However, we can still experience victory over sin. While victory is possible, sooner or later, the devil and our ever-present carnal nature will ambush us and cause us to sin through commission or omission. Fortunately, the Bible says these types of sins do not bring death. (1 John 5:17)

Think about this. The two people most likely to achieve a sinless life would have been Adam and Eve, but God separated them from the Tree of Life because He knew they could no longer live without sinning again! God sees our hopeless dilemma. Therefore, God Himself made "the coin" of salvation.

Whosoever will, may come and receive the coin. (John 3:16) Ongoing sanctification is our preparation for eternal life and justification is the ticket to eternal life. **"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness**

and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:11-13)

Does God Still Require a Tithe?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Mr. Wilson:
I became a born again Christian when I was 32. Since then, I have tried to understand God's will for my life. For years, I have been confused on which Old Testament laws were nailed to the cross. I found your June-August 2006 article titled "Questions on the Laws of Moses" while searching on the internet. I enjoyed that article for it clarified many things that have been a mystery to me. I have a question. Does God still require a tithe? I have looked over your website and did not find anything on this topic. Thank you.
Sherri"

Dear Sherri:
Thank you for your e-mail. Your question is a good one and I hope you will read this response in its entirety before putting it down. You may get the wrong idea if you quit prematurely. The first man recorded in Scripture to tithe was the prophet Abraham. (Genesis 14:20; 20:7, Hebrews 7:2)

It is probable that people paid tithe before Abraham did, but there is no biblical record. The origin of tithing is rather simple. In ancient times, people gave 10% or more of their income to their king for protection. Here is the background:

About 100 years after the flood in Noah's day, there was a divisive incident at the Tower of Babel. (Genesis 11) God divided mankind into small groups according to language. These groups soon moved away from Babel in search of a territory they could call their own nation.

As these groups organized into tribal nations, a leading patriarch became king or chief. At that time, survival depended on hunting and farming. Farming with hand tools and using animals to provide sustenance was hard work and harvests did not appear overnight. So, the availability of food was always a source of concern. Some tribal kings, having more testosterone than intelligence, found it more expedient to steal food than to grow and harvest their own.

Their evil ways forced respectable kings to be concerned with safety and strength because evil kings could declare war on weaker kings with impunity and take possession of whatever wealth they obtained in their raids. An entire year's harvest could be captured by an evil king in a single day.

If the conquering king was nomadic and if he decided to take possession of the weaker king's land, the captives faced a choice: Pay tribute (tithe) to the conquering king and abide by his laws or suffer death. (2 Samuel 8:2) In those rough and tumble times, every king knew that if a particularly evil king (or group of evil kings) were on *a sweep* to steal livestock, gold, food, women, and children, weaker kings could only defend themselves by forming alliances with

each other.

When it comes to national protection, national defense in the U.S. has become very expensive. You also know that the war in Iraq is costing about $10 billion per month in addition to the lives of men and women who serve in the U.S. military. In terms of proportions, the importance of national security has not changed.

In ancient times, tribal kings hired men to serve as soldiers and this military protection came with a price. Thus, everyone in a tribal nation was required to pay a "protection tax" to their king. This tax (also called tribute or tithe) was regarded as a citizen's patriotic duty.

It was a show of allegiance and loyalty to the king and in turn, the financial resources helped the king to protect his throne, territory and subjects. If a family failed or refused to pay their "protection tax" while enjoying the benefits of the king's protection, the king considered them traitors. (See 2 Samuel 8:2, Malachi 3:8)

With this historical setting in mind, consider this short Bible story that occurred about 350 years after the Tower of Babel: **"When Abram heard that his relative** [Lot] **had been taken captive,** [he consulted no one] **he** [immediately] **called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus.**

He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people. After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. The king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.'

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, "I made Abram rich." ' " (Genesis 14:14-23, insertions mine)

It is important to understand that Abraham did not give 10% to King Melchizedek because God required him to do so. Not at all. Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek for two interesting reasons. First, Melchizedek was Abraham's king. Abraham lived in Salem, the territory belonging to King Melchizedek. (Genesis 13:12, 22:2, Psalm 76:2)

Second, Abraham knew that Melchizedek was both a king and a priest. Since Abraham did not personally profit from his victory, he owed nothing to Melchizedek as king of Salem. However, Abraham was entitled to 50% of the spoils, so he gave Melchizedek the priest 10% of the spoils

because Abraham knew that his "protection" and victory came from God.

Note: The territory ruled by Melchizedek included Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham offered up Isaac. Centuries later, King David captured the city of Jebus which had been built on Mount Moriah and David renamed it Jeru-Salem – "city of peace." Mount Moriah also became known as Mount Zion.

God Required Tithe from Israel

When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He established a theocratic government over Israel. That is, God Himself ruled for about 400 years as Israel's king (eventually, Israel rejected God and Saul was chosen to be their king - 1 Samuel 8:7). As Israel's king, God required the people of Israel to pay a protection tax, called "a tithe." Here is the text: **"A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord."** (Leviticus 27:30)

God wanted Israel to demonstrate their allegiance and loyalty to Him by giving Him 10% of their increase and in turn, He would be their "wall of protection." What a deal! To keep Israel from depending on human effort and the bravado that comes from testosterone, God forbid Israel from taking a census to determine military strength (1 Chronicles 21:1) or for that matter, He forbid Israel from maintaining herds of horses bred especially for war. (Deuteronomy 17:16; 20:1)

Since Israel could not "see" their King, and since Israel had no means of sustaining a standing army, tithing was a serious test of faith. Ultimately, the elders of Israel felt vulnerable and they wanted to put their trust in an earthly king who would maintain an army, so they asked the prophet Samuel to appoint a king. Israel's desire for a king and a standing army came from their lack of faith in God.

The "protection tax" which Israel paid "for protection" was given to the Levites. This money was their inheritance because the Levites did not inherit a portion of the promised land as did the other tribes. **"It is the Levites who are to do the work at the Tent of Meeting and bear the responsibility for offenses against it.**

This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. They will receive no inheritance among the Israelites. Instead, I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithes that the Israelites present as an offering to the Lord. That is why I said concerning them: 'They will have no inheritance among the Israelites.' " (Numbers 18:23,24)

There is an interesting dynamic in this scheme. God is so clever! If the Levites fulfilled their duties and if they faithfully taught Israel God's love, His ways, and His commands, God Himself would bless and protect the nation. The result would be prosperity for the Levites.

They would have plenty of money because 10% of Israel's economy would be more than enough to provide for the whole tribe! On the other hand, if the Levites failed to fulfill their duties

and if they did not teach Israel the Lord's love, ways, and commands, the Levites would become "the canary in the coal mine." They would be the first to go hungry and perish.

Every time the Levites became spiritually negligent and arrogant, Israel fell into apostasy. When the tithe income could not support the one tribe that owned no land, the Levites resorted to other ways of extracting money from the faithful people who remained in Israel.

Thus, they set up businesses in the temple, exchanging money into the temple shekel at unfair rates and selling animals for sacrifices at outrageous prices. Remember that Jesus cleansed the temple of this practice twice – and now you know why Jesus was so offended by this practice of the Levites. The Levites were largely responsible for Israel's apostasy. Their apostasy had dried up their source of income and they had turned to robbing what few people came to worship.

Tithing Nailed to the Cross?

For reasons presented in the document, "Questions on the Laws of Moses," you should find it easy to understand that the entire Levitical system was nailed to the cross. The Levitical system was a package of laws which were administered by the Levites.

These laws required such things as circumcision, travel to Jerusalem three times a year, new moon observances, annual feast days, animal sacrifices, temple services, clean food restrictions, and tithing (to mention a few). Many Christians insist that portions of the Levitical system are still intact today and they often manipulate the laws belonging to the Levitical system according to personal whim.

Other Christians distort the Levitical laws by insisting that the Ten Commandments were part of that Levitical system and also claim there is no reason to observe God's seventh day Sabbath. Neither position is valid. The Levitical system had to be administered by Levites and Jesus voided this system of laws at His death. Jesus did not abolish the Ten Commandments at the cross.

He abolished the Levitical laws. This means that tithing is no longer a "legal duty." As I wrote in the document on the Laws of Moses, after the cross, clean and unclean food are no longer a moral issue. Similarly, tithing should not be considered a moral issue either. Nothing is written in the Ten Commandments about these things.

Even though God does not demand tithing under the new covenant, I avoid unclean foods for the same reason that I tithe! These practices, when motivated by a grateful heart, bring glory to God!

Consider this: The Levitical system did not exist when Abraham was on Earth, so Abraham was not required by God to give 10% of the spoils to Melchizidek the priest. However, Abraham knew that his protection and victory came from God, so he joyfully gave glory to God and gratefully gave 10% of the spoils to Melchizedek.

In this same spirit, I joyfully pay tithes and offerings to God in recognition of the countless blessings He has bestowed on me and my family. Life itself is a gift from God and I continue to see God's strength and protection manifested in my life. So, it is a joy for me to return tithe to God out of the abundance that He has given me. God has blessed me financially with far more than I have ever given Him. And yes, I direct my tithes according to the principles which God outlined in the Old Testament.

For example, sometimes I use my tithe to help those who are in financial need. Notice this text: **"When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied."** (Deuteronomy 26:12) Generally though, I use the tithe to promote the gospel of Jesus. I want my tithe to go as far as possible in reaching others with His gospel because it is the source of true serenity and eternal life. I want people everywhere to know the joy, peace, and happiness that Jesus offers. What better use of money is there?

Does the Nation of Israel Have an End Time Role?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Mr. Wilson:
Thank you for the free book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled.* I received it last week and have read it twice. Before I requested the book, I briefly surfed over your huge website and found that you don't believe in a pre-tribulation rapture. Your position on this topic doesn't bother me since I'm not strongly convinced there will be (or has to be) a pretrib rapture. However, I am puzzled by your omission of Israel's end time role in your book. I think most Protestants believe the nation of Israel will play a major role during the Great Tribulation. Do you?
Sincerely, Jessie"

Hello Jessie:
Thank you for your e-mail. I am delighted that you received my book, and even more delighted that you read it twice. Your actions speak volumes about your quest for understanding and truth. There is a reason for my silence in the book about the nation of Israel.

Here is the problem: I believe the Bible teaches that the saints of God will play a crucial role on Earth during the Great Tribulation, but as a nation, Israel has no end time role. Since my position appears to be contrary to what you presently believe and since this is an intricate topic, I hope you will thoughtfully consider this response to your question.

Two Major Problems

I have found several conflicts in the Bible relating to the idea that the nation of Israel has a prophetic role during the Great Tribulation. Since this response has to be short due to the length of the *Wake Up Report!*, I would like to present two significant problems. The first problem concerns the Old and New Covenants. The second problem concerns the rapture, the 70th week and the judgment bar of Christ.

Problem 1: Two Different Covenants - Two Different Schematics

Many Christians believe that salvation's prerequisites change from dispensation to dispensation. In other words, advocates of dispensationalism believe that a person is saved in different ways at different times throughout history. I cannot accept this teaching because I believe that salvation – from Genesis through Revelation – *always* comes through faith. Hebrews 11 (New Testament) obviously indicates that salvation came through faith during Old Testament times.

In fact, I believe the Bible teaches that faith in God (a willful submission to the call and will of God) was necessary in Heaven before sin began and I believe that faith in God will be necessary throughout eternity. Lucifer and one third of the angels were cast out of Heaven

because they refused to trust God.

Adam and Eve sinned because they did not trust God. God's children, whether fallen or unfallen, sinful or sinless, are called to live a life of faith. Absolute trust in God is the only way finite beings can live with an infinite God "whose ways are not our ways." (Isaiah 55:9)

Abraham had a heart for God. When God called Abraham to leave his home, the Bible says that by faith Abraham "went out, not knowing whither he went." (KJV, Hebrews 11:8) Abraham's departure from home required a lot of faith in God and the Bible states that God counted Abraham as a righteous man because of his faith! (Genesis 15:6)

In other words, because of his faith, God considered Abraham a saint instead of the sinner he actually was. (Romans 1:17, 4:16, Galatians 3:9) Remember, this happened before God made a covenant with the nation of Israel. Because Abraham humbly walked with God (lived in harmony with God's calling and will), Jesus honored Abraham's faith by making three *unconditional* promises to him.

First, Jesus promised to give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan. (Genesis 15:18) Second, Jesus promised a childless Abraham that his descendants would someday be as numerous as the stars in the sky. (Genesis 15:5) Third, Jesus promised Abraham that *all* nations would be blessed through him. (Genesis 18:18)

About four hundred years after making these promises, Jesus miraculously delivered Abraham's descendants from Egyptian slavery and took them into the desert to prepare them for service. These slaves were the descendants of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, whose name had been changed to Israel because of his faith in God.

At Mount Sinai Jesus entered into a covenant with the nation of Israel. It is important to understand that God's covenant with the nation of Israel was not for the purpose of salvation. God does not save people in groups. Salvation is an intimate, personal matter. Salvation comes to one person at a time when he surrenders his life to God's control (lives by faith).

The covenant that God offered the nation of Israel was that of serving as trustees of His gospel. From the beginning of sin, the plan of salvation has operated as a living trust. A living trust has three elements: A benefactor, one or more trustees, and one or more beneficiaries.

In a living trust, the benefactor chooses trustees to deliver his benefits to his beneficiaries. Prior to Mount Sinai, the patriarchs were the trustees of the gospel. They spoke for God and the gospel they preached contained important information that was otherwise unknown. After God dispersed humanity at the Tower of Babel and nations formed, He decided to use one nation to reach all the other nations. So, God – the Benefactor – chose Israel as a trustee through which He would bless all nations (beneficiaries).

The wonderful thing about the eternal gospel is that whosoever will may come and enjoy the benefits of God's salvation. As the Creator of mankind, God is not exclusive; instead, He is inclusive. At Mount Sinai the nation of Israel agreed to do whatever the Lord commanded.

(Exodus 24:3)

It is most important to understand the nature and structure of God's covenant because God's covenant with Israel was *conditional from the beginning.* Look at two passages (there are many) from the Old Testament showing that the covenant between God and the nation of Israel was conditional:

1. "Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.'" (Exodus 19:3-6, underlines mine)

2. "If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. . . . However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you." (Deuteronomy 28:1,15, underlines mine)

Fifteen hundred years after establishing His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, Jesus came to Earth as the Messiah. The very nation (Acts 3:15) that He had chosen to be His representative on Earth rejected and killed Him. **"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."** (John 1:11, Luke 20:9-16) The Old Testament is unmistakably clear! For 15 centuries, God did everything possible to get Israel to fulfill His objectives, but Israel rebelled at every turn. (Ezekiel 23, Romans 11:20,21)

Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah was "the straw that broke the camel's back." The eternal gospel of Jesus could not be given to the world by a rebellious group of trustees. How could Israel teach the world about faith in God when a majority of people in Israel refused to live by faith?

So, Jesus, the Benefactor, terminated His covenant with the nation of Israel by pronouncing this benediction: **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often** [over the past 1,500 years] **I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house** [your nation] **is left to you desolate** [of God's covenant, blessings and presence]**. For I tell you, you will not see me** [extending grace to this house ever] **again until you** [are forced by overwhelming circumstances to] **say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord** [at the Second Coming*]**.'"** (Matthew 23:37-39, insertions mine, *See Matthew 26:64 and Revelation 1:7.)

A few days after Jesus terminated His covenant with the nation of Israel, He implemented a

New Covenant (Luke 22:20) because Jesus wants the benefits of His gospel to go throughout the whole Earth. Now, the New Covenant differs from the Old Covenant in two critical ways.

First, instead of choosing a nation of people to serve as trustees of the gospel, the New Covenant opens the door and allows "whosoever will" to become a trustee of the gospel. In the New Covenant, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female (these distinctions had been important in the Old Covenant). (Romans 10:12)

Under the New Covenant, God approves every sinner who chooses to live by faith to serve as a trustee of the gospel of Jesus. Said another way, the Old Covenant pertained to a *selected group* of trustees, but the New Covenant pertains to a *self-selecting group* of trustees. One could also say that after Israel failed (Plan A), God created even a better covenant for those who would choose to participate in Plan B. (Romans 11:15, Hebrews 8:6) Keep in mind that a new covenant was required when the covenant with Israel was terminated because the plan of salvation operates as a living trust – there is a Benefactor, trustees, and beneficiaries.

The second difference between the Old Covenant and New Covenant is profoundly important: The two covenants have different laws, different promises and different prophecies. Mixing or merging the terms and conditions of these two covenants will produce disastrous results. Millions of Protestants are hopelessly confused about Bible prophecy (including what will occur during the Great Tribulation) because pastors and theologians are mixing and merging the terms and conditions of the two covenants.

The prophecies and promises given to ancient Israel under the Old Covenant will not be fulfilled because God terminated that covenant with the nation of Israel. Even though God abandoned the nation of Israel as trustees, any Jew who surrenders to the gospel of Christ by faith in Him can receive salvation because the New Covenant does not distinguish between Jews and Gentiles. (Early Jewish converts understood this concept well. See Romans 11:23.)

Consider this: The Old Covenant does not say one word about the Second Coming because everything in the Old Covenant centers around the First Coming which was supposed to be the only coming! Had Israel been faithful to the terms and conditions of the Old Covenant, there would not be a Second Coming. Jesus would not have returned to Heaven and He would have established His kingdom on Earth just as John the Baptist predicted! (Mark 1:15)

Everything promised and prophesied in the Old Testament would have been fulfilled just as it was written in the Old Covenant **if** Israel had remained faithful as trustees and had accepted Jesus Christ as Messiah. The past 2,000 years of Earth's history would be entirely different than we now know it if Israel had met the terms and conditions of the Old Covenant. Sadly, the Old Covenant had to be terminated because Israel persistently refused to cooperate with God and accomplish His objectives. Therefore, God made a New Covenant for those who are faithful to Him.

Israel Redefined Not Displaced

Given this discussion on the two covenants, you may be wondering what all of this has to do with modern Israel and the end of the world. Here is the point: When Jesus initiated the New Covenant, He created a self-selecting group of trustees who would choose to live by faith.

You might be surprised to learn that Jesus' new trustees are also called "Israel" because He made three unconditional promises to Abraham. To fulfill these unconditional promises, Jesus had to redefine Israel; that is, Jesus redefined the "heirs of Abraham." Consider this verse: **"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed** [the Greek word for seed is *sperma*]**, and** [therefore] **heirs according to the promise** [that will be fulfilled at the appointed time]**."** (Galatians 3:29, insertion mine) **"It is not as though God's word had failed** [when He established the New Covenant]**.**

For not all who are descended from Israel [Jacob] **are** [part of] **Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary,** [biology means little to God. Faith means everything to God. This is why God said to Abraham] **'It is through Isaac** [the son who was promised to you and Sarah, not Ishmael] **that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the natural** [biological] **children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise** [like Isaac, those who live by faith] **who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."** (Romans 9:6-8, insertions mine)

The Apostle James knew that Israel had been redefined because he calls the believers in Christ the twelve tribes of Israel. (See James 1:1 and 2:1.) Of course, current saints do not know which tribe is theirs, but this information will be clarified when the time comes for them to enter the Holy City.

(By the way, no one belonging to the Jewish race today knows their biological tribe of origin either. The Roman army destroyed all of Israel's genealogical records in the first century A.D.) So, biological origin, temple services, sacrificial offerings, circumcision, and all of the Old Covenant terms and conditions mean nothing to God today. (Galatians 2-4, Romans 2:28,29, Hebrews 7-10) God has terminated the Old Covenant, with its promises and prophecies, and has declared it null and void because there is a New Covenant, a new group of trustees and new promises and prophecies.

Because the twelve tribes have been redefined, the 144,000 will come from all nations and religions. They are identified as the "twelve tribes" of Israel in Revelation 7 because the 144,000 will be people who have faith in God, just like Abraham and Jacob (also called Israel).

These people will love God with all their heart, mind and soul as Abraham and Jacob did. Carefully study this passage and notice how Jesus defines the issue of ancestry: **" 'Abraham is our father,' they answered. 'If you were Abraham's children,' said Jesus, 'then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. . . . You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. . . .' "** (John 8:39-44, emphasis mine)

If our behavior reflects the faith of Abraham, God considers us children and heirs of Abraham. If

our behavior reflects the rebellion of the devil, God considers us children of the devil.

Throughout the ages, the saints of God have been tested with persecution and the same holds true for the Great Tribulation. (Revelation 3:9, 12:17, 13:7) The Great Tribulation will separate people of faith from people of rebellion. Thus, in the end, all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26) because the Israel of God (the descendants of Abraham) consists only of people who have a faith in God like Abraham and Jacob.

When the Israel of God goes marching into New Jerusalem at the Second Coming, the twelve tribes will enter through their respective gates! (Revelation 21:12) Think about that glorious day! When the time arrives for all of Abraham's children to enter into the Holy City, twelve great processions will form, and after marching through those pearly gates, a numberless group of "Jews" will gather around the throne of God and together as one man, they will bow down before Jesus, the Messiah, the eternal King of the Jews. (Mark 15:2, John 19:19-22)

A thousand years later, when the Holy City comes down from God out of Heaven and lands on Earth, the three unconditional promises made to Abraham will THEN be fulfilled. (1) The Holy City will physically encompass all of the land that was promised to the patriarch.

Abraham's descendants will possess the land, and the Holy City will be their home throughout eternity. Incidently, the Holy City, built by God Himself, is the city that Abraham anticipated. (Hebrews 11:10) (2) When the saints of all ages are gathered around God's throne, Abraham's heirs will be as numberless as the stars in the sky. They will come from all nations and religious backgrounds, and a "once childless" Abraham will rejoice as he looks over that vast throng.

Among the redeemed, Abraham will be known as "the father of the faithful." (3) Last, there will be endless rejoicing throughout Heaven at the end of sin's drama because the redeemed will realize that all nations were truly blessed with the gift of salvation through Abraham's seed.

Jesus, the Lamb of God and the Lion from the tribe of Judah, will be eternally praised to the highest Heavens for the salvation that He so generously provided to all who were willing to live by faith. Thus, the three *unconditional* promises given to Abraham will be fulfilled.

The salient point is that in this marvelous drama, the modern nation of Israel is not in the picture. The establishment of modern Israel is no different than the recent establishment of Serbia. Neither event is prophetically significant. (For further study, please review these four articles: http://www.wake-up.org/daystar/ds2006/Jan.htm http://www.wake-up.org/Revelation/Rev144.htm http://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Chapter7.htm http://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Chapter8.htm.)

Problem 2: The Judgment, the Rapture, and the 70th Week

Because the terms and conditions of the two covenants are often mixed up and inappropriately merged together, advocates of dispensationalism have devised a mechanical solution (called "a pretribulation rapture") to solve their problems of mixing and merging the two covenants. In a

nutshell, dispensationalists believe that God is still obligated to fulfill His promises to the biological offspring of Abraham because God's calling and promises are irrevocable. (Romans 11:29)

Let me be clear, God's unconditional promises are irrevocable. Heaven and Earth will pass away before God's Word fails. (Matthew 5:18) For this reason, we can be sure that God will fulfill everything He unconditionally promised to Abraham, but His conditional promises to the nation of Israel are another matter.

In fact, if it were not for the revocation of the Old Covenant, there could not be a New Covenant! Jesus terminated the Old Covenant because the nation of Israel passed the point of no return. **"But God found fault with the people and said : 'The time is coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the** [redefined] **house of Israel and with the house of Judah.'"** (Hebrews 8:8, insertion and emphasis mine) See also Isaiah 24:5 and Ezekiel 23.

Because Israel refused to receive Christ as the Messiah, dispensationalists believe that God raised up Christians to temporarily fulfill the gospel commission – that is, Christians were appointed as trustees of the gospel commission until the times granted to the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Luke 21:24)

Then they believe, when the world is seven years away from the Second Coming, Jesus will remove "the believers" from Earth via a pretribulation rapture so that He can fulfill His promises to the nation of Israel. Dispensationalists believe this event will somehow cause 144,000 people within the Jewish race to convert to Christianity and these people will then go throughout the Earth during the seven years of the Great Tribulation proclaiming the gospel of Jesus.

I have several problems with this schematic. Here are three: First, let us suppose there was a pretribulation rapture and all the Christians were removed from Earth. Isn't it true that anyone converting to Jesus Christ after the rapture would have to fall under the provisions of the New Covenant?

Think about this: The Old Covenant required converts to be adopted into the nation of Israel (Genesis 17:12,13, Exodus 12:48, Deuteronomy 23) and this adoption process involved circumcision and it required the services of priests from the tribe of Levi. (Hebrews 7:11)

The problem now is that Jesus Christ, the High Priest of the New Covenant sits at the right hand of God and He comes from the tribe of Judah! In other words, if the terms and conditions set forth in the Old Covenant are still valid and binding, who from the tribe of Levi is worthy to mediate in Heaven for those who missed the rapture?

It makes no sense to remove the trustees of the New Covenant with a pretribulation rapture so that the terms and conditions of the Old Covenant – terms such as circumcision, temple sacrifices and a Levitical priesthood – can be reestablished. The Old Covenant was abolished long ago. (Colossians 2)

The second problem with the pretribulation rapture and modern Israel's role during the Great

Tribulation concerns the 70 weeks of Daniel 9. I believe advocates of dispensationalism have badly distorted Daniel 9 to make the rapture doctrine plausible and the result is total confusion. Dispensationalists claim the 70th week is detached from the 69 weeks. They believe that a gap of almost 2,000 years must be inserted between the 69th week and the 70th week.

I cannot find any support for this claim in the Bible. I believe the Bible affirms that the 70th week immediately followed the 69th week which immediately followed the 68th week, etc. In other words, the Bible does not teach there is a gap of centuries between any of the 70 weeks, including the 69th week and the 70th week.

This is easily proven in two ways. First, time itself is an unbroken continuum. When one day ends, another begins. When one month ends, another begins. When one year ends, another begins. Therefore, it is impossible to insert a span of 2,000 years within a period of 490 years (70 weeks).

Second, and more importantly, history proves the 70th week immediately followed the 69th week because the specifications given in Daniel 9 were fulfilled between 457 B.C. and A.D. 33. The 70 weeks of Daniel 9 began and ended on time.

Here is a very brief explanation on the fulfillment of the 70 weeks: The decree that marked the beginning of the 70 weeks was issued by King Artaxerxes in the Spring of 457 B.C. Of the four decrees issued to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, only one decree occurs in a Sunday year – always the first year in a week of seven years, and 457 B.C. also happened to be a Jubilee year.

It is important to know that 457 B.C. was a Jubilee year because Daniel 9 divides the 69 weeks into two segments by calling them " seven weeks and 62 weeks." God divided the 69 weeks into two segments to give Israel an important clue. He wanted Israel to know that the decree which started the 70 weeks would occur in a Jubilee year – which is always the first year of a Jubilee cycle of 49 years.

According to Daniel 9:25, Messiah would appear at the beginning of the 70th week. According to Luke 3, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in A.D. 27. A.D. 27 is the first year of the 70th week and it is a Sunday year, exactly 484 years (counting inclusively) from the decree of Artaxerxes.

Jesus appeared on time and Jesus died on time, in the middle year of the 70th week. (Galatians 4:4) Astronomy and Bible history leave no wiggle room on this. Zero. Jesus died in the middle of the 70th week (a Wednesday year) in A.D. 30. Jesus, the Author of oblations and sacrifices caused oblations and sacrifices to end at the cross. Daniel 9 has been fulfilled. The 70th week followed the 69th week and everything predicted for the 70th week has been fulfilled. The bottom line is this: Someone has to give the gospel to the world during the Great Tribulation.

Will it be the twelve tribes from all religions preaching under the terms and conditions of the New Covenant, or will it be people from the Jewish race preaching under the terms and conditions of the New Covenant? (This really is not a valid question because under the New

Covenant, there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles.) (For further study on the 70th week, please review these articles: http://www.wake-up.org/Daniel/DanChap6.htm, http://www.wake-up.org/daystar/ds2000/Great%20Clocks.htm.)

The third and final problem is that of the judgment bar of Christ. Dispensationalists have tied modern Israel's end-time role and a pretribulation rapture together and made them codependant doctrines. Given the intricate relationship between these two concepts, here is a problem that every rapture believing Christian should thoughtfully consider: Many advocates of a pretribulation rapture doctrine have not stopped to realize that the rapture doctrine requires two separate and distinct judgments of the living.

In other words, the rapture doctrine presupposes a judgment of the living before the rapture (to see who will be taken and who will be left behind) and then there's a second chance. A second judgment of the living must be held near the end of the Great Tribulation to see who will be saved at the Second Coming. The problem is that the Bible does not teach a second chance nor does it teach there will be two judgments for the living!

The judgment bar of Christ occurs once for the living. **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."** 2 Corinthians 5:10) Since the rapture doctrine requires two judgments of the living and the Bible does not teach a second chance nor multiple judgments, this is an insurmountable problem.

The Bible reveals without ambiguity that the saints of God will be persecuted during the Great Tribulation. **"The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation."** (Revelation 13:5-7)

God permits persecution to rise during the Great Tribulation to separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep will put their faith in God and give up their lives if required, but the goats will do everything possible to save themselves. **"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."** (Matthew 16:25)

Jessie, I am convinced the combined doctrines of a pretrib rapture and the alleged prophetic role of Israel during the Great Tribulation stem from mixing and merging Old Covenant and New Covenant promises and prophecies. Without trying to sound arrogant, I believe these concepts are flimsy and like a house of cards, they will fall one day. Of course, the passage of time will prove all things. I hope you will continue to study this topic by reviewing the various articles listed above. Your question on the prophetic role of modern Israel is a good one and it deserves considerable attention. I hope this has been helpful.

Going Through the Great Tribulation

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Dear Wake Up America:
After looking over your website, I have to say out of Christian love and duty that your views on God and the Great Tribulation are totally wrong. A God of love will not permit His children to suffer persecution and death during the Great Tribulation. Start reading your Bible and stop distributing this garbage. Yes, a great tribulation is coming upon the world, but it won't touch God's people. They will be taken to Heaven before it begins. Tell Larry Wilson to read Luke 21:36 and get a life. The people who deserve God's wrath are evil people, not the saints. Yikes!

Hello Friend:
Let me begin by saying you are free to believe whatever you want to believe about the Great Tribulation. However, I hope you do not overlook this truth: Prophetic beliefs, no matter how sincere and dogmatic they may be, may not necessarily align with reality.

For example, do you remember that almost the entire world's population refused to believe that a flood was coming in Noah's day? What effect did their disbelief have on the event? Zero. Therefore, we must be careful to align our prophetic beliefs with all that God has said on a given topic. As I read it, the Bible indicates that God will permit His children to suffer persecution and even death during the Great Tribulation, but it is reassuring to know that God's children will not have to face their adversaries with human strength.

God will pour out His Spirit on His people and this will empower His children to deal with the conflict that is coming. Even more, through their response to the persecution and their personal testimony, God will be glorified. I may not be able to change your view or attitude on this topic, but I may be able to help someone who is also struggling with this question. So, here's a short response to your comments. Please consider the following six points:

1. - Just before His death, Jesus told His disciples: **"All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you."** (John 16:1-4, emphasis mine)

The words of Jesus are perfectly clear and a casual survey of Church history leaves no wiggle room. Early Christians, such as Stephen, **boldly** stood for the cause of Christ and they suffered to the point of death for their faith in Jesus. (Acts 6) History indicates that nine of the twelve disciples were martyrs for their faith.

So, we should not be surprised that Jesus allowed His disciples to die as martyrs. Jesus said,

"All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Mark 13:13) **"Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. . . ."** (John 15:20)

2. - The book of Revelation plainly states who will be persecuted during the Great Tribulation. **"The** [composite] **beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. . . . He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation."** (Revelation 13:5,7, insertion and emphasis mine)

Jesus knows the future. He knows what will befall each saint during the Great Tribulation and He tells His children not to worry about it. He said, **"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This** [suffering] **calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints."** (Revelation 13:8) So, the book of Revelation leaves no wiggle room. The saints are going to be persecuted during the Great Tribulation.

3. - Some people say that it is not fair that God should put the final generation through the Great Tribulation when many Christians have lived and died without having to endure persecution and torture for their faith. This argument only arises when history is not consulted.

If we go back and review the past 2,000 years of Christian history, we find that only a very small segment of Christians have escaped persecution and torture for their faith. This small segment appeared after 1776 and they were fortunate enough to live in a nation that was founded on the principle of a separation between church and state.

However, prior to the formation of the United States and the establishment of religious freedom, Protestants in Europe were persecuted and tortured for 1,260 years by the Catholic Church, and prior to the authority of the church at Rome, Christians were constantly persecuted and tortured throughout the Roman empire.

From the time of Christ to the present day, freedom from persecution for Christians is an anomaly. Actually, the question of fairness should be inverted. We should be asking, "Why should a large percentage of Christians today be free of persecution and torture when history says that Christians have been objects of hatred for nearly 2,000 years?" This question is addressed in my book, *A Study on the Seven Seals and The 144,000.* Please see Chapter 4. www.wake-up.org/Revelation/RevSeg4.htm

4. - Some people use Luke 21:36 to prove that God's children will escape the Great Tribulation. Jesus said, **"Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."** This verse requires some explanation because the intended meaning is often distorted.

When we review all of Luke 21, we find that Jesus was talking to His disciples about (a) the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and (b) His return at the end of the world. Consider these words concerning the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem: **"For this is the time**

of punishment [predicted to befall Jerusalem] **in fulfillment of all that has been written** [about this evil city]**. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers** [because mother and child will perish together]**! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people** [the Jews]**. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be** [in ruins] **trampled on by the Gentiles until** [the very end of the world, when] **the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."** (Luke 21:22-24, insertions mine)

Now, consider Jesus' words concerning His return at the end of the world: **"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."** (Luke 21:25-28)

So, Jesus discussed the end of Jerusalem and the end of the world within the same context because there are ominous parallels. Jesus closed His remarks with a parable. **". . .Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near.**

Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near." (Luke 21:29-31) Then He said, **"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.**

For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:34-36) Jesus is not indicating that Christians can escape the Great Tribulation. No, the end of the world will affect everyone living on the face of the whole Earth! No one will be able to escape it. So, Jesus is telling His disciples to consider themselves blessed if they live at any other time than when these things events impact the whole world.

Consider this verse: **"Since you** [the church at Philadelphia] **have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from** [through] **the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth."** (Revelation 3:10)

Some people read this verse and they conclude that the church at Philadelphia (whoever that is) will not have to go through the Great Tribulation because the Greek preposition *'ek* can be translated in various ways, including "from" and "through." But, using the word "from" in this verse makes no sense since the other six churches will have to endure the Great Tribulation. Consider these words directed to the church at Smyrna: **"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."** (Revelation 2:10)

Why would Jesus tell the believers at Smyrna to be faithful to the point of death and then tell the believers in Philadelphia they will escape the Great Tribulation? This is a rhetorical question because the premise is false. Jesus does not favor one church above the other. Basically, Jesus encourages the church in Philadelphia and the church in Smyrna with the same message: Stand firm in your faith, even to the point of death, and I will give you eternal life.

5. - Jesus knew that His disciples would suffer persecution and death. Jesus' request to the Father occurred just before His crucifixion: **"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."** (John 17:14-16)

6. - Jesus warned His disciples, **"Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. 'Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.' "** (Matthew 10:17-22)

In closing, the Great Tribulation will be Christianity's finest hour. The fires of persecution and martyrdom will purge the Christian movement of much dross, and after the refiners fire has accomplished this purification, this dark world will be able to clearly see the difference between those who love righteousness and truth versus those who love evil, lust and lies.

God has predetermined that good and evil will be clearly presented during the Great Tribulation. By putting the whole world in a position of suffering, many who are now blinded by prejudice, lies, ignorance, and hatred will see the light. They will repent and choose salvation through Jesus Christ. In other words, God will first clean house and then He will use the faithfulness of genuine saints to save millions of people who at the present time have nothing but contempt for Christianity. Now, that's what I call a God of love!

Will Sinners Burn in Hell for Eternity?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Larry Wilson:
I came across your website a few weeks ago and I have enjoyed many of your Bible studies. You have cleared up some questions that I have had for a long time, but some of your teachings frustrate me because they are in obvious error. I don't understand how a Bible teacher like you can know so much about the Bible and overlook the plain truth.

For example, the Bible clearly teaches that sinners will burn in Hell for eternity. This issue is so simple that it can be summed up in one sentence: Everybody has an eternal destiny – eternal life in Heaven with Jesus or burning in eternal Hell with the devil. Haven't you read Mark 9:43 and other verses that say the fires of Hell will never quit burning? If you are going to teach the Bible, why don't you teach what it says?
- Alicia"

Dear Alicia:
Thank you for your e-mail. Yes, the Bible teaches that everyone has an eternal reward coming, but what are the rewards? The Bible informs us that the saints will be rewarded with eternal life (John 3:16; John 6:40), and the Bible also states that the penalty for sin is death. (Rom 6:23, Rev 20:14) I know why millions of Christians believe in an eternally burning Hell because many Bible texts *seem* to indicate that Hell will burn forever. However, I would like an opportunity to show you another point of view.

When you investigate all the Bible teaches about God's justice, the Second Death, and Hell, eternal death is not the same thing as living for eternity in Hell! Please consider this: The Bible indicates that God has three purposes for Hell. In a nutshell, the first purpose is justice, the second purpose is to execute the wicked, and the third purpose is to purify the Earth. Since my view on Hell is quite different than yours, I hope you will consider my response and be sure to look up each verse as we go along.

Since I do not know anything about your background, and because I want to be as clear as possible in this response, I would like to say two things about Bible study that are important to me before I present my conclusions on Hell:

1. First, I believe the Bible is the Word of God. Therefore, each verse in the Bible has to have the same authority. The "same authority" rule creates a big problem for every Bible student. We are not honest in our search for "The Truth" if we "cherry pick" those verses that suit our personal bias and ignore those verses that we do not like or do not understand. Serious Bible students are forced by the rule of "same authority" to gather up every statement said in the Bible about a particular topic so that they can harmoniously align all that has been written.

To my knowledge, this is the only way the Bible can reveal issues to us that we would rather not believe. During the past 37 years, I have experienced many occasions when one verse unraveled my entire conceptual framework about a particular topic! I have found that God is neither simple nor simplistic. Therefore, I try to remain cautious about my conclusions. Many topics are presented in the Bible, so my first concern is to be sure that I have not left something out that should be put "on the table." When I study God's Word, my prayer is "Lord, I don't care what 'The Truth' is, or where it leads – I just want to know everything about You that I can possibly know!"

I am discussing the rule of "same authority" because there is a phenomenon in God's Word that some people believe is called "apparent conflict." In short, one verse will *appear* to contradict another verse. These collisions interest me because (a) both verses have the same authority, and (b) I believe that God's Word is in perfect harmony with itself; otherwise, the truth about any topic could not be determined.

I have dealt with "apparent conflicts" long enough to know that they can be resolved with the help of the Holy Spirit and plenty of mental "elbow grease."God is infinite, deliberate and thoughtful, and I believe that God has allowed "apparent conflicts" in Scripture to energize our search for truth. Nothing churns the human mind like a worthwhile mystery.

I have highlighted the phenomenon of "apparent conflicts" because many of them are embedded in the topic of Hell. The truth about Hell is only attained when everything written about the topic is resolved into perfect harmony. A person cannot do a simple word search through the Bible by looking up the word "Hell" and expect to resolve the topic. This is because other Bible topics – like justice, restitution and death – are directly involved with the topic of Hell! So, digging "The Truth" out of the Bible is not as easy or as simple as some people would have you believe.

2. The Bible declares that God is love. (1 John 4:16) Love is the perfect balance of mercy and justice. This means that God loves mercy, as well as justice. (Ps 89:14; Mat 23:23) The Bible states that God's eyes constantly sweep over the Earth. (1 Chron 16:9; Ps 139:8) God sees every act of kindness done in secret and He rewards accordingly. (Mat 6:4-6) God also sees every act of violence, watches every theft, observes every adultery, and hears every lie. (2 Chron 16:9; Ps 139:8)

The reason that God's omniscient oversight is important in this study on Hell is **restitution**. Contrary to what many people think, God requires that every sin be made right before He will forgive us of that sin.* (Ex 21; Mat 5:23,24, 1 John 1:9) For example, God will not forgive a thief until the thief has provided restitution to his victim!

Think about this. Can a man steal his neighbor's hubcaps and expect God to forgive him while the hubcaps remain in his possession? Of course, not. God will not forgive our sins unless we truly repent, and the evidence of true repentance is restitution. (Mat 5:23,24) We can carry God's justice one step further. If the victim who lost his hubcaps refuses to forgive the thief when he attempts to make restitution, God will not forgive the victim of his sins, either! (Mat 6:15) I hope you can see that in God's economy, atonement for sin requires restitution and

forgiveness.

* Note: Sometimes, the issue of restitution is not simple to resolve. Restitution in kind is not always possible. For example, stolen hubcaps can be replaced, but how does one make restitution for adultery or abuse? I have found three guiding principles when it comes to the subject of restitution.

First, when there is heartfelt sorrow for a sin, there is a compelling desire and effort to change behavior. This is the fruit of repentance. Second, a determined effort to restore the victim through some form of compensation is appropriate. In those cases where tangible restitution is not possible, the debt owed to the victim can be discussed and redirected toward others in the form of service or assistance.

Last, because sin often harms innocent people (like children) who may or may not know about the event, discretion is important. The essential point is that the victim knows about the heartfelt sorrow and the endeavor to make restitution. I hope the reader can see that God's demand for restitution and forgiveness are important building blocks in character development. (Luke 3:10-14)

Yes, it takes a lot of courage and humility to confess our sins and make restitution to those we have done wrong, but it has to be done. (Luke 19:8,9) On the other hand, a wicked heart will not make restitution because there is no genuine sorrow or deep regret for doing wrong.

Courage and humility are displaced with rebellion and pseudo-justification in the carnal heart. But, like it or not, believe it or not, God will be sure that every wrong will be made right – we can either do so voluntarily or God will extract restitution from us involuntarily.

This explains, in part, why God resurrects the wicked dead at the end of the 1,000 years. He resurrects the wicked to extract the restitution they refused to pay. After justice has been served, they will be executed – eternal death – there will be no resurrection from this death. As I wrote earlier, justice is the first purpose for the fires of Hell. Remember, the second purpose is to execute the wicked and the final purpose is to purify of Earth.

Big Picture

Now that these two issues have been considered, let us see how God's justice and restitution fit into the big picture of apocalyptic prophecy:

Prior to the Second Coming, Jesus judges mankind. (Dan 7:10, John 5:22, Acts 17:31) Jesus Himself decides who will receive eternal life and who will not. (2 Cor 5:10) When He completes His judgment process, Jesus will return to Earth. (Rev 22:12) Notice how He administers His judgment: At the Second Coming, dead people previously judged to be saints will be awakened from their sleep to meet the Lord in the air. Also, those who are alive at the Second Coming and are judged as saints during the Great Tribulation will also be caught up in the air to meet Jesus because Jesus will not touch Earth at the Second Coming. (1 Thess 4:15-18, Luke 14:13,14)

After the saints from all ages have been gathered up to Jesus, He will proceed to kill all of the wicked, who are alive at the Second Coming, with the sword (a verbal command) that comes out of His mouth. (Rev 19:20,21; Rev 6:15-17) Then, Jesus and the saints will return to His Father's house in Heaven, the place where Jesus has prepared for them. (John 14:1-3)

During the ensuing 1,000 years, there will be no life on Earth except for the devil and his angels. They cannot leave Earth in its desolate condition because they will be bound in the abyss (the spirit realm). (Rev 20:1-3) During the 1,000 years, the saints will reign with Jesus in Heaven during the sentencing phase of judgment.

This means the saints will review the case of each wicked person and the saints, along with Jesus, will determine the amount of restitution that will be extracted from the wicked at the end of the 1,000 years. Restitution will be extracted through suffering in Hell. (Exo 21, Rev 18:6, 2 Tim 4:14, Heb 10:30,31; Rev 20:15)

Reigning with Christ

Remember, the saints will reign with Jesus for 1,000 years. Jesus will give the saints authority to determine the amount of punishment wicked people and wicked angels must suffer. (Rev 3:21; 20:6; 1 Cor 6:2,3) The saints will not determine who is righteous or who is wicked because Jesus determined the eternal destiny of each person before the Second Coming.

Those people who injured and harmed others will be tortured in Hell according to the amount of suffering they caused. (Rom 12:19, Mat 10:28) Here is the interesting part: Many of the saints will have been victims of the people they judge! Who would be better judges to determine the amount of suffering that must be extracted from a wicked assailant than those who were their victims? God's system of justice is perfect!

The Golden Rule demands a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a bruise for a bruise and a burn for a burn. (Exodus 21, Luke 12:58,59; Mat 18:23-35) Some wicked people will perish quickly. These will be "salted with fire," while others, who caused great suffering, will suffer for a long time. (Mark 9:47-49, Mat 13:41,42)

The fires of Hell will extract restitution and will not burn out until justice has been served and restitution has been "paid in full." (Mark 9:43) The fires of Hell will not burn eternally. After the wicked people's torture is over, the wicked will perish. **" 'Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,' says the Lord Almighty. 'Not a root or a branch will be left to them. . . Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,' says the Lord Almighty."** (Malachi 4:1,2)

God has promised that at the end of the world, every wrong will be atoned for and He will even resurrect dead people to achieve justice. (Heb 10:30, 31; Mat 25:46) Since the fires of Hell will also extract restitution from the devil and his angels, I suppose Hell could last for several days – perhaps 40 days and 40 nights? Regardless of how long it takes, everyone in Hell will

eventually die and when the wicked no longer exist, Jesus will create a new Heaven and a new Earth. John wrote, **"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea** [of fire]**."** (Revelation 21:1, insertion mine)

I hope you can see from this sequence of apocalyptic events how God uses Hell to accomplish justice, death and the purification of Earth. Now, I would like to address the question of an eternally burning Hell from several different perspectives altogether. Please consider the following eight points:

1. - **Eternal Life**: The reward that will be bestowed upon the saints at the last day is eternal life. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** (John 3:16) **"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day** [and give him eternal life]**."** (John 6:40, insertion mine)

Here is the problem: A person cannot writhe in Hell throughout eternity without first receiving eternal life. In other words, a wicked person has to receive eternal life so that he can be tortured for eternity. The Bible teaches the wicked will not receive eternal life. In fact, the Bible teaches that the wicked will perish – cease to exist. (See John 3:16 above.)

2. - **The Penalty for Sin**: Most Christians believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. (2 Cor 5:21) This problem is a simple one: If the penalty for sin is burning in Hell throughout eternity, then Jesus did not pay the price for sin. Period. Even if you say that Jesus was tortured in Hell for three days and three nights, three days in Hell is not the penalty for sin! Even after billions and billions of years, eternity has just begun!

To pay for our sins, the penalty for sin had to be imposed upon Jesus and it was. **The penalty for sin is "death by execution – without hope of resurrection."** Consider the first recorded command given to Adam: **"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day** [whether it be a Tuesday or a Friday] **that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die** [be executed]**.' "** (KJV, Gen 2:16,17, insertions mine) Adam and Eve were to be put to death on the very day they sinned, but Jesus, seeing that they did not sin defiantly, chose to become man's intercessor instead of man's executioner.

3. Two Resurrections:

Let us assume for a moment that a wicked person does go to Hell at the time of death. Then, try to explain why the wicked are then resurrected at the end of the 1,000 years? What is the point of resurrecting Cain (the first murderer) if he has been burning in Hell for the past 6,000 years?

Even more, what would be the point of resurrecting Abel if he has been sitting at Jesus' side for the past 6,000 years? **The doctrine of two resurrections is in direct conflict with the doctrine of an eternally burning hell. - The Bible teaches the first resurrection occurs at**

the Second Coming for the righteous dead (1 Thess 4:15-18, Rev 20:6) and the second resurrection occurs at the end of the 1,000 years. (Rev 20:5) The second resurrection is for the wicked of all ages.

"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." (KJV, John 5:28,29)

4. - **Immediate Judgment at Death:** The Bible states that everyone will stand before **"the Judgment Bar of Christ."** (2 Cor 5:10) If a person goes to Heaven or Hell at the time of death, this presumes that "the Judgment Bar of Christ" has been in session ever since Abel was killed. The problem is that "the Judgment Bar of Christ" has a beginning point in time and an ending point in time. The apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation tell us the Judgment Bar of Christ began in 1844 and closes during the Great Tribulation, at the end of the 1,260 days allotted to the Two Witnesses, just before the seventh trumpet sounds.

No one can be judged by Christ until His Judgment Bar is "set up." For reasons beyond the scope of this response, Jesus was found worthy to ascend Heaven's throne in 1798 and Jesus began reviewing the books of record in 1844. (Ecc 12:13,14, Dan 7:10) So, Bible prophecy indicates that immediate judgment at death is not possible. (**Note:** God the Father has made a few "executive" exceptions to the Judgment Bar of Christ. Enoch, Elijah and the 24 elders were taken to Heaven prior to 1844. These exceptions are justified on the basis that the Father foreknew this was the best way of resolving issues that are not part of this discussion.)

5. - **First Heaven and Earth Passed Away:** The Bible teaches that God will create a New Heaven and New Earth after the old Heaven and Earth are destroyed. **"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . ."** (Rev 21:1) This verse means that Hell itself has to pass away. Hell is the means through which Earth will be purified of sin! Sin and sinners will have no place on Earth, in Earth or under the Earth when everything is made new. God's universe will be clean of sin and sinners.

6. Reigning with Christ:

If there is an eternally burning Hell, what judgment is left for the saints to conduct during the 1,000 years? **"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world . . .? Do you not know that we will judge angels . . .?"** (1 Cor 6:2,3) Think about this: If all of the wicked receive the same sentence – burning in Hell for eternity, then there is nothing left for the saints to judge during the 1,000 years!

7. Walking on the Ashes of the Wicked:

The Bible declares the wicked will be devoured - destroyed - annihilated - turned into ashes. **" 'Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,' says the Lord Almighty."** (Mal 4:3)

Christians mess the doctrine of Hell up today largely because people do not understand the doctrines of restitution, God's vengeance, soul sleep, the Second Death or the Judgment Bar of Christ. I understand how people conclude that the wicked will burn in Hell forever. Language in the Bible seems to support the idea of eternal suffering in Hell until you put everything the Bible has to say about Hell on the table. Then, and only then, can we understand the truth on this topic. The Bible is like a giant crossword puzzle. When all of its doctrines are properly defined and understood, all of the pieces will harmoniously form one beautiful mosaic.

8. - **Golden Rule:** The final reason why Hell cannot burn for eternity is that God's own law, the Golden Rule, does not permit God to punish wicked people beyond the point of achieving restitution. Period. God abides by His own laws. He has proven His submission to His own laws by the death of Jesus!

The Father would not have allowed Jesus to die if there had been any other way to redeem man. No sinner, not even the devil, merits endless torture in Hell throughout eternity! Restitution is a finite matter and once justice is served, the wicked will die a death from which there is no resurrection.

If God tortured demons and "slightly wicked" people throughout the endless ages of eternity with the same punishment, He would be a tyrant. Justice demands that punishment be commensurate with the crime. Tyrants do not punish fairly. With tyrants, justice is arbitrary and self-serving.

They abuse their victims to suit their selfish or mean-spirited objectives. The Golden Rule can be stated: "As you do unto others, the same will be done unto you." This is perfect justice. According to this rule, there are limits to torture in Hell.

Summary

1. After considering the "same authority" rule. . .

2. After considering God's demand for restitution. . .

3. After considering the apocalyptic sequence that includes the Judgment Bar of Christ, the two resurrections and the purpose of the saints reigning with Christ during the 1,000 years. . .

4. After considering the eight theological points listed above. . .

I conclude that Hell will burn for a period of time. I conclude that wicked people will be tormented with fire according to the injury and harm they inflicted on others. I conclude that Lucifer and his demons will burn the longest because they have caused the greatest injuries.

I also conclude that after restitution has been extracted and justice has been served, the wicked will be put to death. They will never exist again. At that time, God will purify this orb with fire so that the foundations of a New Heaven and a New Earth will be free of the blight caused by sin.

Because the topic of Hell is so important, it seems to me that God has deliberately made the matter of an eternally burning Hell a topic of controversy to keep the subject alive! By keeping this subject in a state of controversy, it forces those who seek the whole truth to resolve this highly important and complex topic. For me, the conclusions stated above align with everything else that I have learned about the marvelous ways of God. There is no doubt about it. God is righteous, fair and just.

He is truly a God of love. There is no selfishness, meanness nor arrogance in God. If you have lost a loved one through a violent crime or if you been hurt in a grievous way by a thug, I hope you can appreciate the idea that God will fully repay. Millions of soldiers who raped and killed innocent people will pay for their deeds, too. You can be sure that justice will be served before death eliminates the devil and every wicked person. **"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."** (Heb 10:31)

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

The Unpardonable Sin? Has God Forsaken Me?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Larry Wilson:
In June, 2007, I had a spiritual awakening. At the time, I was living with my girlfriend and we enjoyed "the good life." Both of us had good jobs and no obligations. For us, the good life revolved around frequent parties and social drinking (sometimes with heavy drinking). We lived for the weekends, we took cruises and vacationed in nice places every chance we got.

We had a number of friends who lived fast and loose as we did and there was little thought about God or the future. We zipped through a lot of money buying stuff and having a good time. One day, while driving to work, I became depressed. I suddenly felt condemned. I don't know what caused this, but a strong impression came to me that God was angry with me and that I was going to hell if I continued living as I was. This impression came out of the clear blue sky because I had not had a religious thought for several years.

I had been raised with church-going parents, but I displaced church with friends and social activities while in college. I didn''t feel that I needed to continue with the religious traditions of my parents. Besides, my understanding of God was as good as theirs. But during that morning drive, I was overcome with a very strong sense of condemnation – that God was angry with me. The intensity of this personal revelation both surprised and scared me.

That night, I told my girlfriend about this and she asked if I was getting religious. I said, "No, but I do believe in God." She said, "Well, I believe in God, too," and that was all she said. For the next three months I tried to go on living as usual, but I became increasingly uneasy and edgy about doing things that I knew were wrong in God's sight.

Finally, I knew in my heart that I had to stop being a hypocrite. I had to align my behavior with my conscience. So, I gathered up my courage and told my girlfriend that some changes were necessary. She said that she had noticed a change in me and that we really needed "to clear the air." I was totally honest.

I told her that I could not continue going to the bars and participate in the drinking parties. I also told her that our sexual relationship would have to end until we were married. She exploded. She screamed, "You have become a religious fanatic!" She shredded me with ridicule. I tried to explain my feelings, but she didn''t want to hear them.

She said she was hurt and felt abandoned. She told me that if I was going to be a priest she didn''t want to have anything to do with me. To top it off, she told me if I was going to be a religious fanatic, there was nothing left of "us." I wasn''t prepared for her rejection. There was no reasoning. After a couple more weeks of living together as strangers and trying to get around her anger, I told her that I thought it best that I move out. She agreed.

Two months have passed and I am still heartsick. We''re farther apart than ever. I have called

her several times, but we are not on the same page. She has told our friends that I have become a religious fanatic. This is not true for I do not even attend church. (I don't know which church to attend. I was searching the internet for some religious information and this is how I found your website.)

She knows that I still love her and I want to marry her, but she will not stop ridiculing me. She said she has no intention of staying away from bars and she continues to party with our old friends.

The "straw that broke the camel's back" happened the other day. I learned that she is now living with a guy we used to party with. This crushed me because I had hoped that she would appreciate my efforts to do what is right. I have lost the love of my life. I have also lost most of my friends.

I am very lonely and I don't know what to do about this. Losing her has broken my heart. Has God forsaken me? Have I committed the unpardonable sin? It would be horrible to lose my girlfriend and still end up in hell. In fact, it feels as though I am already in hell. Can you help?

Thanks,
Raymond "

Dear Raymond,
Thank you for your open and honest e-mail. Before I respond to your questions, I want to say that I sincerely admire your willingness to do what is right - no matter what. At the moment, your faith in God is being challenged and He is purifying your faith with a refiner's fire (Rev 3:18) because I believe He has a special calling for you. You are *momentarily* facing three powerful challenges and if you stand firm in your resolve to do what is right, you will overcome the present adversity and you will be richly blessed. In short, God is putting you through this set of challenges because He wants to give you a richly rewarding life of service. Please let me explain:

1. Isolation:

When a person chooses to honor God by doing what he believes is right, sooner or later he experiences isolation. Jesus said, **"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."** (Matthew 7:13,14)

In your case, the isolation is severe because you have lost your network of friends, including your best friend, your girlfriend. Currently, you have not developed Christian friends who can replace your hedonistic friends. Worst of all, in losing your girlfriend, you have lost an intimate, best friend who was your confidant. Therefore, you are highly vulnerable to returning to your old lifestyle to have a social life. But, hang on. Stand firm. There is a way out of this situation.

2. Ridicule:

People following the Holy Spirit are never on the same page with people who are not. Paul wrote, **"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."** (Romans 8:5-7)

In other words, your girlfriend's hostility – manifested as ridicule and rejection – is consistent with Paul's remarks. Here's the problem: **"The man** [or woman] **without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."** (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Your friends cannot understand your spiritual awakening because it is spiritually discerned. To them, you look like a religious fanatic. They ask themselves, "Who in his right mind would give up a sexy girlfriend, stop going to parties and having a good time, except a religious fanatic?" Since you are the only person within your old network of friends who is doing what you are doing, you will be tempted to return to your old ways to avoid ridicule. But, hang on. Stand firm. There is a way out of this situation.

3. Emptiness:

Right now you are particularly vulnerable to isolation and ridicule, but you are faced with one more challenge that you need to understand. At this point in time, you have not received your mission and purpose from God. You have shown a great deal of resolve to do what is right in God's sight (Hallelujah!), but doing right for the sake of doing right does not maintain a high level of satisfaction.

Even more, doing right for the purpose of avoiding hell is not very satisfying, either. In other words, at this point in time you appear to be an empty vessel awaiting further direction from God. When you were living without God in your life, you filled your life with the things the carnal nature desires.

Notice what Paul wrote, **"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."** (Galatians 5:19-21) Now that you are living for God, you have to wait on God! Soon, God will give you a "purpose-driven life."

So, right now your emptiness is severe and you are highly vulnerable to returning to your old ways to enjoy the gratification that came with the "good life." But hang on, Raymond! Stand firm. God has called you to a far better life than you can imagine. He has a special mission for you.

Putting the Pieces Together

You asked if God has abandoned you. No. No. No! Your old friends have abandoned you. The awakening you experienced is from God. The Holy Spirit profoundly troubled you with a realization of where you were headed. God knows your honesty and He is thrilled that you have responded to His call.

I believe that God has focused on you for a specific reason, just like God focused on Samuel, David, Jeremiah, and Paul for specific reasons. I do not know what this reason is, but it will become clear "as day" as God unfolds His plan for your life. Raymond, you are closer to God than you have ever been.

Choosing to live in harmony with what you know of God's will is not easy because the ways of God stand in opposition to the ways of this world. John wrote, **"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." (1 John 2:15-17)

Here are four strategies that will help you overcome isolation, ridicule, and emptiness. (Please modify these as necessary since I do not know your whole story.)

1. Ask God to heal your broken heart over your girlfriend, and if you allow Him, He will. Look closely at the facts: She has rejected you because of your change in behavior. She has made it clear that she does not want to stop going to bars and parties and she has demonstrated her contempt for you by living with another male.

Obviously, she has moved on with her life and so should you. Ask God each day for emotional healing and the strength to let her go. For what it's worth, statistics indicate that live-in relationships do not endure. Having a party animal for a spouse does not bode well for an enduring marriage.

2. Seek out a church to attend because you will not last long in your resolve to live right without having some Christian fellowship. "No man is an island." I suggest that you start church-hunting. If you do not find meaningful Christian fellowship in one church, then widen the circle until you do.

Remember this: Salvation is not church specific. Salvation comes through faith in Christ alone. Therefore, you should feel free to worship and fellowship with any number of Christian groups for a while and this will help immensely to lessen your isolation and ridicule. You need Christian friends, Raymond. I will say it again, "You need Christian friends."

3. Perhaps the most important thing I can offer is this: Determine in your heart to study and understand God's Word. There is nothing on Earth like the Bible. I used the phrase "determine in your heart" because the worst mistake you can make is to think that reading the Bible is the same thing as studying the Bible.

Millions of Christians read their Bibles thinking this will bring them closer to God. It does not work. If you really want to walk with God and know Him, then you must study the Bible until you clearly understand what God is saying to you through each passage. This quest for Bible truth will bring you close to God.

Studying the Bible takes periods of quiet time and a lot of determination. If you will put forth the requisite effort, God will bless you with an understanding of Truth that will never stop inspiring you! **"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."** (Hebrews 11:6)

4. It seems evident to me that the Holy Spirit has awakened you for a specific purpose. You were headed in a wrong direction, but there is much more to salvation than avoiding hell. You have responded, at considerable cost, to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This proves that you have not committed the unpardonable sin. On the contrary, you are following the Spirit! God has not forsaken you, rather God is preparing you for an exciting ministry of some kind. I do not know about your education, talents, abilities or interests, but God does.

If you remain faithful to God and continue to grow in grace and in an understanding of His truth, God will direct you into a situation where *all* of your education, talents, abilities and interests will combine into joyful service. A ministry received is far more valuable than a ministry achieved. It may take the Lord a few years to get you prepared for "His calling," but He will put you where He wants you when He knows that you are ready for Prime Time!

In closing, be encouraged! You are experiencing what Abraham experienced. You were called. You left your friends and girlfriend behind to follow this calling. You are in a social desert, having no friends; but you will learn that out in the desert, a soft-spoken God becomes your dearest friend.

I am praying the Lord will give you wisdom and strength to stand firm and overcome these challenges. Believe it or not, God knows the number of hairs on your head, Raymond, and He knows the plan He has for you. Please keep me informed on your progress. The world has yet to see what God and you, working together in perfect harmony, can do!

Best wishes,
Larry Wilson

Did Jesus Claim to Be God?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:
I have been studying with Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) for several weeks and I am confused. I am not a good Bible student even though I have attended various Pentecostal churches for about 20 years. As you probably know, JW prefer to use their own Bible because they say other versions of the Bible have been tampered with. Is this true? They say there is no Trinity. They believe there is only one God and that God is Jehovah (the Father). They say that Jesus was created by Jehovah as a separate and distinct being.

When Jesus came to Earth, they say He came as "a perfect human," not as God in the flesh. They say that Jesus Himself never claims to be God in the Bible. They also say that Jesus is not the Alpha and the Omega, but instead, Jehovah is the Alpha and the Omega. Since one of your books is titled *Jesus, The Alpha and The Omega*, I was wondering if you would respond to my questions. Please include the Bible texts.

Thank you,
Sharon"

Dear Sharon:
Thank you for your e-mail. I will do my best to respond to your questions. But first, I would like to write how happy I am to see that after twenty years of attending a particular church, you are still willing to search for Bible truth. It is never too late to get started studying the Bible.

I also appreciate the dedication of Jehovah's Witnesses and other evangelicals who respectfully and kindly engage people in Bible study, even though I personally disagree with their teachings. The apostle Paul wrote, **"For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth."** (2 Corinthians 13:8)

In your case, the JW have moved you out of spiritual complacency to actually search the Scriptures. This is good! It may seem strange to consider at first, but no religion on Earth has all the truth about God. Every religion on Earth is theologically corrupt in one way or another. This does not mean that religion is inherently evil.

It just means that people need to understand that religion is not a destination. It is only a means to an end and that end is "a beautiful reflection of God's love" in every believer. Unfortunately, all kinds of false doctrines are floating around and the only way we can separate truth from error is to closely test everything according to God's Word. Paul wrote, **"Test everything. Hold on to the good."** (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

Jehovah's Witnesses have created their own Bible which they believe is superior to all other

versions. Their Bible is called the "New World Translation" (NWT). Their Bible is not regarded as a legitimate translation by most Hebrew and Greek scholars because (a) it does not stay within accepted rules regarding the use of vocabulary and syntax, and (b) JW created it to support their unusual beliefs.

In other words, it is a self-serving translation, and no other religious organization uses it. (For further discussion on their version of Scripture, see Dr. Walter Martin's book, *The Kingdom of the Cults*.) As far as I am concerned, willfully altering Bible text and calling it "God's Word" in order to accommodate parochial presuppositions shows a complete disregard for God's authority.

This is why I also reject the use of external authority. No rabbi, priest, pope, bishop, apostle or prophet can change or alter God's Word. *It is what it is* and it remains unchanged through all ages even though people may think to change it. The Bible is all that we have to test claims about God and His will. If all religious organizations manipulated the Bible to favor their parochial views as JW have done, then in a few generations no one would be able to determine truth from error! God's Word would disappear.

This may surprise you, but Jehovah's Witnesses were not the first denomination to insist that their version of the Bible is superior to all others. The Catholic Church did the same thing. Catholics maintain the "Douay-Rheims Version" of the Bible is the only authentic English version of the Bible. In A.D. 382, Pope Damasus (A.D. 366 to 384) commissioned his personal secretary, Jerome, to gather up all of the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible and translate them into Latin (the official language of the Roman Empire at that time).

This translation became known as the Latin Vulgate or the *Versio Vulgata*, which means "the published translation." Jerome's tedious efforts and thorough scholarship had few rivals for a long time. As centuries passed, the use of Latin all but disappeared as the Roman Empire faded into a consortium of nations and languages called Europe.

In the sixteenth century, Protestants translated and distributed Bibles in various European languages because (a) they were demanding a reformation of the Church based on Bible truth, and (b) very few people could read or understand Latin. As various translations of the Bible circulated (and lay people discerned the errors of the Church), the Catholic Church finally responded in 1546. (This was 29 years after Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg.) To keep the laity from reading conflicting Protestant Bibles, the Church declared Jerome's Latin Vulgate to be *the only authentic and official* version of the Bible.

To overcome a growing number of Protestant translations which people could read, the Church finally translated the Vulgate's New Testament and it was first published in English in Rheims (France) in 1582 and the Old Testament was subsequently published in Douay (France) in 1609. In 1604, Protestants realized their need for one authorized Bible, instead of many different translations, so they created the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible which they published in 1611.

Both the original KJV and the Douay-Rheims Version of the Vulgate contained 73 books. Both

versions originally included seven extra books which are called the Apocrypha. Jerome did not believe God inspired the apocryphal books, but Pope Damasus believed they were, so naturally, Jerome's Bible included the apocryphal books. Today, Catholic scholars generally believe that Pope Damasus was right because the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1946, confirmed that the apocryphal books were included in a version of the Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation of the original Hebrew writings which did not include the apocryphal books.

Even though I have about twenty Bible translations in my personal library, I favor the New International Version (NIV) for investigative study and the KJV for poetic language and literary style. For me, the strengths of the New International Version are (a) it's a conservative [as literal as possible] translation using contemporary English, and (b) during its preparation, every humanly possible effort was put forth to reduce religious bias. One hundred scholars were selected from diverse religious backgrounds to produce the NIV.

Of course, no translation is perfect, including the NIV. The work of translation and editorial review was divided in a way that religiously diverse scholars had to edit and review each other's work. As a student of biblical Greek and realizing the challenges that go with translation, I sincerely appreciate the unusual effort which the NIV committee took to produce "a neutral translation of the Bible."

I must hasten to write that I also love the King James Version. I find the use of Old English in the KJV to be eloquent and poetic even though the king's English is very difficult to understand in places. Approximately sixty translators at Oxford (England) who wanted to put God's Word in the king's English translated the KJV over a period of seven years.

These translators basically appended William Tyndale's 1524 version of the English New Testament to their work and this is how the King James Version came to be. Ironically, this so-called "authorized" version of the English Bible was never authorized. King James approved the translation of this Bible, but neither he nor parliament "authorized" it once it was completed.

Through the years, the KJV has undergone more than 500 changes. While some people may dislike these next words, I must say that the KJV is not perfect, either. The original publication of the KJV included the seven apocryphal books, but they were not included in subsequent printings because Protestants eventually rejected the apocryphal books as uninspired. However, the KJV remains one of my favorite English translations.

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Trinity

I find that Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a view of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (the Trinity) that does not align with *all that Scripture has say on the topic*. To support their conclusions, a certain amount of Scriptural distortion is necessary (hence their need for a Bible that favors their views). JW often say, "The word 'Trinity' is not used in the Bible." This is true, but neither are the words "Saturday" and "millennium" found in the Bible. Does this mean that Saturday or the 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20 doesn't exist? Of course not.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Roman Catholic Church corrupted the truth about God during the first centuries of Christian development and they are convinced that they have been "raised up" by Jehovah God to exclusively restore His unvarnished truth.

When it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity, JW interpret verses from the Bible like, **"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one"** (Deuteronomy 6:4), and **"Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?. . ."** (Malachi 2:10) to mean there is only one God. They naturally reject the Catholic view of the Trinity which teaches that there is one God who is manifested in three different ways, as in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(**Note:** I also reject the Catholic version of the Trinity because I believe the Bible teaches there are three separate, distinct, and co-eternal Gods. These Gods are **one** in purpose, plan and action. Even though these Gods are separate and distinct, they can be regarded as **one God** as a husband and wife are regarded as **one flesh**. **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."** (Genesis 2:24) As you will learn, my understanding of the Trinity is also unacceptable to JW.)

Their "one Almighty God who is Jehovah" supposition logically forces Jesus into a position lower than that of Jehovah. They reason that if there were two or more co-eternal Gods in Heaven, having the same substance in knowledge, authority, and power, then this would constitute polytheism (the worship of Gods). Incidently, this is why Orthodox Jews and Muslims consider Christians to be polytheists. This also explains why early Christians favored the one God with three different manifestations instead of three Gods.

JW believe that the Holy Spirit is a "spiritual force" that emanates from Jehovah as He directs. JW believe that Jehovah created Jesus, and they reject the idea that when Jesus was on Earth, God was actually living among man in the form of a man. They also believe that Jesus was a perfect man (the second Adam) who died to redeem the first Adam and his offspring. Because the curse of sin came on mankind through the failure of the first Adam, salvation comes to us through the redemption of the first Adam.

In other words, the death of Jesus – the perfect man – was "an atonement death" to satisfy Jehovah's demand for justice. As I said, JW believe that Jesus is a separate and distinct being from Jehovah and that He is a servant of Jehovah. If you wish to review a summary of their views, here is their official website: http://www.watchtower.org

Getting Acquainted with the Jehovah's Witnesses' Paradigm

I would like to demonstrate how JW can stay within their belief that Jehovah is God alone and Jesus is not God. Keep in mind that I am not an authority on their views. I am relaying information that I have read in their literature and taken from discussions. My intent is not to denigrate, but to factually represent their position:

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) Since the name Immanuel means "God with

us," most Christians interpret this verse to mean that God would come to Earth in the form of a baby boy, born of a virgin.

Since Jesus is the only child ever born of a virgin, Jesus must be God. On the other hand, JW interpret this verse to mean that the virgin birth of Immanuel was a sign that Jehovah deeply cared for His people; in other words, the presence of this miracle child should be interpreted to mean that "God has not forgotten us" instead of "God, in the form of a human being, is among us."

"Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’ Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ " (John 20:27,28) In this passage, Thomas called Jesus, "My Lord and my God." Notice that Jesus did not rebuke Thomas for calling Him "my God."

How could Thomas escape censure unless Jesus was truly God? In other words, how could Jesus receive adoration that belonged only to God if Jesus isn’t God? JW claim that Thomas was referring to Jesus as "my lord and my god," that is, Thomas humbly regarded Jesus as a superior being sent from God (something like an angel). JW have an understanding of the term "God" that is different than that of most Christians and this brings us to the following text:

"But Jesus said to them, ‘I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?’ ‘We are not stoning you for any of these,’ replied the Jews, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods?’ If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came – and the [integrity of] **Scripture cannot be broken – what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?**

Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’"? (John 10:32-36, insertion mine) Many Christians do not understand the depth or nature of this exchange. The Jews were about to stone Jesus for blasphemy. They watched Jesus perform miracles and that was fine.

But they also understood Jesus to say that He was, in fact, God, and this aroused their anger. JW respond by saying, "True, the Jews made the claim that Jesus claimed to be God, but Jesus did not, in fact, utter those words!" JW then proceed to use this text to show that the term "god" does not necessarily have to mean God, having the substance of Jehovah God.

Here is an explanation of what happened in John 10. **"I and the Father are one** [equals]**."** (John 10:30) When Jesus said these words, the Jews became outraged because this statement *equates* Jesus with the Father in substance. The Jews’ actions prove this is what they understood Jesus to say by picking up stones to stone Him *for blasphemy*. They said, **". . . you, a mere man, claim to be God."** Considering the behavior of the Jews, it is reasonable to say that their actions were consistent with their understanding of Jesus’ words.

Jesus momentarily diffused their anger by bringing up a subject that requires some explanation. Jesus said, [why are you so angry at My words, that I am One with the Father? Isn’t this

privilege also yours?] **'Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods?' If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came – and the Scripture cannot be broken – what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'"?** [insertion mine]

These words resonated among those hostile Jews (even though they do not make much sense to most Christians today). This is the background: When Moses wrote the book of Genesis, he used the term "sons of God" to differentiate between born-again believers in God and non-believers.

The term, "sons of God" or "gods," was used to trace the trustees of the Edenic covenant which was given to Adam when he was expelled from Eden. Noah's flood became necessary because **"The sons of God** [the trustees of the Edenic covenant] **saw that the daughters of** [carnal] **men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose** [that is, believers in God (the sons of God) exchanged their spiritual birthright for sensual women]**."** (Genesis 6:2, insertions mine) These mixed marriages (believers with non-believers) brought ruin upon the world, and consequently, Noah's flood is history.

The Jews also called Adam "the son of God." (Luke 3:38) If Adam was "the son of God," then his offspring can be called "gods" if they are one in the Spirit with God. Paul well understood this ancient use of language because he wrote, **". . . because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."** (Romans 8:14) John underscores this beautiful relationship, **"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."** (1 John 3:1, KJV)

The point is that when the Jews accosted Jesus for claiming to be the Son of God, Jesus responded by effectively saying, "Why be angry at my claim that my Father and I are one? Aren't you sons of God, too?" Paraphrasing, Jesus continued, "Even in your own law, whose integrity cannot be broken, the sons of Israel are called 'gods.'" Jesus is referring to Psalm 82. **"A psalm of Asaph. God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the 'gods' . . . 'I said, 'You are 'gods'; you are all sons of the Most High.'"** (Psalm 82:1,6)

Jesus paralyzed His accusers for a few moments with a thoughtful response. How could they accuse Him of saying "I am one with God" when they were *lawfully entitled* to say the same thing? Jesus was very clever! Then, He said, **"**[Since my Father and I are one,] **'Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles** [are of divine origin]**, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.' Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp."** (John 10:37-39, insertions mine)

So, considering John 10 and Thomas' declaration he made in John 20 from the supposition that there is only one God, JW do not interpret the words of Jesus **"I and the Father are one"** as the Jews did. Instead, they interpret these texts to mean that Jesus was no different than human beings in substance. In this sense, Jesus was a "son of God" just like we can be "sons of God." This interpretation protects their position and it keeps Jesus *less than equal* with

Jehovah.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. . . . He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." (John 1:1,2,10,11) Christians claim that John left no room for debate on the divinity of Jesus.

Here, John simply said that Jesus, the Word [*Logos*] was God. JW distort this verse to change John's declaration. They do this by inserting the article [a] so that the text reads, **". . . and the Word was with God, and the Word was** [a] **god."** Since we have already read from Scripture that human beings can be "sons of God," JW insist that Jesus is not Jehovah, but a creation of God, a lesser god, like Adam, a perfect man (at least for a while) who was the son of God. The end result, they claim, is that John did not declare that Jesus was in fact a God like Jehovah.

Jesus Himself Claims to be God!

In terms of human warfare, David was no match for Goliath, but the giant had a vulnerable spot right in the middle of his forehead and one tiny stone brought him to the ground. When the Philistine army saw their leader beheaded, they fled. In a similar way, I believe JW have a vulnerable spot right in the middle of their theology.

A day is coming when "The Stone," The Rock of Ages, will hit this vulnerable spot and JW will run for cover. Currently, I do not expect JW (or any other religious body) to admit error in their teachings. When the Great Tribulation begins and the revelation of Jesus Christ unfolds, errors and false teachings will be exposed for what they are.

Until then, we have to search the Scriptures to test every doctrine. If we can demonstrate from Scripture that Jesus Himself claims to be God (equal with the Father), the doctrine of an inferior Jesus promoted by Jehovah's Witnesses can be declared baseless.

The following statement is made on the JW website: "Jesus never claimed to be God. Everything he said about himself indicates that he did not consider himself equal to God in any way – not in power, not in knowledge, not in age." Let us see if their statement is true:

"This is what the Lord [Hebrew: Jehovah] **says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord** [Hebrew: Jehovah] **Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God."** (Isaiah 44:6, underlining mine) This verse is a self-declaration by Jehovah that He is the first and the last. Remember this declaration as we proceed and also remember, the integrity of Scripture cannot be broken.

"When I saw him [Jesus]**, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I** [Jesus] **am the Living One; I** [Jesus] **was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."** (Revelation 1:17-18, insertions mine)

These two verses leave no wiggle room. John saw Jesus. "The First and the Last" says that He was dead, but is now alive for evermore. Contrary to what JW may say, we know that John could not see the Father in these two verses because no one has never seen the Father! (1 Timothy 6:16, John 6:46) Going back to Isaiah 44:6, Jehovah declared, "I am the first and the last," so how can Jesus make the same claim if Jehovah created Him?

If Jesus was created, that would make Him second, not first! The only way to align Isaiah 44:6 with Revelation 1:17,18 is this: Jesus was present at the beginning of everything with the Father! John is right: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** (John 1:1) In other words, these two Gods have to be co-eternal. Both are "the First and the Last."

I [Jesus] **am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. - (Revelation 22:13) Keeping "the First and the Last" declarations of Jesus in mind, we find in Revelation 22:13 that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, as well as the Beginning and the End! There is no wiggle room left for a created Jesus who is less in substance than the Father. Zero! Jesus is Jehovah. Jesus is the First and Last. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. Jesus is the Beginning and the End. Now, consider the following verses:**

"He [Jesus] **said to me: 'It is done. I** [Jesus] **am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I** [Jesus] **will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I** [Jesus] **will be his God and he will be my son.' "** (Revelation 21:6-7, insertions mine)

We know that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. As you can see, when the JW teach that "Jesus Himself never claimed to be God," it is a false premise. This one tiny stone, found in Revelation 21:7, kills the entire argument. Jesus calls Himself God. Jesus is Almighty Jehovah just like the Father! Further, the Father Himself calls Jesus, "God" [Greek: *Theos:* Supreme Divinity].

"But about the Son [Jesus] **he** [the Father] **says, 'Your throne, O** [Jesus] **God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You** [Jesus] **have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore** [Jesus] **God, your God** [your Father]**, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.'**

He [the Father] **also says, 'In the beginning, O Lord** [Jesus]**, you** [are the God who] **laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.' "** (Hebrews 1:8-10, insertions mine) The Father calls Jesus "God" because Jesus is also Jehovah God. To further demonstrate the equality, consider the following verses. Jesus said that He is to be honored (worshiped) as the Father is honored (worshiped).

"Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him." (John 5:22,23) If Jesus was not equal to the Father in every way, substance, knowledge, authority, and power, Jesus would be robbing the Father of the honor that He is due (which is blasphemy). By making Himself equal in honor with the Father, Jesus

and the Father must be one in substance even though they are separate and distinct Gods! Paul agrees:

"[Jesus] **Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God** [the Father] **something to be grasped. . . ."** (Philipians 2:6, insertions mine) How much clearer can this get? From this short study we find at a minimum, there are two equal, co-eternal Gods in Heaven. (There are three, but this is not a study on the Holy Spirit.) These Gods are separate and distinct beings. They were together in the beginning and Jesus is the Creative Agent. That is, He is the Creator of everything that exists!

"For by him [Jesus] **all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him."** (Colossians 1:16, insertion mine)

"But in these last days he [the Father] **has spoken to us by his Son** [Jesus]**, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. - (Hebrews 1:2, insertions mine)**

There is absolutely no evidence in the Bible that the Father created Jesus. In fact, there is no evidence in the Bible indicating the Father has created anything. John plainly declares the opposite, **"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."** (John 1:3) Bottom line, "nothing has been made that Jesus did not make" and we know that Jesus did not create Himself.

Sharon, you have asked some good questions and even though I did not address all of them in this e-mail, I hope you have enough information to help you see that the JW are misleading people about the deity of Jesus. The irony with the JW is that the Jehovah they worship is not the Father. The Jehovah they worship is the One they deny, Jesus Christ Himself, The Rock of Ages!

Note: I believe about 90% of the references to Jehovah in the Old Testament pertain to Jesus. Jesus and the Father are both called Jehovah. For example, in Psalm 2:7-11, Jehovah (the Father) speaks to Jehovah (the Son). The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are so closely united, and so tight in purpose, plan, and action, that it is sometimes difficult to precisely determine which member of the Trinity is speaking in the Old Testament, but 90% of the time, it is Jesus.

"He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he." -Deuteronomy 32:4

". . . For they[Israel] **drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."** (1 Corinthians 10:4, insertion mine)

I hope this helps,

Larry Wilson

How to Identify a True Prophet

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:
My husband was recently transferred to another city and we have been attending various churches, looking for a place that "feels right." We have found a very friendly church, but the minister is called "a prophet." I have discussed this topic with some church members and they suggested that I read 1 Corinthians 12.

This is my first exposure to a church that has apostles and prophets, so I don't know what to think. Could the pastor really be a true prophet? Please help me sort this out.
Sincerely,
Sandy"

Hello Sandy:
You have asked a good question and I am happy to respond. To get started, you may be aware that the title "prophet" is frequently distorted. The Bible defines a prophet as an ordinary person who reveals information from God that is otherwise unknown. (Ezekiel 2 & 3, Jeremiah 29:19) With this simple definition in mind, please consider the following passages:

Jesus warned His followers, **"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. . . . Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**

Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not *prophesy* in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' " (Matthew 7:15, 21-23, italics mine) **"For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time."** (Matthew 24:24,25)

These few verses tell us that false prophets can (a) be gifted and talented people who deceitfully use the name and gospel of Jesus for recognition, power, and/or money, (b) perform great signs and miracles because they are associated with demons, (c) have no affiliation with Christ and His gospel even though they may speak volumes about Jesus and salvation, and (d) will exist until the end of time. (In fact, the last "false prophet" mentioned in the Bible is the devil himself. Revelation 19:20)

Yes, God has true prophets! The Bible indicates that Jesus bestowed spiritual gifts on the early church. (The word "church" as it is used in this study should not be confused with a particular denomination.) Paul wrote, **"It was he** [Jesus] **who gave some** [gifts to ordinary people so that they could serve as] **to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,** [so that all of these should work together] **to prepare**

God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13, insertions mine)

These verses reveal that Jesus equips ordinary people with extraordinary gifts for the benefit of building up His church. Please notice that Paul identifies their order of importance: **"And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and** [last] **those speaking in different kinds of tongues."** (1 Corinthians 12:28, insertion mine)

The Bible is clear that genuine and false prophets will exist until the end. I believe the first step in identifying a true prophet is found in the book of Ezekiel: **"The word of the Lord came to me** [Ezekiel]**: 'Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying.**

Say to those who prophesy *out of their own imagination*: [They deceitfully say] **'Hear the word of the Lord!** [But,] **This is what the Sovereign Lord says** [to them]**:Woe to the foolish prophets *who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing*!**

Your prophets, O Israel, are like [noisy] **jackals** [roaming aimlessly] **among ruins. You** [claim to speak on My behalf, but you] **have not gone up to the breaks in the wall to repair it for the house of Israel** [that is, you have not turned My people away from their decadent sins] **so that it** [My house] **will stand firm** [in righteousness] **in the battle on the day of the Lord.**

***Their visions are false and their divinations a lie*.' They say, 'The Lord declares,' when the Lord has not sent them; yet they expect their words to be fulfilled. Have you not seen false visions and uttered lying divinations when you say, 'The Lord declares,' though I have not spoken?' "** (Ezekiel 13:1-7, insertions and italics mine)

As you can see, Sandy, false prophets are not a recent problem. In fact, it appears that every time God appointed a true prophet for Israel, many false prophets also sprang up! (See 1 Kings 18:19 and Jeremiah 28.) As you might expect, there are several issues involved in the process of identifying a true prophet. Here are five issues which I hope you will prayerfully consider:

1. - God foreknew that His people would have trouble identifying true and false prophets. To reduce this problem, God said to Israel, **". . . Listen to my words: 'When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.' "** (Numbers 12:6)

This text reveals *how* God gives information to a prophet. When a prophet speaks, people do not know whether the prophet is lying (speaking out of his own imagination) or if the prophet has actually received a dream or a vision from God. God told Israel to listen to everyone who claims to have received a vision from Him because such persons must either be exonerated or destroyed! **"**

‘But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.’ You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?’ If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him [or his lies, so put him to death]**."** (Deuteronomy 18:20-22, insertion mine)

2. - Jesus said that false prophets can perform great signs and miracles, so we know that displays or manifestations of supernatural power do not necessarily mean that God has sent a prophet. In fact, the book of Revelation reveals that a time is coming when the devil himself will call fire down out of the sky to prove that he is God, and this overwhelming miracle will deceive most of the inhabitants of Earth.

"And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. . . ." (Revelation 13:13,14) So, the ability to perform miracles does not prove that a prophet is sent from God.

3. - The Bible also indicates that a prophet cannot validate himself. In other words, no person becomes a prophet because he decides to be a prophet and neither can men appoint a prophet. God Himself decides who will speak for Him – and that person may prophesy once during his entire life or he may prophesy many times. (1 Samuel 19)

Paul wrote, **"All these** [gifts, including the gift of prophecy] **are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he** [the Spirit] **gives them to each one, *just as he determines*."** (1 Corinthians 12:11, insertions and emphasis mine) Jesus said, **"If I testify about myself** [claiming that I am the Messiah]**, my testimony is not valid. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth** [that I am the Messiah]**."** (John 5:31-33, insertions mine)

If a person is "gifted" with visions from God, this gift will become evident over time. Spiritually mature people will test and validate the gift and of course, time will prove whether the prophet spoke for God or out of his own imagination. True prophets are not popular during their lifetime because Almighty God does not trifle with man nor does God send trivial messages through His prophets.

When God sends a message, His words cut like a double-edged sword. God condemns sin and exposes error. So, the message of a true prophet is usually hated, and historically, the life span of a true prophet is short and painful. Jesus acknowledged Israel’s customary treatment of the prophets saying, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."** (Matthew 23:37)

4. - During the early days of the Christian church, the Spirit of prophecy was actively working through the apostles because Jesus used the gifts of the Spirit to separate fact from fiction. The

early Christian church became filled with self-appointed prophets (liars) and false teachers with disastrous results. Consider the contrast between these two texts: **"So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there** [in Iconium]**, speaking boldly for the Lord, who *confirmed* the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders."** (Acts 14:3, italics and insertion mine)

On the other hand, the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira soon fell into apostasy because false prophets and teachers had infiltrated them. Jesus said to the church at Pergamum, **"Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore!**

Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." (Revelation 2:14-16) Jesus also said to the church at Thyatira, **"Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.**

I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling." (Revelation 2:20, 21) True prophets (a) will promote ideals and doctrines that conform to God's Word, and (b) can do miracles as God deems necessary to affirm *the validity of their testimony*.

5. - Sandy, since this is a brief response to a rather large subject, please pay close attention to these closing remarks. In terms of authority, the Bible is a closed book. When the apostolic age ended, the Bible was completed. God has not given subsequent prophets any information that extends Scripture.

Everything that God wanted said in the Bible has been said in the Bible and the Canon was closed. This means that all prophetic utterances since the apostolic age must be tested by Scripture. The words of prophets today are not authoritative (that is, their words are not to be regarded as an extension to Scripture).

True prophets *always* direct people to the Bible because every true prophet knows that *the Bible is man's sole authority in matters pertaining to God*. Yes, we should consider the claims of people who say that God has told them something, but we have to test their claims by the Bible.

Paul wrote, **"Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil."** (1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22) Those claiming to receive dreams or visions from God are not to be revered, quoted as an authority, or worshiped. Instead their words are to be thoroughly challenged by the Word of God and if they bear up after close investigation, the Word of God is to be exalted – not the prophet! The lives of prophets should also be examined. Speaking of prophets, Jesus said, **"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."** (Matthew 7:19, 20)

In closing, true prophets are ordinary people having an extraordinary (and usually, an

unpleasant) job to do. Each time a prophet claims to reveal something from God, that claim has to be verified. If the claim is found to be in harmony with Scripture, then a clearer understanding of Scripture will unfold and the body of Christ will be blessed! Otherwise, I hope you will have nothing to do with the subtle lies of a false prophet! (For further study on this topic, please read my article on the end-time appearance of 144,000 prophets at: http://www.wake-up.org/Revelation/Rev144.htm)

I hope this helps,

Larry Wilson

Peace and Joy Before I Die

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Mr. Wilson:
I am 28 years old. My parents divorced when I was seven and my mother married a man with two small children. Together, they had one child. By the time I was nine, I felt as though I did not have a mom or a dad. To overcome my rejection and loneliness, I became sexually active when I was twelve. I found it easy to attract boys, but I also found that boys often treated me as though I were a piece of trash after having sex. For them, sex was a game.

For me, sex was a means to an end. I wanted a close friend. I have been married and divorced. I have no children and haven't seen my mother for years. I cannot recall the number of sexual partners that I have had. I have a history of alcohol and drug use. When I learned that I was HIV positive (about a year ago) I was shocked, but not surprised.

Even though men say I am attractive, I feel worthless inside and at times, I loathe myself. I have a good paying job, but I hate it. You might think this is weird, but I don't think hell could be much worse. I tried going to church, but songs and Bible texts brought no comfort. A co-worker suggested that I write to you. I would like some peace and joy before I die.

–Becky [fictitious name]"

Dear Becky:
If my response does not help, keep reaching out until you find the help that you need because God has prepared someone on Earth to help you. God loves all sinners unconditionally and the Bible says that if we keep asking, knocking, and searching, He will help! (Matthew 7:7) Somewhere, there is a qualified person who can make a tremendous difference in your life, so don't give up.

I have read your letter several times and truly, your pain is great. Even though your sad, miserable, and rebellious past cannot be changed, you can still experience "perfect peace and inexpressible joy" before you die. Of course, tranquility and happiness won't happen instantly, but you can become a whole new person and enjoy a whole new outlook on life **IF** you will (a) take the initiative to do a few things for yourself, and (b) give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to miraculously transform you. To get started, here are three self-help initiatives that I hope you will immediately pursue:

Self-Help Initiatives

1. - HIV is a deadly disease. If you are already taking medication for HIV, you know that your chance of living 25 more years is quite good. Without medication; however, the time before AIDS sets in is about nine years. Unfortunately, after HIV develops into AIDS, the average life span is about nine months. So, find a doctor who understands HIV if you have not done this already and begin taking the appropriate medication. Don't delay.

2. - You did not write anything about your current lifestyle. If you are sexually active, Becky, you must stop. You have a contagious disease that is deadly and you should not expose others to it. Furthermore, your letter reveals that you already know that promiscuity does not bring joy or happiness. Promiscuity will rob you of self respect and self worth. In the end, it will leave you emotionally scarred and very lonely.

3. - If you are using drugs and alcohol occasionally, you must get help to stop immediately. I'm talking about stopping "cold turkey." If you don't do this, you will not be able to get off the merry-go-round caused by chemical dependency.

Consider your life's report: You have a job that you hate, you have a disease that will kill you, you have no family support, and you have been treated like trash by former lovers. It is no wonder that you are in depression, and every time you use drugs and alcohol, they induce greater depression because they are depressants.

In exchange for a few moments of "well being," drugs and alcohol will impair your ability to think straight and weaken your resolve to do what is right. For each drug-induced high there is an corresponding low which calls for another drug-induced high. This merry-go-round is a deadly vortex. Drugs and alcohol will not fix a single problem. They cannot help you get to where you want to be.

Substance abuse is a ball and chain. Alcohol and drugs are chemical demons. They wield great power over their victims, and when people are under their influence, they cause people to say and do all kinds of harmful, stupid, and shameful things.

Once they master you, they will taunt you by saying, "Look how we have made a hopeless fool out of you." The Bible says, **"Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise."** (Proverbs 20:1)

Becky, if you have used alcohol or drugs during the past year, you must join a twelve-step program. If you don't join, the odds are 99% that you will not be able to redirect your physiological dependency from them to God. The Alcoholics Anonymous program is excellent and their arms are open. Embrace them! Don't delay!

Spiritual Initiatives

Your letter ended with a plea for "some peace and joy" before you die. You might not realize this, but peace and joy are spiritual experiences. To have genuine peace and joy, you must have a spiritual life. (Notice, I did not say "a religious life.")

Even though you may be spiritually dead at the moment, God can raise you up from the ashes of your past. (See Isaiah 61:1-3.) I'm sure you understand how a person can have everything that money can buy and still be completely miserable. The plenty/poverty phenomenon occurs because God has put a place in our hearts that He alone can fill.

When God is absent, the heart remains empty regardless of how much stuff we cram into it. Here are three spiritual initiatives that I hope you will follow. If you apply them, these initiatives can lift you out of your present dilemma and within a few weeks, you will find yourself on the road that leads to eternal peace and joy.

1. - *Know and Honor God.* Becky, the first step toward joy and peace is knowing God. I am assuming you do not know much about God or His laws regarding human conduct. (I say this because you indicated that you tried going to church and the "songs and Bible texts" did not do anything for you.)

It is my prayer and hope that you will give God and His Word another try. You need to know about God because He is our Creator. God is the source of truth! Human beings are, in general, slow learners. We are slow to recognize the horrors that sin produces. Think back to when you were twelve years old.

Did you anticipate the pain and suffering that would come through promiscuity and substance abuse? No! *You ignorantly took a path that has all but destroyed you mentally, physically, and spiritually.* And now you loathe yourself for having made such stupid choices. Right?

I'm being blunt in hopes that I can put a dent in your thinking. God's rules for human conduct are for our benefit, not His. Every time we violate His laws (either knowingly or ignorantly), we hurt ourselves because sin *always* extracts a high price in the form of a painful penalty.

This next point is extremely important to understand. God is not punishing *you* with HIV because you have been sexually immoral. No, "the law of sin" is punishing you. The law of sin is inescapable. This law can be described in two sentences: First, whether we sin ignorantly or deliberately, we have to suffer from the consequences of our sins.

Second, sin imposes a degenerative process on everyone and this process eventually terminates our life. (See Romans 6-8.) Consider how the law of sin works for a moment. Millions of people die each year from cancer. They are not dying from this disease because God is punishing them. They are dying because the law of sin eventually robs sinners of life.

On the other hand, some deaths are premature and can be directly linked from cause to effect. For example, mesothelioma has killed many people who have inhaled asbestos fibers, lung cancer has killed many people who have smoked, and AIDS has killed many people who have engaged in promiscuity. So, death comes upon mankind in two ways.

First, death comes to us even when we do everything right, because everyone is subject to the degenerative curse of sin. Second, as your letter so honestly reveals, death can come prematurely if we ignorantly or willfully violate the laws of health. Becky, think about your past as you consider this verse: **"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."** (Proverbs 14:12)

When you started having sex at age twelve, you probably thought that promiscuity would bring love and popularity. The attention young men showered on you probably gave you the illusion of

being loved. But now, I am sure your experienced eye sees this truth: Promiscuity brings loathing and death instead of joy. When you consider your life up to this point, I am sure you wish you had known the truth about promiscuity at age twelve. But do not despair – all is not lost. The good news is that you can still experience genuine love, peace, and happiness if you will begin to honor God in words and deeds.

Honoring God is a two step process. First, you have to put forth some effort to get to know Him. Start by studying the Bible. Begin by reading the books of Genesis and Exodus and then Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Second, ask God to help you make choices that will enable your spiritual life to become stronger.

Since we do not know the future outcome of every choice that we will make, it is important to put your trust in God's knowledge by obeying His commandments. (Ecclesiastes 12:13) If you will do this, good results will soon come your way because God knows what is best for you! After all, He created you. You are unique and original.

So, if you will resolve "to go, to be, and to do" all that you presently know about God's requirements – peace and happiness will soon sprout in the soil of your heart. In due time, as you learn more about God and His love, you will taste the wonderful fruit that you desire!

2. - *Avoid promiscuity.* As I wrote earlier, if you are sexually active, you must stop. Promiscuity took away your self-worth and self-respect, and in return, gave you HIV. Becky, the devil has destroyed millions of young people with promiscuity. He knows our vulnerability for sexual misconduct and he is relentless in his efforts to lead us into sin because the law of sin's consequences are heavy and harsh. You may know that the highest grossing business on the internet is pornography.

The devil understands human sexuality far better than human beings. He has helped millions of people become porn addicts. *Porn is especially troublesome for women because porn causes men to assess the value of a woman according to the amount of sexual arousal she visually produces.*

Most women are unaware of this demonic process because women, especially young women, do not think about sex like men. From a very young age, girls are taught that they should be "pretty." The devil has used TV and the media primarily to convince young women that to be happy, they must be pretty. Young men, being visually orientated, readily agree. Peer pressure to be fashionable and beautiful drives young women to buy all sorts of products to enhance their appearance.

They starve themselves of nourishment to be thin like the women they see in magazines and on TV. They want the same recognition, fame, and wealth. Without being aware of what is happening, a young woman's desire to be *accepted* pushes her to find ways to make her visually attractive.

This is the devil's destructive loop: Women strive to be more attractive and men's visual nature drives them sexually, and of course, the porn industry feeds this horrible destructive loop. Men

addicted to porn do not value women as human beings; rather, the woman's value is determined by fantasies created through visual sex.

Many rapists have confessed that their addiction to porn led them to violently acquire sexual satisfaction. The devil creates sexual desire in men through porn, then he taunts the passions of these men by putting beautiful women before them, and the result is predatory violence. Many women today do not have a healthy self-esteem.

They look for recognition in all the wrong places. Nothing is more heady for a woman than getting the attention and/or affection of a good looking guy. Men addicted to porn worship sex and insecure women worship fashion. These two industries have led hundreds of millions of young people into promiscuous behavior and the results are horrible!

You correctly observed that many of your lovers considered sex a game. A male typically cares more about sex than about the woman who participates with him. The male drive for sex enables him to "move on" to other sexual conquests whenever physical relationships become complicated (that is, when the relationship becomes emotionally involved). You have admitted in your letter that "love, joy, and peace" did not come through numberless sexual partners.

So, if you are sexually active, stop immediately and begin honoring God with your body. God says there is only one environment where sexual intimacy accomplishes everything He designed it to do. That environment is within the confines of marriage. (Colossians 3:5,6; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 13:4)

3. - *Prayer life.* Becky, this is something that you must do every day: Pray without ceasing. This means that you need to "talk with" God every waking hour. You need to tell Him about your feelings. You need to tell Him about your thoughts and plans. You need to talk about your problems as though you are talking to your closest friend. Then, after telling God everything you have to say, the difficult part begins. *You must listen for His response.*

God rarely speaks out loud, however, He does speak. He whispers through the Spirit! Here is a sample of how the Spirit speaks: Let us say you are perplexed about some issue or problem. As you talk with the Lord about it, the Holy Spirit will help you sort through your various thoughts and possible solutions because your highest goal now is to honor God.

As you struggle to reach "the right" decision, the Holy Spirit will fill your heart with peace and resolve when you spiritually find the right answer. This process is not easy nor is it natural, but it is the essence of walking with God. As time goes by, you will get better at detecting the gentle leading of the Holy Spirit and in so doing, peace and joy will fill your inner being – even in the middle of a crisis! I hope you can see that the purpose of prayer is communion with God. Yes, God already knows everything about you and your problems, but He wants to hear from you.

No matter how many problems you have, He loves you! But remember, prayer is not a one-way street. Memorize this: *Prayer is the process of aligning ourselves with God's solution to our problem.* Many religious people ignorantly treat prayer as the process of aligning God with their solutions and then they get angry with God when He does not do whatever they think He should

do. How foolish! God created us to experience a wide range of joy and fulfillment.

This wonderful happiness comes when we consistently submit to His sovereign authority. There will be situations when circumstances threaten our joy and peace from the Lord, but these "cliff hangers" only prove (after they pass) that God intimately knows our situation, and if we allow Him, He will enable us to be victorious over every challenge.

Walking with God produces peace and joy. Jesus said, **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."** (John 14:27)

4. - *Tell Your Story.* And finally, Becky, you need to tell your story to high school students or youth groups of any kind. There is no greater joy than loving others enough to keep them from making the same mistakes you have made in your life.

There is something very "freeing" about coming clean and getting your story out in the open. Helping others will give you a sense of purpose, and joy will lift the burden of guilt that you carry. If you can prevent one person from suffering as you have suffered, your life and the lessons learned are not in vain. Becky, when you help others, they help you by raising your spirits and increasing your joy.

In closing, Becky, the secret to experiencing love, joy, and peace is found in knowing and honoring God in everything we do. God does have some rules about conduct which the world rejects. There will be some tough tests as you exit relationships that are harmful.

There will be some embarrassing failures and, more importantly, there will be exciting victories. But, most of all, there will be love, joy and peace if you stay connected to God through His Spirit. I can assure you that walking with God produces better results than anything the world can offer. I hope you will give these suggestions a try and I hope to hear how you are doing.

With prayers and best wishes,

Larry Wilson

Are People on Earth During the Millenium?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Mr. Wilson:
I was searching the internet for information on the 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20 when I came across your website. I read your article, "The Seventh Millennium," and I have some questions. You claim that Jesus will not touch the Earth at the Second Coming.

My church teaches that Jesus will touch the Earth and bind up the devil in the abyss and rule over the nations with "a rod of iron." With the devil locked up, there will be a thousand years of peace and happiness on Earth! During this time, many people will learn about Jesus and receive salvation.

Then, at the end of the thousand years, the devil will be released to deceive the nations once again. In fact, the devil will lead Gog and Magog against the Holy City! If, as you claim, Jesus takes the saints to Heaven at the Second Coming, how can Jesus rule the nations with an iron scepter? What would be the point of putting the devil in the abyss if Earth is going to be left desolate? How does Gog and Magog fit into your scenario?

Sincerely,
Tom"

Hello Tom:
Thank you for your e-mail. I am delighted that you found our website and I hope you will visit it often to examine the 175+ articles available there for study. Before I respond to your questions, you should be aware that a proper understanding of "the end" of sin's drama requires a proper understanding of several prerequisites.

For example, everyone knows that Algebra is a prerequisite for Calculus, but few people realize that the final chapters in Revelation are like Calculus! In other words, several crucial themes *dovetail* into the final millennium* and each theme could fill a book. Since your questions are somewhat involved, and this response has to be short, I hope you will find my response helpful.

* Note: The Latin word for one thousand is "milli," as in millimeter. Sometimes, I call the thousand years in Revelation 20 the "millennium," even though the word "millennium" is not in the Bible. This is no different than calling the days of the week by their Roman names. For example, the word "Sunday" is not in the Bible, but we understand that Sunday and the first day of the week are the same day.

1. The saints will leave Earth and all of the wicked will be slain at the Second Coming.

For reasons beyond the scope of this article, the Bible teaches that death is really soul sleep. In other words, when a person dies, he or she is not conscious. There is no conscious awareness

after death until a resurrection occurs. This means the dead are neither in Heaven or Hell. They are "asleep" in their graves. (Please see the December 2007 *Wake Up Report!,* "Will Sinners Burn in Hell for Eternity?")

Soul sleep is a very important topic because the "sleeping souls" of the righteous will be awakened at the Second Coming. The Bible indicates there are two corporate resurrections – one for the righteous and one for the wicked. The righteous dead are resurrected at the **beginning** of the millennium (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:51-55; Revelation 20:6) and the wicked dead will be resurrected at the **end** of the millennium. (John 5:28, 29; Revelation 20:5)

Jesus said, **"And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."** (John 6:39,40, underlines mine)

An angel told Daniel, **"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake** [at the Second Coming]**: some** [the dead in Christ] **to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt** [those who crucified Jesus - Revelation 1:7; Matthew 26:64]**. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days. 'As for you** [Daniel]**, go your way till the end** [of your life]**. You will rest** [die]**, and then at the end of the** [1,335] **days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.'"** (Daniel 12:2, 12,13, underlines and insertions mine)

Paul wrote, **"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope** [of the resurrection]**. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring** [people to life just as He did] **with Jesus** [there is no need to endlessly grieve for] **those who have fallen asleep in him.**

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left [on Earth] **till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep** [that is, the living will not go to Heaven *before* the dead are resurrected]**.**

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left [on Earth] **will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."** (1 Thessalonians 4:12-17, underlines and insertions mine)

These texts indicate there will be a resurrection of the righteous dead at the Second Coming. The "dead in Christ" are not spirits floating around on clouds waiting to get their previous bodies. When Jesus appears at the Second Coming, He will speak the command and "the dead in Christ" will come to life again!

They will be given flawless bodies – no longer subject to the curse of sin. As they ascend

toward Heaven, Jesus will call to the righteous living, "Come up here!" Paul says that **together**, the dead and the living will meet the Lord **in the air. - Why are they meeting the Lord in the air? If you will remember, a few days before ascending to Heaven, Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.**

And if I go [there – to the New Jerusalem] and prepare a place for you, I will come back [to Earth] and take you to be with me that you also may be [in my Father's house] where I am." (John 14:2,3, underline and insertions mine)

After Jesus lifts the saints from Earth, He will destroy **the wicked** in two ways. First, Lucifer's government and Lucifer's persona* will be thrown alive into a lake of burning sulphur. **". . . The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur."** (Revelation 19:20)

* Note: **F**or reasons beyond the scope of this article, the coming Antichrist is Lucifer. He and his angels will be allowed to come out of the spirit realm (the abyss) in the fifth trumpet (Revelation 9:1-11) and they will assume physical bodies that we can see and they will *physically* appear before mankind.At the Second Coming, Jesus will destroy the "physical" bodies which Lucifer and his angels "used." Jesus removes their physical bodies and returns Lucifer and his angels back into the spirit realm (the abyss) from where they came.

The wicked who are alive at the Second Coming will be destroyed by a command that comes out of Jesus' mouth: **"The rest of them** [the wicked] **were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse** [Jesus speaks the wicked to death with a command that is described as a 'sword' that comes out of His mouth]**, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh."** (Revelation 19:21, explanation and insertion mine)

2. Why does Jesus destroy all of the wicked at the Second Coming?

During the Great Tribulation, the gospel of Jesus Christ will be preached throughout the world by God's servants, the 144,000. The 144,000 will present "the testimony of Jesus" to every person. (Matthew 24:14, Revelation 12:17) This means that everyone who is alive on Earth will be confronted and tested with the **truth** about Jesus Christ. Jesus does this to determine who will obey and follow Him. Babylon will persecute everyone who chooses to obey Jesus. This means that all middle ground will be eliminated.

There will be some people who receive the gospel of Jesus and be saved, but the rest of mankind will commit the unpardonable sin to avoid persecution. The unpardonable sin is rebellion against the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 12:31,32) In other words, wicked people will reject the gospel of Jesus (as they did in Noah's day) and they will be destroyed (as they were in Noah's day). Once a wicked person commits the unpardonable sin, he cannot repent – even if he had a thousand years to repent!

When the unpardonable sin is committed, the Holy Spirit abandons a person when it becomes

clear that person will not surrender to the authority of the Spirit. Once the Holy Spirit leaves, a person cannot repent of his or her sins. He or she may lament the penalty or consequences that follow (like the hand caught in the cookie jar), but honest repentance (and the prerequisite reformation) is impossible without the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

The critical point so many people miss is this: W*hen Jesus appears at the Second Coming, everyone will have been tested and Jesus will have passed eternal judgment on* ***every person.*** **-** Jesus said, **"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."** (Revelation 22:12, underline mine)

This means that at the Second Coming, Jesus will grant the faithful eternal life and He will destroy the wicked. There is no second chance for salvation once the judgment process of Christ ends. (2 Corinthians 5:10; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14) The bottom line is this: There is no salvation after the Second Coming because every living person will have heard the gospel and all decisions will have been made.

3. After calling the righteous away from Earth and killing the wicked, Jesus puts Lucifer and his angels back in the abyss so that Earth can rest during its Sabbath millennium.

At this time, the world will be left desolate and the devil is returned to the abyss and "chained" to this Earth for 1,000 years so that he cannot bother anyone in the universe. Jesus gives the devil and his angels 1,000 years to "thoughtfully" consider their actions and upcoming destruction. Meanwhile, a very important process will be transpiring in Heaven.

As the saints reign with Jesus, they **will also reign as judges with Jesus. - The saints will judge the wicked (in many cases, the saints will judge the very people who tortured and killed them). This particular process of judging the wicked is not for the purpose of determining eternal life (that issue was decided by Jesus Himself before the Second Coming), but for the purpose of restitution.**

God's justice demands that restitution be extracted from each wicked person who refused to make restitution for the wrongs committed in life. The golden rule is God's eternal rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you – because God will see to it that you suffer as you caused others to suffer.

(Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30, Revelation 2:23, 18:6) In other words, during the 1,000 years, the saints will determine the amount of pain each wicked person and each wicked angel must suffer in the lake of fire. (1 Corinthians 6:2,3) Some people will burn for a long time and some people will burn for a short time.

4. When the thousand years are over, the Holy City, New Jerusalem, will descend from Heaven with the saints safe inside.

When we add up everything written in the Bible about time, the 1,000 years in Revelation 20 will be a Sabbath rest for Earth, the seventh millennium. The land itself will "rest" from the works of sin for one thousand years. At the end of the thousand years, the Holy City, with all of the saints inside, will descend to Earth.

The wicked dead (who have remained in their graves) will then be resurrected to stand before the Great White Throne of Jesus. Jesus resurrects the wicked for two reasons. First, He wants all the wicked to understand why He could not save them. Jesus will give them an unvarnished review of their lives' actions and decisions.

At the end of the presentation, everyone will admit that His judgment is righteous and true. Even though every knee will bow before Jesus, this does not mean the wicked are repentant for their sins – remember, they have committed the unpardonable sin. After they realize their impending doom, the devil is released from the abyss (the spirit realm). The devil will organize the wicked from all nations, encouraging them to attack the Holy City – he deceives the wicked into thinking that they can save themselves by destroying God.

At this time, fire will fall from Heaven and the extraction of restitution (which the wicked had been unwilling to pay during their lifetime) will begin. Ultimately, after restitution has been paid in full, God annihilates the wicked and they become ashes. Sin is no more. Jesus will create a new Heaven and a new Earth. (Revelation 21:1-4)

5. Who is Gog and Magog?

To analyze this topic, we need to back up to the time when the 1,000 years have ended. **"When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison** [the abyss] **and will go out to deceive the** [wicked from all] **nations in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog – to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves** [New Jerusalem]**. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them."** (Revelation 20:7-9, underline and insertions mine)

The identity of Gog who lives in the land of Magog is a mystery to many people. However, "Gog" is nothing more than another title given to Lucifer in Ezekiel 38 and Magog is his territory in "the far north." In a nutshell, this is the story. Lucifer is called "the king of Babylon" in Isaiah 14 and "the king of Tyre" in Ezekiel 28 because the devil is "the prince of this world."

In other words, the Bible gives Lucifer different names to help us understand this invisible foe. Actually, Lucifer was the *real* king of Tyre and the *real* king of Babylon. It is Lucifer who brings civilizations to their end. He understands God's full cup principle very well and this is why he incites sin and rebellion to reach such a degree of decadence that God has no choice but to destroy nations that go past the point of return.

Under the Old Covenant ("Plan A"), Lucifer (as the Antichrist) would have been visibly "exposed" in a prophetic sequence of events that is something like his visible exposure under

the New Covenant ("Plan B"). The physical appearing of the devil is a very serious topic and it deserves careful study. Under the Old Covenant ("Plan A"), Lucifer (Gog) would have come against the city of Jerusalem with a horde of nations for the purpose of destroying God and His people.

John's reference to "Gog and Magog" in Revelation 20 indicates that Lucifer's hatred for God remains – even after a thousand years of living in the abyss! In other words, Lucifer and his angels cannot repent because they have committed the unpardonable sin. Therefore, the level of hatred for God and His people has not changed.

At the end of the 1,000 years, the devil (the Anti-Christ) will rally the wicked from all nations through deceit, causing them to think that they can kill Christ and take His city. However, Jesus rules the nations with an iron scepter and His sovereign rulership cannot be broken. As billions of wicked people rush upon New Jerusalem to destroy Jesus and His kingdom, fire falls from Heaven and the nations of Earth are destroyed.

Warring against Christ's authority is always the destiny of the carnal nature – the carnal nature is always hostile toward God's authority. (Romans 8:5-7) Lucifer became a carnal being when he allowed jealousy toward Christ to consume him. His hatred for Jesus led him to deceive one-third of the angels of Heaven with clever lies. His hatred for Jesus will never change, because he has committed the unpardonable sin. Isn't it ironic that Lucifer meets his end doing the same thing he did in the beginning – but this time, his target will be wicked human beings who, like him, have committed the unpardonable sin?

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

What is the Mark of the Beast?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:
What is the mark of the beast and when will it occur?
Thanks,
Jerri "

Hello Jerri:
As you probably know, there has been a great deal of speculation on this topic during the past 2,000 years. If you visit this online encyclopedia at *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Number_of_the_Beast*, you will find a list of various interpretations.

My understanding of this topic may be unlike anything that you have heard because my conclusion is determined by a set of rules that govern the interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy.***** In a nutshell, I believe the Bible teaches *the mark of the beast* will be *two tattoos*.

One tattoo, showing the number 666, will be placed on the *right hand* of everyone that Lucifer spares from death. The second tattoo will be a name. I have concluded from my study that Lucifer will assume a divine name when he physically appears on Earth masquerading as God and his name will be tattooed on the *foreheads* of his servants – 144,000 high ranking employees that will work for him. (Revelation 13:17)

*****See the web site mentioned at the end of this article for more information about the rules.

Since this explanation sounds far-fetched at the present time, please consider these three topics: (1) the importance of "one-third/ two-thirds" in the book of Revelation, (2) the circumstances surrounding the mark of the beast, and (3) the identity of the beast who imposes his *mark* on everyone.

1. - Twelve times during the time period of the seven trumpets, one-third is mentioned. For example, one-third of the trees will be burned up in the first trumpet, one-third of the ships will sink and one-third of the creatures in the ocean will die in the second trumpet, one-third of the rivers will be poisoned in the third trumpet, and one-third of the day and one-third of the night will be without light in the fourth trumpet.

This repetition of one-third is deliberate. God assures us twelve times that He is generous – even though He will release His wrath on the world during the seven trumpets. Instead of justifiably destroying three-thirds of Earth, God spares two-thirds of everything! To understand the ancient practice of generously sparing one-third and destroying two-thirds, we need to examine some passages from the Old Testament.

"David also defeated the[rebellious] **Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death,**

and the third length was allowed to live. So the [surviving] **Moabites became subject to David and brought** [suddenly agreed to] **tribute** [pay their taxes]**."** (2 Samuel 8:2, insertions mine.)

King David was as generous as he was wise. He spared one-third of the Moabites for two reasons. First, he knew the surviving Moabites would have a change of mind and gladly pay their tribute [taxes] if he spared their lives. (It is amazing what people can do when motivated by gratitude.)Second, David knew that in years to come, the Moabites would recover from this war and repopulate their tribal nation. Their future taxes would mean income for Israel's treasury! So, David spared "one-third" of the Moabites.

About 400 years later, Israel became so rebellious toward God that He could not get their attention. So, God did the *same* thing that David did. He destroyed two-thirds of His own people! **"Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices, I myself will withdraw my favor; I will not look on you with pity or spare you.**

A third **of your people will die of the plague or perish by famine inside you;** ***a third*** **will fall by the sword outside your walls; and** ***a third*** **I will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword."** (Ezekiel 5:11,12, italics mine)

Although I don't have the space to explain the following verse, this last text confirms the ancient custom of destroying two-thirds and sparing one-third: **" 'In the whole land,' declares the Lord, 'two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it.' "** (Zechariah 13:8)

When it comes to dealing with rebellion, the ancient custom of sparing one-third and destroying two-thirds is clearly Biblical. This fact is important to our study on the mark of the beast because during the sixth trumpet, the devil will *generously spare two-thirds* of mankind. (Revelation 9:16)

2. - Here is a very short scenario explaining how the mark of the beast unfolds: The first four trumpets in Revelation 8 will be a series of devastating judgments that come from God. These judgments will be overwhelming, awesome, and deadly.

Thousands of notably wicked places will be destroyed, one-third of Earth will be burned up and 25% of the world's population will die in a very short period of time, perhaps as short as 60 to 90 days. God will use His horrific judgments to get the attention of a rebellious world.Once people are willing to listen, God will send forth His 144,000 prophets to present four messages to the people of Earth. (These messages will test mankind to identify who loves God enough to submit to His authority. Revelation 14:6-11, 18:4)

When the religious and political leaders of the world realize the scope and power of God's wrath, they will unite out of fear of the Almighty and in a sincere effort to appease God's wrath, they will establish an organization that the Bible calls "Babylon." Babylon will be a crisis government designed to mediate between an angry God and a world of many nations and diverse religions.

The *only* thing that world leaders can do in an attempt to appease God's wrath is to quickly legislate moral conduct. To reduce man's decadence and degenerate behavior (the very things that caused God's wrath), Babylon will demand that *all* nations enact and enforce laws that will severely punish people for immoral behavior.

In addition to legislating morality, laws will be enacted and enforced requiring the worship of God. Babylon's "well intentioned" efforts to appease God's wrath will seem appropriate at first for most survivors and this is why the Bible predicts the world will *follow* the beast (Babylon). (Revelation 13:3)

Babylon's "sin-less" laws will put people in a difficult position. The people who refuse to worship God as Babylon demands will be punished because the leaders of Babylon will be convinced that God's wrath will only end when *the world* is conducting itself in a way that is pleasing to God.

Meanwhile, God's servants, the 144,000, will boldly speak against the blasphemy of Babylon and a great debate over the will of God will unfold. So, everyone on Earth will eventually get caught up in this hot debate because Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Moslems, Buddhists, Hindus and others do not share a common understanding about God's will.

Babylon will be so internally conflicted that religious people will not know what to think. This confusion is exactly what God wants. He wants people to hear **the truth** about His will and submit to it – even though they will be persecuted for it! This is how God will test the love and faith of mankind.

3. - About two-thirds of the way through the Great Tribulation (890 days), almost everyone will take a position on the gospel of Jesus Christ, presented by the 144,000. Then, the fifth trumpet will occur. The devil himself will be released from the abyss (the spirit realm where he is now confined) and, with his 200 million angels, will physically appear on Earth. (Revelation 9:16) Lucifer is described in Revelation 12 as a great red dragon. He also is described as the "angel king" of the abyss in Revelation 9:11.

He is "the **beast** from the abyss," in Revelation 17:8 and 11:7, and he is described as the beast that rises "out of the earth" in Revelation 13:11. The devil is represented in different ways in the book of Revelation because each caricature tells us more about his work and character.

In other words, Lucifer – that mighty angel who was cast out of Heaven with his angels, will physically descend from the sky attended by 200 million angels at the fifth trumpet. (Revelation 9:3) He will present himself before mankind in dazzling glory pretending to be Jesus Christ Himself at the Second Coming!

At first, the devil will masquerade as a gracious and forgiving God. He will perform all kinds of counterfeit signs and wonders, even causing fire to come down from heaven to prove his assumed divinity. His miracles will dazzle and amaze the wicked, and these demonstrations will **deceive** most of the world's inhabitants. (Revelation 13:14)

They will say, "This is Almighty God. Let us worship him!" Lucifer's charade will last five months. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, Lucifer's angels will be inflicting great searing pain on all undecided people who oppose Lucifer's claims of divinity. (Note: Lucifer's angels cannot hurt the 144,000 or God's people during the fifth trumpet. Revelation 9:4)

God restricts Lucifer's torture so that people rebelling against Lucifer can escape their predator when they submit to the gospel of Jesus! (See Numbers 21:4-9 for a parallel.) The net effect of the fifth trumpet is that Lucifer and his angels force Earth's people into two camps – one camp consisting of those worshiping "the lamb-like beast" and the other camp worshiping "the Lamb."

When the five months of the fifth trumpet have ended, Lucifer will undergo a sudden change of character. He will suddenly become a mean, "stern-faced king." (Daniel 8:23) He will demand the establishment of his theocracy – a worldwide church/state of one faith, one Lord, one baptism using God's own Word as justification for this action. (Consider the following question for a moment.

How can religious diversity be possible if God actually lives on Earth?) Lucifer will set up his throne and rule over the world as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will outlaw the practice of previous religions and the authority of all previous governments. He will appoint ten kings to oversee his global kingdom and he will select 144,000 wicked people to serve as leaders in his theocracy.

Life on Earth during the time of the sixth trumpet will be desperate. There will be little, if any electricity, manufacturing, banking, travel, communications, and infrastructure. These systems were all but destroyed during the first four trumpets. By the time of the sixth trumpet, most of the world will be surviving on meager rations of food and water. (Remember, this will be a time of great tribulation.)

Of course, those working in the devil's government will receive better rations, but in order to work for the devil, each person has to be as cruel and demonic as his master. To secure his control of Earth and to reduce the number of people consuming rations, the people of Earth will be divided into groups of 1,000.

Then, four of Lucifer's angels will kill one-third of each group. (Revelation 9:15) Remember the practice of ancient kings killing two-thirds? The devil will only kill one-third because he wants *to appear generous*. The result is that 666 people will be "mercifully" spared out of each group.

To conduct business and receive rations from Lucifer's government, all people who have sworn allegiance to him will have to wear a tattoo on their right hand. This tattoo, showing the number 666, will identify the 666 people spared from death. The Greek word used in Revelation 13:16 for "the mark" is *charagma*. The word means "an engraving."

There will be no mystery to the meaning of 666 when the time comes. *This literal number indicates who submits to Lucifer.* The Bible says, **"This calls for wisdom** [to understand the number before it is implemented]**. If anyone has insight, let him calculate** [do the math] **the number of** [belonging to] **the beast, for it is man's number** [in other words, the number 666

represents the number of people who belong to the Man of Sin – 2 Thessalonians 2]**. His number** [of survivors in each group] **is 666."** (Revelation 13:18, insertions mine)

One final point. Lucifer's name will be tattooed on the *foreheads* of his lieutenants so that everyone can visibly see who is in charge. This tattoo on the forehead is a blatant counterfeit of what Jesus will do to the 144,000 after they are taken to Heaven. The Bible says that the **names** of Jesus and the Father will be "written" on the foreheads of the 144,000! (See Revelation 14:1, 22:4.) This glorious insignia worn on the foreheads of the 144,000 will reveal their high rank throughout eternity.

In closing, Jerri, I hope you understand that it is impossible for anyone *to prove* the validity of their prophetic understanding before prophecy is fulfilled. However we do not have to remain in darkness until prophecy is fulfilled. Prophetic matters that have been fulfilled are a matter of prophetic *fact*. Prophetic matters that have not been fulfilled are a matter of prophetic *faith.*

Given this truth, we can understand something about the unknown if we use valid rules of interpretation. Valid rules of interpretation are self-evident in the Bible. For example, suppose you know nothing about the game of baseball. If you closely watched several games of baseball, even though you know nothing about the game, eventually you could figure out the rules of the game by observing the behavior of the players. Similarly, suppose you know nothing about apocalyptic prophecy.

If you closely examine the prophecies *that have been fulfilled*, looking for consistent behavior, you can discover that apocalyptic prophecy conforms to four rules of interpretation. Once you discern these rules, then you can test them. If the rules are proven valid by fulfilled prophecy, the rules allow us to decipher prophetic elements that have not been fulfilled with a high degree of certainty. (For further study on this aspect of prophetic study, please see my article, *The Necessity for Rules,* at *http://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Rules.pdf*)

I hope this explanation helps!

Larry Wilson

No Such Thing as a God of Love!

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:
Recently, our daughter, who has a PhD and is antagonistic toward religion, and I had a discussion while watching TV. We happened to see news about the cyclone that hit Myanmar (leaving 130,000+ dead and two million homeless). Later, we saw a report of a deadly earthquake in China (leaving 70,000 dead). I have been a Christian for the past eight years and my daughter and I have had many discussions about God recently. She said, "Mom, there *may* be a "higher power," but there is no such thing as a "God of love."

She said, "If there is an all powerful ‘God of love,’ He **would not** allow the weather and earthquakes to kill thousands of innocent people. ‘A God of love’ **would not** allow human misery to grind on and on as it does in Darfur and Zimbabwe. Loving parents (she has two children) **do not** let siblings hurt each other and neither would ‘a God of love.’ "

She added, " ‘A God of love’ is an imaginary god. Christianity is no different than the other religions of the world. Since the beginning of time, people have created mystical gods. Religion is a perpetual curse. It masks the realities of life at best and at worst, it justifies killing those with whom it disagrees." I could not give her a good response. Can you help me sort this out?

Sincerely,
Karen"

Hello Karen:
Thanks for your e-mail. The basic problem with your situation is that your highly educated daughter does not understand **the curse of sin**, therefore, the title, a "God of love" is inconsistent with what she thinks a "God of love" should be doing. To make matters worse, your daughter confuses God with religion.

God is one topic and people’s behavior (religious practice) is another. If your daughter would open her heart and mind to consider the plan of salvation, she would find answers to her objections, as well as overwhelming joy, because God is love and unbelievably generous!

She is a prisoner to skepticism and this attitude can hold her in a self-imposed wilderness of darkness for a long time. **"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."** (1 Corinthians 2:14) Nevertheless, do your best to engage her in spiritual discussions whenever possible. Here are a few issues you may be able to discuss:

Through the ages, people have wondered why God permits evil people to torture, kill, and maim

others. People have also wondered how a "God of love" can permit earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, and fires to destroy people's possessions and their lives if He is in control of Earth. How can a "God of love" permit tens of thousands of people to starve to death or die in an epidemic? How can a "God of love" permit cruel men, like Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin, and Pol Pot to impose so much suffering and death?

These are rational questions and the Bible offers some profound insights into these difficult questions. However, to understand anything about God's actions, a person has to first understand that **God's highest priority is to prevent suffering and death on a tiny spec of a planet called Earth.**

God's highest priority is to prevent the third occurrence of sin and He has a very thoughtful way of achieving this result. (The first occurrence of sin involved Lucifer and a third of Heaven's angels. The second occurrence involved Adam and Eve and their offspring. For an indepth discussion on God's plan to keep sin from occurring again, please see Chapter 10 in my book, *The Seven Seals and the 144,000*.)

God's love, God's omnipotence, and God's willingness to let injustice abound appear to be in conflict, but these conflicting concepts properly align and make perfect sense once a person understands "the rest of the story." Many people find a certain satisfaction in condemning God for everything that is bad.

After all, *it is easier to condemn God than to understand God.* Lucifer led a third of God's angels astray through political criticism. Lucifer twisted the truth so that God's behavior looked evil. What would you say of a court where only the plaintiff's side of the argument is given? Would that be fair? Of course, not. And judging God's actions (or lack of action) without hearing His side of the story is also unfair!

Many good-hearted people have erroneously concluded that God is not loving because He permits evil to exist. However, the presence of evil proves that God grants the power of choice to His subjects! If He were a control freak, He would not let His subjects make any choices.

So, the presence of evil speaks volumes about human beings and the choices *they* make. If we were as loving and wise as God and could see each situation as God sees each situation, I believe we would do the same things that God is doing! I make this assertion on the basis that God is both selfless and consistent. In other words, God never deviates from doing what is righteous and loving in *every* situation. (Psalm 89:14) God is not arbitrary. He does not violate or circumvent justice and fairness for personal advantage.

We cannot see the big picture as God sees the big picture right now, so we must "trust God" until the time comes for "the rest of the story" to be told. When that day comes, we will see that in each circumstance, God's actions were loving and appropriate. Think about this: *Faith in God, when seen in reverse, proves that God is love.*

That is why we have the Bible. It tells us over and over that trusting God is trust well placed. As a Christian, you know that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to die in our place.

While there is no greater display of love in all the universe than this, there's more to God's love than Jesus dying on the cross – it is called "eternity with God."

Let us take each argument your daughter presented and address them. First, she claimed, "A God of love **would not** allow the weather and earthquakes to kill thousands of innocent people." Tornados, floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes have killed millions of people through the centuries.

These horrific events have been ongoing for thousands of years and their presence tells us that God rarely interferes with nature's violence. In fact, Jesus predicted Earth would become increasingly unstable near the time of the Second Coming, **". . . .There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains."** (Mark 13:8) From the human perspective, death caused by these calamities is horrible because (a) the amount of death is overwhelming, and (b) death represents the end of the most precious thing there is – life!

According to the Bible, God's perspective of death is quite different. The Source of Life does not view death as the end of life. Rather, God sees death as a temporary condition – a state of suspended animation! (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) Because human beings are under the curse of sin, we must die.(Romans 3:23, 6:23)

Earth itself is cursed and it will be destroyed eventually. (Genesis 3:17, Revelation 21:1) God does not usually disrupt the geophysical laws that He created to govern Earth, He sees death as a temporary state, and He will resurrect every dead person at the appointed time.

God has an incredible plan to rescue human beings from the curse of sin, but this plan takes a long time (in human terms) because God is resolving the sin problem so that sin's curse will never surface again. To help us deal with the inequities and chaos that sin produces, God sends love and grace to all suffering people. (John 16:7, Romans 3:29,30) Contrary to the adage that "Time heals all things," it is God's Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who heals all things.

Your daughter said, "A God of love" **would not** allow human misery to go on and on as it does in Darfur and Zimbabwe." The misery index in many countries is deplorable. For thousands of years, evil people have flourished and imposed much suffering on others. Jeremiah asked God about this, **"You are always righteous, O Lord, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper?**

Why do all the faithless live at ease? You have planted them, and they have taken root; they grow and bear fruit. You are always on their lips but far from their hearts." (Jeremiah 12:1,2) The Lord's response was, **" 'But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it,' declares the Lord."** (Jeremiah 12:17)

In other words, God generously gives nations a measure of time and resources to thrive. If the leadership of a nation embraces righteousness and fairness, it will prosper and the standard of living will improve for everyone. If a nation becomes decadent and degenerate, that nation will be uprooted and destroyed. (Ezekiel 14:12-21)

God manages the nations of Earth according to His "full cup principle." (The full cup principle is: When a majority in a nation become degenerate and corrupt, God sends a warning message. If the message is rejected or ignored, God then raises up a "destroyer" to impose total destruction.)

Sin brings ruin. People in various places are growing desperate. Inhumanity and injustice are increasing. God sees every injustice and He does not forget. The Bible promises that God will raise the wicked from their graves at the appointed time and extract restitution.

"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." (Romans 12:19) Foolish people may think there is no God; they may think that God does not see their murders, thefts, or hear their lies; they may think that God does not concern Himself with violence, cheating, and dishonesty.

This is self-deception. Jesus said, **"Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. . . ."** (Luke 12:7) **"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God."** (Luke 12:6) God records every injustice and at the appointed time, a God of love will apply the golden rule: "As you did unto others, the same will *now* be done to you."

Your daughter said, "Loving parents **do not** let siblings hurt each other and neither would a "God of love." Her statement is true to a point. When children are minors, parents are charged with the responsibility of training their children to love and respect the freedom of others. But parents cannot stop adult children from hurting each other.

Adam and Eve experienced this with their first two sons! Cain killed Abel. So here is another way of looking at her argument. God gives human beings a great deal of freedom! We can hurt one another or we can help the hurting. We can be of service to those less fortunate or we can seek fame and fortune.

We can chose to please self or we can live to help others. We can manufacture guns and bombs or we can build schools, hospitals, and churches. Because God is love, He has given us the freedom of choice. Because we have the power of choice, God has imposed a golden rule on all of us. If we violate this rule, we will have to pay its penalty. What your daughter does not understand is this: The penalty for wicked behavior is not imposed on people who choose to live wickedly until the end of the 1,000 years.

This distant date provides little solace for those who want to see justice "right now." I wish more people understood that Judgment Day *is surely coming*. God has set a date when all mankind will stand before Him. (Acts 17:31) In human terms, this date may be slow in coming, but God will resurrect the dead and He will ensure that every person receives his due reward. God's love is the perfect balance between justice and mercy. On Judgment Day, mercy will be shown to the merciful and justice will be imposed on the unjust. **"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."** (Matthew 5:7)

In closing, your daughter said, "Religion is a perpetual curse. It masks the harsh realities of life at best and at worst, it justifies killing those with whom it disagrees." History also proves that this

comment has some validity, however, her comment does not encompass the whole topic. Whether she realizes it or not, each person has a spiritual dimension. God created us with a desire to be near Him, to know Him, and to love Him. This natural desire is the reason that religion flourishes all over the world in various forms.

Of course, the practice of religion is not to be confused with the attributes of God. God is the source of truth and no religion understands the whole truth. The two are separate and distinct. Religious practice is an expression of what people think or believe about God.

Our actions, even the actions of your daughter, reveal our beliefs about God. Everyone practices a religion of some kind. Agnostics, Catholics, Moslems, Jews, Protestants, Eastern Mystics, and the Heathen have beliefs about God and each person acts accordingly. History demonstrates that humanity has done horrible things out of devotion to a false understanding of God and yes, history also demonstrates that many good things have happened because of people's love for God. So, do we determine whether God is love by the harmful deeds of the many or by the generous deeds of a few?

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

Two Bible Questions Answered

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Dear Mr. Wilson:

I worked for a company of 500 employees for 12 years in the accounting department. For the past five years, I was in charge of accounts payable. I was fired on April 28 and escorted to the door because of time fraud. Emotionally, I am still reeling from this because I was highly conscientious about my responsibilities at work. In short, here is the story: Two years ago my employer's business began to slow down due to the ailing economy.

The company terminated some of the newer employees in the accounting department because there wasn't enough work to keep everyone busy. As the manager of accounts payable, I found that I could get 98% of my work done by 2 p.m. and after dealing with some boredom, I thought I would use my "unproductive time" by starting an internet business on the side. (I had high-speed internet access at my work desk.) At no time did I put my personal business on a higher priority than that of my employer.

I simply used the internet when I was not busy with my employer's work to take care of personal business. I stayed "on top" of my work-related duties and made sure that I met all of my employee responsibilities and deadlines. On Friday, April 25, my computer died. I called the computer support department and they took my computer to the shop for repair.

When I returned Monday morning, there was a note on my desk indicating the CFO [Chief Financial Officer] wanted to see me first thing. I went to his office and he told me that I had been fired for time fraud. The computer repair team had discovered my personal business and a substantial set of records of my personal activities.

I tried to explain that my personal business had not affected my work or my competency as the manager of accounts payable. I reminded him that my employee reviews had been excellent. He agreed that I had been a great employee, but he also said I had lost my dedication to the company and diluted my efforts toward its success with personal pursuits. He said that my personal business during work hours had "robbed" the company of my time, creativity, and energy that it was due.

He said that if I had "non-productive time" that I was obligated to seek out other assignments within the company because the company was paying me a salary to be totally dedicated to the success of the company, not my personal interests. He asked, "Why should my company pay you and other employees to conduct business for yourself?"

He said he was very sorry that I had divided my interests and loyalty. He called Security and a guard escorted me to my desk and after gathering up a few personal items, I was escorted to the door.

Needless to say, I have been devastated. I never thought of myself as thief. I am angry for losing a great job at a time like this. I thought that as long as I was "doing my job," that nothing more was expected of me. I was wrong. I have been sickened by the ordeal and seeking another job with time fraud in my history is painful.

I am writing to ask whether you think I owe my former employer some form of "restitution." I have read your articles on the importance of making things right and I am trying to sort this out. The CFO said I stole time and money from them and in retrospect, I have to agree. What do you think the Lord wants me to do?

Sincerely,

Michelle"

Dear Michelle:

Thank you for your e-mail. I know you are in a painful situation. You have asked a good question and I hope my response will be helpful. Before I address the issue of restitution, I would like to comment on a couple things. First, time fraud is a huge problem in America.

In 2005, a survey was taken on employee practices by Salary.com and America Online. They found that employees spend an average of 2.09 hours per eight-hour workday on something other than their jobs, not including lunch and breaks. Based on these averages, employee time-wasting costs U.S. employers an estimated $544 billion each year. More than half of the 2,706 people surveyed admitted that their biggest distraction during work hours was surfing the internet for personal uses.

Other distractions included socializing with co-workers, running errands outside the office, personal phone calls, and personal business endeavors. Michelle, think about this. If your salary was $20 an hour, and you spent approximately three hours a day on personal business, in a week’s time you have stolen $300 in wages from your employer. (Actually, the amount is much greater than $300 per week because your employer pays taxes based on your earnings, as well as vacation time, health insurance, retirement, etc.)

The second thing I need to say is that your remarks give me the impression that you may not fully realize the extent of your actions. Here is the problem: You defined your job rather than allowing your employer to dynamically define or redefine your job. You wrote, "At no time did I put my personal business on a higher priority than that of my employer."

This is not true. When you concluded that you could finish your duties by 2 p.m., you should have gone to your employer and said, "I don’t have enough work to stay busy." You should have been honest, but you were not. Rather, you began doing personal business at your employer’s expense. You substituted your employer’s job description with personal goals.

It is clear to me that you owe restitution to your former employer. We cannot expect God to forgive us for stealing without first making an effort to restore what we stole. Jesus said, **"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar.**

First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. 'Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.' " (Matthew 5:23-26)

You may have been naive when you started doing business for yourself at work. Nevertheless, you were fired because you stole time and money from your employer. Your employer faithfully paid you to work for him, not yourself. I think you should go back to the CFO and tell him that you now realize the seriousness of your actions and that you would like to make amends. Ask him to help you determine what you owe the company and reassure him that you will somehow pay it – even if it takes you many months.

Further, if you are interested, tell him that you have learned a painful lesson and that you would be pleased to work for the company again in whatever position he might deem appropriate. Be courageous, admit your error, and do your best to make it right even if he does not offer you a job.

At least, when he is called for a reference, he will have to admit that yes, you were fired for time fraud, but you have since done everything possible to atone for your actions. This will speak volumes about your integrity and character, and most of all, you will have peace with God knowing that you have done the right thing. Now, get going with restitution, and the guilt that nags at you will quickly disappear!

Best regards,

Larry Wilson

Is Sabbath the Seventh Day?

"Dear Larry Wilson:

Is there a simple way to prove that the seventh day of the week, Saturday, is the same seventh day of Creation? I am asking because my co-worker says time has been lost and we can't possibly know which day of the week is God's seventh day.

Thank you, Glen"

Dear Glen:

Yes, there is a simple way to prove that Saturday, the seventh day of our week, is the seventh day Sabbath Creation. Here is how: About 2,500 years after Creation, Jesus delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery. He took them into the wilderness and gave them manna to eat. For forty years Jesus Himself demonstrated which day was His seventh day Sabbath because no manna fell on that day! Even more compelling, if we jump forward to when Jesus was on Earth, the Bible records how He observed the seventh day which He Himself had made holy at Creation. (Luke 4:16)

In the second century, A.D., Christians in Rome began deviating from observing the seventh day Sabbath. About 45 B.C., Mirthraism took root in Rome and many Romans worshiped on Sunday, the holy day of Mirthra, the Sun God, before Christianity arrived in Rome.

As the Mirthraites converted to Christianity, they wanted to continue observing Sunday as a holy day. This was because Sunday observance was prevalent in Rome by the second century A.D. and Roman Christians wanted to avoid being associated or identified with the Jews. (The Romans despised the Jews.)

As time passed, the church at Rome became the influential center for Christian doctrine, and the Emperor of Rome, Constantine, became a Christian for political reasons. He imposed the first Sunday law in March, A.D. 321 – a law that pleased the Mirthraites, as well as the Christians. Today, as you know, most Christians worship on Sunday, the first day of the week.

There is one more item that you need to know. During the sixth century A.D., Mohammed established the sixth day of the week as a day that all Moslems must attend a religious service and participate in prayers at a mosque. Any Moslem will affirm that the sixth day of the week is adjacent to the seventh day of the week which the Jews observe. The Jewish seventh day is also adjacent to the first day of the week which is observed by Christians.

Without realizing it, three antagonistic religions agree on the synchrony of the weekly cycle. **This proves that time has not been lost.** The seventh day of Creation remains synchronous with the seventh day of our week. Mankind typically calls it by its Roman name, Saturday, but God still calls it Sabbath.

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

Is Alcohol Use Permitted According to the Bible?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Larry Wilson:
My girlfriend and I are having a conflict over the use of a "little" alcohol. I believe the Bible permits the use of a little alcohol. After all, Jesus turned water into *wine* at a wedding feast. (John 2:9) She disagrees. She believes the wine at the wedding feast was not alcoholic, but she cannot prove this. She says the Bible does not approve the use of alcohol except for medical reasons.

Please help us resolve this thorny issue. Here are three texts that keep us from resolving this issue into a "yes" or "no." (1) 1 Timothy 5:23: **"Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses."** (2) Deuteronomy 14:26: **"Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice."** (3) Ephesians 5:18: **"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."**

Sincerely,
James"

Hello James:
Thank you for your e-mail. I am happy to learn that the Bible is important to you and your girlfriend. Much has been written on this topic and I cannot present every aspect of this subject in this short response. However, I will try to give you a summary statement. First, I want you to know I agree with your girlfriend.

Paul did encourage Timothy to use a "little alcohol" for his illnesses because it was widely known in ancient times that alcohol had medicinal value, but Paul also told the believers in Ephesians that Christians are not to get drunk on wine. Some Christians see some wiggle room in Ephesians 5:18 arguing that they can drink a "little" without getting drunk.

To those who use this argument, consider this: In the United States, a person is determined to be legally impaired with a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of .08%. This means that if you are a female weighing approximately 100 pounds, impairment from wine begins with one 4 oz. drink and your BAC exceeds .08% after a second drink.

So, for a women this size, two 4 oz. drinks of wine makes you legally impaired. If you are a male weighing approximately 180 pounds, impairment begins with the second drink and your BAC exceeds .08% after a third drink. So, three drinks makes you legally impaired. (One drink is 1.4 oz. of 80 proof liquor, 12 oz. of beer, or 4 oz. of table wine.) For what it’s worth, commercial drivers are limited to a BAC of only .04%. This is half of the .08% BAC permitted for non-commercial drivers! It does not take very much alcohol to legally impair a person.

God’s Generous Forbearance

When God delivered Israel out of Egyptian bondage, He permitted the Jews to use "a little alcohol" at special occasions. For example, speaking of their compulsory attendance at three annual feasts which would be held in various places, God said, **"[If you live a great distance from the place for the festival, convert the tithe of your harvest into silver for the trip and when you get to the place I have designated]**

Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice." (Deuteronomy 14:26, insertion mine) Some people use this verse inappropriately to justify the use of alcohol. When God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, He permitted Israel to keep slaves (Leviticus 25:44), permitted men to have multiple wives (Deuteronomy 17:17 – in fact, the twelve sons of Jacob originated from four women. See Genesis 29:23, 29:30, 30:4, 30:9.), and permitted divorce for reasons other than adultery (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

When Israel first came out of Egyptian bondage, God permitted Israel to do things that were not ideal. Israel was a backward nation consisting of poorly educated slaves with a lot of bad habits and customs. Initially, God dealt patiently with Israel’s illiteracy and degeneracy, but over time, it was God’s intention to transform the nation of Israel into a great nation with a high degree of literacy, a marvelous theocracy, a judiciary system that was second to none, and the highest living standards.

God did everything He could do to transform Israel into a great nation that would be the envy of all nations. Tragically, Israel could not stay away from repetitious bouts of apostasy and ruin.

When Jesus was on Earth, He noted Israel’s corporate failure in a conversation about divorce. **"Jesus replied, ‘Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning** [of marriage]**.**

I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.’ " (Matthew 19:8,9, insertion mine) This verse clearly reveals what was permissible at the time of Moses was not ideal. I am sure that if God had imposed His ideals on Israel at the time of the Exodus, no one would have wanted to leave Egypt. As terrible as Pharaoh and his taskmasters were, Israel’s carnal nature, with its degenerate passions and appetites, was rather content in Egypt. This explains why after leaving Egypt, many of the Hebrews wanted to return. (Exodus 16:3, Numbers 11:4-6)

Leading by Example

To get the nation of Israel going in the right direction, God started with Israel’s leaders. For example, those who were called to serve God as priests were forbidden to use alcohol. **"You** [Aaron, as the High Priest] **and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die** [I will kill you]**.**

This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean [and you cannot do this when your reasoning is impaired]**, and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses** [and how can you teach others and demonstrate the holy ways of the Lord if you are impaired with alcohol?]**"** (Leviticus 10:9-11, insertions mine)

You may recall how Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, entered the Tent of Meeting while in an inebriated state. They used unholy fire in an atonement service and upon seeing their impudence, God killed them. (Leviticus 10:1,2) The painful point here is that alcohol interferes with reason and self-control. Stupid choices always produce painful consequences.

Wine is a Mocker

When people drink, more often than not, they say things and do things they regret later on – sometimes for a lifetime. Solomon noticed this phenomenon. He wrote, **"Wine is a mocker** [it will make a fool out of you]**, strong drink is raging** [intoxication is maddening – it leads to abuse, conflict, and assault]**: and whosoever is deceived** [by a mind numbing intoxication] **thereby is not wise."** (Proverbs 20:1, insertions mine)

The Bible records an incident after the flood when Noah got drunk and took off his clothes. Almost always, nudity, sexual immorality, and drinking go together. **"Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered** [stoned and naked] **inside his tent.**

Ham, the father of Canaan, [accidently] **saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine** [stupor] **and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, 'Cursed be** [my grandson] **Canaan!**

The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.' " (Genesis 9:20-25, insertions mine) Wine caused Noah to lose his dignity. The great patriarch who built the ark and "saved the world" was highly embarrassed after he learned that he had been seen naked and he cursed his *grandson* for Ham's offense!

It was considered a most grievous offense in ancient times for a patriarch or tribal king to be seen naked. (Note: Noah may have cursed his grandson because the he may have been responsible for guarding his grandfather's tent. Contrary to what some have claimed, there is no evidence that Noah's curse had any effect on Canaan. This curse did not originate from God or through God. Noah was indignant that his nakedness had been exposed, and in reality, he should have cursed himself for getting drunk.)

If You Really Want to Draw Near to God

Throughout human history, there are times when people desire divine intervention. These moments are usually characterized by a desperate situation of some kind that could have a fatal or catastrophic outcome. Historically, the pagans would petition their gods by bringing expensive gifts to the temple of their god. Of course, the priests were delighted to receive these expensive gifts and they assured the worshipers that their petition would be heard.

However, God gave the Jews a very different approach. If someone wanted to petition God or seek His favor, they could temporarily become a "Nazirite." Everyone partaking in a Nazirite vow belonged to a "tribe" which was temporarily, but wholeheartedly dedicated to the service and will of God. **"**[Moses]

Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the Lord as a Nazirite, he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins [because of the possibility of fermentation]**.' "** (Numbers 6:2,3, insertions mine)

A Nazarite vow could last for days or weeks, depending upon the desire of the petitioner. During this time, the petitioner sometimes fasted while devoting much time to prayer, study, and meditation. If a person wished to draw near to God by becoming a Nazirite, God required a clear mind. Hence, the use of grapes or anything fermented was forbidden!

The Wedding Miracle

As soon as a grape is crushed and the juice makes contact with the air, fermentation begins. Depending on the type of grapes, the storage temperature, the yeast involved, and other factors, pure grape juice can deteriorate into an awful tasting liquid within a week or two because of fermentation.

Making a good tasting wine or vinegar is not a casual endeavor. The process involves separating the grape skins, adding the right type of yeast to the juice just at the right time, and then aging the wine in specially prepared containers. The process is lengthy and it involves considerable effort and attention. I mention these facts because Jesus instantly turned 150 gallons of water into wine at a wedding party in Cana of Galilee. (John 2)

When the master of the banquet tasted the wine that Jesus made, he was astonished at its quality! (He did not know that the wine was the result of a miracle when he made this remark to the bridegroom: **". . . Everyone brings out the choice wine** [the most expensive wine] **first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."** (John 2:10, insertions mine) It is clear from these remarks that alcohol was served at some Jewish weddings in Christ's time because the master of the banquet mentions that cheaper wines were usually served after the guests "had too much to drink."

Three points should be considered: First, nonalcoholic grape juice was not readily available in

Bible times unless it was harvest time. Grape juice begins fermenting as soon as it is expressed from the grape, so grape juice quickly acquires some level of alcoholic content depending on how it is treated.

Second, the Jews often served alcohol at weddings in Bible times. (Many Jews still do this today.) A fine wine today will have an alcoholic content ranging between 12% to 17% and I assume the same would hold true in Bible times. So, depending on the weight of a person, two or three 4 oz. drinks of "fine wine" would render a person legally impaired. Third, there has been much debate through the centuries on whether the miracle wine produced by Jesus was *pure* grape juice or a *fine* wine having alcoholic content.

Personally, I think there is a fourth choice. I am persuaded that Jesus created an exquisite wine that was free of alcohol. Nonalcoholic wine has been around for a long time, although it never has been very popular. My reason for believing Jesus created nonalcoholic wine is simple.

A miracle is a miracle. Instantly, 150 gallons of ordinary water became a "better tasting wine." The technology that Jesus used to make this wine does not exist. His wine has not been replicated. It was not manmade. This wine came from God. Knowing the ministry and mission of Jesus as we now do, I do not think He would give the wedding guests an intoxicating beverage.

We know what happened when Noah got drunk, we know what Solomon says about wine, we know what God required of His priests, we know that Paul told the Ephesians not to get drunk on wine, and we know what God required in the Nazirite vow. Therefore, it is incongruous to think that Jesus created a wine that would make people drunk. The Author of Life came here to draw sinners to God. If the manna in the desert was the food of angels, perhaps the wine created at this wedding was a sample of what angels drink!

James, there is one more aspect to this topic that I hope you will consider. The use of alcohol for recreational purposes has created nine million alcoholics and another nine million people have a chronic drinking problem. Addictive substances have compelling power over human beings and this is why the use of alcohol and tobacco (and other addictive substances) is regulated by our government.

The Bible does not explicitly address the use of addictive substances because God gave mankind the ability to reason from cause to effect. For example, a person can argue that the Bible does not condemn cigarette smoking, the use of marijuana, cocaine, or methamphetamine and they would be *technically* correct.

This silence does not support the recreational use of these substances! God has given us the ability to reason and it does not take a great deal of research to see the harmful effects of these drugs. The facts are crystal clear. Once a person begins experimenting with addictive drugs, the likelihood of addiction is so great and the addiction is so permanent that there is no such thing as moderation after an addiction begins.

Any argument used to support the recreational use of alcohol can be used for recreational smoking.

Consider the addictive nature of cigarette smoking for a moment. Most people begin smoking before they turn 18. Today, some 82,000,000 people in the USA are addicted to cigarettes. Of course, nicotine does not impair the brain like alcohol, yet according to the Center for Disease Control, almost a half million people die prematurely each year from smoke-related diseases. (The life-span of smokers is reduced by an average of 15 years.)

Given the addictive nature of smoking (one in four is addicted) and the harmful effects on health that follow, what position should a Christian take on smoking? Should we take a position of approval as long as smoking is done in moderation because the Bible does not explicitly condemn the habit? Of course not!

As I wrote earlier, 18 million people are either addicted to alcohol or they have a chronic drinking problem. If each person belongs to a family of four people, the number of people affected by the demon of alcohol approaches 70 million!

Even more, about 100,000 deaths are associated with alcohol in the USA each year; 5% of all deaths from diseases of the circulatory system are attributed to alcohol; 15% of all deaths from diseases of the respiratory system are attributed to alcohol; 30% of all deaths from accidents caused by fire and flames are attributed to alcohol;

30% of all accidental drownings are attributed to alcohol; 30% of all suicides are attributed to alcohol; 40% of all deaths due to accidental falls are attributed to alcohol; 45% of all deaths in automobile accidents are attributed to alcohol; and 60% of all homicides are attributed to alcohol. Given these stats on alcohol, should Christians take the position that recreational drinking is OK? No!

James, the facts tell us that the recreational use of *any* addictive substance is foolish for two reasons. First, 82 million smokers and 18 million drinkers prove how easy it is to become addicted. Science now knows that *a single* cigarette, drink, snort of cocaine or meth rock can produce a life-long addict.

Second, Christians should be clear and unequivocal about anything that has an addictive potential. Total abstinence from these substances, just like total abstinence from premarital sex, aligns with divine wisdom and the Word of God. *Anything* that impairs our ability to resist temptation should be treated with contempt.

The devil is a roaring lion, and he works every angle to bring people down into the pit of hopelessness or at the least, life-long regret. Alcohol causes people to do things they would not ordinarily do. Alcohol is a demon in a bottle, if it conquers you – your life and the lives of those who love you will be full of suffering and heartache. *Being spiritually impaired is far worse than being legally impaired.*

Jesus came to Earth to show us how to live, how to love God and each other, and how to overcome sin. Even though He was tempted in all points as we are, Jesus did not sin and neither would He want us to impair the power and work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds with a substance that causes us to diminish the seriousness of sin. **"So whether you eat**

or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Your girlfriend is correct! Seems to me, she has a good head on her shoulders.

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

Are Children Born Lost or Saved?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Larry Wilson:
I have wondered about the eternal destiny of infants and young children who die before reaching the age of accountability. Are they "lost" or "saved?"
Sincerely,
Crystal "

Dear Crystal:
For twenty centuries, Christians have debated the question of how God deals with the death of young children. In ancient times, infant mortality was very high, so to make sure that infants would inherit eternal life, certain Christians began baptizing infants as soon as possible after birth.

In fact, Catholics and a few other Christian groups currently believe that baptism is a requirement for eternal life, so they apply the *sacrament* of baptism to infants as soon as possible. (See John 3:5.) On the other hand, most Protestants do not accept the idea that sacraments are necessary for salvation.

Protestants believe that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone and baptism is regarded as an ordinance. (An ordinance is something that a believer does to show publicly that he or she is a follower of Christ, but it is not a requirement for salvation.)

As you can see, baptism means different things to different Christians, but the question still remains, "What happens to children who die before reaching the age of accountability?" Are they saved because they were baptized, are they condemned because they were born into the curse of sin or does God deal with them as though they never existed?

I believe that all children, in all religions and cultures, are born in a "saved" state. Yes, the Bible teaches that all human beings are born with fallen natures. We come from the womb having a natural tendency toward selfishness, sin, and rebellion, but I believe God does not impart guilt to children for their sins until they reach the age of accountability. For normal children, the age of accountability (knowing the difference between right from wrong and having the ability to follow through with a conscientious decision to do right or wrong) varies somewhere between the ages of 7 and 14.

In other words, God does not condemn a child to eternal death because (a) Adam sinned, (b) the child's parents are sinners, or (c) the child is a *natural* born sinner. If the blood of Jesus can *justify* an adult who has willingly sinned, then the blood of Jesus can also *justify* a child whose ability to reason is limited and knowledge of right and wrong is incomplete. A child is a living trust given to parents until he or she is intellectually and emotionally prepared to bear the responsibilities of adulthood – or age 18, whichever comes first.

Because the emotions of children can be easily swayed, because children cannot reason adequately, and because children do not have a well-defined understanding of right and wrong, they do not have accountability during their first years of life. In fact, this is why we call them "minors" until they are 18 years old.

Minors do not have the same rights as adults. Minors cannot enter into legal agreements, own property, vote, or get married without parental consent. Because children lack judgment (intellectually and emotionally), they are not generally held to the same standards of conduct as adults. (Occasionally, there are cases in juvenile courts where minors are charged and sentenced as adults because the court proves that the minor knew the difference between right and wrong and chose to willfully do wrong.)

If, in our fallen state, we realize the insufficiency of minors, surely God does, too. Notice how God deals with the insufficiency of Gentiles (those who do not know God). **"Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law** [of God, that is, a revelation of the will of God]**, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts** [by the Holy Spirit]**, their consciences** [when they do right are free of guilt] **also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing** [when they do wrong, they know their guilt]**, now** [their actions show their faith] **even defending them** [in God's sight]**."** (Romans 2:14,15)

Paul makes the point clear that when Gentiles follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, God accepts them as His children even though they do not know Him! God justifies Gentiles who do not know Him because He sees the hearts of Jews and Gentiles alike. A person's salvation is not based on the purity of his beliefs about God. Instead, a person's salvation is based on his response to the Holy Spirit. Our response to the Spirit reveals our faith. God called Abraham to leave his homeland.

The Bible says, **"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."** (Hebrews 11:8) When God called Abraham, one could say that Abraham was a Gentile!

God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to leave his family and home behind, and Abraham passed the test because Abraham loved God! Similarly, God knows that many Gentiles are honest in heart and they would gladly do all that He commands if only they had knowledge of His commands! Therefore, since God is willing, through the blood of Jesus, to justify Gentiles who do not know His ways, God also justifies insufficient minors with the same blood!

Carefully consider this passage: **"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men** [that is, death was imposed upon all mankind because of sin's curse]**, because all sinned – for before the law was given** [at Mount Sinai]**, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account** [that is, God does not impart guilt] **when there is no** [knowledge of the] **law** [right and wrong] **. . . .**

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men [the curse of sin was passed along to the offspring of Adam through his sin]**, so also the result of one act**

of righteousness [Jesus living a perfect life for us, without sin] **was justification that brings** [eternal] **life for all men.**

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus Christ] **the many** [sinners] **will be made righteous** [before God]**."** (Romans 5:12, 13, 18, 19 insertions mine)

Paul affirms three important facts in Romans 5 that every Christian should know. First, Adam's offspring inherited Adam's fallen nature. Thus, everyone, but Christ, has sinned because we have Adam's sinful nature. Second, even though a person will eventually die because of the consequences of sin, God does not impart guilt to a person who sins ignorantly. God is more than fair. He does not hold a person accountable for things that person does not or cannot know.

However, God does hold a person responsible for refusing to learn. Third, God reconciled the world to Himself through the blood of Jesus. Jesus voluntarily came to Earth and died in our place so that God could legally save sinners through the process of covering our life's record with the perfect life of Christ.

(The process of covering our sinful record with Christ's sinless record is called "justification.") The net effect of God's love is truly beautiful: *In spite of Adam's failure and our sinful natures, each child starts out in life "saved" through Christ's perfect life until a time comes when as an adult, that person insists on rebellion against the Holy Spirit.*

Look at this verse: **"For if, when we were God's enemies** [that is, when we were in rebellion against God, nevertheless]**, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life** [the gift of His sinless life which covers our sins]**! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."** (Romans 5:10,11, insertions mine)

The Holy Spirit Has Two Objectives

When a baby is born, the Holy Spirit begins working with that baby. The Holy Spirit understands the sinful nature which the baby has inherited. The Holy Spirit understands the rebellion that is in each human heart. The Holy Spirit also understands the language and culture of the baby.

He also understands the religious training which the baby will receive. The Holy Spirit knows all this, but He has two persistent objectives. First, He wants to impress on the child the importance of honesty and truth, that is, firmly standing up for what is right and good and abhorring whatever is wrong and evil. Second, the Holy Spirit works on each person to bring us into submission with the will of God. (For some people, this happens in childhood, and for others, submission occurs in adulthood.)

Obviously, the Holy Spirit has many obstacles to overcome such as arrogance and ignorance,

but the greatest obstacle for the Holy Spirit is man's *natural* rebellion toward God's authority! For example, God says love your enemies. Human beings do not naturally love their enemies.

God says do not steal, commit adultery, covet, or lie. God says, take care of your parents, do not commit sexual immorality, do not take His name in vain, do not worship idols, and do not forget to rest on the seventh day, as He did. So, what is the problem with doing all that God wants?

"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." (Romans 8:5-8)

The Holy Spirit may work on the heart of a person for many years, attempting to bring that person into a "born again state." Being born again means starting all over in life. Paul says it is a whole new beginning, a new life! (Romans 6:4) Finding submission to God's will as a joyful experience is *only possible* after being born again. Some people have "on again – off again" experiences with the Holy Spirit for years. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit does not give up until He sees our rebellion cannot be overcome.

I have known people who have resisted the Holy Spirit for most of their lives, and then at the end of their lives, they finally relinquished their rebellion and surrendered their will to the Lord before it was too late. I have also seen people resist the Holy Spirit and die without appearing to have any interest in God or spiritual matters.

Of course, I am not in a position to read the mind or heart of anyone, but I am saying that the hope of salvation is *lost* when we grieve away the Holy Spirit. Once the Spirit leaves, there is no return and in His absence, there is no further interest in spiritual things or a desire to glorify God. **"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."** (Hebrews 10:26,27)

Conclusion

From birth, everyone has a sinful nature. Therefore, a minor will sin, but a minor is guiltless in God's sight because he or she is intellectually and emotionally insufficient. Jesus has reconciled the whole world to the Father through His perfect life and sacrificial blood.

This means that God is permitted to legally wrap every minor and every submissive person in the perfect record of Christ's life (justification). Salvation is a gift from God for everyone. Salvation does not come through sacraments, rituals, or observing ordinances. What matters to God is our response to the demands that the Holy Spirit imposes on us. If we are honest-hearted and love "the light of truth," we will embrace the truth, and then upon experiencing rebirth, we will make every effort to conform our lives to Christ's gospel through His power.

If we remain self-centered and rebellious and we allow our fallen nature to control us, we can be sure the Holy Spirit is not making headway in His struggle to bring us into submission. Obviously, the Holy Spirit tests different people with different things to see if they are willing to obey God.

Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler? (Luke 18:18-24) He failed the test of selling his material wealth for Christ's sake. He loved his religion and his money more than he loved God. He could not walk away from his wealth and his status in Israel and follow Jesus. One the other hand, King Nebuchadnezzar is an example of a rich ruler who was tested with humility, and after being humiliated by God's Spirit for seven years, the king finally became a believer. (Daniel 4:35-37)

In closing, **"Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' "** (Matthew 19:14) Crystal, if you can accept the idea that minors are freely justified by God's grace, this text will make perfect sense just as it reads!

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

Submit to My Husband or God?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:
I am in a difficult situation. About two years ago a coworker gave me a copy of your little book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled.* Your explanation of the seven trumpets, the full cup principle and God's Sabbath rest made sense to me. I cannot explain the impact this little book had on my thinking.

It was like having a light bulb switched on. Then, I read your book, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega* and numerous articles posted on your website. Suddenly, a number of Bible topics harmonized together in ways that I did not anticipate or expect. I am constantly amazed how everything in the Bible fits together. The Bible has become a new book for me. Things are so much clearer now.

I was raised in a Pentecostal church and my husband was raised in a divided Baptist home (his mother went to church, but his father was not spiritually interested). After marriage, we did not attend church for a few years. One day, we were invited by some neighbors to attend a church service and after a few months, we joined a Southern Baptist church. My husband and I attended numerous Bible study classes and eventually, we became leaders in the church. I resigned from my duties this past December with the excuse that I needed a break.

Even though I was a whole-hearted-born-again Baptist for eighteen years, there were things about church doctrine that "quietly" bothered me. I ignored these issues because we were busy and we had an active church life. I was happy and fulfilled being a Southern Baptist until I read your books. Now that I have spent a couple years investigating the Bible from another perspective, I can see that Baptists "cherry pick" the Bible to make it say what we want to believe. (In fact, it seems that all Christians do this unintentionally and this explains why Protestants are so divided over what the Bible teaches.)

As you know, Southern Baptists are firmly opposed to the idea that Saturday is God's holy day, and after studying and praying about this topic for several months, I am convinced that most Protestants, including Southern Baptists, are wrong about this. Even though I am not a Bible scholar, I now believe that Saturday is God's holy day and the historical change from Sabbath to Sunday is easy to understand.

Of course, my friends think that I have become a legalist. But I clearly understand that salvation does not come through Sabbath observance or for that matter, the observance of any law, including the Ten Commandments, because we are saved through faith.

It is also clear to me that God writes His Ten Commandments in our hearts when we fully surrender to His will. Like King David, I tell God, **"I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."** (Psalm 40:8) I believe the fourth commandment is as important as the other nine and my observance of God's Sabbath has created a serious problem in our marriage

and I don't know what to do.

My husband does not understand what has happened to me. He is a wonderful man and we have three precious teenagers. He is Scripturally frustrated and socially embarrassed because of me. At times he is angry and at other times sympathetic. Obviously, our paths have diverged and I am concerned about our relationship and the impact this is having on our children.

Spiritually speaking, I would say the main difference between us right now is that I search the Bible to discover what it teaches rather than using a few texts to defend what I was taught to believe. Our closest friends are also frustrated with me since I no longer attend church. Relationships with church friends are strained and this annoys my husband. Two friends told me that I should submit to my husband's will on religious matters. They believe that if I will submit to his authority, God will hold him – not me – responsible for going against my conviction.

My husband agrees with them. He thinks that I have become rebellious (not living in submission to his will) and legalistic (working my way to Heaven). My husband can't see how the whole Southern Baptist Church, including men like the Rev. Billy Graham, could be wrong about the holiness of the Sabbath. My husband says that I have become a stumbling block for our children and since I no longer attend church on Sunday, he says that I am violating "the assembling of ourselves together" on Sunday.

I don't know if you understand the emphasis and importance of wives submitting to their husbands in the Southern Baptist Church, but I need help with Ephesians 5:22-24. My husband uses this text to prove that I am in rebellion. **"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands *in everything*."** (Ephesians 5:22-24, emphasis mine)

How can I honor the Lord by doing what I believe is right (observing His Sabbath) without dishonoring my husband who says I am not in submission to his authority?
Thank you,
Jennifer"

Dear Jennifer:
Thank you for your e-mail. As I see it, you and your husband have two problems. You have a social problem and you have a theological problem and these two problems are intertwined. If I understand correctly, the two of you enjoyed religious harmony for many years. You went to church together, your closest friends were church friends, and your lives centered around the Baptist church and its activities. Now, because of your choices, there is a big void in your husband's life. Your thirst for knowledge from God's Word and your willingness to uphold the fourth commandment has terminated your church life and ruined your husband's social life.

When the *totality* of a marriage is shattered by a spouse, the situation can spiral into a meltdown, but it doesn't have to end that way. I hope that you will do whatever you can, both in words and actions, to assure your husband that even though you have undergone an unexpected spiritual change, your love and affection for him and your children has never been

stronger.

Similarly, I hope your husband will love you enough to give you due consideration. I hope he will listen to your discoveries in the Bible by giving you several heart-to-heart opportunities to present your case. Of course, he can't read your mind or understand your convictions, but he should be able to eventually understand your logic, your sincerity, and your devotion to God and His Word – even if he honestly disagrees.

Finally, even if you end up agreeing to disagree on religious matters, you can maintain a good marriage by strengthening ties that bond you together. Remember when you were first married? Your lives did not center around the Baptist church and church friends, and I assume you were quite happy with each other before religion filled your lives.

Equals in Salvation

The doctrine of wives submitting to their husbands is complicated and it is often distorted. Before I jump into this topic, I need to highlight two points. First, when properly understood, the doctrine of submission has nothing to do with salvation. It has to do with attitude. Second, the Bible teaches that men and women are equals when it comes to salvation's process. Please consider these seven questions:

1. - In terms of salvation, is there any difference between God saving a man and God saving a woman? No. As sinners, males and females are equals. We have the same need for a Savior. At Calvary, Jesus redeemed *the whole world;* this means men as well as women. (1 John 2:2)

2. - In terms of rebirth, is there any difference between what is required of a man and a woman to enter Heaven? No. Men and women are equals. Everyone has to be born again in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven. (John 3:5)

3. - If a woman obeys her husband 100% of the time, will her submission save her from hell? No, women are not saved through works (obedience) and neither are men. Men and women are equals. Salvation comes through faith for all *mankind*. (Ephesians 2:8,9)

4. - Will a woman go to hell because she was not submissive to her husband? No. Wives are not subservient to their husbands. Women and men are human beings. Human beings have the ability to think for themselves, make decisions, and take action. Both have reasoning powers and both are accountable to God for their actions.

A husband is not God. In fact, the first commandment requires men and women to love God and to submit to God first! (Exodus 20:3, Matthew 22:37,38) Jesus is the judge of mankind. He determines who will be saved and lost. (2 Corinthians 5:10) Husbands have no role in the judgment of their wives and the opposite is also true.

5. - Will a woman escape condemnation if she obeys her husband rather than God? No. If a woman chooses to disobey God and obey her husband, she has put her husband's authority

higher than God's authority and this is blasphemy. When men and women don't do what they know is right, God holds us accountable for sin. (James 4:17)

6. - Can a husband save his wife from the penalty for sin? No. Can a wife save her husband from the penalty for sin? No. Everyone has sinned. (Romans 3:23) Sinners cannot save sinners. Sinners may help and encourage other sinners to receive Christ, but that is all sinners can do.

7. - If a husband is saved, does this mean his submissive wife will be saved? No. God judges everyone as individuals. (2 Corinthians 5:10, Eccelsiastes 12:13,14)

After examining these seven points, we are forced to conclude on the authority of Scripture that in terms of salvation, a husband and a wife are equals. God treats men and women the same. Women do not need a husband or a priest to represent them before God. Like men, women can boldly approach the Throne of Grace on their own. (Hebrews 4:16)

Men and women cannot provide salvation or take salvation from each other. The bottom line is clear: In matters of salvation, men and women are equals.

If the doctrine of submission has no bearing on salvation, what is its purpose? The point of wives submitting to their husbands and husbands loving their wives as Christ loves His church is "happiness." When a man and a woman love each other wholeheartedly – they *desire* to get (or stay) married and live *happily* ever after. As long as there is *mutual submission* to each other, there is happiness! But two sinners cannot remain in mutual submission very long, and this is the root problem.

The Stature of Women in Paul's Day

This isn't the place to write an essay on the suffrage and submission of women, but history indicates that no group of people has been mistreated more than women. If you want to understand the stature of women at the time of Christ, study the treatment of women under the former Taliban government in Afghanistan. When Jesus walked on Earth, women were little more than a subculture of slaves. They were not permitted to own property, obtain an education, or hold public office.

They were not permitted to speak publicly. If a woman was brought before the Jewish court (the Sanhedrin), one of the judges was appointed to speak for her. Women were not deemed intelligent enough to converse with anyone other than their husbands or other women, and no man wanted to be publicly humiliated by an ignorant or impudent wife.

The point is that in Bible times, a woman's stature was slightly better than that of an animal. Generally speaking, she was a piece of "property" that required a dowery (a payment to the man who would take her), a domestic slave, and a means for procreation. These details are important to understand because the stature of women affected Paul's ministry and two thousand years later, Paul's treatment of women is often misunderstood.

Because Christianity was born in the cradle of Judaism, Paul was forced to deal with a number of issues that differentiated Christian doctrine from Jewish doctrine. Paul's biggest problem when working among the Jews was that of differentiating salvation through faith versus salvation through works.

The Jews were so biased toward legalism in culture and religion that teaching salvation through faith to them was almost impossible. Paul's biggest problems when working among the Gentiles was their devotion to false gods, the sophistry of Gnosticism, and their addiction to sexual immorality.

As Jews and Gentiles joined the Christian church, Paul faced a new problem – the problem of getting Jews and Gentiles to worship together. For example, there was a constant conflict over circumcision. Gentile converts to Christianity regarded circumcision as a barbaric practice and unnecessary whereas Jewish converts regarded circumcision as a sign of God's election and necessary for salvation.

There were other issues such as eating meat that had been offered to idols and sexual immorality. Had it not been for the unusual presence of Holy Spirit power during the first century A.D., the Christian church would have suffocated in a sea of problems.

Early Christians found Paul's reasoning on various topics sometimes difficult to understand, and early on, Peter noticed a tendency to distort Paul's writings. **"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."** (2 Peter 3:15,16)

The book of Acts tells us that Paul traveled widely around the Roman Empire setting up Christian churches. Whenever a new church was formed, Paul imposed a set of rules on that church. These rules reflected (a) Paul's view of what church order according to the gospel should be, (b) Paul's understanding of the plight of women, and (c) Paul's recommendations to Jews and Gentiles who suffered persecution for following Christ.

These things are said because many well meaning people distort Paul's writings today. They take Paul's writings at face value, having no concern for the time, place, or circumstances. Such an approach to Paul's writings is foolish, immature, and unacceptable.

When a person studies the Bible, he has to understand what was said, why it was said, where it was said, to whom it was said, and the circumstances under which it was said. I am emphasizing this point because *Paul sometimes speaks for himself and not for the Lord.* Consider the following three instances:

"To the rest *I say* this *(I, not the Lord):* If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. . . . But if the unbeliever

leaves, let him do so.

A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule *I lay down* in all the churches." (1 Corinthians 7:12-17, italics and underlines mine)

"*I* [Paul] **do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."** (1 Timothy 2:12-14, insertion, italic, and underline mine)

"***I*** [Paul] **also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission."** (1 Timothy 2:9-11, insertion, italic, and underline mine)

The Necessity of Government

After Paul became a Christian, his position on the necessity of government changed. Whereas the Jews were in a constant state of revolt against the Romans (and the Jewish nation was ultimately destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70), Paul saw the hand of God working through all governments, even the Roman government.

He told the believers in Rome, **"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. *The authorities that exist have been established by God.* Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is *rebelling against what God has instituted,* and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."** (Romans 13:1,2 italics and underlines mine)

This counsel was a hard pill for early Christians to swallow because the Romans hated the Christians just like they hated the Jews. Let me be clear: Paul *is not* suggesting in Romans 13 that it was permissible for a Christian to disobey the law of God in order to obey Roman law. Never. Man's law is beneath God's law. (Acts 5:29) The higher law always comes first. Paul means that as far as possible, Christians are to obey and respect the laws of their government because government is God's creation.

I have presented Romans 13 to show that Paul understood the necessity of government (law and order) for nations, home, and churches. All levels of government require leadership in order to maintain order, accountability, and responsibility. This need for leadership becomes apparent when two or more people form a group, and leadership cannot exist without someone becoming *voluntarily* submissive. As Paul traveled about, Paul appointed elders to lead the churches (1 Timothy 5:17, Titus 1:5) and church members were encouraged to "submit to each other" in love for the benefit of the church. (Ephesians 5:21)

When it comes to submission, Paul leaves no wiggle room about Christian behavior. Christians are to obey God, their governments, and their elders. What should be the nature of this submission? Is it not love? Peter told slaves to submit to their masters with all due respect! **"Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God."** (1 Peter 2:18,19)

Given the status of women in Paul's day, Paul used "the law of Moses" to support his premise that women should not disrupt meetings or speak out in public meetings. **"For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches.**

They are not allowed to speak [because they are uneducated], **but must be in submission** [to their husbands], ***as the Law**** [of Moses] ***says***. **If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is *disgraceful* for a woman** [to embarrass her husband and family] ***to speak* in the church."** (1 Corinthians 14:33-35, insertions, italics, and underlines mine)

(***Note:** Paul evidently refers to Genesis 3:16. **"To the woman he** [the Lord] **said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. *Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.*' "** (Genesis 3:16, insertion, italics, and underlines mine))

Given the stature of women in Paul's day – a subculture of illiterate people, having no human rights or formal instruction in God's Word, Paul did not want newly formed churches destroyed in a free-for-all caused by the freedom which Christianity brought to men *and women*. So, he appealed for church order in a variety of ways.

Look at the bigger picture: **"What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two – or at the most three – should speak, *one at a time,* and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, *the speaker should keep quiet* in the church and speak to himself and God.**

***Two or three* prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, *the first speaker should stop.* For you can all prophesy *in turn* so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.**

The *spirits of prophets are subject to the control* of prophets [In other words, a prophet's mouth is subject to a prophet's will, so the prophet must restrain himself and wait for his turn to speak.] **For *God is not a God of disorder* but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should *remain silent* in the churches.**

They are not allowed *to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.* If they want

to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it *is disgraceful* for a woman to speak in the church." (1 Corinthians 14:26-35, insertions, italics, and underlines mine)

Before his conversion, Paul had been a servant of Judaism. Now, that he was a servant of Jesus Christ, he was in a position to see the difference in masters. Which master offered more joy? Clearly there are two forms of government. One form is based on love (voluntary submission), the other is based on force (forced submission).

The difference in attitude between these two forms of government is enormous. Because Christianity is a religion based on love and righteousness, Paul wanted Christians to understand that love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:10) In other words, when we do the things required in the law because of love, we fulfill the intent of the law! When we do the things required by the law in order to receive salvation, that is legalism – forced submission.

Paul understood that a woman's submission to her husband has to spring from love. To keep men from abusing their authority over women, he put husbands in a difficult position. Paul says that men must love their wives "as Christ loved the church." Submission to a wife was unthinkable in Paul's day. Christ submitted to the death of a criminal in order to save the church. *The point is that Paul elevates the stature of women by requiring men to love their wives as Christ loved the church.*

This means submitting to one another, mutual submission. **"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

***Submit to one another* out of reverence for Christ. Wives, *submit to your husbands* as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as *the church submits to Christ*, so also *wives should submit to their husbands* in everything. *Husbands, love your wives,* just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, *husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies*. He who loves his wife loves himself."** (Ephesians 5:19-28)

Pulling This Together

Jennifer, I know my lengthy response may be a bit overwhelming, but I hope you and your husband can see three things at this point. First, Paul's statements regarding the mutual submission of husbands and wives has nothing to do with salvation. Second, Paul's church rules reflect the stature of women in his day. Third, Paul elevated the stature of women when he commanded men to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and if that wasn't enough, Paul says a husband is to love his wife just as he loves his own body! Even though men and women

are not identical, they are equals. Mutual submission is the way of love and the result is happiness.

Jennifer, since your husband is a Christian, he knows that he is not your God, your Creator, your Redeemer, or your conscience. He also knows that you are not subservient to him. You, Jennifer, have been bought with a price. You are not your own. You belong to Christ. (1 Corinthians 6:19,20)

You were created in God's image just like your husband. (Genesis 1:26,27) You and your husband are equals in God's sight. (Galatians 3:28) You are a human being having inalienable rights bestowed upon you by your Creator. You have a conscience and you can blaspheme the Holy Spirit just as he can. (Matthew 12:31,32)

Even though he may honestly disagree with your newfound religious views, I hope he will honor and respect your right to worship God as you deem appropriate. If the table was turned, I am sure he would appreciate the same respect and religious freedom. Religious persecution occurs whenever a person is punished or threatened for worshiping God according to the dictates of conscience.

Unfortunately, the Baptist church takes a position on women that is similar to that of Catholics and Moslems. Baptists, Catholics, and Moslems exclude women from their clergy for different reasons, but the result is the same. Baptists often use the argument that since the Bible is silent about the ordination of women, then the church must remain silent as well. This approach to the topic reveals there is no moral defense against the ordination of women. Consider this argument: The Bible says nothing about abolishing the practice of slavery.

In fact, as we have already seen, Peter encouraged slaves to obey their masters (1 Peter 2:18) and Paul even returned a runaway slave to his owner. (Philemon 1) Prior to the Civil War, some Southern preachers defended slavery on the basis of silence. The Bible says nothing about abolishing slavery!

This takes us back to the point that I made earlier. People are still distorting Paul's writings (and other Scriptures). They approach Paul's writings without concern for time, place, or circumstances. Such an approach to Paul's writings is foolish, immature, and unacceptable.

Knowing what we do today, it is easy to see the wisdom of Paul's ways. Fortunately, the stature of women has improved in many countries although progress has been slow. Protestantism broke the chains of 1,260 years of Catholic dominion and the Dark Ages ended. Protestantism brought democracy to the world and democracy brought education to men and women.

Today, billions of women are educated and well informed and if they can ably serve as Prime Ministers (Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher) and if they can manage huge corporations like Hewlett Packard (Carly Fiorina) and political campaigns to be president and vice president of the United States (Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin), they are capable of managing a church and serving the Lord as ordained ministers of the gospel if men will put aside some prejudice and ego.

I know that Baptists and Catholics encourage women to live in submission to the authority of their husbands and inherently, this sounds biblical, but this doctrine is a toxic doctrine based on a distortion of Paul's writing. It harms the stature of women unless *the whole truth* is told.

The whole is that Paul demands mutual submission to each other. When the Lord told Eve that *her desire* would be to her husband and that he would rule over her, the Lord did not give men authority over women. Moslems believe that men have the right to beat their wives into submission if they do not voluntarily submit. (Quran 4:34) This is not the way of Christ. Look again at the Word of God, **". . . . Your *desire* will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."** (Genesis 3:16, italics mine)

Adam and Eve were equals before sin and Adam and Eve were equals after sinning. Remember, equals are not necessarily identical. Robert is not identical to Mike, but they are equals. Mike is not identical to his wife, Reba, but they are equals. Recognizing the inherent selfishness of the carnal nature, and recognizing the need for governance in every household, God gave women (through Eve) a predisposition – *a desire* – to acquiesce to their husband's will.

The Lord did this for two reasons. First, mutual submission is necessary for two people to live together. Second, the Lord knows that men can be difficult to deal with emotionally. So, He gave Eve a tender heart for her husband, a *desire* to get along, because this makes for a happy home. (Remember the story of Abigail who was married to a fool? 1 Samuel 25)

One more thing. You mentioned that your husband argues that you should not quit going to church. The following text is exalted by some churches (including Southern Baptists) as though it were one of the Ten Commandments: **"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."** (Hebrews 10:25, KJV)

Paul was moved to write these words because the early church was a church in conflict. When Jews became Christians, they brought their religious baggage into the church. When Gentiles joined the church, they brought their religious baggage into the church and when these diverse people came together for worship, there was more conflict than peace in the early church.

This conflict caused some people to quit attending church and Paul realized that isolation from the body of Christ would prove to be harmful. Consider this: If you remove an ember from a fire, the isolated ember quickly cools. The point here is that corporate worship is important.

For eighteen years you were blessed through corporate worship at the Baptist church. Now, you are looking for another corporate body with which to worship. Your husband needs to understand that corporate worship at the Baptist church is not good for you for at least three reasons: First, your understanding of what the Bible teaches and the will of God has changed. Attending church with him now is a lot like worshiping with the Church of Christ: Yes, your body is in church but your heart and mind are elsewhere.

Second, since you are a former leader in your husband's church and you have publicly rejected

certain doctrines of the Baptist faith, sitting among your "former" friends is disruptive (maybe disgusting) to them and undesirable for you. Last, in an effort to comfort your husband, you may want to tell your husband that you will be happy to go with him on special occasions.

Jennifer, your children are studying you. They have not seen anyone living by faith. They need to see that living by faith is problematic. Faith puts every follower of Christ in a difficult position and this is why living by faith is so hard to do!

Every born-again Christian wants to please God by doing what is right, and since there are differences on what is believed to be right, even among Christians, there is conflict. Often, living by faith requires doing whatever we can to accommodate (without compromise) those who don't understand God's will as we do.

Currently, some twenty-eight million Chinese Christians worship in home churches each week because they are not permitted to meet publicly. Some day, I suspect the same will take place in this country. Bottom line: You can agree with your husband that Christians should participate in corporate worship per Hebrews 10:25, but the more important theme for all of us is worshiping God in spirit and truth. Since you are convicted of the Sabbath, you must honor God by keeping His Sabbath. Jesus said, **"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."** (John 4:23)

Summary

In closing, I have three short statements that I hope you and your husband will consider:

1. Faith is not a denomination.

Faith is a way of life. The biblical definition of faith means obeying God without regard for the consequences. (See Daniel 3 and Hebrews 11.)

2. Others may – you cannot.

Whenever a person is confronted with God's sovereign will and he is placed under conviction by the Holy Spirit, that person must not violate the Holy Spirit because this is a test of faith. In other words, it is possible for one person to have a conviction that others around do not share.

Paul wrote, **"One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything *must not look down* on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything *must not condemn the man who does*, for God has accepted him."** (Romans 14:2,3, italics and underlines mine)

3. A woman's salvation is not determined by her husband.

The New Testament is clear: No one stands between a woman and her Savior, Jesus Christ. Women have access to salvation through faith in Jesus just like men. **"There is neither Jew**

nor Greek, slave nor free, *male nor female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28, italics and underlines mine)

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes in him* shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16, italics and underlines mine)

God's claim on us is higher than any other. No man or woman can permit anyone to stand in his/her way of doing what he/she believes God wants him/her to do. Even though happiness in a home or church comes through loving submission, our first and highest love must be reserved for God. Jesus said, **"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."** (Matthew 19:29)

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

Wealth and Riches Have Wings - Proverbs 23:4,5

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle." **Proverbs 23:4,5**

As I write this report (late October), a financial shaking is taking place. There is a great deal of economic uncertainty. The world in general and our country in particular is dealing with a self-inflicted financial crisis. This crisis began developing a few years ago when an epidemic of greed broke out on Main Street and on Wall Street. When passion overrules integrity, then look out! Suffering follows bad choices because there is an inescapable law: **". . . . A man reaps what he sows."** (Galatians 6:7)

We are reaping a harvest from seeds sown yesterday. I expect our nation's output (GDP) will continue to decline and unemployment will continue to rise. I also anticipate shortages and financial despair for companies and individuals alike all because timeless principles have been violated.

If a person buys a house that he cannot afford, common sense says it's only a matter of time until that person is in a "house of pain." If an investment bank buys bad mortgages because they were thought to be a "good deal," it's only a matter of time until that bank goes bankrupt. If a mortgage insurer sells insurance on bad mortgages that look good on paper, it's only a matter of time until that insurer fails (or needs a bailout). This is the scenario that has unfolded because millions of people allowed their passion for wealth to overrule common sense.

Recently, I heard a television reporter say that more than three trillion dollars *evaporated* from 401(k) retirement accounts, stock holdings and other investments during the past six months. This translates into shattered dreams for many people. Millions of baby-boomers are nearing retirement age.

They have worked many years, storing up their earnings, looking forward to the day when they can retire and "take it easy." However, the current financial crisis and the evaporation of three trillion dollars will force many people to keep working to make ends meet which brings me to the first point in this report. If the acquisition of wealth is too important, then look out! Solomon said, riches can **". . . .sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle."**

The Gold Rush of '49

John Sutter wanted to be a rich man. He emigrated from Switzerland to the United States in 1839 having nothing but ambition. Upon hearing that large parcels of land could be easily acquired in the west, he made his way to California where he obtained approximately 50,000 acres from the Mexican government near Sacramento. (At the time, California belonged to Mexico.) Sutter went from rags to riches in a mere ten years. After the United States acquired

California, Sutter's fortunes looked even brighter because he owned thousands of animals (producing meat and hides) and tens of millions of trees (which were good for lumber).

In 1847, James Marshall and John Sutter met. There was a growing demand for lumber and Marshall knew how to build and operate a water-powered sawmill. Marshall and Sutter formed a partnership and Marshall went to work building a sawmill near Coloma. As the sawmill neared completion, Marshall discovered a problem.

The big waterwheel that generated power for the mill needed to sit lower in the waterway. Rather than having several men dig out the trench by hand, he decided to make the waterway deeper by flushing it overnight with a strong torrent of water. The next morning, January 24, 1848, as Marshall was inspecting the waterway, he noticed some golden pebbles glistening in the sand. He picked up several and hammered on them with a stone to see if their shape could be changed because he knew that gold was soft and fool's gold was brittle.

News of Marshall's discovery broke out like a wild fire and within two years, 100,000 "Forty-niners" descended on northern California (at that time, San Francisco had a population of 457 people). At the height of the gold rush, approximately 100 tons (troy weight) of gold was mined during a period of twelve months.

The average miner produced about sixteen grams of gold per day – about half a troy ounce. To put this in perspective, one dollar gold coins contained 1.6 grams of gold, so sixteen grams of gold translated into earnings of approximately ten dollars per day. Since a "dollar a day" was considered good wages, "ten dollars a day" would have been a phenomenal wage *if* only the prices for land, food, building materials, and the necessities of life had remained unchanged.

But alas, gold fever (greed) broke out and most of the Forty-niners went bankrupt mining for gold. They could not dig up enough gold to pay for the bare necessities of life. Ironically, John Sutter also went bankrupt. He went from riches to rags in ten years. Solomon was right, riches can **". . . .sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle."**

Self Indulgence

"And he [Jesus] **told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.**

And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 'This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.'" (Luke 12:16-21)

The rich man in this parable was not condemned for building larger barns. He was condemned

for two reasons. First, he thought his wealth belonged to him (he didn't understand that he was a steward of God's wealth) and second, he became focused on self-indulgence. Jesus told the parable of the rich man because there is a rich man in every person.

Whether we have much or little, the carnal nature finds it very difficult to deny self and this is where the problem with too much money arises. When was the last time you firmly told yourself "NO" and overcame the urge to be indulgent? Consider this: **"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'**

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished [because they thought riches were a sign of approval from God] **and asked, 'Who then can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'"** (Matthew 19:23-26, insertion mine)

Many people who are poor think the "eye of the needle" parable concerns people who have wealth. This is not the case. Rather, Jesus emphasized the conflict of interest that comes when we have money left over (disposable income) after paying for the necessities. It is hard for people having more than enough money to enter the kingdom of Heaven because people will often fall into the trap of increasing their wealth and indulging themselves rather than using their wealth to bless and benefit others.

Jesus also told this parable to emphasize the point that wealth *is not* a sign of God's approval. Wealth is a heavy responsibility that God places on some people and if they are faithful stewards of *God's wealth*, many people are blessed. If they are not good stewards, many people have no way out of their grinding poverty.

We are our brother's keeper! Jesus taught these parables because very few people can turn away from an endless supply of money – even when they know in advance that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus also knew that very few people can resist the "easy life."

The rich young ruler could not bring himself to give away his wealth. (Matthew 19:21-24) The carnal heart loves money because money enables it to go where it wants, buy whatever it wants, and do whatever it wants. Jesus warned, **"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You *cannot* serve both God and money."** (Matthew 6:24, italics mine)

The Life that is Truly Life

There is a rich man in every person. For this reason, Jesus told the parable of the rich man who wanted to hoard wealth so that he could spend the rest of his life eating, drinking, and "taking it easy." Doesn't the "rich man in every heart" explain why lotteries receive so much money while worthwhile projects go begging?

Jesus condemned the rich man because the rich man thought that God's wealth was his wealth. The rich man didn't recognize the stewardship that God had given him. Instead, he became focused using God's wealth for self-indulgence and God said, "You fool!"

Paul told Timothy, **"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is *so uncertain*, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. I**

n this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may *take hold of the life that is truly life*." (1 Timothy 6:17-19, italics mine) Did you notice that the life that is truly life is a life of giving? We need to give something to someone every week! It doesn't necessarily have to be tangible, but every person needs to bless another person each week with a gift of some kind!

Mahatma Gandhi said, "The things that will destroy us are: politics without principle; pleasure without conscience; wealth without work; knowledge without character; business without morality; science without humanity; and worship without sacrifice." Gandhi understood the seven sides of life and this bring us to the second point in this report: Happiness is not found in a self-indulgent life. Of course, self-indulgent people may think they are happy, but take away their wealth and what do they have?

Underneath the distractions and facades which money brings, there is no genuine love, no deep joy and certainly no contentment. When self indulgence has control of our heart, the results are insatiable passions and spiritual emptiness. We have become a nation of self-indulgent people within two generations and Gandhi was right: Politics is disgusting, pleasures are depraved, business is fraudulent, technology feeds our lust, science denies God and religion is meaningless.

True happiness is found in submission to God. As stewards of whatever wealth He has put under our control, we are accountable to Him. If we allow the Lord to fulfill the purposes for which He created us – no matter how great or small they may be, joy and peace will come. There's no room for anxiety. I am concerned about the future and every rational person should be. However, I am not worried about the future because God will take care of His children. Jesus said, **"Do not worry! . . . "** (Matthew 6:25)

As the Second Coming draws near, I expect to see financial anxiety increase. The world's infrastructures (banking, communication, manufacturing, transportation, education, and healthcare) are teetering on collapse and every nation is in trouble. At the moment, the world is in a self-inflicted financial quagmire and nations have emptied their purses to avoid catastrophic implosion. Now that the reserves of the world have been used up to save ourselves from ourselves, the next financial crisis – even a relatively small hiccup – could be devastating.

In the larger scheme, it doesn't matter. Survival is going to become more and more difficult because Jesus wants to teach us the importance of faith. This brings me to the concluding point for this report: Trust in God. Whenever you find yourself in a difficult position financially, there

are two approaches. The low road is: **" . . . . money is the answer for everything."** (Ecclesiastes 10:19) The high road is this: **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."** (Proverbs 3:5,6)

Larry Wilson

Dual Prophecy Fulfillment

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" The sixth angel sounded his trumpet . . . And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind."
- Revelation 9:13-15

"Dear Mr. Wilson:

I came across your website about four years ago. I disagree with you on several points, but I keep coming back because some of your studies have really helped me to put some pieces together. Your end time scenario on the Second Coming is very strange to me.

About a month ago I downloaded your study on the seven trumpets and I was surprised to find answers to several things I have wondered about. I am a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) and this past week our pastor spoke on the seven trumpets during the worship hour. Because your article was fresh in my mind, I listened very closely to what he had to say. He began by saying that Bible prophecy can have dual fulfillments because history repeats itself. Using Matthew 24, he presented a parallel between the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world.

Then, using the four trumpets in Revelation 8, he presented a parallel between the fall of the Roman Empire and the end of the world. His sermon left me in a deep quandary because SDAs believe the seven trumpets occurred long ago. Also, our prophet, Ellen G. White, says the seven trumpets are in the past.

In 1888 she wrote about the sixth trumpet saying, "In the year 1840 another remarkable fulfillment of prophecy excited widespread interest. . . . At the very time specified [in Revelation 9:15], Turkey, through her ambassadors, accepted the protection of the allied powers of Europe, and thus placed herself under the control of Christian nations.

The event exactly fulfilled the prediction." (*The Great Controversy*, pages 334, 335, underlining by Faye). Now, I am really confused. I know that you believe the seven trumpets are in the future and after reading your article, that makes sense. Do you think a dual fulfillment is possible?

Sincerely,
Faye"

Dear Faye:

Thank you for your email. You have asked a good question that involves three important issues and I am happy to respond. Because you have read my article on the seven trumpets, you already know that I believe the seven trumpets are future events.

Therefore, I hope you will accept this response as an examination of certain facts and not as an attack on you or your church. I am confident that when our love, faith, and knowledge of God is carefully built upon Scripture, we please God. Man's understanding of God's truth is constantly advancing.

If we allow the Bible to speak for itself, God will continue to give us greater light. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus will reveal things that could not have been known at other times. (See Colossians 1:26 for an example.) However, if we dilute or distort the Word of God with external authorities, we will surely trample on the clarity and power of God's Word so truth gets buried. With these things said, please consider the following three issues:

1. Five Types of Prophecy

As I count them, there are five different types of prophecy in the Bible and each type has a specific focus with a distinctive set of rules for interpretation. If we mix or merge these five types of prophecy together, the result will be worthless conclusions and gross confusion. Matthew 24 and Revelation 8 are different types of prophecy and I believe they were inappropriately used by your pastor to demonstrate that dual fulfillment is possible. The five types of prophecy are:

a. Messianic prophecies (prophecies concerning the birth and ministry of Jesus)

b. Day of the Lord prophecies (prophecies concerning the establishment of the kingdom of God)

c. Judaic prophecies (prophecies concerning God's covenant with Israel)

d. Local prophecies (prophecies focused on current events, like Noah and the flood)

e. Apocalyptic prophecies (prophecies concerning chronological progression)

Matthew 24 cannot have a dual fulfillment. There are elements in Matthew 24 that pertain to the destruction of Jerusalem. Look at these verses: **"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."** (Matthew 24:15,16)

There are also elements in Matthew 24 that pertain to the end of the world. Consider these verses: **"For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it."** (Matthew 24:21-23)

These elements are separate and distinct. Everything Jesus predicted about the destruction of Jerusalem has been fulfilled and everything Jesus predicted about the end of the world will be fulfilled. In other words, the abomination that causes desolation will not stand in the holy place a

second time. (For a discussion on the meaning of this phrase, please see pages 228-233 in my book, *Daniel: Unlocked for the Final Generation*.)

One more point. In Matthew 24, Jesus also said, **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:37) Using the dual fulfillment argument, should we look for another flood? Of course, not. The full-fillment of a prophecy occurs when the specifications given are perfectly full-filled. Anything less than perfection must be disqualified.

2. The Importance of Chronological Order

The books of Daniel and Revelation contain five and twelve apocalyptic prophecies respectively. Each of the seventeen prophecies are in chronological order and they fit together perfectly when properly assembled. The books of Daniel and Revelation are all about time and timing.

In fact, eighteen prophetic time periods are found in these two books. The prophecies in Daniel and Revelation can be compared to a tall wedding cake having seventeen layers. The toothpicks that hold the cake layers together are the prophetic events in each prophecy that connect and align the layers with each other.

In other words, dates or events in one layer connect to dates and events in other layers. When all seventeen layers are properly aligned, a glorious story about Jesus and His salvation is the result! The harmony that comes from the sum of all the parts is mind boggling.

Some of the seventeen prophecies in Daniel and Revelation have ordinal numbers in them. This feature forces events to occur in chronological order. For example, trumpet four has to occur between trumpets three and five. There is no wiggle room on this point. The same is true for the seven seals and the seven bowls.

If the chronological order stated in the Word of God cannot be trusted, no one has the authority to tell the whole world God's intended order. I hope you will ponder the significance of this statement. God Himself has declared the order of events in His Word. Therefore, the seven trumpets cannot occur twice because the seventh trumpet occurs at the close of salvation, when the Ark of the Covenant is shown from Heaven (Revelation 11:19), and these events occur a few weeks before the Second Coming.

Although I am sure he means well, your pastor is doing more harm than good. He is not talking about dual fulfillment even though he may be using such language. Actually, he is advocating *dual interpretation*. In other words, he may believe the seven trumpets were one thing at one time and they can be something else in the future. This is impossible. The meaning of the fifth trumpet cannot change with time. The fifth trumpet has a set a specifications that cannot be changed or manipulated.

The fifth trumpet *only occurs* when the specifications given in the fifth trumpet are met. Period. If the fifth trumpet marks the release of the devil and his angels from the spirit realm so that

Lucifer can physically masquerade on Earth as Almighty God, how many times can this happen?

Moreover, if Lucifer is permitted to kill a third of mankind to set up his theocracy during the sixth trumpet, how many times can this happen? If the sixth seal is the Second Coming, how many times can the sixth seal be broken and the Second Coming take place? How many times can the seven bowls occur? Dual fulfillment and dual interpretation is pure fiction.

Valid rules of interpretation will not permit the fifth trumpet to be interpreted "one way" at one time and interpreted "another way" at another time. When dual interpretation is taken to its logical conclusion, fiction is the result. Claims of dual fulfillment and dual interpretation are beguiling.

Once this sophistry invades prophetic study, Bible truth is trampled underfoot because a perfect full-fillment of prophecy cannot be found. Even worse, no one can anticipate a prophetic full-fillment because there is no way to determine what a second fulfillment would look like! Again, there is a simple rule that eliminates this problem. "A full-filling *only* occurs when the specifications are perfectly met and this includes the *given order of the events.*"

3. Ellen G. White

Faye, I assume that you included Ellen G. White's position on the sixth trumpet because her views on the Bible largely determine what members of the SDA Church will accept and reject as truth. As I wrote earlier, speaking against any religious authority is difficult because deeply religious people – whether they are Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, Baptists, Mormons, or Adventists – are offended whenever someone says their beloved prophet, pope, or clergy is in error. Nevertheless, please consider the following:

During the 1830s, a licensed Baptist minister from Low Hampton, New York, named William Miller, began preaching that Jesus would return to Earth "about 1843." He concluded the 2,300 days mentioned in Daniel 8:14 would terminate in the Spring of 1843 and that Jesus would return to Earth during that year.

The Millerite message grew quickly. At its peak, historians say somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 people in New England embraced Miller's explanation of prophecy. This is remarkable given the fact that news could travel no faster than horseback in those days.

Because Miller declared Jesus would return to Earth in 1843, pastors and adversaries constantly ridiculed and taunted him with, **"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."** (Matthew 24:36)

Miller and his associates deflected this charge by saying that they did not know "*the* day and hour." They also claimed that there was a great deal of prophetic evidence indicating that 1843 would be the end of the world – evidence such as the great Lisbon earthquake in 1755, the mysterious darkness that fell over New England at noon in 1780, and thousands of stars that fell

in 1833.

Because the world did not end in 1843, we have the advantage of studying the Millerite movement in reverse to see what went wrong. In a nutshell, Miller's conclusion on 1843 created a fatal problem which no one could foresee. The Millerites reasoned backwards.

Here is the logic: If our conclusion is right and since the world ends in 1843, then there must be a *historical* fulfillment and explanation for everything written in the books of Daniel and Revelation. The Millerites (unwittingly) abused the Bible by forcing it to support their conclusion instead of allowing the Bible to speak for itself and tell them things they needed to know.

It is highly important that we recognize this flaw because it is a perpetual problem. The Millerite movement was built on a false assumption and it eventually imploded because it *forced* the Bible to defend a conclusion rather than allowing the Bible to speak for itself. Sometimes the Bible speaks so softly that you must really strain to hear from it.

In 1838, Dr. Josiah Litch, a scholarly Methodist minister from Massachusetts, published a 48 page booklet supporting Miller's prophetic position. Litch had been studying the prophecies for some time when he became aware of the Millerite movement. Litch became involved in the movement and he produced a discovery that brought thousands into the Millerite movement in 1840.

Looking through the corridor of history for a fulfillment for each of the seven trumpets, Litch came up with an explanation for the fifth and sixth trumpets that was better and more concise than anything heard before. Litch's exposition on Revelation 9 fit within the paradigm of 1843 like a hand fits within a glove.

Basically, Dr. Litch thought he discovered a time capsule. He translated the five months in Revelation 9:5 to mean 150 years (using a day for a year) and the time period called "an hour, day, month and year" in Revelation 9:16 he translated as 391 years and 15 days. In other words, Dr. Litch believed the fifth and sixth trumpets spanned a total of 541 years and 15 days.

Based on the time span, Dr. Litch concluded the fifth trumpet marked the rise of Othman, a Moslem commander who founded the Ottoman Empire. Litch calculated the five months mentioned in Revelation 9:5 began on July 27, 1299 when Othman began to assault (torment) the Greeks and the 150 years (using a day for a year) of torment ended when Constantine was crowned at Sparta in 1449. (This Constantine is not to be confused with the Constantine who ruled over Rome during the fourth century A.D.)

Shortly after Constantine was crowned, Constantinople fell to the Moslems and according to Litch, the Ottoman Empire ruled over the Greeks for 391 years and 15 days. Litch concluded in 1838 that the Ottoman Empire would fall two years later, specifically on August 11, 1840. Litch's prophetic position was hot news!

It was widely published throughout New England and everyone waited anxiously to see what would happen. *"At the very time specified,*" Ellen White wrote in 1888, *"Turkey, through her*

ambassadors, accepted the protection of the allied powers of Europe, and thus placed herself under the control Christian nations." The Millerites were overjoyed.

Their prophetic interpretation was on track. The Ottoman Empire had fallen and their joy increased as hundreds of new converts swelled the Millerite movement. Seeing was believing. The end of the world was less than four years away!

Three Tragic Outcomes

There are three tragic outcomes in this story. First, Jesus did not come in 1843 (the date was later changed to the Spring of 1844 and changed again to October 22, 1844) and this was a bitter disappointment for thousands of Millerites – the disappointment was so deep that many abandoned their faith in Jesus altogether.

Second, history reveals that the Ottoman Empire did not fall on August 11, 1840 as Litch predicted. Consequently, anyone still clinging to Litch's interpretation on the fifth and sixth trumpets is trusting in a meaningless interpretation. Third, by 1850 many Protestant churches in the United States abandoned the study of Daniel and Revelation altogether because Miller's fiasco had proven that a historical approach to prophecy could not be trusted.

The Millerites reaped a bitter harvest because they (unwittingly) forced the Bible to support their conclusions. Ironically, history is about to be repeated. Millions of Christians today are forcing the Bible to support their prophetic conclusions and they will be bitterly disappointed when they discover that there is no pretribulation rapture and no way to escape the destruction of the seven trumpets.

On the other hand, millions of Christians who hold to a historical interpretation of prophecy will also be bitterly disappointed when they discover there is no escape from the seven trumpets! In both cases, the result will be the same – an overwhelming disappointment and spiritual bitterness.

In 1873 (35 years later), Dr. Litch published a book titled, *A Complete Harmony of Daniel and the Apocalypse* (published by Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, Philadelphia) and to his credit, he indicated that his previous view on the seven trumpets had been wrong.

After the failures of 1843 and 1844, he went back to the Bible to see where he went wrong. He found some answers and became convinced that the seven trumpets would be seven future events (including a meteoric firestorm that burns up a third of Earth and two civilization threatening asteroid impacts). Litch concluded the seven trumpets will take place just before the Second Coming. (See pages 155-158.)

Just the Facts

Faye, I have considered the SDA position on the seven trumpets and it makes no sense to me. It is basically the same position the Millerites held. It appears to me that the SDA Church

defends the Millerite position on the seven trumpets for two primary reasons.

First, Ellen G. White (who was a Millerite) believed the seven trumpets were historical in nature and any deviation from the prophet's "pen of inspiration" is thought to be an abomination. In other words, some SDAs believe that God spoke through Ellen White and her words have the weight and authority of Scripture.

Second, Seventh-day Adventists are committed to a historical position on prophecy because they believe the historical approach uniquely identifies the true Antichrist, which they believe is the pope, and they also believe the mark of the beast is Sunday observance.

Some SDA scholars have recognized that Litch's August 11, 1840 date is meaningless. For example, Mervyn Maxwell positions the 391 years between 1453 and 1844. Unfortunately, SDAs are locked in the historical approach because (a) no one within the church can openly say the prophet was wrong, and (b) the SDA Church believes that any other approach to prophecy undermines the identity of the Antichrist and the mark of the beast.

I have asked some SDA pastors and scholars about the church's relationship to the seven trumpets. Usually, they brush aside the importance of the topic with one of two arguments. First, they often say the trumpets are in the past and are not essential to our salvation.

Some, like your pastor, may say that a dual fulfillment is possible. This seems to open the door for further Bible study without directly addressing Ellen White's authority or statements on the matter. In other words, the dual fulfillment argument allows staunch members to hold to their historical view, but also allows newer members to embrace another view. (Ironically, the Catholic Church did the same thing at the turn of the 16

th century by offering the preterist and futurist views of prophecy simultaneously.) For reasons already presented, dual fulfillment is impossible. Multiple interpretations make putty out of the "more sure word of prophecy." Let me be clear, the intended meaning of a passage does not change with time and a fulfillment only occurs when all of the specifications are perfectly full-filled.

Second, a few Adventists claim that Ellen White believed the seven trumpets are yet future and they quote from a book written in 1890, *Selected Messages Volume III*, page 426. This quote says, "Solemn events before us are yet to transpire. Trumpet after trumpet is to be sounded; vial after vial poured out one after another upon the inhabitants of the earth."

To me, this argument is not academically honest for four reasons. First, if Ellen White believed the seven trumpets were future, why didn't she correct her errant position published two years earlier in the 1888 edition of *The Great Controversy*?

This book was published 27 years before she died and that is plenty of time to correct a glaring mistake. Second, if Ellen White believed the "seven trumpets" were future, why didn't she say something specifically about the seven trumpets being future events? For someone who wrote 250,000 handwritten pages during her lifetime, there is total silence about any of the seven

trumpets as future events. This silence speaks for itself.

Third, my research indicates that Ellen White mentioned the word "trumpets" 95 times in her writings. In all of these references she either treats the seven trumpets as seven historical events or uses the word "trumpet" to identify a warning instrument, such as: **"Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming.It is close at hand."** (Joel 2:1)

Finally, some Seventh-day Adventists say that her statement on the sixth trumpet in *The Great Controversy* should not be taken as though she is presenting her thoughts, rather she is presenting Litch's view on the sixth trumpet. This argument is a smokescreen.

If Ellen White knew that Litch was in error, why didn't she say so? Litch's error occurred in 1840. Ellen White lived 75 years after 1840 and she never once wrote a word about Litch's error. Truthfully, if she is writing about Litch's position in *The Great Controversy*, she leaves the reader with the idea that Litch's position is perfectly valid! After hearing this fourth argument a few times, I conclude that Seventh-day Adventists are avoiding the fact that she is factually wrong. (My research has revealed that she is factually wrong in several areas, but that is another matter.)

Summary

In closing, I believe the historical position on the seven trumpets the SDA Church defends is not valid. Further, the SDA Church does not use valid rules of interpretation and history does not support their claims of fulfillment in several prophetic topics. Faye, I know my remarks are painful, but this is an honest review of my conclusions. The three most compelling reasons I believe the historical view cannot be supported are:

1. The Ottoman Empire Did Not Fall in 1840

From 1783 to 1914, the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire were increasingly reduced through a series of defeats. The war waged against the Sultan of Turkey in 1840 ended in 1841 without significant changes in territory. During World War I, Turkey allied with Germany and lost even more territory.

Most historians today agree that the Ottoman Empire ended during World War I. In 1923, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey proclaimed Turkey to be a republic and Turkey remains a sovereign nation to this day. History does not validate that the Ottoman Empire fell on August 11, 1840 and it is no surprise that historians do not regard August 11, 1840 as having any significance in Turkish history.

2. Faulty Understanding of the Greek Language

Dr. Litch reached the August 11, 1840 date through a faulty translation of Scripture. The KJV says: **"And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and**

a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men." (Revelation 9:15) Dr. Litch applied the day/year principle to this verse and derived 391 years and 15 days out of the hour, day, month, and year mentioned. The translation should read: **"And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind."**

Greek scholars around the world (who have no position to defend one way or another) widely agree that the syntax of Revelation 9:15 points to a specific point in time and is therefore punctiliar. The phrase should not be regarded as the sum of chronological units of time. (See the NIV, NEB, NEV, RSV, and ASV.) In other words, the sixth trumpet says nothing about 391 years and 15 days.

3. August 11, 1840 Is the Wrong Date

The final problem with the August 11, 1840 date is that Dr. Litch failed to adjust his 391 year, 15 day prophecy according to a change in the calendar which occurred in October, 1582. Pope Gregory XIII removed ten days from the Julian Calendar that year to reset the Julian Calendar with respect to the Sun. Therefore, Dr. Litch's August 11, 1840 date should have been adjusted to August 21, 1840 and absolutely *nothing* of historical consequence occurred on that date.

I know that my response may be difficult to accept, but the truth speaks for itself. Once the 1843 paradigm of the Millerite movement is understood and once the historical facts are put on the table, it is clear that the historical position advocated by Miller, Litch, and Ellen White is factually wrong.

Of course, well meaning SDA pastors may promote the illusion of dual fulfillments, but multiple interpretations only harms and further obscures the truth. Why not let the Bible speak for itself? I have no doubts that Miller, Litch, and White did their best to understand God's truth and if they were alive today, I believe they would eagerly update their thinking.

Previous generations could not know all that we know today because man's understanding of God's truth is progressive. To reach the intended meaning of apocalyptic prophecy, we have to use valid rules of interpretation. If the bitter failure of the Millerite movement teaches us anything, it proves there is no other way!

Best wishes,

Larry Wilson

The National Sunday Law - How, Why, When?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Dear Faye:

A few days ago, I responded to your question on the seven trumpets of Revelation. You asked if the seven trumpets could happen again; specifically, if there could be dual fulfillment. For the reasons presented in my response (see the February 2009, *Wake Up Report!*), the short answer is *no.* (See the February 2009, *Wake Up Report!*)

There can be only one fulfillment for each apocalyptic prophecy. As you know, I believe the seven trumpets will soon begin. I believe the historical position defended by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (and a few other churches) will prove to be spiritually harmful.

After giving your letter some additional thought, I believe your church is missing a tremendous opportunity to prepare people for *the next prophetic event* and this is the reason for this short study. SDAs have anticipated a national Sunday law for more than 145 years.

Many SDAs think this will be the next prophetic event, but this will not be the case for reasons that follow. Even though you did not ask about a national Sunday law in your letter, I hope you will consider this information as a continuation of our discussion on the seven trumpets. I also hope that you will share this article with your pastor. Since you indicated that your pastor believes there will be a future fulfillment of the seven trumpets, he may be interested in this article.

Sincerely,
Larry Wilson"

In a Nutshell

Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) teach a national Sunday law will someday occur in the United States. They believe the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution will be set aside and everyone will be forced to recognize Sunday as a holy day. Once this law is enacted, SDAs believe they will be persecuted for refusing to recognize the sacredness of the first day of the week. In some cases, they believe there will be torture and even death.

1. Seventh-day Adventists use the following logic to reach this conclusion: First, they teach the Roman Catholic Church is the first beast mentioned in Revelation 13.

2.Since the Bible predicts this particular beast will make war against God’s saints and impose false worship upon the world (Revelation 13:5-8), SDAs conclude the Catholic Church will someday war against those who observe God’s seventh-day Sabbath.

3. SDAs also teach the Roman Catholic Church altered the Ten Commandments by eliminating the second commandment and transferring the holiness of God's seventh day from Sabbath to Sunday.

4. SDAs interpret this assault on God's law as a *mark* (as in a trademark) of the Church's presumed authority.

5. Therefore, SDAs conclude the *mark* of the beast will occur when a national Sunday law is enacted. This law, they teach, will require everyone to respect Sunday as a holy day.

6. Next, SDAs teach the second beast in Revelation 13 is the United States.

7. They believe the Roman Catholic Church and Protestants in the United States will "join hands" at some point in the future for the purpose of imposing a national Sunday law.

8. United, these two powers will then impose a *universal* Sunday law on all nations.

The church's prophet, Ellen White (1827-1915), wrote: "As America, the land of religious liberty, shall unite with the papacy in forcing the conscience and compelling men to honor the [Catholic Church's] false Sabbath, the people of every country on the globe will be led to follow her example.

9. She also wrote: "The decree enforcing the worship of this day [Sunday] is to go forth to all the world. . . . Trial and persecution will come to all who, in obedience to fourth commandment, refuse to worship this false Sabbath."

10. Finally, SDAs teach the enactment of a national Sunday Law in the United States will usher in a "time of trouble" for the *whole* world.

11. They believe that God will test all mankind to see who will acquiesce through persecution and honor Rome's false Sabbath and thus receive the mark of the beast. They believe God's saints will resist these laws by standing firm in their faith and obeying the fourth commandment which declares the seventh day of the week holy.

12. How Can This Be Possible? Ever since the Seventh-day Adventist Church formed in 1863, non-SDAs have been puzzled by the Church's anticipations. For example, what will cause the United States Congress to abolish the First Amendment? What will cause Protestants and Catholics to "join hands," supporting the elimination of religious freedom in the United States?

Will the United States and the Catholic Church be able to impose a universal Sunday law on seven billion people? These are valid questions and one would think that after 145 years, the SDA Church should have some answers.

Think about this: The current war in Iraq proves that the outcome of any war is hard to predict. The world's most powerful army has sacrificed thousands of lives in Iraq. The world's richest nation has spent trillions of dollars and invested six hard years setting up a fledgling democracy

in a tiny country of twenty-five million people. (California has a population of about thirty-six million.)

If establishing a democracy in tiny Iraq has been this expensive and lengthy, how will the United States and the Catholic Church *impose* the holiness of Sunday on billions of devout Moslems, Hindus, Jews, Pagans, and Communists? This is a valid question that deserves an answer. Many SDAs are also asking this question because 93%* of Church members live outside the United States. (*Source: Nationmaster.com)

The Remnant Church of Bible Prophecy

Revelation 13:8 indicates that worship will become a matter of salvation during the Great Tribulation. Unfortunately, SDAs have misinterpreted the identity of the two beasts in Revelation 13, as well as the mark of the beast.

The first beast cannot be the papacy, the second beast cannot be the United States, and the mark of the beast cannot be Sunday worship. The historical position defended by SDAs is not defensible when the specifications given in the Bible are given full consideration. To better understand the problem, consider the following:

Revelation 12:17 is a very important text to SDAs. **"Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest** [remnant] **of her offspring – those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus."** (Insertion mine) SDAs use this verse to identify themselves as "the remnant church of Bible prophecy."

13. They reach this position by concluding the writings of Ellen White are "The Spirit of Prophecy" and they often apply this title to her works. Next, SDAs believe the phrase "God's commandments" in verse 17 refers to the "God's [Ten] Commandments."

Since the SDA Church is the *only* church upholding the obligatory nature of all ten commandments and possessing the testimony of Jesus (The Spirit of Prophecy), they conclude that they are the remnant church of Bible prophecy. I make this point so you can see why SDAs believe their church will someday be the object of the dragon's wrath.

Seventh-day Adventists teach the dragon in Revelation 12:17 primarily represents the devil, but "in a secondary sense, a symbol of pagan Rome."

14. Using this logic, they conclude Rome [which morphed from a pagan power into the papal power] is preparing to make war against *them.* Consequently, there is a great deal of concern within the SDA Church about the activities of the Catholic Church in general and the Jesuits in particular. (The Jesuits are a secret society within the Catholic Church formed by Ignatius Loyola in the sixteenth century.)

15. This militant order was established during the Spanish Inquisition and its initial endeavor was the forced conversion of the Moors (Moslems) to Catholicism. Later, Jews and Protestants

became targets of the Jesuits and some SDAs believe the Jesuits will once again persecute those who refuse to submit to the pope's authority.)

The Forty-Two Months Problem

Remember that Adventists believe the first beast in Revelation 13 is the Roman Catholic Church. SDAs support their interpretation, in part, by saying that the forty-two months mentioned in Revelation 13:5 is the *same* time period as the 1,260 days in Revelation 12:6 and the time, times and half a time in Revelation 12:14 and Daniel 7:25. They claim all four references point to papal supremacy during the Dark Ages. (A.D. 538 to 1798)

16. Please read the following passage carefully and especially notice how the forty-two months fits into the story: **"And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea** [waiting to make war on the remnant of the woman]**. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea.**

He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon [who had been waiting to make war on the remnant] **gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.**

One of the heads [actually, the sixth head] **of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed** [when the beast came up out of the sea]**. The whole world was astonished** [at the appearing of the beast] **and** [voluntarily] **followed the beast. . . .**

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and *to exercise his authority for forty-two months*. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer [defeat] **them.**

And he [the leopard-like beast] **was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth** [seven billion people] **will worship** [obey] **the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."** (Revelation 13:1-3, 5-8, italics and insertions mine)

These verses present several problems for SDAs, but to keep this short, we will focus on the forty-two months. SDAs insist that a day must equal a year in Bible prophecy, so they have to place the forty-two months mentioned in verse 5 between A.D. 538 and 1798.

16 (42 months x 30 days = 1,260 day/years) This conclusion is flawed for two reasons. First, the leopard-like beast has no power except during the forty-two months described in Revelation 13:5. If the forty-two months belong in the past, so does this beast!

Second, the Bible says this beast will exercise authority for forty-two months *after* the leopard-like beast rises from the sea. When does this beast rise from the sea? The Bible doesn't

explicitly answer this question. However, it does say that when leopard-like beast rises from the sea, the head that had received the deadly wound **is healed**.

Consider this: History says the power of the papacy was deeply wounded in 1798 when the pope was taken prisoner and placed in exile. This means the healing of the deadly wound has to occur *after* 1798. Since the deadly wound **is healed** when the leopard-like beast rises from the sea, the leopard-like beast has to arise *after* 1798 and the forty-two months will occur *after* the beast rises to power!

Again, the Bible says: **"One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound *had been healed*. . . ."** (Revelation 13:3) These facts force the forty-two months in Revelation 13:5 *after* 1798. Shoving the forty-two months backward into the Dark Ages is going in the wrong direction because the Bible puts them in the future.

Revelation 12:17 does indicate the dragon is preparing to make war against the remnant of the woman and the Bible highlights this war in verse 13:7. **"He** [the leopard-like beast] **was given power to *make war against the saints and to conquer them*. And he was given** [as a gift] **authority over every tribe, people, language and nation."** (Revelation 13:7, italics and insertion mine) When and how does this war occur?

Meaningless Trumpets?

SDAs have unwittingly destroyed an essential portion of Revelation's end time story by forcing the seven trumpets into ancient history. If we put the seven trumpets where they belong, *the seven trumpets will explain how, why, and when false worship will become a great controversy throughout the world!* The seven trumpets explain many things which SDAs know nothing about!

SDAs and evangelicals have a serious problem. Both groups have embraced a prophetic paradigm that denies the importance of the seven trumpets. The SDA Church teaches the seven trumpets happened long ago and evangelicals believe the seven trumpets will occur after a pre-tribulation rapture.

The end result is the same. Both groups believe the seven trumpets of Revelation are prophetically insignificant. **This is a horrible mistake because the seven trumpets are about to begin and they explain how Revelation's story will unfold!** The bitter Millerite disappointment of 1844 proves that a failed prophetic schematic can be spiritually fatal. I offer this observation because I think several hundred million Christians are about to be bitterly disappointed and there is no need for this.

God's wrath is about to break out on this rebellious planet. A series of carefully choreographed judgments will soon fall and thousands of notoriously wicked cities will be burned up (just like Sodom and Gomorrah) or washed away in a violent ocean.

More than 1.75 billion people will soon die as a result of God's wrath. After the nations of the

world are in ruins and the survival of every government is questionable, martial law will be imposed in every nation. It is in this dire context that Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Moslems, Hindus, Pagans and Atheists will unite.

Everyone will see God's wrath and everyone will agree that God must be appeased or He will destroy everyone. Here in the U.S., Congress will set aside the Bill of Rights and enact a national day for repentance and worship. This is how a national Sunday law will occur. The papacy will play an important role in end time events, but not as SDAs anticipate.

End Time Scenario

In a nutshell, here is a short overview of coming events as I understand them. A few years ago, the seven angels who stand before God were given seven trumpets. (Revelation 8:2) Each trumpet is associated with a horrible judgment. When a trumpet sounds, a specific judgment occurs on Earth. The overall purpose of the seven trumpets is to awaken the whole world to the authority and reality of Jesus Christ, His wrath against degenerate behavior, His generous offer of salvation, and His imminent return.

When the seven angels received their trumpets, four of them immediately left God's throne to destroy Earth. Before they could harm the Earth, they were told, **"Hurt not the Earth, neither the seas, nor the trees,"** until God selects and seals 144,000 people. (Revelation 7:1-8) So, four angels are prepared to unleash God's wrath (first four trumpets) at this very moment, but they are waiting for the appointed time to arrive.

When the appointed time arrives, Jesus will terminate their delay (Revelation 10:6) and the four angels will sound their trumpets and a carefully choreographed series of judgments will occur. These judgments will cause great tribulation. Because of fear of more judgments, the 144,000 will be able to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people and surprisingly, the world will listen for a while!

The first four trumpets will occur over a period of about sixty days and the results will be overwhelming and catastrophic. The first trumpet judgment will be a meteoric shower of burning hail that burns up a third of Earth! Notoriously wicked places all over the world will be burned up just like Sodom and Gomorrah. The second trumpet judgment will be an asteroid impact on an ocean. The resulting tsunami (several hundred feet high) will quickly destroy thousands of coastal cities.

The ocean will roil with great turbulence for months. (Luke 21:25) The tsunami that suddenly destroyed 230,000 people in southeastern Asia (December 26, 2004) is a small prophetic sample of how this huge tsunami will destroy thousands of coastal cities. The third trumpet will be an asteroid impact on a wicked continent.

This impact will cause all kinds of seismic havoc. Rivers and underground aquifers will become contaminated with buried sewage and toxic waste. Millions of people will die from drinking poisonous water. The fourth trumpet will affect the Sun, moon and stars.

Even though the Bible does not explain how darkness will cover a third of Earth, I believe there is a simple answer. Hundreds of volcanos will erupt and their ash and ejecta, carried by the jet stream, will darken the middle third of the world for months. Crops will perish and famine will overtake the world. In all, 1.75 billion people will die as a result of God's wrath. God's coming wrath is beyond calculation, but so is His mercy.

The first four trumpets will achieve two impressive goals. First, the world will unanimously agree that there is a living God and that He is definitely angry with all mankind. Every nation on Earth will reel from God's judgments. The nations of Earth will experience communal suffering and as a result, mankind will find it rather easy to unite as one family, begging Almighty God to stop the judgments. Out of anguish and fear, the nations of the world will repeat the words of ancient Israel, Whatever you want Oh God, we will do! (Exodus 19:8)

Religious and political leaders from every nation will meet to discuss ways of appeasing God. During this meeting, world leaders will create a new *religious government* that will be given authority over the nations of Earth. This coming government is called Babylon in Revelation.

It will be given power over every nation without firing a single bullet. **Babylon is the leopard-like beast that rises out of the sea in Revelation 13. It represents mankind's response to the first four trumpets.** Babylon's mission will be simple: The appeasement of God. The leaders of Babylon will decide what must be done within each nation to appease God. Because no one wants to offend God, political leaders will dutifully carry out Babylon's demands for legislation.

The Deadly Wound Healed

I believe religious leaders of the world will nominate and elect the pope as the leader of Babylon. The pope will be selected because the Catholic Church is the only church that has diplomatic relations with most of the world (179 nations currently). Once the pope is exalted by the religions of the world to lead Babylon, **the deadly wound will be healed.**

Bear in mind, the pope will not be put in a position where he can impose the doctrines of the Catholic Church on the nations of Earth. Instead, the pope will lead a diverse religious government in an effort to appease God so that His anger will cease.

Our world has seven diverse religious systems and each system differs on the will of God. Thus, Babylon's approach to appeasing God in one nation will be different than in other nations. For example, the pope and his diverse cabinet of religious leaders, will direct lawmakers in every nation to establish a day for repentance and to worship God.

This explains how a national Sunday law will occur in the United States. This also explains how Moslem nations will implement Friday laws and how the modern nation of Israel will honor Saturday as its holy day. In fact, every nation on Earth will enact laws mandating respect for God so that His judgments will cease.

Each nation will also implement and enforce laws forbidding sinful behaviors such as homosexuality, gay marriage, gay clergy, abortion, sexual immorality, gambling, drinking, etc. A large assortment of "sin-less" laws will be forthcoming. Babylon's effort to appease God through legislation explains how everyone, in every nation, will be affected. This also explains how persecution will face those who insist on obeying the fourth commandment.

Babylon Is the Leopard-like Beast

Babylon is represented in Revelation 13:1-8 as a leopard-like monster that rises out of the sea. When this monster beast rises, it will have seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads represent the seven religious systems of the world and the ten horns represent ten kings that Lucifer will appoint shortly before the Second Coming.

The papacy is the sixth head of the leopard-like beast. This is the head who received the fatal wound. This head will be healed when the pope is selected as the leader of Babylon and the forty-two months of persecution begins. The sea in Revelation 13:1 represents "a multitude of nations, peoples and languages." (See Revelation 17:15.)

In other words, Babylon will rise up from *within* all of the nations of Earth and Babylon will be *given* authority over *every* nation without going to war or firing a single bullet! The Bible speaks clearly about this amazing event: **". . . And he** [the leopard-like beast] **was** [freely] ***given* authority over *every* tribe, people, language and nation."** (Revelation 13:7, insertions and italics mine) The chaotic events due to the first four trumpets causes Babylon to form.

Today, it is outrageous to say that the world's political leaders will *voluntarily* submit to Babylon's authority! In today's society, this submission is unthinkable and impossible, but the Bible predicts it will surely occur.

When world leaders see and experience the magnitude and scope of God's wrath on thousands of notably wicked places and realize that God has killed about two billion people, everyone will tremble at God's awful wrath. If the wrath of Almighty God (actually, Jesus Christ) can do this, He can easily humble the egos of clergy and politicians.

During the gloomy and foreboding darkness of the fourth trumpet, the political leaders of the world will readily agree with their "religious experts" that God's wrath must be promptly appeased or everyone will die. Like the jailer in Philippi, the all-important question will be, **"What must I do to be saved?"** (Acts 16:30)

The formation of Babylon will prove that the religious leaders of the world do not understand God, His Word, or His plans. Ironically, they will think they are doing good, but their actions will only make matters worse. Instead of appeasing God, they will actually insult God!

Oops

I have to bring this study to a close. I hope you can see how worship will become a hotly

contested issue in coming days. You indicated in your letter, Faye, that you had read the article I wrote on the seven trumpets. I hope you will read it again with an open Bible. Look up the texts and see for yourself how God's Word explains itself. (For those who haven't read my study on the seven trumpets, please download it for free and print it: http://www.wake-up.org/Revelation/RevTrumpets.pdf

I will close with these highlights on the last three trumpets. The fifth trumpet will be the physical appearing of the devil, the Antichrist himself, masquerading around the world as Christ! He will deceive the world with his mighty miracles. His supreme miracle will be that of calling fire down out of heaven at will.

Attended by millions of demons, billions of people will believe that this glorious being is Almighty God. The sixth trumpet is even worse. The devil will kill a third of mankind (those who oppose him) as he sets himself up as King of kings and Lord of lords. Everyone who submits to his authority will *voluntarily* receive a tattoo on their right hand.

This tattoo will be necessary to buy and sell. Finally, the seventh trumpet will sound. This trumpet marks the close of God's grace and mercy. There will be a great display of power in Heaven. Everyone on Earth will behold the Ark of the Covenant which contains the Ten Commandments. God's law will be shown to mankind because it is the law that condemns sin. The seven bowls will then be poured out on the wicked. Those rebelling against God will be punished by the very law they refused to obey.

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Are We Near the End of Days?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Dear Mr. Wilson:

I am 53 years old and I wonder if Jesus will return during my lifetime. I am a Presbyterian and one of our ministers recently held a class on the book of Revelation and his take was that the end of days was nowhere in sight. I have been wondering for quite sometime, are there any specific signs from God indicating that the end is near so that we may be spiritually prepared?

The world has an endless supply of economic, political, geophysical and ethnic troubles – everywhere we turn, there is perplexity. I know that "troubles" do not necessarily mean the end is near, for troubles never end. So, what hints about the end of days does God offer?

Thank you,
Jane"

Dear Jane:

Thank you for your e-mail. You have asked a great question and the answer is "Yes!" God has put two types of hints in the Bible indicating that we are living near the end of days. Before I describe these hints, I would like to offer two comments.

First, many people look at the newspaper rather than the Bible to determine where we are in God's great plan of salvation. History says that civilizations come and go, and we know that world wars come and go. Today, there is no end to bad news. The economy of the whole world has fallen, but look back at the pandemic of influenza in 1918. More than fifteen million people died in one year! Fearful events do not necessarily mean the end of days is near.

Second, some well-intentioned pastors may tell parishioners the end is nowhere in sight and other pastors may claim they have received a vision from God that such and such is going to happen soon. These predictions should not be trusted because we cannot verify the contents of a vision and we cannot ignore the fact that Jesus has promised to return.

So, where should we turn for answers? The answer is simple, but the topic is complex. God's Word reveals God's plans. Bible prophecy tells us where we are in God's plans, and even though you may not fully appreciate all that I am about to say, I hope that my response will encourage you to start digging into God's Word for yourself because there is compelling evidence in the Bible that shows we are living near the end of days. God's Word offers two classes of hints.

There are "long scale" and "short scale" hints. Long scale hints are prophecies that cover centuries of time. They show a steady progression of time toward the return of Jesus. Short scale hints narrow the time frame down to a few years. Before I present some of these hints,

you need to understand a few facts about apocalyptic prophecy.

There are five types of prophecy in the Bible and apocalyptic prophecy is the only type of prophecy that is based on chronology. Each apocalyptic prophecy has a beginning point and an ending point in time and the events within each apocalyptic prophecy occur in the order given.

Apocalyptic prophecy allows us to determine our chronological position within God's plan for our redemption. Second, you need to understand that there are seventeen apocalyptic prophecies in the books of Daniel and Revelation and when they are properly aligned, they produce an amazing matrix – showing a consistent fulfillment of prophecy over the passage of time.

As we study this matrix, we can see *what* has been fulfilled and *when* it was fulfilled, and we can also see *what* remains to be fulfilled and *when* it will be fulfilled! I have mentioned these two features about apocalyptic prophecy because a person can read the books of Daniel and Revelation a hundred times and miss the hints that God has put there if he does not understand the orderly nature of apocalyptic prophecy.

Long Scale Hints

1. Daniel 2 contains a long scale hint. The sweeping vision in Daniel 2 began in 605 B.C. and it ends with the Second Coming. To show chronological progression, God foretold the rise and fall of several empires and world history affirms the rise and fall of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Grecia, Rome, and the break up of the Roman empire in A.D. 476.

Since A.D. 476, we have been living in a period represented by the feet of the metal man. About nine months before Jesus returns, a new time period will begin represented by the ten toes. (Daniel 2:42) The ten toes represent ten kings who will attempt to destroy Jesus when He returns. (Revelation 17:12-14) The fulfillment of this long scale prophecy has been underway for twenty-five centuries. We are living between A.D. 476 and the appearing of the ten kings, but what we really want to know is how much more time is left!

2. Daniel 7 also contains long scale hint. Daniel 7 parallels Daniel 2 in many ways, but it adds a very important detail. Daniel 7 predicted that a religious power would rise out of the fourth empire and this power would persecute the saints for 1,260 years. This prophecy has been fulfilled!

The Roman Catholic Church came to power during the Roman Empire and the Church persecuted its adversaries until 1798. The French Revolution broke the power of the papacy. The pope was taken prisoner and he died in exile. Daniel 7 indicates the papacy will regain power again and speak "boastful words" against the Most High.

Daniel 7 is another prophecy that contains a long scale hint about the return of Jesus. We are living between 1798 and a time when the papacy will regain its power over nations and speak boastfully. The fulfillment of this prophecy has been underway for twenty-five centuries. In these first two prophecies, we have progressed from 605 B.C. to 1798, but what we really want to

know is how much more time is left!

3. Daniel 8 contains another long scale hint. Daniel 8 contains the longest prophecy in the Bible. This prophecy spans 2,300 years. It began in 457 B.C. and ended in 1844. This prophecy primarily concerns the appearing of Lucifer at *the appointed time of the end.* (Daniel 8:19) It indicates that two things must first happen before Jesus returns. First, Heaven's temple must be cleansed. The cleansing of Heaven's temple is a Hebrew phrase that describes the judgment bar of Christ.

In other words, Jesus will go through the books of record and determine the eternal destiny of each dead person before He returns. This procedure began in 1844 when the 2,300 years ended. Second, before Jesus returns, Lucifer, the devil, will be allowed to physically appear on Earth.

The devil is the destroyer, the horn power in Daniel 8 who will come out of the north. He will come with 200 million angels and blinding glory, and he will deceive billions of people. Once he has gained enough followers, he will abruptly change character and become the stern-faced king, the cruel dictator described in Daniel 8:23.

Claiming to be Almighty God and having miracle working powers to back up his deception, he will rule over the whole world for a short time. (Revelation 13:11-18) So, Daniel 8 contains a long scale hint. This prophecy tells us that we are living between 1844 and the time when Lucifer will appear. We clearly see chronological progression toward the Second Coming in Daniel 2, Daniel 7 and Daniel 8, but what we really want to know is how much time is left!

Short Scale Hints

1. Revelation 7 contains a short scale hint if you understand the prerequisites. Since I have provided a comprehensive explanation on these topics in other places, I will just summarize how this hint works. I believe that God's patience with Earth ended when the Jubilee Calendar expired on April 9, 1994.

This calendar began with the Exodus in 1437 B.C. and it lasted for seven Great Days (each Great Day is 490 years in length). The end of the Jubilee Calendar marks the end of God's forbearance with mankind. When God's patience expired, He gave the seven angels who stand before Him seven trumpets (Revelation 8:2).

The seven trumpets are seven *redemptive* judgments that contain the wrath of God. The first four angels went out from God's throne to begin their horrific destruction in 1994, but they were told to wait! Before God's wrath begins, He will select and empower 144,000 people as prophets. These prophets will speak for God during the Great Tribulation. Of course, we know the Great Tribulation has not begun because one-third of Earth has not been burned up (the first trumpet judgment). So, we are living between 1994 and the global earthquake (Revelation 8:5) that will mark the commencement of the Great Tribulation.

2. Revelation 12 and 13 also contain a short scale hint if you understand the prerequisites. Again, I have provided a comprehensive explanation about this prophecy in other places, so a summary should suffice. Basically, Revelation 12:7-17 retraces the 1,260 years of persecution described in Daniel 7.

The devil, working through the Roman Catholic Church, "chased God's saints into the wilderness." As 1798 drew near, Earth helped the woman (God's people) by providing a place where people were free to worship God according to the dictates of conscience.The United States of America was established in 1776, just twenty-two years before the papacy was wounded, and this nation "helped" the woman by providing a government with a wall of separation between church and state.

When the devil saw that his 1,260 years were up and that he had not been able to destroy the woman in the desert, he turned his attention to his final assault. He is going to persecute those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus during the Great Tribulation. (The 144,000 will speak the testimony of Jesus during the Great Tribulation.)

When the *appointed time of the end* arrives, the first four trumpets will commence. Revelation 13 indicates that Babylon will form and the woman will be persecuted for 42 months. The short scale hint in this prophecy says that when Babylon forms, the deadly wound given to the papacy in 1798 will be healed.

In other words, a time is coming when the Roman Catholic Church will lead the world in a unified effort to appease God so that His wrath will cease. Look around – since 1929, the papacy has regained much of the respect and influence that it lost during the French Revolution. When Pope John Paul II died in 2005, more than two billion people saw his funeral on TV (the highest number of people ever to watch a single event).

At the present time, 170 nations have ambassadors assigned to the Vatican. In 2008, President George W. Bush held a lavish birthday party for Pope Benedict. These things indicate that the deadly wound inflicted on the papacy in 1798 is almost healed.

These hints indicate that we are living between 1994 and the global earthquake that marks the commencement of the Great Tribulation. (Revelation 8:5) The devil is prepared for his final assault on the woman, the deadly wound inflicted on the papacy is almost healed, and economic and political perplexities are driving the whole world to the brink of ruin.

Merging Long Scale and Short Scale Hints

Long scale and short scale hints work together. The Bible, in its entirety, only speaks of 7,000 years. In other words, if we add up the genealogical records given in the Old Testament, if we chart out the historical records given in the Bible, if we add in the prophetic time periods given in the books of Daniel and Revelation, the sum of every event found in the Bible totals approximately 7,000 years! Since we know that Jesus will return to Earth at the beginning of the one thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20, a little Bible research reveals that we could be

within seven years of the 6000

th year! According to my calculations, the year of the second coming could be 2015. Of course, I could be wrong. It could be sooner or later. I do not know the day and hour, but this does not stop me from searching, watching, and praying!

I do know that the Great Tribulation will be 1,335 days in length, so subtracting three years and eight months from 2015, I find that 2011 *could be* the year the Great Tribulation begins. Will God's wrath be released in 2011? Time will tell. I do agree with Billy Graham.

He once said that if God does not do something about the evil that permeates this nation and the world soon, that He will owe Sodom and Gomorrah an apology. I also know that it is very easy to get distracted with the cares of this life. Remember the ten virgins?

They went out to meet the bridegroom, but they went to sleep! Jesus warned His disciples, **"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."** (Matthew 24:42-44)

Summary

Daniel 2 chronologically places us between A.D. 476 and the ten kings who will war against Jesus when He returns. The chronology within Daniel 7 places us between 1798 and the healing of the deadly wound which the papacy received in 1798. Daniel 8 narrows the window of time and places us between 1844 and physical appearing of the devil, which is during the *appointed* time of the end. Revelation 7 narrows the timing even further.

This prophecy places us between 1994 and the first four trumpets. Revelation 12 and 13 places us between 1798 and the formation of Babylon. Moreover, the Bible, as a whole, indicates that Jesus will return at the end of 6,000 years of sin. According to my calculations, these hints place us between 1994 and 2015 (and this is 2009).

Of course, my calculations may not be perfect, but there is an abundance of evidence building that we are very close. For example, when I consider the burden that seven billion people impose on Earth's resources, when I see the idolatry, unbridled greed, and sexual immorality that contaminates every nation, when I consider the misery index rising in every nation, I cannot think of a better time for the appearing of Jesus than now!

So Jane, the answer to your question is "Yes!" I believe you are young enough to see Jesus come provided that you survive the 1,335 days of the Great Tribulation.

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

Why Does God Permit Persecution?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Mr. Wilson:

I recently came across your website. Your article on the rapture is a challenge. I have been 100% convinced of a pre-tribulation rapture for more than twenty years, but in recent weeks my confidence in this doctrine is not as secure as it once was.

Your article raised some good questions that I had not considered. One issue bothers me a great deal. Why does God permit His people to be persecuted and killed during the Great Tribulation? Didn''t God rescue Noah? Lot? Joseph? Rahab? Daniel and others? Doesn''t the Bible say that God's people will not suffer wrath? (1 Thessalonians 1:10) I hope you will reply.

Sincerely,
Paul"

Dear Paul:

Thank you for your question. I am pleased to learn that you are searching for more truth. I am sure the Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth as you study God's Word. (John 16:13) I am not here to tell anyone what to believe. You have asked a very good question that I have asked myself.

I have found some points from Scripture that may be helpful to you in your own search for truth. Each believer must assemble God's truth for himself and live according to what he believes is right and true. After you read this response, I hope you will go back to our website and reread the article on the rapture. If you do this, several pieces of the puzzle may "snap together" and make a lot more sense the second time around.

To begin, you need to know that persecution and true Christianity are inseparable. Jesus warned His disciples: **"Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. . . . They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me."** (John 15:20,21)

Later, Jesus warned His disciples again, **"All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. . . ."** (John 16:1-4)

Looking into the future, the Bible warns that God's saints are going to be persecuted:
"The [leopard-like] **beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. . . . He** [the leopard-like beast] **was given power**

to make war against *the saints and to conquer them*. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation." (Revelation 13:5-7, italics and insertion mine)

Those who stand up for righteousness are often persecuted. Jesus said, **"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."** (Matthew 5:10-12)

The apostle Peter understood persecution and the importance of not giving up. He wrote,**"So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good** [regardless of the consequences]." (1 Peter 4:19, insertion mine)

Please consider one more text: **"He** [the little horn] **will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The *saints will be handed over to him*** [the little horn] **for a time, times and half a time."** (Daniel 7:25, italics and insertions mine)

Who handed the saints over to the little horn power if not God? For reasons beyond the scope of this article, this prophecy was fulfilled during the Dark Ages. (A.D. 538 - 1798) During this time period, some historians calculate that more than fifty million Christians died for their faith. An unescapable fact is that in the past, God *handed* His saints over to the little horn for 1,260 years and it is not inconsistent that He should *hand* His saints over to the leopard-like beast for forty-two months in the future.

Look at Persecution from God's Point of View

Persecution for Christ's sake is a challenge, but God does not view persecution as we do. According to His infinite wisdom and love, God is able to achieve things for and through His saints when they are persecuted that He cannot achieve otherwise. Please consider the following:

Persecution for Christ's sake purifies our devotion to Christ. When people are persecuted for humbly obeying the will of God, there is no room for bitterness or anger toward their predators. God's people accept, *through faith,* that it is His will that they should stand firm, paying the price that His truth demands. (Remember that Jesus uttered the phrase "Father forgive them" on the cross (Luke 23:34), and Stephen uttered the same phrase when the stones were flying. Acts 7)

When faced with persecution for Christ's sake, a bundle of God's grace is delivered. The Holy Spirit empowers the saint to deal with the situation. God's Word becomes paramount and everyone involved is affected – even if they do not comprehend all that is taking place.

The fires of persecution separate the faith-full (the gold) from the faith-less (the dross). When

the Great Tribulation begins, everyone who obeys the first angel's message will face persecution. Our Creator's demand to worship Him on the seventh day will stand in direct opposition to Babylon's demand that we worship God on the first day.

When persecution begins, many Christians will discover that they really do not have faith in Christ. They will cry out, "Oh God, how could You let this calamity happen to me?"

Peter's experience is recorded in the Bible because he perfectly mirrors the difference between admission and submission. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter was bold, ready to die for his Lord. When the mob rushed into the garden to lay hands on Jesus, Peter whipped out his knife and a scuffle ensued. He managed to cut off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. (John 18:10) Six hours later, he denied three times that he even knew Jesus. What caused Peter to do this?

Peter did not know it, but he had no faith in God. Peter had played the "admission game." He admitted that Jesus was the Messiah. (Matthew 16:16) Peter admitted that he was prepared to die for his master, **". . .'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And all the other disciples said the same."** (Matthew 26:35)

And sure enough, when the mob showed up, Peter proved that he was ready to fight and die for Christ's sake, but his motive was self-defense. Peter was self-seeking and he was willing to die, if necessary, to get what he wanted.

Six hours later, Peter saw Jesus submit to persecution and condemnation without any self defense. Christ's humility humiliated Peter. He felt betrayed and he responded with betrayal. Peter was not prepared to accept the Father's will for Jesus. It was the Father's will that Jesus go to the cross and Peter did not seek the same destiny as Christ.

It is one thing to die in self defense or in defense of God and country, but it is altogether another matter to die for no other reason than God requires it. This is the element in Isaac's story that is so amazing. He was willing to die on the altar without resistence or complaint.

Jesus said, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself** [lay aside self-interests] **and take up his cross** [the will of God] **and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."** (Matthew 16:24,25, insertions mine)

After the rooster crowed a third time, Peter had an epiphany. He began to understand the meaning of submission to the will of God. When Peter saw Israel's Messiah, the Son of God, submitting to inhumane treatment because this was the Father's will for Christ, Peter became ashamed of himself.

Peter saw through his tears that faith in God means total submission to God's will and this includes suffering because of righteousness. Jesus' persecution changed Peter and millions of people since who have studied the life of Jesus.

Persecution purifies the soul of the persecuted and in this process, God allows us to see if self has been set aside so that the will of God can be fulfilled. Jesus said, **"This third I will bring into the fire** [of persecution]**; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.' "** (Zechariah 13:9, insertion mine)

Persecution also keeps faith in Christ vibrant! When Jesus spoke to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, the Christian faith was only sixty-five years old. Already, six of the seven churches in Asia Minor were corrupted by false doctrines, but the church at Philadelphia was hanging on. Because religion mutates quickly, God allowed the devil to chase His people into the desert for 1,260 years. (Revelation 12:6,14) God knows the desert is a good place for training people.

This is why He took Israel into the desert when they first came out of Egypt. I like to call God's desert training, "Desert University." When a person is exiled to the desert, he has to depend upon God for everything. The desert is an unforgiving place, a hostile place, a lonely place, a place that forbids self-indulgence and self-reliance.

The carnal nature hates the desert. Instead, it wants pleasure, luxury, and the "easy life." Even though there is very little pleasure in the desert, a person can find joy in the desert. True joy expands the ability of the heart to trust God and serve man. True joy redirects our motives from self-seeking to selfless service.

"Desert U" teaches discernment and insight. "Desert U" is a holistic experience called sanctification, or in Bible terms, "walking with God." **"This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and *he walked*** [alone] ***with God*****."** (Genesis 6:9, italics and insertion mine) Looking at human nature and knowing that God's wisdom is perfect, we have to admit that putting the saints in the desert for 1,260 years had to be the best thing that God could do for them.

Attending "Desert U" is like putting on a blindfold and after taking hold of Christ's arm, following wherever He leads. There is no way to know where you are going, but your destination is secure! God's people often find themselves all alone in their faith experience. Family and friends rarely understand or appreciate "Desert U."

In fact, family and friends are often opposed to God's will because they do not know God's will. Jesus said, **"A man's enemies will be the members of his own household."** (Matthew 10:36) I have mentioned these matters because there is a special sense of joy at "Desert U." God is there. If necessary, food falls from the sky and water flows from rocks. **"The woman fled into the desert *to a place prepared for her* by God . . . ."** (Revelation 12:6, italics mine)

The final benefit that comes from persecution is exclusion. Persecution keeps those who love the world and the things of this world out of God's church. (1 John 2:15) When the threshold for being a Christian is suffering, the nucleus of God's people remains pure.

When the threshold for being a Christian is easy, religion mutates and the gospel suffers. The

saints become invalids when they should be soldiers of the cross. Instead of being medics to a dying world, church members constantly need a medic to keep them alive.

God's saints do not serve Him because they want to avoid Hell and win Heaven. God's saints would serve God even if there is nothing beyond this life. That is what Jesus did. He would have gone to the cross for you and me even if there was no resurrection.

The saints serve God because He imparts love, peace, joy, and sustaining grace. (Galatians 5:22) This grace comes through total submission to God's will. This grace enables the saints to "overcome the world." **"They** [the saints] **overcame him** [the devil] **by** [their faith in] **the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."** (Revelation 12:11)

The apostle Paul wrote, **"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."** (2 Timothy 3:12) If persecution was a bad thing for God's people, He would not permit it. God does not view persecution as we do because His grace is sufficient. Listen to Paul, a man who knew persecution well: **"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.**

But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (1 Corinthians 10:13) God's saints should not fret over past, present, or future persecution. If we surrender to God's will today, He will give us every grace to glorify His wonderful name today. Today is all that we have.

In closing, consider Peter's words, the apostle who made an about face once he understood God's will: **"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.**

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." (1 Peter 2:12-21)

Larry Wilson

What is the Next Prophetic Event?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Dear Mr. Wilson:

I heard you say in a seminar several years ago that you believe the selection and sealing of the 144,000 is the next prophetic event. I have three questions about this. First, how will the 144,000 know they have been selected and sealed? Second, will their selection and sealing remain a secret until the censer is cast down and the Great Tribulation begins? Third, if someone claims to be one of the 144,000, how can we know if he or she is speaking truthfully?

Sincerely,
Sam"

Dear Sam:

Thank you for your questions. I will begin with your third question: "If someone claims to be one of the 144,000, how can we know if he or she is speaking truthfully?"

During the past twenty-three years, I have received many letters and emails from people claiming (a) they are one of the 144,000, (b) they are one of the Two Witnesses, (c) they have seen God or received visions from Him, or (d) they have received a message or a prophecy from God.

When we hear these types of claims, it is best to reserve judgment until we can test them. The Bible tells us to test "the spirits" because a claimant can be delusional, self-seeking, religiously intoxicated, perhaps medicated, or in need of medication. God knows that we cannot read a claimant's mind and we cannot investigate an alleged dream or vision.

God knows that we cannot tell if people are prophesying out of their own imagination (in which case, God will surely punish them – see Ezekiel 13) or if they are, in fact, telling the truth. This is why John wrote, **"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."** (1 John 4:1)

Because God selects ordinary people as messengers from time to time, it is important that we consider and test their testimony. Here are three "tests" to remember.

First, what is the message? Does the message lead to a better of understanding of Scripture or does it, instead, attempt to glorify the messenger? Does the message rest squarely on the five essential Bible doctrines and does it align with valid rules of interpretation?

Second, is the message specific? Does the message contain definition, that is, does it pertain to a specific event, person(s), place(s), or an appointed time? Does the revelation contain detailed

information that can be tested and validated? God is not trivial.

When He speaks for the benefit of His people, He does not use vague concepts or weasel words. He declares the truth forthrightly and reveals the *unknown.* Consider the visions God gave to Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, and other prophets; they are loaded with definition.

Third, what is character of the person who claims to speak for God? (Matthew 7:16-20) Are they self-sustaining or do they seek money? Are they on a mission to gain for themselves or give to others? Jesus said, **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, *did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles*?'**

Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' " (Matthew 7:21-23, italics mine) When a person claims to have received information from God, it leaves us with only two options. The person is either lying or God has given a revelation that everyone should thoughtfully consider.

We should be very cautious of anyone who claims to have a message from God. Jesus said, **"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid."** (John 5:31) If Jesus, the Son of God, said this about Himself, what does this say about human beings who claim to be a prophet of God or a messenger from God? Why would Jesus say that a person's testimony about himself is not valid? The answer is simple: A person can lie and who would know? Maybe a short illustration will help.

I hear people say from time to time that they are "born again" Christians. This testimony is not valid. Who determines whether a person is truly born again – God or man? The Lord looks upon the heart and He alone knows whether a person is truly born again.

Many "well-behaved people" may think they are born-again, but they are not. Remember this story? **"**[Jesus said to the young man]**'. . . If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.' 'Which ones?' the man inquired. Jesus replied, 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.'**

'All these I have kept,' the young man said. 'What do I still lack?' Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.' " (Matthew 19:17-22)

The Lord carefully showed the young man that his faith was misplaced and his love was misdirected with three sentences! Jesus knew this young man's heart. Knowing that he was self-righteous, Jesus first highlighted the importance of obeying God's law.

The young man smugly responded, "All these I have kept." Then Jesus said, **"If you want to be perfect. . . ."**

I am sure these words shocked the young man. Do you mean that perfection does not come through good behavior? Are you telling me that I am not perfect? Are you telling me that I have to sell my possessions before I can become perfect?

The young man had been educated and trained well. Jesus could see that he was well behaved, but not born again. A born again person understands that he is only a trustee of whatever God has given him to manage. A born again person understands that in terms of wealth, God gives much to some people and much less to most. A born again person is not jealous of the person having much because he is content with what he has been given to manage, and his focus is on pleasing the Lord with whatever the Lord has given him.

Any self-proclamation of being born again is meaningless because Jesus, in three sentences or less, can expose our imperfection. Likewise, anyone claiming to have a message from the Lord may be boasting. So, listen and test. Reserve judgment until you have thoroughly tested the message and the messenger. False preachers and false prophets have misled many people because they are unacquainted with the Word of God.

Second Question

The second question "Will the selection and sealing of the 144,000 remain a secret until the censer is cast down and the Great Tribulation begins?"

Based on the examples given in the Bible, I believe the identity of the 144,000 will remain unknown until the 1,260 days of their empowerment begins. Maybe a few close friends and relatives will know about their election, but generally speaking, I believe they will remain unknown until the censer is cast down and the global earthquake occurs. (Revelation 8:5)

I understand that God typically prepares a person for service in a private setting and until the Holy Spirit works through that person in a dramatic way, that person appears to be just like everyone else. Many people thought Jesus was an ordinary person until He performed miracles. (John 6:42)

Moses was out in the desert when God called him. (Exodus 3:1,2) God called Isaiah in a vision. (Isaiah 6:8) Amos was picking figs. (Amos 7:14) God gave Daniel a vision in the night. (Daniel 2:19) Saul was traveling with others to Damascus, but no one else saw what he experienced. (Acts 9:1-7) Nathanael was sitting under a tree. (John 1:48) God called Jeremiah and Ezekiel as very young men and as such, the elders of Israel did not recognize or respect them as prophets. (Jeremiah 1:6; Ezekiel 1:3)

First Question

"How will the 144,000 know they have been selected and sealed?"

I believe Jesus will meet with the 144,000 at the same time. In other words, I believe Jesus will select and seal the 144,000 on the same day. Jesus' ability to meet with 144,000 different

people at the same time is similar to the scene that will occur at the end of the 1,000 years. When the seventh seal is broken, there will be silence for about half an hour as each created being meets with his Creator. Everyone will meet with Jesus for about half an hour. This is possible because the Holy Spirit is omnipresent (everywhere at once).

When Jesus appears to the 144,000, the Bible says, **"And he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. . . ."** (Revelation 10:3) I believe this shout will be heard around the world. (See Acts 2:2; 9:7 for a parallel.) For the 144,000, this shout (a thunderous declaration) will be overwhelming.

Everyone will hear heavy thunder booming and rolling throughout Earth, but nothing will be found in the heavens or on Earth to produce such a awesome sound! (See Job 36:26-37:5.) The 144,000 will understand the words of this shout and it will serve as a defining signal.

Jesus Christ has taken control of Earth away from man. He will exercise authority over Earth. John does not reveal what is said in the shout, but I like to think that Jesus will shout and the 144,000 will hear, "Prepare the world to meet its Creator!" (Amos 4:12)

You may recall that the Father spoke to Jesus a few times when He was on Earth. Consider this situation which occurred a few days before Jesus was crucified: **"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.**

Father, glorify your name!' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was there and heard it [but did not understand the words] **said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, '*This voice was for your benefit, not mine*. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.' "** (John 12:27-32, italics and insertions mine)

I believe very few, if any, of the 144,000 will know one another. In fact, they will be scattered all over Earth and come from different religious backgrounds. They will speak different languages and understand different cultures. I think it is so generous of God to have brothers and sisters speaking to their own brothers and sisters (their own countrymen)!

Amazingly, the testimony of the 144,000 during the Great Tribulation will be the same! They will deliver four inflammatory messages, and as needed, Jesus Himself will speak through their mouths (thus, the testimony of Jesus will be heard).

The Holy Spirit will perform miracles through them as needed to confirm the authenticity of their message, and most, if not all, of the 144,000 will die as martyrs. The 144,000 will meet with Jesus and the experience will be as real and literal as Paul's experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus. In other words, there will be no doubt about it. Sam, if you have not examined the study that I wrote sometime ago on the 144,000, please download it at www.wake-up.org/Revelation/Rev144.htm. It's free.

In summary, I believe the selection and sealing of the 144,000 is the next prophetic event. In general terms, the world will not know who the 144,000 are until the censer is cast down and the global earthquake occurs. One big clue indicating the 144,000 have been selected will be a phenomenal thunder – the commission given to the 144,000 to prepare the world for the arrival of Jesus!

I hope this has been helpful!

Larry Wilson

Why Does God Permit Injustice?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Dear Mr. Wilson:

I have been living in hell for the past ten years. Our daughter was raped and murdered in 1999. She was a wonderful person, my best friend. We raised her two children, they are now 20 and 22. My husband and I have tried to hide our sorrow and anger from the children, but sometimes it spilled out. My bitterness toward her murderer and God is devouring me from the inside out.

Her murderer has not been captured and my heartache is endless. I cannot count the number of days that I have spent crying. Even on my best days, I am hurting. If there is a God of love, why does He permit injustice to ruin so many lives? I need some answers. The rapist is probably free and has no remorse. Please don't tell me to trust in God and everything will work out.

Sincerely,

Jean (not her real name)"

Dear Jean:

Thank you for your letter. I am pleased that you are reaching out for help and I am happy to respond to your question. The loss of a child is a terrible tragedy and losing a child through predatory violence has to be most agonizing. My heart is stirred at the ever expanding circle of suffering that one predator imposed upon you and your family ten years ago.

Many people experience involuntary suffering after a deep emotional injury occurs. Endless sorrow is highly distressing, but the good news is that recovery is possible. I have seen people regain their balance through counselors and support groups. Also, if you have not seen a physician recently, why not have a check up?

Lengthy sorrow can alter body chemistry and a little adjustment by a good doctor can help make a difference! The truth about God is interesting and emotionally helpful, but please find a counselor who can help you discover your purpose in life. You are alive because God has a purpose for you and fulfilling that purpose will bring much joy.

Note: Jean's situation illustrates a human dilemma. I thought her question might be helpful to those of us who will face the Great Tribulation, because a time is coming when millions of Christians will experience violence and gross injustice because they must stand firm in their faith.

Unfortunately, many Christians are not prepared intellectually, spiritually, or emotionally to deal

with persecution. Remember the words of Jesus, **". . . And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matthew 28:20) Jesus will give us the grace and strength to meet every challenge if we abide in Him. (1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 12:9)

Why?

"Why does God permit injustice?" This is an ancient question. In fact, the oldest book in the Bible (the book of Job) is devoted to this question. God permits injustice to exist because He predetermined billions of years ago that sin should be allowed to exist for a finite amount of time.

Why did God decide to allow sin to exist? God's greatest problem is not the current existence of sin; instead, His greatest problem is preventing sin from occurring a third time. This requires a little explanation.

Before sin existed, Heaven was a happy place. There was no injustice, heartache, sickness, violence, or death. After 6,000 years of sin, I am sure we all agree that Heaven then was a wonderful place to be. Back then, there was no knowledge of such things. Only God knew about good and evil until sin began.

The angels were innocent and naive. They were happy because they had no predisposition for wrong doing. We would say they lived as "very sheltered" children until the day that Lucifer became unhappy with God's ways. The Bible reveals that pride led the devil to complain that God was unfair, arbitrary, and could not be trusted.

One third of the angels listened to Lucifer and they sided with him. Their disaffection for God led to war. Lucifer and his angels were cast out of Heaven. (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:12-17) Even though God expelled Lucifer and his angels for rebellion, He did not destroy them for at least four reasons:

1. If God had destroyed Lucifer and his angels as soon as they sinned, surviving angels would have concluded that God was indeed a dictator who did not tolerate opposition. Think about this: If God had destroyed Lucifer and his angels before the fruits of good and evil matured, highly intelligent angels would not be able to love and trust a god who quickly annihilated beings who disagreed with Him.

Should angels love God because God is love (that is, should they love Him because He truly is wise, patient, fair, reasonable, generous, and forgiving), or should angels submit to God because sudden death is the penalty for voicing disagreement? If God had killed Lucifer and his followers before the fruits of rebellion had matured, the remaining angels would have concluded that God is a divine bully. He could claim to be a God of love, but His actions would appear to prove that Heaven is either a place of total submission or instant death.

2. God's foremost concern is the eternal happiness of His children. He has infinite wisdom and perfect foreknowledge. His ways are perfect and His actions are consistent with principles of

love. God foreknew that sin on Earth needed a few thousand years to mature.

God foreknew that a watching universe needed to understand the deadly and horrible consequences of sin. By allowing the devil and his angels to live, God has provided the universe with two contrasting governments to study – one in Heaven (free of rebellion, full of joy and happiness) and one on Earth (full of sin, decadence, depravity, selfishness, violence, and death). By permitting these two governments to simultaneously exist, God has enabled intelligent beings to see the difference for themselves. He does not have defend Himself. The evidence speaks for itself.

3. God grants the power of choice to His children. He also holds each of us accountable for our actions. This means that we *do not* have to obey God, love Him, or respond to His goodness or generosity. Lucifer and his angels have proven that free will exists. They *chose* to rebel against God and His laws.

Adam and Eve also have proven that free will exists; they *chose* to disobey God. For 6,000 years, sin has flourished on Earth. History has proven over and over again (with the rise and fall of numerous civilizations) that human begins suffer in direct proportion to their departure from the laws of God.

In other words, God's laws are not for His benefit, but ours. Sin is intoxicating. Sin offers temporary pleasure and excitement, but it always extracts a price that is far greater than its benefit. Sin takes us farther than we want to go and costs more than we want to pay. No matter how well Satan disguises it, **"the wages of sin is death."** (Romans 6:23) God has permitted sin and rebellion to mature so that intelligent people can see the difference between God's order and Lucifer's order. Once the curse of sin is removed from the universe, no one will ever want to sin again. "Been there, done that."

4. Because the Father foreknew Lucifer's rebellion and the consequences of allowing Satan and his angels to live, He created a plan to save everyone who would live on Earth. He loved the people of the world so much that He gave Jesus as an atonement for our sins.

For no other reason than love, Jesus was willing to become a man and die one of the harshest deaths known to man so the penalty for our sin could be paid! The Godhead has suffered more and paid a higher price for the existence of sin than any angel or human being will ever know! Incidently, God did not create a plan of salvation for Lucifer and his angels because they were confronted with the truth many times and they willfully and defiantly rejected God's counsel. Lucifer and his angels committed the unpardonable sin. (Matthew 12:31,32)

When these four issues are synthesized, we see why God did not immediately destroy Lucifer and his rebellious angels. We see why sin has been permitted to exist and by extension, why God permits injustice to exist. Look around. Evil is overcoming good and this contest will soon reach a painful climax during the Great Tribulation.

The really good news is that after the current drama with sin is completed, sin will be no more. Injustice, heartache, sorrow, violence, and death will be gone forever! Never again will a mother

senselessly lose a beloved child in a despicable act of violence. Never again throughout all eternity – even among a universe of beings having the power of choice – will sin rule! Amen!

When it comes to injustice, "God has an ace up His sleeve." He has accurately recorded every injustice. At the Second Coming, God will take the saints to Heaven. During the 1,000 years, the saints will sit in judgment of the wicked with Jesus. (1 Corinthians 6:2,3; Revelation 20:6)

The saints will watch each episode of injustice and they will determine the amount of suffering each wicked person must experience in the fires of hell. In other words, Jean, if the man who murdered your daughter is not saved, he will be forced to suffer twice the amount of pain your daughter suffered. Then, this predator will also suffer for the family he hurt. God will see to it that justice is finally served. There is no revenge like God's revenge. God's justice will not be satisfied until the last penny has been repaid. (Matthew 5:26) So, be assured that "Justice Day" is surely coming.

Meanwhile, Jesus is anxious to set everyone free from bitterness if we are willing to "let go of it" and grasp something better. What is better than revenge? God's answer is forgiveness! If we ask God each day for the strength to forgive those who have harmed us or our loved ones, a miracle will happen.

The glacier of hatred will begin to melt and evaporate. If we do not let go of bitterness and hatred, it will destroy us. The first step is ours. We must choose to forgive our enemies. Unless we do, our health will fail, relationships will sour, and our lives will be filled with sorrow and depression instead of the joy and happiness that God intended.

Remember this, Jean, your daughter belonged to you and God. He gave her life through you and you can be sure He knows the perpetrator by name and justice will be served. In the meantime, you need to experience the miracle of forgiveness, and it will surely happen if you will begin by asking God to help you do something you cannot do yourself. Ask God to fill your heart with love. Start praying for the perpetrator of this crime. He surely needs a transformation that only the Holy Spirit can produce.

He needs salvation and a knowledge of the Lord. He needs to confess his sins and make his wrongs right while there is still time. In God's sight, he is a sinner and his penalty will be enormous. If you will begin to pray for him (regardless of your present feelings), you will be changed in the process.

God will set you free of bitterness. When Jesus sets you free, you will be free indeed! In place of anger and bitterness, God will bring peace and assurance. I know you told me not to tell you to trust in God, but the truth is, there is no other way – it is the key to success!

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28) **"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be**

overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:19-21)

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

Abraham and Isaac - Seven Prophetic Samples

Author: Larry W. Wilson

A Recent Prophetic Sample

From time to time, God graciously gives mankind prophetic samples of things to come. For example, a few weeks ago on July 19, an unexpected asteroid impacted Jupiter. The crash created an impact crater approximately 6,000 miles wide! Fifteen years earlier, a comet, named Shoemaker-Levy 9, broke apart and impacted Jupiter.

Shoemaker-Levy 9 created many craters that are much larger than our planet. Scientists are surprised because they calculate that explosive events of this magnitude happen once every 500,000 years. Well, we have witnessed two events in the past fifteen years that surpass the power contained in all of the world's nuclear bombs. Could these impacts be close together because they are intended to be prophetic samples?

Revelation 8 predicts a day in the near future when burning hail (a meteoric firestorm) will set Earth on fire and two horrific asteroid impacts will impact Earth. Twenty-five percent of Earth's population will die as a result of God's wrath. These apocalyptic events are hard to fathom even though they are plainly written in Scripture, so God generously offers prophetic samples to help us overcome unbelief.

It is as though He is whispering, "Look at the many craters on the moon and look at the recent craters on Jupiter! These are samples!" Do not forget, Noah predicted that enough water would fall from the sky to cover the whole earth. Unfortunately, almost everyone found Noah's prediction too hard to believe.

Prophetic Sample #1

God understands our limitations. Because the birth of Jesus would be unlike any other, Isaac's birth was supposed to serve as a prophetic sample of Messiah's virgin birth. To help ancient Israel believe that God would actually assume the form of a human being in the future, God waited until it was biologically impossible for Sarah to have a child before giving her a miracle baby!

The story surrounding Isaac's miraculous birth was to be a prophetic sample. Isaac's birth was supposed to help Israel anticipate Messiah's miraculous birth, but Israel did not believe and did not cooperate with God's plan. In fact, people still scoff at the idea that Jesus' mother was a virgin, but I'm getting ahead of myself. There is more to Isaac's story that needs to be told. So please take a few minutes to consider a really neat story.

Background

Abraham was born six years before Noah died. The Bible indicates that Terah, the father of Abraham, was born 214 years after the flood and Terah was 130 years old when Abraham was born. (Genesis 11:32, 12:4)* We know that Noah lived 350 years after the flood; therefore, Abraham was born 344 years after the flood. (Genesis 9:28)

We do not know how old Abraham was when God called him to leave Ur of the Chaldees, but we do know that after getting as far as Haran, Abraham settled there until his father died. When Abraham was seventy-five years old, God commanded Abraham to leave Haran and continue his journey to Canaan. (Genesis 12:4) Altogether, Abraham lived in Canaan for 100 years, dying at the age of 175. (Genesis 25:7)

* Note: Genesis 11:26 says, "After Terah had lived seventy years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran." This verse should be translated to mean, "After Terah had lived seventy years, he became a father. His sons were Abram, Nahor and Haran." Some people interpret this verse to mean that Terah became the father of Abraham, Nahor and Haran in the same year when Terah was seventy, but this is impossible when Genesis 11:32 and 12:4 are considered. Abraham was seventy-five when Terah died at the age of 205.

Starting over

After God destroyed the world in Noah’s day, He put a new plan into action. He searched Earth for a special person to start something wonderful. God wanted to establish a new group of "trustees" to share His gospel. Prior to the flood, God entrusted divine truth to patriarchs. This system became ineffective within a mere ten generations. By the time Noah was born, the world had reached the point of no return. After God destroyed the world and dispersed defiant mankind at the Tower of Babel, He knew that the truth about Him and His will for mankind would soon become distorted and corrupted. To combat Lucifer’s evil schemes and man’s ignorance and arrogance, God decided to implement a new plan. He chose one family to serve an ever increasing number of families on Earth. In other words, God designed that one family would both demonstrate and proclaim His character of love and His generous offer of salvation to the world. This "enlightened family" would grow proportionately in size as the population of the world grew, and this parallel growth would enable one nation to serve all of the nations of the world as the trustee of divine truth.

It is important to understand that from the beginning of sin, the plan of salvation has operated as a living trust. A living trust is a legitimate process whereby a benefactor distributes his wealth to beneficiaries according to design. When a benefactor is unable to do this for himself, he appoints a trustee to act on his behalf.

The trustee is required to distribute the wealth according to the terms stated in the trust. Of course, the trustee assumes a serious responsibility when he agrees to fulfill his obligation. Usually, trustees are paid well to fulfill their duties. I have digressed for a moment because God is our Benefactor and the whole world is the beneficiary of His amazing grace. (John 3:16)

God chose Abraham and his offspring to serve as trustees of divine truth. God chose Israel to distribute God’s grace and truth to the nations of Earth and they agreed to serve. (Exodus

19:1-8; Isaiah 49:6)

Three Reasons

God chose Abraham to be the father of this family of trustees for three reasons. First, Abraham had a heart for God. Abraham was not afraid to trust God. His faith in God was extraordinary and this delighted God. As sinners go, Abraham was as pure in heart as anyone could be.

He was eager to please God in word and deed. He is the first man in the Bible to be called a prophet. (Genesis 20:7) Second, Abraham was upright, a generous and loving man. Even though he knew the value of money and became wealthy, he did not chase wealth. He even gave the best land to Lot, his undeserving nephew.

Finally, Abraham was diligent and thoughtful. He genuinely cared for others and almost everyone regarded him as a man who could be trusted. Abraham *earned* the respect of those who knew him because he was honest, thoughtful, consistent, honorable in purpose, and generous in spirit and action.

So, God chose Abraham to be the father of His trustees and He eagerly looked forward to having an expanding nation of people who mirrored the character of "father Abraham."

In spite of his character strengths, Abraham also had a few character flaws. Fearing for his life, he lied twice about his relationship with his wife. (Genesis 12:12; 20:2) He told Pharaoh and later on, King Abimelech, that Sarah was his sister. True, Sarah was a half-sister because she and Abraham had the same father. (Genesis 20:12)

The problem was Sarah’s beauty. She was unusually beautiful and Abraham feared that powerful men might kill him in order to take her. (Killing a husband in order to acquire a beautiful woman was not uncommon in ancient times. Remember how King David killed Uriah in order to take Bathsheba as his wife?) Abraham lied to avoid personal injury. If God had not dramatically intervened both times, Abraham would have ruined God’s master plan before it had even started!

God knew that Abraham and Sarah were childless and He embedded this grievous handicap into His master plan for them. Even though she was stunning on the outside, Sarah felt grossly inferior on the inside. According to the culture of that time, Sarah felt humiliated wherever she went.

She was an embarrassment to Abraham because she was a barren (worthless) woman. She might as well have been covered with leprosy. Abraham wanted a son and Sarah desperately wanted children, too. Even after forty years of marriage, and endless sexual remedies and techniques, there were no children! But the truth is that Sarah’s infertility was part of God’s master plan.

One day the Lord appeared to Abraham and made this promise: "All the land that you see I will

give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." (Genesis 13:15-17)

Later on, the Lord gave Abraham a vision: ". . . 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.' But Abram said, 'O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.'

Then the word of the Lord came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.' He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:1-6)

The previous sentence, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness," deserves an entire book, but I must stay on topic. However, I will say that a childless Abram went to bed that night in perfect peace. God saw that Abraham believed His words and God was very pleased. God had promised Abraham that he would have a son and many descendants.

Abram not only believed God, but he also quit worrying about his hopeless situation – for a while.

Lord, We Are Tired of Trying

I am sure you are acquainted with the story that produced Ishmael. If not, please review it in Genesis 16. To save space, the heart of the story is this: Sarah offered Abraham her young slave, an Egyptian handmaid named Hagar. Sarah reasoned that since she owned Hagar, Hager's offspring would be counted as Sarah's own. An eighty-five year old Abraham considered the offer, and even though he knew this arrangement was wrong, he accepted his wife's offer. When Hagar became pregnant, she taunted Sarah with her inability to conceive, and contempt quickly developed between the two women. Sarah blamed Abraham for her misery and Abraham deflected responsibility by saying that Hagar was *her* servant and to treat her as she wished.

Sarah punished Hagar harshly and Hagar ran away. An angel found the pregnant fugitive by a spring in the desert and told her to return to Sarah and remain her slave. For the next thirteen years, Hagar and Ishmael lived with Abraham and Sarah, and Abraham loved the boy as much as any father could love his son.

Meanwhile, back in the tent, Sarah continued to languish in a tormented and hopeless state. She was a childless woman and that made her feel even less of a woman than Hagar, her slave. It looked to Sarah as though she would never graduate from Desert University.

For thirteen years, the Lord said nothing. He just looked down from Heaven on the tensions

taking place in a small tent in Canaan. When Abraham was ninety-nine, the Lord appeared before Abraham. He promised to make Abraham the father of many nations (Genesis 17:5) and He promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants.

The Lord also promised that Sarah would become the mother of nations. Abraham was overwhelmed. "Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?' And Abraham said to God, 'If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!'

Then God said, 'Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers.

He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.' " (Genesis 17:17-21)

The real purpose behind this visit was to reset the master plan. Abraham and Sarah had made a big mess of God's plans. They had shown a lack of faith in God and they attempted to justify their sin. However, because a righteous God will have nothing to do with sin, He decided to start over with a new plan. He changed their identity.

They would no longer be called Abram and Sarai; they would instead be called Abraham and Sarah. He also imposed the ritual of circumcision: "Then God said to Abraham ' . . . . Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.' . . .

On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, and his son Ishmael was thirteen; Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day." (See Genesis 17:9-26.)

"Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. . . . Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.'

And she added, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.' The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast.

"But Sarah saw that the [fourteen year old] son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking [baby Isaac out of jealousy], and she said to Abraham, 'Get rid of that

slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.'

The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his [firstborn] son. But God said to him, 'Do not be so distressed about the boy [Ishmael] and your [Egyptian] maidservant. [Sarah has suffered enough.] Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned [as trustees of divine truth]. I will make [Ishmael] the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring.' " (See Genesis 21:1-12, insertions mine.)

"Some time later [thirty-three years*] God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied. Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son [remaining with you], Isaac, whom you love [with all your heart], and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.'

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the [mountain top, the] place [of the sacrifice] in the distance. He said to his servants, 'Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then *we* will come back to you.'

"Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, 'Father?' 'Yes, my son?' Abraham replied. 'The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'

Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.

He [broke down with many tears explaining the situation. He] bound his [willing] son Isaac and laid him [gently] on the altar, on top of the wood. Then [with a broken heart] he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied. 'Do not lay a hand on the boy,' he said. 'Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.'

"Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place **The Lord Will Provide**. And to this day it is said, **'On the mountain of the Lord it [atonement] will be provided.'**

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, 'I swear by myself,' declares the Lord, 'that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.

Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.' " (See Genesis 22:1-18, insertions mine.)

* Note: Jewish tradition says that Isaac was thirty-seven years old at the time. We know that Isaac lived to be 180 years old. (Genesis 35:28) Given the longevity of those who lived close to the flood and the fact that Isaac did not marry until he was forty, my understanding is that Isaac was a minor of thirty-three years – the same age as Jesus was when He died.

Prophetic Sample #2 – Atonement for Sin

As we looked at Prophetic Sample #1, we can see how Isaac's birth was biologically impossible and this was to serve as a prophetic sample of Christ's birth. Now, let us consider Prophetic Sample #2. Isaac's death on Mount Moriah was to serve as a prophetic sample of Messiah's death.

Both deaths involved a son who was the apple of his father's eye. Both deaths constituted a great sacrifice – both for the son and for the father. Both sons were innocent of guilt, but their deaths were required for the purpose of atonement. Remember, a burnt offering is an offering made to God for the purpose of atonement. (Leviticus 1:4)

Isaac was to die as a burnt offering. This means *atonement* was the reason for his death. God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering to atone for Abraham's sin with Hagar. In other words, the sacrifice of Isaac for Abraham's sin is Prophetic Sample #2 – our Heavenly Father would give up His dearly beloved Son in order to provide atonement for our sins!

Prophetic Sample #3 – Death on the Altar of Burnt Offering

Closely study these words again: **"Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as *a burnt offering* on *one* of the mountains I will tell you about.' "** (Genesis 22:2, italics mine) The death of Isaac on Mount Moriah was a prophetic sample of Christ's death which was supposed to take place on Mount Moriah! Yes, we know that Jesus died outside the city of Jerusalem, on a hill called Golgotha. (John 19:17) But that was not God's initial plan! It was God's plan that Jesus die on the Altar of Burnt Offering in the temple!

Please consider this Messianic prophecy. This prophecy would have been fulfilled if Israel had received as Messiah at the First Advent: **"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication.**

They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. . . .

On that day a fountain [of blood] **will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity."** (Zechariah 12:10,11; 13:1, insertion mine)

If Israel had fallen in love with Messiah and received Him as its King, then, as this text indicates, (a) the death of Messiah would have caused bitter grief throughout Israel, and (b) Jesus would have died as the result of piercing (that is, His throat cut). Sacrificial animals were slain on the Altar of Burnt Offering by having their carotid arteries cut (Hebrew: *daqar* - to wound or stab). This process produces a fountain of blood because the systolic force during a heartbeat causes the blood to squirt from the wound until the blood volume decreases to the point of death.

Now before you become upset with this concept, please consider another Messianic prophecy that would have been fulfilled if Israel had received Messiah at the First Advent: **"If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at *the house of my friends*.' "** (Zechariah 13:6, italics mine)

The phrase, "the house of my friends," is a reference to the temple in Jerusalem. If the Jews had received Messiah as Lord and King, Jesus would have died among His friends and He would have died at the temple – the house of Israel. Unfortunately, things did not turn out this way because Israel rejected God. The trustees of divine truth killed Divine Truth.

Shortly before His death on the cross, Jesus pronounced this benediction on Israel because of its rebellion. He said, **"Look, your house is left to you desolate."** (Matthew 23:38) This statement means that God will never again dwell in His temple on Mount Moriah!

Notice the parallel: Isaac was to be offered as a sacrifice on an altar as an atonement for sin. His experience was to be a prophetic sample highlighting the death of Jesus on the Altar of Burnt Offering.

Prophetic Sample #4 – Mount Moriah

To make Isaac's death a prophetic sample that goes beyond reasonable argument, God specifically commanded Abraham to take Isaac to specific spot on Mount Moriah. Why not conduct the sacrifice closer to home or better yet, in the backyard? There is a simple explanation.

Centuries later, God's temple would be built on this specific spot on Mount Moriah and it was God's plan that Jesus should die on the Altar of Burnt Offering in the temple at Jerusalem – the very same spot where Isaac had been offered centuries earlier! Remember, Jesus was *not* supposed to die on a cross outside of the city. Jesus did not commit a capital offense. (Deuteronomy 21:22,23) It was God's plan that He should to die on the Altar of Burnt Offering as "The Lamb of God."

The place where Abraham offered up Isaac (the top of Mount Moriah) became holy ground. That spot of ground was to be a perpetual monument to Abraham's faith, and not only

Abraham's, but for all sinners who grasp by faith the atonement that was made there. Later on, this spot would become God's dwelling place.

This is why Moses warned Israel just before entering Canaan, **"Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. Offer them *only at the place the Lord will choose* in one of your tribes** [Judah]**, and there** [at that place] **observe everything I command you."** (Deuteronomy 12:13,14, insertions mine)

We know God deliberately chose the site of Isaac's altar because He told Abraham where to offer him. Before we go any further, we need to jump forward about 500 years and notice how God reestablished the importance of this particular spot on Mount Moriah during the reign of King David.

David sinned against the Lord by conducting a census of military age men. Even the seasoned warrior Joab knew this action was wrong. **"But Joab replied to the king, 'May the Lord your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?' "** (2 Samuel 24:3)

Nevertheless, at the end of nine months and twenty days, the census was completed. Joab reported that Israel had 800,000 and Judah had 500,000 men able to handle the sword – an army that totaled 1.3 million men.

When he received the results of the census, "David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.' Before David got up the next morning, the word of the Lord had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: 'Go and tell David, "This is what the Lord says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you." '

"David said to Gad, 'I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.' So the Lord sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died.

When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, 'Enough! Withdraw your hand.' The angel of the Lord was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the Lord, 'I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall upon me and my family.'

"On that day Gad went to David and said to him, 'Go up and **build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite**.' So David went up, as the Lord had commanded through Gad. When Araunah looked and saw the king and his men coming toward him, he went out and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground. Araunah said, 'Why has my lord the king come to his servant?' 'To buy your threshing floor,' David answered, 'so I can build

an altar to the Lord, that the plague on the people may be stopped.'

"Araunah said to David, 'Let my lord the king take whatever pleases him and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood. O king, Araunah gives all this to the king.' Araunah also said to him, 'May the Lord your God accept you.'

But the king replied to Araunah, 'No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God **burnt offerings** that cost me nothing.' So **David bought the threshing floor** and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.

David built an altar to the Lord there and **sacrificed burnt offerings** and fellowship offerings.Then the Lord answered prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped." (2 Samuel 24:10-25, emphasis mine)

Several years later, notice where the temple with its Altar of Burnt Offering was built: "Then Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem **on Mount Moriah**, where the Lord had appeared to his father David. It was on **the threshing floor of Araunah** the Jebusite, the place provided by David." (2 Chronicles 3:1, emphasis mine)

The Lord chose Mount Moriah – the very spot where Abraham had offered up Isaac and the very spot where David was commanded to build the *Altar of Burnt Offering*. It was this very spot that God chose as the location for the temple and the Altar of Burnt Offering.

Why? Abraham had passed the greatest test of faith that a person can face at this place and God made it holy ground. Isaac was to die on an altar at the very same place where Jesus would die on an altar. This was God's original plan!

Prophetic Sample #5 – Total Submission to His Father

Look at these verses: "On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, 'Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then ***we*** will come back to you.'

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, 'Father?' 'Yes, my son?' Abraham replied. 'The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'

"Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on [silently] together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He [explained the situation and God's demand for atonement.

Isaac was willing to lay down his life. Abraham] bound his son Isaac and [gently] laid him on the

altar, on top of the wood. Then [with tears pouring from his eyes] he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied.

‘Do not lay a hand on the boy,’ he said. ‘Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.’ " (Genesis 22:4-12, insertions mine)

Three things are impressive in this scene: First, Abraham clearly understood the need for blood atonement and he did not quibble with God about needing atonement for his sin. Second, Abraham believed that God would resurrect Isaac from the dead. We see this in Abraham’s words to his servants, "*we* will come back to you."

We also see Abraham’s faith regarding Isaac’s resurrection because Abraham knew that God had promised that Isaac would be the heir of the covenant. In other words, Abraham reasoned that Isaac would have to be brought back to life in order for God’s covenant to continue! Last, and most important, Abraham loved God more than he loved Isaac.What a man!

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." (Hebrews 11:17-19)

What does this story say about thirty-three year old Isaac’s submission to his 133 year old father? This is an incredible prophetic sample pointing to the life and ministry of Jesus and His submission to His Father!

Prophetic Sample #6 – On the Mountain of the Lord

"Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided." (Genesis 22:13,14)

Through teary eyes, Abraham looked up and he immediately saw two things. He saw a ram caught in a thicket, but more importantly, he saw that God Himself would provide the atonement that every sinner needs. I am sure that Abraham and Isaac wept together as Abraham named that rock on Mount Moriah, **"The Lord Will Provide** [the atoning sacrifice]**."**

The nation of Israel should have remembered this name. Israel should have understood this profound prophetic sample, but arrogance and ignorance reduced their sacrifices on the Altar of Burnt Offering to mere rituals. How sad! Eventually, this nation of trustees had to be destroyed because they would not learn the intimate relationship that exists between obedience, faith, and love.

Prophetic Sample #7 – Blessings through Faith

"The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, ‘I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.

Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.’ " (Genesis 22:15-18)

For decades, God severely tested the faith of Sarah and Abraham. Allowing their frustrations to get the better of them, they finally failed. Abraham was eighty-five when he threw in the towel and went to bed with a slave woman. Sarah and Abraham almost ruined God’s master plan through the works of the flesh.

In fact, after they finally understood the big mess they had made of God’s plans, God started over. He changed their names and He circumcised Abraham and all the males in his household. Abraham and Sarah had fallen for the oldest temptation in history. That temptation is to justify sin. Lucifer did it, a third of the angels did it, Adam and Eve did it, and Abraham and Sarah did it. Abraham committed adultery and it brought his family and his descendants more grief than we can imagine.

Finally, after letting the guilty pair stew in the results of their own doing, God started over. He came down one day and changed their names. God would have been justified emasculating Abraham, but of course, this would not have resolved the problem, so God started over. He instituted a covenant of circumcision.

This covenant in the flesh was to be a perpetual reminder to Abraham and every male who came through him that sexual immorality is an abomination to God. Sexual immorality produces suffering, heartache, separation, and death.

By the time God demanded the life of Isaac – the one thing that Abraham treasured most – Abraham had learned his lesson and he faithfully carried out the commandment of the Lord, even though his heart was breaking every step of the way. It may have been a journey of three days, but to Abraham I am sure it seemed like a lifetime.

And this is the final prophetic sample that all of us need to absorb today: Faithfully doing all that God commands is painful at times – sometimes, for a long time. Often, doing God’s will hurts and it may come with the threat of death, but standing firm on God’s side and doing what is right even when your emotions are against you –this is the meaning of living by faith!

When we are willing to live this way, God gives us the grace to endure and He credits our faith as righteousness. There is no greater blessing than having God as "our shield and exceeding great reward."

I hope this helps you understand why God chose Abraham. I also hope you understand why Abraham is called the father of the faithful, and most of all, I hope you understand why every whole-hearted believer in Christ is called "the seed of Abraham." (Galatians 3:28,29)

Larry Wilson

Find Freedom in Christ

Author: Larry W. Wilson

A Hungry Octopus

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." -John 8:36

Sin is like a hungry octopus that has very long tentacles. To make matters worse, every sin comes with its own GPS tracking device. You get the picture. We can run, but we can't hide. The GPS locator tells the octopus where we are. Sooner or later, the octopus *will* arrive and devour us.

Foolish people think they can avoid the octopus, but this is impossible. No man can fool God. Moses said, **". . . and you may be sure that your sin will find you out."** (Numbers 32:23) And Paul wrote, **"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."** (Galatians 6:7)

There is an important difference between the *penalty* for sin and the *consequences* of sin. The penalty for sin (big or small) is eternal death. (Romans 6:23) Unless a sinner surrenders to the demands of the Holy Spirit and is born again, he or she will pay the penalty for sin. (Matthew 12:31,32)

On the other hand, the *consequences* of our sins vary according to the severity of each sin. Some sins have small consequences and some sins have enormous consequences. Given the penalty and consequences of sin, we should not treat the topic of sin lightly.

When we do wrong, God requires that we make restitution. (Exodus 22; Matthew 5:23,24) The concept of restitution is more complex than it sounds because the damage sin causes to a victim cannot always be restored by a sinner's restitution. (Numbers 35:33; 1 Samuel 3:14)

For example, how can a predator make restitution for rape or sexual abuse? How can a murderer make restitution for two different murders since he only has one life to give? How does a liar make restitution for slander or libel? How does a married person make restitution for adultery?

How can parents restore the lives of children harmed by divorce? In those cases where restitution is not possible, God has provided a wonderful solution for the victim. It's called forgiveness.

I know that it sounds strange that God requires each victim to forgive, but it is true! God does not want any victim suffering indefinitely. So, God offers each victim a special grace which will set each victim free of all hatred and revenge if he is willing to accept it.

God will remove all negative feelings from a victim if the victim is willing to forfeit his demand for

human justice. (Of course, God will see that justice is served, but until that day comes, God's heart is moved with compassion for the victim's plight.)

In its simplest form, forgiveness is a simple exchange. God says to the victim, "Give me your anger and desire for justice and I will give you spiritual and emotional freedom from the injury." From a human point of view, forgiveness is not possible in many cases.

What is more disgusting or painful than suffering for no other reason than an evil predator's passion? God understands because He suffers with us. This is why He offers to every victim a special grace called forgiveness. Jesus exhibited this grace on the cross. He said, **". . . Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34) Stephen, the first Christian martyr, exhibited this grace. His final words were these: **" . . . Lord, do not hold this sin against them. . . . "** (Acts 7:60)

Freedom in Christ

Whenever a person receives a dispensation of God's amazing grace (as in the previous example on forgiveness), that person experiences freedom *in* Christ. Jesus said, **"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** (John 8:36) Let me be clear, the freedom that Jesus offers is not freedom from obeying God.

Never! *The freedom that Jesus offers is freedom from the demands of the carnal nature.* When the carnal nature is able to do as it pleases, it thinks it has freedom, but in reality the carnal nature is not free. It is *spring loaded* in the direction of evil. (Genesis 4:7) The carnal nature is attracted to things that are degenerative, destructive, and offensive.

The carnal nature is insatiable and never satisfied. It resists authorities and boundaries and it asserts itself above the welfare of others. The carnal nature will cause a person to sin and once sin is committed, bondage begins. The octopus will follow sin's GPS signal, find the sinner, and strangle him.

The Gospel Coin

Like a coin, the gospel of Jesus Christ has two sides. One side is knowledge and the other is discipline, and herein lies a big problem. *Many Christians would rather be an authority on Jesus than a mirror of His character.* This lopsided phenomenon has led many non-Christians to loathe the gospel and the wonderful name of Jesus.

Many so-called Christians exhibit behavior that embarrasses even the pagans! However, a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus is a wonderful thing to embrace. The Bible tells us wonderful things about God and His love. It is a joy to hear thoughtful sermons that inspire and heart-felt songs that bring tears, but these do not bring freedom in Christ.

Freedom in Christ is only possible through total surrender to the authority of Christ! If you want to be happy and fulfilled, if you want to be free from burdens that are crushing the very life out of

you, if you want freedom from addiction, worry, and hatred, you can have it. Jesus grants freedom to His disciples! Sometimes Jesus gives this freedom a minute at a time, sometimes it lasts an hour, or it can even last a whole day!

A disciple is a person who voluntarily submits to the demands of a mentor. A disciple of Christ is not a free man or woman as the world defines freedom, yet disciples of Jesus are truly free! They volunteer to be Christ's slaves, surrendering their carnal natures every time sin raises its ugly head (each minute, hour or day).

Disciples of Christ are also servants of God, and pagans are very puzzled that anyone would want to be a disciple of Jesus. They ask, "Why should we give up the freedom to do as we want?"

Unfortunately, many Christians are not disciples. Wearing a label that says "Disciple of Jesus" is like wearing "The Medal of Honor" without having earned the medal. Leading people to become a disciple of Jesus is time consuming and difficult because a person has to be a disciple before he can help someone else become a disciple!

It takes a great deal of patience to teach another person the ways of Christ and to help him understand the benefits of giving up his personal freedom. Jesus understands the struggle and this is why He said, **"Therefore go and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matthew 28:19,20, italics mine)

Holy Spirit Guilt

Here is an irony. To be free and truly happy, one has to become a disciple of Jesus. To become strong in the Lord, one has to see and admit his weakness. To overcome this world (the cares of this life and the lust of the eyes), one has to receive special grace from God because it is otherwise impossible. I know this sounds confusing, so here is a short illustration.

Suppose a man has come to a place in his life where he really wants to be set free from pornography. He realizes one day that porn has taken him further into depravity than he ever wanted to go. Yet, the man remains overpowered by porn.

He cannot escape the fantasies and pictures that constantly pass through his mind, and this monster is ruining his personal relationships. His wife and children notice that he is emotionally far away and detached. Inwardly, the man wants freedom from porn.

He might gather up whatever resolve he can muster and do something helpful, such as removing all porn from his possession. He might avoid TV shows, movies or even the internet so that he will not see porn. While these actions are steps in the right direction, they are not liberating because his brain is damaged. His passion for porn might be reduced by remedial action, but remember, "even though we manage to pull the nail out of the wall, the hole

remains."

The gospel of Jesus offers a different route to freedom from porn. Jesus said, **"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** (John 8:36) Suppose, the Holy Spirit comes to the man one day and heavily impresses two things upon the man's heart. First, the Holy Spirit causes the man to see that porn is a sin against God in general and against women in particular.

It is a disgusting and debasing sin. Porn is a perversion of the intimate and meaningful experience which God created for a husband and a wife. The Holy Spirit also tells the man, "Porn is devouring your soul. You value women according to the sexual response they produce within you. Porn is destroying your marriage and your relationship with your children.

It will lead to inappropriate relationships, even predatory violence." But, the Holy Spirit does not end there. He tells the man that Jesus will heal him of this illness and put him on the road to freedom from porn *if* he will confess his sin to the Lord and acknowledge that further participation will ruin this life and disqualify him for eternal life.

Did you notice the last five words? When the Holy Spirit pounces on us with conviction, when the Holy Spirit brings us to the moment of truth, the road leads to freedom or death. **"If we confess our sins, he** [Jesus] **is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** (1 John 1:9, insertion mine)

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." (Hebrews 10:26,27)

The type of guilt the Holy Spirit produces always comes with a promise of freedom. God sends the Holy Spirit when we sin so that we will choose freedom and avoid death. If we feed the carnal nature, sin will take us into bondage (addiction). So, the Holy Spirit puts discipleship on the line every time He visits.

In other words, if the man battling porn is willing to confess his sin and believe God's promise, he will receive special grace from God. The man *will be purified* according to God's wisdom. I say "purified according to God's wisdom" because Jesus may set us free from sin for a few minutes, an hour, or a day.

Often, the Lord will test our willingness to be disciplined many times before granting conditional freedom. (Freedom in Christ is always conditional. We have to remain a disciple of Jesus to remain free. This is why Twelve Step support programs are so helpful.)

So, which is better? The man who cleans his house, shuts off the TV and internet, and then struggles within himself to overcome porn or the man who volutarily submits to the Holy Spirit, confesses his sin, and receives God's grace which causes his interest in porn to die for a span of time. Of course, the second answer is the right one.

The carnal nature cannot overcome itself. We can only overcome the demands of the carnal nature through surrender, confession, and faith. Jesus will impart the grace that we need and *conditional* freedom is the result. **"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** (John 8:36)

Jesus said, **"When an evil spirit comes out of a man** [and the man is conditionally set free]**, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it** [demons are not happy unless they are tormenting someone]**. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied** [no demons within]**, swept clean and put in order.**

Then it goes [for help] **and takes with it seven other spirits** [demons] **more wicked than itself, and they go in** [and break down the door] **and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. . . ."** (Matthew 12:43-45, insertions mine)

This means that freedom comes through discipleship and it will be lost if discipline is refused. If the Holy Spirit confronts us on any matter and we refuse, eight demons will break down the door and take up lodging. So, be on guard. That temptation knocking at the door may have eight demons behind it.

Larry Wilson

An Amazing Prophetic Sample Who Could Have Done Far Better

Author: Larry W. Wilson

A Time of Apostasy In Israel

Samson is often called "the strongest man who ever lived" because he did certain things that are humanly impossible. Consider some of his incredible feats: He killed a lion with his bare hands. (Judges 14:6) He killed a thousand men by himself. (Judges 15:15)

He tore down the city gates of Gaza and carried them away on his shoulders, supporting beams and all. (Judges 16:3) He was bound with new ropes and broke them as if they were threads. (Judges 16:12) Even though he may have been the strongest man to ever live, he fell short of being the prophetic sample who God wanted him to be.

For several reasons, I believe Samson's miraculous birth and his amazing strength were prophetic samples of Messiah's miraculous birth and Christ's amazing strength over sin.

Special Timing

Samson was born at a time when Israel was in apostasy and under the dominion of the Philistines. Parallel: Jesus was born at a time when Israel was in apostasy and under the dominion of the Romans.

A Miracle Birth

Consider these parallels between Samson and Jesus. Samson: **"The angel of the Lord appeared to her** [Samson's mother] **and said, 'You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son.' "** (Judges 13:3, insertion mine) Jesus: **"But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. . . . 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' "** (Luke 1:30-34)

The Nazirite Vow

The angel instructed Samson's mother, **"Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines."** (Judges 13:4,5)

The Bible mentions the Nazirite vow for the first time when God discusses it with Moses.

(Numbers 6) The Hebrew word *nazir* means to be separate or to be dedicated/consecrated. The essential idea behind taking the vow was total dedication to the Lord for a specific period of time.

Three people in the Bible were put under the Nazirite vow before birth: Samson (Judges 13:4,5), Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15). These men were obligated before birth because they would become prophetic samples of Christ. Additionally, each of these three men were the result of a miraculous birth. It is also noteworthy that the Levites (the priests) were also obligated to live according to the Nazirite vow. (Leviticus 10:8-10, 21:10-15; Numbers 6:6)

Samson's Mission

God chose Samson before his birth to accomplish several things. He was to "begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines." To appreciate this task, you need to know something about the setting. According to the Jubilee Calendar, Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land in 1397 B.C.

After Israel scattered throughout Canaan, the twelve tribes quickly lost their sense of direction. Each tribe appointed its own leader and from time to time, various tribes would unite in order to fight a common enemy, but there was no centralized authority over the twelve tribes as there had been during the days of Moses and Joshua.

This verse describes Israel's early days in Canaan: **"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."** (Judges 17:6) God designed this lack of centralized leadership. Jesus wanted each tribe to look to Him for direction. He was, as Pilate would later declare, "The King of the Jews." If each tribe was faith-full in carrying out His commands, He would overthrow their enemies and give them Canaan – one city at a time.

When Israel entered Canaan, millions of Canaanites occupied the land. (Israel, itself, had 601,730 men who were age twenty and older. (Numbers 26:31) God required each tribe to eliminate many Canaanites from their share of the promised land.

By putting a small tribe in a life or death situation against a much larger enemy, God designed that His people would observe first hand that He was a personal Savior. He would deliver them. In other words, God wanted each tribe to see that He was *giving* them the land. He did not want them to think they were *taking* the land.

If Israel viewed their conquests through worldly eyes, that would depend upon their own arms of flesh, whereas God wanted Israel to depend upon the everlasting arms of Almighty God. The destruction of Jericho (the first city to fall in Canaan) was a prophetic sample of how God purposed to give Canaan to Israel – one city at a time. Do not forget, the promised land of Canaan was conditional. Israel's God would only work miracles for Israel *if* Israel upheld His covenant. (See Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.)

Soon after entering Canaan, Israel began repetitious cycles of apostasy and repentance. Every time Israel turned their hearts from the Lord, the Lord refused to protect them from the Canaanites. (A loss of divine protection was clearly promised in the covenant.) Whenever God's protection was removed, the Canaanites would rush in and regain the cities previously lost. Thus, the Canaanites remained a "thorn in the flesh" for several centuries.

The book of Judges indicates that Israel had a merry-go-round experience with God. They constantly went in circles, cycling between apostasy and repentance, because human nature has a relentless proclivity and insatiable appetite for sin and rebellion. I have mentioned these facts so that you might understand and appreciate the context of Judges 13.

The chapter begins with a simple assessment of Israel's situation around the time of Samson's birth: **"*Again* the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years."** (Judges 13:1, italics mine)

Divine bondage is a profound topic that goes beyond the scope of this study, but we will leave it at this for now: The Lord will permit adversity and bondage to get our attention if and when necessary. If punitive action does not get our attention, the octopus of sin will surely find us because a GPS device comes with every sin. Sooner or later, every person needs the Savior, and Israel cried out for a savior after forty years of serving the Philistines.

Amazing Strength

I cannot prove this, but I conclude that Samson looked like an ordinary man, a prophetic sample of Jesus. In other words, I do not think that Samson was a hulk of a man with bulging muscles and imposing physique. I do not believe he was a "handsome Hollywood type guy" with long hair.

I base this unusual assumption on three reasons: First, Samson's incredible strength was not of human origin. In other words, God's message to Israel through Samson was, not by human might or power, but by my Spirit. (See Zechariah 4:6.) Second, Samson's life and ministry were to be a testimony to the ordinary people of Israel – that God will give divine strength to ordinary people to overcome any obstacle *if* they will separate themselves from the world and serve the Lord with all their hearts, minds, and souls (as the Nazirite vow indicates).

Third, Samson was a prophetic sample of Jesus and Jesus' physical appearance was not attractive. The Bible says of Jesus, **"He grew up before him** [the Father] **like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."** (Isaiah 53:2, insertion mine) We live at a time when the world is obsessed with physical beauty, so it takes spiritual insight to discern this sophisticated idolatry. There is a huge difference between the beauty of holiness and worshiping beauty.

Samson's amazing strength was to be a herculean testimony. God did not want Israel worshiping Samson's strength. God wanted everyone in Israel to see what He could do through

ordinary people. God wanted Israel to know that even though Israel was in captivity, He had not forsaken them.

God wanted to bring Israel back to Himself, so He raised up an ordinary man who lived under the Nazirite vow to deliver His people from bondage caused by sin. In this sense, Samson was a powerful prophetic sample of Jesus, because when **". . .the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** (John 8:36)

Great Start

Early in his life, Samson did something very strange. The Holy Spirit led him to find a wife among the Canaanites. Samson's desire for a Canaanite woman deeply troubled his parents because they knew the warning that Moses gave: **"When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you. . . .**

Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you." (Deuteronomy 7:1-4)

Notice what happened, and pay close attention to the last sentence: **"Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, 'I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife.'**

His father and mother replied, 'Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?' But Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me. She's the right one for me.' (His parents did not know that this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.)" (Judges 14:1-4)

When Samson and his parents went down to Timnah to negotiate arrangements for the woman, a young lion came out of a vineyard and charged them. The Holy Spirit enabled Samson to catch and kill the lion by tearing it apart with his bare hands.

When the time came for making plans for the marriage feast, Samson passed by the carcass of the lion on his way to Timnah and there he found a swarm of bees and a honeycomb in the carcass. As he gathered up the honey, he was impressed with two superlatives: At his feet lay the carcass of the strongest predator in nature and in the carcass was a comb of honey, the sweetest substance known at the time.

After the marriage ceremony, Samson offered the Philistines (who ruled over the area) a riddle. He offered a huge prize of thirty linen cloths and thirty sets of clothes if they could solve his riddle by the end of the marriage feast (seven days) and if they couldn't produce the answer,

they would have to give him the same in return.

Because Samson was offering a substantial prize, the Philistines agreed to the challenge. **". . . .'Tell us your riddle,' they said. 'Let's hear it.'** [Samson said,] **'Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet.' For three days they could not give the answer."** (Judges 14:13,14, insertion mine)

"On the fourth day [of the wedding feast]**, they** [the Philistines] **said to Samson's wife, 'Coax your husband into explaining the riddle for us, or we will burn you and your father's household to death. Did you invite us here to rob us?' "** (Judges 14;15, insertions mine)

The riddle had innocently put Samson's wife and her family in a difficult situation. The Bible says, **"She cried the whole seven days of the feast. So on the seventh day he finally told her** [the answer to the riddle]**, because she continued to press him. She in turn explained the riddle to her people."** (Judges 14:17, insertion mine)

"Before sunset on the seventh day the men of the town said to him, 'What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?' Samson said to them, 'If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle.' Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power.

He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of their belongings and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. Burning with anger, he went up to his father's house. And Samson's wife was given to the friend [the best man] **who had attended him at his wedding."** (Judges 14:18-20, insertion mine)

In case you missed it, Samson's wrath against the Philistines is justified. In other words, God used the deceit and extortion of the Philistines to engage Samson in the larger process of setting Israel free from the Philistines. **"Later on, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson took a young goat** [for the purpose of reconciliation] **and went to visit his wife** [in Timnah]**. He said, 'I'm going to my wife's room.' But her father would not let him go in.**

'I was so sure you thoroughly hated her,' he said, 'that I gave her to your friend. Isn't her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead.' Samson said to them, 'This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them.' So he went out and caught three hundred foxes [an extraordinary feat] **and tied them tail to tail in pairs. He then fastened a torch to every pair of tails, lit the torches and let the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines.**

He burned up the shocks and standing grain, together with the vineyards and olive groves. When the Philistines asked, 'Who did this?' they were told, 'Samson, the Timnite's son-in-law, because his wife was given to his friend.'

So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father to death. Samson said to them, 'Since you've acted like this, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you.' " (Judges 15:1-7) The love of Samson's life was murdered and his desire for revenge was insatiable.

Samson's personal zeal for justice helps us understand Christ's zeal for righteousness. Notice this parallel: **"When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.**

So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!' His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house [a place where truth is taught, righteousness is upheld, and prayer is offered] **will consume me.' "** (John 2:13-17)

Downfall Begins

"One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. The people of Gaza were told, 'Samson is here!' So they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They made no move during the night, saying, 'At dawn we'll kill him.' But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron." (Judges 16:1-3)

Evidently, when Samson lost his wife, he also lost his moral compass. Samson sought out a prostitute (probably, one of many such instances) and this is how his downfall began. **"Some time later, he fell in love with a** [Philistine] **woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, 'See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels** [twenty eight pounds] **of silver.' "** (Judges 16:4,5, insertions mine)

The Bible does not say whether Delilah was a prostitute; however, the Bible does indicate that she did not love Samson and that she betrayed him for money. Delilah did to Samson what Judas did to Jesus. Delilah did not love Samson, but Samson loved her. Judas did not love Jesus, but Jesus loved him.

Both Samson and Jesus were betrayed for the love of money. It is ironic that Samson gave up his life to destroy as many of his enemies as possible, whereas Jesus gave up His life to save as many of His enemies as possible. **"For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"** (Romans 5:10)

The story of Samson has a sad end, but not a hopeless end. He repented of his sins and the Lord honored his repentance by restoring strength to him. (This proves that Samson was not naturally strong.) Samson betrayed the Lord by loving Delilah more than he loved the Lord.

Then, Delilah betrayed Samson because she loved money more than she loved Samson. After

spending a few cruel years in Philistine captivity, the Lord enabled Samson to weaken the authority of the Philistines over Israel by killing many of them at a religious feast.

It is a divine irony that the destruction caused by Samson, and centuries later, the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, centered on the destruction of two temples. Both temples served as the religious center for both nations and both religious centers were corrupt. Samson's final act enabled Israel to escape the bondage of the Philistines – for a while.

Summary

The story of Samson is a tragedy. God chose him before birth to accomplish far more than he succeeded in doing. Samson was unusually gifted with Holy Spirit power, but he did not use the gift as God desired. He could have done so much more, but *sin defeated* the strongest man to ever live.

Samson did kill a few thousand Philistines, but he could have been another Moses. Even though Samson's life is not a perfect mirror or prophetic sample of Christ like Job, Isaac, Joseph, and Samuel, we can rejoice over two facts: First, Samson repented at the end of his life and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit shows that God forgave him.

Second, the story of Samson's incredible strength is a sterling example of the strength that Christ will give us to root out the Philistines in our lives. If you are dealing with an enemy that keeps you in bondage, why not ask God for strength!

Jesus said, **"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"** (Matthew 7:7-11)

Larry Wilson

The Story of Esau and Jacob

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Part I

Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah. (Genesis 25:20) After twenty years of marriage, they still had no children because Rebekah was barren. Distressed and impatient, Isaac prayed and asked the Lord to open Rebekah's womb.

The Lord answered Isaac's prayer and Rebekah became pregnant, but her pregnancy was troublesome. It seemed as though a great battle was taking place within her abdomen and the tumult became so vigorous that she asked the Lord about it! **"The Lord said to her, Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."** (Genesis 25:23)

"When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau [meaning: the red man]**. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob [meaning: the sneaky one, the cheater].**

Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob." (Genesis 25:24-28, insertions mine)

"Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished! (That is why he was also called Edom [the red man].) Jacob replied, First sell me your birthright.

Look, I am about to die, Esau said. What good is the birthright to me [if I am dead]**? But Jacob said, Swear to me first. So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised** [was not interested in the possessions or the obligations of] **his birthright."** (Genesis 25:29-34, insertions mine)

Esau cared so little for the birthright that belonged to him because he loved the open country; he was a born explorer. He wanted to go where no one else had gone. Esau possessed the mind of a hunter/warrior. Esau was much like those who would come after him in history like Leif Erikson, Christopher Columbus, Daniel Boone, Meriwether Lewis, and William Clark gifted men who were determined to discover the length and breadth of the world. Esau was not content to be confined to a homestead and a garden.

He was not interested in tending sheep. He was not interested in settling down and becoming the spiritual leader of a nation. Esau was a free spirit who truly loved to roam the earth, and his

father, Isaac, who grew up tending sheep and taking care of the home place admired the bold and adventuresome spirit of his firstborn son, Esau.

Rebekah loved Jacob because he was a "mother's boy." Jacob lived in the shadow of his stronger brother. Esau was physically agile, skilled in the use of weapons, and clever as a wilderness survivor/hunter. Jacob was studious and content to live "among the tents."

As he began to understand the covenant which God had given his grandfather, Abraham, Jacob coveted the birthright that he had missed by a few measly seconds! Jacob had a heart for God. He was aware of the prophecy God gave Rebekah, but he could not figure out how "the older will serve the younger." He could only wait upon the Lord. As far as Rebekah was concerned, she favored Jacob. She wanted Isaac's birthright passed on to Jacob because she knew that Jacob was a spiritual man, a man who loved God.

In spite of what many people think, the Bible does not indicate that Esau was an evil man although he did have some missteps. When Esau was forty, he went against his parents wishes and married two Canaanites. (Genesis 26:34) While Esau was entitled to Isaac's birthright (and the responsibilities that went with the birthright), he did not care for it.

However, he did want his father's blessing. Esau and Isaac were very close and Isaac intended to bestow the birthright blessing upon Esau before he died (Genesis 27:4). I am sure that Isaac would not have done this if he thought Esau was not worthy of the birthright.

Esau and Jacob had serious character flaws (don't we all?). Esau shirked his responsibilities as Isaac's firstborn and he showed no interest in the covenant God gave to Abraham. On the other hand, mild-mannered Jacob was greedy, a liar, and a sneaky cheat. It is interesting to see how Jacob's dishonesty and Esau's indifference intersected. When Esau came in from a hunt that produced nothing, Jacob leveraged the birthright out of Esau. Jacob's greed enabled him to take advantage of his brother.

His act was despicable and evil in God's sight. (Leviticus 25:17; Deuteronomy 24:14,15) Esau, who regarded the obligations of his birthright as an unnecessary burden, let them go for a bowl of lentils. Esau was not worried because (a) he was much closer to his father than Jacob, and (b) both men knew that to make the birthright transfer legitimate, there was another hurdle their father's approval and blessing.

One day, Rebekah overheard Isaac (who was blind) tell Esau to go on a hunt. Isaac wanted a tasty meal of wild game so that he could pronounce the birthright blessing upon Esau before he died. Rebekah raced to Jacob's tent with a plan and Jacob's greed caused him to conspire with his mother to steal Esau's blessing so that the birthright transfer could be consummated.

This fact may surprise you, but Esau and Jacob were seventy years old. (**Note:** As I calculate it, Jacob was about 70 years old when he deceived his father, Isaac. Here is the evidence: (a) Jacob was 130 years old when he moved into Egypt. (b) Joseph was 39 or 40 when his father moved into Egypt. (Genesis 41:46,48; 45:4-6) (c) Joseph was born during Jacob's twentieth year with Laban (Genesis 30:25; 31:38). So, 130 minus 40 minus 20 equals 70.)

"Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob. She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made. He went to his father and said, My father. Yes, my son, he answered. Who is it? Jacob said to his father, I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing.

Isaac asked his son, How did you find it so quickly, my son? The Lord your God gave me success, he replied. Then Isaac said to Jacob, Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not. Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau . . .

Then his father Isaac said to him, Come here, my son, and kiss me. So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.

May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed." (Genesis 27:15-29)

Soon after Jacob left Isaac's tent, Esau showed up with fresh game. Of course, Jacob's deception became known immediately. Esau was furious, but he controlled himself out of respect for his father. He would wait and kill Jacob after Isaac died and in so doing, spare his father the agony.

Meanwhile, Rachel overheard Esau's plans and she told Jacob that he must flee to her brother in Haran. Shortly after, Rebekah went to Isaac under the pretense of sending Jacob to her brother's house so that Jacob would not marry a "Canaanite" as Esau had done. Isaac agreed and he sent Jacob away with his blessing. Rebekah and Jacob did not see each other again and Esau probably scorned his mother for betraying him. *Sin always extracts a greater price than the benefit anticipated.*

So, Jacob fled to the house of his mother's brother, Laban. There, Jacob met a man who was a lying cheater, but was even more greedy than himself! For twenty years, Jacob was a victim of Laban's dishonesty. Jacob was cheated out of his wife and he was cheated out of his wages ten times. (Genesis 31:41) I am sure you remember how Jacob worked for seven years to marry Rachel only to discover, when morning light finally illuminated the wedding tent, there was Leah! Now that we have examined something of Jacob's conduct and character, we will examine Jacob's conversion in Part II.

Larry Wilson

Esau and Jacob - Conclusion

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Two issues were presented in last month's *Wake Up Report!* that require a short review. First, to appreciate the context of Jacob's actions, we need to remember that Jacob was about seventy years old when he deceived his father, Isaac. In other words, Jacob's deception was not a youthful indiscretion.

Jacob covered himself with animal skins, put on Esau's clothes, and then lied to his father to steal Esau's birthright. Second, we know that Esau was a free spirit; he loved to roam the "open country," whereas Jacob was content to live among the tents of his parents.

Esau was not a spiritual man, whereas Jacob had a heart for God. Moreover, Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob. These dynamics converged into a tragedy when Rebekah and Jacob conspired to rob Esau of his birthright by deceiving Isaac. This summary has been provided because Esau and Jacob represent two classes of sinners – the "non-religious wicked" (Esau) and the "religious wicked" (Jacob).

I call one group the "religious wicked" because outwardly, they are religious, but their conduct is wicked. A great gulf exists between being *religious* and having a character that pleases God. All religions have wicked people in them. It is paradoxical that a person can have heart for God and behave like the devil.

The devil is thrilled when "religious" people profane God's holy name. Millions of people will have nothing to do with God because they have witnessed the disgusting behaviors of those who claim to be religious! For example, the Pharisees in Christ's day were religiously devout, but their ways were evil.

For a while, Judas appeared to be a wholehearted disciple of Jesus, but his ways were evil. Corporately speaking, the nation of Israel claimed to be God's people, but their ways were often an abomination to Him. **"And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, 'These are the Lord's people, and yet they had to leave his land.' "** (Ezekiel 36:20)

Three Groups of People

I believe God sorts the people on Earth into three groups: The religious wicked, the non-religious wicked, and His saints. A sinner becomes a saint when he surrenders his life to the Holy Spirit and experiences the miracle of "sin-sorrow" in his heart. It's like being born all over again!

Sin-sorrow is a divine gift that arrives through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Sin-sorrow produces reformation, an eagerness to provide restitution, as necessary, and a determination to glorify God in every aspect of life. Sin-sorrow should not be confused with guilt-sorrow.

Cain built an altar to worship God because Cain was a religious man, but God rejected Cain's offering because Cain refused to provide the required sacrifice. Cain became angry with God and furious with his brother because God exalted the altar of his younger brother. Cain killed Abel out of jealousy. He coveted the respect and honor that God gave Abel.

God saw Cain kill Abel and God confronted Cain with his sin. Cain was not sorry that he had killed Abel. When Cain learned that he would be cursed for his sin, Cain experienced guilt-sorrow. He became sorry that he had been cursed. God evicted Cain from his home and exiled him from working his beautiful gardens.

For the rest of his life (which probably lasted several hundred years) Cain would have to wander about as a marked man and he cried out to the Lord that his punishment (not his guilt) was more than he could bear. (Genesis 4:9-13) Again, there is a huge difference between sin-sorrow and guilt-sorrow.

According to the apostle Paul, Esau was a godless man. (Hebrews 12:16) This is why Esau belongs in the category of the non-religious wicked. Many people in this category (atheists and agnostics) have good hearts (humanly speaking), but they do not know "sin-sorrow."

When Esau learned that Jacob had stolen his blessing, Paul says that even though Esau was furious, **". . . He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears."** (Hebrews 12:17) Esau was agnostic and he chose to stay that way by shutting out the promptings of the Holy Spirit. He was not interested in walking with the Lord or assuming the spiritual responsibility that came with the birthright. Esau wanted his father's blessing (human approval), but he did not want the obligation of trusting and obeying God.

Because Jacob sinned against Esau and Isaac, he had to leave his mother and the security of home. As he trudged through the open wilderness, the weight of his transgressions became more overwhelming than the weight of his backpack. At some point in his trip, "sin-sorrow" overtook Jacob and he realized for the first time that he was unworthy of the very birthright that he had stolen!

The Holy Spirit finally managed to open Jacob's eyes when he was seventy years old. He realized how far he had fallen from glorifying God in word and action and that he had insulted God by doing things that God hates. Even more, he had profaned God's holy name in Esau's eyes by defrauding him. Jacob saw his hypocrisy as Esau saw it and was crushed. I can imagine that tears rolled down Jacob's cheeks as he confessed his sins to God. I am sure he cried, "Lord, have mercy on me! Look at the huge mess I've made!"

Sin had robbed Jacob of his home and his brother's respect. He was a fugitive from justice, seeking refuge in the wilderness. (Ironically, in a number of ways, Jacob was not very far away from the wilderness where Moses would flee centuries later after killing an Egyptian and where his offspring, the twelve tribes of Israel, would wander for forty years.)

"When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in

which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

There above it stood the Lord, and he said: ‘I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south.All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’

"When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.’ He was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.’ Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it.

He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.’ " (Genesis 28:11-22)

God gave this vision to Jacob for at least two reasons. First, because Jacob had experienced sin-sorrow, God assured Jacob that His covenant would be conveyed to him. Of course, Jacob did not have a godly character at the moment, but he had become a saint because he had experienced "sin-sorrow" and repented of his sins.

Jacob resolved that if and when possible, he would make things right with Esau. Second, the vision separated Jacob’s past from his future. From this date forward, Jacob would live according to God’s will. His greed would be displaced with contentment – receiving with gratitude whatever God provided for him. His dishonesty would be displaced with honesty. (See Genesis 30:33.)

Some people have wondered how God could skip over Esau and pass His covenant to Jacob because (a) biologically, Jacob was not entitled to the birthright and (b) legally, Jacob was not entitled to the birthright blessing because he acquired it through fraud. So, consider the following thoughts.

We know that God rejected Cain’s offering because Cain did not meet the requirements. God’s approval is not determined by man’s will. God is not bound by biological order. God’s covenant is not limited to the firstborn. In fact, God did not convey His covenant to Jacob until Jacob had repented of his sins against Esau and Isaac. God only selected Jacob as the heir of His covenant after the sinner became a saint!

Jacob served Laban for twenty years and Laban defrauded Jacob more times than Jacob could count. I am sure that Jacob saw his past mirrored in Laban’s deceitful actions many times. Nevertheless, God’s grace changed Jacob’s heart. He was diligent and honest in his ways and

he waited patiently upon the Lord for each blessing. After twenty years of serving Laban, the Lord told Jacob to return to his homeland. (Genesis 31:3-13) Jacob obeyed and he managed to get away from his grasping and overbearing father-in-law, only to face his brother Esau coming with 400 men.

"[As he was nearing home] **Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He instructed them:** [notice the humility] **'This is what you are to say to my *master* Esau: "Your *servant* Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now.** [After 20 years of service] **I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, menservants and maidservants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes." '**

"When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, 'We went to your brother Esau [but we did not speak to him – we were afraid when we saw the number of men]**, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.' In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, 'If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.'**

"Then Jacob prayed, 'O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, "Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper," I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant.

I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, "I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted." '

"He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, 'Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds.' He instructed the one in the lead: 'When my brother Esau meets you and asks, "To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?" then you are to say, "They belong to your *servant* Jacob.

They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us." ' . . . For he thought, 'I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.' " (Genesis 32:3-20, insertions and italics mine)

This story has a very happy ending. Jacob and Esau were reconciled. **"But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. 'Who are these with you?'**

he asked. Jacob answered, 'They are the children God has graciously given your *servant*.' Then the maidservants and their children approached and bowed down. Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.

"Esau asked, 'What do you mean by all these droves I met?' 'To find favor in your eyes, my lord,' he said. But Esau said, 'I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.' 'No, please!' said Jacob. 'If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me.

For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.' And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it. Then Esau said, 'Let us be on our way; I'll accompany you.' " (Genesis 33:4-12, insertion and italics mine)

Two brothers separated by sin were united through the humility and repentance of one. Esau saw a profound change in Jacob. Instead of the arrogant and stingy brother who counted every penny twice, Jacob had become humble and exceedingly generous. Esau immediately saw that Jacob's greed for money had been displaced by love for people.

Jacob's arrogance had been displaced by genuine humility. Even Esau, a godless man, was touched by what he saw! Evidently, he and Jacob lived together in peace thereafter for there is no record of further hostility between them. In fact, both men laid their father to rest. **"Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him."** (Genesis 35:28,29)

(**Note:** It is ironic that Isaac thought he was going to die more than twenty years before he actually died. In fact, it was Isaac who sent Esau on a mission to capture wild game because he thought he was near death. (Genesis 27:2-4) Isaac's action alerted Rebekah and she conspired with Jacob to seize Esau's birthright. (Genesis 27:6-13) Rebekah died during Jacob's absence, but Isaac lived on and he must have been overjoyed when Jacob returned home. He must have been very pleased when he learned that God Himself had passed His covenant to Jacob and of all things, there is no evidence that Esau was unhappy about it!)

Jacob's Time of Trouble

"[After hearing that Esau was coming toward him with four hundred men,] **. . . . Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions.**

"So Jacob was left alone, and [sometime during the night, Jacob was ambushed by a man who he thought was a spy from Esau's army] **a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him** [that is, the 90 year old Jacob would not give up]**, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with**

the man.

Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob [realizing the man in his grasp was The Angel of the Lord] **replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered. Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled *with God* and *with men* and have overcome.'**

"Jacob said, 'Please tell me your name.' But he replied, 'Why do you ask my name?' [You already know Me!] **Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.' The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon."** (Genesis 32:22-32, insertions and italics mine)

There are several interesting aspects in this story. First, Jacob discovered the consequences of greed when he was separated from his doting mother. She had spoiled Jacob from the realities of life by giving him everything he wanted. Second, Jacob's sins against his brother and father forced him into exile, a situation where the Holy Spirit could bring about "sin-sorrow."

Third, Jacob repented of his sins and at seventy years of age, God put a right spirit and a clean heart within him. Fourth, to purify Jacob's character, God gave Jacob a harsh master (Laban). His father-in-law was a member of the "religious wicked" group and he mirrored Jacob's previous ways. Finally, God in His infinite wisdom, knew that Jacob needed an "extreme makeover" and once Jacob became repentant, the Holy Spirit made it happen!

At the Jabbok River that night, Jacob soberly faced an old sin. Esau, the warrior-brother he had defrauded twenty years ago, was coming toward him with 400 men. Jacob knew this day would come and he made several deliberate actions. He had forwarded a large portion (maybe half) of his herds to Esau in an effort to appease his brother, but was it enough? Would Esau forgive him or kill him? Jacob was troubled because he wanted peace with Esau. Even more, he wanted to know that God was pleased with his efforts to appease Esau. (See Matthew 5:23,24.)

I can imagine that Jacob was sitting on a rock, scanning and listening through the darkness for any evidence of movement. Suddenly, Jacob was attacked from behind. Instinctively, Jacob fought back. At first, Jacob may have thought that he was struggling with a spy from Esau's camp.

As the battle continued, Jacob realized that he was not wrestling with an ordinary man. It dawned on him that he was wrestling with The Angel of the Lord! God struggled with Jacob because He wanted to see if this ninety year old man truly wanted His approval. When Jacob realized that he was wrestling with God, his struggle changed.

Instead of fending off his attacker, Jacob did everything possible to hang on to Him! This is why the angel said, **"Let me go, for it is daybreak."** (Genesis 32:26) In my mind's eye, I can see an exhausted Jacob being pulled about on the ground and his arms were wrapped around one leg

of the angel.

The angel said, **"Let me go!"** But Jacob would not let go because he knew that once God left, his question would remain. So, Jacob said, **"I will not let you go unless you bless me."** Jacob had done his best to make restitution with Esau, and the only thing that mattered now was the assurance that God was pleased.

The angel said, **"Your name will no longer be Jacob** [the cheater]**, but Israel** [the overcomer]**, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."** (Genesis 32:28) The moral of this story is that God honored Jacob with a name change because Jacob had overcome his defects.

It was a struggle for Jacob to be honest with Laban because Laban was a thief, but it was the right thing to do. It was a struggle for Jacob to give Esau the restitution he deserved, but Jacob did so because it was the right thing to do. It was a struggle for Jacob to wrestle with God until he received the assurance that his sin had been forgiven, but he did so.

The good news is this: Everyone who struggles to live right and make things right, as necessary, will receive God's blessing and approval. God will also given each person a new name! **". . .To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."** (Revelation 2:17)

John wrote, **"For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."** (1 John 5:4) Every saint has to experience Jacob's time of trouble. Every saint has a carnal nature and this nature wars against our efforts to live right in God's sight and make things right as needed. The Bible predicts that a day is coming when Jesus will remove the carnal nature from His saints* and "the children of Israel" will be free from sin at last. (Hebrews 8:10) Jesus said, **"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** (John 8:36)

God considers each born again person to be a child of Abraham and Israel. (Galatians 3:28,29) Paul wrote,
". . . .For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel [that is, biology cannot make you a descendant of Israel]**. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. . . . In other words, it is not the natural children** [born of the flesh] **who are God's children . . . ."** (Romans 9:6-8. See also Galatians 3:26 and Romans 8:14.)

If you have grown weary of struggling with sin, don't give up! Jacob didn't give up. Ask the Lord to renew your determination. Ask the Lord for courage to fight the good fight of faith. Ask the Lord for strength to do what is right and the determination to make wrongs right as far as possible. Hang on to the Lord's leg until you get the blessing that you want!

If we follow Jacob's example, we will receive a peace that passes understanding, and a crown of righteousness awaits us. (2 Timothy 4:8) Paul understood the importance of struggling forward. He wrote, **"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called**

me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14)

*Note: For further study on the sealing that occurs during the Great Tribulation, please read Chapters 4-6 (Justification, Predestination and The Sealing, respectively) in my book, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega,* or you can download these articles at http://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Subjindex.htm.

Press on,
Larry Wilson

Jesus Will Demonstrate What Matters Most

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The Lord confronted Apostle Peter in a vision a few months after Jesus returned to Heaven. Peter was dumbfounded by the meaning of the vision until there was a knock on the door.

"At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion [a captain over 100 men] **in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing** [Cornelius may have become a believer in Jesus through the centurion in Capernaum whose servant Jesus healed. (See Matthew 5:8-10) Nevertheless]**; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.**

One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, 'Cornelius!' Cornelius stared at him in fear. 'What is it, Lord?' he asked. The angel answered, 'Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa [about twenty miles away] **to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.' "** (Acts 10:1-5)

Four days later, **"As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. 'Stand up,' he said, 'I am only a man myself.' Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: 'You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me** [in a vision concerning unclean animals] **that I should** [abandon this practice. God told me that I must] **not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?'**

Cornelius answered: 'Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.'

So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. [Read the following sentence twice:] **Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.' Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts** [uncircumcised] **men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.' "** (Acts 10:25-35, insertions mine)

I am sure that Peter, with his Jewish paradigm, was completely overwhelmed by this revolutionary thinking. He must have been astonished by their willingness to embrace the gospel of Christ. Peter's visit with Cornelius transformed the thinking of the early church. Peter's experience would later underscore Paul's transforming theology.

Up to this time, most of the converts to Christianity were Jews and as such, they were still Jews

in terms of culture and behavior, but Christians in terms of theology. Due to their Jewish thinking, they were unwilling to contaminate themselves by entering the home of a dog (a term used by Jews to describe unclean meat, that is, a Gentile. (See Matthew 7:6 and Mark 7:28.) In a vision, God revealed a profound truth to Peter. *Cornelius was just as much a child of God as any Jew, even though Cornelius was not a Jew.*

This concept is important to understand because it will be demonstrated again during the Great Tribulation. God will soon demonstrate to the whole universe that within every religious system on Earth, there are thousands of people like Cornelius! Such people have the right hearts, even though their heads are messed up. God loves to bless such people. On the other hand, God cannot help individuals with arrogant hearts and hard heads.

The Demonstration

The whole world will implode with fury during the first sixty days of the Great Tribulation. There will be thunder, lightning, rumblings, a global earthquake, meteoric firestorms, two asteroid impacts, and darkness. Death and destruction will occur on an unimaginable scale. Infrastructures will disappear. The world will be ruined beyond repair. The recent destruction in Haiti is a prophetic sample of God's coming wrath with the exception that the nations of the world will not be able to rush in and help. Every nation will be helplessly paralyzed like Haiti.

The essential difference between a natural disaster (such as the earthquake in Haiti) and a divine judgment (such as the seven trumpets of Revelation) is purpose. When God sends a divine judgment, there is a divine purpose. This purpose is revealed before God acts.

For example, God gave Noah a message and a mission before sending the flood. God sent Jonah into Nineveh before destroying the city. God sent two angels into Sodom before destroying the city. For over 100 years, God sent many prophets to Jerusalem before destroying the city. And, today God is sending a warning to the world through the prophet John.

The book of Daniel has been unsealed and the book of Revelation speaks clearly about God's coming judgments, and unfortunately, few are willing to listen and spiritually prepare. Jesus said, **"As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:37)

During the Great Tribulation, the Holy Spirit will give power to God's servants who will give a clarion declaration of the gospel of Jesus all over the world. This time, the outpouring of Holy Spirit power will dwarf the experience of the disciples at Pentecost. The 144,000, located in every nation, will boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ with signs and wonders and the Holy Spirit will ensure that everyone hears God's servants.

The overwhelming shock and awe caused by the first four trumpets will shatter religious paradigms. Presently, many people are closed to the gospel because of religion and culture (arrogance and ignorance), but this overwhelming surprise will humble individuals' hearts and people will become receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In a setting of global ruin, the world

will thoughtfully listen to the 144,000. Many, like Cornelius, will receive Jesus as their redeemer.

Many more, like Pharaoh, will only harden their hearts, but there will be a small window of time when Jews, Moslems, Hindus, Atheists, Catholics, Protestants, and Pagans will thoughtfully consider a gospel that may be contrary to everything they believe. What rebuttal is there given the circumstances, the awesome display of signs and wonders, and the message which the 144,000 will proclaim?

The 144,000 will announce the sovereignty, glory, and love of Jesus Christ and they will invite every living person to join His coming kingdom. The price of admission will be submission to the authority of Jesus Christ, the coming King of Glory. Bow down before the King of kings and give Him the love and allegiance He deserves!

The 144,000 will present the gospel of Jesus to the world in four waves.* Each wave will be presented as a nonnegotiable demand. During the first wave, everyone will be told, **"Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. . . ."** (Revelation 14:7) The 144,000 will announce the commencement of the judgment of the living.

They will inform the inhabitants of Earth that our faith in Christ will be tested and Jesus Christ Himself will judge us. Each person will **". . .appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."** (2 Corinthians 5:10) The Holy Spirit, speaking through the 144,000 will explain the test, **". . . And worship Him who made the Heavens, the Earth, the sea and springs of water."**

(***Note:** Four angels will be sent to the 144,000 with four messages from God's throne to the world. For further study on these four messages, please visit this link: www.wake-up.org/Videos/Video.htm and view the May-July 2007 video segments or you can read the accompanying pdf notes.)

The heavens, earth [land], sea, and springs of water are mentioned in the first angel's message because these four elements make up the foundations of our planet. Everyone will see and feel the enormity of Christ's power and His authority over the heavens, earth, sea, and springs of water during the first four trumpets.

(The heavens are darkened in the fourth trumpet, a third of Earth is burned up in the first trumpet, an asteroid will impact the sea in the second trumpet, and an asteroid impact will contaminate the springs of water in the third trumpet.) The power displayed at the beginning of the Great Tribulation will demonstrate to everyone that our Creator's power over the foundations of this planet cannot be challenged or overthrown.

An overwhelming display of power is needed to shatter the religious paradigms of the world. God has predetermined that every person within every nation will hear about Jesus Christ, His incredible love, and His generous salvation. The full gospel cannot be proclaimed throughout the world currently because of religious arrogance.

After 2,000 years, only 25% of the world claims to be Christian and everyone knows that Christianity is as divisive and fragmented as any other religious system. Even though they come from all over the world and will not know each other, God's servants, the 144,000, will be on the same page because the Holy Spirit will speak through them.

They will tell the world to give Jesus glory! What does it mean to give glory to God? How does a child give glory to his parents? When a child embraces and exalts the values extolled by his parents, he brings glory to his parents by reflecting their character. Giving glory to God is no different. God insists that we reflect His character because His character is one of love. Giving glory to God means embracing God's truth and exalting His righteousness, having a clear head, a heart of love, and hands free of guilt.

Religious Heritage Will Disappear

This might come as a shock to some readers, but the Bible predicts that everyone will be forced to abandon their religious heritage during the Great Tribulation. (Revelation 13:15) Every religious organization on Earth will be abolished at the sixth trumpet! The Catholic Church will be abolished. Islam will disappear.

Judaism will be terminated. Eastern Mysticism will be no more. This will be possible because during the fifth trumpet the devil will physically appear on Earth. After convincing the world that he is Almighty God, he will set up a one-world theocracy with himself as King of kings and Lord of lords at the sixth trumpet. Everyone will be required to join and worship his theocracy or be killed. A time is coming when the world's religions will become meaningless. God permits this because paradoxically, most people worship their religion instead of God!

This is proven by the fact that most people cannot move forward with God's truth because religion cannot change. In spite of this, within the religions of the world, millions of people, like Cornelius, will embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ during the Great Tribulation and will gladly give Him glory!

They will thoughtfully submit to Christ's authority in spite of terrible persecution. I know this sounds strange now, but a numberless multitude from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people will step outside of their religious beliefs and culture to worship Jesus. (Revelation 7:9-17)

Jews will be worshiping Jesus, Moslems will exalt Jesus over Mohammed, Hindus will worship Jesus as the only true God, Catholics will abandon church sacraments and put their faith in Christ. Atheists and agnostics will praise the name of Jesus, Protestants will embrace the law of God, and all people will worship Jesus on His holy day!

God's Spirit will be poured out on all flesh and the result will be astonishing! These coming events tell us that God is not so much concerned with our current beliefs as He is with our honesty and dedication to what we believe to be truth. When God clearly shows the world His truth, those who love truth will embrace it and this will also bring glory to Him! Think about this: Truth, to the honest in heart, behaves like the element iron in the presence of a magnet. When

a magnet is brought close, the iron will respond – but aluminum and copper will not.

Bottom line: God will demonstrate during the Great Tribulation that salvation is not church specific. Salvation is heart specific. People like Cornelius will be eager to learn more and the numberless harvest that comes out of the Great Tribulation will demonstrate to the universe that God has and has always had children in every religious system.

God's people will defy the laws of Babylon when they hear the 144,000 speak the Second Angel's message. (Revelation 14:8) Remember, *the church of Jesus Christ is not a denomination.* His church consists of people who love truth and exalt righteousness.

Many people have been misled into thinking that belonging to some church is important or necessary for salvation. This is false. When Jesus comes, He will not gather up THE church, He will gather up individuals like Cornelius who make up HIS church! May God transform our hearts and open our minds so that we might eagerly embrace the full gospel of Christ as Cornelius did.

Larry Wilson

Getting Through Difficult Times

Author: Larry W. Wilson

As I write this article, many of my friends are enduring painful circumstances. Please take a moment and consider the travail that each situation offers. One friend lost her mother just a few days ago. Another friend is overwhelmed with sorrow, because he lost his fiancé in September.

A relative lost his job and he has been unable to find work for months. Another relative is going through a bitter divorce and his parents (who have been intimately involved in the children's lives) are distraught. Another friend has been forced into bankruptcy. Another friend is struggling with complications from heart surgery.

Another friend is facing bankruptcy because of medical bills. Another friend is struggling with the side effects of chemo treatments. Another friend has succumbed to drug addiction. One friend has undergone surgery for stomach cancer and has been given less than four weeks to live. Another friend is recovering from a near fatal stroke. Another friend is in the hospital with a clot in her lung. I could offer more situations, but you get the picture. We live in a world of hurt. Sooner or later on this earth, everyone gets hurt.

Even though difficult situations can develop without notice, they have one thing in common. There is no escape. Tribulation is like crawling into a narrow tunnel – everything is dark, disgusting, foreboding, and the exit is unknown. Anxiety, depression, and pain overwhelm you, and there is no way to get out – but to crawl forward. Because all people find themselves in a difficult situation sooner or later, and since there is no easy way to go through times like these, I thought a few words about getting through a difficult time might be helpful.

Note: This short study addresses some of the spiritual issues that attend suffering. Because each difficult situation has a unique set of parameters, a single solution to life's problems is not possible. In each situation, there are practical steps that can and must be done, but there are also elements in some difficult situations that we can do nothing about. In this study, I want to focus on the importance of maintaining a healthy attitude, especially during situations that we are powerless to resolve.

All difficult situations become much worse when we allow a negative attitude to prevail. Therefore, I hope that this study will encourage anyone stuck in a devastating situation that seems to be unresolvable. The statement, "there is a silver lining in each cloud," may seem trite, but it is true. Even though we may not be able to see through the dark clouds of despair, we know the sun always shines. **". . . .Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning!"** (Psalm 30:5, KJV)

Four General Principles

When people are trapped in difficult situations, how do they overcome feelings of helplessness, depression, and despair? How do they focus on a bright outcome when there is nothing but

heartache, darkness, and the unknown? How do they keep from getting frustrated with God when day after day, their prayers seem to have no effect? These are important questions and although each difficult circumstance is unique, here are four general principles that all people should keep in mind when they find themselves trapped in a difficult situation:

Principle #1:

God is love (1 John 4:8), God sees everything (2 Chronicles 16:9), God hears everything (2 Samuel 22:7), God understands everything (Matthew 10:26), but God, in His infinite wisdom (Proverbs 8:12,22-28), does not usually produce the outcome that we want. (Daniel 3:17,18)

It is our privilege to ask God for anything that we want as long as our request is subject to His infinite wisdom. Faith in God means believing and trusting that (a) He has heard our request, and (b) He will produce the best possible outcome in due time. This can be a very hard pill to swallow, but there is no other way to have peace when trapped in a difficult situation. Even Jesus agonized with the Father in the Garden of Gethsemene, **". . . not my will, but thine be done."** (Luke 22:42, KJV)

When desperate circumstances force us into a tight corner, many people are unprepared to exercise the power of faith. The concept of faith is often misunderstood and to understand it, you must realize that faith has two sides. One side is accepting the facts listed in Principle #1. The second side of the coin is total surrender to God's infinite wisdom. Let me make a blunt statement: *We take the place of God when we presume to tell God what the outcome of our tribulation should be.*

The Bible says that human beings are inherently rebellious toward God's authority (Romans 8:7). Therefore, it should not be surprising that we are tempted to get angry with God when He refuses to carry out our will! However, as God's children, we should strive to overcome our inherent rebellious nature.

Born again people **". . . .live in accordance with the Holy Spirit and they have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."** (Romans 8:5) If we are unwilling to let God use His divine wisdom, if we are unwilling to accept God's will in all matters (big and small), then we set ourselves up for a situation where rebellion toward God can be justified. This is exactly what happened to Lucifer *when he lived in Heaven* and rebellion led to his fall. I assume you know the dismal outcome of that story.

God does not ask us to put our faith in Him without first giving us sufficient evidence that our faith in Him is not misplaced. This is why we have the Bible. Unfortunately, most people today know nothing about the Bible! As the Bible traces God's actions over 4,000 years of human history, it provides the evidence that *intelligent faith* requires.

The Bible reveals that God is love, and that God sees, hears, and understands. Even more, it assures us that God *will surely produce* the best outcome possible for everyone who is willing to surrender to His wisdom and to His perfect timing. Consider these examples: Look at Jesus. It was God's will that He die on the cross.

Then, God resurrected Him and placed Him on Heaven's throne. Look at Joseph. It was God's will that he go to prison. From there, God put him on Pharaoh's throne. Look at Daniel. It was God's will that he go into the lions' den. From there, God placed him in the courts of Darius' kingdom. Look at Esther.

It was God's will that she risk her life to save her people. She was willing to perish if that was God's will, but instead, God saved an entire nation as a result of her faith. It is clear that submission to God's divine wisdom always produces a glorious outcome even though the current situation may be imprisonment or even death.

Principle #2:

When it comes to seeing God's handiwork, patient endurance and faith-fullness are nonnegotiable. If we have no patience, the incredible experience of seeing God's direct involvement in our difficult situation will be lost. (James 1:2-8) The experience of receiving strength from God on a day-to-day basis will also be lost.

Faith in God is not to be confused with living in denial. Many people believe that positive thinking is the equivalent of faith in God. While we should try to look on the positive side of everything, positive thinking is no substitute for faith. Faith in God starts with complete surrender to His divine wisdom and waiting patiently upon the Lord for His solution. That means you trust God to give you wisdom, courage, strength, and whatever you need in order to deal with your situation.

Be realistic. God rarely suspends the laws of nature to accommodate the needs of anyone. If God suspended the laws of nature every time someone asked for a miracle, nothing on Earth would be predictable! God put the laws of sowing and reaping in place for a reason. If we sow good seed, a good harvest will follow.

If we sow wild oats, what should the harvest be? Of course, God can suspend natural law when divine wisdom and a higher purpose dictates, *but only then.* When God, in His infinite wisdom, cannot suspend the laws of nature on our behalf, He sends the Comforter. The Holy Spirit imparts strength, courage, and grace to deal with the situation – one day at a time! (Matthew 6:31-34; John 16:5-15)

Some people do not want the gift of the Comforter, but instead, want God to simply make their problem go away. God does not work like this. Let us keep in mind who God is and who we are. He has omniscience. He knows best and He is intimately acquainted with our needs and it is through the tough times that Jesus comes very close to us if we are willing to patiently wait for Him.

Principle #3:

God has two wills: Intended and permissive. (I call them Plan A and Plan B.) For example, when God led Israel out of Egypt, He "intended" to take Israel into the Promised Land within two years

(Plan A). When the twelve spies returned from the Promised Land and gave a report that caused the people to distrust God, He became angry with that rebellious generation.

He confined them to the desert for thirty-eight more years so that specific generation could die off (Plan B). Individuals can rebel against God and ruin Plan A (God's intended will for our lives). Unfortunately, this may mean that they may have to wander in the wilderness for what seems like forty years (Plan B).

Moses, after killing the Egyptian, fled to the wildernesss and spent forty years tending sheep before God called him to lead His people out of Egypt. I am reminding you of this story because sometimes our pain and suffering are self inflicted. We reap what we sow. But be of good courage. God will implement Plan B if we are willing and Plan B will have a glorious result if we stay with it!

So, repent if necessary! Let go of your bad attitude toward God and man. Turn from your carnal thinking and evil ways because God will lead His children out of the wilderness if they are willing to walk in His ways. God is in the business of making lemonade out of lemons for the people who love and obey Him. It may take a while, but with God, the end is always better than the beginning!

Principle #4:

Everyone born into this world is a victim of sin's power. It is imperative that we understand this curse because the curse of sin explains a number of things that are otherwise unexplainable. The suffering of my friends is common to all mankind.

Death, sorrow, illness, addiction, bankruptcy, and broken relationships never end. Millions of people have asked, "Why does a God of love permit all of this suffering? How can Almighty God sit on His throne and ignore our problems?" These are reasonable questions and the following response to this question may surprise you.

But first, let me put a frame around this topic. Please consider the following: God has omniscience (all knowing), God has omnipotence (all power), God is love (all giving), God is constant (never changes), God has perfect wisdom (never makes a mistake), and God is impartial (reasonable and fair). These attributes of God have been stated so that the following three facts will make sense.

Fact 1:

In the beginning, there was no sin (Plan A). Then, sin began. First, with Lucifer and his followers in Heaven, then with Adam and Eve and their offspring on Earth. God, in His infinite wisdom, decided that the curse of sin should exist for a predetermined period of time (Plan B).

Get this: *Before sin began, God foreknew that sin would occur and He predetermined the duration of the curse of sin to exist for the eternal benefit of the universe.* Read the previous sentence again. When God brings the curse of sin to an end, *everyone in the universe* will have

a very clear understanding of good and evil. This knowledge, along with those who were redeemed from sin's curse, will insure that sin will never invade God's universe again.

Fact 2:

God, in His infinite love, has given every being the power of choice. We can choose to submit to His wisdom and authority or we can choose to rebel against Him. The choice is ours and so are the consequences. (We must reap what we choose to sow.) Lucifer and his followers chose to rebel.

We see the consequences. Adam and Eve chose to rebel. We see the consequences. The amazing thing about understanding the consequences of sin's power is that God's wisdom is fully exonerated. In other words, once a person understands the power of sin, he or she finds that God's laws are not arbitrary. God's love is not manipulative. God has done everything possible to protect free moral agents from sin's power. On the other hand, if we rebel against God's laws, we simply reap the consequences. (Galatians 6:7,8)

Fact 3:

Now we come to a fact that can be hard to understand. Sin causes people to hurt one another. Lucifer caused one third of the holy angels to lose their home. Cain killed his brother Abel. King David killed one of his best friends to have his wife. Wicked parents ruin innocent children. Sin is like radioactive material that radiates and kills whomever happens to be around it. When Adam chose to rebel against God's law, the perfect world that God created changed drastically.

Prior to the fall, Adam and Eve had a predisposition for living righteously. They lived in perfect harmony with the ways and will of God. After Adam and Eve sinned, sin's power changed them. Suddenly, they had a propensity for doing evil and this propensity was passed on to their offspring.

Therefore, death, sorrow, illness, and all kinds of problems began to multiply exponentially throughout Earth. Remember, God has ordained that sin's curse should endure for a predetermined amount of time. During the last 6,000 years, the curse of sin has radiated and harmed people all over the world.

This planet is similar to an ant farm display with clear panels. The universe watches us and witnesses our evil deeds, rebellion, murders, and sexual immorality. They see endless cycles of pain, sorrow, death, and suffering. They understand the power of sin better than we do because they are observing the effects, but not living in it! Even more, they also understand a number of things about God and His ways that would not otherwise be possible to know!

Do you remember the story of the blind man in John 9? The Jews believed that birth defects were a curse from God. One day, **"His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi** [Jesus]**, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.' "** (John 9:2,3, insertion mine) The blind man suffered from the curse of sin which came into this

world through Adam.

The blind man was a victim of sin's radiation. Jesus made it clear that the blind man was not suffering from a particular sin on his part or that of his parents. We live in a world cursed by sin and every deformity and every crime testifies to this curse. The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that God can make lemonade out of lemons! How many times have you seen a disabled person do something extraordinary? What you are actually seeing is the gift of God displayed in that person's life.

The Faith of Jesus

Perhaps the above information will help us get through difficult situations. If knowledge is helpful, then yes, it helps to understand what God is doing and why God permits certain things to happen and why it often appears that God does not answer our cry for help.

It also helps to know that God will work things out according to His infinite wisdom. This knowledge is the basis of intelligent faith. To see God's response, we have to patiently endure. **"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."** (Romans 8:28) On the other hand, knowledge is not our Savior. Information is not enough, but God has more to give! Consider this:

Jesus was deeply troubled by His approaching death. He said to His disciples, **"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour."** (John 12:27) Later, in the Garden of Gethsemene Jesus prayed, **". . . My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."** (Matthew 26:39)

We see an interesting contest in these two verses. When facing death on the cross, the humanity within Jesus did not want to go there, but the divinity within Jesus knew that He had come to Earth "for this very reason." Jesus experienced a great internal struggle because of these two competing interests and this is why I believe He sweat great drops of blood. (Luke 22:44)

Jesus said to His disciples, **". . . In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."** (John 16:33) Jesus' victory helps us because He has walked in our shoes. He has suffered more than we can ever suffer and He overcame sin's power.

Therefore, Jesus knows how to coach us through difficult times. He knows when to send the Comforter (the Holy Spirit), He knows when to give us courage, He knows when to give us strength, and He knows how to lead us into the perfect will of God because He has "been there, done that."

Jesus is intimately acquainted with our suffering. **"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a**

son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect [mature through suffering]**, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. . . ."** (Hebrews 5:7-9, insertion mine)

What an exciting thought to realize that when we suffer, God sees, He hears, He knows, He understands, and He will do everything possible (while sin's curse is active) to see us through. Paul wrote, **"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."** (1 Corinthians 10:13) So, the bottom line is this: In this world, we will have trouble, but we have some facts to hang on to and we have a Savior who overcame the world.

He knows all about our troubles. Trust in Him, surrender to His will – and a peace that passes understanding will flood your soul – the Comforter will see to it! (Isaiah 26:3) Here is a perfect example of perfect peace that the Apostle Paul wrote (Paul was a man often persecuted for his faith): **". . . . I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.**

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:11-13)

Larry Wilson

Some Questions on the Book of Revelation

Author: Larry W. Wilson

1. - Why does the Bible say there will not be a temple in the New Jerusalem?

LW: John wrote, **"I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."** (Revelation 21:22) A temple became necessary in Heaven when the plan of salvation was put into operation. Before sin existed, there was no need for a temple, altars, or atonement.

When the work of the Two Witnesses is completed on Earth, the temple in Heaven will be vacated (Revelation 15:5-8) because salvation will never again be offered. At the close of the 1,260 days allotted to the Two Witnesses, everyone on Earth will either have the seal of God or the mark of the beast, and the intercession of Jesus will no longer be needed.

This is important to remember: People will not be in the valley of decision when mercy comes to an end. The door closes after all people have made their final decision and they are sealed or marked. That is how it was in Noah's day. John says the Father and the Lamb are the temple on the new earth because worship will occur wherever they may be!

2. - The Bible says that New Jerusalem is 12,000 furlongs in length, width, and height and the city wall is 144 cubits thick. (Revelation 21:16,17) Does this really mean the holy city is 12,000 furlongs (1,420 miles) tall?

LW: Even though we have to accept the measurements given at face value, I do not have a good answer. If we accept the idea that God observes the natural laws of physics (which He created), the physical dimensions of New Jerusalem are puzzling for the finite mind because it is hard to imagine a city that is 1,420 miles square and 1,420 miles high.

If the holy city were on Earth today, it would tower 1,420 miles into space! For the sake of comparison, Earth's atmosphere reaches about 62 miles high, and the International Space Station orbits Earth about 200 miles above Earth. Some artists have rendered the holy city as though it were shaped like a pyramid – having a four-sided base with a very tall spire in the center. Still, it is hard to conceive a physical structure reaching 1,420 miles into space.

History reveals that a Roman furlong was 625 feet in John's day and a cubit was 18 inches. Therefore, 12,000 furlongs amounts to approximately 1,420 miles and a wall 144 cubits thick amounts to 216 feet. If we align these dimensions with Earth's gravity and its orbital mechanics, the size and mass of a 1,420 mile cube would severely impact our weather, our rotational period and the orbit of Earth around the Sun as we now know it. One would have to wonder if there would be any gravity on the top floors of the holy city. Interesting issues.

Since the laws of physics that we live under do not seem to accommodate a 1,420 mile cube sitting on Earth, here are a couple speculative ideas that I offer in fun. Suppose the new earth is

expanded to the size of the planet Saturn. If so, a 1,420 mile cube sitting on its surface would not be such a great problem. The diameter of Saturn is about ten times the size of Earth. To put this in perspective, 764 planets the size of Earth can fit within Saturn. (For that matter, 1,321 planets the size of Earth can fit within Jupiter!)

Here is another speculative idea and one that I favor. I hope that from now on, every time you eat a doughnut you will be reminded of this idea. (Smile) Maybe the shape of the new earth will be changed from that of a sphere to that of a toroid. (A toroid looks like a doughnut.) Don't laugh yet!

Suppose that when the New Jerusalem descends from Heaven, the Mount of Olives splits from East to West as the Scripture says, and a great valley (actually, a large hole) opens up through the middle of the earth to accommodate the city of God. (See Zechariah 14:4.) In this scenario, Earth would flatten out to look something like a huge doughnut revolving around its hub, the celestial City of God.

We know that the holy city will not need the Sun or the Moon for light, for the glory of God gives it light. (Revelation 21:23) The Bible also says that God will live among men. (Revelation 21:3) Since I'm this far out, consider one more thing: Perhaps God will take the new earth out of its orbit around the Sun and transport it on a travel itinerary to see an infinite number of galaxies which the Lamb has created. If so, New Jerusalem would be something like a big diesel pusher "RV" where happiness and joy, homes and gardens, animals, and victorious humans will forever live.

I know these thoughts are outrageous, but we know that God has an exciting future planned for the redeemed, and I really like the idea of God's children being known throughout the universe as "happy campers." In this scenario, the holy city (God's throne) would literally be the center of the earth. I cannot think of a sweeter idea or a better companion for a 1,420 mile cube than a revolving doughnut! (Contrary to what many people say, I am not full of gloom and doom! Smiling...)

3. - Revelation 22:18,19 says that if anyone adds anything or takes words away from this book of prophecy that God will punish that person. Do you think that people who are teaching an incorrect understanding of Revelation right now will be punished?

LW: The short answer is "no." The book of Revelation promises a blessing to those who will read it (Revelation 1:3) and, as you have indicated, it also promises a curse if its words are changed. The blessing is available right now, but the curse pertains to a specific time in Earth's history when the book of Revelation will be presented to the people of Earth *as a testing truth.* God knows that down through the ages, honest and sincere people have tried to understand this book of prophecy. Even today, there is mass confusion about the book of Revelation.

Even though most of what is said about Revelation is wrong, God does not hold people accountable for wrong doing unless (a) we know better and do it anyway, or (b) we reject the clearest evidences of truth or the prompting of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the curse pronounced in Revelation 22 is only applicable during the testing time (the Great Tribulation)

when people will knowingly and willingly alter the Word of God to justify rebellion.

During the Great Tribulation, God will enable the 144,000 to present the book of Revelation in the clearest of terms. Every nation, kindred, tongue, and people will hear a pure gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. (The gospel of Jesus given today is highly contaminated with human error.

Step back and just look at the confusion that is called Christianity.) The 144,000 will speak for God – no lie will be found in their mouths. (Revelation 14:5) The 144,000 will present a gospel in direct opposition to the lies (and laws) of Babylon and this opposition will be met with intense persecution.

Babylon will wield great power and to counteract God's 144,000 servants, the devil will empower two million false prophets. (Of course, I do not know the actual number of the devil's false prophets, but I do recall that one true prophet faced down 450 false prophets on Mount Carmel. See Revelation 13:4; 1 Kings 18.)

The important point to remember is that God's servants will present Revelation's story which will be inflammatory and the devil's prophets will alter and distort the words of Revelation to deceive those who want to be deceived.

4. Why is there a half hour of silence in Revelation 8:1?

LW: Revelation 8:1 says, **"When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."** The brevity of this verse is misleading. The story surrounding the seven seals is a very large topic and I do not have enough space in this report to write much.

In a nutshell, here's the seven seals story. Before any life was created, the Father wrote down a complete history of sin. Because He has perfect foreknowledge, He described in perfect detail the lives and choices of everyone who would be affected by sin. His book included the actions of the angels in Heaven (where sin began), as well as all human beings who would live on Earth. After writing the book, He did a peculiar thing. He blotted out the name of each person who would choose rebellion and forfeit eternal life.

Then, He sealed up the book with seven seals (so that no one could read it) and He named it, "The Book of Life." No one (not even Jesus) knows what is in the book. Only the Father knows. The Father wrote this book to prove several things at the end of sin's drama. When the 1,000 years in Revelation 20 have ended, the Book of Life is opened (Revelation 20:12) and everyone will clearly see three things:

First, everyone will see his or her life accurately recorded in a book that was written perhaps billions of years before life occurred! The Father will prove to everyone that He sees everthing and knows every specific detail about every being. Wow! What a thought!

Second, the Father will prove that He knew billions of years ago who would choose eternal life and who would not. The wicked will see that their names were blotted out of the book.

(Remember, The Book of Life remains sealed up until the 1,000 years have ended. Mankind is not judged out of this book. Mankind will be judged from the books of records (deeds) which angels record in real time. Jesus uses the books of record, not The Book of Life during the judgment process.)

The Father will show everyone the contents of His book because He wants everyone to see that even though He knew who would choose to be saved and who would choose to be lost, He loved everyone the same, and most of all He did not and would not manipulate the choices of one soul, even though He foreknew what each one would do. Finally, the Father wants everyone to see what Jesus did to save sinners.

The Father will present the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus to every person. Everyone will see the cruelty that Jesus willingly endured to save mankind. The Father also wants the universe to understand that Jesus is fully God, just like Himself. The Father wants the universe to know that Jesus is a co-eternal member of the Godhead, that Jesus has all of the powers, rights and substance as the Father. This final disclosure will complete "the revelation of Jesus Christ."

So, consider the setting: At the end of the 1,000 years, the Holy City will descend from Heaven with the saints on board. The wicked, from Cain to those who perished at the Second Coming, will be resurrected to see the Holy City! At this moment, Jesus will break open the seventh seal and open The Book of Life.

How does God reveal the three things written above? I believe God will display the book on a giant panoramic screen in the sky (heaven). As each person watches, he or she will be spellbound by God’s foreknowledge, enduring love, patience, grace and fairness. This revelation will silence the wicked and humble the righteous – for what can anyone say? The silence will last half an hour.

"By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.’ All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame." (Isaiah 45:23,24)

Larry Wilson

Political Activism?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:

I am in a quandary. Do you think Christians should become involved in the political unrest that is brewing in our country? I believe our country is in serious trouble. I also believe that we are facing several problems that will require painful solutions. I am wondering what I can do, if anything. Do you think Christians should participate in political movements like the "Tea Party?"

Sincerely,
JoAnn"

Dear JoAnn:

Thank you for your email. You are not alone in your quandary. Many people believe the United States is headed in a wrong direction and they are wondering what can be done to save the ship before it sinks. Of course, the beauty of a democracy is that each person can choose whether or not to engage in political activism.

To complicate matters, there is such a wide range of issues embroiled in standing conflict that this makes it is hard to know what to do. Whether or not to engage in political activism is a personal matter and ultimately, I suppose it depends on the issue or issues that concern you most. I do have a view on political activism that I would like to share, however, so please take a few moments to consider the following because I find this topic to be a serious one.

Before I begin, you should know that I am not politically indifferent or a political fatalist. I do not accept the premise that what will be – will be. I believe that "we the people" have an obligation to support and help direct our democracy. Recent history proves that people in this country can have influence over our government and we can improve our nation's direction *when enough people* get involved.

For example, the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the equal wages for equal work movement of the 1970s prove that grass roots reform is possible. A few years ago, I became active in county government to bring about zoning. It was a lengthy process, but it was well worth the effort. So, yes, I know that people can improve the function of government at local, state, and federal levels.

The Basics

By definition, a democracy is a society of free people, that is, they are free to govern themselves. Our forefathers recognized the enormous gift of freedom that God had granted to

this nation, but they also knew that this freedom was contingent on many factors which is why amendments were soon added to the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. democracy has been one of the finest forms of government on Earth, but all forms of government are vulnerable to the same fatal virus. This virus is man's sinful nature.

A free society can only exist for as long as a majority of its individuals embrace the highest standards of conduct and exalt "right doing." No government, including a democracy, can exist without the rule of law. Therefore, the product of a free society is simple: To live well, its leaders and citizens must *individually* embrace and uphold the principles codified in the last six commandments of the Ten Commandments or society will descend into bribery, scandal, dishonesty, and violence. (Consider Mexico.)

If leaders and citizens do not *individually* embrace and exalt the moral principles codified in the last six commandments, political leaders will have no choice but to expand the dominion of government by creating more and more laws in hopes that more control will enable society to function. (The United States is a perfect example.)There is no society without the rule of law – formally or informally. Even in Somalia – perhaps the most lawless nation on Earth having no central government – the strong rule over the weak and the rich rule over the poor.

Step back and consider the process: When a free society becomes degenerate, ignorant, arrogant, and unwilling to uphold moral conduct that is honorable in God's sight, that society becomes unfit to govern itself. Legislators see the problems at hand and they attempt to overcome lawless behavior through legislation.

This process increases the size and scope of government which is necessary to manage the deviant behavior of people. Then, to remain free of government regulations, lobbyists are employed by the rich to seek special exemptions. Using bribery and other favors, legislators often find a way to justify whatever lobbyists want.

Over time, most of the leaders of the U.S. democracy have become corrupt and abusive and there is nothing further that God can do with the nation as a whole. Throwing out the leadership in Congress *en mass* is not an option because having no elders to guide a huge nation would result in anarchy.

God recorded the history of Israel in the Bible because He wants everyone to understand His response to man's degeneracy. God has not changed over the centuries and His policies for dealing with degenerate nations are changeless. (See Ezekiel 14:12-23.) Take an hour and read the whole book of Judges.

It describes the seesaw experience of Israel as it vacillated between a free nation and a nation subservient to the laws of other nations over a course of about 400 years. God has provided this information in His Word so that we might understand that He knows how to deal with mankind. He has a predictable process.

A free society can only endure and exist for as long as a large majority of its people **love** God and their neighbors as themselves. What happens when people do not love God or one

another? The answer is simple: *Predatory abuse becomes commonplace.* We become suspicious and fearful of one another.

In contrast, when a nation embraces God and His ideals for human behavior, it will be blessed with freedom and prosperity. **"From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth– he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.**

No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield." (Psalm 33:13-20)

Fatal Virus

Historians cannot fully explain the fall of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Grecia, and Rome because *there is much more to the fall of any nation than human beings can see!* Similarly, no man or political party can save a wicked nation because "no king is saved by the size of his army" and "a horse is a vain hope for deliverance."

The Bible teaches that a nation is not a manmade entity. A nation does not have its origin in the will of men. Every government exists because a *divine mandate* brought it to life and God gave it authority over its subjects. (Romans 13:1) God sets up kings and takes them down *according to His sovereign authority*. (Daniel 2:21; 4:32-37)

Keep in mind, God holds leaders in public office to a very high standard of conduct. The same holds true in religious matters. In recent years, and rightfully so, millions of Catholics have been embarrassed because of all the priests who have been accused of sexually abusing children.

The priests violated the trust of the children, as well as that of their parishioners. Church and state are not man-made institutions. **"From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth – he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. . . ."**

God sets up leaders and He brings them down (according to divine wisdom) when they abuse their "God-given" trust. When a majority of the leaders in a church or a nation becomes corrupt, God brings the whole institution down. This explains why governments appear and disappear. They appear because God has determined they should exist. They disappear when God determines they should cease to exist. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. (Psalms 127:1)

So, why is every person on Earth accountable to God? Let us begin by stating an eternal truth – God hears every word and sees every act. **"The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good."** (Proverbs 15:3) **"For God will bring every deed into**

judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:14) **"For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."** (Matthew 12:37)

Because God sees and hears the sum of everything taking place on Earth, He knows when a majority in a nation have rejected righteousness. **"There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers."** (Proverbs 6:16-19)

The virus that is rapidly tearing down the United States of America is our sinful nature. Increasingly, Americans continue to yield to their sinful nature. As a country, the U.S. is accelerating toward destruction because the sinful nature has gained control.

The Bible says, **"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.**

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:19-23)

What causes people to become selfish and hateful? What causes people to become greedy? What motivates people to lie and steal? What causes people to take bribes? What causes people to constantly condemn others, putting every political decision in the worst possible light?

What moves people to engage in sexual immorality? What causes children to abandon their parents and parents to abandon their children? The answer is simple. The sinful nature is a fatal virus. The sinful nature refuses to take responsibility for its actions. (Genesis 3:9-19) It tempts human beings to sin and once restraint (and responsibility) is cast aside, a free society quickly becomes a mad society. Look around at the madness. People become angry and protest. They become frustrated and mobs form, committing violent acts.

Yet the root problem remains, which is our sinful nature. Those controlled by the sinful nature will do (a) whatever they think they can get away with, or (b) whatever it takes to get what they want. Legislators see this proclivity.

They know there is little earthly reason to do what is honorable, but they can make more laws to stop harmful behavior. This is how it was in Noah's day. **"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain."** (Genesis 6:5,6)

Jesus understands man's sinful nature. He knows that the sinful nature of man *always*

overtakes society. As the process spirals downward over time, the norms of society sink lower and lower. Have you noticed over the past fifty years how there is now more profanity, more nudity, more pleasure, more obesity, more disease, more alcohol and substance abuse, more luxury and materialism, and increasing emphasis on sex and everything else which the sinful nature craves? Obviously, the sinful nature has gained control.

"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those *controlled* by the sinful nature cannot please God." (Romans 8:7,8, italics mine) Consider this: The sinful nature enables people to justify hurting others to get what they want. Even the former director of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, admitted in a recent TV interview that capitalism cannot limit greed because a greedy person will find a loophole.

Increasingly, the motto of corporate America has become "Get all that the market will bear." But, Jesus made a more significant motto when He said, **"This is my command: Love each other."** (John 15:17) Speaking about the last days, Jesus said: **"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold."** (Matthew 24:12)

In terms of money, this text works in both directions. Cold-hearted corporate leaders will financially gouge fellow citizens and feel nothing – "It's nothing personal," they say, "we're just doing business." On the other hand, cold-hearted individuals will seek a loan and lie about their finances, borrowing far more than they can repay.

Paul warned the believers in Colosse, **"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."** (Colossians 3:5,6)

Save Me from My Brother!

When a majority of people in a democracy come to a place where they no longer love God or one another and become controlled by their sinful natures, they become unfit for self government. Therefore, the magnificent freedoms granted to a free society must be reduced in order to protect brother from brother so that society can continue to function.

Even the newest person in Congress can see the problem. Even though he or she may not fully understand the sinful nature, legislators clearly see the corporate effects of sin and they have no tools but legislation and law enforcement to stop predatory abuses. For example, Congress enacted the Credit Card Act of 2009 to reduce the predatory practices of credit card banks.

Why would banks do this to their customers? (A) They could get away with it. (B) Everyone else was doing it. (C) It was a fast way to make a lot of money. (D) All of the above. Obviously, the correct answer is (D). On the other hand, how many people do you know who are willing to charge the limit on their credit cards knowing they plan to declare bankruptcy?

The Need for New Laws Will Never End

As a free society descends into the chaos of lawless behaviors, freedoms necessarily must be reduced to protect ourselves from one another. Consider this: The 108th Congress of the United States (2003-2004) passed 480 new federal laws. The 109th Congress of the United States (2005-2006) passed 482 new laws.

The 110th Congress (2007-2008) passed 460 new laws. So far, the 111th Congress (2009-2010) has passed 160 laws. The number of federal laws created in the past six and a half years (1,582) speaks volumes. Almost, 1,600 additional laws (not counting approximately 600 new laws within each of the fifty states during the same period) prove that we need increasing protection from one another. There is a deadly virus that is killing our free society. This virus is the sinful nature of man.

Each person who listens to the news knows that the U.S. economy is like a runaway train and Congress cannot stop it. Congress attempted to stop this train in 1990 with a law called "Paygo." This law is so called because Congress wants to **pay** for its obligations as it **goes** along. Hence the title, "Paygo."

Thus far, Congress passed the Paygo law three times: 1990, 2007, and 2010. History says, "First enacted as part of the Budget Enforcement Act of 1990 (which was incorporated as Title XIII of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990), PAYGO required all increases in direct spending or revenue decreases to be offset by other spending decreases or revenue increases. It was thought that this would control increases in deficit spending. . . . After the expiration of PAYGO [in 2002], budget deficits returned.

The **federal surplus** shrank from $236.2 billion in 2000 to $128.2 billion in 2001, then a $157.8 billion deficit in 2002—the last year statutory PAYGO was in effect. The deficit increased to $377.6 billion in 2003 and $412.7 billion in 2004. The federal deficit, excluding trust funds, was $537.3 billion in fiscal year 2006. In the first 6 years of President Bush's term, with a Republican controlled Congress, the federal debt increased by $3 trillion [to $8.5 trillion]." (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PAYGO , insertions and bold emphasis mine.)

Since 2007, a Democratically controlled Congress has increased the federal debt to more than $12 trillion. President Obama signed a new Paygo Law on February 12, 2010, but this law will not stop the runaway train. The U.S. deficit during 2009 ballooned to $1.42 trillion.

On March 20, 2010, the U.S. Congressional Budget Office projected a deficit of $1.8 trillion for 2010. Can the U.S. be able to avoid national bankruptcy? This is the question which political groups like the Tea Party and others are debating, but before you answer, go back and take a quick look at the social consequences of forced austerity in the tiny nation of Greece (who has run out of money and defaulted on its loans). Angry citizens protest in the streets!

The problem is that an economy is like an airplane in flight. If the airplane flies too slow, it stalls and falls to the ground and everyone inside dies. If it goes too fast, the wings tear off and it falls to the ground and everyone inside dies. If our government should suddenly stop increasing the deficit (slow down the airplane), it would have to more than double our taxes to pay its current obligations.

If this happened, the economy would implode. *So, what happens when several million unemployed people and tens of millions who receive some form of government assistance each month suddenly receive no money?* How safe will America be? How angry will people become? Can you imagine long lines of people standing outside Walmart begging for food?

Can you imagine being robbed at gun point for groceries as you exit a food store? Can you imagine gangs holding "gated communities" hostage within their gates until their financial demands are met? Can you image hospitals and doctors offices closed because there is no insurance and people cannot pay actual costs?

When the government tells a huge number of people they will no longer receive government assistance, what choices will they have for survival? Consider Greece again (even though there has been a temporary respite for Greece by the European Union, the drama is not over – keep an eye on it).

In Closing

JoAnn, the continent of Africa has been on public display for several hundred years. There have been an endless round of governments whose leaders started out with good intentions, but they quickly fell into horrible abuses because the virus of the sinful nature is everywhere.

We cannot count the number of cycles that African nations have gone from limited freedom to totalitarian dictatorship. *There is no earthly remedy in Africa or America when the citizens of government have no love for each other.* This is why generally speaking, political activism in the United States is of a secondary concern for me.

There are always two sides to a controversy and wisdom dictates that we carefully consider both sides of the conflict. If it appears that a good solution is possible, I think activism should be encouraged. If a better solution is not clearly possible, then activism is like starting a war. The danger is that no one can know the outcome at the beginning. In closing, please consider these three issues:

1. - First, Jesus *was not* a political activist. Jesus was a spiritual activist. Jesus understood the sinful nature and this is why His ministry focused on changing people's cold hearts into hearts of love. Slavery was very common in Christ's time and women had no rights. The Jews hated the Romans and the Romans hated the Jews.

Yet, Jesus did not start a movement to free Israel, nor did He condemn slavery or seek equal rights for women. Rather, Jesus went to the core of the problem. He showed people how to love one another for love can overcome the virus of the sinful nature. He showed what the human heart can be and should be.

Jesus promised, "the meek will inherit the Earth." A free society is coming, a society truly free from the virus of sin! In the meantime, Paul wrote, **"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you;**

never will I forsake you.' " (Hebrews 13:5)

2. - Second, most people do not understand our prophetic perspective. (I know that you understand what I mean by this.) We know that the Bible states that the book of Daniel was sealed up until the time of the end. (Daniel 12:4,9) After reading my book, *Daniel: Unlocked for the Final Generation*, you know that I am convinced that we are living at the time of the end. This does not necessarily mean that we should be politically indifferent, it just means that political changes (whatever may be achieved) will be short lived.

We are living at a time when sin and rebellion has reached critical mass. For reasons presented in my book on the Seven Trumpets, I believe that the world passed the point of no return in 1994. This means, corporately speaking, that spiritual reformation and repentance will not be possible until the wrath of God begins (the seven trumpets of Revelation).

As I see it, the *whole world* is on a runaway freight train – not just the USA. No man or political party can save us from the painful consequences that are coming. Our problems are far too complex and there is no human remedy. The Bible says **". . . no king is saved by the size of his army and a horse is a vain hope for deliverance, despite all its great strength it cannot save."** (Psalm 33:16,17)

3. Finally, the best thing that any citizen can do at this late hour is to embrace the Lord and obey His commands. **"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."** (Matthew 6:33,34)

Turn off the radio and refuse to listen or engage in political dissension. Pray for our political leaders. Turn off the TV and spend more time studying your Bible. Visit a shut-in or a sick person. Help a neighbor. Go out of your way to show kindness and compassion. Make an effort to help abused women. Send a gift to a charity. Read a story to a child. Walk with the Lord, pay attention to whatever God sets before you. Get out and stay out of debt. Do not cheat your employer. Give him a full day's work. Tell the truth in all cases.

Jesus said, "Love one another." This is the revolution that we really need. **"And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.**

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." (Romans 13:11-14)

Larry Wilson

What is Next? (Part 1)

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:

What does Bible prophecy predict will happen next? One internet site says one thing and another says something else. Because I am not a Bible scholar and honestly, I don't have much confidence in my pastor, I don't know who or what to believe.

From a secular point of view (politically, economically, ecologically, militarily, religiously, etc.), there is a great deal of uncertainty. I am guessing there is going to be a global implosion of some kind and I cannot figure out what I should do. Would you break this down for me? I would like to know what is coming next?

John "

Dear John:

Yes, it seems as though there is a new crisis roiling the world every month or so, but if recorded history proves anything, it proves that bad news does not mean that the end of the world is at hand. I do believe that the end of the world is near, but not on the basis of what we hear or read in the media. God has given all of us something far better than media driven eschatology to indicate the nearness of Christ's return. It is called, "Bible prophecy!"

The books of Daniel and Revelation are different than the other books in the Bible. The book of Daniel was written around 600 B.C. and God put a seal on this book until the time of the end. (See Daniel 12:4, 9.) This indicates that God has something to reveal to the final generation that He has not revealed before. The book of Revelation was written around A.D. 100 and even though it was not sealed up like the book of Daniel, Revelation depends on the unsealing of Daniel to make sense.

God embedded two amazing elements within the books of Daniel and Revelation for the benefit of the last generation who would live on Earth. First, He put a chronological sequence of prophetic events in these books. These events began to unfold about 600 B.C. and the sequence will continue without interruption until the world is purified of sin – 1,000 years after the Second Coming. Second, God put eighteen spans of time within this sequence of events so that we can determine the overall duration of God's plan.

Once we understand *how* the prophetic sequences of Daniel and Revelation align with each other, we can determine our chronological position within God's plan. With a little training, an ordinary person can determine the *previous* prophetic event and the *next* prophetic event for himself because the Bible speaks for itself. This feature of apocalyptic prophecy is the basis for

my assertion that the book of Daniel has been unsealed and that Christ's return is very near.

Why Experts Disagree

When it comes to interpreting Bible prophecy, it is true that one expert says one thing and another expert says something else. Prophetic expositors arrive at different conclusions because there are as many different methods of interpretation as there are people.

Methods of interpretation is a phrase that defines a controlling set of ideas or views that a person has in mind *before* he or she actually begins to interpret prophecy. Doctrinal beliefs, presuppositions, assumptions, concepts about the role and authority of Scripture, the use of external authority, and church traditions produce controlling ideas. Notice how they work: A Catholic scholar will interpret Bible prophecy so that his Catholic doctrines and his prophetic conclusions harmoniously align, and a Baptist scholar will do the same thing.

In other words, two scholars can study the *same* passages of Scripture and arrive at different conclusions because everyone approaches Bible prophecy with some kind of baggage. This baggage is called "methods of interpretation," "presuppositions," "rules of interpretation," or hermeneutics. Perhaps the following parable will illustrate the controlling power that comes with baggage.

The Parable of the Math Teacher

Once upon a time, there was a math teacher who was invited to teach math in at a college in a distant city called Overspent. During the first week of college algebra, the teacher discovered a puzzling situation. His students could not solve a single math problem correctly. In fact, all of the students gave identical answers for each math problem that he gave them.

He asked the students to explain how they had entered college – given the fact they did not have the skills necessary to resolve basic math problems. The students said their high school teachers did not require them to work through math problems because highly educated and spiritually guided math teachers long ago had solved all math problems and all that they needed to do was to memorize the answers. The teacher was shocked.

The next day, the teacher set out to remedy the problem. He put this equation on the board: 3c + 5 = 20. He asked the students to solve for c. All of the students reported that c was equal to 3. When the teacher asked how they arrived at 3, they said they had always been taught that c *always* equals 3.

The teacher could not believe his ears. He demonstrated on the chalkboard how c was solved, and he proved that c = 5 in the equation using simple *rules* of substitution. The students became angry. They were insulted by this "outsider" because he showed no respect for their high school elders and their traditional way of solving math problems.

The students told the teacher that if he had written 3e + 5 = 20, their answer would have been 5

because "e" always equals 5. They had been taught that "a" always = 1, "b" always = 2, "c" always = 3, etc. The teacher responded by saying that in math, a variable's name does not determine its value. It does not matter whether a variable is called "e" or "c" or "x."

When it comes to resolving a math problem, the *process* must conform to valid rules of substitution or the answer will be erroneous. The students could not bear to hear any more of this heresy, so they rose up as one man and stormed out of class. The math teacher was stunned. He wondered how he could help these students.

They knew nothing about working through math problems or that math is controlled by *four self-evident rules* of addition, multiplication, subtraction, and division. He thought to himself, "They think they have been properly informed and they are afraid to consider answers that are contrary to traditions of their elders." Perplexed by their hostility, he wondered what he could do to get the students to put aside their traditions so that they could consider the truth.

The next day, the teacher plainly said to his students: "Please hear me out. You have been misled. Your knowledge of math is worthless. Memorizing the answer to a math problem is not to be confused with properly working through a legitimate process to find the correct answer.

If you follow the four rules that govern basic math, you can test and validate your answers in many different ways. More importantly, others who know nothing about you or your elders can also test the validity of your answers because accurate math solutions are not a matter of opinion, they are a matter of fact.

Accurate solutions are true because they can be proven true by self-evident rules!" Immediately, the students became hostile. The teacher had condemned their traditions and their beloved elders. He had insulted them and their exalted high school teachers. They threw desks and chairs at the teacher and in a riotous frenzy, they beat him to death.

When the bell rang, the students went away happy. They were relieved that the offending teacher had been silenced. They petitioned the dean of the college to provide a math teacher who would teach according to their elders and their wish was granted.

Years later, many of these students graduated from Overspent City College and some of them went to work for the elders of the city. Later, the city faced an enormous financial crisis and all of the elders and college graduates could not stop the city from going bankrupt. When the auditors showed up, no one in the accounting department could figure out what went wrong – literally.

There are four lessons to be learned from this silly parable. First, for most of us, traditions are more important than truth. Traditions are familiar and predictable, whereas the truth can be disruptive, humiliating and socially divisive. Second, it is impossible to be "a defender of the faith" and at the same time, be "a seeker of truth."

These two mindsets stand in opposition to each other. Third, if someone exposes the folly of a tradition, he or she will surely suffer for it. Last, if we reject or ignore the truth, failure cannot be avoided. We may arrogantly defend our ignorance, but ignorance will not save us from the

results that truth demands.

Can the Bible Tell Us Things We Don't Want to Believe?

Experts widely disagree in Bible prophecy because knowingly or unknowingly, every expert uses **a set of rules** to support prophetic conclusions. Of course, every expert believes his conclusions are true because they are in harmony with his baggage (or rules). The problem, of course, is that false rules cannot produce valid conclusions.

A rule is a statement that is always true. For example, 2 + 2 equals 4 because the law of subtraction says that 4 - 2 = 2. When it comes to Bible prophecy, a rule cannot have an exception, for if it does, no one has the authority to speak for God and tell humanity when the rule should be applied or ignored. To illustrate this matter, consider the following rule: "A day in Bible prophecy *always* equals a year." If we accept this rule to be true (that is, having no exception), the 1,000 years in Revelation 20 have to be translated as 365,242 years. (365.242 days per solar year x 1,000 years = 365,242 years)

For reasons that will be presented next month, the day/year rule described above is faulty. There are time periods in Daniel and Revelation where a day should be translated as a year (for example, the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 are translated into 490 years), but there are other time periods where translation is not permitted.

For example, the 42 months in Revelation 13 and the 1,335 days in Daniel 12 are literal time periods. Because some time periods in prophecy are translated a day for a year and others are not, a valid rule is required to tell us when time periods should be translated and when they should not.

Here is the critical point: If we use a rule that requires us to translate *every* time period in Daniel and Revelation into a day for a year, the Bible will be put in a position of internal conflict. The Bible will not be able to speak for itself because the chronological order given in Daniel and Revelation will be broken! (I will demonstrate this point in next month's newsletter.)

Today, millions of Christians have embraced prophetic concepts that have no truth in them. A prophetic concept can *appear* to be true – if flawed rules, that is, certain presuppositions are used. For example, many Christians believe that the role of modern day Israel is prophetically important during the end of the world.

They also believe that a pre-tribulation rapture is imminent, but the underlying presuppositions that hold these ideas together are faulty. The New Covenant teaches that the Israel of God is not biological! Everyone in Christ is now the heir of Abraham. (Galatians 3:28,29)

Logic and reasonableness do not alone ensure validity. For thousands of years, people believed Earth stood still and the Sun traveled in its orbit around Earth. In fact, everyone could plainly see that the Sun traveled across the sky! Then, along came an obscure mathematician who said the Sun stood still.

Even worse, Copernicus *proved* that the Sun was not moving and he was severely punished for speaking out against the traditions of the elders and telling the truth. History demonstrates that advocates of truth are frequently punished. (Wasn't Jesus crucified for speaking the truth?) Nevertheless, for the honest in heart, great joy occurs when greater truth is found!

An ongoing discovery of greater truth is the process that enables the Bible to tell us things that we do not want to believe, but unfortunately, many people do not want or have a working knowledge of Scripture. Most people are content with their traditions (the familiar) and they are quick to discredit the truth (which is divisive). Perhaps the greatest problem for human beings is that we cannot know what our response to truth will be until greater truth arrives and it challenges our sacred traditions.

Faulty Interpretations until Daniel Is Unsealed

The book of Daniel contains 533 sentences. It was written about twenty-six centuries ago, but unlike the other sixty-five books in the Bible, the book of Daniel was sealed up "until the time of the end." The angel, Gabriel, said to Daniel, **". . .Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end."** (Daniel 12:9)

What does "closed up and sealed until the time of the end" mean? It means that God hid something in the book of Daniel that would remain "top secret" until the time of the end arrived. I am convinced that the book of Daniel has been unsealed and the time of the end has arrived for the following reasons:

The secret information that God encoded into the book of Daniel is something like the "Rosetta Stone." The Rosetta Stone was accidentally discovered and unearthed in 1799 near Rosetta, Egypt, by French soldiers. The marvelous thing about this buried rock is that it bears a message written during the second century B.C. in two forms of Egyptian script – demotic and hieroglyphics.

When archeologists examined the rock, they were thrilled because the inscriptions would help solve a very perplexing mystery. Prior to 1799, archeologists could not read the clay tablets bearing Egyptian hieroglyphics because no one could decipher the language.When the Rosetta Stone was discovered and translated, the demotic inscriptions on the stone enabled Thomas Young (1773-1829) and J.F. Champollion (1790-1832) to decipher the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians.

In a similar way, God buried a set of four self-evident rules in the book of Daniel 2,600 years ago. By God's grace, I accidently stumbled into this buried treasure. (Of course, the passage of time will prove or disprove the validity of my claim.) Four rules of interpretation have shattered centuries of prophetic exposition and tradition, because by definition, all prophetic interpretations are faulty and incomplete until the book of Daniel is *unsealed*. These four rules cover chronology, fulfillment, language and God's use of time.

God put these things in the book of Daniel to dethrone our traditions because *greater truth is*

God's gift to the honest in heart. Notice how this works: God separates people who hold to traditions from people who love truth by sending greater truth on the Earth. When greater truth comes along, the honest in heart rejoice to see it while those defending the traditions of the elders will rise up and punish those who embrace it. Yes, the parable of the math teacher is silly, but the moral of the story is painfully true.

I am out of space for now, but in next month's conclusion, I will discuss the four rules that unlock the book of Daniel and by extension, the book of Revelation.

Larry Wilson

What is Next? (Conclusion)

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Note: This *Wake Up Report!* concludes my response to a question that was asked last month. (Read it by selecting this link.) The essence of John's question was: "I would like to know, prophetically speaking, what is next? One expert says something and another expert says something else. Please break this down for me."

John, please consider the following parable: Three boys, Abe, Brian, and Charlie, stood in front of a clothing store display. Two shirts were on display in the window and the prices on the shirts were $30 and $50. Abe said, "If I had $100, I would buy both shirts!"

Brian replied, "I believe you could buy both of them for $60."

"The total for both shirts is $80," Charlie declared.

"That's just your opinion," retorted Abe.

Brian agreed saying, "That's right! No one *really* knows what the total is. One person says one thing and another person says something else. Who are we to believe?"

Charlie asserted, "The total price for these shirts is not a matter of opinion, it is a matter of fact!"

Brian concluded, "A person can believe whatever he wants, but who can say what the truth is?" When the conversation ended without coming to an agreement, the boys went their separate ways. The truth was spoken, but two of the three boys (2/3's) did not recognize it.

Taking the parable one step further, consider this: How can a person tell if a prophetic explanation is an opinion (a private interpretation) or a fact? Thus far, I have not directly answered your question because to the untrained ear, another response will appear to be just another opinion and when it comes to Bible prophecy, opinions are **not** particularly meaningful.

It is my hope that you will embrace the use of the rules and discover for yourself what comes next – prophetically speaking. Now that the book of Daniel has been unsealed (the rules discovered), Bible prophecy is not only easier to understand, but a chronological order can be determined! Last month, we discussed three issues:

1. Faulty rules of interpretation will produce faulty conclusions.

2. God sealed up the book of Daniel until the final generation arrives on Earth because God's gift to the honest in heart is a greater understanding of truth. Those who love truth are willing to abandon traditions when greater truth comes along because for them, truth has greater value than tradition.

3. Finally, God has put a chronological sequence of prophetic events in the books of Daniel and Revelation. These events began to unfold about 600 B.C. will continue without interruption until the world is purified of sin – 1,000 years after the Second Coming. God also revealed eighteen spans of time (time periods) within the end time sequence so that people searching for truth can determine their chronological position within God's plan.

Consistent Behavior Produces Rules

By God's grace and through stumbling efforts, I discovered four self-evident rules in the book of Daniel during the 1980s. These rules govern all aspects concerning the interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy. (Apocalyptic prophecy is defined in this article as the unique prophecies contained in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

There are five types of prophecy in the Bible and each type of prophecy has unique rules of interpretation.) I did not make up these four rules. Rather, these are God's four rules that govern His prophetic explanation of the future. I simply observed these four consistent behaviors within apocalyptic prophecy and I have distilled my observations into four rules. (This is similar to the work of physicist Georg Ohm. He studied the behavior of electricity and after he observed a number of consistent behaviors, he distilled his observations into a set of mathematical equations that we now call "Ohm's law.")

I believe the discovery and validation of these four rules are what unseals the book of Daniel. These four rules control the interpretation of Daniel and Revelation. When properly applied, the books of Daniel and Revelation will make sense *just as they read*. These rules address four issues: chronology, fulfillment, the use of language, and timing.

According to these rules, there are five prophecies in the book of Daniel and twelve in the book of Revelation. When these seventeen prophecies are properly aligned with each other, they produce an amazing timeline. This timeline contains a sequence of more than 100 events that occur in chronological order. This timeline has been functioning for twenty-six centuries and it will continue to function until 1,000 years found in Revelation 20 end and Earth is made new.

Rule One

Given the brevity of this article, we will examine Rule One. I have arbitrarily made the rule governing chronology "Rule One" because determining the order of events within the seventeen prophecies is "Job One!" Try this: Draw a time line and then place all of the events specified in Daniel and Revelation on this time line.

When you do this, you will be confronted with placing all the events in the correct chronological order. This is why I consider the first rule about chronology to be so important. This rule is stated as follows: "Each apocalyptic prophecy has a beginning point in time, an ending point in time and the events within each prophecy occur in the order given."

This rule is deceptively simple and it demolishes 2,000 years of prophetic speculation and

tradition. Please give the following sentence a full five seconds of serious thought because the ramifications are huge: *God has declared the order of events within each apocalyptic prophecy – if this is not the case, there is no way to determine chronological order within apocalyptic prophecy.*

If God has declared the order of events within each apocalyptic prophecy and each apocalyptic prophecy is written in Scripture, then the Bible will reveal the correct order of events to everyone – *just as it reads*. If God has declared chronological order, then there is prophetic certainty instead of endless chaos and cancelling views.

On the other hand, if God has not declared chronological order, then everyone is permitted to define and create a prophetic order that accommodates his or her religious baggage. In fact, we see this process throughout Christianity today and the result is that there is no general agreement among Christians on the next prophetic event!

To resolve this problem, some church groups turn to external authority. This authority can be a founding father, a prophet, or even church tradition. There is a simple test that determines if a person uses external authority. Present the Word of God and notice the result. Jesus did this and He was considered a blasphemer because the Jews exalted religious traditions above the Word of God! (See Mark 7:8,9.)

Bottom line: If God has not declared chronological order in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, then it becomes impossible to factually determine the next prophetic event. On the other hand, if there is chronological order, then we can determine what event comes next. We have had twenty-six centuries of prophetic sequence since the book of Daniel was written.

Looking backwards from our day, the book of Daniel proves *there is chronological order* and the result is truly astonishing. This is good news because the final generation can know and understand a number of prophetic truths that previous generations could not discover! Remember, God's greatest gift to the honest in heart is greater truth. During the Great Tribulation, God will separate the honest in heart (His sheep) from those who worship tradition (the goats) through greater truth!

Avoiding Internal Conflict

Last month, the following paragraph was included in my report: "There are time periods in Daniel and Revelation where a day should be translated as a year (for example, the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 are translated into 490 years), but there are other time periods where translation is not permitted.

For example, the 42 months in Revelation 13 and the 1,335 days in Daniel 12 are literal time periods. Because some time periods in prophecy are translated a day for a year and others are not, a valid rule is required to tell us when time periods should be translated and when they should not."

If we use a faulty rule that requires *every* time period in Daniel and Revelation to be literal or a faulty rule that requires every time period to be translated as a day for a year, *the Bible will be put in a position of internal conflict (inconsistency)*. In other words, the Bible will not be able to speak for itself because Rule One, which governs chronological order, will be found in conflict with Rule Four which governs timing!

A valid rule of interpretation cannot have an exception, for if it did, who would have the authority to tell the world when the exception is permitted? Let me repeat this important statement. *A valid rule will not force the Bible into a position of internal conflict.* I emphasize this point because valid rules and valid conclusions are always in perfect harmony with God's Word!

Perhaps a short demonstration would be helpful. Consider the chronological order in the following prophecy.* Rule One forces this prophecy to begin with Revelation 12:7 and it continues through Revelation 14:5. Remember, an apocalyptic prophecy is defined as having a beginning point and an ending point in time and the events within the prophecy must occur in the order given.

1. - Revelation 12:7-12 (A.D. 30) - There was war in Heaven on Resurrection Sunday. Lucifer and his angels were cast out of Heaven a second time.

2. - Revelation 12:13-14 (538-1798) - Then, the dragon (Lucifer) chased woman (God's people) to the desert for 1,260 years (a time, times and half a time) According to Rule Four, this time period must be translated using a day for year because the Jubilee Calendar is in operation.

3. - Revelation 12:15,16 (1776 to the present) - Then, the earth helped the woman. God provided a place (the United States of America) where she could escape religious persecution.

4. - Revelation 12:17 (1798 to the present) - When the 1,260 years ended and the woman had not been destroyed, the devil became furious. Knowing that he will be given one last chance, he is preparing for a massive assault on the *remnant of the woman* during the Great Tribulation.

5. - Revelation 13:1 (Future) - When the world is reduced to ruins by God's wrath (the first four trumpets), a beast with seven heads and ten horns will suddenly appear. This beast will be a *crisis* government. This government will be created by the religious and political leaders of Earth for the purpose of appeasing God so that His wrath will cease.

The seven heads represent the seven religious systems of the world. The head (religious system) that was wounded in 1798 was the Roman Catholic Church. When this beast (also called Babylon) forms, we can conclude that the pope will have a leading role. This is how the head that received the deadly wound in 1798 will be healed.

6. - Revelation 13:2-6 (Future) - Babylon (the crisis government) will be a hand-puppet of the devil. The devil will use Babylon to persecute *the remnant of the woman* for 42 months. Since Rule Four states this time period is not translated because the Jubilee Calendar is not in operation, the 42 months in Revelation 13:5 will be 42 literal months.

7. - Revelation 13:7-10 (Future) - The Bible clearly states that the saints will be conquered and defeated. Most of them will be killed or put in prison, and *all* inhabitants of the earth will obey the laws of Babylon – *all,* that is, except the saints.

8. - Revelation 13:11-18 (Future) - About two years after Babylon is created, the devil and his angels will be released from the Abyss to physically appear before the people of Earth during the fifth trumpet. (See Revelation 9:1-11.) During the sixth trumpet, the devil's forces will kill a third of mankind (most, if not all, of the 144,000 will be killed), set up a worldwide theocracy, and implement the mark of the beast.

9. - Revelation 14:1-5 (Future) - Then, the 144,000 will be resurrected at the seventh trumpet and taken to Heaven on the 1,265th day of the Great Tribulation. They will be presented to God as the first fruits of the coming harvest.

Summary

John, I know my response is more technical than what you may have expected. However, it is necessary to understand four things before your prophetic confusion will end. First, opinions about the next prophetic event are meaningless. On the other hand, understanding the architecture of apocalyptic prophecy for yourself is priceless!

Second, when two-thirds of the world's population hear the truth that comes from God's Word, like the two boys in the parable at the beginning of this article, they will be unable to recognize the truth because they have no tools to distinguish between truth and error. Third, the unsealing of the book of Daniel changes everything in terms of understanding apocalyptic prophecy.

The time has come for long-standing traditions to be dethroned and truth exalted. History says this process always comes at a price. There will be rejection, ridicule, and persecution for those who love truth. God understands this and He has promised to compensate the faith of His children in due time.

The meek will inherit the earth! Finally, the Bible teaches that the next *visible* prophetic event will be a series of dramatic physical phenomena in the sky – including a global earthquake. See Revelation 8:5. These intimidating manifestations will be immediately followed by four horrific judgments from God. (See Revelation 8:6-12)

Larry Wilson

*Note: For a comprehensive discussion on these prophetic topics, please see my book, *A Study on the Seven Trumpets, Two Witnesses and Four Beasts*. For a discussion on the selection and ministry of the 144,000, please see pages 151-206 in my book, *A Study on the Seven Seals and the 144,000*.

These materials are freely available on the web. Please go to http://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Subjindex.htm . Scroll down and look for the articles titled, "The 144,000," "The

Seven Trumpets," "The Two Witnesses," and "The Four Beasts." For a discussion on the four rules of interpretation, please see the article titled, "The Necessity for Rules."

Eternal Security and Dinosaurs

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:

1. I have been taught that once a person is saved, he cannot be lost. Do you believe in eternal security?
- Robyn

2. - The devil was once a perfect angel, but he fell. What would stop a Christian in eternity from taking the same path as the devil?
- Michelle

3. - How can the Bible be taken as "the word of God" or "the truth" when there is physical evidence of dinosaurs and humans evolving?
- Christina "

Ladies, thank you for your questions! I will start with Robyn's question:

Robyn: The reasoning underlying "once saved – always saved" involves two steps. First, it is believed that being born again is a momentary event – as in the birth of a baby. In other words, it is believed that salvation comes to a person the second that he is born again, not at the end of a lengthy qualifying process.

Second, it is believed that once a person is saved, he becomes a child of God *forever*. The parallel offered is simple enough: Nothing can change the identity of our biological parents, therefore, nothing can change the identity of our spiritual Father. The conclusion is that once we become a child of God, we are saved – no matter what!

Advocates of eternal security use many Bible texts to support their position. Here are three: First, Jesus said, **"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; *no one can snatch them out of my hand*.**

My Father, who *has given them to me*, is greater than all ; *no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand*." (John 10:27-29, italics mine) Second, Paul wrote, **"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, *will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*."** (Romans 8:38,39, italics mine)

Finally, Paul wrote, **"That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that *he is able to guard what I have***

***entrusted to him for that day*. What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. *Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you*– guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us."** (2 Timothy 1:12-14, italics mine)

Robyn, if these three passages were the only verses in the Bible that speak about salvation, there might be some legitimacy to the doctrine of eternal security. However, the Bible reveals much more about salvation and aligning all that is said into one harmonious truth is a challenge. In just a moment, I will address your question about eternal security, but right now, please consider Michelle's question, because your two questions are interconnected:

Michelle: The Bible teaches that long ago, Lucifer (the devil) lived in Heaven. He was blameless, the model of perfection and perfect in beauty. The Bible also teaches that Lucifer had a change of heart. Think about this. Lucifer lived in a perfect place with perfect beings. He served a perfect God – a God of love.

Lucifer had everything that a created being could be given – his beauty was exceptional, he had a sinless nature, and he had the highest and best job a created being could have! (Ezekiel 28:12-18) He was a guardian cherub (he stood beside God's throne.) Lucifer had it all and still, he fell into sin. Even worse, *prior* to being thrown out of Heaven, Lucifer led one-third of God's angels to unite with him in rebellion against God!

Adam and Eve were also created perfect. They were sinless and they served a perfect God of love. They had everything that created beings could want. They had happiness, holiness, and the Garden of Eden and yet, they fell. Lucifer deceived Eve and when Adam realized her fate, his love for Eve caused him to deliberately eat the forbidden fruit.

I have briefly reviewed these two failures to make a profound point. God's children have the power of choice – they always have, they always will. This means that with the power of choice throughout eternity, God's children can choose to rebel against the laws of God if they want.

The fall of Lucifer and one-third of the angels proves that sinless beings can choose and did choose to sin. The fall of Adam and Eve proves that sinless humans can choose and did choose to sin. Because God's children can choose to sin, what will keep angels and humans from sinning at some point in the future? The answer to this question is amazing!

God has permitted sin to exist for several thousand years so that the nature of sin can be fully understood. God has carefully documented the course of sin so that throughout eternity, endless generations can study the drama caused by sin. Earth has served as a theater for the universe.

This is the only place in all the universe where death, sorrow, suffering, disease, broken relationships, and hatred exist. This drama has been recorded in real time with technology that is better than 3D or any technology man is aware of. At any time in eternity's future, if any hint of rebellion should arise, God will put out the fire by calling upon the redeemed from Earth, a host of ex-sinners who know all about the wages of sin and the heartache it brings. The saints will

meet with any person who is about to sin and there will be a show and tell experience.

The redeemed will also remind the person who is contemplating sin that if he insists on sinning, there will be no rescue because God will not provide redemption for defiant sin. (This is why God did not offer salvation to Lucifer and his angels. Matthew 12:31,32; Hebrews 10:26) The bottom line will be made clear: Sin has been proven to be an awful cancer that eventually turns sinners into predators. Therefore, the day you choose to sin, you will die. (Genesis 2:17)

The drama of sin has three elements related to eternal security. First, we have a few million examples of holy angels who were eternally secure, but are now lost. They will be burned up at the end of the 1,000 years. (Revelation 20:10,15) Second, Adam and Eve are two examples of holy people who were eternally secure, but fell.

Both instances (one in Heaven and one on Earth) prove that eternal security is based on eternal submission to God's will. Look at these two texts: **"*If we deliberately keep on sinning* after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."** (Hebrews 10:26,27, italics mine) Please consider this passage and notice that it is possible to fall away!

"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, *who have shared in the Holy Spirit*, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, *if they fall away*, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." (Hebrews 6:4-6, italics mine)

So, Robyn and Michelle, there is eternal security, but it is conditional. **"If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will die for it; because of the sin he has committed he will die. But if a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life. Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die."** (Ezekiel 18:26-38)

Being born again is not a one time event. There is a beginning moment to a spiritual life, but the way to success is to be spiritually renewed each day or our carnal natures will quickly separate us from the Lord. (Romans 12:2,3; James 1:23-25) The apostle Paul knew that salvation belonged to those who finished the race!

He wrote, **"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, *if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you*. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. . . . I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, *I have kept the faith*."** (1 Corinthians 15:1,2, 2 Timothy 4:7, italics mine)

Christina: Your question involves two separate issues, so please give me a moment to identify them before bringing your question into focus. First, the language in Genesis 1 and 2 is not

subject to the wild distortions often heard today when other Bible texts are considered.

For example, our Creator, Jesus Christ, declared from His own mouth that He created the world and everything in it in six days and this is why He commands us to remember the seventh day of each week by resting on His holy day. (Exodus 20:8-11; See also: Colossians 1:15,16; John 1:1-14 and Revelation 14:6,7.) Because the synchrony of a day is determined by the arrival of evening and morning (Genesis 1), every day since Creation week has been twenty-four hours in length.

Creation week was a profound event. Consider this: Light was created on the first day, atmosphere was created on the second, dry ground and food was created on the third, the Sun, moon and stars were created on the fourth, fish and fowl were created on the fifth, beasts and mankind were created on the sixth, and the seventh day was set apart from the six as a memorial to all that the Lord had done.

According to Genesis 1, Jesus did not create this orb we call Earth during Creation week. Moreover, He did not create water during Creation week! This water-covered orb existed long before Creation week. Geologically speaking, Earth appears to be about 4.5 billion years old and life on Earth, according to the Bible, is about 6,000 years old. These two issues explain the mixed geological strata of Earth because the strata contains a mixture of old and recent creation!

I have mentioned these things because dinosaur fossils do not prove evolution as science claims. The fact is, dinosaurs could not have lived on Earth before Creation week! The dinosaurs required an atmosphere, dry ground, sunlight, and food – items that did not exist before Creation week.

I believe that Jesus created dinosaurs for the same reason that He created whales – the oceanic version of dinosaurs. Both are/were "giant caretakers" of their respective worlds. Both are/were designed to keep the growth and undergrowth in check so that other forms of life might flourish.

God destroyed the dinosaurs during Noah’s flood for a minimum of two reasons: First, their bones would serve as a testimony to a worldwide flood in Noah’s day. Second, because the surface and weather of Earth would be radically changed by the flood, they were no longer necessary to manage the rapid growth and undergrowth of vegetation.

The dinosaurs were buried in strata that is billions of years old and this mixture of recent creation (6,000 years ago) and ancient creation (4.5 billion years ago) confirms that creation’s story is true! I am looking forward to the day when the bones of some antediluvians and some dinosaurs are found in the same strata! Can you imagine the scientific outcry that will follow?

As for the evolution of one species to another (Darwinism), we know several things about genetics today that makes Darwinism less attractive than it once was. First, we know that genetic mutations *within species* can and do occur. Second, we know that selective or limited breeding eventually produces a derivative that reflects the genes that are dominant within a

given gene-pool.

Third, we know that some species are adaptable. They can adapt to whatever their environment may be. Our Creator wisely gave plants and animals (and humans) a certain amount of genetic adaptation so that wherever they might live on Earth, they might adapt and prosper. Paul wrote:

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ " (Acts 17:24-28, underlining mine)

The Bible and true science are not in conflict. Even though recent advances in DNA technology are many, science cannot defeat God. Science has not produced one living example of Darwin’s theory that one species can become another. If life on Earth has been on-going for millions of years, there should be examples of life-forms in transition everywhere. Look around. We have monkeys and we have humans. Have you seen any half monkey-humans lately? Grin....

Larry Wilson

How Does a Person Become Demon Possessed?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Dear Mr. Wilson:

I have been watching your video seminars on the web. Thank you for making them available for free! A few days ago I was watching a segment on Revelation and I heard you say that predatory violence is the clearest evidence of demonic possession.

Maybe it's just me, but after hearing you say this, I am seeing predatory violence in the news almost every day. You probably saw the story about a disgruntled truck driver in Connecticut who killed eight coworkers before killing himself. Then, in California, an uninvited husband showed up at his ex-wife's birthday party and after killing her and her friends, he dropped their two children off with his parents and then killed himself.

Last week, three young men in Boston ordered pizza and they ambushed the 58 year old pizza delivery man. They stabbed him to death for about $100 before eating the pizza. These tragedies are senseless and outrageous, but until I watched your video I had not connected the dots. If your conclusion about predatory violence is correct, then demonic possession is rampant! How does a person become demon possessed?

Thanks,
Cindy"

Hello Cindy:

Thank you for your email. You are correct: There is more demonic possession around us than people realize! Demonic possession is an important topic and many Christians shy away from it because (a) they believe demon possession is part of the occult, and (b) they believe there is nothing that can be done about it. Actually, demonic possession is not limited to the occult and there is something that can be done about it!

A demon possessed person is dangerous because he is not in control of himself. His need for gratification can eclipse whatever pain or suffering his actions may cause. When a person has no empathy for others and no controlling sense of right or wrong, everyone around that person is at risk.

The Bible speaks of demonic possession in many places,1 but it does not differentiate between mental illness and demonic possession. An important difference between demonic possession and mental illness is this: Mental illness has a predictable pattern of behavior which mental health experts can detect and diagnose.

Fortunately, many people with mental illness are helped with "leveling" drugs. Even though mentally ill people can be dangerous to themselves and others, they are not predators with a predetermined scheme or target. The three examples you cited indicate demonic possession to me. So, let us determine how a person becomes demon possessed.

First consider this thought: Everyone is a possible candidate for demonic possession. In fact, a time will come during the Great Tribulation when there will be two groups of people on Earth. One group will have the seal of God and the other group will be demon possessed!

Therefore, demonic possession is only going to increase and it is imperative that Christians understand the topic. The only way out of demonic possession is through divine intervention.2 Medical science cannot exorcize a demon. An ordinary person cannot help someone who is demon possessed and neither can a possessed person cast out a demon who has consumed him.3

Demonic possession comes through the process of sinking lower and lower into the clutches of sin. The Bible teaches there are four types of sin: defiant, willful, accidental, and ignorant. Of course, all wrongdoing is sin,4 but God deals with our sins in different ways as outlined in the following paragraphs:

Defiant Sin

To understand defiant sin, we must first understand how the Holy Spirit works in a person's life. The Holy Spirit sets the clearest evidence of God's will before us (the truth about God's will), strongly impresses us that this knowledge is true, and convinces us that God's will must be obeyed (conviction).

Defiant sin begins when we refuse to obey the knowledge and conviction given by the Holy Spirit. Over time, defiance can become habitual and when it does, the Holy Spirit will eventually cease to work within us. Let me be clear, when it comes to defying the Holy Spirit, there is a point of no return.

The Bible calls this point the unpardonable sin. After a person reaches the point of no return, he or she has no desire or internal urging to do what is right, to learn about God, or please and honor Him. When the Holy Spirit leaves a person's heart, it is as though a person becomes a zombie – having little discernment or concern about right or wrong. There is no peace in such a soul – only a restless, cold, tormented heart.

Accidental Sin

Accidental sin, on the other hand, occurs spontaneously without forethought – such as telling a lie, uttering a bad word, being dishonest, etc. Accidental sins plague humanity because every sinner is "spring loaded" toward wrongdoing. This explains why the Bible says, **". . . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** We cannot help it, but sooner or later the carnal nature will rise up and cause each of us to accidentally sin.

Even though he had been a Christian for more than twenty-five years when he wrote this, the apostle Paul lamented, **"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me."**

Even though all wrongdoing is sin, God will not hold a person guilty for an accidental sin *if* that person confesses his sin9 and restores or repairs the damage caused (makes restitution).10 God knows that no one is perfect, but God does require that each sinner *show* sorrow for his sins by forsaking them and making things right.

Ignorant Sin

Even though every sin has guilt, God does not condemn a sinner of wrongdoing if he is ignorant of his sin. This may sound comforting; however, *ignorance is not bliss. Each sin has seeds of death within it*. Each sin (big or small) has the potential for a deadly outcome – even if we ignorantly sin! For example, consider the past 6,000 years. What has been the outcome of Eve's *ignorant* sin12 of eating the forbidden fruit?

Ignorance will not alter the consequences of wrongdoing. For example, what difference does ignorance or knowledge make if a person falls out of a tree? The law of momentum is impartial and so is the law of sin! The law of sin demands that ignorant and informed sinners reap what they sow. Look at the stories in the newspapers; people are reaping all that has been sown. Even worse, history says that we are corporately reaping the consequences right now which generations sowed in the past!

This brings us to a profound point. Sin is not a set of arbitrary rules which God made up according to His pleasure. God infinitely understands the seeds of death found in every sin and He wisely set up boundaries (laws) to protect us from sin's deadly harvest (the consequences of wrongdoing). Because every sin has the potential of a deadly harvest, God commands us to avoid wrongdoing *for our benefit,* not His. So, blessed are those who are honest in heart, willing to grow in discernment about matters of right and wrong and double-blessed are those who walk in the light!

Honesty

Knowledge is a doubled-edged sword. Knowledge can save us or it can condemn us. Consider the following two examples: A sinner receives knowledge and the Holy Spirit convicts the sinner to obey the knowledge; however, the sinner refuses to obey because he prefers to indulge in the pleasures of sin. God reads the sinner's heart and sees that the sinner has chosen to rebel. In this example, God holds the sinner guilty of *defiant* sin.

In this next example, suppose a devout person loves God but he has chosen to *honestly* refuse to embrace advanced truth about God's will because the new information is contrary to his present knowledge of God. In this situation, the sinner's rebellion stems from his love for his religious heritage instead of the pleasures of sin.

Even though this sinner insists on remaining ignorant, God sees that he has an *honest heart.* God will not hold this sinner guilty because guilt is not imparted unless knowledge and conviction are both present. Unfortunately, the person in this example will not benefit from advancing truth.

This was Israel's experience and we know they wandered in the wilderness forty years, eventually dying there. Again, the point is made that ignorance is not bliss when it comes to sin. In this example, we see how "honest rebellion" can keep a sinner in the wilderness throughout his life, even though he will not lose eternal life.

God reads the heart. He understands defiant, willful, accidental, and ignorant sin. He sees our knowledge base and the amount of Holy Spirit conviction in each heart.17 God is more than fair in His judgment. Human beings sin every day (through acts of commission or omission) without any awareness that our actions are sinful in God's sight, but a merciful God overlooks our ignorance as long as we are honest and faithful according to all that we believe to be right and true.

When it comes to pleasing God, He is primarily concerned with our honesty and faith. Human beings cannot comprehend God's higher ways because God is infinite. His ways are a thousand times higher than our highest thoughts! Therefore, honesty and faith are nonnegotiable in His sight.

Honesty is an openness to the facts and a willingness to know more truth. If we are honest in heart, the Holy Spirit will be able to show us new concepts from God's Word. After we receive knowledge, the Holy Spirit will produce conviction. Together, these produce a compelling sense of "this is the way, therefore, walk in it."

When knowledge and conviction come together, a testing truth occurs. God tests us because He requires everyone to *step out in faith* and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, even though our friends and family may think we are crazy. Therefore, honesty (an attitude of openness toward new truth) and faith (our willingness to act on conviction) enables the Holy Spirit to sanctify (purify) us.

Deliberate Sin

Sin is a topic that has multiple dimensions and we have briefly looked into defiant, accidental, and ignorant sins. Now, we need to examine deliberate sin because this sin is the doorway through which demons attempt to gain control over people. *When deliberate sin finally becomes defiant sin, demons rejoice!*

When Jesus created Adam and Eve, He gave them intelligence. Because we have intelligence we have the capacity to think and analyze situations and to intelligently reason from cause to effect. Even teenagers can analyze some aspects of life and determine what is good and what is evil. (Smile.)

Prior to sinning, Adam and Eve knew the difference between right and wrong,20 but they did not have the knowledge of good and evil.21 Prior to sinning, Adam and Eve had a *natural* tendency toward right doing. They did not have to struggle to do right because it came *naturally*.

When Eve ignorantly 22 sinned and then Adam deliberately sinned, the result was the same. Both became subject to the law of sin which leads to death.24 They lost their sinless natures and wrongdoing came *naturally* – not only to Adam and Eve, but to their offspring as well!

Sinners commit all four types of sins from time to time and God knows that we cannot prevent it.25 But, a God of amazing grace and bountiful mercy does not give up on us until He sees there is nothing further He can do with us!

The Knowledge of Good and Evil

God has given us the Bible for several reasons. First and foremost, He wants us to know about His love for us! This knowledge can be transforming if properly understood and embraced. God also gave us the Bible because it contains the truth about good and evil. God wants every human being to understand good and evil because seeds of death are within every sin.

The Royal Law contains the greatest two commandments27 and this is followed by the Ten Commandments 28 which show us what love will do and not do. The Bible also tells us about the thirst of the carnal nature 29 and it reminds us that sins of omission are treated like sins of commission.

Finally, the Bible tells us there is the sin of failing to bring glory to God.31 This knowledge may appear to be overwhelming, but sinners are not helpless and neither are they hopeless. This is a fact: In our own strength, we cannot overcome sin. Here is another fact: We can overcome sin by allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us from within!

John wrote, **"No one who is born of God will continue to** [deliberately or defiantly] **sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God** [and power to overcome sin is given to everyone born of God]**. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother."** 32

Of course, the devil does not want people reading the Bible or advancing in the knowledge of God's love or the Bible's definition of good and evil. Consequently, the devil tries to reduce or eliminate the importance of the Bible, and sadly, his efforts are paying off very well. (Recent surveys taken by the Pew Research Center indicate that succeeding generations of Christians tend to study the Bible less than the previous generation.)

To further reduce the effectiveness of our minds (so that human beings cannot determine good from evil) and reduce self-control (so that human beings will find it easier to do evil), the devil and his demons have introduced all kinds of mind-altering substances into society.

The demons well know that mankind is "spring loaded" to do evil. Therefore, demons prey on young people because (a) they are largely ignorant about matters of good and evil, (b) having the carnal nature, they are spring loaded toward wrongdoing, and (c) they are fascinated with mind altering substances that give a delusional sense of well-being. Add promiscuity and sexual immorality to this mix and there is a doorway to pleasure that most young people cannot resist.33

God hates promiscuity and sexual immorality34 because once a person becomes involved in sexual immorality, there is a possibility that sexual gratification will shut out self-control.35 In other words, it is very easy to become a slave to passion.36 If a person willingly engages in sexual immorality, knowing that it is sin, then it is deemed a deliberate act and God holds that person guilty for his sin.

On the other hand, if a person ignorantly engages in sexual immorality, the consequence of this sin will be horrible even though God may overlook the sinner's guilt. Remember, there is no difference when falling out of a tree. The man who understands the law of momentum hits the ground just as hard as the man without knowledge. There is a sorrowful harvest for every sin because seeds of death are within every sin.

The Doorway of Hatred

There are other doorways besides sexual immorality that lead to demonic possession and we must consider one more doorway involving passion. This passion is hatred. (God's anger toward evil is sometimes called hatred,37 but God's hatred is unlike human hatred.) Human hatred is the inverse of love.

The ultimate desire of human hatred is murder.39 Hatred generally springs from bitterness, jealousy, or vanity. Hatred can grow from real or imaginary injustice. Hatred can become a passion and it can become so powerful in a person's heart that he cannot free himself of it. Prisons are full of people who are bound internally with hatred.

Demons can easily possess a hate-full heart because hatred does not care about right or wrong, justice or truth. Hatred is blind. If possible, it would seek more than death can offer! Hatred is like a bucket with a hole in its bottom that cannot be filled. Demons seek out people who harbor hatred because such people will often commit predatory violence.

John wrote, **"Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.** [So,] **Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.** [Cain was humiliated when God honored Abel's offering, but refused to honor Cain's offering and this made him furious with Abel.

Cain's hatred for Abel led him to kill his brother for revenge.] **We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has**

eternal life in him." 40

The Fight to Do Right

As long as the carnal nature is within us, we must not stop fighting the good fight.41 The greatest battles on Earth occur within the human heart – the fight to do right must never end. We cannot give in and allow passions of hatred, sexual immorality, or pleasures to overtake us.

Be assured, the devil has a custom set of temptations carefully crafted for each person. If a person is too old or too wise to chase after pornography and knows better than to indulge in the temporal pleasures of sexual immorality, then be assured that the devil has plenty of other temptations.

In the game of life, the devil uses chips such as money, power, fame, drugs, leisure, shopping, sports, and materialism to capture our affections. He uses these chips as a foothold into our soul and too many sit at his game table, winning very little, but having a great time (they think) as he overtakes their souls!

There is a doorway into each heart and the devil and his imps know where it is. They are doing their best to kick it down with tailor-made temptations so that they might overpower us and possess us. Until the sealing of God's children is completed,42 the war between Christ and Satan over the souls of human beings will not end. If, through Christ's strength, we persevere and win a victory over one passion, watch out for a "door kicking event" in another area. The devil doesn't knock.

He lures us into temptation and when opportunity is present, he attempts to kick down the door with everything he has. Jesus said, **"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.'**

When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first." 43 We see here that no victory over the flesh is final until the sinful nature has been removed. So, be on guard – fight the good fight!

Lucifer has been called a murderer from the beginning44 because he was the first to be filled with violence.When Lucifer saw that he could not have what he wanted, violence broke out in Heaven.46 The same process holds true on Earth. When someone is filled with insatiable bitterness, craving, or passion, predatory violence often follows.

The devil and his demons never sleep. They are doing everything possible to increase the misery index of mankind. They are on a mission to destroy us by (a) eliminating the Word of God (which tells us about God's love for us and the knowledge of good and evil), (b) dulling our minds with addictive substances, and (c) inflaming carnal passions and pleasure.

These demons are relentless because *they know that they can overtake a person when a sinner gets so deep into sin that he stops struggling to do what is right.* Listen to the words of this wise woman: "Whatever weakens your reasoning, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes away your relish for spiritual things, in short if anything increases the authority and the power of the flesh over the spirit, that to you becomes sin, however good it is in itself." Susanna Wesley (mother of John Wesley)

Is There Any Hope?

Is there hope for a sinner after he sins defiantly, willfully, accidently, or ignorantly? Yes! Yes! Yes! There is hope for any sinner *unless* he becomes defiant and remains defiant. Defiant sin leads to the unpardonable sin.47 The Holy Spirit only gives up on a person when that person becomes so stubborn that nothing further can be done to change his mind.

The Holy Spirit knows the incalculable value of eternal life. The Holy Spirit loves each sinner with boundless love. The Holy Spirit knows the devil's games. Therefore, the Holy Spirit does a little "door kicking" at times in an effort to get through. The Holy Spirit is not temperamental or easily discouraged.

He dearly wants to enter a sinner's heart and bring that sinner to Christ so he might be saved! **"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."**48

Summary

The human race is caught in a war for souls that is intensifying. The Holy Spirit is working hard, but the devil and his demons are winning the battle just as they did in Noah's day.49 Sinful natures mean we are hit with a double whammy! We have a carnal nature and there is a devil.

The Bible teaches there is a sin that does not lead to death50 because God knows that it is impossible for someone with a sinful nature to *consistently* live without sinning.51 Yes, Jesus offers victory over every temptation.52 Jesus offers to transform the desires of our hearts and minds so that we will not become a victim of our own passions.

When temptation comes knocking, we should recognize that the devil is hiding, ready to rush in, kick the door down and take over another soul. On our own, we cannot overcome a single temptation for very long, but we can overcome a whole world of temptations through honesty and faith in Christ.

Prayer is the key to overcoming. Pray ahead of temptation. If we ask the Lord to change our heart from within, He will! When He sees that we really mean what we say, He will repair the damage within us and that temptation will have no appeal! If we abide in Christ, we will become and remain conquerors, and like Peter, walk *on* the water.

It is highly important that we *show* the Lord our sincerity. If pornography is a problem, show the Lord you recognize it is a problem by throwing it out of your house, shut off the internet and all sources through which it comes. Buy no more of it! If sexual immorality is a problem, show the Lord you recognize it is a problem by breaking off the relationship.

If it is an ongoing relationship, by all means, do not get married until the relationship is rebuilt on solid ground and the Lord is at the center of it. If substance abuse is the problem, show the Lord your sincere desire to stop the problem by seeking a counselor who understands the twelve step program.

If spending or shopping is a problem, show the Lord you are aware of it and seek a godly counselor who understands problems involving insatiable desires. Most of all, we have to stop looking to this world as a pattern for our lives. We have to focus on God's Word: **"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."**

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

References

1. Matthew 4:24; 8:16; 8:28; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22

2. Matthew 10:1; Mark 3:15

3. Matthew 8:28,29; 17:14-20

4. 1 John 5:17

5. Matthew 12:31,32

6. Luke 11:13; Jeremiah 13:23

7. Romans 3:23

8. Romans 7:15-17

9. 1 John 1:9

10. Matthew 5:23,24, 1 John 5:17

11. Romans 6:23

12. Genesis 3:13; 2 Corinthians 11:3

13. Romans 7:23

14. Galatians 6:7,8

15. Romans 2:14,15; Acts 10:15;34,35

16. See 1 Corinthians 3:9-15.

17. 1 Chronicles 28:9

18. John 3:21

19. 1 Peter 1:1,2

20. Genesis 2:17

21. Genesis 3:22

22. Genesis 3:6,6,13; 2 Corinthians 11:3

23. Romans 5:12

24. Romans 7:23,24

25. Romans 3:23; 7:12-20; 8:5-12

26. Genesis 6:3-8

27. Matthew 22:34-40; James 2:8

28. Exodus 20:3-17

29. Galatians 5:17-21

30. James 4:17

31. Romans 3:23; 1 Corinthians 10:31

32. 1 John 3:9,10

33. Galatians 5:19; 2 Timothy 3:4; Jude 1:7

34. Colossians 3:5,6

35. Leviticus 18; Matthew 5:17-20; Acts 15:29; Hebrews 13:4

36. 2 Peter 2:19,20

37. Deuteronomy 16:22; Psalm 45:7; Proverbs 6:16; Malachi 2:16

38. Matthew 12:30

39. John 8:44

40. 1 John 3:12-15, insertions mine

41. 1 Timothy 6:12

42. See Chapter 6 in my book, Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega

43. Luke 11:24-26

44. John 8:44

45. Ezekiel 28:16

46. Revelation 12:7-9

47. Matthew 12:31,32

48. 1 John 2:1,2

49. Genesis 6:3

50. Romans 3:23; Romans 7:11-20; 8:5-12

51. 1 John 5:16,17

52. Romans 6:14; 1 John 1:9; 1 Corinthians 15:57

53. Ezekiel 36:26

54. 1 John 5:4

55. 1 John 1:9

56. John 15

57. Romans 12:2

Facing Two Tomorrows

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Dear Mr. Wilson:

Do you still think the Great Tribulation will begin in 2011? More and more, I feel uneasy about world conditions and my fear of the future has changed my way of life. My wife also believes the end is near, but she wants to hurry up and do everything that she has always wanted to do before she can't. Other than dealing with our monthly obligations and focusing on matters that are short term, how do I look ahead and make plans for the future when I believe the end is imminent?

Thanks,
Jeff "

Hello Jeff:
Thank you for your email. You asked if I still believe the Great Tribulation will begin in 2011. To be accurate, I must restate your question. I do believe the Great Tribulation *could begin* any time now, including 2011. I do not know when the censer will be cast down. Please consider two facts: First, there is a big difference between time study, and time setting and second, a date of interest does not necessarily mean it will become a date of importance.

The books of Daniel and Revelation produce an interesting dilemma. Together, they contain eighteen prophetic time periods and every student of apocalyptic prophecy is forced to put them somewhere on a time line. Putting each time period in its rightful place constitutes **time study.**

-As you know, many Christians avoid the books of Daniel and Revelation. They say, "Bible prophecy is a mystery and solving the mystery is not essential for salvation. All that matters is having a relationship with Jesus." Of course, a relationship with Jesus is important, but how can a person have a great relationship with someone he or she does not know?

The book of Revelation is a tell-all book about Jesus. The book of Revelation reveals many things about Jesus that are both shocking and wonderful. When the Great Tribulation begins, the imaginary Jesus (the mental image that worship due to their religious mindset) will disappear and the real Jesus will appear. This abrupt transition will cause millions of Christians to become bitter. The four gospels do not give us a complete picture of Jesus. There is far more to Jesus Christ than His ministry on Earth.

For example, study the words of Jesus to the seven churches (Revelation 2 and 3). If He were on Earth today, He would not fit in very well with any Christian church. Consider the description of the seven trumpets and seven bowls in the book of Revelation. Very few people realize that

Jesus destroyed the world in Noah's day and this same Jesus will soon destroy the whole world again.

If we are going to have a relationship with the real Jesus, we need to understand that Jesus has been given sovereign power, and at this time, He rules on the throne as Almighty God! (Revelation 11:17; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28) Christians desperately need, as the late Paul Harvey would say, "the rest of the story," and there is no other place to get the rest of the story about Jesus than in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

Dates of Interest

Through the years, I have openly discussed *dates of interest*. Am I discouraged because the Great Tribulation has not begun? Not at all. Have I thought the Great Tribulation would begin before now? Yes! Like Peter, John, James, and Paul, I thought Jesus would be here long before now.

Should I be discouraged and angry with God because dates of interest came and went without becoming dates of importance? Not at all. Like Thomas Edison, who conducted more than 10,000 failed experiments to create the light bulb, we cannot give up or give in to discouragement. Faith is the substance of things *hoped for.* **"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for."** (Hebrews 11:1,2)

I think there are several "signs" indicating the end of the world is near. These signs are not date specific, but they are time related. First, nuclear proliferation and massive military armament by dozens of nations are ticking time bombs. (Pun intended) Second, Earth itself cannot sustain a population load of seven billion people.

Inevitably, war will break out because there are insufficient amounts of food and water. Third, the nations of Earth are bankrupt (both morally and financially). One small nation in financial despair (like Greece) can threaten the whole economy of Europe, and if the European Union fails, the world's economy will also implode. It is interesting how one insignificant domino can fall and cause a chain reaction of a whole string of larger dominos to follow.

Even though these three matters are very serious, they do not necessarily indicate that the Second Coming is near. However, when 2,600 years of fulfilled apocalyptic prophecy is combined with these ominous signs, students of Daniel and Revelation see harmony rising from the sum of all the parts.

World problems are rapidly expanding, and soon, all of the elasticity will be used up. This old balloon called Earth will burst and at that very moment, the whole world will need a Savior and at just the right moment, the censer will be cast down. Seven trumpets will sound because Jesus is on His way!

The essential difference between time study and time setting is caution. Consider this: Our faith

in Jesus and the Word of God is not based on some date for our Lord's return. Our confidence in Bible prophecy does not hang on a future date. Actually, it's the other way around.

Our confidence in Bible prophecy is built upon many fulfilled prophecies that have occurred over the past twenty-six centuries. Because we live in the twenty-first century, we have the joy to examine the Bible and observe the steady march of time toward the return of Jesus.

Even though Christians have been watching and waiting for the Second Coming for 2,000 years, there is no doubt in my mind that Jesus will return very soon. When He will return is a question that is worthy of investigation. (See 1 Peter 1:10-12.)

Our investigation into the timing of Christ's return must involve prophetic truth, as well as prophetic faith. There is an important distinction between prophetic truth and prophetic faith. Prophetic truth is solid. Prophetic truth is proven fact. When an element of prophecy is fulfilled, that element becomes a fact.

On the other hand, prophetic faith is "cautiously solid" if our conclusions are built upon valid rules of interpretation. Since no one can prove something true that has not yet happened, prophetic faith must be built upon self-evident rules of interpretation that consistently explain the past, the present, and the future. Every Christian should stand in awe at the prophetic truths contained in the books of Daniel and Revelation. Looking backward, we see God's Word validated. Looking forward, there is good reason to anticipate the soon arrival of "the day of the Lord."

Noah and the Censer

Long ago, the Father set future dates by His own authority. (Acts 1:7) For example, the Father set a date for the commencement of the Great Tribulation, but no one knows this date. Jesus said, **"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, *but only the Father.* As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:36,37, italics and insertion mine) Many people think this text concerns the date of the Second Coming, but this is not the case. Jesus is talking about "the day of the Lord."

Look at this verse: **"Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that *the day of the Lord* will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief."** (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4, italics mine)

The phrase, "the *day* of the Lord," does not point to some day of the week such as Sunday, Monday, or Tuesday. This phrase is used nineteen times in the Bible and it refers to a span of time that concludes with the physical appearing of Jesus. This span of time has several different names.

For example, it is called "a time of wrath, distress, anguish, trouble, ruin, darkness, gloom, clouds, and blackness." (Daniel 8:19, Zephaniah 1:15; Ezekiel 30:3) It is also called "the appointed time of the end" (Daniel 8:19; 11:35) and we are told it will come unexpectedly like a thief. (2 Peter 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; Luke 12:39; Matthew 24:43) A time is coming when the awesome authority of Jesus Christ will be clearly seen and everyone will feel His anger with man's decadent and degenerate behavior.

In Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus drew a parallel between the commencement of "the day of the Lord" in Noah's day and in our day. Why the parallel? In both cases God's wrath suddenly begins. Clouds gathered and the rain fell in Noah's day. The rain caught the distracted antediluvians by complete surprise! In our day, the censer being cast down will catch even the ten virgins by complete surprise! (Matthew 25:1-12) Remember this, the day of the Lord will come as a surprise – even for those who anticipate His return!

The Second Coming Will Not Surprise Anyone

While the day of the Lord will come as a surprise, the Second Coming will NOT come as a surprise to anyone – even the wicked! Here is why:

When the censer is cast down (Revelation 8:5), the righteous will count down the days until the Second Coming because Daniel indicates the Lord will appear on the 1,335th day! (Daniel 12:11,12) Gabriel even told Daniel that he would be resurrected at the end of the 1,335 days! **"As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the** [1,335] **days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."** (Daniel 12:13, insertion mine)

The date of the Second Coming will not catch the wicked by surprise because the devil will tell his followers the date of Christ's appearing. About twenty days before the 1,335th day, the sixth bowl will be poured out. (Revelation 16:12) Demons will be sent throughout Earth to rally all the kings along with their armies to make war on the soon appearing Jesus.

John wrote, **"Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon** [the devil*]**, out of the mouth of the beast** [the devil] **and out of the mouth of the false prophet** [the devil]**.**

They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. . . . Then I saw the beast [the devil] **and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army."** (Revelation 16:13,14; 19:19) The wicked will be armed and ready to make war against Jesus! There is no surprise for anyone, and certainly no ambush.

*(**Note:** The great red dragon (Revelation 12:9), the lamblike beast (Revelation 13:11) and the false prophet (Revelation 19:20, Revelation 13:14) are the same entity. John refers to Lucifer as three distinct entities because the devil is given three different caricatures in the book of Revelation. The devil's activities are divided into thirds so that mankind might better grasp an

enormous picture – the devil's sophisticated efforts to lead the world astray.)

Two Tomorrows: Earthly and Heavenly

Jeff, you know that Christians have been anticipating the end of the world for 2,000 years. If every Christian had followed Paul's advice and shut down their dreams and future plans because the coming of Jesus was near, no Christians would be on Earth today. They would have vanished! Notice his words: **"What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none."** (1 Corinthians 7:29 – See also Exodus 19:10-15.)

For 2,000 years, Christians have been dealing with two tomorrows in different ways. This diversity is caused by our two natures (spiritual and carnal) and the influence of different personalities. Have you heard the old saying, "Don't be so heavenly-minded that you are of no earthly good?" There is wisdom in this axiom because, like it or not, a productive and happy life requires the fulfillment of a number of earthly obligations.

How can anything of substance be accomplished without planning, commitment, and execution? Hospitals, schools, universities, business corporations, and churches are valuable parts of society. Such institutions can take many years to establish. Doing good requires plans, commitment, and labor. There is nothing wrong with looking forward and planning accordingly. We have to live on Earth until Jesus comes, so let us make the best of this assignment! On the other hand, we must be careful. It is one thing to occupy until the Lord comes, it is another to become totally preoccupied.

Jesus told a parable one day. Speaking of Himself, He said to His disciples, **"A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.' "** (Luke 19:12,13) When the king returned, he richly rewarded the nine servants who had put the king's money to work. The parable ends when the king confronts the servant who had received one mina. (A mina represents three months wages.)

"Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.' His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'

Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.' 'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!' He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has [been faithful with what was given them]**, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing** [to show for the money I gave him]**, even what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and kill them in front of me.' "** (Luke 19:20-27, insertions mine)

When properly understood, this parable speaks volumes. Jesus has gone away to Heaven to be crowned King of kings. He has given His followers some assets. Some followers have been given much and some have been given little. The servant given one mina became angry with the king when he saw that the others had much and he had little.

So, the servant did not want to serve the king. The servant wrapped the mina in a piece of cloth and went about his own business. When the king confronted the servant about his actions, the man justified himself by saying the king was unfair. The king had only given him one mina. The king then killed the servant because he was unwilling to serve the king. The moral of the parable is elegant: If you have received much or little, you have to be wise and faithful stewards until the Lord returns.

Watch for the Providence

Providence should be one of the cornerstones of our relationship with Jesus. The Lord invites us to bring our thoughts and plans, our perplexities and goals to Him. (Hebrews 4:26) If we walk with the Lord, obeying His commands, He will hear our prayers and respond accordingly. Of course, the Lord will not respond to our prayers if we are rebellious. (Isaiah 1:15) We cannot see beyond today, because we do not know the higher plans Jesus has in mind for us. It is always a privilege to seek the Lord and learn His plans.

The Lord will hear our prayers if we are humble and willing to listen. The Lord answers the prayers of every sincere person who seeks Him with all of his or her heart. (Jeremiah 29:13) Therefore, after presenting your concerns to the Lord, leave them with Him. My prayers go something like this: "Lord, you know my concerns.

I'm not sure that I am aware of everything that I should be concerned about! Therefore, I am asking you to show me the direction that I should go. If I do not see a providential opening before the deadline, I will take this to mean that I must use my best judgment. If I respond incorrectly, please make your will very clear so I cannot miss your instruction! Whether I succeed or fail, may your holy name be glorified. Amen." Each of us needs to be on our knees each day, requesting the Lord's guidance in our lives and listening for His response.

The Book of James

There is one book in the Bible that was written for people facing two tomorrows. It was written by a man who thought Jesus was soon to return. James wrote, **"Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."** (James 5:7,8)

James lived at a time in Earth's history when the two tomorrows presented a tremendous problem. All of the disciples, including James, thought they were living in the last days. Severe persecution caused many of the early believers to be destitute, so the early Christians came together and sold their goods and possessions to share the proceeds with other believers. (Acts

4:32-5:11) As time passed, James began to analyze some of the problems of living with two tomorrows and the Holy Spirit led him to write five short chapters. Read the book of James in one sitting. It can be done in less than thirty minutes. It's full of wisdom!

If James were writing this article today, I am sure he would close with the following admonition: **"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.**

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' " (James 4:13-15) As long as we live here, we have to be responsible and take care of Earthly matters in a way that is pleasing to God. (1 Corinthians 10:31) Do not forget the parable in Luke 19. We are here to serve a king who will surely return and He will require a return on the money and time He has given us. Watch for God's providence.

Submit all your plans to the Lord and see what He has to say. (This is an essential cornerstone in having a relationship with Jesus.) Our ultimate purpose on this Earth is to please God. God's timing is perfect and He will fulfill His perfect plans. When He does, everyone will be rewarded according to what they have done.

". . . .Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things." (Matthew 25:21) While you are going about the King's business, just remember the words of Jesus: **"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will** [begin to] **come at an hour when you do not expect him."** (Matthew 24:44)

Larry Wilson

The Sacrificial Harley

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Have you ever wondered why Jesus lived thirty years on Earth before He was crucified? He could have descended from the sky on Thursday, been captured and put to death on Friday, and resurrected and taken to Heaven on Sunday, but the Father had a much bigger plan!

He willed that Jesus should come to Earth as a baby and live among human beings as one of us so that we might study His life and examine how God would live if He had to walk in our shoes. The Father also predetermined that Jesus should be His servant. The Father Himself would speak to mankind through the lips of Jesus (John 14:10,24) so we could learn about God and His ways.

To some people, the following concept will seem strange at first. When Jesus was born, He was like any other baby. He did not know anything. He had to be fed, bathed, and diapered. I am sure His mental, physical, and spiritual development was quite ordinary at first.

The Bible says that Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:52) This means that Jesus developed as children do. I am sure that Mary told Jesus about His miraculous birth. I am also sure she told Jesus about the promised Messiah, and by age twelve (Luke 2:42-50), Jesus was well on His way to figuring out who He was. This discovery must have been bittersweet. By faith, Jesus concluded that He was Son of God and by faith, He also concluded that He was the Lamb of God. He could not be one without being the other.

Jesus was the Son of God *by faith* for most of His life. Until Jesus was transfigured on the mountain (Matthew 17:1-9), Jesus had no proof that He was, in fact, the Son of God. Prior to coming to Earth, Jesus put aside every divine prerogative. He came to Earth as a subject of the Father, to do His will. (John 6:38) This is why Jesus is called the Son (the subject) of God. The Hebrew word for son is *ben* and it means subject or subjected. While Jesus heard the Father's voice at His baptism and He saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Him in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16,17), the two signs were *affirmations* of His identity, but they were not proof.

After Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit led Him into the desert. (Matthew 4:1) After forty days of fasting, the devil pounced on Jesus because He was weak and vulnerable. (The devil always preys on us when we are at our weakest or lowest point.) The devil's first temptation was carefully designed and highly focused. Lucifer wanted to dupe Jesus with a nagging question. The devil gently questioned the identity of Jesus! Notice the devil's carefully chosen words:
"After fasting forty days and forty nights, he [Jesus] **was hungry.**

The tempter came to him and said, '*If you are* the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' " (Matthew 4:2,3, insertion and italics mine) The devil had been closely watching and studying Jesus for thirty years before this temptation occurred. The devil understood that up to that point, Jesus understood that He was the Son of God *by faith alone*.

The devil knew that Jesus had zero proof that He was the Son of God. The devil reasoned that if he could get Jesus to presume that He was the Son of God by producing a miracle, Jesus would violate the Father's will and the Father's efforts to redeem mankind would have to end right there. If Jesus sinned, He could not be the flawless lamb required for the atonement of mankind.

Jesus answered the devil with words that many people do not appreciate. **"Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." ' "** (Matthew 4:4) Jesus understood that the devil's temptation was not about food.

The devil preyed on Jesus' hunger so that the sin of presumption could be hidden from sight. (Presumption occurs when a person justifies wrong doing.) If Jesus had presumed to perform the miracle to prove His identity, the devil would have succeeded and the redemption of mankind would have ended.

For most of us, the sin of presumption is tiny and common. In fact, it is largely ignored. Jesus saw through the devil's sophistry and He replied (I'm paraphrasing), "The Scriptures say in Deuteronomy 8:3 that God allowed Israel to go hungry in the desert before giving them manna so that He could teach them that faith in God is of greater value than food.

God can speak and food will fall from the sky. He can speak and stones can become bread. I have been fasting in the desert because this is the Father's will for me. His Spirit led me into this deserted place. I must remain here without food until the Father directs otherwise. It would be a sin for me to violate the will of my Father." What faith. Such was Jesus' faith!

During His final days on Earth, Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane one evening. For eighteen years, Jesus had anticipated His death and knowing that the time had arrived, He went into the garden to receive strength from the Father for the ordeal that lay before Him. Jesus did not want to die on the cross, but He was willing to submit to the Father's higher will.

We should never forget His words, **". . . . My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."** (Matthew 26:39) Again, what faith! Living by faith is the most difficult thing a person can do, whereas living in presumption is easy. The difference between living by faith and living in presumption is easy to define, but difficult to admit. Faith yields obedience, presumption excuses transgression.

The biblical definition of faith is embarrassingly simple, but it is a killer. Faith means "Go-Be-Do." When we become willing to go wherever God directs, to become all that God asks, and to do all that God requires, faith in God mirrors the faith of Jesus. Otherwise, we deceive ourselves.

Living in presumption is easy when faith is dead. Consider these words: **"During the days of Jesus' life on Earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of *his reverent submission*. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and,**

once made perfect [e.g., He was faith-full to the end of His life]**, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."** (Hebrews 5:7-9, italics and insertion mine)

Clearest in the Desert

Communion with God is clearest in the desert and that's why the Holy Spirit took Jesus there at the beginning of His ministry. The desert is a scary, harsh, and unforgiving place. A person cannot survive there for very long. No one wants to be trapped in a desert that is hot by day, cold by night, isolated from friends and family, and full of cactus spines, rattlesnakes, and scorpions. Without shade, food, or water, the desert is a deadly place.

Metaphorically, there are many routes into the deserts of life. Sometimes we can make foolish decisions (like drinking and driving) and end up in a self-inflicted desert that takes f-o-r-e-v-e-r to exit. Sometimes, we can end up in a financial desert (through unemployment) even though we thought we were doing well when everything fell apart.

Sometimes, a whole nation can find itself in a desert experience through war, economic mismanagement, famines, etc. I mention these things because a growing number of people are finding themselves in some kind of a desert, and the rest of mankind is fearful they will end up in similar circumstances. But, the good news is that God is in every desert!

The Sacrificial Harley

". . . . Without faith, it is impossible to please God." (Hebrews 11:6) A few years ago, Bill and Sue (names have been changed to protect the identity of the faithful) found themselves in a deep financial desert. Bill is self-employed and his data acquisition business tanked when the financial crisis occurred in 2007.

Sue's income could not meet their monthly obligations and they soon found themselves facing many financial problems, including foreclosure. The one bright spot on the horizon was that Bill had obtained a small contract with a large corporation and he desperately hoped that the small contract would mature into a much larger contract.

One night, some batteries used in Bill's equipment caught fire. The fire not only destroyed Bill's equipment, but it also destroyed a lot of equipment that belonged to the corporation. For three months, Bill and Sue lived on pins and needles. Bill lost a great deal of equipment in the fire that he could not afford to replace, and due to the fire and the lost business, they faced foreclosure on their home. To top it off, Bill's client threatened to sue him for hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages.

Bill and Sue owned one toy. It was a Harley Davidson motorcycle. Because their financial situation was dismal, Bill felt the Lord impressing him to sell their Harley Davidson motorcycle, but Sue resisted. Sue did not want to let the Harley go. In her heart, she knew Bill was right, but she resisted the Spirit's prompting.

She argued that the proceeds from the sale would not stop the foreclosure or the pending lawsuit. Besides that, the motorcycle was the only thing they had for fun – it was their way of temporarily escaping some of the "desert heat." Most of all, Sue knew they could never replace the Harley if they sold it. The motorcycle had been with them for many years and to her, it was an important part of their life. She could not bring herself to let it go. A few weeks later, Bill and Sue were sitting in their usual place at church.

The pastor presented plans to expand the church and he asked for a financial commitment from each family in the church to help with church expansion. Bill and Sue sat there, feeling uncomfortable. They wanted to help, but they had nothing to give. During the church service, they avoided eye contact – their desert experience was too painful.

During the service, Sue sensed the Holy Spirit moving within her heart. She was convicted that she should step out in faith and give the Harley to the Lord. After the service was over, while walking toward "the Harley," (they had ridden it to church) she blurted out to Bill, "Let's sell the Harley and give the proceeds to the building program!"

Bill looked at his wife and smiled. He had felt the same conviction during the service. "That's a great idea. Let's do it," he said. And with that, a sacrificial Harley roared to life and they rode home – happy as they could be that they could do something for the Lord. Bill and Sue did not give the Harley to the Lord in order to get something from the Lord. Their gift was a one-way street. It was their joy to make a sacrifice to the Lord and both had perfect peace about doing so!

Two days later, Bill received notice from his client's attorneys that the corporation was not suing them. Not only that, but the corporate executives had decided to pay for everything that had been destroyed and were anxious to purchase additional equipment from Bill as well. In the twinkling of an eye, Bill and Sue saw manna fall from Heaven. They were still in a financial desert, but they had hope.

I have shared their story of the sacrificial Harley because many people are hopeless and frustrated. When we are forced by circumstances to walk on, day after day, in the heat of the desert, the journey can appear endless. We can become very discouraged and fall into the temptation of becoming angry with God.

Of course, God sees our weeping and He understands our doubts and tantrums. *God does not forsake His children.* He wants to teach us the essence of faith because faith in God produces inner peace. It is hard to let go of our dreams, goals, and ambitions so that God's goals and purposes for our lives can be fulfilled. It can be very hard to see others exit their desert when you have to remain in yours. Therefore, keep your eyes on the Lord. His purpose for you and His goals for you are unique.

Allow Him to refine and purify your faith because **". . . .Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."** When God sees that our faith has matured to the level that He wants, when He sees that we thirst for the peace and joy that He offers, He will speak on our behalf. He may send grace (strength to endure) or manna from

Heaven, or if necessary, He will change stones to bread!

This is my last newsletter for 2010 and I wanted to end this year by saying that the eyes of the Lord range throughout Earth. He sees each person, both those who are in a desert and those who need a desert experience. He knows the desert is not a comfortable place to live, but from His point of view, the desert can be a place where faith is born and divine peace nurtured.

Before the Father performed a single miracle through Jesus, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert to have His faith tested. By faith, Jesus overcame the devil's temptations and look how the Father was able to use Jesus! There is no need to be afraid of a desert experience. Instead of fearing whatever the outcome may be, surrender the outcome to God's higher will and you will receive peace. (John 14:27) Jesus said, **" . . . And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matthew 28:20)

Larry Wilson

Why Does God Put the Ark of the Covenant on Display

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Dear Robert:

Thank you for your letter. I am pleased to learn that you found the little book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be Fulfilled*, helpful and informative. I understand your objections to my assertion that God requires all mankind to rest from their labors on His seventh day Sabbath.

I read the attachment that you kindly offered – written by the late C.I. Scofield (1843-1921) – explaining how grace nullifies mankind's obligation to observe God's law in general and His Sabbath in particular. As I wrote in the book, I believe the Ten Commandments are obligatory, but not for the purpose of salvation. Said another way, I believe tax laws are obligatory, but not for the purpose of citizenship.

I understand from your letter that you are 95% convinced that God's grace has made God's Sabbath rest obsolete. Since there appears to be a small opening in your thinking, may I exploit this opening with a few thoughts for your consideration? To be frank, I think Scofield overlooked a simple, but profound fact in his article.

The Bible teaches that where there is no law, there is no penalty and no need for grace. (Romans 4:15; 5:13) Grace *only becomes necessary after* a transgression occurs. The purpose of grace is *to escape the penalty* which a violated law demands. Grace does not nullify a law. To nullify a law, it must be rescinded, and once rescinded, there is no penalty and no need of grace.

A few years ago I was conducting a seminar in Texas. One morning, I was driving on a county road, and as I entered a long curve, I crossed over the yellow line. I was driving about 35 miles per hour and I could see that no other cars were oncoming for half a mile. Because I often drive a large truck, making wide turns is customary.

I didn't realize my transgression until a police officer on a motorcycle pulled me over. I asked what I had done wrong and he told me. He then handed me a ticket for $200 and told me to stay on the right side of the yellow line. I mention this experience because it perfectly illustrates the topic at hand. There is a traffic law in Texas that forbids crossing over a yellow line, there was a violation (I crossed over the yellow line), there was a $200 penalty, and I suddenly found myself in need of grace.

Before I went to City Hall to pay the ticket, I learned that the city of Round Rock was short on revenue, and not surprisingly, there was no grace for my sin. I had to pay the penalty in full. Even if I had found grace, it would not have eliminated "the yellow-line law" because *grace is limited* to offsetting the penalty of a law.

Scofield and many scholars since him have incorrectly concluded that God's grace eliminates

God's laws. This is not the case. When God rescinds a law (as in the law of Moses), there is no further violation of that law because it does not exist anymore. More importantly, there is no need for grace from a penalty that no longer exists. Therefore, the need for grace indicates the presence of a penalty and a penalty indicates the presence of a law.

As you know, Robert, many Christians do not separate the laws of Moses from the Ten Commandments. They lump the laws together and abolish all of them at the cross. They improperly use Colossians 2:11-17 and Ephesians 2:14,15 to support the idea that God has set mankind free from His laws.

Where there is no law, there is no transgression and where there is no transgression, there is no need for grace. **When a person improperly uses a Bible text, he puts the Bible in a state of internal conflict. - God's Word is not full of cancellations.**

In other words, the Bible does not say one thing and then cancel that statement by saying something else that is contradictory. On the surface, some verses *appear* to be in conflict with other verses, but this *apparent conflict* evaporates when the whole truth on a matter is discovered. Truth is proven by the harmony that comes from the sum of its parts.

Ironically, many Christians will say the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross and then they will immediately do an about face. They will say that nine of the Ten Commandments are obligatory because "they are restated in the New Testament." This foolish approach to the authority of the Ten Commandments hides a simple objective. It presumes to eliminate the obligation of the fourth commandment – even though Hebrews 4:4-10 specifically restates the necessity of observing God's seventh day Sabbath.

Now that we have covered a few core issues, I have a question for you. For the sake of discussion, let us set aside the issues of law, penalty, and grace, and assume that Scofield is right in his conclusion that the Ten Commandments were abolished when Jesus died on the cross. With this thought in mind, please consider the following:

At the Seventh Trumpet

When the seventh trumpet sounds, a very unusual thing will take place. The book of Revelation says, "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the Ark of his Covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm." (Revelation 11:19) Robert, why does God put the Ark of the Covenant on display at the seventh trumpet?

To appreciate the importance of the question, three facts need to be stated:

1. - Unlike the laws written by Moses, the Ten Commandments were inscribed on two tablets of stone by God's own finger and they are called "the covenant" or "the testimony." Consider these two texts: Moses said to Israel: "The Lord gave me two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of

God.

On them were all the commandments the Lord proclaimed to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day of the assembly. At the end of the forty days and forty nights, the Lord gave me the two stone tablets, **the tablets of *the Covenant.***" (Deuteronomy 9:11, insertion and emphasis mine) "When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him **the two tablets of *the Testimony,*** the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God." (Exodus 31:18)

2. - We find in Scripture that the Ten Commandments were placed in a special gold box called "the Ark of the **Testimony**" or "the Ark of the **Covenant**."

"He [Moses] took **the Testimony** [the Ten Commandments] and placed it in **the ark**, attached the poles to the ark and put the atonement cover over it. Then he brought **the ark** into the tabernacle and hung the shielding curtain and shielded **the Ark of the Testimony**, as the Lord commanded him." (Exodus 40:20,21) When the Israelites entered Canaan, they were told to stay back about a half mile from the Ark of the Covenant. Joshua said, "[Follow the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant]

Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about **a thousand yards** between you and **the Ark** [of the Covenant]; do not go near it. . . . See, **the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the Earth** will go into the Jordan ahead of you. . . .

Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried **the Ark reached the Jordan** and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off.

So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried **the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord** stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground." (Joshua 3:4,11, 15-17, insertions and emphases mine)

3. - Revelation 13:8 indicates that a great conflict over worship will occur during the Great Tribulation. The Bible predicts that *all* of the wicked will worship the beast, that is, the wicked will obey the laws of the beast. "**All** inhabitants of the earth **will worship** the beast – all whose **names have not been written** in the book of life. . . [and] all who **refused to worship** the image [of the beast were] to be **killed**." (Revelation 13:8,15, insertions and emphases mine)

The biblical definition of worship is more inclusive than a religious meeting. Worship means obedient submission to God's will. (John 4:23; Romans 12:1; Hebrews 11:7,8) For a stark contrast in what worship is and is not, please examine the story of Cain and Abel. (Genesis 4)

Summarizing

• God wrote the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone with His own finger. The Ten Commandments are called "the covenant" or "the testimony."

• The golden box containing God's covenant or testimony was called "the Ark of the Covenant" or "the Ark of the Testimony."

• The issue of obedient worship will separate the sheep (those obeying the laws of our Creator) from the goats (those obeying the laws of the beast) during the Great Tribulation.

Now that these facts have been reviewed, here again is the question: If the Ten Commandments were abolished (rescinded) at the cross and they are no longer obligatory, why does God open up the Heavenly temple and put the Ark of the Covenant on display at the seventh trumpet? Could it be that God wants to show a defiant world the ten laws they refused to obey, that is, the Sabbath they ridiculed, the Covenant they refused to accept?

Divine Origin

Man did not devise the Ten Commandments. The Creator of the Universe descended upon Mt. Sinai to personally give mankind His laws. The Ten Commandments are changeless (they were written in stone by the finger of God) because they are based on divine wisdom and authority.

Obeying the commandments will bring many blessings, if we properly relate to them. On the other hand, if we reject the Ten Commandments, painful and unexpected consequences will be the result because they are the bedrock of happiness and well-being.

Bible history indicates that religious people become unhealthy when they improperly use the laws of God as a means to obtain salvation (legalism). The Jews deceived themselves into thinking they were righteous and special in God's sight because *they obeyed* His laws. This toxic relationship with God's laws is not limited to Jewish history. Church history indicates that Christians have also turned away from worshiping God by substituting traditions and manmade rules.

Many Christians have improperly defined and exalted grace. The result is lawlessness. Notice that the Jews obeyed the law (legalism) and Christians abolished the law (lawlessness). Both actions have accomplished the same result! **Both groups of people participate in idolatry.**

Idolatry occurs when the first commandment is broken. God's law was not designed to save mankind and God's grace was not designed to save mankind. On the contrary, the Ten Commandments were designed as a covenant and God's grace is revealed by His willingness to forgive sinners.

The key to salvation is through faith in God. (Ephesians 2:8,9) According to Hebrews 11, faith is our willingness to go, to be, and to do all that God commands (law). Because we

cannot perfectly do everything that God requires, God provides grace from the penalty for sin when we seek forgiveness. When He sees that we are doing our best to honor and glorify Him, He is pleased to extend grace – but His grace does *not* nullify His law!

A Covenant

Many people ask, "How are the Ten Commandments a covenant?" A covenant is a promise. The Ten Commandments are called "the covenant" because they are a promise. The Ten Commandments reveal how a born again person **wants** to live and what a born again person **wants** to do.

Because the power of sin lives within us (Romans 7:17), sinners cannot perfectly fulfill the demands of the Ten Commandments. Everyone has fallen short. (Romans 3:23) Of course, God understands the law of sin that operates within us and His grace is sufficient for all sinners who repent of wrong doing and put their faith in Him for salvation.

Grace "by no means" nullifies God's covenant! (Romans 3:31; 6:15) Sinners can have a healthy, growing relationship with God if they will study His laws and depend on the Lord for transforming power. A healthy relationship with God and His laws refines and ennobles every sinner because "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting (changing) the soul." (Psalm 19:7, insertion mine) And that is God's promise.

Robert, my hope is that you will prayerfully consider what God's Word has to say regarding this matter. Thank you again for your letter. May the Lord bless you in every possible way.

Larry Wilson

Warning! Don't Drink the Wine of Babylon

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Mr. Wilson:

Revelation 14:8 indicates that all of the nations will drink the maddening wine of Babylon's adulteries. Who is Babylon? What is the wine of Babylon? What is Babylon's adultery?

Sincerely, Sherri"

Thank you for your questions. I hope my response will be helpful because the future has a sequence of events that few people anticipate. We have to understand the circumstances that will cause the formation of Babylon before we can discuss Babylon's adultery and wine. According to Wikipedia, the estimated size and diversity of Earth's seven billion people currently live in approximately 195 nations and speak about 6,500 languages.

1. China has a population of about 1.3 billion people most of which are atheists.

2. India has a population of about 1.2 billion people most of which are Hindu or Buddhist.

3. There are about 1.5 billion Muslims and 1.2 billion Catholics living in various countries.

4. This leaves about 1.8 billion people in smaller categories such as Protestants (650 million), Jews (14 million) and various other groups.

These statistics force us to consider the nationalistic, linguistic, religious, and political diversity that exists on Earth. For thousands of years, this diversity has been a source of antagonism and conflict. In the past forty years, leaps in technology have made our world seem very small in matters of travel, economics, food supplies, energy, communication, and nuclear proliferation. It seems inevitable that one day, a nuclear exchange will occur at some point in the future. This oncoming eventuality is important in this study because the Bible indicates that life as we presently know it will abruptly change in a single day. (See 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6.)

God’s Wrath Will Produce Babylon

Please consider this short scenario that could lead to the formation of Babylon.* Sometime in the near future, I anticipate a nuclear exchange will occur. When this happens, God will step into the conflict with a series of apocalyptic judgments that will be so overwhelming that the war will cease. Suddenly, world leaders will realize that their greatest opponent is not another nation having atomic bombs, but Almighty God Himself!

When God's wrath breaks out, He will get the undivided attention of all nations. In terms of scope and consequences, God's wrath will be global and totally devastating. The Bible indicates that God's wrath will begin with a mighty display of lightning, intimidating peals of thunder, rumblings deep within Earth, and a global earthquake that will destroy dams, bridges, electrical grids, and buildings. This earthquake will make travel and communication almost impossible. God will put the world in a state of lock-down because He has a message for this rebellious planet.

A few days after the global earthquake, God will burn up a third of the world with a meteoric shower of burning hail. A few days later, God will hurl a great asteroid into an ocean. The impact will destroy a third of the ships as well as a third of the sea creatures. The resulting tsunamis will swell several hundred feet high.

Giant concentric walls of water will rush toward coastal cities and destroy thousands of them in minutes. A few days after this, God will hurl a flaming asteroid into a continent and the shockwaves from the impact will shatter its geological strata. This will cause the rivers, aquifers, and springs of water to become contaminated and millions of people will die from drinking poisoned water. After this, hundreds of volcanos will erupt and fill the sky with ash, soot, and debris. The jet stream will cause darkness to cover the middle third of Earth. There will be no light for weeks, crops will perish, and global famine will follow.

God will destroy 25% of the world's population (1.75 billion people) within a period of a couple months. It goes without saying that the remaining 5.25 billion survivors will be badly traumatized and scared to death. The omnipotent power of Almighty God will silence the whole world in the same way that He silenced a powerful storm on the Sea of Galilee. The fear of the Almighty will humble everyone and the survivors will whisper, "What does He want?"

When the religious and political leaders of the world see the fierce destruction and apocalyptic proportions of God's wrath, they too will be overwhelmed and traumatized just like everyone else. Since they do not know God's plans (even though His plans are announced in the book of Revelation), the leaders of the world will erroneously conclude that God's wrath will continue without cessation unless something is done quickly to appease Him.

Furthermore, world leaders will not be able to dismiss these judgments as random acts of nature because I believe God's wrath will target notoriously wicked places (like Sodom and Gomorrah). Thus, Atheists, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and Pagans will be forced to admit that a discernible pattern of destruction is obvious. The smouldering ruins of thousands of wicked cities will prove to everyone that Almighty God reigns and He must be very angry!

Think about this: By the time the fourth trumpet-judgment in Revelation 8 has ended, all of the world's infrastructures (communication, banking, manufacturing, travel, and every nation’s economy) will be destroyed. A third of the world will be a heap of ashes. Thousands of coastal cities will either be missing or uninhabitable. Twenty-five percent of the world’s population will be dead. Darkness will cover Earth 24/7 and the onset of global famine will be inescapable. These dire circumstances and the anticipation that more judgments are imminently coming will

motivate world leaders to unite and do something quickly!

The religious and political leaders of the world will assemble, and according to the book of Revelation, their solution to appease God's awful wrath will be to form a crisis government that will oversee every nation, making sure every effort is made to appease God. This crisis government (called Babylon in the book of Revelation) will have authority over not only civil matters, but also religious ones as well. All 195 nations of the world will humbly agree to follow the directives of this "monstrous beast." (Revelation 13:3)

Babylon's Adulteries

Revelation describes Babylon as an adulterous organization because God considers man-made church-state governments an abomination. The church (the bride of Christ) belongs to Christ and she is not permitted to "get in bed" with civil or secular authorities. Even when God delivered Israel from Egypt, He kept the powers of church (the priesthood) and state (the king) separate.

Babylon's function and role will appear to be a reasonable idea to almost everyone traumatized by the first four trumpets. Its motto will be simple: "The whole world must appease God so that His wrath will cease or we shall all die!" After witnessing the smouldering evidences of God's wrath, the destruction of thousands of coastal cities, the slaughter of 1.75 billion people, endless darkness, and looming famine, who can disagree with Babylon's motto without insulting the Almighty?

After the adulterous church-state government forms, I can envision a scenario where the leaders of Babylon announce to the world: "Every nation has suffered great loss. God is angry with the whole world for one reason. We have become wicked, degenerate, and violent. God is offended with our evil ways.

The Bible says that God destroyed the world in Noah's day because of violence and wickedness. The Bible teaches that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of sexual immorality, and the Bible teaches that God destroyed Jerusalem for idolatry and violence.

God never changes, and now that a third of the world has been reduced to ashes and 25% of the world has been slain, it is absolutely necessary to change our sinful ways if we want to survive. We must therefore make every effort to please the Almighty or He will destroy the rest of us.

Given this unforeseeable crisis, which is due to our decadent and degenerate behavior, the leaders of the world have established a new organization which will lead the way forward. This new organization will work with the authorities in each nation. World leaders have elected the pope to the head this new government because the Roman Catholic Church is unique in that it already has diplomatic relations with 175 nations. The pope will be assisted by an executive council of religious leaders from every religious body. This coalition of the world's religious leaders will guide us and provide counsel as we proceed.

"All 195 nations have wholeheartedly agreed to carry out the recommendations that will proceed from the crisis government. Due to the implementation of martial law in every nation, many new laws, carefully designed to eliminate offensive behaviors in God's sight, will be implemented without debate or delay.

People refusing to obey these laws will be arrested and punished because the world cannot risk offending Almighty God any further. *We have no choice but to appease God's wrath if we want to survive.* Therefore, a list of sinful behaviors will be published and anyone caught offending the Almighty will be quickly punished. Did not God say 'Is it not better for one man to die than a whole nation perish? (See John 11:50.)"

Babylon's Wine

The wine of Babylon will be a compelling lie. It will be the biggest lie told ever since Lucifer lied to Eve in the Garden of Eden. The lie Babylon will promote is that God's wrath can be appeased. The wine of Babylon will seem reasonable and all 195 nations will drink it and do stupid things to try to stop God's wrath. (This is why the wine is called *maddening* wine.)

To counteract this lie, God will send 144,000 prophets throughout the world. They will speak plainly against Babylon's wine. They will boldly say, "**. . . . Fallen! Fallen** [False! False] **is Babylon the Great** [whose plans for appeasing God are nonsense and its presumed authority is an insult to the Almighty]**, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine** [those nations and people who participate in Babylon's lies will become delusional fools and mad men] **of her adulteries** [unholy alliance between church and state]. " (Revelation 14:8, insertions and underlining mine)

Getting Prepared

The book of Revelation teaches three facts that every Christian should clearly understand at this hour. First, Gods wrath is surely coming. The book of Revelation indicates that God is about to send fourteen overwhelming judgments upon Earth. (These judgments are described as seven trumpets and seven bowls.) These judgments will be progressively destructive. In fact, Earth will be totally devastated during the seventh bowl.

Second, Jesus said that the end of the world will be similar to the story of Noah. (Matthew 24:37-39) For 120 years, God warned the people through Noah. Noah told the antediluvians what God was going to do and when He was going to do it. (Genesis 6:3) The antediluvians did not believe Noah.

They did not repent of their evil ways and neither did God deviate from His plan. Similarly, the book of Revelation is speaking to the world. It contains God's plan and He will not deviate from it. When His wrath begins, God will speak to the whole world (and the leaders of Babylon) through His 144,000 servants, and like the antediluvians, most of the world will not listen and will defy God's commandments.

Third, every Christian should know today that there can be no appeasement of God's wrath during the Great Tribulation because Earth has passed the point of return. When God's wrath begins, no amount of appeasement can change, divert, or alter God's actions.

This explains why God sends 144,000 prophets to tell the world that Babylon's wine is a huge lie. This truth is confirmed by the casting down of the censer at the Altar of Incense in Heaven's temple. (Revelation 8:5) When the daily service at Heaven's Altar of Incense is terminated, there can be no further appeasement of God's wrath because 6,000 years of corporate atonement ends when the censer is cast down.**

Salvation will be offered to individuals during the seven trumpets and all who are willing to obey the eternal gospel and put their faith in Christ will be saved. However, it is vital to understand that there will not be any appeasement of God's wrath, in fact, His wrath will only get worse when the seven bowls begin.

Sherri, I know this scenario sounds like a fairy tale. (The antediluvians also thought a flood was a fairy tale, until the first raindrops fell.) If the documentation was not in the Bible, I would not believe it. Currently, there are many scoffers, but when God's wrath begins, life will change.

Babylon will implement martial law and the individual freedoms that we treasure so much today will be suspended. Constitutional rights and legislative debate will be set aside because of the overwhelming crisis. A day is coming when a few "civil servants" will rule over each nation with absolute power, and worse, a small group of religious leaders will rule over these civil servants with absolute power.The book of Revelation predicts a future and a one-world-church-state that is now impossible to imagine. The Word of God is infallible. It predicts that Babylon is coming. Do not be deceived with its wine.

Larry Wilson

PS: I hope our readers will make copies of this study and pass them around. Hurry. People need to be introduced to this topic. A monstrous beast will soon come to life and what will we then be able to say?

*Note: This topic is covered in considerable detail in my book, *The Seven Trumpets, Two Witnesses and Four Beasts.* This information can be freely downloaded from The Trumpets of Revelation.

****Note:** For further discussion on the Full Cup Principle, please see Chapter 2 in my book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled* or this information can be freely downloaded at http://www.wake-up.org/warnbook/WarnBook.htm

The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The seven bowls (also called the seven last plagues) are puzzling to many Christians. When do they occur? What is their purpose? Who receives them? Who tortures the wicked? Jesus or the devil? The seven bowls are not discussed very often because people do not think they will be affected by them. Of course, the bowls will occur in the future, but they are important right now because they reveal more information about God's character. Before we examine the seven bowls, please notice that they can be divided into two groups:

Plagues on Evil Individuals **Plagues on Evil Corporate Entities**

1. Ugly and painful sores
2. Oceans turn to blood
3. Rivers and springs turn to blood
4. Scorching heat
5. Painful blindness affects Lucifer's officials
6. Kings of Earth gather for Armageddon
7. Hailstones weighing 100 pounds each fall and a sword comes out of Jesus' mouth kills the remaining evil people

The seven last plagues are called seven bowls (or vials in the KJV) because God wants us to understand that near the end of the Great Tribulation, He will force the wicked to "drink and swallow" His wrath. The result will be a very painful and eventually, a deadly experience. In Bible times, experiences were sometimes described as drinking from a *phiale.** For example, filled with overflowing gratitude for God’s protection, King David wrote, **"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.**

You anoint my head with oil; *my cup overflows* [with joy]**."** (Psalm 23:5, italics and insertion mine) Centuries later, Jesus cried out from the Garden of Gethsemane, **" ‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. *Take this cup from me*. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’ "** (Mark 14:36, italics mine)

The ancients often used the imagery of a cup to describe a human experience because they observed that once something is swallowed, the results become inescapable. Everything from euphoria and joy to excruciating pain and death came in a cup and being forced to drink a cup of poison was the worst possible experience. (See Jeremiah 25:15-30.)

*Note: The Greek word *phiale* describes a broad shallow cup, a saucer, or a bowl. The KJV transliterates *phiale* into the English word "vial," but this choice of words does not convey the proper meaning in today’s English.

The seven bowls can be listed in two columns because the first four bowls serve a different purpose than the last three. Everyone who receives the mark of the beast will experience the first four bowls. The last three bowls will impact corporate entities that Jesus intends to destroy.

For example, Jesus will impose the fifth bowl on Lucifer’s theocracy (his officials and employees). Jesus will impose the sixth bowl on the kings of Earth and their armies, and finally,

the seventh bowl will affect Earth itself. Fiery hailstones will destroy some of the wicked and the rest will be destroyed by the sword that comes out of Jesus' mouth. This will occur at the close of the seventh bowl. (Revelation 16:21; 19:19-21)

Note: If you have read my book, *A Study on the Seven Trumpets, Two Witnesses and Four Beasts,* you should recall that the seven trumpets can also be divided into two columns. The first four trumpet-judgments will fall upon notably wicked places and wicked people will experience the last three trumpet-judgments.

The First Five Bowls Examined

I believe the seven last plagues will occur over a period of seventy days – each bowl is poured out for ten days. It is interesting that the first four bowls focus on food, water, and shelter because prior to the seven last plagues, wicked predators will deprive God's children of these same necessities! The following is a short paraphrase on how I believe the first five plagues will unfold. Hopefully, this will help you better understand the story:

{Revelation 16:1} Then I heard a loud voice in Heaven say to the seven angels, "Go now and make the wicked drink from the cup of God's wrath." Jesus said to the first angel, "Lucifer controls the world. He will not permit my people to buy or sell because they will not wear his mark.

He intends to starve my people to death. Do to the wicked as they have done to my people. Go and poison their food. Let those wearing the mark of the beast eat the food and suffer the horrible boils that will follow."

". . . . The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head." -Obadiah 1:15

{2} The first angel poured out his bowl of poison on *the land* and ugly and painful sores broke out on everyone who had the mark of the beast, but the saints were not affected. When the wicked realized that their food supplies were the source of their boils, they rushed to the ocean to find food. Then Jesus said, "Neither shall the sea provide food for the wicked. Poison the oceans of the world!"

{3} The second angel poured out his bowl upon the oceans and the water turned into a thick blood-like fluid, like the blood of a dead man. *Every* living creature in the sea died. The remains of the sea creatures floated to the surface and washed onto the shores. Nothing from the sea could be eaten, but again, the saints were not affected. God provided food for them.

Jesus said to the third angel, "Many of the wicked participated in the slaughter of my servants, the 144,000. Since they are bloodthirsty, take away their water and give them blood to drink."

{4} The third angel poured his bowl of poison on the rivers and springs of water, and the springs of water became like blood, just like the oceans. Even more, the drinking water became

poisonous for everyone who had participated in the murder of God's people. The agony suffered by the murderers was intense. They were hungry and thirsty, and the agony they suffered was unbearable.

{5} The angel with the third bowl spoke to Jesus: "Eternal God, you are just and fair in these judgments, for you have judged righteously; {6} for these devil worshipers shed the innocent blood of your saints and prophets – and you have given them blood to drink."

{7} Then, the mighty angel who stood at the Altar of Incense also responded: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, your vengeance is righteous and your actions are justifiable."

After the third bowl was poured out, the wicked were in great anguish all over the world. The devil, who pompously masqueraded as Almighty God, could not prevent or cancel the effects of the first three bowls. To keep his masquerade intact, the devil stalled for time by promising to improve food supplies and the availability of fresh water, but his promises remained unfulfilled.

To further divert the attention of the wicked from his failure to save them, Lucifer directed the wicked to utterly destroy the remaining saints because, he claimed, they were aligned with "the devil." Lucifer cleverly led the wicked into thinking the saints were the reason for the great curse upon Earth and if the saints were eliminated, the curse would end.

Immediately, the wicked agreed to kill the saints on a specific day (the 1,290th day of the Great Tribulation) and great rewards were promised to everyone who captured and killed one of God's saints. Instead, Jesus protected His saints. Not one single saint perished. Jesus said, "The wicked intended to kill my people, now let them feel the heat of my wrath."

{8} The fourth angel poured his bowl on the Sun. The Sun became so hot that it scorched Earth with unbearable heat. The stench rising from the dead sea creatures was so unbearable that no one wanted to go outdoors, but the situation indoors was worse. There was no water or electricity.

{9}Objects became so hot that people were badly burned by merely touching them. Millions of wicked people, exhausted from their efforts to survive, died from hunger, thirst, and heat exhaustion. Even the devil's highest ranking officials had no food, water, or protection from the searing heat. Nevertheless, the wicked refused to repent of their wickedness and worship the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the only true God. They cursed the saints along with their God and refused to glorify Him.

The wicked cried out to Lucifer, "If you are Almighty God as you claim, stop these curses. Ever since you became king of kings and lord of lords (during the sixth trumpet), our condition has only become worse and worse. Use your miracle working powers to end the suffering! Show us again that you are Almighty God!" These requests put the devil in a predicament. He no longer had power to stop anything, including the effects of the first four bowls.

{10} A few days later, the fifth bowl was poured out. Suddenly, a painful plague afflicted everyone who worked for the devil. His officials and employees became dysfunctional. They had

willingly closed their eyes to the light of God's truth (presented by the 144,000); therefore, Jesus removed their eyesight.

When the fifth bowl was poured out, a painful blindness fell upon Lucifer's officials and employees, and his theocracy ended. The only thing the devil's officials and employees could do was to sit on the ground and gnaw their tongues in agony. {11} They cursed the God of Heaven (Jesus) because of the pain, but they refused to repent for what they had done.

The fifth plague, directed specifically at Lucifer's government, stunned the remaining wicked. Suddenly, they began to question the identity of the glorious being who claimed to be Almighty God. Why would he give a curse of painful blindness to his officials and employees? Why would he destroy his entire work force and kingdom with painful blindness? Why would he treat his loyal followers with such horrifying contempt . . . unless he *really was* an imposter? Could he actually be the devil?

The fifth bowl will be the game changer. The wicked will be forced by unavoidable circumstances to admit that the 144,000, who they ridiculed and murdered as "false prophets," are the true prophets of Almighty God after all. As events unfold, one bowl at a time, the wicked will be forced to admit that the glorious being masquerading as Almighty God is the devil, the dreaded Antichrist. He is *the* "false prophet" – just as the 144,000 claimed. The wicked will be crushed by unspeakable disappointment and guilt.

They will realize, too late, that they were duped. They were duped because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12) Instead of placing their faith in Jesus and submitting to the authority of a God of love, they temporarily avoided persecution. They placed their loyalty and trust in the father of lies — a cunning devil who told them all kinds of lies while performing endless miracles to win their confidence and loyalty.

God Is Love

If God is love, then God's behavior defines love in action. In other words, whatever God does must be perfectly within the boundaries of love. God's love can be defined as a perfect balance between justice and mercy. According to infinite wisdom and changeless consistency, God knows when mercy is appropriate and when the demands of justice are required.

This balance is always perfect because God is love personified! *The actions of God always demonstrate what love is and what love is not.* Given this eternal truth, the seven bowls have to be understood as an action of love. Much more can be written about this topic, but time and space will not permit it. Please consider these three purposes for the seven bowls: Vengeance, exposure, and discovery. A few words about each might be helpful.

1. Vengeance

There is an important distinction between vengeance and revenge. Vengeance is a righteous process that achieves justice. Vengeance is exercised when a disinterested party (having no

relationship with the parties involved) lawfully punishes a predator or perpetrator of a crime on behalf of an injured party.

On the other hand, revenge is retaliation. Revenge is exercised when someone having a personal interest in an injury punishes another party. The problem with revenge is that the limits of justice are usually ignored or abandoned in order to satisfy passion. In other words, left to his own devices, a person seeking revenge will often go beyond justice and become a predator himself.

During the Great Tribulation, the wicked will drink the wine of Babylon and treat God's saints with contempt and hatred because God's saints will not cooperate. Babylon will unjustly persecute the saints, taking their possessions and ultimately, their lives. The wicked will impose a stunning amount of cruelty and hardship on the saints.

Of course, Jesus will not miss a single event, faithfully recording every thought, word, and action because He will execute justice at the appointed time. Every ounce of suffering imposed on the saints will be repaid to the wicked. In fact, they will be repaid with a double portion of suffering by a God of love! (Revelation 18:6)

*Note: A double portion of restitution is required when malicious intent is premeditated and carried out. (Exodus 22:4-9)

After Noah's flood, God imposed a system of law and order on mankind. (Genesis 9:5,6) Later, God expanded the role of law and order at Mount Sinai: **"But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."** (Exodus 21:24,25)

God set up civil authorities to administer justice and to execute vengeance as necessary (Romans 13) and when lawfully applied, *God's system of justice is a deterrent to crime.* God requires everyone to respect the person and property of others, just as they respect their own person and property.

God's system of justice protects the weak from the strong and the innocent from the ruthless. Every society has builders (those who contribute to the advancement and well being of society) and predators (scoundrels who abuse the weak by depriving them of their possessions and/or lives).

To a great extent, a child's character is determined by the presence or absence of parental training and childhood associations. In Bible times, if a teenager observed the execution of a convicted murderer, that experience and the importance of another person's life would not be soon forgotten.

Because God closely identifies with children and the weaker people in society, God demands the execution of vengeance on murderers to protect society from predators. Therefore, we should not be surprised to learn that God, who loves every person equally, demands that murderers be put to death.

God has a golden rule. **"Do to others as you would have them do to you."** (Luke 6:31) When this law is violated, God's justice requires restitution. If a predator does not make amends and he is not caught and punished during his lifetime, God will resurrect the predator at the appointed time and personally see to it that restitution is extracted. This shows God's fairness and love for justice! The inverse of the Golden Rule is iron clad. It says, "It will be done to you as you did to others."

Vengeance is the lawful execution of justice, and one day, restitution will be extracted from every wicked person who failed to provide restitution. In fact, restitution is one of the purposes for the lake of fire that will consume the wicked at the end of the 1,000 years.

The wicked will suffer in the lake of fire in direct proportion to the suffering they imposed upon their victims. This is why Paul warned, **"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."** (Romans 12:19) We should never forget this phrase:
". . . I will repay, says the Lord."*

*Note: If a murderer is caught and executed for his crime, the demands of the law – life for life – have been met. However, restitution for the suffering he created during the crime has not been met. This, too, must be paid in full. God's law includes punitive action (punishment), as well as compensatory action (restitution).

If a murderer repents of his sin before execution, his death will satisfy the punitive requirement of God's law and the compensatory requirements for suffering will be transferred to the scapegoat (Lucifer). On the other hand, if a murderer does not repent of his sin and he dies a natural death, the murderer will suffer in the lake of fire at the end of the 1,000 years, according to the amount of compensation imposed upon him. Only then will he die, thereby satisfying the punitive requirment, because the penalty for his sin remains upon his own head.

We have examined the concept of vengeance because the seven bowls contain God's vengeance. During the Great Tribulation, desperate circumstances will separate the people of Earth into two groups. The sheep (God's people) will embrace the testimony of the 144,000, worship the Creator, and love one another.

The goats (the wicked) will rebel against God's authority and submit to Babylon's authority. The contest between the two authorities will be sharp and distinct. The wicked will do whatever it takes to survive – only to end up as slaves of the devil. There will be no justice for God's saints during the Great Tribulation, so God Himself will execute vengeance upon the wicked with the seven bowls during the final seventy days of the Great Tribulation. God will lawfully punish the wicked according to the way they maliciously treated His children.

2. Exposure

Another purpose for the seven bowls is exposure. Jesus will expose the devil's masquerade during the fifth bowl! Here's the story: About a year *before* the fifth bowl occurs, God will permit

Lucifer to leave the spirit realm and physically appear before mankind. He will lead the wicked into total rebellion against the authority and will of God. The devil will masquerade as Almighty God and he will perform many magnificent miracles – even calling fire down from Heaven! Many of the wicked will embrace the devil as though he was God. When the devil gains enough followers, he will demand that everyone on Earth worship as he dictates or be killed. The devil will set up a false theocracy and rule over Earth as king of kings and lord of lords. This pompous despot will reign over the whole world for about nine months. During the fifth bowl, Jesus will strip away the devil's masquerade and He will expose the great deceiver for who he really is (evil incarnate).

The fifth bowl will be poured out on a specific group of people. Those who serve as officials and employees in Lucifer's government (false theocracy) will be struck down with excruciating pain, a blindness that renders them dysfunctional, and Lucifer's empire will immediately shut down.

Ironically, those who refused to see any light in the gospel of Jesus Christ will no longer be able to see the god of darkness they serve. When the rest of the wicked realize that Lucifer is powerless to stop the painful blindness and "heal" his administrative staff, the devil will be exposed for who he really is.

The wicked will be paralyzed by great fear. Not only will they hate the devil, but they will also loathe themselves. They will remember the 144,000's testimony, but it will be too late. Finally, the wicked will realize they cannot escape the coming doom.

3. Discovery

When the wicked discover that the glorious being who masqueraded as Almighty God is the devil, they will also discover that they have no Savior and no refuge from Almighty God. They will have no one to worship, no divine being in whom to trust, and no hope for the future.

The fifth bowl will force the wicked to discover their true condition before God, the Creator of the universe. In an attempt to lessen the impact of this awful discovery, Lucifer will send miracle working demons to the ten kings of Earth during the sixth bowl. These demons will perform miracle after miracle before the kings of Earth and then, with sophisticated cunning, they will present their demonic proposal. They will tell the kings that Jesus will arrive soon to ultimately destroy the entire world. They will suggest to the kings of Earth that they must join forces with Lucifer to stop Jesus! They must make war on Jesus as He appears – the demons contend it is their only chance of survival.

Two interesting facts will emerge: First, the Bible predicts that Earth's ten kings will join forces with Lucifer's demons, even though they know that Lucifer is the devil and his angels are demons. Consider the ramifications of this union for a moment. To save self, sinners would rather join forces with the devil and attempt to destroy the Creator of the universe than to confess their sins and repent.

Let me be clear – the power of sin within sinners is entirely delusional. Second, the desperate

actions of Earth's ten kings prove that ultimately, sin has the same effect on human beings as angels. Under the right circumstances, both would attempt to destroy the God of love if possible. A sinner's love for his own life speaks volumes.

On the other hand, the cross proves that the Creator of the universe, Jesus Christ, was willing to cease to exist so that sinners might be saved. This is love in action! Contrast this with the war against Jesus at the Second Coming. This final revelation demonstrates why sin and sinners cannot be tolerated in God's universe ever again. Given the time, power, and opportunity, every sinner eventually becomes a predator. This fact would be very hard to accept were it not for the "discovery" made possible during the seven bowls.

Vengeance, exposure, and discovery have been briefly discussed to help you understand that the seven bowls have several important purposes. During the Great Tribulation, the inhabitants of Earth will experience a period of increasing distress. As circumstances become more desperate, a sharp distinction between the sheep and the goats will appear.One group will choose the way of divine love, worship the Creator, and love one another. The other group will grasp at every straw to save themselves from suffering, hardship, and death – only to face God's wrath, extended suffering, and finally death.

Love for God will take the sheep in one direction and love for self will take the goats in the opposite direction. As the Great Tribulation escalates, the wicked will prey on the saints to survive. The wicked will take the saint's possessions and treat them with contempt.

The wicked will torture and imprison the saints of God for rebellion against the laws of Babylon. Many of God's people will die in the process. When every person has reached his or her spiritual destination, that is, either *sealed* as a sheep or *marked* as a goat, salvation's offer will end.

At that time, God will execute vengeance on behalf of His helpless saints. He will lawfully punish the wicked with seven plagues, and holy angels will declare that God's actions are righteous! Justice will be served. Unrepentant predators will suffer according to the suffering they caused. **"For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."** (Hebrews 10:30,31)

Larry Wilson

Thoughts on Bible Prophecy and Coming Events

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The prophecies written in the books of Daniel and Revelation describe a sequence of events spanning a period of approximately 3,500 years. Several prophecies began unfolding during the fifth century B.C. and we have been able to observe their chronological fulfillment over the past 2,600 years.

It is the consistent and precise fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecy during the past 2,600 years that enables us to determine what the Bible says about tomorrow. Because the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation conform to a well defined architecture, we can determine our location within the chronological order of events they predict. In other words, we can verify what has happened in the past and we can determine what is coming next.

The world stands on the doorstep of a great transition. I am not talking about the unrest currently seen in the Middle East. History reveals that nations routinely change governments. No regime lasts forever. The rise and fall of governors and governments is as old as mankind.

Looking toward the future, Bible prophecy largely ignores the current unrest that we see around the world. The books of Daniel and Revelation are concerned with something far larger than the Middle East. The Bible predicts that God Himself will soon step into the affairs of men and bring life –as we currently know it – to an end.

The Bible is the *only* source of truth on this subject because God's coming actions have nothing to do with the social and political unrest that currently plagues Earth. The Bible is the *only* book that contains a comprehensive roadmap of soon coming events and the Bible is the *only* authority that speaks for God about this matter. For these reasons, Christians should prayerfully reconsider the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation. Generally speaking, most of the people on Earth are about to be overwhelmed with the arrival of the "Great Day of the Lord."

What Happens Next?

The following is a brief summary of coming events that will affect the entire planet. The book of Revelation predicts three *global* earthquakes. These earthquakes will increase in severity as they occur. They will sever bridges, break down hydroelectric dams, tear train tracks apart, collapse metropolitan freeway overpasses, and kill many people.

Obviously, thousands of buildings will collapse. The world's economy will implode. Communication, travel, and manufacturing infrastructures will come to a screeching halt. Prior to 1994, scientists claimed that a global earthquake was physically impossible. This theory has been shattered. An earthquake shook the whole world in December 2004 and approximately 230,000 people died in southern Asia as a result of the tsunami that followed.

In addition to global earthquakes, Revelation also predicts the world will be set on fire by a

meteoric shower of burning hail. This cataclysmic event will burn up a third of Earth. Millions of acres of trees and more importantly, food crops will be destroyed. Until the 1980s, scientists scoffed at the notion that Earth had been impacted by a civilization-threatening asteroid. This theory has been shattered. Today, scientists have identified more than 120 impact craters on Earth. A few of the craters are more than 150 miles in diameter!

Powerful telescopes recorded the impact of Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9, with Jupiter (July 1994). One impact created a crater large enough to hold three planets the size of Earth. No one is ridiculing the possibility that a massive asteroid could hit Earth *again* and destroy the whole world. In fact, the book of Revelation predicts two asteroid impacts are coming. One asteroid will impact an ocean and the resulting tsunami will wash away thousands of coastal cities with the same ease that high tide removes footprints in the sand.

Then, a second asteroid impact will obliterate much of a continent. Many, perhaps millions of people who survive the initial impact will eventually perish from drinking contaminated water. (Ground waves from a massive asteroid impact will shear geological structures allowing deadly bacteria to enter underground aquifers.)

The Bible does not say which ocean or which continent will be impacted, but we can be sure that when these events take place, they will not be random events. God is deliberate and purposeful in all that He does and His apocalyptic judgments are executed with surgical precision.

The book of Revelation also predicts that extensive darkness will cover Earth for many months. This darkness could be caused by a sequence of volcanic eruptions that occur shortly after the asteroid impacts. Consider this: Where there is no sunlight, there can be no crops. The result of extended darkness is famine. A worldwide famine is coming.

The most frightening part of Bible prophecy is not coming disaster. What concerns students of Bible prophecy most is the religious and political response that will be forthcoming. The Bible predicts that the world's religious and political leaders will unite and hastily create a worldwide organization to appease the wrath of an angry God.The Bible predicts this crisis organization will suddenly rise up and it will be given authority over all nations without firing a single bullet! This is no fairy tale. This is not a reality check.

These events are predicted in God's Word and we need to know now what we will soon face. God has informed us of His actions so that we will not lose faith in Him. **"I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe."** (John 14:29)

God has something to say to every living person on Earth – all seven billion of us. One day, He will suddenly terminate the affairs of man and during a short period of 1,260 days, He will sort through the people of Earth. He will separate the honest in heart from those who hate the light of truth.

He will separate the sheep from the goats. God will present the terms and conditions of salvation to every member of the human race during the Great Tribulation, and He will see to it

that *every* person is invited to be a part of a New World order that He will establish. Even the most vile person on Earth (if he repents and turns from sin and rebellion) can be part of God's coming kingdom.

Before He sets up His kingdom, God will destroy the kingdoms of men and this includes everyone opposed to His government and authority. Keep in mind, God is impartial. He loves everyone equally, but the human race has gone too far. God's patience is exhausted. Corporately speaking, the actions and attitudes of Earth's inhabitants have become too violent, decadent, and degenerate. We have filled up our cup of iniquity and as it was in Noah's day, the time has come for God to purify Earth.

How Soon?

The Bible speaks of Earth's final events as "The End of Days" or "The Appointed Time of the End." Several Bible authors write about this period of time because the end of sin will be marked by a complete spiritual and physical reconfiguration of Earth. In a small way, signs of this coming transformation are visible already.

For example, weather patterns have gone crazy. Flooding, drought, tornados, and hurricanes are producing more havoc. Seismic activity is also increasing. According to the USGS, more earthquakes measuring 6.0 and above on the Richter scale have occurred in the past decade than any of the previous three decades.

Volcanic activity is also on the increase. Our planet now has more than 400 active volcanos. Are these physical changes a sign of what is to come? Yes, if you understand that sin has doomed this planet. Consider the financial impact from nature's violence on the financial institutions of the world.

Many insurance companies are in deep trouble as a result of natural disasters. Insurance is not available in some areas because insurance companies cannot afford the losses. Moreover, the economy of the twenty richest nations on Earth is nothing more than a house of cards. A global earthquake, a global fire, or an asteroid impact could easily cause the cards to fall.

What about the spiritual condition of man? Have you noticed more hatred? Have you noticed less patience? Have you noticed more predators? As the global population continues to increase (a net gain of 9 million new people per month), another world war seems inevitable. The Middle East is boiling.

North Korea and Iran are powder kegs. An increasing number of nations now have nuclear capability, so what will Earth look like after World War III? It is time to wake up America! Planetary resources are too few for so many people and this will bring a global revolt. The world's political leaders see the problems, but there is no solution. They are too complex. People are uncertain about prices, they fear the unknown, and their anger builds. More and more, people are giving study to ways of protecting themselves from others.

Although the Bible does not precisely state when the Great Tribulation will begin, it does offer enough data to determine a "window of time" during which the end of the age happens. For example, if a person totals all the prophetic time periods in Daniel and Revelation, the genealogical records of Genesis and Exodus, and the years from the Exodus to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the Bible only refers to approximately 7,000 years (plus or minus a few years).

We know that the 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20 occurs *after* The Great Tribulation. Therefore, this suggests that on or about the 6,000th year of sin, life as we now know it could come to an end. According to these general calculations, the Great Tribulation could begin any time. Maybe the end of the age will occur before 2017 – but the passage of time will have to reveal the actual date. This much is certain, the world is in trouble and it is only a matter of time until a nuclear exchange occurs.

God Has a Plan

God is sovereign. God has a plan for Earth. He has a purpose for each individual. To understand God's purpose and plan takes some effort and personal desire. The Bible reveals everything we need to know, and we need to know all that we can know.

The end time story in Revelation is not based on a continual decline into global, moral bankruptcy. Instead, the end time story focuses on two points. The first point is timing, the second is degeneration. In other words, given enough time, degeneration overcomes mankind.

If history reveals anything, it tells us that civilizations come and go because of degeneracy. The length of time a civilization enjoys prosperity is directly proportional to God's favor. Notice this response of the prophet Daniel to King Nebuchadnezzar: **"He** [the God of Heaven] **changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning."** (Daniel 2:21, insertion mine) Each time we have a political election in the United States, I reflect on this text.

How does God set up kings (or leaders) and depose of them when they were elected to office by popular vote? I have found a rather simple answer: God is able to bring about circumstances that propel people in various directions. One clear example of this is found in the story about the Tower of Babel. God altered the common language of man by creating many languages, and this simple event brought about the dispersion of nations. (See Genesis 11:1-9.)

Back to Daniel for one more point: Notice Daniel's statement to Nebuchadnezzar about the quality of men God places in leadership. **"The decision** [to punish you for unbridled vanity, oh king] **is announced by messengers, the holy ones** [angels] **declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men."** (Daniel 4:17, insertions mine)

Here is a profound point: When a nation turns its back on principles of righteousness and its

individuals turn away from right doing, God deals with that nation and its individuals accordingly. The prophet Daniel clearly understood why he was in Babylon as a captive. Notice his confession: **"All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. 'Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you.' "** (See Daniel 9:11 and Ezekiel 14:12-22.)

These principles are timeless because God is eternal. Our planet has turned away from God. Moreover, the resources of the world are limited. This is a recipe for conflict. The cancer of sin has become pandemic. Selfish ambitions and greed have ruined our economy. Affections for one another are cold and ethnicity is all too important. All of these things serve to alienate us from one another. So, what must God do with His wayward planet? He must act. He will act.

Keep in mind that we cannot protect ourselves from the coming tribulation. Any efforts to save self is a lot like arranging deck chairs on the Titanic. What difference does it ultimately make where the chairs are placed on a ship headed for the bottom of the ocean?

Like Humpty Dumpty (representing the civilizations of the world), all the king's horses and all the king's men (the efforts of man) cannot put it back together again. In the language of football, we have reached fourth and goal, and 5 seconds remain on the clock. Will the world implode or will God step in? The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation reveal that God is about to take matters into His own hands.

What Does God Want?

The Bible indicates that God will accomplish four important matters during the Great Tribulation. First, He will awaken every person on Earth to the fact that Jesus, the Judge of all mankind, is about to appear and require an account of each person's behavior.

Second, God is about to expose the properties of sin to the human race because few people recognize or understand sin's powerful control. Third, God is going to expose the contents of every human heart by placing a comprehensive test of faith before each of us. Finally, God will silence the blasphemous claims of the world's religious systems.

He will demonstrate that human beings cannot obtain salvation through membership in *any* religious system. God is about to inform the world that salvation only comes through total commitment and submission to Jesus Christ.

Most of the prophetic interpretations we hear on radio and television are misleading. Do not misunderstand. People can believe anything they choose to believe about the future, but belief or denial has no effect on coming events. Almost everyone in Noah's day refused to believe a flood was coming. What effect did their denial have on the promised event? Millions of people anticipate things that will never happen and when the predicted events of Revelation begin, everything that can be shaken, will be shaken.

On that day, many people will abandon their faith in God because they placed their faith in their religious leaders instead of studying God's Word for themselves. Even worse, many religious leaders have not spiritually prepared their flocks (their parishioners) for the trying circumstances they are about to face. What is more bitter than the experience of misplaced trust? I mention these things because most religious leaders, either do not know about the coming events or they deny the seriousness of the fulfillment of prophecy.

Few people are spiritually prepared for the trying experiences ahead. What many people have been *led* to believe about God is not true. In the coming hour of tribulation, many unprepared people will become bitter. In their anger, frustration and fear, many people will turn against their religious leaders and hate God. Of course, such hatred will be misdirected. After all, Bibles are readily available and where should the responsibility for preparation lie.

God's Silence

The character of God is poorly understood – even in the United States. Many people diminish God's authority, glory, and power because He has not recently revealed Himself in the affairs of man. When the prophet, Isaiah, saw God's throne, he fell on his face saying, **" 'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.' "** (Isaiah 6:5) On the other hand, Isaiah was amazed at God's reluctance to show Himself as the Almighty. Isaiah wrote, **"Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel."** (Isaiah 45:15)

God's *apparent* silence comes as a consequence of sin. Just as offenses physically separate friends or family members, the offensiveness of sin separates us from God's physical presence. As generations come and go, knowledge of God dims. The reality of God becomes faint, and the longer we go without renewed evidence of God's authority and glory, the more silent He appears to be. In the vacuum of this silence, sin becomes more attractive and less offensive. Sinners become bold and defiant in transgression.

Sin metastasises. Violence, sorrow, and suffering spring up like dandelions after a spring rain. Every night, the evening news confirms our accelerating slide into depravity. Degenerate, hideous sins are justified and glamorized on TV for purposes of entertainment.

Sin has a strange effect on human beings –it causes sinners to minimize the effects or the guilt of their wrong actions. Think about this for a full five seconds: Sin causes human beings to deny the significance of *personal* wrong doing! (How many people in prison falsely maintain innocence?)

The Bible reveals that God breaks His silence from time to time. He uses four judgments to limit the growth of sin. (Ezekiel 14:21) His four judgments are sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts. In His infinite wisdom, God allows nations to rule until they fill up their cup of iniquity, and when they do, the Bible says that He removes them from power. (See Daniel 2:21; 4:16, Leviticus 18:24-27.)

What makes this process so remarkable is that God, even within the chaos of sin, completely accomplishes His plans and purposes on this Earth! We may try to explain the outcome of Earthly events by analyzing the actions of the players, but this is only a limited view.

Do not be naive and think that things happen by the prowess of man. Nothing happens in the universe without God's knowledge and permission. Even though we are not able to see God on His throne, we can know that He reigns over the kingdoms of man. God is sovereign. We may not see all that He is doing, but the evidence is right before our eyes. The Bible is clear – God is ever in control. How He maintains control over Earth is a mystery. That He does it without showing Himself is His silence.

God's silence is not too hard to penetrate, if you really want to see and hear Him. The evidences of His handiwork are all around us if we want to acknowledge Him. However, if we do not want to give Him respect, we can easily ignore Him and deny Him the recognition He is due. Thus, His silence compliments our power of choice. God can either be the greatest and most wonderful being in the universe, or if we choose, we can deny His existence. What a God! Perhaps the least understood element within God's character is His reluctance to awe His creatures with His powers and presence. His silence will be a topic of eternal discovery!

A Very Important Point

Soon, God will break His silence with mankind by raining down His judgments upon Earth. These coming events will be correctly understood as manifestations of God's wrath, but God Himself will be grossly misunderstood. To appease God and stay His awful judgments, the world's religious and political systems will enact laws "honoring God" that will be contrary to what He actually wants!

What God seeks from man is a repentant heart and a submissive attitude. He calls men and women to live a life free of the damning power of sin. Even more, He grants men and women who put their faith in Him, the power to be transformed through victory over sin.

Unfortunately, Revelation predicts that billions of people will reject God's gracious offer of grace, His gift of power over sin and resulting salvation. They will turn away because they do not believe. The hearts of many people have become hardened through rebellion and ignorance, but this is not the worst part of the story.

Revelation predicts a time is coming when wicked people will punish and torture those who obey God's laws. The persecutors will think that their actions are justified and that like Pilate, they can wash away their guilt by washing their hands. God *never* ignores an evil deed even though He may allow evil to flourish for a season. God will avenge the suffering of His children and we can be sure that justice day is coming. (See Revelation 18:6 and Obadiah 1:15.)

In the context of His coming judgments, God's character and His behavior will be misrepresented and misinterpreted. This is the heart of Revelation's story. It is a story of a loving God visiting a planet in trouble. It is a story of a just God rendering justice. It is a story of

a merciful God extending mercy. What does it say about the human race when God is left with no other alternative than deadly judgments to gain man's attention?

Revelation is a story about rebellious people and a world gone astray. Most people, when put to the coming test of faith in God, will openly and conscientiously reject the clearest evidences of God's truth. They will unite themselves in rebellion against the commandments of God (the Ten Commandments) by obeying the laws of the coming Antichrist.

God will allow Satan (the dreaded Antichrist) to physically appear during the Great Tribulation at the appointed time. This will be a deadly deception. You need to understand that God allows the devil to appear and personate Christ *before* Christ returns because the wicked **"refused to love the truth and so be saved."** (2 Thessalonians 2:10) Lucifer will claim to be God and he will lead billions of people to believe that he has come to establish a thousand years of peace, but his claims are lies.

Why will the majority of the world be duped by this coming imposter? Jesus said, **"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."** (John 3:19-20)

If my understanding of Bible prophecy is correct, God will soon break His silence. On that dreadful day, everyone will know that God's patience with sin and sinners has reached its limit. When the great day of the Lord begins, mortals living on a tiny speck of a planet called Earth will know that Almighty God, Owner and Creator of the Universe, has summoned mankind to appear before His everlasting throne.

We can prepare for coming events. We can prepare *now* to be a part of God's new creation. Read your Bible. It tells us who God is, what He is like, and what He wants from each of us. Preparing for Jesus' return can be compared to preparing for final exams in the senior year of college. This is serious. Ready or not, the great day of the Lord is coming. Bible prophecy is a beacon signaling that the kingdom of God is at hand. Prepare to meet God!

Larry Wilson

The Cadillac Prayer

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Several years ago I met a man who was angry with God. Jesus had refused to answer his prayer. Curious, I asked the man about his unanswered prayer. He said, "I prayed for five years that Jesus would give me a new Cadillac and He didn't." He wasn't joking.

Seeing that he was rather bitter, I asked why he prayed for a Cadillac. He said, "I became a Christian after attending Brother Joe's (name withheld) church about ten years ago. Over the years, I gave a lot of money to the church because I was led to believe that if I believed in God with all my heart, Jesus would answer my prayers. Pastor Joe's favorite text was Matthew 21:22 and he offered examples each week proving that Jesus answered the prayers of believers.

After listening to Pastor Joe for a while, I thought I would give God a try. Pastor Joe said that the key to faith is that we must not have any doubts about receiving when we ask God for something. Taking the pastor at his word, I convinced myself that I would receive a new Cadillac.

After five or six years of believing and praying, I woke up and concluded that I could have purchased a new Cadillac with the amount of money that I had given to the church. So, I quit praying and attending church because I had been deceived." I asked the man if it was possible that he was praying for the wrong thing. He said, "I want what I want. If Jesus raised the dead and healed the sick, a new Cadillac should have been easy."

The man was not a fool – he was misled. To the best of his knowledge and ability, the man had done everything right. He had *believed* in Jesus and he had *proven* his faith by giving a sacrificial sum of money to his church for five or six years. The man *believed* that a miracle was coming and he refused to believe otherwise until it became obvious there would be no miracle Cadillac. By the time I met him, his bitterness with Jesus could not be "reasoned" away. In his mind, he had given Jesus a fair trial and Jesus had failed.

You may smile at this story, but watch out. Millions of Christians have been "set up" for the same bitter results. Please consider the following ten statements:

1. I believe in God.

2. I believe that Jesus died on the cross.

3. I believe that salvation comes through faith.

4. I believe that God hears my prayers.

5. I believe the Bible is the Word of God.

6. I believe in Heaven and Hell.

7. I believe that God works miracles.

8. I believe that God rewards the righteous.

9. I believe the Lord will take me to Heaven.

10. I believe there is a devil.

Do you believe these ten statements are true? If so, you are "a believer." Right? Now, look at the words of Jesus: **"If you *believe*, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."** (Matthew 21:22, italics mine) For those people who insist on "proof texts" that require no interpretation, there it is in black and white. Jesus Himself said if we believe – we shall receive. Can you understand the man's mindset: He believed, but Jesus deceived?

The Nitty Gritty

Many people today are praying "the Cadillac prayer" and, as far as they know, they are doing everything right and getting "no response" from God. The man said what he wanted very well, "I want what I want." Does God promise to fulfill our wants? James wrote, **". . .You do not have** [what you want]**, because you do not ask God** [for the right things]**. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your** [self-centered] **pleasures."** (James 4:2,3, insertions mine)

Does a wise parent give his child everything the child wants? No, of course not. Will a wise and all knowing God give His children everything they want? No, of course not. God is very careful about answering our prayers because He perfectly understands our motives and the carnal nature that lives within us.

The carnal nature is self-centered beyond measure: "It wants what it wants – and worse, it does not remain content very long – even after it gets what it wants!" The carnal nature is insatiable and human wisdom is always flawed. What makes us happy today makes us miserable tomorrow. (For example, it is often said that the two happiest days for a boat owner are the day he buys the boat and the day he sells it.)

Therefore, according to divine love and infinite wisdom, God is put in a situation where He has to say "no, no, no, no, no, and no" to millions of prayer requests each day because He knows fulfillment would be harmful. *Note to self: If I ask and I don't receive the answer I wanted, a long string of "no's" does not mean that God is not listening, it just means the answer is "no" or "not now."*

It took several years for the man to "wise up" and stop praying for a Cadillac. Then, the man made a huge mistake. He became bitter at God and abandoned his faith in Jesus. Of course, Jesus loves that man and the Holy Spirit is doing everything possible to bring him into truth, but

the man needs to understand where he went wrong.

First, he *allowed* his pastor to mislead him. If the pastor had led the man to become a seeker of God's truth, rather than a seeker of God's gifts, the Cadillac prayer would have eventually ended without bitterness. Jesus knew the man with the Cadillac prayer would become bitter because the man had been led to believe that Jesus said something that He didn't say! Jesus knew the man's heart and his faithful giving (even though the man's motives were selfish). Jesus knew the man and He sadly waited for the implosion. Now, Jesus waits for the man's recovery.

Huge Gulf

A huge gulf exists between intellectual ascent to truth (believing something is true) and living by faith (reverent submission to God's will). Of course, learning the truth about God is important because truth always deepens our faith in God, but intellectual assent (believing something is true, such as believing there is a God) is not enough. James wrote, **"You *believe* that there is one God. Good! Even the demons *believe* that – and shudder."** (James 2:19, italics mine)

For the sake of discussion, let us surgically separate "believing" from "faith." For example, you can believe the moon is made of cheese if you want. But believing that something is true does not make it true. Moreover, believing that God will or won't do something has no bearing on what God will or will not do! The antediluvians did not believe a flood was coming. Oops.

Faith in God involves reverent submission to God's will. Faith means going where God directs, doing all that God commands, and being all that God wants me to be (go-be-do). If we want answers to our prayers, we must live in reverent submission to God's will. Otherwise, we are going to face a long string of "no's."

Consider His perfect example: **"During the days of Jesus' life on Earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."** (Hebrews 5:7) If the man with the Cadillac prayer had become a Bible student instead of a Bible spectator, he would have quickly discovered his pastor's mistake. The pastor violated the meaning of Scripture by lifting Matthew 21:22 out of Bible context.

He took Jesus' words and made them say something which Jesus did not mean. As a living author, I have had this happen to me many times. People who wish to prove me wrong on some point will lift a sentence of two from a paragraph and use my words to say something that is totally contrary to the point that I advocate.

This process is called *academic dishonesty.* When pastors and Bible teachers *unknowingly* make the Bible say something that is contrary to its truth, they put the Bible in a state of internal conflict. When they *knowingly* make the Bible say something that is contrary to its truth, they are spiritually dishonest and detestable in God's sight. (Proverbs 12:22)

The man with the Cadillac prayer was led into false knowledge and ironically, his "faith" brought his bitter disappointment! When the man concluded that he had been deceived, he fulfilled the demands of the carnal nature. Unfortunately, he abandoned his faith in God, instead of having his knowledge corrected and his motives purified! *I have shared his story because his experience will soon be repeated billions of times when the Great Tribulation begins.*

The world is full of people embracing false religious thoughts and beliefs. Millions of faith-full honest-hearted people have been led to believe fiction. When God's wrath breaks out on the world, people will suddenly awake and great bitterness will follow – for a while.

People will come to despise their pastors – when they learn that their pastors did not warn them or teach them about God's coming wrath. People will hate their church leaders – when they realize that their church was full of spiritual inadequacy. People will also hate God when they grieve over loved ones who died in the mayhem.

God anticipates this coming bitterness and this explains why God will give the survivors 1,260 days to process their thoughts and feelings. His servants (the 144,000) will proclaim the eternal gospel, the Holy Spirit will lead millions into truth through Bible study, and the honest in heart will overcome their bitterness. Joy will eventually displace anger and frustration because this is what faith (reverent submission) does! Faith in God always makes perfect sense when observed in reverse.

Abiding in Christ

In closing, there is a huge difference between believing in God and abiding in Christ. Abiding or resting in Jesus means "letting go and letting God have His way in everything." Jesus said, **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."** (John 15:5-7)

The secret to asking for the right things and receiving the right things is abiding in Jesus! Many people have no prayer life because (a) they are too busy, and (b) they really do not want God to interfere with their plans, goals, or ambitions. The carnal nature has a theme song that everyone loves to hear (remember, everyone has a carnal nature).

The title is, "I did it my way." (My apology to the late Frank Sinatra who made the song so popular.) We have to be honest! The carnal nature wants what it wants and living in reverent submission to God's will is a great challenge. Which activity is easier? Either going, doing, planning, buying, and selling or reverently waiting on God. You know the answer. This is why Jesus said, **"Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."** (Luke 18:25)

Larry Wilson

Laws Can Have Unintended Consequences

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The Bible predicts a day is coming when God will send a sequence of judgments on the world. The Bible also predicts that mankind will respond to God's wrath with a series of "well-intentioned laws" and unintended consequences will follow. The beast mentioned in the text above is called Babylon in the book of Revelation.

Babylon will be a crisis government that will spring to life shortly after God's judgments begin. While the entities that will develop into Babylon already exist today, Babylon will not form until God's time arrives. Many people do not anticipate the coming crisis that will have no equal in scope or scale since Noah's flood.

God's coming judgments will devastate the world and its infrastructures. The deaths of 1.75 billion people and the smouldering ruins of *thousands* of cities will force world leaders to respond to the reality that there is an Almighty God and He is very angry with mankind. Rising from the "sea of panicked humanity," the beast (Babylon) represents mankind's global attempt to appease God so that His wrath will end.

How the Beast Forms

Governments are sometimes illustrated in Bible prophecy as beasts because beasts will do whatever is necessary to survive. When the political leaders of the world experience God's judgments, they (like everyone else) will be filled with terror and panic.

Fearing that more judgments will follow, world leaders will tell the world's religious leaders to find a solution that will stop God's wrath. I believe religious leaders will gather at a world council to determine the best possible way to appease God so that His wrath will cease. Their options will be limited and they will conclude that one organization having worldwide authority will be necessary.

This "crisis government" (the beast, Babylon) will examine each nation and dictate to its national leaders what is "acceptable and unacceptable behavior" in God's sight. The world's religious leaders will reason that if sinful behavior provoked God's wrath to break out, then righteous behavior should appease God and stop His wrath. Even though this solution will appear logical to most people, there will be a huge problem.

Because the world is religiously diverse, various nations will direct their citizens to appease God in different ways. For example, the mandated solution for Moslem nations will be different than the mandated solution for Catholic nations. The beast's duplicity – one worldwide organization attempting to appease one angry God with different laws in different nations – explains why the beast is called "Babylon." Babylon means confusion.

Martial Law Will Terminate Individual Rights

God's coming judgments (the first four trumpets described in Revelation 8) will devastate the infrastructures of the world. This devastation will necessitate martial law. Governments will suspend constitutional rights and civil jurisprudence will be "set aside until the crisis is over."

Historically, martial law has been a tool used by nations to (a) suspend individual rights, (b) concentrate executive power, (c) expedite decisions, and (d) implement laws that are thought to be necessary for the survival of the government. Anarchy flourishes where there is no government, so martial law is usually justified as the best way to maintain any semblance of order in a crisis. At first, Babylon (the beast) will not dissolve the governmental structures of the nations.

Instead, each nation will implement its own version of martial law and the leaders having executive power will submit to Babylon's directives out of fear for the next event. There will be no need for constitutional amendments or popular vote.

The political leaders will submit to Babylon's demands because survivors will be highly motivated to appease Almighty God so that His judgments will cease, and the leaders will not want to offend God any further. The Bible is clear that civil authorities will carry out Babylon's demands without resistance. **". . . .and all the world wondered after the beast."** (Revelation 13:3)

Babylon will organize as a result of a world crisis of terror, destruction, and anxiety. Political and religious leaders of the world will have good intentions. After all, what could be more effective in appeasing an angry God than outlawing behavior that God condemns? In their rush to appease God's wrath, Babylon will make and enforce laws that will have unintended consequences. Many innocent people will be hurt by Babylon's laws, and it will be these good people who will be the ones who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

After the worldwide government of Babylon establishes martial law and begins to function, the devil will arrive and take over Babylon's leadership. He will turn the organization into a malicious beast. *Absolute power corrupts absolutely.* The devil himself will give Babylon extraordinary power and authority. **". . . . The dragon** [the devil] **gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority."** (Revelation 13:2, insertion mine)

Lucifer has a plan. Once God's wrath is released and the beast is born, the devil will make Babylon into his hand puppet. **"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with *the remnant of her seed,* which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."** (Revelation 12:17, KJV, italics mine)

To change conduct that is offensive to God, *the only tools* that religious and political leaders can use are legislation and punishment. Babylon will create many laws which the nations of the world (functioning under martial law) will implement and enforce. Civil authorities will arrest and impose severe penalties on anyone breaking the laws.

Their justification will be simple: "We have to do whatever it takes to avoid making God angry." God will allow Babylon to gain control over the nations without firing a single bullet. The political

leaders will fearfully submit to Babylon's directives in hopes that compliance will end God's judgments.

This process explains how and why the topic of worship will become an inflammatory matter all over the world. *A time is coming when mankind will attempt to appease God through worship and by outlawing sinful behavior, but the unintended consequences of these laws will be to persecute the saints – the remnant of the woman who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.*

History Repeats Itself

When Justinian I (A.D. 483-565) became the ruler of what remained of the Roman Empire in A.D. 527, he aspired to rebuild and restore the empire to its former glory. The empire was in shambles and he faced extraordinary challenges. We can learn about Justinian's efforts by examining the laws he created.

Laws are created by those who have power to resolve problems, and Justinian's laws reveal the problems he faced and his ambitions. In fact, Justinian's codex (his laws) reveals an emperor who was convinced that Christianity could unify a fractured empire.

Historians say that Rome fell for many reasons, but four elements came together in a "perfect storm" and brought down the empire. First, there was a loss of respect and confidence in Rome's leadership. Second, economic problems and lack of funds decimated Rome's military. Third, demographics changed.

Tribal nations became populous, powerful, and assertive. Finally, the spread of Christianity was unstoppable. Christianity undermined Roman authority because Christians would not worship Caesar as God and the relentless persecution of Christians only caused Christianity to flourish. When these four elements are merged, the reason the old Roman Empire fell is rather easy to understand.

When Justinian came to power, Europe and northern Africa had splintered into tribal nations and the city of Rome had been pillaged and burned just fifty years earlier. Western civilization was fragmented by religion, ethnicity, culture, and language. Justinian knew that he could not directly impose Roman authority on the tribal nations that had pulled the empire apart.

He did not have the military might to force them into submission. However, Justinian believed there was an *indirect* way to unify and rebuild the Roman Empire. About A.D. 533 he created this law: *Everyone under the jurisdiction of the empire is required to be a Christian.*

Justinian believed that Christianity would help unify the Roman Empire and compared to other religions, Christianity was a good thing. Christianity exalted honesty, integrity and it had one Supreme God (unlike the polytheistic religion of the Romans).

When Justinian imposed his demand that everyone under the jurisdiction of the empire must be

a Christian, he also bequeathed authority to the head of the Christian Church *at Rome* (the pope) to determine who was a Christian and who was not. (This was a political solution that would later prove to be disastrous.)

The pope could not implement Justinian's law in A.D. 533 because three tribal nations (the Ostrogoths, Heruli and Vandals) were waging war against his authority. These tribal nations were opposed to certain religious views which the pope had endorsed and they wanted to kill the pope for corrupting the Christian faith. To make matters worse, Justinian's law and his deference to the pope made the tribal nations furious.

A series of deadly battles took place between 534 and 537 and eventually, the Heruli and the Vandals were uprooted. In A.D. 537, the Ostrogoths set siege to the city of Rome in hopes of starving the city residents and capturing the pope, but Justinian's general, Belisarius, arrived and broke the siege.

So, Pope Silverius escaped without harm. After the rescue, Belisarius discovered correspondence indicating that Pope Silverius had been secretly negotiating with the Ostrogoths to end the siege and Belisarius was outraged. Belisairus removed Silverius as pope and demoted him to the position of monk. This happened in March, A.D. 537.

When Belisarius removed Silverius from office, Belisarius appointed Vigilius to be the next pope. About a year later, in A.D. 538, Pope Vigilius began to exercise authority that previous popes did not have. As you might expect, Vigilius abused his enormous power and over time, the Roman Catholic Church dominated all of Europe! *Justinian created a law that had unintended consequences for 1,260 years!* Even then, the devil had made a hand puppet out of the Roman Catholic Church. He took control of it and through the Church found a way to persecute God's people.

"When the dragon [the devil] **saw that he had been hurled to the Earth** [cast out of Heaven on Resurrection Sunday]**, he pursued the woman** [the people of God] **who had given birth to the male child** [Jesus in 4 B.C.]**. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly** [escape] **to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time** [1,260 years]**, out of the serpent's reach."** (Revelation 12:13,14, insertions mine)

This time period of 1,260 years mentioned in Revelation 12 ended on February 20, 1798 when General Berthier, obeying orders from Napoleon, entered Vatican City and arrested the pope on the grounds that the pope refused to renounce temporal (civil) authority over Europe.

On March 7, 1798, Napoleon's army entered Rome and established the Roman Republic. The civil power of the papacy was finally broken in Europe. When we understand the history of these events in 1798, we can see that Lucifer began chasing God's people in A.D. 538. Using the Roman Catholic Church as a hand puppet, John saw in vision that the devil chased the woman into the wilderness for 1,260 years and history affirms that "the persecuted" eventually became "the persecutors" of the woman.

We Are Living During the Intermission

The Bible indicates there are two periods of persecution for the saints with a short intermission in between. The first period of persecution lasted 1,260 years. (A.D. 538-1798) The second period of persecution lies just ahead and it will last forty-two months.

We are living during the intermission (1798 to the present). Many people believe there will be a pre-tribulation rapture and they will escape the Great Tribulation, but the Bible does not teach this. Instead, it teaches that God has – and will – permit His people to be persecuted! Consider these three reasons. First, persecution purifies the church (the body of Christ). Nominal Christians cannot endure persecution. Second, persecution matures our faith, our love for God, and our love for those who suffer for His sake.

Third, persecution causes God’s children to "hunger and thirst" after the Word of God. No martyr ever went to the stake ambivalent about right and wrong. When a person is threatened with suffering and death because of his determination to uphold God’s Word, the Word of God becomes his bread and water. Think about this: If salvation comes through faith in God, then faith has to be tested to determine if we are faith-full. History will be repeated. Bible prophecy leaves no room for doubt.

Larry Wilson

Man's Beliefs Have No Impact on Reality

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Shortly before His death, Jesus had a private talk with His disciples. They wanted to know about the end of the world and the establishment of the kingdom of God. This discussion is recorded in Matthew 24 and 25 (portions are also found in Mark 13 and Luke 21). Please examine four statements given by Jesus as He discussed this topic:

First: **"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."** (Matthew 24:44)

Second: **"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."** (Matthew 24:36)

Third: **"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."** (Matthew 24:32-34)

Fourth: **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:37-39)

When Matthew 24 and 25 are carefully examined as one presentation, Jesus *appears* to make conflicting statements. For example, in the third text, Jesus speaks about the lesson of the fig tree, indicating there will be signs revealing that His coming *is at the door*, but in the first text, Jesus says His coming will occur when it is not expected. How do these statements align?

Additionally, Jesus says in the second text that no one, including Himself, knows when He will return. Only the Father knows. Will the Father announce the timing of the Second Coming a few hours before it occurs? Why would the Father hide this information from Jesus?

The final text suggests that people will be attending weddings and going about the usual routines of life on the day that Jesus returns. Given that Jesus made these statements directly, we know they are true, but how do we reconcile them with all that is said in the Bible about the Second Coming?

For example, the Bible indicates in Revelation 16:12-21 that Armageddon will be underway (sixth bowl), a great earthquake will move the islands and mountains, and huge hailstones will fall at the Second Coming (seventh bowl). How can Jesus' appearing come as a surprise when Armageddon is occurring and when the islands and mountains are moving out of their places?

There is a solution to the apparent contradictions given in Matthew 24 and 25. Of course, every word Jesus spoke is true, but the truth may not be immediately obvious. I have found a solution that resolves these apparent conflicts for me and I hope you will consider the following explanation.

When Jesus spoke to His disciples, He did not speak on His own. The Father put words in His mouth in much the same way that God puts words in the mouths of prophets. (Compare John 14:10,24; 17:8 with Ezekiel 2 & 3, and Isaiah 6.) When Jesus lived on Earth, He lived within the parameters and limitations which the Father imposed on Him. (Hebrews 5:7-10, Psalm 2:7-12) Jesus laid aside His powers of divinity before He became a man.

When He walked on Earth, He could not use His powers of divinity and remain within the Father's will. This explains why His first temptation in the wilderness (turning stones into bread) was to use His powers of divinity. (Matthew 4:3) To redeem mankind, Jesus could not exercise His own will or His powers of divinity. **"For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me."** (John 6:38)

When Jesus spoke to the disciples in Matthew 24 and 25, the New Testament did not exist. Jesus had not died on the cross and the book of Revelation did not exist. This means that Jesus did not know many parts of the plan of redemption when He was on Earth. Later on, after He returned to Heaven, the Father revealed more about the plan of redemption to Jesus. (Revelation 1:1)

Today, human beings can read and understand concepts that Jesus could not see or understand when He was on Earth. The Father's plan to resolve the problem of sin has unfolded over time and it is not shallow, simple, or brief. It is intricate and completely perfect.

This also means that the return of Jesus is not a simple matter. The book of Daniel was sealed up (Daniel 12:4,9) and many of redemption's mysteries had not been made known when Jesus lived on Earth. (Romans 16:25-27) It is important to understand this perspective because words always live within a context. Therefore, truth and context cannot be separated from each other and remain true.

Man's knowledge of the plan of redemption has increased over the past 2,000 years, and consequently, many Bible mysteries have been resolved. We should study the Father's words, spoken through Jesus in Matthew 24 and 25 from this larger point of reference. Let us review the four statements mentioned above in light of what we understand today from the Bible:

First, **"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."** (Matthew 24:44) The Father is not speaking about the physical appearing of Jesus on the 1,335th day of the Great Tribulation, but instead, He is talking about the first day, Day One, when the Great Tribulation begins.

That day will come as an overwhelming surprise! Today people are confused about this because they do not know that the coming of Jesus consists of a series of events that will occur over 1,335 days, and that they will begin without any warning or announcement. Suddenly, the

censer used at the Altar of Incense in Heaven's temple will be cast down (Revelation 8:5) and the whole world's activities will literally come to a stop – "at an hour when you do not expect Him."

Second, **"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."** (Matthew 24:36) When Jesus spoke these words, the date for Christ's return had not been revealed yet because Plan A was still in effect. However, Plan A was later abandoned, and as a result, the Father set fixed dates for several future events. (Acts 1:7)

For example, the day, hour, month, and year for the sixth trumpet has been set. (Revelation 9:15) Daniel reveals that the Great Tribulation is limited to 1,335 days; therefore, the date of the Second Coming will not be a secret to anyone living on Earth during the Great Tribulation!

Third, **"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."** (Matthew 24:32-34)

When the Father spoke these words through Jesus, the Father was talking to His future disciples, not the disciples sitting at Jesus' feet. The Father was speaking about those people who will see the series of events that will lead up to the Second Coming. There will be a definite sequence of events, and many survivors will live through the Great Tribulation and will be taken to Heaven without seeing death.

Fourth, **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:37-39)

Through Noah, the antediluvians knew the year of the flood – long before it happened. (Genesis 6:3) There was no surprise in terms of timing. God has clearly demonstrated that giving people a date for the end of the world is meaningless. There are several reasons why the antediluvians did not listen and subsequently drowned: Some people did not believe that Noah had received a message from God. Others were procrastinators who simply put off preparation indefinitely.

Some did not want their dreams and plans crippled by predictions of doomsday. As so many people today, some did not want to be associated with crazy Noah. I am sure there are other reasons, but ultimately, the antediluvians were caught by complete surprise because they did not know what to watch for.

In fact, I believe that after 120 years, no one even traveled into the countryside to see Noah's folly anymore. When the time came, God told Noah and his family to enter the ark. The animals arrived and the great door of the ark was closed. Seven days later, the antediluvians drowned.

When Jesus' words are aligned with all that the Bible has to say about His return, they make perfect sense. When Jesus' words are taken out of context, a huge problem arises because words cannot be separated from their context and remain true!

Pastor Harold Camping

As you know, May 21, 2011 has come and gone without a rapture, and many people (including Christians) are ridiculing Pastor Harold Camping who boldly predicted and expected to be taken to Heaven on that day. It has been reported that Family Radio (Camping's media organization) spent about $100 million notifying the world that a pre-tribulation rapture would occur on May 21.

Now that the predicted date has passed and the money has been spent, Camping and his followers have been widely ridiculed in the media. Because the passage of time has proven Camping wrong, he has attempted to deflect some of the criticism by saying that May 21 was "a spiritual date." Camping now says believers will be raptured on October 21, 2011. Skeptics, of course, view Camping's new date as a stall tactic – " kicking the can further down the road."

I feel sad for those who sold their homes, cars, and possessions in anticipation of a May 21 rapture. I also feel sad for Mr. Camping and those who put their faith in his prediction. Yet, at the same time, I have to admire the faith and courage of those people who sold their homes, cars, and possessions because they fully believed that life on Earth was over!

That's right, they firmly believed there would be a rapture and their actions confirm their belief. History proves over and over again that man's spiritual beliefs have no bearing on reality. God permits people to believe whatever they want to believe, but their beliefs may or may not align with reality.

When it came time to enter the ark, all but eight people believed Noah was wrong. What effect did their belief have on reality? About 100,000 people believed Jesus would return in 1844. What effect did their belief have on reality? Perhaps as many as 100,000,000 Christians believe there will be a pre-tribulation rapture. What effect will this have on reality?

Our beliefs, faith, hope, and sincerity have no effect on God's plans, and this can be a hard pill to swallow. God will do all that He has promised to do when the fullness of time is reached, but *only* when the fullness of time is reached. Therefore, sincerely believing that something will or will not happen (and setting a date for it) is a matter of intellectual assent and intellectual assent is not to be confused with faith.

The Holy Spirit knows each of our hearts. He is pleased when we love God and one another and live up to all that we know to be right and true. God always rewards those who live by faith. (Hebrews 11:6) The Bible speaks clearly: **"The righteous shall live by faith!"** (Romans 1:17)

Therefore, we should not ridicule those who were deeply disappointed on May 21. We should pray that they will NOT abandon their faith in God, but instead that they will abandon their

prophetic paradigm – their intellectual assent to a pre-tribulation rapture. Camping's prediction was built on faulty rules of interpretation (hermeneutics) and instead of letting go of God, he and his followers need to let go of faulty rules and conclusions.

Whenever faith brings us to a dead end street, there is a painful, but wonderful opportunity to spiritually mature. This process enables growth in grace and faith. When it becomes clear that faith and reality do not align, it is time to restudy and rethink God's Word.

Human beings cannot and do not know the future. Only God knows with certainty how the future will unfold. He has given us certain clues in the books of Daniel and Revelation, but prophetic faith (events awaiting fulfillment) is not to be confused with prophetic fact (events that have taken place).

After many years, Abraham and Sarah grew tired of waiting on the Lord for the promised son. When the reality of what God promised did not appear, their faith in God faded. Rather than restudy and rethink God's Word, Sarah set out to fulfill the Lord's promise herself and Abraham agreed.

You know the dismal result. There is a significant difference between faith and presumption. Faith waits on God, believing that when the fullness of time is right, God Himself will produce the evidence – faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.

On the other hand, impatience leads to presumption. Millions of Christians have become impatient. We want to see our prophetic faith fulfilled "right now." There is a ground swell of desire among Christians for a pre-tribulation rapture or the return of Jesus; however, no matter how sincere the desire, man cannot produce either event.

Mr. Camping became a victim of his own creation. He produced a time line from Bible texts that made perfect sense to him and then he convinced others that his paradigm (actually, a private interpretation) was valid. Today, everyone knows that Camping's paradigm and God's Word d/o not align.

Could Mr. Camping and his followers have been dissuaded from their conviction prior to May 21? Probably not. When intellectual assent and faith are mixed together, nothing but bitter disappointment can force a person into another way of thinking. So, is it better to mix faith and intellectual assent and risk disappointment, or should we take the safe road and avoid the risk of having our faith tested?

Based on what I have observed, Mr. Camping is a man of considerable faith (as was Abraham). Camping and many of his followers acted according to their faith. I have read how one follower cashed out his retirement savings to buy $140,000 in newspaper ads.

What faith! Perhaps a good summary for these actions would be, "Right heart – wrong head." I have heard it said that "genuine Christians" would never do such a foolish thing – sell their possessions or give everything they have to help others hear about the return of Jesus.

What nonsense. Christians who are unwilling to live by faith are worse off in many ways than those who are willing to live by faith and fail. It is far better to exercise faith and fail, than to walk by sight and do nothing for God. God knows that the human race is full of people having right hearts and wrong heads and He also knows that millions of people would be happy to do His will if only they actually knew His will! When our beliefs are shattered, two options usually surface: We can either abandon the Lord as Peter did in Pilate's judgment hall, or we can get out the Word of God to see where we went wrong.

God's Word is truth, but our understanding of God's Word is always incomplete. Harold Camping's public failure and humiliation should be a present reminder of this fact. Instead of condemning Mr. Camping and his followers, we need to encourage them to restudy and rethink the elements of their faith.

We should commend them for their faith. Their failure may be fodder for skeptics and critical Christians, but Camping and his followers have given us a prophetic sample of what faith in God actually does. Think about this: Where there is no possibility for failure, faith is impossible. Faith involves risk, otherwise there is no need for faith.

Standing Principles

God's Word is true and it can be trusted, but there are three standing principles which Christians cannot ignore at this late hour:

1. True Bible study will never put the Bible in a state of internal conflict. Contrary to public opinion, the Bible does not teach conflicting concepts. This is a matter which most Christians do not fully appreciate. In other words, until we understand everything said in the Bible about a topic, we cannot be sure of anything said about the topic.

There are many "apparent conflicts" in the Bible and resolving them is not easy, but necessary. Camping's prophetic views are obviously flawed. He put the Bible in a state of internal conflict. He has misinterpreted many Bible concepts and the passage of time has proven twice (1994 and 2011) that his rules of interpretation are not valid and his prophetic schematic is wrong.

2. Before Noah and his family entered the ark, God gave a sign to the antediluvians, but they did not see it. God confirmed the end of the world had come by sending the animals into the ark. Unclean animals arrived in pairs and clean animals arrived in groups of seven.

Think about this: Noah's ark was not proof that a flood was coming.The orderly arrival of the animals was THE divine sign that should have attracted the attention of the antediluvians. God's humble creatures entered the ark when the time arrived, but who was paying attention? Who was watching and waiting?

The books of Daniel and Revelation outline a clear sequence of prophetic events that will transpire prior to the Second Coming. When we see this sequence begin, we will know that the end has come. *Until the sequence begins, the end is not here.* Do not sell your home, assets, or

quit your job until you see the sequence begin. The only exception to this counsel is a divine revelation. If God personally leads you or instructs you to do something, then do so by all means – but do not ask or expect others to do the same.

When God has something to say, He speaks for Himself. We must not put words in God's mouth. If God calls you to be a prophet and requires you to say something to others as His spokesperson, then speak up. If the Bible and the Holy Spirit validate your testimony, your calling will prove true. If the Bible and the Holy Spirit do not validate your testimony, your calling is imaginary and God will deal with you accordingly. (See Ezekiel 13:1-16.)

3. Anxiety is increasing. The world is economically distressed. The world is ecologically distressed. The world is geophysically distressed. The world is politically distressed. The population is relentlessly increasing each day. Resources are dwindling. It is obvious we are in a pressure cooker that has no vent.

The flame underneath the cooker is getting hotter and a great explosion is inevitable. When will the final 1,335 days begin? *I don't know.* I don't know. **I don't know. - I do believe that we are living on the doorstep. I do not know when we will enter the 1,335 day countdown to Christ's appearing.Therefore, I am laying plans for next year. Even though I am watching and waiting for a nuclear exchange and the casting down of the censer, life goes on and my endeavor for the Lord must continue.**

Even though next month (August 2011) contains a date of interest,* I continue to make plans for next year because a date of interest IS NOT a date of importance. When the censer comes down and the global earthquake occurs, my plans for the future will be terminated and God's plan for the future will unfold.Until that happens, God requires His children to faithfully keep about their work and endeavors. Tragedies and calamities are everywhere and they are increasing. People need help. People need encouragement and consolation.

Currently, there is no evidence (corporately speaking) that God wants His people to sell their possessions and quit their jobs. However, there are many places where we can financially help those who have lost everything. We have a tremendous opportunity to help those who are questioning God's love.

We have an opportunity to explain what faith in God really means. We have an opportunity to increase Bible literacy. People need to understand that faith in God begins with surrender to God's will – to go, to be, and to do as He directs. Faith is refined through trials and tribulation, all the while patiently trusting in God with steadfast determination. You will know that your faith in God is viable when the Comforter puts a peace within your soul that passes understanding. It is described as being joyful without knowing why you are happy!

If you happen to know any of Camping's followers, reach out and comfort them. Strengthen their faith and if possible, invite them to restudy and rethink their understanding of the Bible. The end is close, but not here. Until the end arrives, keep about the King's business. Use your talents for the Lord!

Larry Wilson

*** Note**:A person cannot study the seventeen apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel and Revelation and ignore the eighteen prophetic time periods found in them. God has defined eighteen prophetic time periods and each one has to be properly located or positioned.

Because the Great Tribulation will be 1,335 days in length, because the eighteen prophetic time periods in Daniel and Revelation intricately align with each other, and because "with God, timing is everything," I have freely speculated on the timing of the 1,335 days with the declaration that I do not know when the 1,335 days will begin. Be assured, everyone on Earth will be alerted when they begin. Many Christians scoff at the study of prophecy and "time study" as though it might be evil.

How sad. The first time Jesus was on Earth, He came unexpectedly and was ultimately rejected. For many people, His Second Coming will have the same results. Notice Peter's words: **"Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out *the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing* when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.**

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things." (1 Peter 1:10-12, italics mine)

How Should Christians Respond to Paul

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Christians have diverse opinions regarding what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:1-15. For example, Paul could have been writing that it is a sin for men to wear long hair like women and women to wear short hair like men. Paul's counsel to the church at Corinth was based on Old Testament principles that superficial students of the Bible do not understand or appreciate. For this reason, Christians frequently distort Paul's writings and arrive at conclusions that Paul did not intend. The apostle Peter also noticed this problem:

"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. -" (2 Peter 3:15,16)

To better understand Paul's epistle to the church at Corinth, we first have to understand what Paul was thinking. Please consider Paul's thoughts on the imminent return of Jesus and how he thought this should affect marriage:

"Because of the present crisis [the imminent return of Jesus]**, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.**

But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this [so stay as you are]**. What I mean, brothers, *is that the time is short*. *From now on those who have wives should*** [abstain from sex and] ***live as if they had none*****; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. *For this world in its present form is passing away*** [anytime now]**."** (1 Corinthians 7:28-31, insertions and italics mine)

Even though Paul recommended "remain as you are," Paul also understood human nature. He also wrote:

"I wish that all men were [as unaffected by sexual attraction] **as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for *it is better to marry than to burn with passion*."** (1 Corinthians 7:7-9, insertion and italics mine)

Paul had a view of life that was affected by his belief that the end of the world was imminent – in fact, he clearly wrote, **"time is short. *From now on* those who have wives should live as if**

they had none." He counseled that men and women should abstain from sexual relations because Jesus would appear soon. Paul evidently reasoned the idea that sexual relations should cease before the appearing of the Lord from a parallel of Moses' command to Israel at Mt. Sinai:

"After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. Then he said to the people, 'Prepare yourselves for the third day. *Abstain from sexual relations*.' On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain." (Exodus 19:14-17, italics mine)

Paul's View on Authority

Paul was the son of a Pharisee. No doubt, he became a Pharisee because he loved to study law. He was fascinated by the results that occur in people when they heed divine law. After his conversion, Paul spent three studious years in isolation. (Galatians 1:18) He went to "Desert University" to rethink and restudy his understanding of God and his world view.

When Paul was alone in the desert with portions of the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit enlightened Paul and he learned how and why God *legitimately* rejected the nation of Israel as trustees of His gospel. Paul also discovered that God's next step in the plan of redemption was the Christian movement (Ephesians 3:1-11) and Paul discovered that everyone who believes in Christ is considered (by God) to be an heir of Abraham. (Galatians 3:28,29)

Because very few of the early Christians were well educated, not many of them could follow Paul's logic. Few people understood *why* Paul said what he said and this gulf of ignorance led to enormous confusion (and it still does). Various church elders attempted to build arguments using Paul's writings without first understanding the basis for Paul's argument and consequently, more chaos ensued. This is why Peter made the remark that some Christians were distorting Paul's writings "to their own destruction."

Some of Paul's statements appear to be very strange when viewed 2,000 years after he wrote them. Paul's counsel on hair length fits into this category. Consider this passage and notice the basis for his argument:

"Does not *the very nature of things* teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering." (1 Corinthians 11:14,15, italics mine)

From Paul's perspective, "the very nature of things" referred to the fact that a man with long hair looked like a woman and a woman with short hair looked like a man. What does hair length have to do with "the very nature of things"? Look at this passage:

"A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your

God detests anyone who does this." (Deuteronomy 22:5)

God insists that women and men look different? The simple answer is "authority." Why do generals dress differently than colonels who dress differently from sergeants who dress differently from privates? In a word, "authority." Our dress speaks about our authority; this is why privates do not look like generals and presidents do not look like homeless wanderers. Follow Paul's words to understand the role he believed authority has in life:

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." (Romans 13:1,2)

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear. . . ." (Ephesians 6:1,5)

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church*, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits [obeys] **to Christ, so also wives should submit** [obey] **to their husbands in everything."** (Ephesians 5:22-24, insertions and italics mine)

Paul viewed life as a hierarchy of authority and Paul clearly put women below men in terms of authority.

"To the woman he [God] **said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' "** (Genesis 3:16)

It is God's plan that each husband "should wear the pants" and be the spiritual leader of his household. It is God's plan that a man should love his wife (as Christ loved His church and gave His life for it) and that each wife should obey her husband as she obeys the Lord. It was God's plan that husbands train up their children properly. In fact, the Lord chose Abraham so that he would train up his children to do right and refuse wrong:

"For I have chosen him [Abraham]**, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."** (Genesis 18:19, insertion mine)

Paul saw the happiness and beneficial order which divine law and love could achieve in the home, the church, and the nation if divine order was implemented, and many of Paul's arguments are consistently based on this world view. Look at his counsel regarding the choice of church leaders:

"An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to

drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined." (Titus 1:6-8)

Now that we have reviewed a few concepts about Paul's interest and devotion to law and order (the very nature of things), consider these words from Paul:

"Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head – it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. - **For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head."** (1 Corinthians 11:4-10)

Three elements stand out in this passage. First, if a man prays with his head covered, he dishonors his head because man was created in the image and glory of God. However, if a woman prays with her head uncovered, she dishonors her head because she is under the authority of her husband or father. Women should not mimic men for they were created for men.

Second, men did not come from women and men were not created for women. Paul says this puts women in a lower position. Therefore, **"the woman ought to have a sign of authority upon her head."** Third, if this passage was everything that Paul said about the hierarchy of authority between men and women, every woman would have two good reasons to be angry with Paul. Please keep reading!

"In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. *Judge for yourselves:* Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

Does not the very nature of things [the natural order established by God] **teach you that if a man has long hair** [so that he looks like a woman]**, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice** [I have nothing further to say than an appeal for natural order] **– nor do the** [other] **churches of God** [located around the region]**. "** (1 Corinthians 11:11-16, insertions and italics mine)

Summary

The hierarchy advocated by Paul is biblical, reasonable, and understandable, but limited to Paul's application. God has made two timeless declarations: Husbands have higher authority (Genesis 3:16) and there should be no confusion between the sexes (Deuteronomy 22:5). Contrary to what some people say, Paul does not define the will of God on hair length and head

covering. Instead, Paul borrows two declarations from God to support a position on hair length and head covering.

Cross dressing is unacceptable in God's sight because it causes sexual confusion. Sexual confusion is wrong because it dilutes or redirects authority. High priests did not dress like other priests because they had higher authority, and women should not look like men because men have also been given higher authority.

Paul was an advocate of hierarchy because divine order (happiness) stems from divine authority (love). A Christian shows respect for divine authority by obeying Jesus' statement, **"If you love me, you will obey what I command."** (John 14:15) Obedience that springs from love is joyful, enabling, and ennobling. Coerced obedience always produces rebellion and apostasy.

God has not declared that a woman should cover her head when praying. Paul argued for the idea because he viewed it as a sign of submission (woman's lower standing). *God has not declared that a man should wear short hair or a woman must wear long hair.* Paul argued for the idea because he viewed it as "the natural order of things."

Of course, views about natural order can change over time. Cultures come and go. However, there is nothing wrong with a woman wearing short hair or a man wearing long hair as long as a clear distinction remains between men and women.

Larry Wilson

Fear Monsters

Author: Larry W. Wilson

1 John 4:18

According to a Greek legend, there was a courtier named Damocles (dam-o-clees) who served a tyrant. King Dionysius II (di-o-nee-see-us) was lavishly self-indulgent, incompetent and immoral. Dionysius had obtained the throne through subterfuge and mutiny, and his subjects despised him for it.

The king employed Damocles primarily because he was witty and flattered the king. One day, Damocles noticed the king was very worried. Damocles told the king he should not fret over those who wanted to kill him, but instead, focus on his many blessings. When Damocles noticed that the king was actually listening to him, he became enthusiastic.

He told the king to consider all the many blessings the gods had given him such as his good fortune, great power and authority, and the greatest luxuries the world could offer. So, there was no reason to be despondent. The king listened, but said nothing. After pondering Damocles' pep talk for a few minutes, the king commanded they trade places.

He wanted Damocles to feel what he felt! So, the king adorned Damocles with his crown and the finest garments from his closet. He put Damocles in the lap of luxury, with a hundred beautiful maidens fulfilling every request. He gave Damocles authority over his generals.

Finally, Dionysius placed a great sword above the throne, hung by a single hair from a horse's tail. After just a few hours of sitting on the throne, Damocles begged the king to switch places because he did not want to be so highly blessed anymore. You may smile, but the moral of the story is quite simple: A "fear monster" will ruin your happiness, even if you have everything the world offers!

The world is full of "fear monsters" and new swords hanging by a single hair from a horse's tail keep appearing every day! For example, I have friends who have obtained permits to carry concealed weapons because they are afraid of people who carry concealed weapons without permits.

I have friends who will not go out after dark because they are afraid of the people who like to go out after dark. I have friends who go through their mail and rip off their names and addresses from each envelope because they are afraid that someone will go through their garbage and steal their identity.

I have friends who are afraid to stand up for what they believe is right in the workplace because they fear they will lose their job. I have unemployed friends who are afraid they will never find a job. I have friends who cannot afford health insurance and they are afraid they will get sick and medical expenses will push them into medical bankruptcy. I have friends who realize the

unfunded liabilities of our government will never be met (approximately $114 trillion dollars) and they are afraid their social security checks will be reduced or eliminated.

I have farmer and rancher friends who are afraid that extremes in weather will cause their crops to fail, pushing them into bankruptcy. Some friends are afraid the Great Tribulation will begin soon and this will ruin their dreams and goals. And yes, I also have friends who are afraid they will not be saved when Jesus comes.I could go on and on with this list of fear monsters, but you get the point. Fear monsters are everywhere. It is ironic that even though fear monsters are lurking everywhere, there is very little fear of the living God now.

People from all walks of life are edgy because they sense the whole world is spiraling out of control. We live in an environment where fear and uncertainty are easily justified (this means fear monsters are real and rational). During July 2011, the Congress of the United States put on a worldwide show as it wrangled back and forth over a new debt ceiling.

Everyone in the world has been put on notice that the USA cannot afford to borrow forty-two cents for each dollar it currently spends. Simple logic says that sweeping and painful changes are forthcoming in this country and when fear becomes rational, *paralysis of the analysis* tends to set in. People become frozen in their tracks. People do not know what to do. People are reluctant to make long range decisions when tomorrow becomes highly uncertain because a single misstep could prove to be financially fatal.

Rich people, middle class people, poor people, and rabbits all do the same thing when they are frightened; they become paralyzed with fear. Rich people (and companies managed by them) will not create more jobs when they are worried about economic uncertainty. Middle class people will not freely spend their hard earned dollars when they are frightened by economic uncertainty and the lower half of the United States' population is barely making ends meet.

So, the economy languishes, unemployment goes up, prices go up, and the unemployed, the poor, and the elderly find themselves in a dire situation. A giant fear monster has been released from its cage and politicians are smart enough to know that suffering brings anger and anger produces anarchy.

At this very moment, Greece is a perfect example of this sequence. When anarchy rises, uncertainty only gets worse and a nation ceases to thrive. Instead, it becomes a slave to its debtors. Unfortunately, an economy is like an airplane. An airplane has to reach and maintain a certain speed (cash flow) in order to fly and it also has to accomplish this speed while observing the laws of gravity (expenditures) and aerodynamics (revenue created by taxes).

I have not shared information about our present situation to increase your fears. Instead, I have identified a few fear monsters to remind you that there is no need to be tormented or paralyzed by them. Of course, a certain amount of fear is healthy and normal, but we cannot allow fear monsters to steal our peace and joy. If you are having trouble with fear monsters, there is a way to defeat them. The apostle John wrote, **"But perfect love drives out fear. . ."** (1 John 4:18)

Jesus further expained this by saying, **"If you obey my commands, you will remain in my**

love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." (John 15:10) Remaining in Christ's love requires strong determination and effort. It is an experience that matures over time. In a nutshell, it works like this: God knows each person by name. He even knows the number of hairs on our heads. God loves each person and He eagerly seeks to have a deep relationship with each of us that will eliminate all fear, but He allows us to determine the depth of the relationship.

The relationship we have with God is determined by our willingness to surrender to His wisdom and purposes. The problem with sinners is that we exalt our wisdom above God's wisdom and we put our goals above His purposes. This conflict explains why many Christians maintain a shallow relationship with God.

Fear monsters cannot be defeated in a shallow relationship with God. Fear monsters are only neutralized when a person is fully surrendered to God's will. The peace which Jesus gives only arrives when perfect (as in complete) love is present. This peace takes the dentures out of the fear monsters. Jesus said, **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give** [peace] **to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled** [abide in me] **and do not be afraid."** (John 14:27, insertions mine)

Jesus said, **"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money** [or any other god]**. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.**

Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? . . . . So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:24,25, 31-34)

Jesus said, **"with God all things are possible."** (Matthew 19:26) This truth is priceless. It means that God can and will take care of us if we are willing to allow Him. Our job is to surrender to the Lord each day (this means that we must go as He directs, do as He commands, and be all that He wants us to be) and He will take care of everything else. Living by faith is not complicated, but it is difficult. Living by faith means doing all that you know to be right and honorable in God's sight and leaving the consequences with Him.

Corporately speaking, the sword of Damocles is hanging above each of our heads by a single hair from a horse's tail. The world is spiraling out of control. The Great Tribulation will soon begin, but no matter what happens, Jesus will see His children through to the very end (whatever our end will be). **"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 8:38,39)

Peter wrote, **"The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray."** (1 Peter 4:7) *Prayer is to fear what light is to darkness.* Prayer brings God in and His loving presence pushes fear monsters out the back door! Prayer is communion with God. Prayer includes conversation with God.

Prayer includes expressions of gratitude and petitions. Prayer also includes listening – not for God's audible voice, but for a voice. For example, there have been many situations in my life that I did not know what to do. So, I prayed about the matter. I asked the Lord for wisdom. I meditated on the problem (weighed the pros and cons).

Then, I waited to see what He might say. I have had some prayers unanswered for days, weeks, months, and years, but I have learned that God always sends an answer! In some cases, the Lord may speak through a person who has no idea that he/she just gave me the solution that I was seeking.

Sometimes, the timing involved in a particular situation will produce an amazing answer to prayer, and sometimes, to be honest, I have been so befuddled and distracted that I missed God's response – for awhile. Being clear minded so that we can *receive and accept* God's direction is very important.

Finally, there is one aspect of prayer that cannot be overlooked. When we present our petitions and concerns to the Lord, He hears and takes notice. Jesus said, **"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."** (Matthew 6:7,8)

Therefore, instead of repeating the same prayers over and over like a broken record, prayer life should focus on our higher needs, such as our need for patience, peace, joy, strength, and grace to accept the things that we cannot change and wisdom to make the best of our situation each day.

Three times Paul prayed for the Lord to remove a thorn in his flesh, but the Lord said, "No." Instead, God used the thorn in Paul's flesh as an indicator. As long as Paul was in Christ, the thorn was no problem at all (2 Corinthians 12:7-9), but Paul knew the moment he walked away from Christ, the thorn would suddenly begin to hurt.

The Lord kept the thorn in Paul as a reminder of Paul's connection with his Master. Has the Lord left a thorn in your flesh? It is a reminder. Moses pestered the Lord to let him enter the promised land. But the Lord said "No" and He instructed Moses, **"Do not speak to me anymore about this matter."** (Deuteronomy 3:26)

God did not want to discuss the promised land because God had a better plan for Moses. Little did Moses know that after his death, he would be taken to Heaven. The lesson is that Moses humbly accepted God's authority and I am sure that after the Lord resurrected Moses, he was thrilled with the result.

Larry Wilson

Do I Need to be Rebaptized?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" Mr. Wilson:

I was baptized when I was a baby. Do I need to be rebaptized?
Sincerely,
Brian"

"I was baptized when I was 12 and now I am 36. I drifted in and out of various churches until I was 30. My spiritual life today is much improved than when I was baptized. Should I be rebaptized?
Thanks,
Robert"

"I am fifty-one years old. I fell away from the Lord and lived an immoral life for about ten years. I have been attending church for the past three years. Should I be rebaptized?
Thank you,
Marion"

Dear Brian, Robert, and Marion:

Before I respond to your questions, please consider a little background information on baptism:

Because of a severe famine, Abraham's descendants moved into Egypt. After they relocated, the famine became so dire that everyone who lived in Egypt, including the Israelites, sold themselves to Pharaoh for food. (See Genesis 47.) Over time, the Israelites became very important to the economy in Egypt.

They provided cheap labor for a succession of Pharaohs for hundreds of years. (I believe some of the pyramids are an enduring testimony of their bondage.) Their bondage and suffering appeared to be endless until the Lord sent Moses to deliver Israel out of Egypt.

As a precondition for deliverance, the Lord required the Israelites to show respect for His higher authority. He commanded the Israelites to rest from their labors on His holy Sabbath. This act of defiance (resting on Sabbath) put Pharaoh on notice that a rebellion had begun in Goshen, where the Israelites lived.

Pharaoh responded by promptly increasing their workload with unreasonable demands. I believe Pharaoh did this for two reasons: First, if slaves had time to rest from their labors, then their work quotas were obviously insufficient. Second, as a king, he could not tolerate rebellion and still remain powerful in the eyes of his subjects.

Therefore, he asserted his authority by imposing great suffering on the Israelites. For economic,

political, and spiritual reasons, Pharaoh could not afford to let his slaves obey any other god than himself. (The Egyptians revered the Pharaohs as descendants of the gods and naturally, the Pharaohs did everything possible to protect and perpetuate this spiritual status.)

"Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: 'Why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, "Make bricks!" Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.' Pharaoh said, 'Lazy, that's what you are – lazy!

That is why you keep saying, "Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.' Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks." The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, 'You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.'

When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, 'May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.'" (Exodus 5:15-21)

God sent ten horrible plagues upon Egypt, and finally, Pharaoh finally allowed Israel to leave Egypt. No sooner had Israel departed than Pharaoh had a change of heart. He gathered up a huge army including 600 of his best chariots and all of the other chariots of Egypt. He chased after *his* slaves and found them near the Red Sea at Pi Hahrioth. When the Israelites saw Pharaoh and his mighty army approaching, they were overwhelmed with anxiety. They had no weapons or defense.

"They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, "Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians?" It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!' Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.' " (Exodus 14:11-13)

Pharaoh would have immediately captured the Israelites, but the Lord who had been leading Israel in a cloud, moved from the front of the Israelite caravan to the rear of the camp. The Lord descended in a cloud of fire and darkness between the two groups.

Throughout the night, a dense darkness enveloped Pharaoh and his army, but at the same time, the cloud provided light for the camp of the Israelites. Shortly after sunset, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and a strong east wind blew the water apart so that dry ground appeared in the middle of the Red Sea.

"And [in the middle of the night] **the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left."** (Exodus 14:22, insertion mine)

A few hours before sunrise, the Egyptian army began to assemble for an attack on Israel, but the Lord threw the Egyptian army into confusion. The darkness was so dense they could not

see one another or which way to go. As this was occurring, the last of the Israelites arrived on the other shore.

When the Lord lifted the darkness over Pharaoh, the king and his army saw an amazing sight. Pharaoh saw the Israelites standing on the other shore and the path through the sea was still open. Immediately, he sized up the situation and gave the order to charge. All of his soldiers raced into the sea without hesitation. When the entire army was in the sea, Moses stretched out his hand again and the waters flowed back. In a matter of moments, Pharaoh and all of his army, including his horses and chariots, disappeared.

Of course, the Israelites were overcome with joy and thanksgiving! A miracle had happened! This story reveals a few facts:

1. Pharaoh lost his firstborn son during the tenth plague. A few days later, in pursuit of his slaves, Pharaoh lost his army and his life. The leadership of Egypt was never heard from again. The nation had been decimated by ten horrible plagues and within a few days of letting the Israelites depart, Egypt did not have a king or an army because Egypt had defied the Lord of Hosts.

2. Although the Israelites were delighted to cross over the Red Sea on dry ground, the Red Sea became a physical barrier. There was no possibility of returning to Egypt; a point they would later lament.

3. Given the tensions of the moment, the Israelites did not realize they were heading into a giant hostile desert.

4. Over time, word spread throughout the surrounding nations that Israel was a special nation with a special God. The God of the Israelites was more powerful than any other god and this information kept tribal kings away from a helpless Israel while the Israelites remained in the desert.

You may be wondering by now, how this story relates to baptism. Everyone is born into slavery because of the curse of sin. We are born with a carnal nature and from time to time, this nature causes us to sin, that is, to do things that are foolish, wrong, and evil. God understands this, so the Holy Spirit is given as a gift to everyone at birth.

The Holy Spirit does His best to lead us into a submissive relationship with God, but many times, we act like Pharaoh. We refuse to do what the Lord wants, even when the evidences of His will are crystal clear. This may seem strange, but when a person becomes willing to do what the Lord wants, persecution always follows.

The Israelites were severely punished for resting from their labors on Sabbath, but they continued to obey the Lord until deliverance came. When the moment of deliverance finally came, they walked out of Egypt. When Pharaoh attempted to recapture his slaves, they walked through the Red Sea. Because they followed the light and put their faith in the Lord, they remained free from slavery.

The parallel to this story is that when a person comes to a place in his life where he is willing to obey the authority of the Lord (faith means to go-be-do as God commands), persecution, grace, and deliverance will come. When a person experiences deliverance, he knows firsthand that he has a Savior.

After a person has such an experience with the Lord, he is qualified to make a public statement by baptism. A person who has experienced deliverance wants to inform the world that he has been set free from the curse of sin, left "the land of Egypt," buried the old man at sea, and entered "the land of Canaan" by God's grace.

No longer a slave to sin, he is a new creation! He has been set free through the power of Jesus! This is the idea behind the ordinance of baptism. Baptism is not a ritual that merits salvation. Baptism is an ordinance that indicates a transforming experience with Jesus has occurred and the new man wants to put the world on notice that he is not the same person any more.

Sometime after entering Canaan, the Jews adopted baptism as a ritual for citizenship. Whenever a Gentile wished to become a Jew, the Gentile had to undergo baptism. This ritual signified the death of the Gentile, his burial at sea, and the resurrection of that person as a Jew. (See how Paul uses this imagery in Romans 6:1-4.) Jesus referred to this ritual in His talk with Nicodemus:

"Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water [that is, willing to become a citizen of the kingdom] **and the Spirit** [that is, willing to receive the spiritual nature that is required in the kingdom of God]**. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."** (John 3:5,6)

No born again person is perfect and it is impossible, as long as the carnal nature remains within us, to live without sinning. Of course, God knows this. A few hours before He went to the cross, Jesus initiated a special ordinance that few Christians really appreciate. This ordinance is foot washing.

"He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' 'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.' 'Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus answered, 'A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.' " (John 13:6-10)

As we travel the highway of life, the feet of born-again pilgrims become dirty with accumulated sins and a periodic "foot washing" is necessary to remove the sin. The foot washing ordinance (again, this is not a ritual that merits salvation) is a miniature baptism. The object lesson of this ordinance is that someone else (representing Jesus) does something for us (washes our feet) that we cannot do for ourselves (remove the guilt of our sins).

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John

13:14,15)

Unfortunately, most Christians ignore the foot washing part of the ordinance when partaking of the Lord's Supper. Many Christians waltz into church and partake of the bread and wine without realizing their desperate need to have their sins removed by Jesus (the foot washing). What is the point of partaking the Lord's Supper if we are unclean? Jesus said, **"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."**

Now that some background has been presented, I can respond to your questions. Brian, if you have experienced "a total makeover," spiritually speaking, since becoming an adult and it is your desire to let everyone know that you have become a disciple of Jesus, I recommend that you be rebaptized.

Robert, if your "in and out" of church experience means that you abandoned the ways of the Lord and lived a sinful life, I recommend that you be rebaptized. On the other hand, if your "in and out of church" experience was largely that of dissatisfaction with various churches and you were continually searching for a more fulfilling experience while living in a way that was pleasing to the Lord, I think a good foot washing with the Lord's Supper will be sufficient. Either way, this is your call.

Finally, Marion, I am happy to learn that you are attending church. I hope and pray that you have found a new and wonderful experience in knowing Jesus. Given your brief comments about your past, I recommend that you be rebaptized also. Let your friends and family know that you wish to renounce your past. You have crossed through the Red Sea and with God's help, you will not be returning to the slavery to sin.

Larry Wilson

Legalism and Grace

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Because the book Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled supports the concept of God's Sabbath rest on the seventh day of the week, people often use the argument that the book promotes legalism and they choose to dismiss the entire book. Unfortunately, most Christians do not observe Saturday as a holy day and further, they misunderstand the differences between legalism and grace.

If Sabbath observance is so important, why don't more Christians know about it? Many people get excited that Revelation will soon be fulfilled, but their excitement quickly ends when they learn that God's seventh day Sabbath will be an issue that separates the sheep from the goats during the Great Tribulation. Before we address the reasons why people call Sabbath worship legalism, we need to consider some basic information regarding legalism and grace.

As far as God is concerned, there are only two types of human beings: Those who submit to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and those who rebel against it. **"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."** (1 Corinthians 2:14) A person does not become a born again person on his own. A rebellious person becomes a born again person when the Holy Spirit finally manages to bring a person to the point he will "surrender all" to Jesus.

No person can serve two masters; therefore, giving up self-mastery and allowing Jesus to be Lord and Master is a very difficult thing to do. When a person "surrenders all," he becomes a different person. The Holy Spirit enables him to love God with all of his heart, mind, and soul, and his neighbors as himself, because without the Holy Spirit within, loving God is contrary to his sinful nature.

When a born again person walks with the Lord, he soon discovers that what he thought was 100% surrender is more like 5% surrender because no one can know the depth of his surrender until he is challenged. The Holy Spirit is like a dentist who uses a bright light to look in our mouths for sensitive spots and hidden cavities.

The Holy Spirit searches our hearts for sensitive spots with the light of truth, to find hidden places where selfishness resides. When the Spirit finds a defect in our character, He reveals this deficiency so that we can overcome it through Christ’s power.

The Holy Spirit endeavors to transform us into a perfect reflection of Christ’s character of love. Many Christians "think" they have surrendered to the Lord, but they lack experience surrendering to the Holy Spirit. Remember, Peter said (with 100% conviction) that he was prepared to go to his death for his Lord (Luke 22:33) and then, a few hours later, he denied that he even knew Jesus. (Luke 22:57-61)

Peter did not know his heart and was unaware of the defects lurking in his character. When Peter denied knowing Jesus, the Holy Spirit finally got through and Peter saw, for the first time, a huge defect in his character. Conversely, Judas refused to acknowledge the defect in his character. Instead of overcoming his defect, it overcame him and he took his life.

The story of Saul/Paul's conversion is profound. As a Pharisee, he was zealous for his religious beliefs. He believed that God required rigorous obedience to obtain salvation and Saul was absolutely rigorous in "measuring up" to God's requirements. His zeal explains why he persecuted Christians.

Paul was concerned that certain Jews who followed the teachings of Jesus did not obey God's laws. Therefore, on the basis of Deuteronomy 13, Saul went about eliminating heresy from Israel. Then one day, while on the way to persecute more Christians, Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus.

This event was a life changing experience. Saul learned that God's commandments are spiritual instead of external. (Romans 7:14) As a Pharisee, Saul kept the law because he thought obeying the law pleased God, but later he learned the god he was zealous to please was not the God of Heaven; it was a god called "religion."

As a Pharisee, Saul had been faultless in terms of legalistic righteousness (Philippians 3:5,6), but when Paul became a Christian, he discovered that he could never measure up to the demands of the law on his own! (Romans 7:15-18)

As Paul began to understand the spiritual nature of the Ten Commandments, he discovered that he had ten passions (which each of the Ten Commandments define) that are offensive to God. Saul thought he was in perfect compliance with the tenth commandment (which defines the passion of covetousness and jealousy) until he met Jesus.

Then, Paul discovered that he had never complied with it. (Romans 7:7,8) When Paul discovered that he could not remove covetousness and jealousy from his heart, the law brought Paul to the realization that he needed a Savior, full of grace and truth. (Romans 7:22-25) Paul also discovered that victory over every passion is only possible through Christ.

Saul/Paul's insight and experience with God's laws is a profound lesson for all of us. Saul changed from being perfectly legalistic to Paul, "the chief of sinners," spiritually speaking. (1 Timothy 1:15) When Paul finally saw his own defects, he realized that he could not measure up spiritually to the purity which the law requires and it made him realize the critical importance of God's grace. Many people distort Paul's writings (2 Peter 3:16), but Paul is clear. Grace and faith does not abolish the law, for where there is no law, there is no need for grace. (Romans 4:15, 3:31; 6:1,2)

I have mentioned Saul becoming Paul to show that there is a legalistic approach to the Ten Commandments (including the Sabbath commandment) and there is a spiritual approach. The legalistic approach is conceived in self-righteousness and it is all about measuring up externally.

Merely resting from work on the Sabbath as the fourth commandment dictates *does not* fulfill the law. The spiritual approach is much more intimate and difficult. It can be a hard thing to give up *a whole day* to the Lord each week. Not using the Sabbath for our own pleasure or personal advantage can be difficult. The essential difference between a holiday and a holy day is ownership of the day. Jesus owns His Sabbath. (Mark 2:27,28) We own whatever holidays we may create. (For further discussion on observing the Sabbath, please download this article: http://www.wake-up.org/daystar/ds2000/MARA.htm.)

Unlike the pagans, every Christian has two minds – a sinful mind (the natural mind) and a spiritual mind (the mind that comes through the ministry of the Holy Spirit) – and there is a war between them. (Romans 7:23) Paul wrote, **"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is** [leads to] **death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is** [leads to] **life and peace; the sinful mind is** [naturally] **hostile to God** [God's authority]**. It does not** [voluntarily] **submit to God's law, nor can it do so."** (Romans 8:5-7, insertions mine)

With an understanding of the legalistic and spiritual approaches to God's law, let us consider the following statements regarding Sabbath keeping:

First Statement

"It really doesn''t matter which day a person worships on. We should worship the Lord seven days a week."

Given what this argument actually says (instead of what it is attempting to say), there is nothing wrong with this statement. Conducting or attending worship services seven days a week is fine. There is no commandment requiring or forbidding this in the Bible. However, this argument has nothing to do with the requirements given in the fourth commandment. The fourth commandment is not about worshiping the Lord seven days a week. The fourth commandment is about giving the seventh day of the week to the Lord:

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." (Exodus 20:11)

God has decreed that six days are allotted for work and the seventh day is not allotted for work. He rested from His work on the seventh day and made it holy at Creation, not at Mt. Sinai. (See Genesis 2:1-3.) This is why the first word in the fourth commandment is "Remember. . .". The Sabbath stands as a memorial to His creation (of which we are a part) and mankind is commanded to cease from our work each Sabbath day to honor *His* creative work.

You would think that the whole world would welcome God's Sabbath. Unfortunately, the Sabbath is generally loathed because human nature rebels and does not want give up a whole day. Paul said it well, **"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires . . . the sinful mind is** [naturally] **hostile to God** [God's authority]**. It does not** [voluntarily] **submit to God's law, nor can it do so."**

Thirty years after Paul became a Christian, he had no question about the importance of the fourth commandment. He wrote, **"There remains** [forever]**, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work** [on the seventh day]**, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest** [each week]**, so that no one will fall** [miss out on entering the Promised Land] **by following their example of** [defiance and] **disobedience."** (Hebrews 4:9-11, insertions mine)

Second Statement

"The Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross (abolished). Since the Sabbath commandment is not re-commanded in the New Testament, there is no further obligation to keep the seventh day holy."

Think about this: Why would God immediately restore nine of the Ten Commandments that He just abolished? Even more, why will God show the Ark of the Covenant from Heaven at the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:19) if the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross? The Ten Commandments were not abolished at the cross and remember that Paul specifically addressed the continuation of the Sabbath commandment in Hebrews 4:9 (see previous paragraph).

The truth of the matter is clear. If a person does not want to give up a whole day to the Lord, it does not really matter whether the Ten Commandments were abolished or whether they remain obligatory. Rebellion against God's Sabbath confirms what Paul said, **"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."** (Romans 8:7)

Pressing a spiritual argument on the carnal nature naturally causes rebellion to spring up. This happens to all of us. However, when truth is heard, the Holy Spirit goes to work, leading us into all truth. (John 16:13) There is a right way and a wrong way of entering into the Sabbath experience. The wrong way is through legalism. The right way is through the Holy Spirit.

Third Statement

"Everyone keeping the Sabbath commandment is trying to work his way to Heaven. Under the new covenant, we are saved by grace, not by works."

The challenge in responding to this statement is to differentiate between what is legalistic and what is spiritual. Consider this: The Pharisees claimed they kept the seventh commandment because they had not physically sinned. But Jesus addressed this self-deception when He said to them: **"But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed**

adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28)

Jesus highlighted the spiritual nature of the law. You do not have to physically commit adultery to break the law because the Ten Commandments actually define ten sinful passions. Because the law is spiritual, Jesus reprimanded the Pharisees (Israel's spiritual guides) for missing the greater meaning of the law.

If a person does not steal, is he a legalist? If a person does not tell a lie, is he a legalist? If a person obeys the first three commandments, is he a legalist? Are we legalistic if we rest on the seventh day because God commands it? *It depends on the nature of our relationship with the law.*

If, like Saul, we obey the law and think we are righteous before God, we are a legalist. On the other hand, if we obey the law realizing it has been given to expose our defects, we become "chief of sinners" and like Peter and Paul, we realize our desperate need of a Savior who freely offers grace and transforming power!

The best argument you can give to rebut the charge of legalism is an understanding smile. Accusations usually say more about the accuser than about the one being condemned. The carnal heart is unwilling to give the Lord a whole day. However, do not underestimate the Holy Spirit.

He is at work and there will always be people who discover what Paul discovered. The Ten Commandments are spiritual. Do not worry about those who scorn the Sabbath and slander those of us who love it. Be courteous and move on. Jesus said, **"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in Heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."** (Matthew 5:11,12)

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

Did Jesus Have a Sinful or Sinless Nature?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Through the years, I have received letters and phone calls asking about the nature of Jesus. Basically, the question is "Did Jesus have a sinful or sinless nature?"

Usually, my first response is "Why does this matter to you?" I ask this in an attempt to get beneath the surface to discover the real underlying concerns. When discussing historical matters, I have observed that some questions are rhetorical icebergs that have a large mass hidden below the waterline.

This topic, like many others in the Bible, contains *apparent* contradictions. An apparent contradiction occurs when Bible texts *appear* to say things that conflict with other texts. The Bible does not have internal conflict; however, it does contain a number of *apparent* conflicts (or paradoxes).

For example, the topic of hell contains an apparent conflict. Some Bible texts give the indication that hell burns forever and other texts indicate that hell will not burn forever. (The upcoming February 2012 DVD of the month is a presentation on this fascinating topic.) *God put apparent conflicts in Scripture to motivate sincere Bible students into a deeper study of His Word.* When a sincere student finds an apparent conflict, he is motivated to resolve its wonderful mystery.

Less motivated students typically fall for the temptation of shortcutting their investigation with "proof texts" that favor whatever position they wish to defend while ignoring, distorting, or discrediting other texts that militate against their bias. The strongest evidence of poor scholarship is the failure to resolve the mystery of an apparent conflict.

Even though questions on the nature of Jesus date back to early Christianity, it is not discussed very widely today. I suppose this silence is largely due to the fact that once a denomination takes a position, all discussion and inquiry typically ends. (After all, what is the point of questioning and researching something that has already been accepted as truth unless the Bible student happens to find an apparent conflict?)

For those who have not given the question of Jesus' nature much thought, a little background information on the paradigm that gives this question importance may be helpful. Since the fourth century A.D., some Christians have believed that Jesus had a sinful nature. Please consider a short description of their beliefs:

1. - Because of sin's curse, Jesus was born like one of us, that is, having a sinful nature or the natural propensity to do wrong and commit sin.

2. - Before Jesus could die on the cross and the pay the penalty for our sins, Jesus had to be tempted in all points as we are without sinning.

3. - Through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus resisted every temptation to do wrong. He lived a perfect, sinless life, overcoming every temptation to sin and became a perfect/sinless substitute for sinners.

4. - The gospel requires believers to emulate the life of Jesus. Christians can and must overcome sin as Christ overcame sin through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. If a person is not overcoming temptation or sin, the Holy Spirit is not at fault.

5. - Jesus has demonstrated that anyone having a sinful nature can be perfect (e.g., live without sinning) through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Advocates for this logic need the sinless life and sinful nature of Jesus to prove that perfection (sinless living for all mankind) is possible and necessary. For them, the bottom line is this: If Jesus had a nature that is *unlike* our nature, His victory over sin cannot be used as a model for sinners. Therefore, given the parameters within this paradigm, they conclude that Jesus had a sinful nature.

A Different Paradigm

My understanding of the gospel produces a different paradigm and a different position on Jesus' nature.

1. - I believe the Bible teaches that salvation requires a righteousness from God which no sinner can produce. (Romans 1:17) Jesus created this righteousness by His perfect conformity to the Father's will when Jesus was on Earth.

2. - The Father rewards my faith in Christ (faith in Jesus is defined as a daily surrender to His teachings and gospel) by "covering" the record of my life with Christ's righteousness (His perfect life). This amazing gift is called justification. It enables me to stand before God as though I have never sinned.

3. - It is the Father's desire that I "grow up" in Christ. This phrase means the Father wants me to become more and more like Jesus. Until my carnal nature is removed, the Father knows that the law of sin is at work in my body and I cannot live without sinning. (1 John 5:17; Romans 7:14-25) As a disciple of Jesus, I deeply regret that I sin. I do not want to defame the wonderful name of Jesus with offensive conduct. Therefore, I show sorrow and repentance for my sins by acknowledging and confessing them and making restitution as needed.

4. - I know that victory over a sin (sanctification) is possible through faith. I know that (a) I can resist the devil to some extent, (b) I can ask Jesus to change the desires of my heart so that particular sins are no longer attractive, and (c) I can ask Jesus for strength to overcome spiritual laziness. I want to become all that Jesus wants of me, but I also know that any victory over sin is temporal. If I am careless, it can return at any moment. I also know that victory over any sin is a joyful experience. It gives me encouragement to keep working on my other sins.

5. - The curse of sin is like a greasy flag pole: The minute I stop climbing, I start slipping. Sanctification, climbing the greasy flag pole in an attempt to overcome sin, cannot end unless/until my carnal nature is removed. According to the Bible, the carnal nature is either terminated at death or it will be removed during the Great Tribulation from all who pass the test of faith.

Given my understanding of the gospel of Jesus, you can see that I do not believe that perfection (sinless living) is possible unless a person is sealed during the Great Tribulation when the carnal nature is removed from those who pass the test of faith. I see no need for Jesus to be born with a sinful nature. In fact, I believe that He was born with a sinless nature, like Adam before the fall. Please consider the following:

1. - Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:20) This makes Jesus unlike me and the rest of mankind.

2. - Before He was born, the angel called Jesus "the holy one" and "the Son of God." (Luke 1:35,36) This makes Jesus unlike me and the rest of mankind.

3. - As a child, teen, or adult, Jesus never sinned. This makes Jesus unlike me and the rest of mankind.

4. - There is no evidence in the Bible that Jesus needed or experienced rebirth. He did not need to be "born again." This makes Jesus unlike me and the rest of mankind.

5. - The Bible declares that all have sinned. (Romans 3:23) This makes Jesus unlike me and the rest of mankind.

6. - The Bible does not give one example of anyone, other than Jesus, who lived without sinning. Even Paul, one of the most ardent disciples of Jesus, did not attain perfection. (Philippians 3:12-16)

7. - The Bible says that Jesus was tempted in every *point* as we are tempted. (Hebrews 4:15) This does not mean that Jesus was tempted in every *way* that we are tempted. Temptations can occur under very different circumstances even though they may challenge the same *point*. For example, Jesus was tempted to deliberately sin, just like we are, to do something wrong. The test may be different, but the point is the same.

The Meeting

I believe Job’s experience is recorded in the Bible because it portrays a similar parallel to Christ’s experience. I believe that Lucifer presented an argument against Jesus in Heaven. The argument may have gone like this: Lucifer said to the Father, "Jesus has gone to Earth to redeem mankind, but this is a silly charade. Jesus does not have a sinful nature, He is naturally offended by sin, and His victory over sin will be mockery because He has no propensity or attraction for sin in the first place!"

The Father could have responded, "Lucifer, in the beginning, millions of angels had sinless natures, but you managed to lead them into sin. Adam and Eve were created with sinless natures, but you managed to lead them into sin. Jesus went to Earth as a second Adam to recover all that Adam lost.

He has the same nature that Adam had before he fell. You may do whatever you want to lead Jesus into sin, but you cannot take His life. To put your allegations beyond controversy or doubt, I will send Jesus into the solitude of the wilderness for forty days when He begins His ministry.

When He gets there, He will not eat for forty days and He will have no companionship. I will do this to Jesus so that at the end of the forty days, when He is physically near death and He has the greatest doubts (if any) about His mission, you will have your best opportunity to lead Him into sin.

Everyone in the universe will see that as the second Adam, Jesus had no advantage over the first Adam when confronted with temptation. To make sure that everyone understands that Jesus had no advantage over Adam, I will grant you three chances to lead Him into temptation.

If you win, Jesus will suffer the penalty for sin. If He wins, you will suffer the penalty for sin twice over, once for being a sinner and once for being a predator." With these words ringing in his ears, the devil soberly left Heaven to prepare for a vigorous assault on Jesus.

After Jesus' baptism, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness, just as the Father had promised Lucifer. I am sure this development puzzled Jesus, who knew nothing of Lucifer's discussion with the Father. However, just as everyone else in the universe is required to live by faith, the Father also required Jesus to live by faith (daily surrender to His will) and He meekly went to the desert.

The Faith of Jesus

The Bible reveals very little about the childhood of Jesus. **"And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."** (Luke 2:52) As Jesus grew up, His understanding of who He was unfolded because He studied the Scriptures. Evidently, the Holy Spirit spoke to Him by the age of twelve, and He was convinced that He was "the Son of God." (Luke 2:42-50) The Bible does not indicate when Jesus discovered that He was "the Lamb of God," but that must have been a very sobering day for the young man.

The Father spoke to Jesus at His baptism and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. (Matthew 3:16,17) These two witnesses and the testimony of His mother were the strongest evidences (reported in the Bible) confirming that Jesus was indeed "the Son of God." This indicates that Jesus was "the Son of God" by faith, and the Father and the Holy Spirit confirmed His faith at the beginning of His ministry.

The faith of Jesus is an often overlooked feature in Christ's life, but it explains why Lucifer's first

temptation in the desert was a poisoned pill, a temptation created for doubt and appetite. After fasting forty days, Jesus was emaciated physically and very weak. A wily Lucifer appeared before Jesus, studiously prepared to win this all-important encounter.

Lucifer knew that his existence rested on this wilderness rendevous. The Father permitted Lucifer to tempt Jesus three different ways so that no one could ever say that the Father "protected" Jesus, who did not have a sinful nature, from temptation. The devil came to Jesus with three *designer* temptations. Lucifer carefully planned and masterfully presented these temptations because they would be his only chance to present himself physically to Jesus.

"The tempter came to him and said, '*If* you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' " (Matthew 4:3, italics mine) Lucifer's first temptation did not appear to be a temptation to do anything evil. What commandment would Jesus have broken if He momentarily grasped divine power (which Jesus could have done at any time) and turn stones into bread?

The temptation was serious because Lucifer asked Jesus to violate a covenant which Jesus had made with the Father when Adam and Eve sinned. Four thousand years earlier, Jesus had promised the Father that He would come to Earth and die in our place. The Father accepted Jesus' offer *on the condition* that Jesus would not say or do anything on His own.

Jesus would only do the will of the Father. (John 6:38; 14:24) Knowing this, Lucifer approached Jesus, and looking upon his frail target, the devil quietly said, "*If* you are the Son of God [and you are, aren't you?], then prove it. Let there be no more doubt about this. Go ahead, exercise divine power and settle the question!"

Prior to this meeting, Lucifer knew three things about Jesus:

1. - Jesus could grasp divine power at any time and perform a miracle so He would have a temptation to exercise this power.

2. - The Father had granted Jesus the freedom to terminate His endeavor to save man at any time. As long as He did not sin, Jesus could exit from His efforts to save mankind by exercising this divine prerogative. (John 10:18)

3. - Lucifer knew that if Jesus exercised divine power to save Himself from starvation, the plan of redemption would be terminated because the salvation of sinners hinged on Jesus' perfect submission to the Father's will. (John 5:30) *The level of submission required of Jesus was far more strenuous than anything God has ever imposed on human beings. This explains, in part, why the righteousness required for salvation goes beyond anything that a human being can produce.*

Lucifer had studied Jesus for thirty years before confronting Jesus with this temptation. The devil knew that Jesus was limited in various ways by His incarnation as a human being. Lucifer also knew that after forty days of fasting, Jesus would be so weak that He could hardly speak. If Jesus succumbed to Lucifer's first and best temptation, Jesus' upcoming ministry would end before it began.

Therefore, Lucifer tempted Jesus to save Himself from hunger knowing that (a) Jesus was very hungry and fragile, (b) if Jesus had any doubts about His identity as "the Son of God," this temptation would encourage Him to prove who He was, and (c) there was no explicit commandment forbidding Jesus from turning stones into bread. **BUT,** Lucifer knew such an act would violate the covenant between the Father and the Son and this would immediately terminate the plan of redemption which had been under way for 4,000 years. Lucifer is so subtile.

Do not treat this temptation as a casual affair. Lucifer's first temptation was perfect and fit the circumstances. It was well prepared, sophisticated, executed at the best possible time, and clever. The devil is extremely intelligent. His first temptation was designed to appeal to the humanity and the divinity in Jesus at the same time.

As a human, Jesus was hungry and weak, and He had no idea how much longer the Father would keep Him in the desert. As a human, Jesus wanted to escape the painful and lonely prison where He had been sent. He was not in the desert of His own accord. (Matthew 4:1)

Lucifer also knew that faith in God can evaporate since doubt can spring from a suggestion, so he decided to approach Jesus as though Jesus was in doubt. Since Jesus had received little evidence that He was "the Son of God," Lucifer concocted this temptation so that the humanity and divinity of Jesus could be tested simultaneously.

There was genuine hunger (humanity) and there was honest room for doubt. Therefore, the devil challenged the divine side of Jesus by suggesting that He turn stones into bread. Jesus had only to speak the word. The devil insinuated, "Why not exercise divine power? Why not end the misery? Why not turn stones into bread?

Why not use your own authority and be filled? Even better, why endure all of this? Rise up, show yourself as God, shake off this bondage and do whatever you want!" Jesus did not waver. He saw through the devil's game and terminated the temptation with twenty-one words.

Second Temptation

Rejected, but not defeated, the devil carried Jesus to Jerusalem and together they stood on the highest point of the temple. **" 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." ' "** (Matthew 4:6) The devil quoted from Psalm 91 for good reason. History indicates that many Jews anticipated Messiah would descend from the heavens and land in the temple courtyard unharmed.

Given this expectation, the temptation makes perfect sense. Once again, Lucifer was not asking Jesus to do anything sinful, *per se*. Instead, Lucifer challenged Jesus to miraculously establish Himself as the Messiah by descending into the courtyard below. The devil even encouraged Jesus with a Bible text that indicated the angels would protect Him from being hurt.

Jesus and Lucifer both understood the ramifications of this temptation. If Jesus landed unhurt below, then from the start of His ministry, the Jews would greet Him enthusiastically as the Messiah, and this daring event would eliminate the grinding campaign that Jesus would otherwise face.

Keep in mind that like the first temptation, this temptation broke no commandments or laws. The devil had done his homework. In response, Jesus said fourteen words, **"It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "** (Matthew 4:7) Those words reveal a profound point.

There is a great gulf between faith and presumption: Faith surrenders to obedience, presumption justifies wrong doing. If Jesus had acted on the devil's temptation and descended from the highest point of the temple, Jesus would have acted on His own because the Father had not given Jesus instructions to carry out such an act.

To make his temptation sizzle, the devil even threw in a "proof text" to entice Jesus. Lucifer knew that Jesus desperately wanted Israel to hear what the Father would speak through His lips and Jesus knew that the leaders of Israel would be astonished if He landed in the courtyard without injury.

Jesus knew, however, that He had not come to convince the leaders of Israel, but that He had come to convince those who love God and His truth with all their hearts. Jesus told Lucifer that presumption is no substitute for faith. It is offensive to put "the Lord your God" to any test. (**Note:** It is interesting that Jesus identifies Himself to Lucifer as "the Lord your God." I am very sure the devil did not appreciate being reminded of this.)

Third Temptation

After suffering two failures, the devil played his last card. He carried Jesus to a very high mountain and showed Him the kingdoms of the world and all their splendor. Then, Lucifer presented a fantastic offer: **" 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." ' "** (Matthew 4:9,10)

I would like to paraphrase this temptation using contemporary English. Lucifer speaks: "Jesus, we both know why you have come to Earth. We both know that you are the Son of God, as well as the Lamb of God. You came here to die. We also know that should you fail to perfectly carry out the will of the Father, which is excessively harsh, the Father will not resurrect you.

We also know that you want to redeem sinners, but if you do something which the Father does not like, your endeavor will fail. Therefore, I am making you an offer which you should not refuse. Bow down and worship me, acknowledge that my ancient claims against the government of God have validity and I will give the world to you.

Everything will be yours and you will not have to die. I took this planet from you, fair and square, and I can give it to whomever I want. Simply acknowledge that my standing arguments against

the government and ways of the Father have validity."

A weak and suffering Jesus rebutted Lucifer's ridiculous offer without hesitation: "You are evil! You are a liar, a thief, and the enemy of a generous and loving God. You are not worthy of any honor or worship. The first commandment forbids worshiping any other God and it condemns you to death. Get away from me." **"Then the devil left him, and angels** [from the Father] **came and attended him** [brought Him food and water]**."** (Matthew 4:11, insertions mine)

Summary

If you think perfection (sinless living) is possible, then you will need a Savior with a sinful nature as your model. If you believe that perfection (sinless living) is impossible until the carnal nature is removed, then the sinless nature of Jesus aligns with a much better paradigm. When Lucifer's three temptations are properly understood, we know that Jesus was tested as follows:

1. - Jesus was tempted to save Himself by exercising divine power (something that human beings cannot do). This was a test to see if Jesus would die of starvation (per the Father's orders) or save Himself by turning stones into food.

2. - Jesus was tempted to act presumptuously. If He landed unhurt in the temple courtyard below, the leaders of Israel would have immediately recognized His Messiahship. However, Jesus had promised the Father (when Adam and Eve sinned) that He would not say or do anything other than what the Father wanted. This was a test to determine if Jesus would live by faith or act out of presumption.

3. - Finally, Jesus was tempted to avoid the cross. Both Lucifer and Jesus knew there was a possibility that Jesus could fail in His efforts to redeem mankind, but Jesus would rather risk failure for our sake than avoid the inevitable death that faced Him. This was a test to see if Jesus loved Himself more than He loved sinners.

Jesus (having a sinless nature) was tested far beyond anything that Adam and Eve encountered when they had a sinless nature. The second Adam went on to recover all that the first Adam lost. After considering the perfect life of Jesus and His righteousness, the topics of justification and sanctification, the curse of sin, and the severe temptations which Christ faced after forty days of fasting, I am overwhelmed with the lengths to which God has gone to save sinners. To God be the glory, great things He has done.

Larry Wilson

Jesus' Existence Before He Came to Earth

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Bible students often wonder if Jesus existed before He took human form, and if so, what His activities were prior to His birth. Jesus did exist before He was born as Mary's child, but organizing the facts on this subject takes some investigation. The Bible does teach that Jesus has existed forever. Jesus existed along with the Father and the Holy Spirit as a separate and distinct God before anything was brought into existence.

Jesus Speaks about Himself

Jesus gave the apostle John a vision on the isle of Patmos. Carefully consider what John heard Jesus say about Himself: **"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. *I am the First and the Last.* I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!' "** (Revelation 1:17,18, italics mine) Later in the book of Revelation, Jesus said, **"I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the First and the Last*, the Beginning and the End."** (Revelation 22:13, italics mine)

These two passages provide three titles that belong to Jesus. The phrases "the First and Last," "the Alpha and the Omega," and "the Beginning and the End" all describe Jesus. He existed in the beginning before there was anything. Notice that Jesus calls Himself God in the book of Revelation: **"He said to me** [John]:

'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.' " (Revelation 21:6,7, insertion mine) We learn from this verse that Jesus, "the Alpha and the Omega" and "the Beginning and the End," declares Himself to be God!

Now that we have established that Jesus is God and that Jesus is "the First and the Last," consider this verse from Isaiah: **"This is what the Lord says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am *the first and I am the last*; apart from me there is no God. . ..**

You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one." (Isaiah 44:6,8 italics mine) When these verses from Isaiah are included with the previous verses from Revelation, a very interesting fact is revealed. Most of the passages in the Old Testament referring to God (about 95% of the time) pertain to Jesus! In other words, titles such as Jehovah, the Almighty, Lord God Almighty, etc. usually refer to the God we call Jesus.

Jesus told Isaiah that there is no other Rock (or God) besides Himself. Of course, Jesus was not talking about the Father or the Holy Spirit (who are separate and distinct Gods). When Jesus said there is no other God, He affirmed there was no other God overseeing Israel.

He was in charge. Paul supports this conclusion in this verse: **"For I do not want you to be**

ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and *that rock was Christ.*" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4, italics mine)

The Bible teaches that Jesus is called God, the Lord Almighty, Israel's King and Redeemer, the Rock, the First and Last, the Alpha and the Omega, and the Beginning and the End. These passages should remove any doubt that Jesus existed long before He was born of Mary!

Did the Father Create Jesus?

The Bible teaches that Jesus is a separate and distinct God who existed *with* the Father before anything was created. The Father did not create Jesus; in fact, all three Gods have existed from eternity. Carefully examine the words of John: **"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.**

The life appeared*; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you *the eternal life*, which *was with the Father [in the beginning] **and has appeared to us."** (1 John 1:1, 2, insertion mine, italics mine) As eternal beings, the Father and Jesus have no origin since Jesus was with the Father before anything existed. John amplifies Jesus' eternal life with the following verses:

"In the beginning was the Word [this title describes Jesus]**, and the Word** [Jesus] **was with God** [the Father and the Holy Spirit]**, and the Word** [Jesus] **was God** [having the same substance as the Father and the Holy Spirit]**. He** [Jesus] **was with God** [the Father and the Holy Spirit] **in the beginning** [when eternity began]**.**

Through him [Jesus] **all things were made** [Jesus is the Creator of all life and substance]**; without him nothing was made that has been made. . . . The Word** [Jesus] **became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We** [Peter, James and John] **have seen his glory** [on the Mount of Transfiguration]**, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."** (John 1:1-3, 14)

There is no evidence in the Bible that the Father created Jesus or that Jesus is "a lesser God" than the Father. The Bible does reveal that from eternity, Jesus has the same substance, powers, glory, and authority as the Father and Holy Spirit! All three Gods are equals in every way.

The differences between them is found in their service. Now, please consider two passages. The first passage shows that the Jews would not accept the idea that Jesus was an equal to the Father and this made them very angry. **"For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."** (John 5:18) The second passage affirms that Jesus

considered Himself equal with the Father.

Paul wrote: **"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."** (Philippians 2:5-7) Equality with the Father was not something that Jesus sought because He was "in very nature" God.

Jesus Is the Creator of Everything in Heaven and on Earth

Jesus created the universe, including the angels in Heaven. He also created Earth and mankind in six days. (Exodus 20:8-11) **"For by him** [Jesus] **all things were created: Things in Heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."** (Colossians 1:16,17) This passage affirms again that Jesus existed before anything was created. This is why He is called "the First" and "the Alpha" and "the Beginning."

Our Father Is Invisible

Jesus is a visible representative of the Father. **"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."** (Colossians 1:15) This verse summarizes three elements about Jesus that many people have not considered. First, Jesus is the image of the *invisible* Father because *the Father is always invisible.* He lives in "unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16) and no one but Jesus (and the Holy Spirit) has actually seen Him! (John 6:46)

The angels cannot see the Father and the saints will not see the Father at or after the Second Coming. The angels have seen His glorious form, and the saints and those who killed Jesus will see the Father's glorious form at the Second Coming (Matthew 26:64; Revelation 6:16,17), but no one can actually see the Father because His infinite glory and boundless powers keep Him in unapproachable light. Twice in the Bible Paul affirms that the Father is invisible (1 Timothy 6:16; 1:17), and Jesus plainly said (John 6:46) that "no one has seen the Father" except Himself. This fact brings us to another interesting point.

Jesus said, **"Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father. . . ."** (John 14:9) This does not mean that Jesus is the Father, but what Jesus means is that His character is a perfect mirror of the character of the Father. (Colossians 1:19) This invisible Father/visible Jesus arrangement may sound confusing at first, but consider this: I understand the Bible to teach there are three co-eternal, separate, and distinct equals – the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19,20)

This makes Jesus' resurrection very simple to understand. The Father (a living God) resurrected a dead God (Jesus). (See Acts 2:32 and Revelation 1:18.) Also, the presence of three distinct Gods explains why the unpardonable sin is uniquely defined as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and not the other two Gods. (Matthew 12:31,32) If the Holy Spirit cannot live in our heart and communicate with us because of rebellion, fellowship with Jesus and the Father becomes

impossible and therefore unforgivable!

Long ago, three divine equals decided to create a family and expand the universe so in love, they willingly surrendered many powers and prerogatives to each other. They became one in purpose, plan, and action. For example, consider this possibility: I believe the Godhead decided one God would sit on the throne of the universe and He would display the awesome powers and infinite glory that belonged to each of the three Gods.

This required the other two Gods to surrender their display of power and infinite glory so that the universe might have one supreme ruler above all. This God was called "the Father." In return, the Father agreed to live in unapproachable light and infinite glory so that all creation might realize the infinite powers of deity.

The God who came to be called Jesus agreed to become the "voice" of God, or "the Word of God," because He would speak verbally for the other two Gods. In other words, three Gods would speak through one mouth. This explains why John saw a double-edged sword coming from Jesus' mouth. He is the Word of God. When He speaks, things appear or disappear. (Psalm 33:9)

The relationship between the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit defines what love is. For example, when Jesus came to Earth, He came to do the will of the Father who sent Him (John 6:38), but do not overlook the larger point. Jesus surrendered Himself to the will of the Father long before He came to Earth. Why would coeternal members of deity surrender their wills to one another?

The simple answer is that their love for each other produces a universe without conflict or competition. The Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit determined their created beings needed three Gods, but the Godhead decided the creation would need one God (the Father) to be the highest focus of adoration and worship.

They also knew that God's family would need one God (Jesus) to live among created beings as a created being showing everyone what the Father would do if He walked in their shoes. Finally, the three Gods knew that creation would need one God (the Holy Spirit) to live within each heart so that all creation could have instant and simultaneous communication with the Father.

This arrangement puts God above, beside, and within every living being within the universe! Their desire was that God would be present in every place or heart in the universe (this explains why the Holy Spirit is omnipresent, but the Father and Jesus are not).

To accomplish their goals, three equal Gods surrendered prerogatives to each other and this amazing union is called love. This is why the Bible says that God is love. This declaration means that the Godhead dynamically demonstrates and defines every aspect of love "in real time."

It is amazing that three infinitely powerful and glorious Gods are constrained by nothing but love and humility to live and work together for the happiness and welfare of their family. *The only*

thing holding the government of the universe together in righteousness is love and humility!

Jesus is a perfect reflection of the Father. The Father is also a perfect reflection of Jesus. In other words, the Father would have died for us if that had been necessary. Moreover, the Holy Spirit is a perfect reflection of Jesus and the Father, and He is willing to remain invisible for eternity so that the glorious Father might be glorified as the supreme Ruler of the Universe.

The mutual surrender between equals is mentioned by Jesus several times: **"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? . . . Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe** [my testimony] **on the evidence of the miracles themselves."** (John 14:10,11, insertions mine)

Finally, remember that Colossians 1:15 calls Jesus "the firstborn over all creation." People misapply this title to teach that Jesus is a "created" being or that Jesus was born before Cain. The title, "the firstborn over all creation," means that Jesus is preeminent among created beings. Ponder this verse for a moment: **"For by him** [Jesus] **all things were created: things in Heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."** (Colossians 1:16,17)

This topic is broad and I have just provided a brief synopsis. Next month, I will discuss Jesus' activities before and after His ministry on Earth. Meanwhile, for further study about Jesus, please see chapters 1-3 in my book *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega.* If you do not have the book, these chapters can be freely downloaded at: http://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Subjindex.htm

Larry Wilson

What is Jesus Doing?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Last month we investigated the existence of Jesus before He came to Earth. This month we will investigate His work in Heaven before and after He came to Earth.

Jesus Speaks for the Godhead

Before the universe was created, the Father and the Holy Spirit agreed that Jesus would be the "voice" for the Trinity. There would be one spokesman which explains why Jesus is called "the Word." (Revelation 19:13; John 1:1-14) John describes this arrangement in John 1: **"In the beginning** [before anything was made] **was** [Jesus] **the Word, and the Word was with God** [Jesus was with the Father and the Holy Spirit]**, and the Word was** [also] **God** [the same in substance as the Father and the Holy Spirit]**. He** [Jesus] **was with God** [the Father and Holy Spirit] **in the beginning. Through Him** [Jesus] **all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."** (John 1:1-3, insertions mine)

When Jesus was on Earth, He did not speak on His own. He spoke the words which the Father gave to Him: **"These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. . . . For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives** [Him] **the Spirit without limit. . . ."** (John 14:24, 3:34, insertion mine)

Shortly before Jesus returned to Heaven, He told His disciples that in His absence, the Holy Spirit would deliver His words to them: **"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own** [even though the Holy Spirit is a separate and distinct God who can speak for Himself, He does not speak on His own, just as Jesus does not speak on His own]**; He will speak only what He hears** [me say]**, and He will tell you what** [I have said and what] **is yet to come.** [As I have brought glory to the Father by speaking only the words He gave me,] **He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."** (John 16:13,14, insertions mine)

Many people do not realize that Jesus is the Creator of everything that exists. **"For by Him all things were created: Things in Heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him.**

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God [the Father] **was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on Earth or things in Heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."** (Colossians 1:16-20, insertion mine)

Because Jesus is God and He speaks for the Godhead, His words have incredible power! **"For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm."** (Psalm 33:9) At the

Second Coming, Jesus will speak and the remaining wicked people will die at His command! **"The rest of them** [the wicked] **were killed with the sword** [a command] **that came out of the mouth of** [Jesus] **the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh."** (Revelation 19:21, insertions mine)

Jesus and the Father are not omnipresent because they surrendered this prerogative to the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Holy Spirit do not create because they surrendered this prerogative to Jesus. The Father and the Holy Spirit do not speak for the Godhead because they surrendered this prerogative to Jesus and yet, everything Jesus creates belongs to the Father.

There are many more points of surrender within the Godhead, but you get the idea. The union and oneness of the Godhead is incredible! Their perfect union (in purpose, plan, and action) is bound by infinite love. I like to compare the union of the Godhead to the construction of an atom where all of the parts (the electrons, protons, neutrons, etc.) make up one atom, held together by incredible force.

Notice the ownership arrangement which Jesus mentioned to the Father just before He went to the cross. Jesus prayed: "**I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours** [your property]**;** [but] **you gave them to me** [if I would come and redeem them] **and they have obeyed your word.**

Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For *I gave them the words you gave me* [to speak] **and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me."** (John 17:6-8, insertion mine, italics mine)

Before Coming to Earth

Before Jesus came to Earth, He created the universe and the angels with His delegated creative function. As their Creator, Jesus walked among the angels and spent much time with them. He spoke to them on behalf of the Godhead. He taught the angels many things and explained the wonder of His creations.

Jesus was also busy with the administration of the angels. It surprises some people to learn that the angels called Him Michael before humans called Him Jesus. Before coming to Earth, Jesus was called Michael, the archangel. (For a discussion on the identity of Michael, please see Chapters 1-3, "Who is Jesus?" in *The Alpha and The Omega*. If the book is unavailable to you, you may freely download these chapters at: http://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Subjindex.htm)

It was after Lucifer and his followers were expelled from Heaven that Jesus created Earth. Jesus warned Adam and Eve about God's wily foe, and Jesus also instructed Adam and Eve that they must not eat the fruit from The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If they did, Jesus warned them that they would suffer the penalty for sin (death by execution) on *the very day* they sinned. (Genesis 2:17)

Eventually, Lucifer caused Eve to sin and she in turn, led Adam into sin. However, I understand that instead of executing the guilty pair, Jesus immediately went to the Father to see if they could be rescued. Jesus loved Adam and Eve more than He loved His own life and He willingly offered to do whatever was necessary to save them from the penalty for sin. The Father presented a plan to redeem Adam and Eve and Jesus accepted the terms and conditions of this plan.

The plan required the *Creator of life* to give up His life so that sinners could have the eternal life that belonged to Him. The plan also required Jesus to humble Himself to three "whatevers." First, whatever the Father wanted Jesus to become, He would become. Jesus agreed to live on Earth after the curse of sin had 4,000 years to mature.

He agreed to live among a rebellious people who were members of a toxic religious system. Even more, He agreed to live among them in poverty and to accept the stigma of having no father. These two conditions insured that His peers and the religious leaders would treat Him with endless contempt. Second, whatever the Father wanted Him to do, Jesus agreed to do. He agreed to die as a sinner and cease to exist (experience the second death). Finally, whatever the Father wanted Him to say, Jesus agreed to say – no matter the situation or the consequences.

When Jesus accepted the terms and conditions required for man's redemption, He became "the Son" of God that day. (Psalm 2:7-12; 45:7) (**Note:** The Hebrew word *ben* means "son" and *ben* identifies a male who is subject to a higher authority.) When Jesus agreed to the three "whatevers," the Father made a covenant with Jesus. *If* Jesus perfectly carried out His plan for the redemption of mankind, the Father would:

1. Resurrect Jesus from the second death and give Him eternal life

2. Give Jesus authority over His followers (the church)

3. Give the saints and the kingdom of Earth over to Jesus as His possession

4. At the end of sin's drama, show the universe that Jesus is His equal in substance which means that Jesus is Almighty God just as the Father is Almighty God. The only difference between the Father and Jesus is the surrender of various prerogatives.

(For more information on this matter, please see pages 54-56 and 129-169 in the book *Jesus' Final Victory.* If you do not have the book, you may freely download this large file at: http://www.wake-up.org/Commentary/Commentary.htm)

So, in the beginning, Jesus created the universe and the angels. From the time that sin began on Earth until Jesus was born, He oversaw the kingdoms on Earth and He continues to oversee man's actions according to the Father's policies.

After His Ascension

On the basis of His sinless life, selfless sacrifice, and perfect conformity to the Father's three "whatevers," the Father resurrected Jesus and took Him to Heaven where Jesus was promoted and positioned at the right hand of the Father as man's priest-intercessor. (See Hebrews 5:4,5.)

Jesus also resumed His role as the Archangel. (To the angels, Jesus has always been and will forever be the Archangel, Michael. See 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Daniel 12:1; Revelation 12:7-9.) Jesus also took control of His church on Earth and He resumed His duties as the Overseer of the kingdoms of Earth, fulfilling the Father's policies.

About two centuries ago, the final countdown to end Earth's sin problem began. Due to a conflict of interest, the Father could not terminate Earth's sin problem, so He conducted a search throughout the universe to find someone worthy to do the job. (See Revelation 4-6.)

The person selected had to end the sin problem with no apparent flaws or shortcomings in the intricate process of saving some sinners and destroying others, fully exonerate God's character and government from Lucifer's clever lies, and restore the universe to a sinless state in perfect harmony with the laws of love. Jesus was the only person found capable of fulfilling all three requirements.

In 1798, Jesus ascended the throne of God (the Father stepped aside) and has been in control of Heaven and Earth. Paul knew this event was coming. He wrote, **"And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."** (Ephesians 1:9,10)

Jesus began the process of breaking each of the seven seals on the Book of Life in 1798. He broke the third seal in 1844 and the judgment of mankind (the dead) began. The next seal to be broken is the fourth seal and when it is, people will see the sovereign authority of Jesus throughout the Earth. The censer in Revelation 8:5 will be cast down and the Great Tribulation will begin. (One of God's purposes for the Great Tribulation is to judge the living.)

At this time, Jesus has sovereign authority. He rules from the throne of God as God, according to His infinite wisdom. He is Almighty God and He currently rules over the universe as the Father ruled over the universe prior to 1798. Jesus is man's judge, high priest, and king, and there is no higher authority.

Jesus is exceedingly generous, but a day will come when sin's grip on Earth must end. At that time, God's wrath against man's degenerate behavior will begin. Jesus is waiting for the time set by the Father. Until then, Jesus oversees and overrules as necessary, holding everything together on Earth until the time to put an end to sin has arrived. It is at this moment there is no more time. (See Revelation 10:6.) Jesus will end corporate mercy and His wrath will break out on Earth. Twenty-five percent of Earth's population will perish.

The sovereign authority of Jesus Christ will overwhelm a world that languishes under the deadly cancer of sin. Even though the wrath of God will be painful, Jesus will extend mercy and salvation to the survivors. Many people will wake up, repent of their sins and be saved.

At the end of the 1,000 years, Jesus will terminate His sovereign authority. He will leave the throne. He will return everything to the Father so that He might live among His created beings. Paul wrote, **"When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."** (1 Corinthians 15:28)

Larry Wilson

Has the Time Come to "Run for the Hills?"

Author: Larry W. Wilson

From time to time the staff receives phone calls and emails asking, "Has the time come to 'run for the hills?' " I have no doubt that many people would like to escape the stresses and demands of life by "running for the hills," but this article will focus on the serious side of this question.

A growing number of Christians (and non-Christians) are worried about the future. Looking ahead, they see a huge catastrophic meltdown coming. They believe the U.S., in particular and the world in general, cannot continue on its present course much longer. They are convinced that a series of calamitous events will occur and the result will be indescribable chaos, suffering, and death.

Given this looming destiny, people are actually considering the idea of "running for the hills." For purposes of discussion, let us identify this coming time period as "The Great Tribulation," a time when survival will be far more difficult.

The Bible confirms a coming global meltdown and in fact, the books of Daniel and Revelation reveal much about this topic. Jesus also spoke about The Great Tribulation when He was on Earth. When asked about signs that would indicate His return was near He said, **"For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again.**

If those days *had not been* cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days *will be shortened*. At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time." (Matthew 24:21-25, italics mine)

When Jesus spoke these words in A.D. 30, He indicated that the number of days allotted for The Great Tribulation *had been cut short* (notice the past perfect tense). This means The Great Tribulation will be shorter than originally planned. I believe God *reduced* the number of days originally allotted for The Great Tribulation redundant when He devised "Plan B" and He revealed the reduced number (1,335 days) to Daniel during the sixth century B.C. (See Daniel 12:11,12.)

(For a discussion on Plan A and Plan B, please see Appendix D in *Jesus' Final Victory* which can be downloaded from: http://www.wake-up.org/Commentary/Daniel_Revelation%20Final.pdf.) I have come to this conclusion for several reasons. First, Jesus used the past perfect tense to indicate action completed in the past. The time allotted for The Great Tribulation was reduced before the meeting occurred in Matthew 24. Second, 65 years after Jesus ascended to Heaven, Jesus met with John on the Isle of Patmos (about A.D. 95).

The information revealed in Revelation contains several prophetic time periods that harmoniously align with the 1,335 days recorded in Daniel 12. This raises an important question. How could Jesus say The Great Tribulation had been shortened in Matthew 24 and then 65 years later, Jesus told John that the time allotted to the Two Witnesses was 1,260 days and the time allotted for the composite beast was 42 months? In fact, Jesus showed John several prophetic time periods that perfectly align with the 1,335 days reported in Daniel 12.

This leads me to ask, was the time cut short *before* the book of Daniel was written or will the time be cut short *after* The Great Tribulation begins? I conclude the number of days was reduced *before* the book of Daniel was written because (a) Jesus used the past perfect tense in A.D. 30 to indicate the number of days had been reduced, (b) in A.D. 95 the prophetic time periods given to John harmoniously align with the 1,335 days given to Daniel, and most of all, (c) God's Word means what it says. The prophetic time periods will be fulfilled as God declares. Of course, I would be very happy if The Great Tribulation was reduced to 35 days or less, but I believe the Bible says otherwise.

During The Great Tribulation, desperation and anxiety will overwhelm those who do not know how to live by faith. Even those who walk with God will tremble! Circumstances will be dire and extreme. Survival will be a day to day struggle. The Bible teaches that God will release Lucifer (the Antichrist) and his demonic angels from the spirit realm during the fifth trumpet, about 890 days into The Great Tribulation. (For additional study on this topic, please see Prophecy 8 in my latest book, *Jesus' Final Victory* http://www.wake-up.org/Commentary/Commentary.htm or "The Greatest Deception of All Time" at http://www.wake-up.org/daystar/ds2006/Feb.htm).

After Lucifer and his angels are released from the spirit realm, they will appear physically before the people of Earth. Compared to mankind, they will be giants who far exceed human stature. They will have physical, mental, and miracle-working abilities that will make everyone in their presence tremble.

The devil, himself, will masquerade as Almighty God. (Daniel 11:36,37; 2 Thessalonians 2:4) He will be glorious in appearance. (2 Corinthians 11:14) Millions of demons (fallen angels) will attend him. (Revelation 9:1-11) Acting as magnanimous benefactors, they will perform all kinds of "good miracles."

The nations of the world will enthusiastically receive them because human beings worldwide will be doing whatever it takes to survive. The saying, "seeing is believing" is applicable, because Lucifer's extravagant displays of power and miracles will be impossible to deny. Because of Lucifer's deception, Jesus warned His followers to ignore rumors or reports saying that Jesus has returned and He is in this place or that place.

This warning brings up two points about the Second Coming that everyone must know. First, when Jesus returns, everyone on Earth will see Him. **"Look, He is coming with the clouds, and *every eye* will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen."** (Revelation 1:7, italics mine) This text means that if you go out to see "Jesus" in one place or another, you are actually going to see a demon!

Second, when Jesus appears, He will not touch Earth! The saints (both the dead and the living) will meet the Lord together *in the air* at the Second Coming because they will leave Earth and return with Jesus to live in New Jerusalem for 1,000 years. (John 14:2,3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17) Lucifer and his angels will do just the opposite.

They will descend from the sky to Earth and people will see them in various cities and they will deceive billions of people with their miracles, signs, and lies. Lucifer will claim that he has come to establish a thousand years of peace and unfortunately, billions of people will believe him.

Not So Fast!

There is no doubt The Great Tribulation is coming, but should we "run for the hills" to protect ourselves and our loved ones while we can? Before you pack your suitcase, please consider two things: First, it would be foolish to relocate unless you have prayerfully sought the *Lord's will* and you have "providential evidence" from Him indicating that you should go.

Remember the Christian commitment phrase "go-be-do?" This little phrase sums up the attitude and experience of a true Christian. It means, "Lord, I am willing to go wherever you want me to go, do whatever you want me to do, and be all that you would have me to become." Second, remember that true Christianity shines best and accomplishes things that would be otherwise impossible when circumstances are difficult.

If the followers of Jesus "run and hide" before The Great Tribulation approaches, no one will be left to support the 144,000 as they boldly proclaim the gospel. No one will be ready to share their homes, food, and water with those who receive Jesus and have no place to go. No one will be left to encourage and strengthen new Christians.

When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, all of the disciples fled, except Peter. Peter bravely pulled out his sword and cut off a man's ear, but Jesus rebuked him and a few hours later, Peter denied that he even knew Jesus. Peter soon discovered that fighting for survival or supremacy is not Christ's way.

Peter was stunned when he finally realized that Jesus came to Earth to give His life "as a ransom for many." (1 Timothy 2:6) The "run and hide" game is foolish. When it comes to serving God, saving self is ego-centric (self-centered), whereas surrendering our life to save others is theo-centric (God centered).

Leaving or Loving Thy Neighbors?

Jesus said the second greatest commandment is this: **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** (Matthew 22:39) Within the context of The Great Tribulation, the essential difference between leaving your neighbors behind or remaining with your community is love.

Christians should not join a commune or a militia group to survive "doomsday." (Smile) The destiny of true Christianity is just before us. Again, unless you have "providential evidence" to

relocate, this is no time to leave your neighbors behind. A time will come when "running for the hills" will be appropriate, but that day will come near the end of The Great Tribulation.

When Jesus terminates intercession for sinners and the door to mercy closes (the 1,260th day of The Great Tribulation), nothing further can be done to save sinners. Most, if not all, of the 144,000 will be dead by that time and the time for sharing the gospel will have ended. Until the battle for souls is over, each of us must stand fast and serve at our post of duty.

We must remain loving, faithful, and active for the salvation of others, even to death. Jesus has a plan for each of us: **"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This** [kind of service and commitment] **calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints."** (Revelation 13:10, insertion mine)

There is a time to be bold and there is a time to evade those who would do us harm. Paul was beaten three times and stoned once for his testimony (2 Corinthians 11:25), but he also escaped certain death when his followers lowered him in a basket through an opening in the city wall. (Acts 9:25) God gives His faithful followers grace and wisdom to meet the challenges of each day. You can count on Jesus for He promised, **"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matthew 28:20)

This is why learning to live a life based on faith is so important right now. It is important that we recognize the Holy Spirit's voice and direction so we can walk with God each day. God does not call for everyone to live like Paul, even though Paul thought his way of living was as good as it gets. (1 Corinthians 7:7)

God does not call everyone to be a pastor, evangelist, teacher, doctor, or lawyer. (1 Corinthians 12) However, God has a special work for you if you are willing to love Him and serve Him with all your heart, mind, and soul and love your neighbors as yourselves. There is enormous and endless joy when our place in God's will is found.

The Greatest Example of Love

Jesus could have easily played "run and hide." He could have aborted His efforts to save sinners by saving Himself. He did not want to die, but He was willing to go to the cross in order to save us. Before we examine His never-to-be-forgotten words in the Garden of Gethsemane, consider this: Jesus' death should not be equated with the death of a man. Millions of saints have stood firmly for their faith and with God's help, died a martyr's death, but Jesus' experience goes far beyond the death of a martyr.

Jesus suffered extremely as the Father imposed the guilt of our sins on Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21) The burden of our guilt was so heavy that it would have killed Jesus before He was crucified! Had it not been for the angel who strengthened Jesus, He would not have made it to the cross.

Later, while Jesus was hanging on the cross, the Father did something that crushed the life out of Jesus. He turned His back on Jesus (indicating His rejection of Christ as a sinner) and this made Jesus forcibly cry out, **" ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ – which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ "** (Mark 15:34) On the cross, Jesus died the second death – a death without hope of resurrection. The Father required Him to experience what the wicked will experience at the end of the 1,000 years when the penalty for sin is imposed upon the wicked.

This is important because Jesus is more than a man. He suffered more than a man can suffer. He is a co-eternal member of the Godhead, and to cease to exist forever so that sinners could have His eternal life involves more sacrifice than we can imagine. Divine love does not "run and hide."

Rather, divine love is willing to do whatever it takes to benefit others. Jesus prayed, **" ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.’ An angel from Heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."** (Luke 22:42-44)

Larry Wilson

Church Membership is Not Required for Salvation

Author: Larry W. Wilson

I have been asked many times if church membership is required for salvation. The answer is "no." The eternal destiny of each person is determined by his or her response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Those obeying the Holy Spirit are living by faith. Those refusing to obey His voice are living in rebellion.

No religious organization or clergy person can send a person to hell or save him from it. So, why did Jesus establish His church when He was on Earth? The answer is quite simple: Jesus established His church to nurture, sustain, and edify His followers. (Ephesians 4:11,12)

If church membership is not required for salvation, why should any person want to be a member? Joining a church is similar to joining any group that has a clearly defined mission and message. Many people working and pulling together can accomplish far greater things than individuals working alone.

For example, over time a hundred people can easily purchase and pay for a church building. A hundred contributors can offer "vacation Bible school" and other programs for the youth in their community. A thousand people can establish and maintain projects such as a mission hospital, a school or a publishing facility.

Through the centuries, Christian churches have provided all kinds of valuable services for their members, communities, and societies. Therefore, Christian churches should not be regarded as a nonessential part of life. Our world is a much better place because of organized groups within Christianity.

Different churches meet different needs. Blessed are the people who can find and attend a church that edifies and nurtures them. If "church life" is your priority, then find a church that has a thriving "church life." If "Bible study" is your priority, then find a church that fulfills this requirement. If "social issues" are your priority, find a church that focuses on "social issues."

Finding a church that meets your family’s needs may take some effort, but the effort is well spent if you find a place you can call "home." Just remember two things: There is no such thing as a perfect church, and church membership has absolutely nothing to do with salvation.

Many people believe that salvation is church specific. This is not true. Salvation is not dependent upon belonging to "the right church." Instead, you determine your own salvation by your response to the Holy Spirit. Be very cautious of church groups that think they are better than all the others. Be wary of church groups that declare themselves to be the only true Church of Jesus Christ and watch out for churches that impose rituals on its members to be saved. Stay away from churches that believe they alone are God’s people.

When Jesus Was on Earth

When Jesus was on Earth, the nation of Israel consisted of both religious Jews and secular Jews. The religious Jews could essentially be divided into three subgroups. There were the Essenes, a small number of people who lived in isolated communes, who were largely concerned with achieving purity (separation from the world) and walking with God. There were the Sadducees, who were wealthy and affluent which included the merchants and political leaders. Finally, there were the Pharisees, a zealous group of people who were known for their obnoxious dedication to God.

Many of the religious Jews regarded the Pharisees as their *defacto* clergy because they were very vocal about the importance of knowing the laws of God. The Pharisees were zealous, some were highly educated, and most of all, they were widely known for their piety and purity. (Matthew 5:20)

History indicates that the Pharisee movement arose about 150 years before Jesus was born when certain men became convinced that the Levites were not carrying out God's will. As a sect within Judaism, the Pharisees had an advantage over the Levites. Anyone could become a Pharisee, but a Levite had to come through genealogy. A religious tug-of-war between the Levites and the Pharisees created "a divided house." Over time, the Pharisees gained greater influence over the religious thinking of laymen than the Levites.

Jesus spoke to the Pharisees shortly before His death and said, **"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are."** (Matthew 23:15)

Jesus called people the Pharisees converted "twice the sons of hell" because false religion is a heavy load to carry. Religion has enormous power to do good and to do harm. Religion can be extremely toxic or it can be nurturing and healing. Religion can create a holistic balance (spiritual, mental, and physical) or imbalance (where ideology and passion overrule common sense).

Religion can be enlightening or confining. Religion can be expansive and invigorating, as well as highly deceptive. Religion can be a stepping stone to a better understanding of God's love and character or it can crush those who are sincerely searching beneath the weight of false guilt.

The Pharisees scorned tax collectors (Jews who worked for Caesar) because they considered it an insult for the Pharisees (as "God's servants") to recognize Caesar's authority by paying tax to him. Knowing what the Pharisees believed about salvation and how the Pharisees felt about tax collectors, Jesus told this parable: **"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.**

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 'But the tax collector stood at a distance.

He would not even look up to Heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:10-14)

This parable teaches us that human righteousness is worthless. Rigorous devotion will not merit God's favor or produce salvation. The problem is that God requires a righteousness for our salvation which human beings cannot produce.

No one can be saved on the merits of his religious zeal, knowledge, or practice. Rather, a person is justified in God's sight when he obeys the prompting of the Holy Spirit (lives by faith). The bottom line is simple: Unless God specifically gives each of us the gift of salvation, we cannot be saved! Salvation is not an insurance policy that we purchase at will! God determines salvation and He promises it to all who will live by faith. (Ephesians 2:8,9)

Obeying the Holy Spirit Never Ends!

From God's point of view, every person who obeys the prompting of the Holy Spirit is a person of faith. When a person does what he believes to be righteous and true, no matter the consequences, that person is living by faith. When a person persistently refuses to follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit, God sees the rebellion and there is no provision in His plan of redemption to redeem defiant sinners.

Please consider this. God cast Lucifer and his followers out of Heaven for one reason. They committed the unpardonable sin; they defied the Holy Spirit time after time after time. There came a point in time when Lucifer and his followers would never admit their error and submit to God's authority.

When this moment was reached, the Holy Spirit left Lucifer and his followers alone. After he was cast out of Heaven, Lucifer deceived Eve and she sinned. Out of Adam's love for Eve, he willingly sinned. An important distinction must be made between the sin of Lucifer and his followers and the sin of Adam and Eve. Lucifer and his followers continually defied the Holy Spirit (passed the point of no return) and when the Holy Spirit left them, this eliminated any possibility of sorrow and repentance.

On the other hand, Eve and Adam did not defy the Holy Spirit. Eve sinned because of deception and Adam sinned because he loved Eve more than he loved God. Therefore, out of love for humanity, God graciously implemented a plan of redemption for Adam and Eve and their offspring, but redemption of Lucifer and his followers was not possible.

Before Lucifer and his followers were cast out of Heaven, the destiny of Heaven's angels hinged on their response to the Holy Spirit. This statute existed before sin began in Heaven, this statute continues on Earth today, and it will remain intact throughout eternity to come! Jesus said, **"And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be**

forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, *either in this age or in the age to come*." (Matthew 12:31,32, italics mine)

These thoughts bring me back to the beginning of this article. Church membership has nothing to do with salvation. Even before Jesus created Earth, God established the principle that each person's eternal destiny is determined by his response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Those who listen and obey the Holy Spirit live by faith. Those who refuse to hear and obey His voice are living in rebellion.

Larry Wilson

Knowing Jesus

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Knowing about Jesus is Not the Same as Knowing Jesus

"Dear Mr. Wilson:

I am 51 years old and have attended church all of my life. I was baptized at 14, read large portions of the Bible, and heard more sermons than I can count. After reading last month's *Wake Up Report!*, I learned that religious life is not a substitute for spiritual life. I now realize that I considered myself spiritually secure without actually knowing Jesus. I may know a lot about Jesus, but I am ashamed to admit that I really don't know Him. So, what can I do now?

Sincerely, Bonnie"

Dear Bonnie:

Thank you for your email. Whether you realize it or not, the Holy Spirit has led you into a profoundly important discovery: Knowing about Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus. I have four suggestions that may help you to know Jesus in a personal way. Please consider the following:

Step 1. Ask for the Holy Spirit with Determination

"Then he [Jesus] **said to them** [His disciples]**, 'Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him."**

Then the one inside answers, "Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything." I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness [persistent determination] **he will get up and give him as much as he needs. So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.**

For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:5-13, insertions mine)

Even if a 10,000 watt broadcast antenna is 50 feet away, a radio cannot receive the signal unless it is turned on and tuned to the correct frequency. Similarly, Jesus could be standing in our presence (as He did among the Pharisees), yet we cannot know Him and love Him until the

Holy Spirit has "turned us on and tuned us in."

Millions of people are physically alive, but spiritually dead, and the interesting thing about this condition is that we cannot make ourselves spiritually alive through our own efforts! Without the Holy Spirit's help, there are a million concepts within the Bible that we cannot see or understand. Paul wrote, **"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."** (1 Corinthians 2:14)

If you want to know Jesus, go to your prayer closet and ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to you. The Holy Spirit will activate your spiritual receptors so that you can know Jesus.

Step 2. Stop the "Easy Sins"

For the sake of discussion, let us suppose there are three categories for sin: There are "easy sins," "difficult sins," and "accidental sins." Sins that fall into the easy category are sins of carelessness, such as taking God's name in name, swearing, lying, cheating, and dishonesty. (Overcoming them is not easy, but they are easy to identify.)

Sins that are in the difficult category are sins like hatred, jealousy, bitterness, sexual immorality, selfishness, and greed. Overcoming sins in this category requires significant time with the Lord. Accidental sins are unintentional sins which pop up without warning. These sins occur because we have a sinful nature and from time to time, it overpowers our best intentions.

When a person wants to know Jesus, he shows his desire to the Father by cleaning house. He begins with eliminating the things that he knows are offensive to God. A person should not expect God to listen to his prayers if he willfully lives in sin. (Psalm 66:18) Jesus cannot abide with a person who is negligent, lazy, or indifferent about the importance of sanctification. If you want to walk and talk with Jesus, you need to know that the road to Heaven is "uphill," but worth the effort every step of the way!

Step 3. Be Willing to Let Go of the World

John wrote, **"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."** (1 John 2:15-17)

A carnally oriented person loves the world and everything in it! Only when we have a rebirth experience can we avoid loving all that is in the world. Our first birth is according to the flesh and it is attracted to the deeds of the flesh. If we are born a second time, we are born by the Spirit and we are attracted to the endeavors of the Holy Spirit.

A born again person sees life through a very different set of lenses. Paul indicates that

everything is different. **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"** (2 Corinthians 5:17)

When we pester the Father to give us the Holy Spirit (as mentioned in Step 1), we must be ready for a life-changing experience. When the Holy Spirit dwells within a person, He brings with Him transforming power. The most powerful evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit is not prophesying, talking in tongues, or working miracles.

Instead, it is the obvious presence of the Holy Spirit that brings peace (a calming serenity) and love (replacing hostilities, contempt, and malice for others). The Holy Spirit also brings a strong desire for *personal* sanctification (not corporate sanctification*).

When the Holy Spirit arrives on our doorstep, the world and its enticements quickly dim and the things that we used to love, we will soon hate, and the things that we used to hate, we will soon love. *It is the Holy Spirit's duty to transform earthbound sinners into heaven-bound saints.* This is important because earthbound sinners would not enjoy Heaven *at all*.

(***Note:** When you come across people who are more concerned and frustrated with the religious behavior of others more than themselves, watch out. The Holy Spirit is not involved. Substituting religious ideology for personal sanctification is not a work of the Holy Spirit. However, there is one exception to this warning. People who the Lord appoints to speak corporately on these matters can do so with Holy Spirit approval.)

When a person receives the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), he becomes a new creation and he cannot get enough of God's Word. Suddenly, the Bible is no longer a giant reference book, but instead, it is God's voice! A born again person is encouraged to see and love people as Jesus saw and loved people.

Every born again person receives a mission along with a new set of eyes. As he matures in the Lord, the mission unfolds. Through eyes of faith, he sees and understands the temporal nature of everything that exists on Earth. He also understands that no one can serve God and money.

A born-again person may not know where God is leading, but he knows God and wherever He leads will be fine. A born again person understands that using the name of the Lord is not the same as being called by the Lord! Compare these two passages:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' " (Matthew 7:20,23)

"Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Peter 1:13-19)

Step 4. Spend Time with Jesus

It can be very difficult to consistently spend quite time with the Lord. This is a huge problem in today's society because people are going crazy with busyness. If spending time with Jesus is not protected (in prayer and Bible study), the devil will quickly notice our developing habit and he will be sure that we will have no time for Jesus!

Every time I see those little solar lights lining a sidewalk, I am reminded of my need for Jesus. The solar light says, "No Sun means dead battery." The Christian says, "One week without Bible study and prayer makes one weak." There is *no* substitute for spending time with Jesus.

If reading the Bible is difficult, start with easier books like Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. If you take your eyes off Jesus for a week or two, your intimacy with Him will evaporate. You will be left knowing about Jesus instead of knowing Him. Jesus said, **"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."** (Jeremiah 29:13)

Please try these four steps for six weeks and let me know the results:

Step 1. Ask for the Holy Spirit with Determination

Step 2. Stop the "Easy Sins"

Step 3. Be Willing to Let Go of the World

Step 4. Spend Time with Jesus

Larry Wilson

Who Does the Scapegoat Represent?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Many Bible students enjoy studying the Old Testament sanctuary service. The most important service held in the wilderness tabernacle was the Day of Atonement. Two goats were used during the Day of Atonement service. Some people think both of the goats represent Jesus, while others believe the scapegoat represents the devil. Many people believe the scapegoat (Hebrew: *azazel*) represents Jesus because Leviticus 16:10 indicates the scapegoat is used to *make atonement for sin.* However, I would like you to consider the following four steps that lead me to the conclusion that the scapegoat represents Lucifer.

Point #1 Predatory Behavior Produces Greater Guilt

When an adult entices or leads a minor to do something illegal, the guilt for the adult is far greater than the guilt for the minor because the adult knew right from wrong, and he preyed upon the ignorance and innocence of the minor. Children are considered minors because they are intellectually and emotionally immature and the law takes their lack of maturity into consideration. This is an underlying principle that is involved with the topic of the scapegoat and it is important to understand.

Lucifer was the first to sin and after he sinned, he became a *natural predator*. The devil was not content to be the only sinner in Heaven. Instead, he preyed on innocent angels and eventually caused a third of them to rebel against God. (Ezekiel 28:12-16; John 8:44; Revelation 12:3,4) Of course, the angels who eventually turned away from God to follow Lucifer sinned too, but in terms of degree of guilt, the devil has greater guilt because he led or enticed the fallen angels to sin against God. Even more, after God expelled the devil from Heaven, the devil continued his predatory behavior and enticed Eve to sin, and through her, Lucifer ultimately got to Adam. (Romans 5:12)

When Jesus was on Earth, He spoke about the penalty for predatory behavior. **"And if anyone causes one of these little ones** [small children] **who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out."** (Mark 9:42,43, insertion mine)

When God destroys wicked angels and wicked people with fire at the end of the 1,000 years, the devil's punishment will be greater than anyone else's because justice declares that he has greater guilt than anyone else. He is the father of sin, he preyed upon innocent angels and human beings, and has enticed millions to sin against God.

Point #2 The Temple Becomes Defiled with Sin's Guilt

As you probably know, there were two daily services in the earthly tabernacle. One daily service centered on the Altar of Incense and the other daily service centered on the Altar of Burnt

Offering. The presence of two altars and certain differences in their sacrifices indicates that God requires atonement for sin on two different levels.

The Altar of Incense was used to make atonement for the corporate sins of Israel. Corporate intercession was necessary because due to logistics, millions of people could not be at the Altar of Burnt Offering each day with sacrificial lambs. There were twelve tribes and each tribe came to the temple with their sin offerings on a rotational basis.

For example, if the tribe of Judah was scheduled for the month of March, corporate intercession at the Altar of Incense atoned for the entire tribe of Judah until the date when individuals from Judah could present a sin offering at the Altar of Burnt Offering.

The daily service at the Altar of Burnt Offering consisted of dealing with sin offerings presented by individuals and family representatives. Here is a profound point that many people do not understand: In God's economy, the sin is *never* forgiven, *but* sinners can be forgiven. In the sanctuary service, when a sinner wanted to make atonement for his sins, he came to the temple and stood before the Altar of Burnt Offering.

He placed his hands on his sacrificial lamb and confessed his sins. Then, the sinner cut the jugular vein in the lamb's neck and a priest captured some of the lamb's blood in a cup. The priest dipped a small tree branch into the blood and sprinkled some blood on the horns of the altar. God designed this process to teach everyone that guilt is only transferred from sinners via "sinless blood" to the temple altar. Remember, **" . . . . without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."** (Hebrews 9:22)

For example, in Bible times if a person stole a cow, he became a lawbreaker (sinner). All lawbreakers are condemned to death because the penalty for sin is death. (Romans 6:23) If a thief wanted to make things right and escape the penalty for sin, he had to do two things. First, he had to make atonement with the owner of the cow (provide restitution and reconciliation – see Exodus 22).

Then, the thief had to make atonement with God in order to be set free from the penalty of his sin. If the thief came to the Altar of Burnt Offering with the prerequisite sin offering of a sinless lamb and confessed his sin, the thief's guilt was transferred to the horns of the altar "by the blood of the lamb" and the thief departed free of any condemnation!

It could be said the end result was very good with one exception. The victim had been made whole (his cow was returned or satisfactory substitution had been made), the thief had been forgiven (his guilt transferred to the temple), however this sinful act caused the temple to be contaminated because the thief's guilt rested on the horns of the Altar of Burnt Offering! The thief's guilt remained on the horns of the altar until the Day of Atonement arrived.

Point #3 God Cleanses His Temple of Sin's Guilt

Once a year, God cleansed His temple of accumulated guilt on the Day of Atonement. It is

important to understand that sinners cannot cleanse God's temple. God conducted this service each year to teach Israel a number of lessons. Perhaps the most obvious lesson is that a future day is coming when God's temple will be free of sin forever because sin will no longer exist in His universe. To cleanse the earthly temple, the High Priest (acting on God's behalf) presented two perfect goats before God. Lots were cast to see which goat was "God's goat." The casting of lots might sound strange, but it illustrates an important concept.

The two different goats used on the Day of Atonement represent two different beings. These beings were the covering cherubs on God's throne, Jesus and Lucifer. Both were perfect in every way until sin originated within Lucifer. Lucifer became jealous of Jesus because the angels worshiped Jesus, but they did not worship Lucifer.

Lots were cast on the Day of Atonement so that God might declare and confirm which goat was "His anointed goat" (His chosen one). Casting lots over the goats illumines the fact that even though Lucifer and Jesus were covering cherubs, only one cherub was "the Son of God." The chosen goat was then slain and through its sinless blood, the sins accumulated in the temple were transferred to the head of the scapegoat. The scapegoat was then led out into the desert to suffer a lingering death.

Summarizing two facts: First, *God's goat* was put to death on the Day of Atonement, but the scapegoat was not. Second, the casting of lots was not a random process. God spoke through the casting of lots, declaring and confirming which goat was His goat. God did this because while Jesus and Lucifer were covering cherubs (they looked similar), they were nothing alike.

Jesus is a member of the Godhead. He lived in the form of an angel (before coming to Earth to live in the form of a man). On the other hand, Lucifer was a "created" angel who could never be a member of the Godhead. Therefore, the casting of lots distinguished the difference between the two goats.

Point # 4 Punishment Fits the Crime

The hallmark of a reasonable and fair judicial system is that punishment fits the crime. God's judicial system is no different. Given the lifelong suffering and pain that predators can impose on children or any innocent victim, thoughtfully consider this question: Which individual should suffer more, the predator or his victim?

Your response to this question is important. How much suffering is appropriate for a predator who has inflicted more sorrow, death, pain, and suffering on children and innocent people than human beings can calculate? God has answered this question. **"But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."** (Exodus 21:23-25)

If a predator fails in this life to provide the restitution that God requires, he will be resurrected to suffer the punishment he is due at the end of the 1,000 years. Justice (atonement) will be complete when all predators have paid back the suffering imposed on children and innocent

victims.

Summary

Two goats were required to cleanse the temple on the Day of Atonement. God's goat was executed and with its sinless blood, the sins of Israel were transferred to the head of the scapegoat. Once the sins of Israel were placed on the scapegoat, they were never removed. The scapegoat was condemned to protracted suffering and death. This is why a capable man led the scapegoat into the desert where it would starve to death. God's goat represents Jesus (the Savior from sin) and the scapegoat represents Lucifer (the predator, the creator of sin).

The Hebrew word for atonement is *kaphar*. The word means to reconcile, to restore, to rebuild as one, hence the English word, "at-one-ment." We learned earlier that a thief can make atonement for his sin by (a) restoring the cow or a substitute cow to its owner, and (b) by transferring his guilt to the temple through the blood of a perfect lamb.

We know that God cleansed the temple that Moses built on the Day of Atonement annually by removing all of the guilt that had accumulated through the year. We know that in order to transfer the guilt from the temple to the scapegoat, God provided His "chosen goat." We know that the penalty for sin is death; however, the scapegoat was not slain on the Day of Atonement. The suffering caused by sin was transferred to the scapegoat and the scapegoat fulfilled the demands of justice by suffering for an extended period of time.

The scapegoat bore in its flesh not the penalty for sin, but the responsibility for sin. The protracted death of the scapegoat represents the lingering death that Lucifer will suffer at the end of time. As a predator, he has caused an incalculable amount of sorrow, suffering, pain, and death and he must pay for his actions.

All of the suffering associated with the sins that were transferred to the temple will end up on Lucifer's head! When Lucifer's suffering finally ends in the lake of fire, God's justice will be satisfied and atonement for what he has done will be complete!

In closing, each of us must be careful to insure that we make things right and keep things right with man and God. Whatever we have stolen, we must pay back. As far as possible, be sure to make things right with those we have wronged. Then, we have to confess our sins to Jesus and repent of them. (1 John 1:9)

The only way to escape to the condemnation that comes from being a sinner is through the sinless blood of Jesus Christ! Otherwise, the words of the ancient prophet Obadiah will be fulfilled: **"The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head."** (Obadiah 1:15)

Larry Wilson

Should We Test the Lord for Answers?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Recently, I received the following question about prayer which many people share:

"Last year, my wife and I were offered an investment opportunity that really caught our attention. The opportunity was not a ‘get rich quick’ scheme. It appeared to be a legitimate situation that came about on its own merit. We discussed it and prayed about it for several days and we still could not determine what we should do.

Finally, we decided to put the matter before the Lord and depending on the outcome of two tests that we put before Him, we made our decision. The tests we put to the Lord were not carelessly designed or easily fulfilled and the time frame during which they had to be completed was about a week. Miraculously (or providentially) both tests were convincingly fulfilled and we accepted them as a sign from the Lord that we should invest.

Nine months later, our investment is in shambles. We are heartsick. Logic says we should terminate our loss by selling our shares while they still have value. Of course, my wife and I are surprised and confused at the result. What do you think we should do now?"

This situation is a bit complicated. As an investment, I do not know if the basis for this investment has changed. Good investments take time. They have ups and downs. If this investment is not a get rich quick scheme, maybe you should consult a financial counselor to help you weigh the pros and cons.

As a spiritual matter, your situation involves many issues. One issue you are facing is whether you and your wife should abandon an investment (financial loss) which the Lord clearly approved and confirmed. (I assume that you both acted in good faith and the Lord did approve this investment by fulfilling both tests you put before Him.) Before I share my thoughts on your situation, let us see what the Bible says about "testing the Lord."

The Breastplate of Decision

When Moses built the wilderness tabernacle, God instructed him to create special clothing and accessories which Aaron, the High Priest, had to wear when serving as High Priest or entering the Holy Place. This "costume" was intricate and beautiful. It included a breastpiece which contained twelve precious stones and the name of each tribe was engraved beneath each tribe’s stone. (Exodus 28:15-21) God instructed Aaron to "bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart as a continuing memorial before the Lord." (Exodus 28:29)

Two "special stones" were also included in the breastpiece. They were called the Urim and the Thummim. (Exodus 28:30) The leaders of Israel used these two stones when seeking God’s wisdom on perplexing matters. According to Josephus, if God looked favorably on a request, the Urim would glow brightly and if God did not look upon the request with favor, the Thummim

would glow brightly. (Antiquities. iii. 8, § 9, Whiston's translation.)

The Lord gave Israel the Urim and Thummim because He knows the limitations of human beings. He knows that human wisdom is limited and our foresight is faulty. Therefore, He invited the leaders of Israel to ask Him for direction when they felt direction was necessary and He generously responded.

About 500 years after Moses built the tabernacle, the Israelites no longer wanted a theocracy. They wanted a "real" king to rule over them like the nations around them. (1 Samuel 8:7) So, the Lord chose Saul to serve as the first king of Israel, and eventually, Saul became hostile toward the Lord.

In fact, Saul's rebellion toward the Lord became so great that the Lord refused to answer the king through the Urim and the Thummim or the prophets! (1 Samuel 28:6) This demonstrates a profound point. If we knowingly do wrong and resist God's instruction, He will not answer our prayers. (Psalm 66:18)

I am sure that many people "interpret" the outcome of tests which they put before the Lord as "the Lord has spoken" when in fact, the Lord has said nothing! The Bible is clear that before we put a test before the Lord, we need to be sure that there is nothing in our lives that would prevent the Lord from responding to our petition. (See 1 Corinthians 11:27-30.) (For more information on the Lord refusing to answer our prayers, see Isaiah 1.)

Gideon's Fleece

Between the time of Moses and King Saul (about 500 years), the Israelites went through several cycles of rebellion, captivity, repentance, reformation, and then, back into rebellion. God is consistent and each time Israel turned its back on Him, the Lord withdrew His protection from Israel and then tribal nations in Canaan would overpower the Israelites and take them into captivity.

During one cycle of apostasy, God permitted the Midianites to rule over His people. (Judges 6:8-13) Eventually, His people repented and God sent help in the form of a man named Gideon. One day, Gideon was hiding in the mountains and the Lord appeared to him.

The Lord commanded Gideon to deliver Israel out of Midian's hand. Gideon was very timid. He belonged to the weakest clan in Manasseh and considered himself to be the least in his family. (Judges 6:15) Nevertheless, the Lord gave Gideon his marching orders and after spending time with Gideon, the Lord disappeared.

Gideon was totally overwhelmed and did not know what to think. To make sure that he had not been hallucinating or suffering from a delusion, Gideon put the Lord to a test to make sure that he correctly understood the Lord's command. **"Gideon said to God, 'If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised – look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will**

save Israel by my hand, as you said.'

And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew – a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew.' That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew." (Judges 6:36-40)

God miraculously responded to Gideon's bizarre requests and this gave Gideon a great deal of courage, but amazingly, not enough to get the job done! Gideon was still afraid. So, the Lord kindly gave Gideon one more dose of courage. **"During that night the Lord said to Gideon, 'Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah and listen to what they are saying.**

Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.' So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore. Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. 'I had a dream,' he was saying. 'A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp.

It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed.' His friend responded, 'This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands.' When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, 'Get up! The Lord has given the Midianite camp into your hands.' " (Judges 7:9-15)

Two principles can be distilled from this Bible story: First, when God wants a human being to do something for Him, He generously considers the limitations of creatures made of dust. The Lord chose Gideon to defeat the Midianites because God wanted Israel to understand that the forthcoming victory would be divine, not human. The Lord wanted His wayward people to live according to His law, and if they did, He would be their strength and protection. The Lord wanted Israel to understand that He is Sovereign.

He overrules the nations of Earth and He thwarts the plans of wicked men when necessary. God chose Gideon because He knew Gideon would be the least likely person in Israel to boast about defeating the Midianites. The second principle we can learn from Gideon's story is that God is pleased when we turn to Him for answers.

Then, after we receive His answer, we should go forward in faith, even if the journey forward is scary and risky. Attacking 100,000 Midianites with a band of 300 Israelites would be suicide if it was not for the Lord, Gideon's fleece and hearing about the dream given to the Midianite enabled Gideon to courageously do all that God commanded.

Jephthah

One more story about testing the Lord needs to be included. It is the story of Jephthah. **"Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites.**

And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: 'If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.'

Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into his hands. He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon. When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines!

She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, 'Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the Lord that I cannot break.'

'My father,' she replied, 'you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me just as you promised, now that the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites. But grant me this one request,' she said. 'Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry.'

'You may go,' he said. And he let her go for two months. She and the girls went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. After the two months, she returned to her father and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin. From this comes the Israelite custom that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite." (Judges 11:29-40)

I am convinced that Jephthah offered his daughter as a burnt offering because the Bible plainly says, **"He did to her as he had vowed."** Was the Lord happy with the outcome of Jephthah's vow? No. Does the Lord prevent us from making vows? No. When we make a vow to the Lord, must it be kept?

Absolutely! This is why Jesus said that we should avoid making oaths with God. (Matthew 5:33-37) What Jephthah did to his daughter, Abraham *almost* did to his son. It is amazing that both Isaac and Jephthah's daughter were willing to die at their father's hand as "burnt offerings." (See Genesis 22:13.)

Jephthah is a symbol of the Father, who gave up "His only son" for our salvation. Jephthah's daughter is a symbol of Jesus who gave up "everything," including the intimate love that comes with marriage, to save us from the penalty for sin.

Summary

God created the Urim and Thummim so that Israel's leaders could turn to Him for answers to questions they could not possibly resolve. God eventually refused to answer Saul by the Urim and Thummim and the prophets because Saul consistently rebelled against God's directives.

Gideon tested the Lord with his fleece to confirm that God had actually chosen him to lead Israel against the Midianites. The Lord chose Gideon because of his timidity and He nudged him forward by sending him into the camp of the Midianites to hear about "the giant barley loaf." Finally, Jephthah made a promise to the Lord and although the fulfillment of the promise was painful and overwhelming, he kept his vow.

In response to the question and after reviewing these three topics, please consider this: You and your wife prayed for wisdom when the investment opportunity first came along. Evidently, you could not reach a mutual decision, so you put two tests before the Lord which you believe He miraculously answered.

Assuming both of you are not living in a way that offends the Lord (like King Saul), it is fair to conclude that the Lord responded to your tests and He has led you and your wife into this investment. Now, the only way forward is through faith! Like Jephthah, the Bible solution to this question is to stay on course until/unless the Lord should provide clear evidence to lead you out of it.

I am not a financial expert and the Biblical response may seem contrary to financial wisdom, but sometimes the Lord leads us into faith trying and faith testing circumstances to teach us that our strength and protection is in Him, not in money, investments, or armies. Therefore, be of good cheer!

Remember, the Red Sea parted and God's people walked forward on dry ground. Even though you are in a financial desert, the Lord has not abandoned you. He is poised to teach you new things and reveal more of Himself than ever before. **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."** (Proverbs 3:5,6)

Larry Wilson

Where Was God in Aurora?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

A day or two after the Aurora, Colorado massacre on July 21, 2012, Stephen Prothero, a religious blogger at CNN, teased CNN readers by transposing Pope Benedict's 2006 question from, "Where was God during Auschwitz?" to "Where was God in Aurora?" A few days later, Prothero indicated on his blog that seven basic answers could be distilled from the 10,000+ responses he received:

1. There is no God.

2. Don't blame God, blame Satan.

3. Don't blame God, blame us. (Human beings have free will.)

4. God was behind the massacre, and it was just (because this nation has turned its back on God).

5. God was present at the massacre with the victims, but not the perpetrator.

6. Which God?

7. Who knows? It's a mystery.

Before offering my thoughts on God's whereabouts during the Aurora massacre (12 people killed and 58 wounded), consider these facts: Wikipedia estimates that approximately 9,500 civilians have been killed or murdered during the past 18 months in Syria. Between March 2003 and April 2009, the Associated Press estimates that 110,600 civilians were killed in Iraq.

In 2009 alone, there were 15,241 murders in the United States, and Wikipedia also reports that since 2006, approximately 9,000 civilians have been killed in Afghanistan. If we go back in time, we could ask, "Where was God when Pol Pot, Charles Taylor, Idi Amin, Stalin, and Hitler were in power?"

Collectively, these despots killed tens of millions of innocent people. I know that people tend to catalog the deaths of innocent people in war-torn areas as "unfortunate collateral damage," but isn't the massacre in Aurora another case of "unfortunate collateral damage?"

Let me explain. If a soldier is engaged in warfare and he kills unarmed civilians or if an angry or insane person kills or wounds innocent people, is there a difference? In both cases, innocent people die and our judicial systems (civilian and military) say there is no difference. Predatory violence is a crime and felons are (or should be) punished accordingly. For example, you may recall that just last year, army sergeant Calvin Gibbs was found guilty of three counts of killing

civilians in Iraq and sentenced to life in prison.

As you continue reading this article, keep this definition in mind: *A tragedy occurs when a predator harms an innocent person.* Predators can harm people in many different ways. For example, on June 22, retired Penn State football coach, Jerry Sandusky, was found guilty on 45 of 48 counts of sexually abusing several minors. Even though Jerry Sandusky did not kill anyone, the jury concluded that he had seriously harmed several young men. More and more it seems, the media tells tragic stories.

Do not forget though, the news media is limited to reporting "known sin." Given the fact that the world population is seven billion, there must be an infinite number of tragedies going on that are hidden and unknown. I have highlighted these examples to put some perspective on the tragedy in Aurora, but let me be clear, tragedies will not end until the Second Coming. Instead, I believe we really need to ask this more encompassing question: "Where is God?" Remember, tragedies have continued since Cain killed Abel!

If a person dies when he is 125 years old, we would conclude that he lived "an unusually long life." However, when compared to God's endless life span, 125 years is nothing, not even statistically significant. This comparson is important because when we investigate the ways and plans of an infinite God who knows no haste or delay, large samples of time are required. King David wrote, **"For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night."** (Psalm 90:4)

If a person wants to study the character and ways of the Most High God, he must study the Bible because it is the only document on Earth that actually quotes God. Within the Bible, apocalyptic prophecy proves the existence of the Most High God because He alone can declare the end from the beginning and no one else can do this.

Moreover, the Bible has documented God's actions, declarations, love, and plans over the past 6,000 years. No other document does this. The Bible declares that the Most High God is love (1 John 4:7,8), but God's love is poorly understood and this ignorance has created an endless amount of scoffing and skepticism.

Fortunately, certain elements of God's love can be understood because God is as reasonable as the sciences He has created (although it does require effort to understand Him and His sciences). As we continue to discuss "Where is God when tragedies occur?" let us first consider five things the Bible says about God:

1. Great King. - The Bible says that the Most High God is a great king. **"For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the Earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is His, for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."** (Psalm 95:3-6) **"For by Him all things were created: things in Heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him."** (Colossians 1:16)

2. God Is Patient. The Bible says the Lord is patient: **"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise** [to bring the problem of sin to an end]**, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."** (2 Peter 3:9, insertion mine)

3. God Sees Everything. The Bible says the Lord's eyes sweep over the Earth, He sees everything: **"For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the Earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. . . The Lord knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile** [unwise]**."** (2 Chronicles 16:9, Psalm 94:11, insertion mine)

4. God Holds Each Person Accountable for His Actions. - The Bible says that God holds a person accountable for his actions: **"For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."** (Ecclesiastes 12:14) **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."** (2 Corinthians 5:10)

5. God Deals with Mankind on Two Levels. - This may come as a surprise, but God deals with mankind on two levels, a corporate level and an individual level. Please consider a few of the distinctions between these levels:

Throughout Earth's history, God has "organized" people into **groups of people** called tribes, nations, or countries. The Bible says, **"From one man** [Adam] **He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole Earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."** (Acts 17:26, insertion mine)

Nations do not arise by the prowess of men. The prophet Daniel said, **"He** [God] **changes times and seasons; He sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. . . . so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men."** (Daniel 2:21, 4:17, insertion mine)

Consider how the Most High dealt with the *whole* world in Noah's day: **"Now the Earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the Earth had become, for all the people on Earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people, for the Earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the Earth.' "** (Genesis 6:11-13)

These and many other verses in the Bible indicate that God takes action when *a group* of people reach a point where extended mercy has *no redeeming effect.* At times throughout history, God has destroyed nations so that future generations can know about His love.

Remember, God sees oncoming generations with the same clarity that He sees the current generation. God destroys a wicked generation so the oncoming generation will not suffer under the burden of guilt created by their forefathers. In other words, when a huge number of predators and abusive people are destroyed, future generations will not be subjected to endless rounds of tragedies, at least for awhile.

God also deals with mankind at the individual level by empowering peers to rule over peers. When God raises up a nation, He appoints people to rule over people and He has put a predisposition within most people's hearts to obey their rulers as long as the rulers are honorable.

The Bible says, **"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. . . . He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."** (Romans 13:1-4)

When rulers do what is right, God blesses that ruler and his nation. **"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He chose for his inheritance. From Heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from His dwelling place He watches all who live on Earth – He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.**

No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine." (Psalm 33:12-19)

When leaders (political and religious) do evil in God's sight, God responds in different ways to eliminate them. (See Numbers 16:46; 1 Chronicles 21 and 1 Samuel 3:11-14.) God holds each leader accountable as a trustee and each leader is accountable for his actions. When Judgment Day arrives, evil leaders will be punished for their evil actions. (See Revelation 6:15-17.)

When the five Bible principles previously mentioned are aligned with the tragedies mentioned above, we find a consistent behavior. God grants freedom to each of us as individuals, but God holds us accountable for our actions. God executes corporate punishment on nations when *its majority* passes the point of no return.

God does not often deal with individuals. Instead, He has generously appointed leaders over the nations to serve as trustees of justice, and He allows peers to deal justly with injustice. (Note: Many wicked people may escape justice in this life, but at the end of the 1,000 years, God will resurrect the wicked and deal with them on an individual basis.

Until then, God does not generally execute judgment upon individuals. This is why Paul wrote, **"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."** (Romans 12:19))

Summary

The Most High is keenly aware of each and every act of predatory violence. Jesus told His disciples, **"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the**

ground apart from the will [knowledge] **of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."** (Matthew 10:29,30, insertion mine) God is moved by every sorrow (He sees them all) and He sends the Holy Spirit with sustaining grace to the victims. (John 16:7)

So, why did God allow the tragedy at Aurora, and why has He allowed tragedies (the harming of innocent people) to continue for thousands of years? I can think of several possibilities, but here are two. Perhaps it has to do with numbers! Suppose, at creation, God foreknew how many years it would take to repopulate Heaven. Perhaps God has allowed the curse of sin to linger on Earth to produce the number of saints equal to the billions of angels cast out of Heaven for rebellion. When that number is reached, the end will come.

Second, it is possible that God has allowed the curse of sin to linger for the sake of knowledge! Suppose that God foreknew that six millennial days (6,000 years) would be necessary for evil to fully mature and the knowledge of good and evil become complete. Many people still do not realize that given enough time and opportunity, every sinner becomes a predator (a tragedy maker). This is the curse that comes with sin and this is why sin (and those who love it) must be destroyed at the appointed time.

Human beings tend to look at circumstances from an earthly perspective, but God is looking forward to a new Heaven and a new Earth and He has patiently taken wise steps to prevent sin from occurring again in His universe. (This is not a simple or easy task given the fact that God's children have the power of choice.)

God is making sure that Earth's drama with sin will not be repeated in the eternity to come. Of course, the tragedy in Aurora and future tragedies that will surely come to light tell us that we have not yet reached the fullness of God's plans. But remember, a new order is coming. Unfortunately, as that date draws near, skeptics and scoffers are increasing exponentially.

God is not "missing in action." He waits patiently on His throne. He has seen the billions of tragedies that have occurred on Earth. He has not been inactive. Civilizations have come and gone because they reached a point of no return. His inaction in recent years has given scoffers a good reason to scoff (they think).

Remember, even if a person could live to be 125, that is nothing compared to the Most High who is timeless and ageless. He has a wise plan, it is flawless and on track. At the appointed time, we can be sure that He will rise up and deal with the whole world as He did in Noah's day. **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:37)

Larry Wilson

The Times of the Gentiles

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Recently, I received a very interesting question that deserves serious study. The question was, "What did Jesus mean in Luke 21:24 when He said, 'Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled?' " The background for this question is very interesting and for most readers, the outcome will be surprising.

One day, the disciples asked Jesus, **". . . .what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"** (Matthew 24:3, KJV) Jesus responded by expressing what is identified as a "Day of the Lord" prophecy. Remember, there are five types of prophecy and each type uses unique rules of interpretation. (See page 22, *Jesus' Final Victory.*)

Jesus co-mingled the destruction of Jerusalem (the end of their world) with the destruction of Earth (the end of our world) because there are parallels between these events. To appreciate the phrase, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled," we need to start with verse 20:

Jesus said: **"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by** [Roman] **armies, you will know that its desolation** [destruction] **is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. *For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written*** [in the Scriptures]***.* How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!**

There will be great distress in the land and *wrath against this people.* They [the nation of Israel] **will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations.** [The city of] **Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles *until the times of the Gentiles* are fulfilled."** (Luke 21:20-24, NIV, italics and insertions mine)

I am sure that the disciples were shocked to learn that the nation of Israel was about to perish, Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, and this coming catastrophe would be God's doing, a "fulfillment of all that had been written [in Scripture]." I am sure the disciples were well acquainted with the destruction that King Nebuchadnezzar inflicted on Jerusalem in 586 B.C., but I do not think they were acquainted with the Scriptures that Jesus mentioned pointing to the final destruction of Jerusalem.

God Made a Covenant with Israel

When God gave His covenant to Israel at Mt. Sinai, He promised to bless Israel beyond their imagination *if* they would faithfully serve Him as trustees of His gospel. According to His covenant, God also promised that He would destroy the descendants of Abraham if they became unfaithful to Him and profaned His holy name. (Leviticus 22:31-33; 26:14-43)

God destroys nations that become unfaithful to Him and Israel was no exception. (Ezekiel 14:12-22) Since God chose Israel to be a nation of priests, they were to represent Him to the nations of Earth. Therefore, Israel had a higher calling than other nations and with a higher calling comes a higher level of accountability.

In His covenant, God also promised that if circumstances should require Him to destroy Israel, He would spare a remnant. (Leviticus 26:43-45) About 400 years before Mt. Sinai, God made three promises to Abraham. First, God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. (Genesis 13:16, 17:4) Second, God promised Abraham that his descendants would someday inherit the land of Canaan. (Genesis 12:7, 15:5, 17:8) Last, God promised Abraham that all mankind would be blessed through him. (Genesis 17:19; Galatians 3:16)

God foreknew the rebellious nature of mankind so He put a provision in His covenant allowing Him to spare the remnant of Abraham's offspring until His promises to Abraham were fulfilled. About two years after God entered into the Mt. Sinai covenant with Israel, the Children of Israel rebelled against God when the twelve spies returned from surveying the land of Canaan. (Numbers 14) According to the terms and conditions stated in His covenant, God destroyed Israel, but He spared a remnant. All of the people who left Egypt died (except Caleb and Joshua) and a remnant (the children born in the wilderness) were spared.

After entering Canaan, Israel went through endless cycles of repentance and apostasy for about 800 years. Finally, when Israel's cup of sin was filled, it reached a point of no return,. Israel had reached a level of decadence and rebellion where extended grace had no redeeming effect. Israel's behavior caused God to carry out the terms and conditions stated in His covenant. He allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy two-thirds of Israel and take the remnant captive for 70 years. (Ezekiel 5:10-15; Jeremiah 25:9-11)

The remnant in Babylon clearly understood why they were captives in Babylon. (Daniel 9:3-19) Even though God was angry with Israel, He did not forsake Abraham's offspring. In fact, God sent encouraging messages to the remnant of Israel through Ezekiel and Jeremiah. God told the exiles that He had not forgotten His covenant, He had spared a remnant, and He would restore them to their homeland. (Ezekiel 36:24) After seventy years of captivity ended, God fulfilled His promise through Cyrus in 536 B.C. (2 Chronicles 36:22,23)

Not only did Cyrus set Israel free, but he also returned the city of Jerusalem (its rubble) to the Jews. During the reconstruction of the city and the temple, God reminded Israel through Ezra and Nehemiah that His covenant with Israel still remained. Post-exile Jews perfectly understood that if Israel behaved like their forefathers, God would surely destroy them, as well. (Nehemiah 8, 9)

God's relationship with Israel is but a mirror reflecting God's relationship with all nations of Earth. All nations are subject to God's higher authority (Daniel 4:17,34,35) and when any nation reaches a decadent point where extended mercy has no redeeming effect, a God of love is moved to bring that nation's violence and degeneracy to an end.

God does this for the benefit of innocent children and for future generations. God does not enjoy

destroying anyone, but He will not allow sexual immorality, degenerate behavior, and predatory violence to go unpunished. When God uses His wrath to destroy a nation, He often saves a remnant, *if* their testimony will have a redeeming effect on other survivors.

For example, when God destroyed the world in Noah's day, He spared a remnant of eight people. When He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, He spared Lot and his family. When He destroyed Jericho, He spared Rahab and her family. However, on other occasions, God spared no one. (Deuteronomy 2:31-34;3:4-6, 1 Samuel 15:3)

The Creation of Plan B

During the Babylonian captivity, God spoke frankly, but tenderly, to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel. God promised the remnant of Israel that they would have a bright and wonderful future *if* they would cooperate with Him. God wanted the remnant to forsake the rebellious ways of their forefathers and "get with His program."

If they cooperated with Him, everything God promised in His original plan for Israel would occur. However, God wanted this remnant to know that *if* they should return to Jerusalem and over time behave as their forefathers did, God would surely destroy them. To make this point clear, God did something during the Babylonian captivity that many people do not understand.

He created a contingency plan. The contingency plan was rather simple. If the remnant of Israel behaved as their forefathers did, God announced that He would create *a new Israel* and move forward to fulfill His promises to Abraham. I call God's contingency plan for *a new Israel*, "Plan B." (Because of space limitations, I cannot address the dimensions and ramifications of Plan A / Plan B in this article. Please review Appendices B and D in my book, *Jesus' Final Victory*.)

Many people ask, "Why was Plan B necessary if God already knows the outcome of everything?" Even though God is omniscient and knows everything, He does not predestine the behavior of people. God responds to human beings according to our will. He never removes our power of choice! Israel had the power of choice and could cooperate with Him or rebel against Him. If Israel chose rebellion, God made it clear in the prophecies of Daniel that Plan B would be implemented.

Consider God's foreknowledge: When God made three promises to Abraham, God foreknew that He would not be able to fulfill two of His promises through the biological offspring of Abraham. In spite of this, God still attempted to fulfill the promises! When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He foreknew that all of the adults (except Caleb and Joshua) would die in the wilderness, but this did not keep Him from delivering Israel from Pharaoh's grip. God foreknew that when He made promises to Abraham, He would eventually have to fulfill those promises through the *adoption* of Gentile believers.

Notice the difference between selection and adoption. When God chose the biological offspring of Abraham to be the trustees of His gospel (Genesis 17:7-14), Abraham's descendants became "God's elect" on the basis of selection. God *selected* them. (Exodus 19:3-8; Romans

9-11) After 1,500 years of apostasy in Israel, when it became clear God's elect would continue down the path of rebellion, God implemented Plan B. God abandoned the biological descendants of Abraham and He let the world know His displeasure by destroying that nation and their city in A.D. 70.

To fulfill His promise to Abraham, God implemented the adoption process. God displaced the biological offspring of Abraham with self-selecting offspring who wanted to be trustees of His gospel. After the cross, anyone who chooses to serve Jesus Christ as Lord and Master is *adopted* into the family of Abraham! (John 3:16; 1:12-13; Galatians 3:26-29) By adopting people who were eager and willing to do His will, the tables were turned 180 degrees. By adopting Gentiles as heirs of Abraham, God terminated His need for Abraham's biological offspring.

The Full Cup Principle

During the Babylonian captivity, God announced that His patience with Abraham's biological descendants was limited. He had dealt with Israel's failures for about 900 years and in an effort to bring Plan A to fruition, He granted Israel one last chance. God gave Israel seventy weeks (490 years) of probationary time to accomplish some divine objectives. (Daniel 9:24)

God told Israel that Messiah would appear during the seventieth week to establish the kingdom of God on Earth. This was a test for Israel to determine if it would receive and embrace the ministry and teachings of God in the flesh or despise God's presence in their midst. Israel's response to Jesus would reveal whether the nation had walked away from God during the seventy weeks or whether the nation had walked with God, and you know the rest of the story.

Near the end of His ministry, a frustrated Jesus said to the leaders of Israel: **"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the** [dead] **prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'** [You think you are wiser and more enlightened than your forefathers, but you are no different than your forefathers.

Your corrupt religion is your God. You worship a religion that invokes the name of God, but you do not know God or His ways. If you knew the Father you would love Me because the Father and I are one. You have rejected the Word of God with the same malice and rebellion exhibited by your forefathers.]

So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. [You are murderers, just like your forefathers.] ***Fill up, then, the*** [cup, the] ***measure of the sin*** [committed by] ***of your forefathers!*** **You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? . . . Look, your house** [your temple] **is left to you desolate** [the glory and presence of God will never return to it]**."** (Matthew 23:29-33, 38 italics and insertions mine)

Israel's seventieth week report card can be summarized in one sentence: **"He came to that**

which was his own, but his own did not receive him." (John 1:11) When it became a fact that Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah, the Father terminated Plan A and initiated Plan B which God had created and revealed to Daniel while he was a Babylonian captive. Plan A and Plan B cannot co-exist. Plan B is based on a different (new) covenant. For example, the High Priest appointed for Plan B is from the tribe of Judah and He ministers in the true temple that God established. (Hebrews 7:12, 8:6)

This is contrary to Plan A which required the high priest to be a Levite; a descendant of Aaron. The promises and prophecies made in Plan A do not carry over into Plan B. Plan B has different promises and prophecies. In fact, the promises and prophecies belonging to Plan A are incompatible with the promises and prophecies made in Plan B! Unfortunately, most Christians do not realize that it is impossible to assemble a valid prophetic schematic when elements from Plan A and Plan B are mixed or merged together.

The transition from Plan A to Plan B required three steps:

First, a new covenant was necessary. This covenant is summarized in John 3:16, stated in Hebrews 8:10, and Jesus initiated it in Luke 22:20.

Second, God took a self-selecting remnant from old Israel (those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah) and He created a *new Israel* that would soon include millions of Gentile believers from every nation.

Think about this: If a Gentile obeys Christ's call to follow Him, he is no different than Abraham who obeyed Christ's demand to follow Him. From God's point of view, those who love God with all their hearts, minds and souls, and their neighbors as themselves, live as Abraham lived. In God's sight, such people are Abraham's children. (John 8:39)

Ironically, the Jehovah who called Abraham out of his homeland was the Messiah Himself. (Exodus 6:3; John 8:58; Isaiah 44:6) The God that calls Gentiles to leave their families and homes to become part of the new Israel is Christ Himself! (Galatians 3:26) Since Plan A was terminated, Gentiles in Christ are counted as the seed (Greek: *sperma*) of Abraham and heirs of the promises which God gave to him. (Galatians 3:28,29)

Faith in God is a matter of choice. Surrender to God's will is a matter of choice. Plan A and Israel's history prove that biological descent means nothing without faith in Christ and surrender to God's Spirit. Since biological Israel consistently rejected the voice of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had to abandon biological Israel to fulfill two of His promises to Abraham.The one promise God made to Abraham that was fulfilled through Plan A was the promise that Messiah would biologically come through Abraham's lineage. (Genesis 17:19; Galatians 3:16; Matthew 1; Luke 3)

The third step in the transition from Plan A to Plan B was the destruction of old Israel and old Jerusalem. (Luke 21:22) Since Plan B involved a new High Priest, a new covenant, a new Israel, and a New Jerusalem, there was no place for Plan A to be a part of Plan B. We have already noted that in God's original covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai, He promised to destroy the

nation of Israel if it went into apostasy.

This covenant that Moses wrote in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 is the authority behind the phrase, **"For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written** [in Scripture]**."** (Luke 21:22, insertion mine) During the seventieth week, Israel confirmed its rejection of God (the ministry of Jesus).

This was "the last straw," Israel's cup of iniquity overflowed. Forty years later, Jesus Himself sent Rome's armies into Judea (A.D. 70) to destroy Israel and Jerusalem. Just as Jesus promised, He spared a remnant. A self-selecting group of *adopted* believers escaped Jerusalem by taking the words of Jesus to heart and leaving the city early. Thus, Jesus spared twelve *new tribes* who believed in Him! (Compare James 1:1 with James 2:1 for the identity of the new twelve tribes.)

The Years Allotted to the Gentiles

Jesus said, **"Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."** (Luke 21:22-24, italics mine)

Now that we have explored God's covenant with Israel, the rebellious history of Israel, the seventieth week test, the differences between election and adoption, God's contingency plan to fulfill His promises to Abraham, and some of the differences between Plan A and Plan B, four conclusions can be made about the phrase, **"Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."**

First, when Jesus spoke these words on the Mount of Olives, His followers were not called Christians. (This label would be created in Antioch a few years later. See Acts 11:26.) Believers in Christ were generally called "disciples," "followers of the Way" (Acts 24:14), or Gentile believers. (Acts 15:23) After Paul was converted in A.D. 34, the quantity of Gentiles believing that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the Savior of the world, soon exceeded the number of Jewish believers.

Furthermore, after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, there was an enormous amount of anti-Jewish sentiment throughout the Roman Empire. This led the Gentile believers to separate themselves from Jewish heritage as quickly as possible. Of course, throughout their history, the Jews saw no difference between ungodly Gentiles and believing Gentiles. To them, the world consisted of only two groups of people, the Jews and the Gentiles.

Second, Jesus used a double entendre in Luke 21:24. The word Gentile goes in two opposite directions. In today's vernacular, the words of Jesus could be stated as follows: " . . . The city of Jerusalem will be trampled on by *godless Gentiles* until the years allotted for the ingathering of *Gentile believers* are fulfilled." (Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:10)

Third, when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, Jesus terminated the biological lineage of Abraham by having all of Israel's genealogical records destroyed. History records how the

Romans took Israel's survivors to Rome to work as slaves. (It is said that Jewish slaves helped build the Amphitheater in Rome.) Thus, the temple fire and the slavery that followed produces an interesting dilemma for Jews today. There are approximately 35 million Jews on Earth today and no one knows for sure whether he/she is a biological descendant (heir) of Abraham and there is no way to tell! No records exist to identify who is who.

Since A.D. 70, it is important to understand that one cannot become an heir of Abraham through conversion to Judaism. Even though a Gentile could become an heir of Abraham through conversion prior to the cross. (Matthew 23;15), but this is no longer possible under the new covenant (Plan B).

Ever since the cross, the *only way* to become an heir of Abraham is through adoption. *Paul says this is true for Jews and Gentile alike.* (Ephesians 2; Romans 9 - 11; Galatians 4) Unfortunately Plan B is not properly understood and many end time expositors use Plan A prophecies to make the modern nation of Israel the centerpiece of their schematic.

Let me be clear! The Israel of God is no longer centered in or around Jerusalem. Believers in Christ, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, are found all over the world and their High Priest, King, and Holy Temple are currently in Heaven.

Last, God declared that if Plan B was implemented, the city of Jerusalem would be cursed with wars and desolations until the end of the world. (Daniel 9:26) Indeed, 2,000 years of history reveals a sorrowful story for the ancient city that King David founded about 1000 B.C. Jerusalem has experienced many wars and desolations since A.D. 70.

Even though Jerusalem seems to be prospering currently, its prosperity is temporary. The years allotted to the ingathering of *godly Gentile believers* will soon end and God will destroy the entire world, including ancient Jerusalem. Daniel 9:26 says, **" . . . . The end will come** [upon Jerusalem] **like a flood** [as a tsunami destroys everything in its path]**: War will continue until the end** [of the world]**, and desolations** [upon the city] **have been decreed."** (Insertions mine)

I hope this helps!

Larry Wilson

Speaking in Tongues

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Many people have asked me what I believe the Bible teaches about the gift of tongues. Some churches teach that speaking in tongues is an affirmation of receiving the Holy Spirit. The Bible provides more information about this interesting subject than most people realize.

Speaking in Tongues at Pentecost

1. At the time of the Exodus, God required all male Israelites to attend three annual services at a specific place which later, became the city of Jerusalem. **"Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks** [later called Pentecost] **and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the Lord empty-handed"** (Deuteronomy 16:16, insertion and emphases mine)

2. Following the Exodus, the Lord was patient with Israel's rebellion, even though they continued to rebel and remain in apostasy for about 800 years. Finally, during the sixth century B.C., the Lord used King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Israel.

When Israel learned that destruction was surely coming (Jeremiah 25:9-11), many Jewish families scattered throughout the surrounding nations to avoid death. (See Ezekiel 5:10-15.) After 70 years of Babylonian captivity, many of the offspring born during the exile chose to remain in their adopted homelands. Jewish families were dispersed throughout the Middle East and surrounding nations during this period, and this explains why people spoke so many different languages at Pentecost in A.D. 30.

3. Ten days after Jesus ascended, the day of Pentecost arrived. About 9 a.m. on Sunday morning, (Pentecost always fell on a Sunday), the Holy Spirit descended upon the meeting with a display of intimidating power. There was a violent wind, tongues of fire, and curiously, everyone heard the message in their own language!

"All of them [the disciples of Jesus] **were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.** [Then Peter said] **'These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!' "** (Acts 2:4-6;15, insertions and emphases mine)

4. The disciples did something that had never been done before. They spoke to the congregants about Jesus using the native languages and dialects of the congregants: **"Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews**

and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 2:8-11, emphases mine)

5. When Acts 2 is carefully examined, there is no evidence of an unknown tongue being spoken at Pentecost. Instead, the Bible record clearly indicates that Christ's disciples spoke in the native languages and dialects of the congregants.

Paul's Position on Speaking in Tongues

1. I believe God chose for the Holy Spirit to be manifested at Pentecost (through violent wind, tongues of fire and the miracle of speaking foreign languages) for at least two reasons. First, the gift of speaking foreign languages overcame the impossible barrier which foreign languages create.

Every man heard in his own language the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Second, when the tongues of fire rested upon the disciples, the disciples and the gospel of Jesus were given instant credibility. Three thousand congregants were baptized (Acts 2:41) and when they returned home from Jerusalem, they carried the experience and the gospel of Jesus back to their homeland. Seeds planted at Pentecost sprouted into an array of churches when Paul arrived on the scene years later.

2. Given his unusual calling and experience of associating with Gentile believers, Paul, the Jew, quickly realized that Gentile churches were very different than Jewish synagogues. The Jews remained together in various nations because their ethnicity and their religion made them inseparable.

Early Christianity, on the other hand, was ethnically diverse; it had no traditions, and its doctrines were embryonic. Paul could see that unless the Holy Spirit kept a newly formed church alive, human efforts could not hold it together. At Corinth, the believers were unhappy because they could not determine who was leading the church.

There were Jewish converts who insisted on maintaining Jewish traditions and Gentile converts who were hostile to these assertions. To calm the storm, Paul explained that the Holy Spirit gives different gifts to different people for the purpose of building up the church. After making this point, Paul then said the Holy Spirit Himself – not human beings – determines who will receive a gift from God and what that gift will be: **"All these** [gifts] **are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines."** (1 Corinthians 12:11, insertion and emphasis mine)

Paul provided nine examples showing that the Holy Spirit does not give everyone the same gift: **"To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues** [e.g., the gift of ears – the ability to hear a

foreign language and understand what was said]**."** (1 Corinthians 12:8-10, emphases and insertion mine)

3. To unify the church in Corinth, Paul established a chain of command: **"And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues."** (1 Corinthians 12:28, emphases mine)

Paul placed "speaking in different kinds of tongues" at the bottom of the list because some people in Corinth were speaking gibberish and after doing so, using this "ability" to wield authority in the church.

4. To combat this silly behavior and more importantly, the ulterior motive behind it, Paul said that unknown tongues (gibberish) really have no place or value among believers: **"Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers."** (1 Corinthians 14:22, emphasis mine)

5. Paul said five intelligible words are of greater value than 10,000 words (of gibberish) spoken in an unknown tongue. **"I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a** [gibberish] **tongue. Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults."** (1 Corinthians 14:18-20, insertion and emphases mine)

6. Paul conceded that a person might experience a "eureka" moment and be overcome with profound emotion. In this setting, he might speak an unknown tongue (gibberish) to God: **"For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit."** (1 Corinthians 14:2, emphasis mine)

7. Wisely, Paul did not rule out speaking in foreign languages. (Remember, many of the early Christian churches were filled with ethnically diverse believers speaking many dialects.) However, Paul made it clear that before someone speaks in a foreign tongue, there must be an interpreter who can interpret the speech.

Otherwise, the speaker must remain silent. This requirement eliminates gibberish altogether for two listeners cannot translate gibberish and produce identical results. **"Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. . . . If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. . . . But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."** (1 Corinthians 14:39; 14:28; 14:40, emphasis mine)

8. Finally, Paul appealed to common sense: **" . . . Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. . . . Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in** [unknown] **tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of**

instruction?" (1 Corinthians 14:9, insertion and emphases mine)

"Did You Receive the Holy Spirit?"

Please consider the following story: **"While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?'**

They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?' 'John's baptism,' they replied. Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all." (Acts 19:1-7)

Contrary to what some people infer, there is no indication in Acts 19 that anyone spoke (gibberish) in an unknown tongue. Since Paul was in Ephesus, the gift of tongues was particularly useful. Ephesus was a cosmopolitan city, made up of many nationalities.

People in the city spoke Latin, Greek, Hebrew and various Asian languages and dialects. The gift of tongues at Ephesus parallels the gift of tongues at Pentecost. The impossible barrier of language was overcome and this gift gave credibility to the disciples and the gospel of Jesus. Everyone present at the baptism clearly heard the gospel spoken in their own language!

Peter's Experience with Cornelius

Many people believe that speaking in tongues is a confirmation of being saved. Notice this passage: **"The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles** [Cornelius and his family]**. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, 'Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the** [power of the] **Holy Spirit just as we have.' "** (Acts 10:45-47, insertions and emphases mine)

To appreciate this verse, we have to examine the setting. Peter would not, under ordinary circumstances, enter the house of an "unclean Gentile." Jesus understood Peter's religious paradigm and He gave Peter a vision (about unclean animals) so that when invited to enter the house of Cornelius the Gentile, he would go.

Peter was afraid. He was concerned that he might offend Jewish believers if he went to the home of an uncircumcised Gentile, so Peter gathered a few "circumcised believers" to go with him. Early Jewish converts had a very narrow view of the gospel of Jesus. To them, Jesus was a Jew, the gospel of Jesus was Jewish and in A.D. 34, the Gentiles were not important to the Jews.

Of course, the disciples did not know the profound truths found in Ephesians 2 and Galatians 3 because those chapters had not been written. Therefore, when Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius and his household and the Gentiles began speaking to one another in their native tongue. Peter turned to his circumcised brothers asking, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?"

Because the Holy Spirit enabled the Gentiles to speak in tongues, Peter and his circumcised brothers were forced to acknowledge a profound truth that day: God loves Gentile believers just as much as He loves Jewish believers. Peter said, **"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."** (Acts 10:34,35, emphasis mine)

This was the point of the vision God gave to Peter before he went to the home of Cornelius, but the truth and meaning of the vision did not penetrate Peter's paradigm until he saw the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Cornelius' home.

When the Gentile converts spoke in tongues, Peter unwittingly confirmed there was no gibberish. Peter said, **"They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."** We know there was no unknown tongue spoken at Pentecost and there was no gibberish spoken at the home of Cornelius. I assume that Cornelius' family members and servants spoke among themselves in various dialects of the Roman language and this is what Peter and his friends observed.

Summary: Speaking in gibberish or an unknown tongue has no place in church or in the corporate worship of believers. The gift of speaking in tongues enabled the gospel to overcome the impossible barrier of language during the first century A.D. This genuine miracle, unlike gibberish, enables the gospel to go where it could not otherwise go! This genuine gift was bestowed upon early believers for the benefit of unbelievers. The result was rapid church growth.

Larry Wilson

Questions Answered About The Trinity

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Monotheism Versus Tritheism

Many Christians have different perspectives about the Trinity and the role of the Holy Spirit, so I decided to dedicate this *Wake Up Report!* to my understanding of this topic. Questions regarding the Trinity have long roots in Christian history and Christian views are widely divided on the nature and properties of the Godhead. As I discuss this topic, please understand that my conclusions may be different than your own. My goal is for you to take this information and use it as a stepping stone for your own personal study.

Monotheism versus Polytheism

To be as clear and direct as possible, I believe the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is a separate, distinct, co-eternal member of the Deity. Jesus is not the Father and the Father is not Jesus. Both Deities are separate persons having separate wills. They are also equals in substance.

By definition, this understanding makes me a polytheist, an individual who believes there is more than one deity. I also believe the Holy Spirit is a separate, distinct, co-eternal member of Deity. The Holy Spirit is not the Father or Jesus. The Holy Spirit is a Deity who can hear and speak on His own.

He has a will of His own. He is equal with the Father and Jesus. As you can see, I believe the Bible teaches there are three distinct, separate, co-eternal beings that make up the Godhead and this makes me a tritheist. (A tritheist believes there are three separate deities.) I believe the Bible teaches these three Gods are so closely united in purpose, plan, and action that they often function and/or speak singularly as one God. Their role, separateness, and perfect union make the Godhead a fascinating, yet controversial, study.

To me, three separate Gods functioning as one deity is similar to a husband and wife (two separate individuals) functioning as one flesh. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6) Many Christians believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit without serious consideration.

Hopefully, this presentation will help you think through this topic and decide what you believe based on Scripture. In an effort to be as fair as possible, I should mention that many Christians disagree with tritheism. They believe the Bible upholds the doctrine of monotheism, that is, there is one God who manifests Himself as three persons.

In doing so, they deny that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are separate and distinct members of deity. Therefore, they reason that if a person worships Jesus or the Holy Spirit, he or she is actually worshiping the Father because the Father is in Jesus and the Father is in the Holy Spirit and all together, they are the Father. This discussion dates back to the beginning of the

Christian Church: Are there three separate co-eternal Gods or is there one God manifesting Himself as three persons?

The Nature of Jesus in Church History

During Christ's ministry on Earth, the Pharisees found His teachings to be blasphemous because Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and they viewed His claim as being equal with God to be blasphemy. The Pharisees were incensed because Judaism is strictly a "one God" religion which rejects the possibility of three separate co-eternal Gods.Judaism also rejects the possibility of a Godhead in which one God manifests Himself as three persons. Therefore, when Jesus appeared in A.D. 27, He seriously challenged Israel's monotheistic tradition.

The first converts to Christ''s teachings were Jews (His disciples). During His ministry, the number of Jewish believers grew, but the number of His followers remained small. Then, a few days after Christ''s ascension, 3,000 Jews were baptized at Pentecost. (Acts 2) As the number of Jewish converts swelled, they became divided over the nature of Jesus.

Some Jewish converts believed that Jesus was a separate God, separate and distinct from the Father. Others believed that God created Him and still others believed that Jesus was an incarnation of the Father. Later, after Paul converted to Christianity, Gentiles joined the Christian Church in increasing numbers and seeds of a stubborn controversy began to sprout.

Gentiles generally came from polytheistic backgrounds and arguments between monotheistically biased Jews and polytheistically biased Gentiles began over the nature of Jesus. The core of their argument was whether Christians should be monotheistic or polytheistic.

Conflict over the nature of Jesus roiled the body of Christ for several centuries and many ideas and divisions followed. During the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., the church at Rome gained religious and political powers. Once the Catholic Church held sufficient standing within the Holy Roman Empire, the church moved to "forever settle and end" the argument over the nature of Jesus and the Godhead.

The Eleventh Synod of Toledo (in Spain) in A.D. 675 formally declared the Church''s position on the trinity. In brief, church leaders said: "We confess and we believe that the holy and indescribable Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one only God in His nature, a single substance, a single nature, a single majesty and power. . . . The three are one, as a nature, that is, not as person. Nevertheless, these three persons are not to be considered separable, since we believe that no one of them existed or at any time effected anything before the other, after the other, or without the other." (Source: Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J., Catholic Doctrine on the Holy Trinity, http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/Trinity/Trinity_001.htm, emphases mine)

With this declaration, the Roman Catholic Church modified the strict monotheism of the Jews. Later, Abbot Joachim (1135-1202), who was an influential monk, promoted the idea that the Trinity was made up of three separate, distinct Gods. Because Joachim was widely respected,

his views gained some traction. After he died, the church silenced Joachim's teaching during the Fourth Lateran Council (1251). The council affirmed that there is one God, manifested in the Bible as three persons. Nearly 200 years later at the Council of Florence (1445), the church reaffirmed monotheism: The Trinity is One God who manifests Himself as three persons. Like the Jews, the Church maintained there was one God, but that He manifested Himself as three persons. This position remains unchanged and many Protestant churches embrace this understanding today.

Textual Conflict

Sometimes, the Bible presents a topic that seems to have opposing properties. For example, the Bible indicates in one place that Hell will burn forever and in another place, that Hell will not burn forever. When the Bible presents an *apparent conflict*, a controversy can occur because people will typically sample *some* of the evidence and reach a premature conclusion. Human nature loves to magnify what it wants to believe and diminish the importance of what it does not understand or wants to believe.

The doctrine of the Godhead has been controversial for centuries because the Bible *appears* to present conflicting ideas on this topic. However, for the honest in heart, an *apparent conflict* in the Bible is an invitation for careful and thorough study because mature Christians know there is no internal conflict within God's Word.

The Godhead is true and changeless and the Word of God accurately reflects their character. Therefore, an *apparent conflict* in the Bible means there is a lofty solution that, when found, will harmoniously encompass all the apparent conflicts. *The Bible has to make sense just as it reads or it cannot speak for itself.* With this premise in mind, please consider these seven issues:

1. If the Catholic position on the Trinity, "one God manifesting Himself as three persons," is valid, how can one God have two wills? Did Jesus petition another manifestation of Himself in the Garden? **"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."** (Luke 22:42, emphases mine)

2. Did the Father send a manifestation of Himself to Earth or did He send another Deity who had a will of His own, a Deity who was separate and distinct from Himself? Jesus told the Jews, **"For I have come down from Heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me."** (John 6:38, emphases mine)

3. Did the Father speak about His love for Himself when Jesus was baptized or did the Father speak about His love for another member of Deity? **"Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!' "** (Mark 9:7, emphasis mine)

4. During His final moments on the cross, did Jesus cry out to another manifestation of Himself with a question? **"And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama**

sabachthani?' – which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' " (Mark 15:34, emphasis mine)

5. Paul said that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. Did the Father raise up a manifestation of Himself or did the Father restore life to a member of Deity who willingly gave up His eternal life so that sinners could have it? **"Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him** [Jesus] **from the dead;)"** (Galatians 1:1-KJV, insertion mine, emphasis mine)

6. Jesus said that He was once dead and is now alive forever more. (Revelation 1:18) If Jesus is a separate member of Deity who willingly gave up His eternal life so that sinners could have it, the price of our redemption exceeds calculation. On the other hand, if Jesus is a mere manifestation of the Father, God's sacrifice for our sins amounts to just suffering. Said another way, if the penalty for sin is death, God did not pay the penalty for our sins because God Himself did not die on the cross.

7. Finally, I have to ask this question. If there is one God who manifests Himself as three persons, why did the Father search through the whole universe only to determine that another manifestation of Himself (Jesus) was worthy to receive the book sealed with seven seals? (See Revelation 5.)

This prophetic story highlights the core issue between the doctrine of monotheism (one God) and tritheism (three Gods). What would be the point of the Father searching throughout the universe for someone worthy to take the book sealed with seven seals only to give it to Himself? If monotheism is true and there is only one God, then Revelation 5 becomes a divine sham and we know this is not possible! **". . . Let God be true and every man a liar. . . ."** (Romans 3:4) God is honest and always above any hint of reproach.

When considering the previous seven issues, the idea of one God manifesting Himself as three persons creates several textual problems for which there is no solution. *The greatest problem I have with Jewish monotheism and the Catholic's modification of that monotheism is that the Bible is put into a position where it cannot be understood just as it reads.*

If a Bible student is willing to consider the idea that the Godhead (the Trinity) is made up of three separate Gods who are united as one Deity, serving creation as one God in purpose, plan, and action, the entire Bible will make perfect sense *just as it reads*. When people reach or support conclusions built on religious bias, insufficient samples, inadequate knowledge, or maligned opinions, they create many insurmountable problems and questions resulting in confusion and more division.

A Good Question

At this point, you may be asking yourself, "If the Godhead functions as one in purpose, plan and action, what difference does it ultimately make if there is one God or three separate Gods? Let me emphasize why I believe this topic is important by listing four reasons.

1. When people know the truth about the Godhead, the Bible will make sense *just as it reads.* This is extremely important. *Every truth is a stepping stone for understanding greater truth.* For example, Paul said the Father is **"King of kings and Lord of lords."** (1 Timothy 6:15)

However, when Jesus appears at the Second Coming, John sees Him wearing the title, **"King of kings and Lord of lords."** (Revelation 19:16) Can the Father and the Son be the same person or is there much more to the story? I believe Jesus was found worthy in 1798 to receive sovereign power. (For further study on this topic, please see Prophecies 3 and 6 in my book, *Jesus' Final Victory*.)

In essence, the Father gave His throne and power to Jesus and this is how Jesus became "King of kings and Lord of lords." Paul tells us that once Jesus has accomplished everything that needs to be done, Jesus will return the sovereign power and throne to the Father. (1 Corinthians 15:25-28) At the end of sin's drama, the Father will reveal to everyone that Jesus is the Father's equal in every way!

2. The behavior of three separate but equal deities is defining. Three separate co-eternal Gods living in perfect harmony define what love is and is not to all observers. They live and function according to the laws of love, thus their lives are a comprehensive demonstration, a living laboratory for all creation to study.

3. If we understand that Jesus is deity, a separate, distinct co-eternal member of the Godhead, then the enormous price which our salvation required is shocking. Think about this: A co-eternal member of the Godhead was willing to cease to exist forever so that we might have His eternal life.

Because Jesus was willing to forfeit His life for sinners and was willing to fulfill the Father's will perfectly for our salvation, the Father, by His own authority, raised Jesus from the dead so that He could later exalt Jesus as His equal! (Why is this important to know? The character of Jesus mirrors the character of the Father. Thus, Jesus said, **" . . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. . . "** John 14:9)

4. The presence of three independent members of deity and an expanding universe of created beings requires government. Three Gods and billions of free moral agents having the power of choice could not live together harmoniously without a government based on laws of love. This is why monotheism is a deficient doctrine: If there is one God as Judaism claims or one God having three manifestations as Catholicism claims, then what is love?

If Lucifer and his followers had to wait for "a manifestation of God" to die on the cross in A.D. 30 to see what love is, then their complaints against God before the Earth was created could be justified. If there is only one God, there is no example of love to emulate and no definition of love other than what God says.

On the other hand, if there are three distinct, separate, co-eternal members of the Godhead, their daily submission to each other is a divine example which created beings can study and emulate throughout eternity. *God never asks His children to do or experience something that He*

has not first experienced.

The Deity of Jesus

Now that we have briefly examined some church history and mildly challenged two forms of monotheism, we need to dig a little deeper into the Bible to see if Jesus is, in fact, a co-eternal, separate and distinct Deity independent of the Father. In short, we need to learn if the Bible teaches polytheism. Please examine the following passages and consider my response to each one.

1. Psalm 45:7 **"**[The Father said to the Son,] **You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."** (insertion and emphases mine) This text indicates polytheism since one deity spoke to another diety. (Paul repeats this text in his letter to Jewish believers that affirms that Jesus is a God who was set above His companions. At a point in time, God the Father revealed to the angels that Jesus had a status above the angels. See Hebrews 1:9.)

Comment: This verse, twice repeated in Scripture, confuses many Christians because they either reject or do not know that Jesus once lived among the angels as one of them. Before coming to Earth, Michael was the archangel. For the purpose of discussion, consider this: Before Jesus lived on Earth in the form of a man, Jesus lived in Heaven in the form of an angel.

Just as many people did not know that Jesus was God when He was on Earth, many angels did not, at first, know that Michael was God. When sin occurred on Earth, Michael offered to give up His eternal life for sinners and the Father responded with the words written in Psalm 45:7.

The Father openly declared Michael to be "God" before the angels and this is how Michael was exalted above His companions. This is one of the wonderful things about the Godhead. They do not lord their awesome powers over their subjects. Love does not permit it! (Presentations about Michael/Jesus as God are in Chapters 1-3 of my book, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega* and Prophecy 12 of my book, *Jesus' Final Victory*.)

2. Philippians 2:6, Colossians 2:9 **"**[Jesus] **Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped . . . For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."** (insertion and emphases mine.)

Comment: Because Jewish converts to Christianity often stumbled and struggled with the deity of Jesus, Paul was forced to confront the monotheism of Judaism regularly. Wishing to clear the air on this topic, Paul wrote to the churches in Philippi and Collossae saying, (a) Jesus was "in very nature God," and (b) in Christ's body, all the fullness of deity lives." Paul is adamant that Jesus is Deity like the Father. Jesus also said that He should be honored (worshiped) even as the Father is honored. (John 5:22,23) If the Father and the Son were not equals, Jesus' words would have been blasphemous and this is precisely how the Jews interpreted His words.

3. John 5:18 **"For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was He**

breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." (emphasis mine)

Comment: The Jews were fiercely loyal to "one God" and because of this, they "tried all the harder to kill Jesus" when He called God His Father. To better appreciate their hatred for Jesus, please consider this backdrop:

The devil is a master at creating lies and counterfeits. For example, the Bible says that Jesus created the world in six days, but the devil has led a huge number of educated and intelligent people to believe that the world and everything in it evolved over billions of years. Jesus made the seventh day holy at the end of Creation Week and the devil has created competing holy days (Friday for Moslems and Sunday for Christians) to largely obscure this fact.

The Bible teaches that salvation comes through faith in Christ, but the devil has led billions of people into thinking they can obtain salvation through sacraments, merits, or good works. For every good thing that God has said or created, the devil has created a lie or a counterfeit. This is particularly true regarding the Godhead.

After Noah's flood, at the time of the Tower of Babel, God divided the world. The devil seized upon this development by leading mankind into the darkness of superstition and counterfeit polytheism. Attempting to obscure the truth about the Godhead, the devil led the ancients to believe there were many gods. (Greek mythology is a good example of counterfeit polytheism.)

Lucifer's counterfeit polytheism was already at work by the time of Abraham. The Egyptians worshiped many gods. After Abraham's descendants were held as hostages and used as slaves for 400 years in Egypt, many of them also worshiped the gods of the Egyptians.

The biblical account documents this practice: **"When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' "** (Exodus 32:1, emphasis mine) I am sure that you remember that Aaron made a golden calf which probably represented Apis, a powerful "bull god" which the Egyptians worshiped.

When Jesus spoke to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, He spoke to them in the singular because Jesus spoke on behalf of a united Deity. Therefore, the first commandment says, **"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."** (Exodus 20:2,3, emphasis mine)

Given their polytheistic experience in Egypt, the Jews understood the first commandment to mean the gods of the Egyptians were nothing because there was only one God, the God who had delivered them from Egypt. However, their simplistic understanding of the Godhead eventually set them up for a fatal mistake.

Their narrow understanding of the first commandment gave them the reason and authority to reject Jesus as another God 1,500 years later. Ironically, the Jews never discovered that the

God who they called Jehovah for 1,500 years was Jesus Christ Himself. When Jesus claimed that God was His Father, they understood Jesus to claim equality with the Father which made them so angry they tried "all the harder to kill Him."

This brings us to an important point. If a person wishes to properly understand the doctrine of the Godhead, he has to search the Bible with timeliness in mind. In other words, a Bible student has to be aware of a divine process called "progressive revelation." Progressive revelation means that over time, more about the Bible subject is revealed.

The book of Genesis introduces the Godhead in the first verse by using the Hebrew word *elohiym* (*elohiym* indicates plural Gods) and 65 books later, the book of Revelation brings this topic to a profound climax. The book of Revelation is called "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" because at the end of sin's drama, Jesus will be revealed to the universe as a distinct, separate, co-eternal God equal to the Father.

Of course, Jews and Christians through the ages could not understand the Godhead because the book of Daniel was sealed up until the time of the end. (Daniel 12:9) Now that Daniel has been unsealed and the rules of interpretation have been discovered, Revelation's story unfolds to reveal the truth about the Godhead. For the first time in Earth's history, all 66 books in the Bible can be understood. They are in perfect harmony – *just as they read*.

Before we move forward to Item 4, please consider three examples of progressive revelation: The Lord said to Moses, **"I** [Jesus] **appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord** [Jehovah] **I did not make myself known to them."** (Exodus 6:3, insertions and emphasis mine)

Paul wrote: **"Now to Him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey Him. . ."** (Romans 16:25,26, emphasis mine)

Peter wrote: **"He** [Jesus] **was chosen** [by the Father] **before the creation of the world, but was revealed** [to us] **in these last times for your sake."** (1 Peter 1:20, insertions and emphasis mine)

You may wonder what progressive revelation has to do with monotheism and the first commandment. When Jesus spoke from Mt. Sinai, He spoke in the singular because the Godhead is singular in purpose, plan, and action. The oneness of the Godhead is declared in the first commandment.

When Jesus said **"I am the Lord your God . . . . you shall have no other Gods before me,"** we know that Jesus spoke for the Godhead because He used the plural for God *(elohiym*) when He said, **"I am the Lord your God."** Speaking in the singular, Jesus counteracted the gross polytheism which permeated the world at the time.

Remember, Jesus speaking in the singular is not a problem for the Father. The worship of the Son is permitted because the Son is also a member of the deity. (John 5:22,23) Even more, no one learns the truth about Father without first learning the truth about Jesus. (John 14:6) This brings us to the next text.

4. John 1:1,3 **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . Through Him** [the Word] **all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."** (insertions and emphasis mine)

Comment: If we allow the Bible to speak for itself, this text is radiantly clear. John declares that Jesus is the Creator of everything, Jesus is a separate God, independent from the Father. John says Jesus was with God and Jesus was God, before anything was made. This indicates polytheism and that more than one deity was present in the beginning. Jesus is given the title, "the Word," in John 1 because Jesus is the voice of the Godhead. When the Godhead has something to say, Jesus speaks it.

5. Genesis 1:1 **"In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth." (**emphasis mine**)**

Comment: Does the first verse in the Bible indicate monotheism or polytheism? The word used for God in Genesis 1:1 is the Hebrew word *elohiym* which is the plural form of *elowahh* which means the Deity. Three Deities (plural) were present at the creation of Earth.

The Father commissioned Jesus as the creative agent of the Godhead to create Earth. (Hebrews 1:2; John 1:3,10) and at the same time, the Holy Spirit was hovering over the waters. Wherever the Father and/or Jesus go, the Holy Spirit is already there because the Holy Spirit is everywhere; He is omnipresent. (Genesis 1:2; 2; Acts 5:31,32; Timothy 1:14)

6. Genesis 1:26 **"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air . . .' "** (emphases mine)

Comment: The plurality of God cannot be overlooked or ignored in the first chapters of Genesis. At Creation, Jesus said to the Father and the Holy Spirit, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness . . . ." This passage and Genesis 1:1 indicates polytheism existed before the creation of Earth and John 1:1 affirms this point.

All of God's children are created in His image, after His likeness. Every child of God has a separate, distinct will because each member of the Godhead has a separate, distinct will. Every child of God can know and understand the principles of love because each member of the Godhead is a God of love. When Jesus created Adam and Eve, He gave them characteristics that mirror the characteristics of the Godhead. Because the Godhead lives together as one Deity, a husband and wife can live together as one flesh.

7. Deuteronomy 6:4 **"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." (**emphases mine**)**

Comment: The English translation of this verse appears to support monotheism (one God). However, when we look into the Hebrew language, Moses used the word *elohiym* for God to indicate that God is plural. A literal translation of this verse means: Hear, O Israel: Our God is plural and Jehovah (Jesus) is the One [who represents them]. Incidently, about 98% of the references to Jehovah in the Bible refer to the God we call Jesus!

8. Isaiah 45:5 **"I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me . . ."** (emphasis mine)

Comment: At first glance, the English translation of this verse supports monotheism. However, if we look again into the Hebrew language, Jesus Himself used the plural form of deity (*elohiym)* in this declaration. A literal translation of this verse means: "I am Jehovah (Jesus). I speak for the Godhead. What I say is from Us." This truth is affirmed in John 1 where Jesus is called "the Word." Jesus is called "the Word" or "the Word of God" (Revelation 19:13) because He alone speaks for the Godhead.

Jesus Is an Almighty God!

Before we leave this discussion on monotheism versus polytheism, I need to address some issues that have been postponed in previous paragraphs.

Look at this text: **"This is what the Lord says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God** (*elohiym*)**."** (Isaiah 44:6, emphasis mine) Did Jesus or the Father make this declaration? Please open your Bible and compare Isaiah 44:6 with Revelation 2:8, and then compare Revelation 22:13 with Revelation 1:8.

Exchange the different terms describing Jesus within these four verses and you will discover four facts: (a) Jesus declares that He is the first and the last, (b) Jesus declares that He is the Lord Almighty, (c) Jesus declares that He is Israel's King and Redeemer (Pilate's sign on the cross was correct – compare Luke 23:3 with John 19:19-22), and finally (d) Jesus declares that He is the Alpha and the Omega. Please review these supporting verses until they make sense, just as they read. Jesus has revealed many characteristics about Himself in these verses that separates Him from the Father.

When Jesus said that He is the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega, He was not saying that chronologically speaking, He was the first God to exist. Rather, Jesus was saying that from the cosmic beginning (before anything existed), He has been the voice of the Godhead.

He does not speak on His own behalf. Therefore, as the Word of God, His words are first and they are final (the beginning and the end). When Jesus said that He is the Lord Almighty, He declared that He is an Almighty God, Israel's interface with an Almighty Godhead. Worshiping Jesus is the same as worshiping the Father because they are one and they are equals! (John 5:22,23; Colossians 2:9)

Three in One?

The Bible does not explicitly answer how the Godhead came about. However, it does contain insight on this topic and when the evidence is carefully put together, a wonderful story unfolds. The following scenario is supported by a variety of texts although some details are my own creation. For purposes of discussion, please consider the following:

The Bible indicates there was a time before anything was created that can be called "the beginning." (John 1:1) Let us assume that three separate, distinct, co-eternal Gods came together for a meeting. According to infinite wisdom and loving kindness, they agreed to unite and unify to create a family that would fill an ever expanding universe.

As equal, co-eternal Gods, having the same powers and prerogatives, the other option was endless competition and warfare. There is not enough space in the universe for three equal, independent, free will infinite Gods to live if they have no interest in unity and cooperation! Therefore, if they could not unite as one Godhead, they knew that all creation would get caught up in a conflict of loyalties between opposing deities. So, their first act as the Godhead was a solemn declaration of submission to each other (comparable to a marriage).

This submission involved separate components and with each submission, each God accepted a specific power and a specific limitation. In other words, to live together as one, each God had to relinquish certain powers and prerogatives to the other two so that all three could function as one Deity – ONE in purpose, plan and action.

For example, two Gods (the Father and Holy Spirit) agreed that the other God (the God the angels call Michael and we call Jesus) should serve as the voice of the Godhead. They did this so that everything and anything the Godhead might say to their creation would come from one mouth.

This submission on the part of two Gods explains why Jesus is called "The Word" in John 1 and "The Word of God" in Revelation 19:13. In today’s vernacular, we would say that Jesus was appointed, "The Speaker of the House." Speaking for the Godhead was not the only submission that occurred.

The Father and the Holy Spirit also relinquished their creative powers to Jesus and He was appointed as "The Creative Agent of the Godhead." Jesus is the only God who creates and He alone created everything that exists in Heaven, on Earth, and throughout the universe. (Colossians 1:16,17)

Because the Father and Holy Spirit have no voice (that is, neither can speak for the Godhead) and because the Father and Holy Spirit cannot create anything having substance, these two submissions are profoundly important to understand. Look again at John 1 and Colossians 1:16,17:

"In the beginning[before anything existed] **was the Word** [Jesus is called "the Word" because

He speaks for the Godhead]**, and the Word was with God** [Jesus was with the Father and the Holy Spirit]**, and the Word was God** [Jesus is a distinct and separate deity just like the Father and the Holy Spirit are separate and distinct deities]**. . . . Through him** [the Word] **all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."** (John 1:1,3 insertions and emphases mine)

"For by Him[Jesus] **all things were created: things in Heaven** [He created the angels] **and on Earth** [He created mankind]**, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He** [Jesus] **is before all things, and in Him all things** [the whole universe] **hold together."** (Colossians 1:16,17, insertions and emphases mine)

This mutual submission of the Father and the Holy Spirit to Jesus encompasses some issues we need to consider. In another example, two Gods (Jesus and the Holy Spirit) relinquished their rights of sovereign authority to the Father so the Father rules over Jesus and the Holy Spirit unopposed.

As King of kings and Lord of lords (until 1798), the Father was free to exercise His authority according to His infinite wisdom. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not only supportive, they are 100% committed to whatever the will of the Father might be! This awesome faith cannot be described in words!

The encompassing issue of mutual submission between members of the Deity is important to understand because it explains elements which would otherwise be impossible to understand. Another example of submission is when two of the Gods surrendered their ability to be omnipresent to the Holy Spirit.

Prior to their union three separate Gods had the ability to be everywhere at once. However, the Father and Jesus relinquished this ability to the Holy Spirit so that the Godhead would have one set of universal eyes and ears. Because they must have complete faith in each other, God’s subjects are required to have faith in them. What a wonderful concept.

Since the Holy Spirit is the only God who can be everywhere at the same time, He serves as a two-way conduit between the Godhead and all creation. The Holy Spirit sees and hears everything as it happens in real time throughout the whole universe and He conveys this information to the Father and Jesus as it happens.

On the other side the coin, the Holy Spirit can immediately connect one or all of God’s saints with the Godhead without the necessity of an appointment! According to Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit intercedes for God’s saints. He also reports to the Father the contents and desire of every contrite sinner. (Romans 8:26,27)

Think this through: Because of their perfect union and submission to each other, we actually serve three Gods. We have a God above us (the Father who served as the supreme Ruler of the Universe (until 1798) whose government is righteous and true).

We also have a God beside us (Jesus, the Creative Agent of the Godhead, who lives among His creation as one of us, showing us what the Deity would do if the Father lived within our limitations). Finally, we have a God within us (the Holy Spirit is present within every heart, nurturing us, guiding us, comforting us, edifying us, and bringing God's joy and presence to us).

Is the Holy Spirit a Separate God?

If you have managed to read this far, you know why I believe the Bible teaches polytheism (more than one Deity lives in Heaven). I believe the Father and Jesus are distinct, separate, co-eternal members of Deity. If the Father and Jesus separately exist, I believe it is safe to assume that the Holy Spirit exists separately.The Holy Spirit is not the Father or "an influence that emanates" from the Father (as Catholics believe), and the Holy Spirit is not Jesus. There are three factors that lead me to this conclusion:

The first factor is the universal presence of an unpardonable sin. Have you ever wondered why the unpardonable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and not blasphemy against the Father or Jesus? Jesus said that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unpardonable in this age and in the age to come (after we get to Heaven and sin is no more)! (Matthew 12:31,32) How does blasphemy against the Holy Spirit occur and why is sinning against the Holy Spirit the one sin which Deity cannot forgive?

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit occurs when a person repeatedly defies a conviction from the Holy Spirit. Suppose the Father directs the Holy Spirit to convict a certain person about something which He wants that person to do. The Holy Spirit comes to that person and strongly impresses the person that he must do something which the Father wants him to do. (For example, do you remember the note that Pilate's wife sent to her husband when Jesus was in his court?) (See Matthew 27:19. See also King Agrippa's comment in Acts 26:28.) Suppose the person rejects the conviction from the Holy Spirit, not once, not just five times, but like Pharaoh, rejects the conviction many times and becomes more and more stubborn. Eventually, rebellion will mute the conviction and the internal struggle will end. Any desire to do what the Father wanted will simply evaporate.

The Holy Spirit is a God of love. He loves and respects the will of each sinner for whom Jesus died and He will only leave a person if that person insists on *continued* rebellion. When the Holy Spirit detects that defiance has taken a person beyond the point of repentance, his sin becomes unpardonable.

After every effort had been made to bring Lucifer and his followers to repentance, God cast them out of Heaven because they blasphemed the Holy Spirit. What makes defiance against the Holy Spirit unpardonable? *The only God who can enter our hearts and convey the will of the Father with conviction is the God who is omnipresent.* Jesus cannot do this. The Father cannot do this. Neither of them have omnipresence. If we shut out the Holy Spirit, we shut off all communion with God and this is unforgivable. (1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:6-9)

The second factor that indicates the Holy Spirit is a separate member of the Godhead is that

when a sinner is baptized into Christ, he becomes a participant in God's redemption. Therefore, Jesus commanded that such a person be baptized into three distinct, separate, co-eternal members of the Godhead, uniquely named and identified as The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:10-20) I believe that Jesus commanded this because redemption requires the efforts of all three Gods.

The final factor is that Jesus indicates the Holy Spirit is a separate, distinct God who has relinquished His authority to speak on His own! Carefully study the words of Jesus: **"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth.** [Even though He can,] **He will not speak on his own; He will speak only what He hears** [from the Father and Me]**, and He will tell you what is yet to come."** (John 16:13, insertions and emphases mine) Why did Jesus say the Holy Spirit will not speak on His own?

Why did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would speak only what He hears? Why did Jesus say the Holy Spirit will tell you what is yet to come? Jesus used this language to indicate that like Himself, the Holy Spirit is the God who hears and speaks. However, He only speaks what He hears from the Father or the Son. If we treat the Holy Spirit as a separate member of the Godhead, the Bible will make sense – *just as it reads*. The next paragraph will demonstrate a sample of this.

In John 16:7 Jesus said to His disciples, **"It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."** When Jesus spoke these words, He knew three things. First, Jesus knew that Jerusalem would be destroyed in A.D. 70 and the disciples would be scattered throughout the world. (Matthew 24)

Second, Jesus knew that the Father's original plan (Plan A) to implement the kingdom of God on Earth during the seventieth week would not be fulfilled. Third, Jesus knew that He would be leaving Earth and returning to Heaven within a few days. (John 14:1-3) When we understand that Jesus does not have the ability to be omnipresent, His words concerning the Holy Spirit make perfect sense *just as they read*!

In essence, Jesus told His disciples that through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, He would be closer and nearer to each of them, no matter where they went after Jerusalem was destroyed. This is why it was beneficial for them that He left Earth. The Holy Spirit would be sent to them and He would be able to be with all of them no matter where they went. (For a discussion on Plan A and Plan B and the relationship to the seventieth week, please see Appendices B & D in my book, *Jesus' Final Victory*.)

Jesus also said, **"Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. . . ."** Jesus meant that on resurrection Sunday, He would ascend to the Father. The Father was very pleased with all that Jesus had done for the redemption of mankind, but the Father was not pleased with the way Israel had treated Jesus. Because the kingdom of God could not be established on Earth as planned (Plan A), the Father gave Jesus "all necessary authority" to establish His church on Earth. (Matthew 28:18)

Jesus knew that Lucifer and his demons would do everything possible to destroy His church.

Therefore, a few days after ascending to Heaven, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to Earth on a mission. Jesus knew the most convincing way to overcome the religious paradigms of the Jews and establish His church throughout the Roman Empire was through miracles and evidence of divine power. (See Acts 14:3.)

Jesus also knew that His believers would not have sufficient wisdom and insight on managing and directing His church. Therefore, He promised to send "The Counselor" or "The Advisor" to them. Through the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit, a new religious body would not only begin, it would manage, against all odds and demonic assaults, to endure persecution and apostasy for centuries to come.

The book of Acts tells a compelling story about how the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit enabled a few fishermen to change the course of human history. The Holy Spirit could do things for the church that Jesus Himself could not do if He remained on Earth. This why Jesus was taken from Earth and the Holy Spirit was sent!

Often people wonder, "If the Holy Spirit has always existed, why did God wait thousands of years to pour out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?" The outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the first century A.D. was a special manifestation of divine power designed to achieve a special outcome. However, the work of the Holy Spirit on individuals prior to Pentecost and the work of the Holy Spirit on individuals after Pentecost did not change.

Here is the story: Religion is a powerful paradigm (it controls what most people will consider about God). Remember, Jesus knew "the most convincing way to establish His church in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the Roman Empire was through a display of divine power." People in Bible times did not know much about Earth sciences and they did not have a thousand explanations which technology has provided for us today. Therefore, the ancients were prone to superstition and fear of "the unexplained."

When the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, there was a great wind (intimidation), tongues of fire appeared on the heads of the disciples (the anointing of chosen people), and the gospel was heard in many languages (the gift of tongues). This phenomena was instantly deemed "an act of God" and 3,000 souls were baptized into Christ on the basis of what they saw and heard.

This show of divine power gave the gospel of Jesus a huge dose of credibility and in turn, the church of Christ received a huge boost in membership. The rest of the story, recorded in Acts, is church history. Early Christians regarded Pentecost as the birthplace of Christ’s church. (See John 7:39)

Unfortunately, early Christians poorly understood their new religion. They knew just enough to abandon their former ways. Therefore, the first century A.D. was marked by Holy Spirit power much like the Great Tribulation will be marked by Holy Spirit power during 1,260 days. (Revelation 11:3)

Through the ages, the Holy Spirit has been "poured out" on various people. For example, the Holy Spirit came upon Saul (1 Samuel 19:23), David (1 Samuel 16 &17), Gideon, (Judges 6:34)

and Philip (Acts 8:39). In each case Jesus wanted people to know that He had chosen certain people to do or say certain things.

Do not forget, the Holy Spirit is omnipresent. He is at work at all times and in all places, edifying the body of Christ with gifts of all kinds. (1 Corinthians 12-14). He is also at work in every human heart as long as we permit Him to dwell within.

Special events and manifestations of the Holy Spirit (such as those at Pentecost) are not to be confused with the still small voice of the Holy Spirit calling us to walk with God. Look closely at this text: **"Then the Lord said** [to Noah]**, 'My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.' "** (Genesis 6:3, insertion and emphasis mine) The Lord indicated the Holy Spirit would not endlessly contend with the antediluvians.

"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the Earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the Earth, and his heart was filled with pain." (Genesis 6:5,6, emphasis mine)

Corporately speaking, a majority of the people in Noah's day committed the unpardonable sin. The Holy Spirit could not soften the rebellious hearts of the antediluvians. Therefore, God had to destroy the whole world for the benefit of oncoming generations. The same is true of the world today. All signs indicate we have passed the point of no return. Our world (corporately speaking) will not repent and reform. According to the books of Daniel and Revelation, God's wrath will come just as He said it would.

I know this has been a lengthy article. I hope this study has been helpful. I hope you will read through it a couple times and pray about it. At first, you may think this topic is not very important and to be honest, understanding this topic is not required for salvation.

However, if you wish to understand the Bible in general and apocalyptic prophecy in particular, you need to understand this topic. We have looked at monotheism (one God), polytheism (more than one God) and tritheism (three Gods). The fullness of Deity is within Jesus just as the Father has the fullness of Deity within Himself. (Colossians 2:9) Jesus is not the Father and the Father is not Jesus or the Holy Spirit. I believe three separate, distinct, co-eternal deities function as One, One in purpose, plan, and action and they are forever committed to this arrangement. What an amazing demonstration of love!

Larry Wilson

Religions and Nations Disappear before Jesus Returns

Author: Larry W. Wilson

I know the title of this article is outrageous, but Revelation 13:14 and Revelation 17:12 do predict the world's religions and nations will be abolished before Jesus returns. If God's Word did not state it, I would not believe it. Since this may be the first time you have ever read this prediction, I am sure you are wondering how these events will happen.

Apocalyptic prophecy predicts a series of coming events which are stranger than fiction. During the Great Tribulation, the world will be very different than it is today. The Bible predicts a coming world order unlike anything people are anticipating. The same situation occurred in Noah's day.

In Noah's day, no one believed that a significant change was in the offing. This is the advantage of studying and understanding the "the more sure word of prophecy." God wants His people to understand His Word so that when He steps into the affairs of mankind and alters everything we know, we will not be discouraged or deceived.

Revelation 9 indicates a time is coming when God will permit Lucifer (the devil himself, the Antichrist) and his demons to physically appear on Earth. As I understand this subject, Jesus will only permit the devil and his angels to exit from the spirit realm (the Abyss) when two-thirds of the time allotted for the Great Tribulation has expired.

God holds the devil and his angels back until the 891st day of the Great Tribulation arrives. When these supernatural beings are released from the spirit realm, they will have physical bodies. The devil and his angels unexpectedly will descend to Earth from the sky. (Revelation 9:3) Their appearing will be glorious and intimidating.

The devil's angels will be so numerous that they will fill the sky from horizon to horizon like a swarm of locusts. At first, the people of Earth will run for shelter to escape their glorious presence, but before long, millions of people will go out to see "the greatest deception" to ever occur on Earth.

The Bible tells us that God is love. He is not willing that anyone should perish. This may sound strange, but God intends to use the physical appearing of the devil to save people who would not otherwise chose His salvation! Please consider some of God's objectives during the fifth and sixth trumpets.

1. Searching among the Wicked for Precious Souls

Long ago, God thoughtfully and deliberately designed the Great Tribulation to accomplish several objectives. One of God's objectives is to save as many people as possible during the 1,260 days allotted to the Two Witnesses. There are at least two problems with this objective. First, from God's point of view, the religions of the world are blasphemous.

Mankind is basically ignorant of God and His truth. Second, each person on Earth has been given the power of choice. To judge the living and determine who will be saved, God intends to enlighten the world with His truth (using 144,000 servants) so that each person can hear and understand the properties of salvation and sin. Once a person receives this knowledge, he/she will be in a position to make an informed and intelligent decision about his/her eternal destiny.

The first two and a half years of the Great Tribulation will be agonizing. The Bible reveals that the first four trumpets will devastate the whole world and reduce the population of Earth by 25%. In response to God's wrath, all nations will implement martial law shortly after the Great Tribulation begins.

To make matters worse, the religious and political leaders of the world will create a crisis government in an attempt to appease God so that His judgments will cease, and this crisis government which the Bible calls Babylon will persecute everyone who refuses to obey its blasphemous laws.Given the dire circumstances that remain after the first four trumpet events, survival will be questionable. For 890 days, the survivors will hear the 144,000 and by the 891st day, most people will have made their decision for or against God.

God mercifully keeps the devil and his angels in the Abyss for the first two-thirds (890 days) of the Great Tribulation which lasts 1,335 days. Lucifer and his demons will be released after a majority of the people on Earth no longer listen or consider the 144,000's testimony. The release of the devil and his angels will be a powerful "game changer."

When Lucifer and his angels physically appear, the devil will masquerade as Almighty God. Claiming to be God, he will travel the world for five months, winning the confidence of billions of people by *appearing* to be holy, righteous, generous, forgiving, and gracious. His appearance and actions will deceive a large number of survivors from the first four trumpets.

Pretending to be Almighty God, the devil will perform amazing miracles. He will even call fire down out of Heaven to prove his assumed divinity. His popularity will quickly grow and millions of wicked people will admire, adore, and worship him. Millions of wicked people will bow down before him in humble obedience. They will be the people who defied the gospel of Jesus presented by the 144,000.

Currently, there are many non-religious people on Earth (atheists, agnostics, etc.). These people do not believe there is a god and they will continue to deny there is a god even when Lucifer is walking on the earth! During the five months allotted to the fifth trumpet, Lucifer's demons will be at work by attempting to eliminate the infidels and torturing them with indescribable pain.

During the fifth trumpet, the demons will force many non-religious people to capitulate and join ranks with those who believe that Lucifer is Almighty God. There will be an antidote for this demonic torture. If a person surrenders to the gospel of Jesus, Jesus will not permit the devil's demons to torture him any further. So, the fifth trumpet will eliminate many infidels. Most of the infidels will join forces with Lucifer, but a few will surrender to Jesus Christ and be saved!

Notice Paul's comment about this coming event. Paul describes Lucifer as the "lawless one" or "man of sin" (KJV) because Lucifer will not be subject to any law but his own. He will do as he pleases, and because of his incredible powers, no one will be able to obstruct or thwart his actions:

"The coming of the lawless one [will appear to be a divine event, but the devil's actions] **will be in accordance with the work of Satan** [who he really is] **displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."** (2 Thessalonians 9:9-12, insertions and emphases mine)

Several things can be said about this passage, but we will consider two: First, Paul says the wicked **"refused** to love the truth and so be saved." His language indicates something that many people overlook: The appearing of the lawless one occurs for a specific reason. Before Lucifer can appear, the world will have had to hear the gospel and reject it. We know the world heard the gospel and rebelled against it because God does not assign guilt to a person for something that he does not know and has not heard. (See James 4:17.)

Second, because the wicked refused to accept the truth and be saved, God sends a "game changer," a powerful delusion so that both groups of wicked people (religious and non-religious) will believe the lie and be condemned. You see, long ago God predetermined that the living will be thoroughly tested during the Great Tribulation to see who will choose to live by faith and be saved. Every person has the power of choice and each person will be required to make a choice. Our response to the testimony of Jesus, spoken through the lips of the 144,000, will determine our eternal destiny.

2. Abolishing the Religions and Nations of the World

When the five months allotted to the fifth trumpet ends, the devil will suddenly change behavior and character. His deceit is over. His change of character is prompted and empowered by the fact that during the sixth trumpet, the devil and his forces are permitted to kill people. In fact, the Bible indicates that he will kill a third of mankind, those who oppose him. (Revelation 9:15)

Surprisingly, many saints, remaining infidels, and a host of religious people will make a large group of people who will continue to oppose him. The saints will defy his authority and blasphemous claims. They know Lucifer is the devil. The infidels will defy Lucifer's move to abolish the nations of the world, and religious people will defy Lucifer's move to abolish the religions of the world.

Lucifer will give orders to abolish the religions and governments of the world at the sixth trumpet. He does this because when "God Himself" lives among men, there will be no room for religious plurality (people having different views about God). Lucifer intends to rule over mankind as Almighty God since he is opposed to all religions. (2 Thessalonians 2:4) Lucifer will

demand that everyone worship and obey him or die. The image to the beast mentioned in Revelation 13:14 will be Lucifer's one-world-church-state.

He will rule over the world as "King of Kings" (political matters) and "Lord of Lords" (spiritual matters). He will claim that there is only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. Anyone resisting membership in Lucifer's one-world-church-state will be considered part of the opposition and will be killed. (Revelation 13:15)A one-world government cannot exist when governments and national boundaries exist. Lucifer will eliminate the governments of the world and divide it into ten sectors, appointing ten puppet kings over these ten sectors.

The first four trumpets (Revelation 8) will destroy much of the world's infrastructure. Communication, travel, banking, manufacturing, and energy will be non-existent. When the devil appears on Earth at the fifth trumpet, his agenda is to destroy the world in general and God's saints in particular.

This is why he is given the titles, Abaddon and Apollyon in Revelation 9:11. These titles mean "the destroyer." The devil will set up his one-world-church-state by dividing the world into small groups of a thousand people and he will place captains over each group that are loyal to him. (Dividing people into groups of a thousand was a common practice in ancient times. It is an efficient way to logistically manage many people. It also keeps any one group from becoming very powerful. See Exodus 18:21,25; Numbers 31:14; 1 Samuel 22:7 and 1 Samuel 29:2.)

Remember that one of God's objectives for the Great Tribulation is to save the largest possible number of people. Jesus allows the religions and nations of the world to be abolished during the sixth trumpet so that people will realize their need of a Savior. One of the greatest impediments to a new gospel is an old gospel, or as some people call it, "old time religion."

Many good hearted people would rather cling to their "old time religion" than embrace God's advancing truth. When all of the "old time religions" are abolished and outlawed, a huge obstacle for accepting God's present truth will be removed. People will find themselves having to choose between God's truth or the devil's lies. Past traditions and the practice of "old time religion" will not be possible!

The time of the sixth trumpet will be chaotic and horrific. All governments will be in disarray and ineffective during the Great Tribulation. In the United States, there will be no constitution, no Bill of Rights, and no Congress or court of appeal. The devil will have total control over the people of the world.

Only when he has achieved this will the devil offer survival to everyone who swears total loyalty to him and his government. Those who refuse to go along will be killed. The good news is that during this final hour of salvation, a few people will give up their "old time religion."

They will wake up and realize their desperate need of a Savior, a God whose ways are righteous and whose eternal government is based on principles of love. When these last few sheep come out of Babylon, God's offer of mercy ends. The seven bowls will then begin and Jesus will appear.

Larry Wilson

All Ten Virgins Went to Sleep

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Suppose an individual is promoted to the rank of captain in the army and his first assignment as a commanding officer is at a remote outpost located in eastern Afghanistan. He is responsible for thirty-two soldiers (four officers and twenty-eight enlisted men).

As commander of the outpost, one of his first concerns is guard duty. Knowing the enemy prefers to attack under the cover of darkness, the captain decides to assign half of the troops for night duty. Two officers will serve in alternating shifts as officer of the night and fourteen enlisted soldiers will serve as guards in two hour shifts.

Each night, an officer will visit a bunker in random order hourly to ensure that each guard is alert and responsive. There is no room for negligence or failure, so the captain wants to do everything possible to ensure the survival of his soldiers, as well as the outpost.

Of course, his decisions about guard duty will impact the unit's daily activities because each morning, only half of the troops will be available to go out and engage the enemy (the officers and guards will be sleeping until noon). Furthermore, if there is enemy fire or contact during the night, no one in the outpost will get any sleep.

While the routine described in this scenario can be followed for a short time, it would be difficult to sustain for several weeks. The dilemma is twofold: Fatigue and boredom. If fewer people are assigned to guard duty, each person will have to serve longer shifts, and as a result, extended hours lead to fatigue and carelessness.

When a soldier becomes careless, he lets down his guard. On the other hand, if the captain assigns more people to guard duty, this will reduce their effectiveness during daylight hours to go out and engage the enemy. Thus, managing human limitations at an outpost in hostile territory is not an easy task. Everyone involved with warfare knows there is an enemy within (human limitations) and an enemy without.

This outpost scenario in hostile territory has an interesting parallel when compared with the church of Christ. For the past 2,000 years, the church has tried to overcome the enemy, but the devil has done everything possible to destroy the outpost and the soldiers associated with it.

As Captain of the Host, Jesus has appointed a number of people to serve as officers of the night, which include apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. (Ephesians 4:11) Since the promise of Christ's return was given a long time ago, some of the officers have become drowsy and have let their guard down. Even worse, other officers have become careless and they have abandoned their duty altogether. We must admit with great sadness that many people are not looking into the Bible with great interest.

The passage of time indicates the continuation of time – tomorrow will be like today – so, eat,

drink, and be merry! Christians are asleep. The devil has prepared well for his final assault on the church. This assault will be brutal and it will last 42 months (Revelation 13:5), but most Christians are totally unaware of the ambush that lies "just around the bend."

The Lord knows "this slippery slope" is inescapable. There is decline and degeneracy with everything connected to fallen man. Ancient Israel could not avoid "the slippery slope." Shortly before the Babylonian captivity, notice what God said about His priests: **"Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain."** (Isaiah 56:10,11)

Familiarization

One more illustration should be made before we consider the parable of the ten virgins. Have you ever noticed that when you put on sunglasses that you don't notice the tint in the glass after a few minutes? The lenses can be pink, orange, blue, or green, but after a few minutes everything looks natural because our brain compensates for the tint. The same phenomenon occurs with odors. A house or workplace can have a distinct odor, but after a few minutes the smell is not detectable because our brain says the smell is familiar or normal.

Our ears can also deceive us. For example, when I was a teenager we moved into a house that was located about 100 feet from the train tracks and after a few disturbing nights, I never heard another train go by – day or night. Familiarization is so powerful that our eyes, ears, and nose can be fooled! This behavior raises the question: Are we truly awake to what is going on around us or have we become so conditioned by an endless stream of bad news that nothing unsettles us any more?

The Parable

These illustrations about guard duty (staying awake) and familiarization (being conditioned to ignore the obvious) are important to this study because they are the unidentified culprits found in a parable told by Jesus. Here's the story:

One day, Jesus said to His disciples, **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."** (Matthew 24:37-39)

Even though you have read this text many times, you may not realize that this passage actually describes the experience of unbelievers. However, Jesus also had a few choice words for believers! He described it this way:

"At that time [Jesus is still talking about His return] **the kingdom of heaven** [the corporate body

of believers] **will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.**

At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you.

Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." (Matthew 25:1-13, insertions mine)

Six Points to Ponder:

1. The virgins believed the bridegroom was coming and they went out to meet him.

2. Fatigue overtook them and all of them went to sleep!

3. When awakened, it became clear as to who was wise and who was foolish.

4. The wise could not help the foolish.

5. The foolish were not permitted into the banquet.

6. All ten of them were virgins.

What Does the Parable Mean?

The ten virgins represent the kingdom of Heaven, which is the corporate body of Christ or Christianity as a whole. (The parable does not indicate that every Christian is asleep.) The church of Christ has been watching and waiting for 2,000 years for Christ's return, but the fulfillment of His promise has not come to pass. Prophetic fatigue has overtaken His people. Today, there is more contempt than genuine interest for the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation among Christians! "Jesus is coming soon" has been said so many times that no one actually anticipates it. (This is the problem with familiarization.)

At midnight (when the corporate body of believers is sound asleep) there will be a sudden awakening. Without warning, the groomsmen (the 144,000) will appear and cry out, "Here's the Bridegroom." This awakening will be caused by the casting down of the censer (Revelation

8:3-5) and the first four trumpet-judgments that follow.

The destruction of thousands of cities and 1.75 billion people will be startling and will awaken Christendom to the imminent return of Jesus. The awakening will prove to be cataclysmic. When God's judgments begin, the wise virgins will quickly awake. They will understand and embrace the fulfillment of God's Word. The foolish virgins will become bitter and agitated. The wrath of God and the persecution that follows will overwhelm them. This is not what they expected and it certainly is not what their church believes or what they were taught.

The foolish will visit with their spiritual friends, but the wise virgins will not be able to help them. Their confusion and disappointment will be too great. The wise will suggest that the foolish seek out their pastors and religious leaders, since the pastors and religious leaders were the source of their confusion.

Ultimately, the foolish will not be able to overcome their bitterness, agitation, or confusion. As the parable reveals, the sad truth is that all along, Jesus never knew the foolish virgins. The foolish virgins seemed to be religious, but they were not honestly open to the Holy Spirit or were they students of His Word. As Jesus once said to the Pharisees, a whitewashed tomb is nothing more than the residence of a dead man. (Matthew 23:27)

Watch Out!

Remember, the underlying problem with the ten virgins is fatigue and familiarization. Christians have heard thousands of times that Jesus is coming soon. After 2,000 years, "soon" has lost its meaning and many people have thrown in the prophetic towel and moved into forms of worship that have little redeeming value. There should be emotional appeal in worship, but our worship must be based on "hearing the Word" and our understanding of God must be built squarely on the Rock of the Ages.

Many Christians do not give enough thought to the prophecies. They reason that tomorrow will be much like today. One day, this assumption will prove false. There are two tomorrows. There is the tomorrow – that segment of time – that occurs before the censer is thrown down. The second tomorrow occurs when the censer is thrown down causing events unlike anything the world has ever seen.

Keeping these tomorrows balanced is not easy, which brings us back to the dilemma facing the army captain. If we place too much emphasis on protecting the outpost, how can we go out and engage the enemy? If we place too much emphasis on engaging the enemy, who can stay awake during the night?

Familiarization is a deceptive process. We must search our hearts and seriously ask ourselves if we have become conditioned to the point that we cannot see the signs (the prophetic samples) of Christ's return. Are we trusting our eyes, ears, and nose when we should be searching God's Word? Even if we do not try to interpret the parable of the ten virgins, the message is clear. The wise carried extra oil with them. They went to sleep, but it did not take very long to get prepared

when they were awakened.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come [the censer will be thrown down]**. . . . So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."** (Matthew 24:42,44, insertion mine)

Larry Wilson

PS: Please fast and pray with me that our camp meeting experience in July will be blessed with the outpouring of Holy Spirit power!

The Properties of Faith - Part 1

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Recently, I had a discussion with a friend on the topic of faith. We discussed the relationships between religious paradigms, traditions, culture, knowledge, devotion, behavior, and faith. Near the end of the phone call, he suggested that I create a presentation on the properties of faith.

He was convinced that others would also enjoy investigating the different and sometimes confusing aspects of living by faith. Most Christians agree that faith is an important topic because the Bible teaches that salvation comes through faith! (Ephesians 2:8,9; Galatians 3:11) Therefore, I have prepared a three-part study for your consideration.

Let me make a statement for you to think about as we proceed: As strange as this may sound, it is often our desire for salvation that hinders our understanding about what faith is – and is not. For example, biblical faith is not a form of self-deception. Some people have accepted the notion that God saves a person on the basis of personal conviction, that is, if a person believes with all his heart that he is saved, then he is saved.

The Bible does not teach that personal conviction determines eligibility for salvation. Salvation is not a ticket, a life insurance policy, or an intellectual belief that avoids Hell. When a sinner responds to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and totally surrenders himself to God's will (by becoming eager to go where God wants him to go, be who God wants him to be, and do as God directs him to do – "go-be-do"), he immediately becomes an *heir* of salvation. Let me clarify, an heir does not have what is promised, but he has the promise.

God promises to give every *heir* of salvation eternal life at the Second Coming. Until the Second Coming, the issue that confronts the heirs of salvation each day is whether or not we are living by faith. Jesus told each of the seven churches (Revelation 2 and 3) that salvation will be given to overcomers at the Second Coming. He also told His followers, **"All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."** (Mark 13:13)

Faith Saved Two-Thirds of the Angels

The relationship between faith and salvation is timeless and universal. Consider the role that faith played in Heaven before God created Earth. Lucifer and all of God's angels were happy and selfless before sin began. Everyone loved God, enjoyed His presence, lived in His house, and ate from His generous table.

Over time, Lucifer became jealous of Christ and unhappy with the Father. In an effort to convince the other angels, Lucifer skillfully framed God's policies and actions to made Him appear to be evil and unfair. Eventually, one-third of the angels believed Lucifer's lies, and when their contempt for God reached maturity, rebellion followed.

These angels "bought into" Lucifer's sophistry because they had the ability to reason, they had

the power of choice, and they believed Lucifer was right and God was evil! There *is only one way* that a finite being can happily live in the presence of our infinite God. Because God's ways are not our ways, created beings have to *blindly trust* God's wisdom in all things.

We have to be patient with God's long-range plans and we have to be faithful and obedient even when it seems that God is absent or ignoring us. His time scale is eternal and our knowledge of His ways is limited, which means waiting on God can be very aggravating. Let's face it, "We want what we want." Consequently, our own impatience can lead to bitterness which can lead to rebellion. Fortunately, God understands.

Lucifer sought out his friends in this deception because he wanted their affection and loyalty, which should only belong to God. To redirect the faith and love which the angels had for God, Lucifer made up several lies and he used them to "reason" with the other angels. For example, Lucifer claimed that God was unfair because He had a law demanding that sinners must die.

Lucifer claimed this law was God's way of keeping everyone in line because the minute someone did something that God did not like, he would die. I believe Lucifer challenged the angels with a question that went something like this: "How can God claim that angels have the power of choice? The minute we exercise our choice and do something He doesn't like, we are condemned to die! This isn't love! This is tyranny." What could the angels say?

All created beings are given the power of choice. What we choose to do with that "power" is up to us. We can choose to blindly trust in God or we can choose to do otherwise. If we believe God and trust Him unconditionally, we choose to believe that God sees us, understands our daily needs, hears every prayer, and deeply loves us.

We believe that God's wisdom is always present, working things out for the best possible result. Choosing to wait on God can be very trying (ask Abraham and Sarah) and choosing to maintain a nonnegotiable faith in God can be hard to do when we are suffering, irritated, worn out, distressed, or discouraged.

Living by faith can be very difficult at times.Two-thirds of the angels chose to believe that God was right and Lucifer was wrong. Their *faith* in God allowed them to remain in Heaven, and ultimately, all God's creation will see that the angels' faith saved them from eternal death.

Faith in God means remaining confident about what He promises. Faith in God always produces a glorious result. (Romans 8:28) The result may not be what we wanted or expected, and in some cases, we may not live to see the result, but there will be a day of fulfillment beyond our expectations with rejoicing that cannot be contained.

Each time God fulfills His purposes, His children become wiser. God gives them spiritual insight to grasp a larger and more beautiful result than they could have ever asked for or imagined otherwise. Choosing to live by faith is difficult, but faith in God always results in exhilarating joy and when viewed in reverse, it always makes sense.

Faith Defined

The *Mirriam-Webster.com* dictionary defines faith as:

1. a: allegiance to duty or a person, loyalty; b: (1) fidelity to one's promises, (2) sincerity of intentions

2. a: (1) belief and trust in and loyalty to God; (2) belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion; b: (1) firm belief in something for which there is no proof; (2) complete trust

3. something that is believed especially with strong conviction; especially a system of religious beliefs

The Bible mentions the word *faith* 247 times in the King James Version. Faith is mentioned so many times because I believe God wants us to understand the properties of faith. The Bible offers diverse examples showing many different dimensions to faith. This month and in the upcoming two newsletters, I have chosen topics that go in different directions to highlight some of the properties of faith.

Faith: Obeying a Direct Order from God

We need to examine faith within the context of obeying a direct order from God. Many people think that faith would be a lot easier to exercise if God plainly told us His will. If you have toyed with this idea, you might want to rethink it. Notice this verse: **"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became *heir* of the righteousness which is by faith."** (Hebrews 11:7, italics mine)

Notice that Noah became an *heir* of the righteousness which comes through faith. We know that an heir is someone to whom something is promised. An heir does not have what is promised, but he has the promise. Noah did not receive eternal life because of his faith; rather, he became *an heir* of eternal life.

I need to clarify an important point regarding this. Thus far in human history, very few people have been "saved," that is, very few people have had eternal life bestowed upon them and taken to Heaven. For purposes of discussion, a "saved" person is someone who is not an heir of salvation.

A "saved" person is someone who is no longer subject to death (saved from the curse of sin). People in this category include Moses, Enoch, Elijah, and the twenty-four elders. The righteous dead remain heirs of salvation. They are "asleep" in their graves and will be resurrected at the Second Coming and at that time, *given* eternal life when they meet Jesus.

During the Great Tribulation, the whole world will receive a direct order. Everyone will be commanded to worship the Creator. (Revelation 14:7) Those willing to put their faith in God and

obey this command will be persecuted by those who are unwilling to obey God. Living by faith is not easy, but everyone who chooses to live by faith becomes an heir of the righteousness that comes through faith.

To put Noah's experience with "a direct order" in perspective, I have written a short parable:

One day, as Noah was walking with the Lord, the Lord said, "My son, I am sick at heart with the way life on Earth is deteriorating. I have decided to destroy the whole Earth with water so deep that the highest mountains will be more than 20 feet under water. (Genesis 7:20) I have chosen you and your sons to build a big boat to save the faithful and the animals."

Noah asked, "My Lord, when will this happen?"

The Lord said, "One hundred-twenty years from now."

Noah was shocked. Stumbling for words, Noah gasped, "My Lord, it is true. The world is evil and violence is epidemic. How will this water appear?"

The Lord answered, "I will send torrents of water from the sky and squeeze the great aquifers below the surface of Earth. I will melt the ice stored on the mountains, as well as the ice frozen at the north and south poles. This planet will be totally covered with water just like it was before Creation week took place."

After walking along in thoughtful silence, Noah spoke, "My Lord, how big should the boat be?"

The Lord handed some blueprints to Noah and said, "The boat shall be 450 feet long. The construction of this boat would normally take 40 years, but it will take you 120 years because of persecution, ridicule, and extortion."

"Extortion? What do You mean?"

"Because you and your family will become the laughing stock of the world, hiring people to work on the boat will be very difficult. You will eventually have to pay five times the usual wage for laborers."

"How much will this project cost?"

"The boat could be built for about $25,000,000, but cost overruns, construction delays, and extortion will bring the total close to a $100,000,000."

Noah stammered, "My Lord! Nothing like this has ever been seen. Where do You want it built?"

"Build the boat at the crossroads. I want everyone on Earth to see this boat and observe its construction. I want people to inquire about it. This boat will be a symbol of My deep grief with mankind. This boat will testify that I intend to cleanse Earth with water, and it will also prove to be a vehicle of salvation for those willing to believe My Word."

Noah looked over the blueprints and responded, "My Lord, I am willing to do all that You ask. Through the power of Your Spirit and His guiding providence, I will build the boat, but may I ask how the boat will be financed? I do not have $100,000,000."

"Noah, you must go and sell everything you have to get the project started. You are to build a small temporary house near the site where the boat will be built. When the time comes to enter the boat, dismantle the house and put it in the boat. After the flood, you can remove the house and carry the pieces down the mountain.

It will be shelter for you and your family. As for funding the construction of the boat, I will impress the patriarchs, people like Methuselah and his family, to generously support this project, and there will be a number of saints who will not live long enough to see you enter the ark. They will also support you. You are not to worry about the money. It will come as needed. Your most frustrating challenge will be dealing with the malice of mankind."

The walk ended and Noah returned home. With the help of his believing family, Noah began selling his property. Noah's obedience demonstrated his faith, and his faith made him an *heir* of the righteousness which is necessary for salvation.

If we look closely at Hebrews 11, we find that Noah's faith was consistent with many other heirs. God commanded Cain and Abel to kill a lamb as a burnt offering. Abel killed a lamb; Cain did otherwise. God called Abraham to leave home and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Eventually, Abraham grew weary of waiting for the Lord to give him and Sarah a son. They let go of their faith in God and Abraam had a son through Hagar. This greatly displeased the Lord. Ultimately, Abraham renewed his faith in God's promise and Sarah brought forth the promised son when she was 90 years old.

Earlier, I mentioned that an heir does not have what is promised, an heir only has the promise. Look at this verse: **"All these people were still living by faith when they died** [Noah, Abel, Abraham, etc.]**. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. . . ."** (Hebrews 11:13, insertion mine)

I believe the stories of faith in Hebrews 11 have something to do with salvation, but not in the way that many people think. When a person lives by faith, he transitions from rebellion and intellectual ascent to having an attitude of humility toward God's great authority. This attitude is demonstrated by an eager willingness to go-be-do.

When we choose to have this submissive attitude, living by faith begins and we become an *heir* of the righteousness necessary for salvation. The righteousness of Jesus is given to everyone who lives by faith. His righteousness is the wedding garment that everyone needs in order to attend the coming banquet. (See Matthew 22:1-14.)

Larry Wilson

The Properties of Faith - Part 2

Author: Larry W. Wilson

What Are the Properties of Faith?

A person who lives by faith has a life that is part intellectual (knowledge), part spiritual (believing), and part physical (doing right regardless of the consequences). People who have a faith experience with God are happy, filled with peace, and eagerly awaiting the Lord's return.

Worries and concerns do not cloud their thinking. They believe God's Word and know He will save everyone who lives by faith. They have chosen to believe that Christ's righteousness provides everything necessary to save sinners. People who live by faith choose to believe that God knows them and cares for them!

The only valid relationship a sinner can have with God is a life of faith.

God is not our equal. He is not a make-believe buddy or a guardian angel. God is real and He reveals Himself to His children in different ways known only to those who choose to put their faith in Him. When a person lives a life of faith, he receives an incredible gift. He becomes an *heir* of the righteousness necessary for salvation; a righteousness which God has provided through the life of Jesus. **"For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness** [that is not man-made, a righteousness] **that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.' "** (Romans 1:17, insertion mine)

Last month, our study ended with an excellent example of an individual who lived by faith, the story of Noah. By faith, Noah obeyed a direct order and he became an heir of the righteousness necessary for salvation. Do not overlook the fact that Noah's story contains an interesting parallel for those who will live at the end of the world. During the Great Tribulation, the 144,000 will proclaim a direct order from God (Revelation 14:7) to everyone living on Earth. Only those people, like Noah, who choose to put their faith in God will obey Him and become heirs of the righteousness needed for salvation.

We continue now with the next topic that highlights the properties of faith:

Faith Versus Faith

Knowledge and faith have crucial differences. Knowledge often causes faith to be exercised in opposing directions. This phenomenon is common in politics, science, and religion. For example, some persons *believe* the Koran is the Word of God, and others *believe* the Bible is the Word of God. Interestingly, based on their knowledge of the Koran and the Bible, millions of Muslims believe that Christians are infidels and millions of Christians believe Muslims are pagans. This is a classic example of faith versus faith.

Faith is not limited to religion. There is endless debate about the origin of life on Earth. Some

people believe in a "theory" called evolution and others believe in a "theory" called Creation. Many people think this is simply a debate between intellectuals and science (evolutionists) versus believers and the Bible (creationists), but both sides of this debate share the same common denominator: Faith!

Human beings did not watch Creation Week as it occurred and obviously they did not witness evolution occur over the eons. Therefore, the debate over origins cannot be settled because knowledge alone cannot resolve every question. It becomes obvious then that where knowledge ends, faith begins.

Notice the consequences that can come from faith versus faith. If I choose to accept the theory of evolution (simple life forms evolving into complex life forms over millions of years), I choose to reject the biblical account of Creation (Genesis 1 and 2). If I choose to believe the biblical version of Creation, that God created mankind in His own image on the sixth day of the week, I have to reject the assertion that human beings evolved from a piece of slime over millions of years.

The Bible says that God made the visible out of the invisible. If you choose to accept God's Word, then "**By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, *so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible*. -" (Hebrews 11:3, italics mine)**

A thousand years before Paul wrote Hebrews 11, King David wrote, **"Let all the Earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. *For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm."*** (Psalm 33:8, italics mine) Later, David summarized the creation of everything saying, "**For *He commanded* and they were created. -" (Psalm 148:5, italics mine)**

Evolutionists argue that it is hard to imagine that the entire universe came into existence because God spoke it into existence. On the other hand, creationists say it is just as hard to imagine that a big explosion took place billions of years ago and *matter, life, and an environment that supports it randomly appeared* out of nothing. Renowned physicist Steven Hawking claims that over time, everything we see today occurred without the necessity of, or any input from God, who does not exist.

When considering origins, evolution and creation are both matters of faith. Supporters of each side claim they have sufficient evidence to win the debate and claim the other position is deficient. In a similar manner, the Catholics teach that the Jewish faith is deficient. The Muslims believe the Hindu faith is deficient. The Protestants claim that these groups are all wrong. This is what faith versus faith looks like and we see this conflict in economics, politics, science, and religion.

Does It Actually Matter?

Does it matter what we *believe* about the origin of life on Earth? Please consider three possible scenarios:

(A) When a person chooses to put his faith in evolution, the Bible is denigrated to the level of a myth which causes a new problem. It creates a void leaving no explanation for the most obvious and *most serious problem* on Earth, which is the curse of sin. People who believe in evolution do not have a redeemer and they see no need for redemption. To them, sin is something that exists between people (the last six commandments), not between God and man (the first four commandments).

The nature of evolution forces evolutionists to look backward. Why do you think NASA is spending billions of dollars searching for life on Mars? Believers in evolution are more concerned with man's origin than man's destination. Evolutionists do not believe in a resurrection and have no hope of one.

As they study fossils or geologic strata, they see no evidence of a glorious hereafter with God, family, and friends. Advocates of evolution *exalt* the authority of science and intelligent reason as though evolution is factual, but the premise underlying their cherished theory is built on faith. Evolutionists claim the big bang is the best explanation on the origin of life, but they are totally silent about the curse of sin which kills everything that has life.

Personally, if I were a gambling man and the odds in the debate was 90/10 in favor of evolution, I would still place my bet on Creation because a 10% chance for eternal life is better than being 100% dead forever.

(B) There is also a confusing difference between faith and intellectual assent. Intellectual assent occurs before we are old enough to choose a life of faith. Every child absorbs the language, culture, and religion around him as he grows up. If a child grows up having parents who believe in Creation, he will accept the idea that God created everything out of nothing more easily.

Even if he does not challenge the concept of a literal creation for many years, the idea remains. Our natural alignment with ideas believed to be fact or taught as fact is called intellectual assent. Intellectual assent is a casual agreement with something believed to be true. For example, a person can *believe* that George Washington was the first president of the United States and he can also *believe* that Jesus came to Earth and died on a cross for sinners. A person can embrace both of these beliefs without the beliefs having any influence or effect on his life.

Every child inherits the God of his parents. This God may be Allah, Jesus, Jehovah, Buddha, or Atheism. (Even Atheism is a religion based on faith.) A child may not practice the religion of his parents when he becomes old enough to do as he pleases, but nevertheless, the religion of his parents is his religious start. Usually, this intellectual assent remains intact until an event challenges his belief system and he is forced consider his beliefs and make a choice.

Because intellectual assent is a collection of casual or assumed facts, college age young people are often willing to change their beliefs in exchange for what they believe is a better set of "facts." This willingness to exchange beliefs explains how young adults are able to abandon their inherited religion for something that fits better with a lifestyle they want to live.

Few young people have lived by faith because they have never had a compelling reason to do so. So, the natural default is intellectual assent which comes through traditions, culture, and contemporary knowledge. In complete contrast, living by faith requires a price, and maintaining faith in God when the consequences are painful requires determined commitment.

(C) Our behavior determines whether we are living with intellectual assent or genuine faith in God. It reveals who we really are and what we really believe. Faith renders obedience at all times and in all circumstances, while intellectual assent excuses transgression. If a person is living up to all that he knows to be right and true, he is living by faith. Faith and obedience are inseparable. God sees our hearts and knows what we are thinking. He sees each transgression when there is a separation between knowledge and behavior.

Faith is not only a commitment to the knowledge we have, but it is also a commitment to growth. Many people have a right heart (they live by faith), but a wrong head (their knowledge is all messed up). As the Holy Spirit prompts an individual to learn more about God, the person's discoveries can go in many directions.

If a particular discovery compels him to obey God's greatest commandments ("Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind and soul and thy neighbor as thyself."), *his behavior will prove that his growth in knowledge is going in the right direction and as he commits to pleasing God, it shows that he is living by faith.* James wrote, **". . . . I will show you my faith by what I do."** (James 2:18)

Let me be clear, there is a big difference between wholesome faith and toxic religion. Toxic religion does not have two great commandments. Toxic religion is all about "loving God supremely" while treating our neighbors as "outsiders" or unclean people. Toxic religion is destructive, harsh, critical, arrogant, and self-righteous.

The Pharisees in Christ's day are an example of toxic faith. They worshiped their religion and it caused them to crucify the Creator of mankind. (John 1:1-14) Religious systems that express hatred and diminish the value of others do not spring from God. (John 8:44) Religious systems that uphold the Word of God and love their neighbors as themselves spring from God. Regardless, all religious systems eventually produce fruit. Jesus said, **"Thus, by their fruit, you shall recognize them."** (Matthew 7:20)

Did Jesus Come to Earth?

Personally, there is sufficient evidence from outside sources (for example, Josephus and the writings of early Christian believers) that proves Jesus came to Earth, died on a cross, was resurrected, and taken to Heaven. If a person chooses to believe the biblical account of Creation and the fall of man, which brought about the curse of sin (Genesis 1-3), then the death of Jesus on the cross makes a lot of sense.

A redeemer and the redemption of sinners is only possible because God loves mankind. Redemption is necessary because sinners cannot save themselves from the penalty for sin. On

the other hand, the theory of evolution has no need of a Savior because evolution does not consider the curse of sin or the penalty for sin.

Since I grew up in a Christian environment, I inherited and intellectually accepted as fact that Jesus loved sinners so much that He was willing to come to Earth and die for us. However, Jesus' life on Earth and His death on the cross did not have a transforming effect on me until I was an adult. I only became seriously interested in Jesus when I realized that there is nothing beyond this short life unless I become an *heir* of the righteousness of Jesus.

Personally, when I felt the weight of my sins and began to grasp the penalty that loomed over my head, I realized I needed a Savior. When I began to comprehend what Jesus had done for me, I was overwhelmed. As is so often the case, I went along in life, happily unaware of my condemnation. I did not sense my need for a Savior, but fortunately the Holy Spirit changed this.

Scripture reveals that God has a wonderful proposition. He says to sinners: "If you are willing to believe in Me and live by faith, I will make you an heir. I promise to give you the righteousness necessary for salvation. I will also give you a new life that is far better than anything you can create for yourself. You will experience a peace that words cannot express. And at the end of sin's drama, you will not be hurt by the second death. All of this is possible *if* you are willing to live by faith (to go-be-do as I direct)."

Larry Wilson

P.S. Don't forget that the new *Asteroid Impact!* brochures are now ready to ship. We have many preorders for the brochure that have not yet been shipped because payment has not been received. You can obtain copies to share for just the handling and shipping cost of $5.00 for 100 brochures. Call the WUAS office at 800-475-0876 to order.

The Properties of Faith - Part 3

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Last month, we investigated the difficult topic of what determines whether we are living with intellectual assent or genuine faith in God. We discussed how our behavior reveals who we truly are and what we truly believe. *Faith renders obedience at all times in all circumstances. In contrast, intellectual assent excuses transgression.*

When a person lives up to all that he knows to be right and true, he is living by faith. Obedience and faith are inseparable. God sees the motives of our hearts and minds. He clearly sees each transgression when there is a separation between knowledge and behavior. As we continue, the last two segments will highlight different properties of faith:

Faith That Overcomes Fear

We could describe faith in God as a form of heroism. An ordinary person becomes a hero when he willingly risks his own life to save another life. Heros are exalted because their actions are an expression of supreme love. Jesus said, **"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."** (John 15:13)

From God's perspective, living by faith is a heroic act because a faithful person puts God's will above his own. A person reveals his faith in God when he faces threatening situations and chooses to do right in God's sight without regard for the consequences.

This may sound strange, but faith is not detected on "easy street." In fact, a person's faith and true character are not revealed until he or she is tested which is why He designed a testing time for everyone during the Great Tribulation. Jesus spoke to His faith-full believers at Philadelphia saying, **"Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from** [during] **the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the Earth."** (Revelation 3:10, emphasis and insertion mine)

Faith and character are often hidden from view until they are tested. One way faith in God grows is through personal study and prayer. Similarly, character grows from test to test. As we study the Bible, the curtain is pulled back to reveal the successes and failures of people in the past. Even more importantly, God reveals His involvement and response.

God sees everything. In fact, the phrase "the eyes of the Lord" is mentioned 88 times in the Bible. **"For *the eyes of the Lord* range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."** (1 Chronicles 16:9, italics mine)

Jesus taught that faith in God is not measured by size because it can be as tiny as a mustard seed and still move mountains! (Matthew 17:20) Faith in God is a choice. We demonstrate our choices with each challenge that comes our way. When confronted with a test, those who live by faith grasp the Promises and Providences of God, and through His strength, they overcome

their fear. For example, consider the actions of King Jehoshaphat:

"After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to make war on Jehoshaphat. Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, ‘A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea.’ . . . Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.

"The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him. . . [The king offered prayer and he concluded saying:] **For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.’**

"All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord. Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah . . . . He said: ‘Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. *For the battle is not yours, but God’s*.

" ‘Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you. . .’

"After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: ‘Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever.’ As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated." (2 Chronicles 20:1-22)

The faith of one man inspired a whole nation to have faith in God! To demonstrate his faith in what God could do, King Jehosophat placed an unarmed choir at the head of the army. As the column marched toward the enemy, they sang praises to God who had promised victory. What finer words could be used to end the story, **"and they** [the enemy] **were defeated"**? Blessed is the person who gains victory over fear through faith!

Total Surrender –- Even to Death

The most difficult dimension in faith is total surrender even to the point of death. Jesus gave us the perfect example of this kind of faith. A few hours before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed: **" ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.’ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."** (Luke 22:42-44)

The Father did not remove the bitter cup that Jesus had to drink, but the Father did send an

angel to strengthen Jesus.

Many people do not realize this, but when it comes to prayer, God may not answer prayers in the way people anticipate due to three reasons:

1. Divine wisdom and foreknowledge:

- God sees tomorrow with the same clarity that He sees today. God always knows what is best. In many situations, we may pray for an outcome that would not be good for us (or others), so divine wisdom and love may prevent Him from answering our petition in the way we think is best. For example, what loving father would give the keys to the car to his ten year old son? Even human wisdom has to say "no" from time to time. So, when Jesus asked the Father to remove the bitter cup, the Father said "no" because the redemption of sinners required the death of a sinless sacrifice! Therefore, the Father sent an angel to strengthen Jesus so that He could fulfill His mission, even if it meant dying on the cross. Jesus lived a life of faith and He accepted His own death as the will of the Father. The faith of Jesus is astonishing.

2. Justice and fairness:

- God is love, His actions and policies are based on the principles of love, but He must be unquestionably fair. For example, God does not send miracles very often, but when He does, it is usually in a setting where He can accomplish several objectives at the same time. (Acts 14:3) For instance, millions of sick people worldwide pray for healing. It would not be fair for God to answer some petitions and ignore others. God does not cancel the laws of cause and effect, and He is not cancelling the curse of sin right now. However, He does the next best thing to help everyone which is to increase knowledge and give people the ability to help one another.

God loves everyone (Matthew 5:45) and He gives us a great deal of freedom which enables us to grow in knowledge and exercise our faith in Him. Of course, God knows tremendous injustice is occurring on Earth. God sees the suffering caused by predators, and believe me, He keeps records and He will deal with those who have hurt others and preyed on the vulnerability of the poor, sick, and elderly at a time He has chosen.

Of course, human beings want justice executed right away, but God has ordained that justice will be served *after* the drama with sin is over. He will deal with all of the wicked and be sure they receive the appropriate punishment for the sins they committed. Be assured, the wicked are heirs, too – only they will receive God’s wrath when the time is right. No crime will go unpunished.

3. The curse of sin:

- Until the curse is lifted, God must allow the consequences of sin to bring about sorrow, suffering, and death. God has ordained that the curse of sin will last long enough to accomplish His objectives and not one day longer.

Three reasons come to mind for allowing the curse of sin to exist for six millennia:

First, God foreknew that it would take 6,000 years to produce enough saints to "repopulate" Heaven. Right now, Heaven is two-thirds full. When redemption is accomplished, Heaven will be restored to three-thirds – a full house!

Second, God foreknew that it would take 6,000 years for the curse of sin to mature. Since God's greatest problem is the prevention of a third episode with sin, He has allowed the consequences of sin to develop. God wants the knowledge of good and evil to be completely revealed.

Going forward through eternity, there will be no excuse for sin or rebellion. No one will be able to create lies or arguments against God's character or government because the truth about God will have been demonstrated. No questions will remain about the supremacy of God's government or the purity of His character.

Finally, at the end of sin's drama, God will show the universe who Jesus really is. God will show the universe that Lucifer's character changed and he became a liar and a murderer because of sin. God will show the universe that sin makes predators of every sinner – given time and opportunity.

God will show the universe the great price that was paid for the redemption of sinners. God will show the universe that He has perfect foreknowledge and even though He knows the end from the beginning, He will not treat His children according to His foreknowledge, but based on His love.

When God creates the new Heaven and the new Earth, He will replace it with something better than He had when He first created Heaven and Earth. Everyone living in His house will understand the horrific consequences of sin. The knowledge of good and evil will be complete as well as the knowledge of God's purity and perfect love. What a really wonderful way to press the reset button and begin eternity all over again!

Knowing all this helps to understand why God turned down Jesus' petition. Jesus prayed to escape Calvary, but the Father knew that the redemption of sinners required the death of a perfect sacrifice. His hands were tied by love for us (**"For God so loved the world . . ."**) and His hands remain tied by the curse of sin. Do not be discouraged. Rejoice!

A day is coming when God will righteously annihilate the wicked and purify the universe of sin.

Summary

In these three issues of the *Wake Up Report!*, we have examined four dimensions of faith.

1. Obeying a direct order

2. Faith versus faith and intellectual assent versus faith

3. Faith overcoming fear

4. Total surrender

Each dimension has its own properties and challenges, but they all have one thing in common – *choice.* A life of faith begins when a person chooses to surrender his will to God's will and live by faith. By choosing to live by faith, a person becomes an heir of the righteousness which is necessary for salvation.

None of us have escaped the curse of sin yet, but we do have the promise of salvation and that is good enough. Tests and trials come and go, strengthening our faith in God, and with every test and trial comes with commensurate grace from God. His grace is sufficient for any challenge when we surrender to His will.

Living by faith – there is nothing like it, yet nothing is more difficult and more exciting at the same time.

Larry Wilson

Pain, Sorrow, Suffering, and Death

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The issue of why God allows suffering, death, pain, and sorrow is one of the most challenging questions ever asked. If you or someone you know is experiencing the heartache of a tragedy, unusual pain, sorrow or suffering *right now,* this article may help them understand the bigger picture. I hope it will be encouraging. To get started, please consider the following:

The Bible teaches that God is omnipotent (all powerful) and omniscient (all knowing), but the Bible also teaches that God will not use these infinite powers to benefit Himself. If He did, He would be a self-seeking and self-promoting God.

The Bible also says that God is love. This means that God's words and actions stay within the boundaries defined by the laws of love. Therefore, God refuses to do certain things. For example, God will not violate the power of choice He has given to angels and human beings. He permits each of us the choice to love Him or hate Him. God allows each of His children the freedom to do evil or to do right. Of course, whatever we sow we reap, but to be given the freedom to make those choices is amazing!

God uses His infinite powers for the benefit of His children, and He does so with fairness and justice for all. God loves everyone throughout the world and He wants to be understood even though finite beings can never fully understand an infinite God. However, finite beings *can* understand everything that God has made known. Walking with God means that things we do not understand today will be understood later. As time passes, when faith in God is viewed in reverse, it always makes sense!

No one in the universe is more humble, compassionate, and loving than God. Every day, He suffers far more than we can imagine. Think of it. A perfect God hears every lie, sees every act of hatred, watches our sorrow, and feels our suffering. He witnesses every act of adultery and understands the pain.

He sees every sparrow that falls and mourns with us when a loved one dies. We serve a God who knows the number of hairs on our heads and empathizes with every heartache and injury. God can see everything occurring on Earth and because of His omniscience, He has been heartsick ever since sin began.

God has infinite wisdom. He knows what is infinitely best for an ever expanding universe, including Earth, and for each individual. God is deliberate and purposeful in everything He does, which means there are specific reasons why events unfold in an orderly basis. Even though it may not be evident to our eyes, divine wisdom is at work and later, every individual will see God's larger purposes.

The Bible predicts a day will come when all created beings will bow down before God with astonishment. The saints will kneel with adoration and praise in their hearts and the wicked will

kneel when they see the recorded evidence of His love. The Bible declares the wicked will even admit that God is righteous and fair in His judgment!

God is neither simple nor simplistic. If you want to know God, you must diligently seek Him. A billion years in the past or a billion years in the future are but a small moment in His existence. Long ago, God wisely decided to take several thousand years (a very short time within the context of endless eternity) to resolve the sin problem in such a way so that it will never happen again.

The span of time God is using to deal with sin is important to consider. We tend to view God within the context of our life's experience, but God operates on a huge timescale. The Bible reveals God's character and ways over a period of 7,000 years. When God's words and actions are properly aligned, we learn that His love is larger and more wonderful than words can express!

As you ponder these concepts, I hope you will see a starting place for answering why sorrow and suffering exist. Through the years, people have asked me, "Why doesn't Almighty God stop all of the suffering, sorrow and death that plagues Earth?" I believe that God wisely allows pain, sorrow, suffering, and death to occur on Earth for this brief time period in His eyes because He is resolving the huge problem of sin.

He does not want it to infect the whole universe ever again. Said another way, God is allowing the curse of sin to exist on Earth so it will not recur throughout eternity. Even though this is the basic answer to the question, there is much more to understand.

When God created the angels, they were created to be happy and holy beings. He gave them everything necessary to enjoy eternal life. He also created them with a *strong propensity* to live in harmony with God's two laws of love: (a) You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and (b) you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Heaven was an incredible place to live until passion overtook reason.

Unfortunately, Lucifer, the highest created angel, became jealous of Christ. Lucifer wanted to be worshiped as Jesus was worshiped, but the Father would not permit it. Lucifer's pride was hurt and his disappointment soured into rebellion. His hatred for the Father motivated him to secretly seek the sympathy of the angels.

Lucifer used deceit and sophisticated lies to mislead the holy angels. Eventually, Lucifer led a third of the holy angels to become anti-Christ. Of course, the Father knew what was happening. Remember, even though God is omniscient (all knowing), He will not violate the power of choice He gives to His children!

Time after time, the Godhead did everything possible to resolve Lucifer's hatred, but Lucifer would not back down. When all attempts to convince Lucifer to repent failed, the Father assembled and confronted the angels. He commanded the angels to bow down and worship Jesus, and all of the angels who defied His command were immediately cast out of Heaven. God did not destroy Lucifer and his followers at that moment for two very important reasons.

First, if God had killed a third of the angels that day, the remaining two-thirds would have eventually concluded that God is not a God of love. Remember, the remaining angels did not understand Lucifer's passion and rebellion. If they would have watched the sudden death of their dearest friends, they would have served God out of fear instead of love. They would have concluded that Lucifer was right after all: God is a divine bully who insists that everyone obey Him under penalty of death!

Second, God did not immediately destroy Lucifer and the rebellious angels because the knowledge of good and evil was just beginning to unfold. Even though the holy angels were highly intelligent, they did not understand the properties of good and evil for they had never seen or studied evil.

By allowing the rebellious angels to live, God created a living laboratory so that the faithful angels could see how the curse of sin would affect their friends over time. By giving evil the opportunity to reach maturity, God will show the universe forever what sin actually does to happy and holy beings (whether angels or mankind). Throughout endless eternity, God will use this evidence to prevent another incidence of sin, since the power of choice will not end at the second coming. God always gives His children the power of choice.

After Lucifer and his followers were cast out of heaven, Jesus created Adam and Eve. When Lucifer observed Creation Week, he saw, in a demonic way, a fantastic opportunity to "get even" with God. The devil reasoned that if he could lead Adam and Eve into sin, they too, would become *natural* enemies of God.

After he was cast out of Heaven, Lucifer discovered that when a holy being sins, a sudden change occurs within them. They become selfish, self-seeking, and rebellious toward God. God's laws of love become offensive and undesirable to them. When God created the holy angels (as well as Adam and Eve), He gave them a theo-centric (God centered) heart, which means each holy being was given a very strong predisposition for loving God and one another.

When a holy being chooses to commit sin (which is very difficult to do), that strong predisposition for loving God and others becomes a strong predisposition for loving self. Consequently, every sinner becomes ego-centric (self-centered) instead of theo-centric (God-centered). Whether we choose to believe it or not, every sinner has a very strong inclination to be selfish and self-seeking.

To put this in perspective, notice how sinners today typically relate to God's two laws of love, expressed by the Ten Commandments. The first law of love is to love God with all your heart. Sinners relate to the first four commandments which make up the first law of love in the following ways.

Sinners create their own gods and worship graven images (idols). They carelessly speak God's name or take God's name in vain. Even more, they typically resist God command to rest from their labors on His holy Sabbath. The last six commandments describe the second law of love – love your neighbor as yourself.

Sinners treat others with disrespect and cruelty. They lie, cheat, steal, murder, commit adultery, and covet their neighbor's possessions. Worse, the children of sinners will often abuse their parents in horrible ways to get whatever they want. *All sinners have the heart of a predator* and will readily take advantage of each other and do all kinds of evil things to each other to achieve whatever they want. This is the way it was in Noah's day and it is no different today. From birth, every child is naturally selfish and self-centered.

Lucifer is a highly intelligent being and he reasoned that if he could lead Adam and Eve into sin, he would have an increasing number of rebels to fight against "the tyranny" of God. Lucifer realized that Adam and Eve were unlike the angels because they had been given the ability to procreate. If Adam and Eve, along with all their offspring, sinned, Lucifer concluded his empire would swell in size and given enough time, he would become a force for God to deal with!

The devil did not know that God had a very special reason for creating Earth. God gave Adam and Eve the ability to procreate so that Heaven could be repopulated with "victors over sin." God foreknew that Adam and Eve would choose to sin. He also foreknew that it would take 6,000 years for enough sinners to choose eternal life so that He could restore Heaven to three-thirds again!

At the end of sin's drama, Heaven will be better off than ever because one-third of Heaven will be victorious over sin! God has allowed sin to exist for a short season so that the curse of sin might be understood and finally destroyed. Therefore, He has allowed this "living laboratory of sin" to exist for a short time so that no one throughout eternity would want to revisit the experience of sin. When Lucifer and the holy angels rebelled against God, it was difficult because their natural inclination was to love God and one another.

However, the redeemed are born into the curse of sin, but they will choose submission to God and His Word. This is difficult for them because their selfish inclination is to rebel against God and their neighbor! After Jesus' Second Coming, God will have a large multitude of holy beings in the universe who know experientially what the curse of sin is all about (pain, sorrow, suffering and death). These witnesses will forever say, "We have been there, done that, and we assure you that you want nothing to do with it!"

Bible prophecy indicates that we are very close to the end of sin's drama. For a short season of only 6,000 years (remember, a billion years in eternity is but a moment), God has been willing to let the curse of sin run its ugly, painful and deadly course on Earth. Everyone who lives in the universe today, and those who will eventually live in His universe will be able to see and understand what sin and sinners do.

Thus, the knowledge of good and evil gained from Earth's experience with sin is designed to avoid pain, sorrow, suffering, and death throughout eternity. By giving the curse of sin a small measure of time to mature, God knows that He can secure the universe from another round of sin's curse!

The good news is that God has chosen to allow sin's curse to exist for a short season. He has also chosen to give *special grace* to *everyone* who wants freedom from sin's curse. God's

amazing grace comes to us in different ways. First, God is willing to give repentant sinners a deep sense of peace and joy, a happiness within that passes all understanding. Second, God is willing to send the Holy Spirit to comfort, enable, and strengthen us when we are hurting, discouraged, depressed, and lonely.

Third, He is willing to impart wonderful knowledge and understanding about His character, His love, His plans, and His ways. Finally, and most of all, He is willing to transform us. He will enable us to overcome our ego-centric ways. He knows that we are cursed at the present time with the properties of sin (which makes us naturally selfish and self-seeking), so He has made a way for us to be born again!

Through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit we can taste and experience the joy of a theo-centric life and in so doing, we can make the most of walking with God and living in harmony with His laws of love in our present situation! I hope you now appreciate how God is working with a much bigger picture than just Earth. He is preparing the whole universe for endless happiness throughout the corridors of eternity.

Larry Wilson

Has God Changed?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

About fifteen years ago, Dr. Laura Schlessinger, a nationally syndicated radio talk-show host who offers advice on marriage, dating, and relationships, made a comment on her website about homosexuality that produced a great deal of attention. She said:

"I'm sorry – hear it one more time, perfectly clearly: If you're gay or a lesbian, it's a biological error that inhibits you from relating normally to the opposite sex. The fact that you are intelligent, creative, and valuable is all true. The error is in your inability to relate sexually intimately, in a loving way, to a member of the opposite sex – it is a biological error." (December 8, 1998)

In response, Kent Ashcraft wrote an open letter to Dr. Laura (who was a practicing orthodox Jew until August 2003). Later, he emailed a copy of his letter to a friend and it went viral over the internet within a few days. Since then, many variations of the letter and claims of authorship have appeared on the internet.

I learned of Ashcraft's letter a few days ago. Even after fifteen years, I think a biblical response to Ashcraft's letter is appropriate because he used the Bible in a clever way to challenge some of today's so-called modern mores. Many Christian churches have demonstrated their belief that God has changed His mind about homosexuality through an increasing number of homosexual clergy.

Ashcraft's letter most likely became popular because (a) he made God's laws look foolish, and (b) he appealed to two ideas which many Christians already accept as true. First, many Christians believe the God of the Old Testament is unlike the God of the New Testament, and second, not only was the Old Testament abolished at the cross, *it really needed to be abolished*. I do not know Mr. Ashcraft or anything about his moral or religious views except for the arguments set forth in his letter. I have included a copy* for your review:

Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate. I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God's laws and how to follow them.

1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighbouring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanliness - Leviticus 15:19-24. The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

4. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord - Leviticus 1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

5. I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself, or should I ask the police to do it?

6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination, Leviticus 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this? Are there 'degrees' of abomination?

7. Leviticus 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle-room here?

8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Leviticus 19:27. How should they die?

9. I know from Leviticus 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Leviticus 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? Leviticus 24:10-16. Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Leviticus 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively and thus enjoy considerable expertise in such matters, so I'm confident you can help.Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your adoring fan,

(***Note:** Some reports on the internet indicate that Ashcraft did *not* include items 8 through 10 in his letter to Dr. Laura. It is believed someone else likely added these items. Since the arguments in items 8 through 10 are compatible with items 1 through 7, they are included.)

How would you respond to Mr. Ashcraft's letter? My response is this:

Dear Mr. Ashcraft:

I have just learned of your letter to Dr. Laura and even though you wrote it fifteen years ago, it remains pertinent and I would like to offer a response. You have presented some sophisticated arguments and I found your examples, references, and logic to be quite clear.

You have framed a premise that appears to be this: If God's laws to ancient Israel are still intact, then God's declaration "that homosexuality is an abomination" is still intact. However, if the laws given to ancient Israel are not binding today, then homosexuality is no longer an abomination to God. Have I accurately summarized the basic premise of your letter? If so, please consider my three-part response:

1. God Seeks the Elevation of Mankind

God created seven categories of laws in the Old Testament. He gave Israel laws about health, religious conduct, civil conduct, war conduct, business conduct, sexual conduct, and moral conduct. These categories are not surprising because most nations today have laws in these same categories and have added more laws, such as environmental laws and maritime laws.

Your ten questions to Dr. Laura can be broken down into four questions regarding health, three questions regarding religious conduct, two questions regarding civil conduct (slavery), and one question regarding moral conduct (the death penalty for violating the fourth commandment, God's seventh day Sabbath).

Six of the seven categories of laws God gave to Israel came through Moses. God Himself spoke *only* the Ten Commandments (the moral law) from atop Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17) and wrote them on two tablets of enduring stone with His finger. (Exodus 31:18) Given the price that God paid to save sinners, Christians believe that God is love, caring, and generous.

Most Christians believe that God gave His laws for our benefit, not His. God has infinite wisdom and His laws are designed to continuously elevate those who obey and uphold them. This elevation process includes nations as well. (Psalm 33:12) Bible history teaches there is an inseparable relationship between compliance with God's laws and the well-being of those who honor them.

May I illustrate the elevating process which God's laws can produce? While Abraham's descendants lived as slaves in Egypt for 430 years, each passing generation assimilated deeper and deeper into Egyptian ways, thoughts, and behaviors. When the time came for deliverance, God foreknew Israel's mind-set.

The character transformation Israel needed to move forward with God's plan would be a significant challenge. From the time of the Exodus, God did everything possible to win Israel over to His ways, but many people did not like God or trust Him. Because of their constant rebellion against Him, God eventually refused to take the generation He delivered from slavery into Canaan. With the exception of Caleb and Joshua, all adults who were delivered from Egypt died in the wilderness because of defiance and stubbornness!

From the beginning, it was God's plan to transform a nation of slaves into a nation of priests. God wanted Israel to become a nation of loving and intelligent people who would not only tell the whole world about His love and salvation, they would demonstrate it! Notice the words God spoke to Moses:

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."(Exodus 19:4-6)

There are several ways to change the behavior of people corporately. Sometimes, education will produce change. For example, when some people learn that illness comes through a direct exposure to disease, many people will avoid the exposure. Sometimes, financial policies will produce change.

For example, when banks do not pay any appreciable interest on savings accounts, many people will remove their cash from the bank and invest it elsewhere to get a better return on their money. Finally, laws will sometimes produce change. For example, when governments want people to change behavior, they make laws and impose significant penalties for breaking these laws.

Generally speaking, those who are wise will obey these laws and those who are foolish will go to prison. These three samples illustrate this point: Good education, policies, and laws can have an influence on people, but none of these will eliminate our natural rebellion toward authority.

When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He provided education, policies, and laws in addition to shelter, food, and water. God loved Israel, even though they were a nation of rebellious slaves, and His efforts to transform His people came through education, policies, and laws.

His commands were "stepping stones" so that Israel could eventually reach the high calling for which He had chosen them. However, God's education, policies, and laws could only be effective if Israel loved and admired Him. Notice how God's "stepping stones" applied to divorce. Moses wrote:

"If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance."(Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

Fourteen hundred years after the Exodus, Jesus came to Earth and the Pharisees tested Him to see what He had to say about divorce. Notice what Jesus said about Israel's condition during

the time of Moses:

"Some Pharisees came to him to test hi**m**[Jesus]**. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?' 'Haven't you read,' he** [Jesus] **replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." ' "**

'Why then,' they asked, 'did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?' Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. *But it was not this way from the beginning*. I tell you[the truth, the Creator says] **that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.' "** (Matthew 19:3-9, insertions and italics mine)

Because God is loving, infinitely wise, and all-knowing, His laws are always appropriate and beneficial even though we may not understand their ultimate purpose or importance. When we do not understand the reasoning behind God's laws, believers must trust God's infinite wisdom. This explains why faith in God is so important, but sometimes difficult. In these types of situations, we must obey God out of faith instead of reason, and Israel's history proves that living by faith is not an easy choice.

Some of God's laws (like the Ten Commandments) are everlasting and some laws (like the religious laws given to Moses) were designed from the beginning to be temporary. Temporal laws are not unusual and we commonly use them today. For example, whenever we see a reduced speed limit in a construction zone, we see a temporary law. When the purpose for the temporary law is achieved, it expires. King David, a lawmaker himself, closely studied the wisdom behind God's laws and wrote:

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb."(Psalm 19:7-10)

Because some of God's laws are everlasting and some are temporary, there is a great deal of confusion and conflict today as to which is which. Orthodox Jews cannot accept the idea that some of God's laws were temporary and the arguments set forth in your letter may have had a profound impact on Dr. Laura since we now know she renounced Judaism in 2003.

On the other hand, many Christians, instead of taking the time to determine which laws were abolished by the death of Jesus, abolish everything written in the Old Testament. Given this "all or nothing" confusion, I would like to direct your attention to the issue of sexual behavior.

Consider this passage that Jesus spoke about sixty years *after* His ascension to Heaven.

Explaining what eternal life in the holy city, New Jerusalem, would be like, Jesus said to John (who, at that time, was exiled on the isle of Patmos for his faith):

"He who overcomes[the passions of the carnal nature – see messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3] **will inherit all this** [life in the holy city and Earth made new]**, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."** (Revelation 21:7,8 insertions mine)

Jesus said that sexually immoral people, liars, and idolaters will not enter the holy city. Mr. Ashcraft, you may not be aware of this, but Jesus is the God of the Old Testament! (John 8:58, 1 Corinthians 10:4, John 12:41, Isaiah 44:6, and Revelation 1:17,18) More than ninety-five percent of the references in the Old Testament pertaining to "God" actually refer to Jesus.

Therefore, if you believe the words of Jesus in Revelation are factual, then you also must accept the words of Jesus in the Old Testament as factual. Given the serious consequences of the lake of fire and the second death, we have to ask: "What is sexual immorality?" God has defined sexual immorality and the definition is found in Leviticus 18.

However, like God's position on divorce, His position on sexual immorality has been clear from the beginning. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of sexual immorality a full 500 years *before* God spoke the words recorded in Leviticus 18.

Early Christians understood the curse of sexual immorality and in its first official action, as an organization, it outlawed among other things, sexual immorality. (Acts 15:20) Later, Paul condemned sexual immorality in many texts. (See Romans 1; Colossians 3:5,6;1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3)

The New Testament must have had a basis for this condemnation and the basis for Jesus' warning in Revelation 21:8 had to be Leviticus 18. God has not changed. Sexual immorality has not changed. Jesus, the God of the Old Testament is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. (Hebrews 13:8) From the beginning, God united a man and a woman as one flesh (Genesis 2:24) and sexual relations were limited to the confines of a marriage between a man and a woman:

"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.**"**(Hebrews 13:4)

Sexual conduct is very important to God because He uses sexual conduct as a way to renew and sustain the marriage relationship. When a husband and a wife are faithful to each other, society benefits. Healthy and happy marriages are far more likely to produce happy and productive offspring than children from broken marriages.

Our sexual conduct and actions have an important impact on society. Our sexual conduct matters to God. (2 Corinthians 5:10; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Revelation 22:12) James

wrote, **"Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do."** (James 2:18) Faith without works is useless. (James 2:20)

2. God's Temporary Laws Are Terminated, Never Changed

Previously, I stated that God created some laws to be temporary. When Adam and Eve sinned, the Father sent the guilty pair away from Eden, but not without a promise. God promised He would provide a way back to Eden through the death of His Lamb, Jesus. If a person wanted to show faith in God's promise of redemption, the sinner willingly offered a sacrificial lamb on an altar at appointed times. This law explains why the patriarchs offered sacrificial lambs. After the flood, Noah continued to offer sacrificial lambs as God required.

Centuries later, Abraham offered sacrificial lambs, and after the Exodus, God gave Israel further instructions about the offering of sacrificial lambs at appointed times. When sin began, God's law regarding sacrificial lambs began. This law was binding upon all who *believed* God's promise and this law remained intact until the "Lamb" of God came to Earth and died for our sins.

When Jesus died on the cross, the law requiring sacrificial lambs was terminated. The apostle Paul was punished by the Jews because he declared *the religious laws* given to Israel had been abolished. Paul argued that the Levitical system was terminated because it had served its temporary purpose and he showed how a new covenant having a new High Priest was established. After paying the price for our sins, Paul taught that Jesus had returned to Heaven to serve in the presence of God as man's intercessor. Notice his words:

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. . . . For when there is a change of the priesthood

[from the sons of Levi to the Son of God]**, there must also be a change of the law** [a new law was put in place, a law different from what was given through Moses]**. He** [Jesus] **of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from** [the tribe of] **Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests** [serving at the altar. In fact, Moses limited services at the altar to Levites.]**"** (Hebrews 4:14,15; 7:12-14, insertions mine)

During the first century there was a great deal of confusion between early Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity. At first, Christianity appeared like a sect of Judaism because the first converts were Jews! As the gospel of Jesus made inroads throughout the Roman Empire, Gentile converts did not want to assimilate into Jewish culture (which they despised) and Jewish converts did not want to let go of their religious culture or traditions (which they cherished). Therefore, conflict came into each Christian church. Notice what the apostle Paul wrote to the newly formed church in Colossea:

"When you[Gentile and Jewish converts to Christ] **were dead in your sins** [unaware of your guilt] **and** [living] **in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God** [awakened you and] **made you alive with Christ** [through the ministry of the Holy Spirit]**. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code** [the religious laws given to Moses]**, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us** [e.g., the religious laws which we Jews distorted through legalism and ignorance]**; he took it away** [abolished it]**, nailing it to the cross."** (Colossians 2:13-14, insertions mine)

Paul speaks clearly. The religious laws given through Moses were abolished at the cross. This does not mean that God also abolished those laws governing sexual conduct at the cross. **"I the Lord do not change. . . ."** (Malachi 3:6) Remember, Jesus spoke the words in Revelation 21:8 about sixty-five years after His ascension to Heaven.

In God's sight, sexual immorality has not changed since Creation week. Because God has infinite wisdom, He does not need to change or modify His laws. If a law has a sunset from the beginning, that law is temporary and when its sunset occurs, it is abolished, *not changed*. Likewise, the religious laws which God initiated in Eden and amplified through Moses were abolished because a *new* covenant was put in place with a *new* High Priest who lives in a *new* Jerusalem which is located on a *new* Mt. Zion!

3. How Should God Handle Defiance?

Finally, I would like to address item #5 in your letter. You argued that Exodus 35:2 indicates that Sabbath breakers should be put to death if God's laws are endless. Through the centuries, many Christians have offered this passage to prove that God's seventh day Sabbath rest was abolished at the cross. God's seventh day Sabbath was not abolished at the cross, but instead, the command to execute Sabbath breakers was abolished around 1000 B.C. when God ended His theocracy. Please let me explain:

When God delivered Israel out of Egypt, He set up a theocracy. A theocracy is a church-state government where God rules. In Israel's case, God served as Israel's king (in civil matters) and as Israel's lord (in religious matters). Four hundred years into the theocracy, rebellious Israel did not want a theocracy and it did not want God as king. Israel wanted to be like the other nations and have a human king. Heartsick, God terminated His theocracy and gave Israel its second king, a man named Saul. (1 Samuel 8)

This is an important fact to understand. God's theocracy began at the beginning of Israel's history. Within this context, Exodus 35:2 makes perfect sense and so does Exodus 22:18 which says, "Do not allow a sorceress to live." At the time of the Exodus, God knew how stubborn and rebellious Pharaoh's slaves would be.He knew that everyone within Israel would not want to observe His stepping stone laws and participate in His elevating transformation. Therefore, God said to the first generation of Israel (the generation that would later die in the wilderness):

"For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord. Whoever does any work on it must be put to death. Do not light a fire in any of your

dwellings on the Sabbath day."(Exodus 35:2,3)

Mr. Ashcraft, thousands of writers have overlooked the setting of this law through the centuries. The theocratic context of this law gives this law its unique and timely application. As Israel's king, God could not tolerate anarchy, so He imposed death on those who would defy His commands.

God imposed a seventh day Sabbath on Pharaoh's slaves with the same authority and penalty that Pharaoh had previously imposed on forced labor. God *had* to do this with a nation of scofflaws (a nation who habitually ignored the law). The hardness and stubbornness of their hearts required God to be firm!

Think about this: When a military general gives a direct order to a subordinate, there should be consequences for defiance. When a person defies an arresting law officer, there should be consequences for defiance. When a governor signs a law, there should be consequences for defiance. What is the point of having a law if there is no authority to deal with defiance?

Summary

Mr. Ashcraft, I do not know whether you actually believe the ideas stated in your letter or whether you merely wished to compile some arguments to confront Dr. Laura, who openly claimed to be an orthodox Jew at that time. Nevertheless, you framed the Old Testament in a light that suggests the Bible is silly and unnecessary. This response may not change your mind about the Bible, but I hope you will give the whole Bible some reconsideration.

As Dr. Laura would say, "Let's be perfectly clear." Jesus said in Revelation 21 that sexually immoral people will not receive eternal life or have a place in the holy city. Sexual immorality did exist before Leviticus 18 was given to Moses. God's wrath destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of sexual immorality.

When Jesus explained divorce to the Pharisees from God's point of view, Jesus explained why the laws of Moses were given as "stepping stones." God wanted to elevate the nation of Israel from darkness to that of enlightened teachers and evangelists (priests) to benefit the entire world.

God does not change. He has infinite wisdom and He also knows the end from the beginning. Therefore, He has no need to change or modify a single law. He simply abolishes temporary laws when their sunset occurs. Since King Saul's reign, Israel has not operated under a theocracy. Therefore, God's commandment that Sabbath breakers must be put to death for defiance, as well as many other commands that pertained to His theocracy, has been null and void for 3,000 years.

Look around at the agony sexual misconduct is producing. This agony ranges from abused children, self-loathing teens, insatiable addiction in older people, and the cause of many diseases. If more people understood the sorrowful and painful harvest that sexual immorality

brings and if more people avoided sexual misconduct, then millions of people would be happier and the world would be a much better place for our children and future generations. The Bible teaches that nothing good ever comes from transgressing God’s laws.

God gave us His laws for our benefit and contrary to what many people say, there is no evidence in the Bible where God has changed His mind about things He calls "an abomination." Sin began on this planet with the devil deceiving mankind and given the behavior of people we see all around us, obviously he has not stopped.

Larry Wilson

Entering into God's Rest

Author: Larry W. Wilson

- "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from hisown work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore,make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience." -Hebrews 4:9-11

I would like to address a passage in Scripture that people often distort, claiming God's seventh day Sabbath is not binding or mentioned in the New Testament. This article has two underlying assumptions.

First, I assume you have been introduced to the idea that God continues to move forward with His plans regardless of human conduct, and second, I assume that you are aware of the inseparable relationships that exist between grace and law, faith, and obedience.

For discussions on these matters, you can download the following links from our web site: Appendix D in my book, *Jesus' Final Victory* http://www.wake-up.org/Commentary/AppendixD.pdf and Chapters 4 and 5 in my book, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega* http://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Chapter4.htm and http://www.wake-up.org/Alpha/Chapter5.htm

Anticipation Begins with a Promise

To appreciate the significance of Hebrews 4:9-11, we need to start with a promise that God made to Abraham about 400 years after Noah's flood. **"At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' "** (Genesis 12:6-7)

Later on: **"The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, 'Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the Earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.' "** (Genesis 13:14-16)

Finally, the Lord said to Abraham: **"I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as *an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you*; and I will be their God."** (Genesis 17:7-8, italics mine)

Many people read these verses and think that Canaan is nothing more than "promised" real estate, but there is far more to God's promise than several million acres. God promised Abraham that he and his descendants would inherit the kingdom of God, whose headquarters

would be in Canaan, as an everlasting (eternal) possession. We see evidence of this understanding in Abraham's anticipation:

"By faith h**e**[Abraham] **made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."** (Hebrews 11:9-10, insertion mine)

From the time of Abraham to Christ's ascension, God has adjusted His plans for mankind. This may come as a surprise, but it was God's original plan to establish His kingdom in Canaan shortly after Abraham's descendants took possession of the land.

Jesus would have come to Earth as a baby and after paying the penalty for sin, He would have established the kingdom of God in the land of Canaan. Thus, Israel would have become a nation of priests (Exodus 19:6), serving God on behalf of all mankind. Jesus would have eventually resurrected Abraham and the saints who had died previously.

They, along with those who had not died, would have lived forever in Canaan, the headquarters of the kingdom of God! Abraham understood God's promise and this is why he was looking forward ***to a day*** when Canaan would have ***a city whose architect and builder was God***.

Two Profound Points

When we understand the elements of God's promise to Abraham, two profound points surface. First, if God's kingdom had been established on Earth as God originally planned, *Moses* would have led Israel into **God's rest**. The kingdom of God is called "God's rest" in Scripture (Psalm 95:6-11) for very good reasons.

After the children of Israel were delivered from slavery, they began to understand God's rest. (Exodus 33:14) The concept behind "God's rest" is the fact that God worked for six days and then He "rested" from His work on the seventh day. (Genesis 2:1-3) Because there was no curse on Earth, Adam and Eve enjoyed the daily bliss of "God's rest."

Since God met their physical needs, they did not need to work to survive. Then, when sin entered the world, Adam & Eve's work began in earnest. The Lord cursed the ground and ever since, mankind has had to work hard to survive. (Genesis 3:17-19) The Edenic promise of redemption God gave to Adam and Eve included a full restoration to "God's rest" and Paul urged the Jews (Hebrews 4:11) to make every effort to enter God's rest (the kingdom of God) which had not yet appeared.

Notice what Paul says about Israel's forefathers:

"Who were they who heard[God's voice] **and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would**

never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." (Hebrews 3:16-19, insertion mine)

The second point is even more profound (and often ignored). Paul says that Joshua ***did not*** lead Israel into God's rest even though Joshua led Israel into Canaan! **"For if Joshua had given them rest, God would *not* have spoken later about another day."** (Hebrews 4:8, italics mine)

After Moses and Joshua died, Israel continued with numerous cycles of apostasy followed by repentance. Finally, after living in Canaan for about 400 years, Israel rejected Christ as their king. (1 Samuel 8:7) When Israel did this, God abandoned the plan He gave to Abraham. God started over with another plan after David became king.

"Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. *Today*, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, *'They shall never enter my rest.'* " (Psalm 95:6-11, emphases mine)

Note: Massah and Meribah are two names that identify a large rock near Horeb, where Israel became angry with God and doubted that He was with them. (See Exodus 17:5-7)

Near the time of his death (~970 B.C.), David spoke to Solomon saying, **" 'I am about to go the way of all the Earth,' he said. 'So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go, and that the Lord may keep his promise to me: "If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man** [a descendant] **on the throne of Israel." ' "** (1 Kings 2:2-4, insertion mine)

Like Abraham, David anticipated the kingdom of God. David knew that Israel had not yet entered into God's rest. This is why the Holy Spirit, speaking through David, said to Israel, "**Today**, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. . . . as our forefathers did." David understood that God's rest was coming and he anticipated a day when his own descendant, the Messiah, would come to Earth and sit on his throne.

Moving forward about 250 years, we find that Jesus could also have been born around 730 B.C. if Israel had been willing to cooperate with God. God was willing to establish His rest during the days of Isaiah and King Ahaz, but the people did not have faith in God and were not spiritually prepared for His kingdom so they were not able to enter God's rest. Remember Isaiah's words to King Ahaz.

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give

birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right" . . . "Before the boy knows how to say 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria". . ."For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this." (Isaiah 7:14-15; 8:4; 9:6-7)

When God's plan failed again, He implemented the terms which were clearly stated in His covenant. (Leviticus 26) Because Israel disobeyed God, He destroyed Israel and sent the remnant into captivity. During the Babylonian captivity, God revealed another plan to Daniel.

In this plan, God granted Israel 70 weeks to accomplish His objectives and He set an unconditional date for the Messiah to arrive. If Israel would have repented and prepared for the kingdom of God, God's rest would have been established on Earth when Jesus came to Earth in 4 B.C. Notice what Jesus said at the beginning of His ministry: **"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!' "** (Mark 1:14,15)

Unfortunately, Israel would not listen to Jesus and wanted no part of His kingdom. **"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."** (John 1:10-11) When it became clear that Israel had no interest in entering into God's rest, God abandoned biological Israel, allowing His temple and the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed.

Shortly before His death, Jesus lamented, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate."** (Matthew 23:37-38)

The Father put His final plan in motion while Jesus was still on Earth. Jesus implemented a new covenant (Luke 22:20) which contains a new set of promises and prophecies. Under this plan, there is a new Mount Zion (Revelation 14:1), a new Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12), and a new Israel (Galatians 3:29).

God's first three plans failed because entering into "God's rest" comes with a very difficult condition: **"Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' 'No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.'. . . . 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven.' "** (John 3:3,5; Matthew 7:21)

The reason Jesus returned to Heaven is because Israel would not cooperate with God. God's rest could not be established in Canaan, even with Messiah on the ground in Jerusalem! Three times God patiently tried to establish His rest on Earth and each time, Israel failed. Earth's inhabitants have yet to experience God's rest! For the fourth time, God started over with His final plan, the plan that is now in place, and this is how Paul's comments (written around A.D. 64) in Hebrews 3 and 4 become clear. Please consider three elements that support this conclusion.

1.Paul said the promise of entering God's rest still stands.

"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel [the good news concerning the kingdom of God] **preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."** (Hebrews 4:1-2, insertion mine)

2. Paul said those who have faith in Christ will also rest from their works on the seventh day just as God rested from His work.

"There remains, then, a[weekly] **Sabbath rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."** (Hebrews 4:9-10, insertion mine)

"Now we who have believed[in Christ and received His gospel] **enter that rest** [each week]**, just as God has said, 'So I declared on oath in my anger, "They** [the rebellious and unbelieving] **shall never enter my rest." ' And yet his work has been finished** [and God has been resting] **since the creation of the world. For somewhere he** [Moses] **has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.' "** (Hebrews 4:3-4, insertions mine)

Remember, Paul wrote the book of Hebrews about A.D. 64. His comparison between resting on God's weekly seventh day Sabbath and entering God's eternal rest is clear. God's holy Sabbath was *not* nailed to the cross; in fact, God's Sabbath is a weekly rest that points to the fulfillment of the everlasting rest promised to Abraham.Notice the logic that Paul used in his letter to the Jews (who observed the seventh day Sabbath, but poorly understood the prophetic importance of the Sabbath rest). Putting all the pieces together, here is what I believe Paul could have written:

In the beginning, our forefathers were slaves of Pharaoh. God mercifully set us free and gave us His seventh day Sabbath rest. To help us understand His rest, God also made the land produce enough food to last three years every sixth year so that we could enjoy His rest every seventh year! God also required us to set our slaves free so that they might taste the joy of His rest as well!

Thus, throughout our history, God's Sabbath rest has been a recurring example of His rest which Adam and Eve forfeited by sinning. Since God's promise to Abraham remains intact, and

since God's rest has not been established, we must make every effort to align our hearts and thoughts with God's truth and live by faith, or like our forefathers, we will not be permitted to enter His rest.

3.Paul used the experiences of Moses, Joshua, and David to make the point that the current generation should be very careful or it will repeat the fatal mistake made by its forefathers.

Summary

God's eternal rest is future and we should be asking God to purify our hearts each day so that we might enter His rest. The promise is intact, Abraham and his descendants will possess God's rest forever. Paul says that ***all*** Israel will be saved. (Romans 11:26) Those who have been born again, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb will be saved! What about God's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants as an ***everlasting*** possession? Unfortunately, God abandoned that endeavor 2,000 years ago because of rebellion.

However, to keep His promise to Abraham, God has exponentially increased the value of His promise. He will purify the whole Earth with fire. Then, He will create a new Heaven and a new Earth. New Jerusalem will be a glorious city whose architect and builder is God and it will descend from Heaven. When Abraham and his descendants (e.g., people having the faith of Abraham) see the fulfillment of God's final plan, they will be satisfied – eternally satisfied. Jesus said to us with all His love: **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."** (Matthew 11:28)

Larry Wilson

Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled

Author: Larry W. Wilson

2014 Almost Here – Happy New Year???

Substantial changes are coming to America, and perhaps this would be a good time to sit down and meditate for a few minutes on these changes from a Christian perspective. Storm clouds have darkened the horizon. A "perfect storm" (I call it "Brutus") is swirling offshore with tremendous energy and it *will* make landfall in a short time. The power within Brutus should not be underestimated. Whatever can be blown away will disappear.

A list of insurmountable problems faces this worn-out-over-populated planet. According to the book of Daniel, we have reached "the appointed time of the end." The world has reached a time when national and global problems are so large and complex that there is no solution without enormous carnage. Do not be alarmed! God is very much aware of our situation. He knows our limitations, our self-inflicted problems, and that another world war is inevitable. The Bible predicts a cry for "peace and safety" will rise *before* the Great Tribulation begins. (1 Thessalonians 5:3)

Problems in the United States (U.S.) are growing. For example, consider its dependency on basic needs. Unfortunately, the nation’s power grid is inadequate, overloaded, and needs major updating. Thousands of bridges are weak and need significant repair. The postal service is bankrupt.

The work force has been reduced, and social security and many pension funds have not been properly funded. Millions of retirees could be left in poverty. The nation’s banking system is essentially bankrupt, and if it were not for the "crazy-money" created by the U.S. Federal Reserve, no one could write a check and pay a bill! The food industry operates on a "just in time" inventory. This means our nation’s food inventory is less than three weeks, and at any given time, four days of the reserve food supply is in transit.

U.S. unemployment and under-employment combined is hovering around 15%. Forty-three million citizens receive food stamps (this number has doubled in the past ten years). Thousands of ex-students are now in default on billions of dollars in loans they cannot repay.

The nation’s healthcare system is in upheaval. This issue is so complex and expensive that no one knows what 2014 will bring. In these challenging times, the nation needs a functional government that makes good and thoughtful decisions. Unfortunately, Congress is divided, lives in a continual state of gridlock, and is dysfunctional.

I have itemized these situations so that you can see why substantial changes are coming. Of course, politicians and pastors would have us "think positive thoughts" and embrace optimism about a better future (2014 is an election year), but no amount of optimism and positive thinking (as important as they are) can change what is coming. They may not have identified Brutus, but

this perfect storm is coming and words cannot describe the outcome. I am reminded of that gospel song, "In times like these we need a Savior." Jesus said, **"Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me."** (John 14:1)

A "perfect storm" is defined as a storm when several atmospheric conditions align changing an ordinary storm into an epic storm that is not easily forgotten. (For this reason, we name storms with names like Katrina, Sandy, Ike, Wilma, and Andrew.) Using the analogy of a perfect storm, I believe three conditions have developed and when viewed together, they could easily produce Brutus, a "perfect storm" that could ignite World War III.

Condition #1: Too many nations are bankrupt.

Most of the developed nations of the world (sometimes called the G20) are in various stages of bankruptcy. The essential difference between Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain, and Italy (nations declared bankrupt) and the rest of the G20 is that the remainder of the G20 have larger economies, more assets, and greater wealth which has permitted them to "buy" more time. But at the end of the delay, bankruptcy is bankruptcy. Bankruptcy is the inability to meet a payment deadline.

The U.S. is bankrupt. The national debt is ~$16 trillion. It has to borrow $1.1 billion per day to pay the interest on our national debt. (This daily figure will dramatically rise if/when interest rates increase.) This great nation, the United States of America, who once loaned and generously gifted money to other nations has **borrowed** $416 billion last year to pay interest on money that we borrowed in the past. It is impossible for the U.S. to borrow its way out of debt.

To keep the U.S. economy functioning, the Federal Reserve has injected $3 trillion dollars into the economy since 2007. This money (currently $85 billion per month) has not produced the desired results. It appears that Wall Street soon figured out how to capture this "crazy-money," so instead of putting the economy on its feet, the Federal Reserve has made a few shrewd people very rich. The economy has not been fixed; instead, the fallout has been delayed. The middle class is disappearing and the poor are getting poorer.

There is no financial solution or possible means for recovery. A nation whose economy represents 20% of the world's economy cannot be rescued. This will become clear when Brutus makes landfall. I am not being fatalistic or pessimistic. God foreknew these details thousands of years ago.

Consider God's ways for a moment: Men do not create nations. (Romans 13:1-5) God creates each nation according to His purposes. (Daniel 2:21) Nations are living organisms, too complex and diverse for a group of finite people (any government) to manage. Therefore, the welfare of each nation depends upon that nation's relationship with God.

If a nation exalts righteous principles, God blesses that nation with prosperity. (Psalm 33:12) When a nation turns it back on righteousness, God removes His blessings and the woeful results of greed, idolatry, sexual immorality, mismanagement, and dysfunction begin. (Galatians 5:19-21; 6:7) Over time, a dysfunctional house becomes divided and Sovereign God destroys it.

(Daniel 4:17; Jeremiah 25:12,13) There you have it. The rise and fall of nations have been explained in one short paragraph!

Before we leave this segment on the bankruptcy of the nations, remember the current situation in the U.S. is not unique. All members of the G7, the richest nations among the G20, have the same financial woes as the U.S. and each is afflicted with the same greed, idolatry, sexual immorality, and mismanagement.

Therefore, most nations are trying the same things to recover from bankruptcy that the U.S. is now doing. This "lemming-like" behavior by the nations to resolve financial problems will only produce a "lemming-like" result. The lemmings are famous because once a year they madly chase each other past the edge of a cliff, fall into the ocean, and all drown together.

Condition #2: World Reserve Currency

There is another silent development taking place in the world that could bring about the ruin of the global economy. Since World War II, the U.S. has enjoyed a strategic benefit among the nations of the world. We have had the good fortune of having and controlling the world's reserve currency.

This means, for example, when Japan wants to buy a million barrels of oil from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Japan has to first buy dollars from the U.S. to pay OPEC because OPEC does not accept Japanese money (the yen).

The dollar has been considered the largest and the most stable currency in the world. World nations have bought U.S. Treasury bills and bonds (U.S. debt) to conduct financial transactions with other nations in dollars, and/or they deposit their excess funds in a secure place and receive a good return on their investment.

Lately, the world reserve currency scene has been changing. Several months ago, representatives from China, Japan, Germany, Russia, and other nations held a secret meeting without informing the U.S. These nations made arrangements to deal directly with each other, exchanging their own currencies among themselves. This has caused a 30% drop in reserve currency demand for the U.S. dollar. This means there is a tipping point ahead, which may happen possibly this coming year.

When the U.S. dollar is no longer deemed desirable as a reserve currency, what nation will buy U.S. bonds and Treasury Bills and loan money to the U.S.? Remember, the U.S. has to borrow $1.1 billion per day to avoid default.

Other nations will not loan money to a country whose economy is not secure and cannot repay existing loans. When this tipping point is reached, the U.S. could become the new Greece. Worse still, because the U.S. represents 20% of the global economy, we could take most of the G20 nations over the cliff with us.

Condition #3: World Food Supply

Because the population of the world is relentlessly growing (over seven billion people now), it is causing an increased need for commodities such as food, oil, metals, and building materials. During the past twenty years, China has become the world's third largest economy. (The European Union is the largest and the U.S. is second.)

To feed its population of 1.3+ billion people, China has been buying exports from many nations. Since exports are limited (nations typically ration their exports, taking care of their own needs first), China has been trying to buy huge parcels of land in Africa and South America for food production.

As a result of China's global purchases and investments, China is economically sustaining portions of Africa and South America. Although nations import and export food supplies on a regular basis, there could be a sinister component within this process. For example, what happens if/when an exporting country suddenly decides that it is not in its best interest to export food which was sold a year in advance as a commodity contract on the futures market? Could this be regarded as an act of war?

It certainly is a possibility. For example, if China's leaders determined that thousands of Chinese could die of starvation unless they take the purchased food by force, what would keep China from deploying military force to take pre-purchased food? What nation in Africa or South America could stop China's military forces?

For the past eight years, many nations have been frustrated with Iran's nuclear ambitions. Iran's hatred for Israel is well documented. Israel has warned Iran that it will not stand by and allow its avowed enemy to build an atomic bomb. Many believe this could be the trigger that could bring about a nuclear exchange, but it could be something as simple as food or economic default.

Because all nations are competing for the necessities of life (commodities extracted from Earth), any circumstance or political policy that causes the disruption of life within or among the nations could be grounds for war. As the demand for commodities rises, so does the price along with the misery index for the middle and poor classes.

When the misery index reaches an intolerable level, anger and frustration will boil over, and rioting and looting will begin. When social order breaks down, martial law will become necessary. Military spending levels indicate that every nation anticipates war either within or outside its borders. No one knows when the trigger will be pulled, but every nation knows war is always a strong possibility.

Brutus Will be a "Perfect Storm."

Nothing we can do will prevent Brutus, the perfect storm, from occurring. Absolutely nothing! We may be able to do a few practical things to endure it. The following suggestions are based on the possibility of forced evacuation which may or may not occur in your area. History indicates

that sudden evacuations can be caused by earthquake, fire, flood, nuclear accident, social unrest, and/or war. Here are a few suggestions to consider:

First, work on a written list, itemizing things that you should have readily available if you are notified to leave your home suddenly (a list might include medications, important papers, pictures, cash, appropriate clothing, food, and water). If there should be an unexpected evacuation, do not panic. Instead, work from your prepared check-list.

Second, always keep some food and water on hand. Rotate your food supplies. Be prepared to share with those who will have no food. As a general rule, keep your vehicle's fuel tank full and make lodging arrangements with friends or relatives who live in different directions but within a half tank of gas (~100 miles).

Your plan is to reach one destination and stay there. Having two or three predetermined locations to meet family members may prove helpful. In the event of a sudden evacuation, traffic congestion will be severe and gasoline may be unavailable. Wireless phones may be jammed and useless. Remember the evacuation pictures of New Orleans when Katrina was about to make landfall?

Third, network with someone who is close by and will need help. It may be a family with small children or an elderly couple. Genuine Christians love their neighbors as they love themselves. If possible, work with them as a team and travel together for a long as possible.

Finally, regardless of what occurs, abide in Christ. If we abide in Jesus each day and we humbly seek to know His will in our lives, the Holy Spirit will lead and impress us to do what Jesus wants done. Remember, we cannot save ourselves from the Great Tribulation.

If we abide in Christ, we will love our neighbors enough to be helpful and useful as the Lord leads. The Great Tribulation will bring about conditions that will allow the gospel to be told and repeated many times as it focuses on the gospel of Jesus which brings peace, joy, and serenity. Memorize the following verses and repeat them often.

Jesus said: **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."** (John 14:1-3)

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19,20) These words are God's truth-filled reminders to you, and when peace is in short supply, they will shore up your faith and give you courage for the days ahead.

Larry Wilson

Did People Worship On The Seventh Day Sabbath Before Mt. Sinai?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Some Christians question whether God's seventh day Sabbath was observed before He gave the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai because Sabbath observance was never mentioned in the book of Genesis.

I would like to address this question and summarize my conclusions by writing that even though Genesis and several other books in the Bible do not mention Sabbath observance, evidence provided elsewhere in the Bible answers and resolves this question.

Two essential points should be established as we begin this study: First, Jesus Christ created everything that exists. He created everything on Earth in six days, and He created the seventh day and made it holy. (Genesis 2:1-3)

John speaks of Jesus as the Creator saying, **"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."** (John 1:10:11)

Paul says more about Jesus as the Creator, **"For by him** [Jesus] **all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him** [the Son] **and for him** [the Father]**."** (Colossians 1:16, insertions mine)

Second, Jesus does not change. **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."** (Hebrews 13:8) **"I the Lord do not change. . . ."** (Malachi 3:6) As we proceed in this study, we will see that the actions of Jesus in the past through the future are consistent. If we accept these two conclusions, the remainder of this study should be easy to follow.

Since we know that Jesus is deity, the Creator of the seventh day carefully considered His response to the Pharisees when they accused Him of breaking the Sabbath: **"Then he** [Jesus] **said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So,** [speaking as the Creator of the Sabbath, Jesus continued] **the Son of Man is Lord** [over all creation] **even of the Sabbath.'"** (Mark 2:27, insertions mine)

The Pharisees understood Jesus to mean: "I made the Sabbath for man. As the Creator [owner and Lord] of the Sabbath, who defines Sabbath observance? You or Me?"

Genesis 2 clearly states that Jesus created the Sabbath at the end of Creation Week. Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees as the Creator of the Sabbath 4,000 years after Creation Week, said "the Sabbath was made for man." Considering this statement, how can anyone argue that Jesus created the Sabbath for man, hid it for centuries during the time of the patriarchs, and waited until 2,500 years after Creation Week to reveal the Sabbath on Mt. Sinai.

The New Testament indicates three times that "the Lord's day" is the seventh day of week. (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:27; Luke 6:5)

The Seventh Day Was Holy before the Ten Commandments

Jesus affirmed that the seventh day was holy two times before speaking the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai! The first instance occurred a few weeks *before* He delivered Israel from Egypt and the second instance occurred more than a month *before* Israel reached Mt. Sinai.

When Jesus sent Moses back to Egypt to deliver His people from slavery, there is evidence suggesting that Jesus required Israel to rest from their work on the seventh day. We know Israel's "resting" infuriated Pharaoh. Even though Exodus 5 does not explicitly say that Jesus required Israel to rest on His Sabbath, Exodus 5 indicates there was severe punishment and persecution for "resting."

This means that Israel was caught between the demands of two kings and violating Pharoah's orders brought punishment while violating Jesus' demands meant no deliverance. **"But the king of Egypt said, 'Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!' Then Pharaoh said, 'Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working.' "** (Exodus 5:4,5)

When the Israelites suddenly stopped their labor to rest, Pharaoh summoned the Israelite foremen to appear before him. Pharaoh made it clear that since they had chosen on their own to take a day off, he would no longer provide the straw needed to make bricks.

He further declared that the Israelites' brick production quota must be maintained or they would be severely punished. The foremen left Pharaoh's palace and soon found Moses and Aaron. Notice what they said, and then what Moses said to Jesus: **"And they** [the foremen] **said** [to Moses and Aaron]**, 'May the Lord look upon you and judge you! *You* have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.' Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'O Lord, why have *you* brought trouble upon this people? Is this why *you* sent me?' "** (Exodus 5:21,22, italics and insertions mine)

This verse indicates that God (not Moses) required Israel to rest from working. Obviously, the day God chose for resting was His holy day. Moses respectfully placed the blame on the Lord because it was the Lord who demanded the Israelites to rest from their work.

Jesus said the Sabbath was created for man and He declared the seventh day holy at Creation. He wanted to increase Israel's faith and reveal His sovereign authority over Pharaoh before delivering Israel from Egypt. So, the Lord demanded that Israel rest from their labors on the Sabbath day – His holy day.

A second instance of Sabbath observance can be found prior to Mt. Sinai. The story in Exodus 16 began exactly one month after the Exodus. Israel had run out of food and the camp was

hungry and grumbling, so Moses appealed to the Lord. . . . **"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way *I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.* On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.'. . . . He** [Moses] **said to them, 'This is what the Lord commanded: "Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'' ' So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and** [unlike storing up manna on other days of the week, the manna stored up on Friday] **it did not stink or get maggots in it."** (Exodus 16:4,5,23,24, italics and insertions mine)

The evidence in Exodus 16 reveals three things. First, the order of the seventh day Sabbath in the weekly cycle has not been lost. Jesus withheld manna *on the seventh day* of each week 2,500 years after Creation. Then, 1,500 years after Mt. Sinai, Jesus told the Pharisees that He was Lord of the seventh day of the week.

Second, when the Israelites were in the wilderness for forty years, Jesus produced a miracle every sixth day when the manna they stored on the sixth day did not decompose. Finally, we learn in Exodus 16 that manna began to fall from Heaven about forty days before the Ten Commandments were given.

Obviously, the Israelites knew of the Sabbath before the Ten Commandments were given.

The Sabbath Was Known before the Flood

The Bible says, **"And after he became the father of Methuselah, *Enoch walked with God 300 years* and had other sons and daughters. . . . This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and *he walked with God*."** (Genesis 5:22, 6:9)

We have seen thus far that Israel knew of God's seventh day Sabbath prior to Mt. Sinai, but was the Sabbath known before the flood? The Bible reveals that Enoch walked with God for 300 years! The Bible also states that Noah walked with God, so did these patriarchs know about the Sabbath?

I believe the antediluvians were not subhuman, knuckle-dragging apes. Compared to humanity today, the descendants of Adam were physically superior to us. The Bible records how they lived for hundreds of years. Men walked with God and they heard Him speak. This is how the Word of God (and the laws of God) became known. I cannot think of any reason why God would hide the holiness of the seventh day from the antediluvians.

Until Jesus expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, they walked with Him. Even though there is no explicit text indicating the Creator told Adam and Eve about the holiness of the seventh day, we know that from the beginning the Sabbath was made for man.

Jesus is purposeful and consistent in all that He does. It seems inconceivable that Jesus would not tell Adam and Eve about the holy boundary He put around the seventh day. From the beginning, the seventh day of Creation was separated from the other six days.

From the beginning, God has allowed man to work six days of the week, but has forbidden working on the seventh day.

Moses covered 1,600 years of human history in the first nine chapters of Genesis. When God gave Moses the information for Genesis (about 2,500 years after Creation Week), He gave Moses enough information so that humanity might understand the following concepts: the origin of life on Earth, the origin of man, the origin of marriage, the origin of His seventh day Sabbath, the origin of sin's curse, and a record of the horrific display of God's wrath against lawlessness.

Even though the Bible does not record in Genesis that Adam and Eve observed the seventh day, there is unmistakable evidence that Adam and Eve did not violate or trample on the holiness of God's Sabbath!

Their *first and only sin* while living in the Garden of Eden was that of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve, Enoch, and Noah did walk with God and I believe that Jesus revealed the holiness of the seventh day to them since the Sabbath was made for them.

When Did God's People Begin Resting?

Some Christians who wish to ignore God's Sabbath rest choose to skip over, distort, or ignore Paul's words in Hebrews 4. Notice: **"For somewhere he** [Moses, in Genesis 2:1-3] **has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.' There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who** [plans to] **enters God's rest also rests from his own work, *just as God did from his*."** (Hebrews 4:4, 9,10, insertions and italics mine)

Paul wrote these words about 35 years after Jesus died on the cross, yet he reminds the early church by saying, **"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God."** Genesis 2 proves that the seventh day Sabbath is not a "Jewish Sabbath." Adam and Eve were not Jews.

Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man, meaning all mankind. (Mark 2:27) At Mt. Sinai, Jesus said the Sabbath was created as a weekly memorial to His creative works. (Exodus 20:8-11) There is no indication anywhere that the Creator cancelled the holiness He placed on the seventh day at Creation or made another day holy.

Thirty-five years after the cross, Paul wrote that a Sabbath-rest remains for the people of God, **"for anyone who** [plans to] **enters God's rest also rests from his own work** [on the seventh day]**, just as God did from His** [on the seventh day]**."**

Ten "Unseen" Commandments

When Jesus created Adam and Eve, He wrote the Ten Commandments in their hearts and minds. This means that Adam and Eve were in natural alignment with God's law and this was seen in their thoughts, words, and actions. There was no lawlessness in the Garden of Eden until they committed a lawless act.

Prior to sinning, Adam and Eve always looked forward to meeting and worshiping their Creator each Sabbath day. Unfortunately, when Adam and Eve sinned, their nature changed so much that their first inclination was to run and hide from God.

Instead of being naturally lawful, they became naturally lawless and the result of this curse has been witnessed in the thoughts, words, and actions of mankind ever since.

When Jesus met with the guilty pair, He made a covenant with them and their offspring, promising redemption and restoration. God's love for humanity would provide the necessary atonement for sin AND God would restore the Ten Commandments within His people's hearts and minds.

Few people speak of the second half of the promise, but it is just as important as the first part! The Ten Commandments are called "the covenant" and they were kept in a box called the ark of "the Covenant." At the appointed time, God will remove the carnal nature of humanity and again write His laws in the minds and hearts of the faithful.

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Hebrews 8:10-12)

Even though it has been almost 6,000 years since sin began, God will do all that He promised. During the Great Tribulation, God will seal His people. (For more on this topic, please see Chapter 6 in my book, *Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega*.)

It is an interesting fact that throughout human history, only Moses and those who saw him return to camp from the mountaintop ever saw the Ten Commandments, the two tablets of stone God engraved with His finger. (Exodus 31:18; 32:15,16) Since then, God has not permitted mankind to see the Ten Commandments.

God has promised that He will write His laws in the hearts and minds of His people, but only for those who exercise faith and embrace His promise. It is not necessary for God to show the Ten Commandments to His people now, because they do not worship His law as two tablets of stone.

Instead, they wish to receive God's law written within their hearts and minds. Their greatest desire is to demonstrate God's law of righteousness through their conduct. In other words, God's people want to be living examples of His law, loving God above everything, and their neighbors as themselves.

During the time when the Ark of the Covenant was on Earth, the Ten Commandments written on stone remained hidden from view. Whenever the tabernacle was moved, the Ark of the Covenant (the golden box containing the Ten Commandments) was covered with thick cloth (the temple veil - Numbers 4:5) and was kept more than half a mile away from the Israelites! (Joshua 3:4)

For centuries, Israel's high priests could not look at the Ten Commandments even though they entered the Most Holy Place once a year, on the Day of Atonement and stood before the Ark of the Covenant. I believe the Ark of the Covenant was taken to Heaven more than 2,000 years ago.

Consequently, no one on Earth will ever see the Ten Commandments (the two tablets of stone) again! A day is soon coming when the Ark of the Covenant will be shown to the whole world (Revelation 11:19) and although the Ark will be seen in the sky, the Ten Commandments will not!

God shows the Ark of the Covenant, but not the Ten Commandments, to the world at the seventh trumpet. When it sounds, Earth's inhabitants will already be in two distinct groups. One group will have rejected the gospel of Christ and will have received the mark of the beast's tattoo, "666." The other group will have accepted the gospel of Christ and will have had their faith in Christ tested. The second group will have demonstrated their faith during extreme persecution.

As a result, Jesus will remove their carnal natures and they will receive the seal of God. This group will rejoice when they see the Ark of the Covenant. There is no need for them to see inside the Ark because the promise (the covenant) has already been fulfilled! The Ten Commandments have been written in their hearts and minds.

Just like Adam and Eve before sin began, the saints will have sinless natures! Meanwhile, the wicked will see the glorious Ark of the Covenant in the sky with anxious foreboding. The contents of that box seals their doom. The two tablets, written with God's own finger, defines love for God and man, the very laws which they have despised and rejected. God shows the wicked the Ark of the Covenant, clarifying for them the reason for their punishment and judgement.

God will force everyone having the mark of the beast tattoo to experience His wrath and drink from His seven bowls (the seven last plagues).

Nine Commandments Are Not Enough

Most Christians acknowledge that the Ten Commandments are important and should be obeyed. However, when pressed about the demands of the fourth commandment (the holiness of the seventh day), the carnal nature pushes back, insisting that the fourth commandment was abolished at the cross and is no longer important.

Most Christians will agree that worshiping an idol is offensive to the Creator (per the second commandment), but do not believe that working on the seventh day (per the fourth commandment) is offensive. Most Christians will agree that committing adultery is morally wrong (per the seventh commandment), but maintain that resting on the seventh day (per the fourth commandment) is legalistic.

Most Christians will agree that stealing is a sin (per the eighth commandment), but they ignore Saturday as a holy day (per the fourth commandment). Why do most Christians "cherry pick" the Ten Commandments? Shouldn't nine commandments be enough?

For more than forty years I have been fascinated with the various arguments used by Christians to eliminate the demands of the fourth commandment. I will list the five basic arguments I hear most often.

1. The Catholic position: The Church received authority from Christ to transfer the sacredness of the seventh day to the first day of the week. This transfer was completed by Pope Sylvester I during the fourth century A.D.*****
2. The Sabbath is a Jewish ritual and it was not imposed on mankind before God gave the Ten Commandments.
3. The Ten Commandments are part of the covenant God made with the Jews. This covenant was nailed (abolished) to the cross.
4. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated by New Testament writers. The silence regarding the Sabbath proves it was abolished at the cross.
5. If a person insists on keeping the Ten Commandments, he is a legalist. Christians are not under any obligation to obey the Ten Commandments, instead, believers in Christ are now under a dispensation of grace. Keep in mind, however, that these same people believe that obeying nine commandments does not constitute legalism.

Noah's Flood

Noah was a preacher of righteousness. (2 Peter 2:5) For 120 years, Noah faithfully warned the people of God's coming wrath. (Genesis 6:3; Hebrews 11:7) Did Jesus commit murder when He destroyed the world in Noah's day or was there a judicial basis for His action which was based on righteousness, justice, and mercy?

According to the Bible, Jesus deliberately drowned tens of thousands of men, women, and children. How do we justify this horrific action by a God of love? God has not changed His ways since Noah's flood! Remember, **"I the Lord do not change. . . ."** (Malachi 3:6)

Prior to the flood there was stealing, murder, adultery, lying, idolatry, improper use of God's

name, and disregard for God's holy Sabbath. While the first six chapters of Genesis are silent about specific sins, the antediluvians did offend God and cause Him to drown them.

Remember the initial point in part one of this article was that Jesus never changes, so therefore we can ferret out the answer. God never changes so He destroyed the antediluvians for the same reason that Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel, and Jerusalem were destroyed. Finally, God will burn the wicked up in a lake of fire at the end of the 1,000 years for the same reason He destroyed the antediluvians.

Remember, the Lord does not change: **"The Earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore Earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left."** (Isaiah 24:5,6)

The Full Cup Principle can be seen throughout the Bible. God's cup of wrath is filled when a group of people reach a place where extended mercy does not have a redeeming effect. At that point, God's wrath is aroused and He sends destruction.

God destroyed the world in Noah's day, and later destroyed nations and cities because they became defiant and degenerate. When a group of people knowingly and willfully reject God's laws, lawlessness springs up like weeds after a Spring rain. Consider Jesus' words to Ezekiel:

"Her [Israel's] **priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.** . . . **Doom has come upon you—you who dwell in the land. The time has come, the day is near; there is panic, not joy, upon the mountains. I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you; I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. I will not look on you with pity or spare you; I will repay you in accordance with your conduct and the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that it is I the Lord who strikes the blow."** (Ezekiel 7:7-9; 22:26, insertion mine)

God removed Adam and Eve from Eden, destroyed the world in Noah's day, removed Israel from their homeland and exiled them in Babylon, destroyed His people and the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and will destroy the wicked at the end of the 1,000 years for the same reason – lawlessness.

Remember, faith in God does not eliminate His law. **"Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith** [in Christ]**? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."** (Romans 3:31, insertion mine)

Is There Grace When There Is No Law?

We can assume that the Ten Commandments existed in Noah's day because the Bible says, **"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."** (Genesis 6:8) Where there is no

law, there is no condemnation and need for grace. If a judge grants you grace and you are released from paying the penalty for speeding, this does not mean the speed limit no longer exists.

The suggestion that the Sabbath was unknown prior to the flood or Mt. Sinai is born out of our carnal rebellion, an attempt to cover up a glorious truth. Foolish arguments about law, grace, and faith have been imposed on God's Word causing a great cloud of darkness and confusion about the truth of God's Sabbath, which ironically, was made for man!

The Sabbath is a gift from our Creator and the carnal nature hates it. This is why Jesus gave Sabbath observance the force of law at Mt. Sinai. He knew that man's rebellion and Lucifer's sophistry would soon combine causing the world to deny its accountability to its Creator.

Too many Christians today have convinced themselves that God's grace has somehow eliminated His law. They stumble within this circular reasoning and conclude that everyone is free from the one command that requires rest from our works "just as God rested from His." Yet, they overlook one very profound truth, that there is no need for grace if there is no law.

Consider the following comparisons: Obeying the law of the land does not make an illegal immigrant a citizen and neither does obeying the law of God make a sinner a citizen of New Jerusalem. Those who seek to obtain their citizenry in God's kingdom through obedience are under the curse of sin and their hope will be dashed to pieces.

On the other hand, those who understand the covenant and want the laws of God written in their minds and hearts can see how law, grace, faith, and works harmoniously align to glorify God in every aspect of their lives. "When we walk with the Lord, in the light of His Word," as the old gospel song reminds us, it is only a matter of time in this degenerate world until our faith in Him is tested.

The biblical definition of faith means: Obeying God without regard for the consequences. (See Daniel 3.) Those who walk by faith know, **"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. . .The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart."** (Psalm 19:7,8)

There is enough evidence in the Bible to demonstrate that God's Sabbath rest has been known and observed ever since Creation Week. He is a God of love and He has never imposed a harmful or inferior law on mankind.

Those who plan to enter God's "eternal rest" are wonderfully blessed once they discover and embrace the joy that comes with observing God's seventh day rest with Him. Jesus made it for us – He meant it to be a gift accompanied with a tremendous blessing!

Larry Wilson

***Note on the Catholic position (insertions in bracket are my comments):** Rabanus Maurus (776-856), abbot of Fulda and later archbishop of Mainz, Germany wrote: "Pope Sylvester (his papacy: 314-335) instructed the clergy to keep *the feriae* [a weekday, other than Saturday, on

which no feast occurs].

And, indeed, from an old custom he called the first day [of the week] the 'Lord's [day],' on which the light was made in the beginning and also the resurrection of Christ is celebrated."[1] Rabanus does not mean to imply that Sylvester was the first man who referred to the days of the week as *feriae* or who first started the observance of Sunday among Christians.

He means that, according to the testimony of Roman Catholic writers, Sylvester confirmed those practices and made them official insofar as his church was concerned. Hence Rabanus says elsewhere in his writings: "Pope Sylvester first among the Romans ordered that the names of the days [of the week], which they previously called after the name of their gods, that is, [the day] of the Sun, [the day] of the Moon, [the day] of Mars, [the day] of Mercury, [the day] of Jupiter, [the day] of Venus, [the day] of Saturn, they should call *feriae* thereafter, that is the first *feria*, the second *feria*, the third *feria*, the fourth *feria*, the fifth *feria*, the sixth *feria*, because that in the beginning of Genesis it is written that God said concerning each day: on the first, 'Let there be light'; on the second, 'Let there be a firmament'; on the third, 'Let the earth bring forth verdure'; etc. But he [Sylvester] ordered [them] to call the Sabbath by the ancient term of the law, [to call] the first *feria* the 'Lord's day,' because on it the Lord rose [from the dead].

Moreover, the same pope decreed that the rest of the Sabbath should be transferred rather to the Lord's day [Sunday], in order that on that day we should rest from worldly works for the praise of God."[2] Note particularly, he says that 'the same pope [Sylvester I] decreed that the rest of the Sabbath should be transferred rather to the Lord's day [Sunday].'[3]

According to this statement, he was the first bishop to introduce the idea that the divinely appointed rest of the Sabbath day should be transferred to the first day of the week.

This is significant, especially considering that it was during Sylvester's pontificate that the emperor of Rome [Constantine] issued the first civil laws compelling men to rest from secular labor on Sunday and that Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, was the first theologian on record to present arguments, allegedly from the Scriptures, that Christ did transfer the rest of the Sabbath day to Sunday.

[1] Rabanus Maurus, *Liber de Computo* (A book Concerning Computation), Chap. XXVII ("Concerning Festivals"), translated from the Latin text by Robert L. Odom, cf Migne's Patrologia Latina, Vol. CVII, col. 682.

[2] Rabanus Maurus, *De Clericorum Institutione* (Concerning the Instruction of the Clergymen), Book II, Chap. XLVI, translated from the Latin text by Robert L. Odom, cf Migne's Patrologia Latina, Vol. CVII, col. 361.

[3] The wording in the Latin text reads: "Statuit autem idem papa ut otium Sabbati magis in diem Dominicam transferretur, ut ea die a terrenis operibus ad laudandum Deum vacaremus."

Web Source: http://biblelight.net/sylvester-I.htm

The Mystery of Melchizedek

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The Meaning & Importance of Melchizedek

Through the centuries, Christians have wondered about the meaning and importance of Melchizedek. Perhaps the Holy Spirit created this spiritual disturbance because the topic of Melchizedek is surprisingly important for Christians living today! For simplicity, I have divided this presentation into three parts:

1. **Who was Melchizedek?**
2. **What Does "The Order of Melchizedek" Mean? and;**
3. **After the Cross, Why Do Christians Need a High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek?**

1. Who was Melchizedek?

Melchizedek and Abraham were both Noah's descendants. Noah lived about 350 years after the flood, and Shem, one of Noah's sons, also lived about 400 years after the flood. Genesis 11 indicates that Abraham descended from Shem, and according to my study, Abraham was born about seven years before Noah died and 59 years before Shem died.

Due to the geographic dispersion of mankind at the time of the Tower of Babel, it is unlikely that Abraham knew Noah or Shem personally. Terah, Abraham's father, began having children when he was 70 years old and I estimate that he was about 130 years old when Abraham was born.

I believe the Lord called Abraham, when he was about 65 years old, to leave Ur of the Chaldeans (located near Babylon) to relocate in Canaan. Abraham traveled as far as Haran where he remained until Terah died at the age of 205. At age 75, Abraham left Haran and continued his journey into Canaan. (Genesis 12:4)*

Nothing is written in Genesis 14 about the lineage of Melchizedek. The Apostle Paul, writing about Melchizedek, says, "Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life. . . ." Paul's words in Hebrews have made people speculate that Melchizedek was an eternal being such as Jesus or the Holy Spirit, but I do not think that was Paul's intention.

I believe Paul contrasted Abraham's lineage (which was traced back to Noah because lineage meant everything to the Jews) with Melchizedek's lineage (which was absent because he was a complete stranger with no genealogical or biological record) to underscore the point that Melchizedek, despite his unknown lineage, was greater than Abraham.

Similarly, the nine kings who were contemporaries of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 had nothing

written about their lineage. Obviously, they were not eternal beings. The Bible simply says that Melchizedek was King of Salem and he was also a priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18) at the same time the other kings were living on Earth.

2. What Does “The Order of Melchizedek” Mean?

The Bible says Melchizedek was a king over the province of Salem and a priest of God Most High. According to my calculations, about 130 years after the flood, God destroyed the Tower of Babel and the people of Earth were grouped by language and scattered all over the world. After the dispersion, God chose spiritual men at various times and in places to serve Him as tribal kings and priests.

Prior to the flood, such men were often called patriarchs. (Romans 9:5) Melchizedek was such a chosen man. “No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.” (Hebrews 5:4)

One day, four of the nine kings united to attack the five kings who were poorly prepared to defend themselves. After defeating the five weaker kings, the four kings took their food and possessions and headed for home. These four bullies made a very bad choice because “They also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom. . . . When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. . . .

He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people. After Abram returned from defeating [the biggest bully] Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of Heaven and Earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.’ Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’ ” (Genesis 14:12-20, 15:1, italics and insertion mine)

The blessing pronounced upon Abraham was not just a gratuitous gesture by Melchizedek. Instead, the Holy Spirit came upon Melchizedek, showed Melchizedek who the stranger standing before him actually was, and told Melchizedek that God had chosen Abraham to be the “grandfather” of the Savior of the world and the father of many nations to come. So, Melchizedek blessed Abraham! Abraham received a second confirmation of God’s blessing through Melchizedek.

When Abraham heard Melchizedek’s blessing, Abraham realized that Melchizedek was a priest for the same God that he served and he gave his tithe to Melchizedek. Abraham’s subservient action proves that he recognized Melchizedek to be a man having a higher position in God’s

service than his own. This fact was highly important when Paul wrote the book of Hebrews 2,500 years later.

Fast Forward 1,000 Years

About 1,000 years after Abraham gave his tithes to Melchizedek, the Holy Spirit gave David a Messianic oracle. The Jews could not and did not figure out the meaning of this prophecy. Today, most Christians have not been able to figure it out either because they know nothing about the distinction between “Plan A” and “Plan B”.

(*Note: For a short explanation on “Plan A” and “Plan B,” please see Appendices B and D in my book, Jesus’ Final Victory or go to: http://www.wake-up.org/Commentary/AppendixB.pdf and http://www.wake-up.org/Commentary/AppendixD.pdf) I have inserted some commentary into the passage quoted from Psalm 110 and 37 so that you can understand the meaning:

“Of David. A psalm. The Lord [the Father] says to my Lord [His Son]: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’ The Lord [the Father] will extend your mighty scepter from Zion [into all the world]; [and] you [my Son] will rule [from David’s throne in Jerusalem] in the midst of your enemies [for several centuries]. [However, at the appointed time] Your troops [the angels] will be willing on your day of battle [when you bring sin’s drama to an end].

Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth [my Son, you are an eternal God, after your resurrection, you will never grow old]. The Lord [the Father] has sworn and will not change his mind [this promise cannot be broken]: ‘You [my Son, have been chosen to be and] are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.’ [You my eternal Son, are both a king and a high priest] The Lord [the Son] is at your [the Father’s] right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.

He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth. [and the kingdom given to the Son will be inherited by the meek]” (Psalm 110:1-6, insertions mine)

Paul used this oracle (which is a conversation between the Father and the Son) to prove to the Jews that their own Bible (specifically, the book of Psalms) pointed forward to a time when the Levitical priesthood, temple services, and the observances of feasts would become obsolete. The book of Psalms predicted a new order, a new priesthood, and a new covenant would occur which would terminate the Levitical system and render it obsolete. (“For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.” Hebrews 7:12)

Paul explained: “This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. [Notice the union of authority over church and state in Melchizedek. In the Levitical order, God did not permit this union. The high priest was one man (Aaron) and the administrative leader was another (Moses) and they were not permitted to officiate, one for the other.]

He [Melchizedek] met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and

Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means ‘king of righteousness;’ then also, ‘king of Salem’ means ‘king of peace.’ [Thus, Melchizedek was a king of righteousness and peace as well as a high priest of God Most High.] Without father or mother [no record of who they were], without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life [no records showing lineage, his birth, or death], like the Son of God [who is not a Levite] he [Melchizedek] remains a priest forever [all who die in the Lord will serve God as priests forever – throughout eternity].” (Hebrews 7:1-3; Revelation 1:6, insertions mine)

Paul’s point was this: “We have this hope [our hope is in Jesus Christ who will one day reign over God’s eternal kingdom in the order of Melchizedek, as king of peace and righteousness and as high priest of God Most High. Our hope in Him serves] as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

It [our hope in Jesus] enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain [the Most Holy Place in Heaven], where Jesus, who went before us [to Heaven], has entered on our behalf [to intercede for us in the Father’s presence]. He [Jesus] has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek [and this clearly makes the Levitical priesthood useless and obsolete because no Levite can begin to do anything like this!].” (Hebrews 6:19,20, insertions mine)

Remember, genealogy was everything to the Jews. Being a biological descendant of Abraham was considered a matter of eternal life. (Matthew 3:9; John 8:39) Paul reminded the Jews that there was no record of Melchizedek’s parents, his birth, or his death and lineage is what separated the Jews from the Gentiles, the clean from the unclean.

Therefore, Paul used the book of Genesis and challenged the Jews how “a nobody” (a person having no lineage) like Melchizedek could be greater than Abraham. Clearly, Abraham recognized that Melchizedek was greater than himself and gave his tithe to him!

Paul positioned Melchizedek above Abraham so that he could prove the Levitical priesthood was temporary from the beginning. Melchizedek was chosen to serve as God’s priest. One thousand years later, the Father promised Jesus, as recorded in the book of Psalms, that He would someday serve as high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Four thousand years after sin began, Jesus ascended to Heaven where

He now serves in Heaven’s temple in the order of Melchizedek and this makes the Levitical order on Earth totally obsolete. Given this fulfillment of prophecy, Paul gave the Jews a difficult challenge. Which temple and which man would they honor? Which man and temple will be their hope for eternal life? The man standing before the curtain in Jerusalem’s temple with its annual services, or the Man in Heaven’s temple, sitting at the right hand of God having the scars of a new covenant in His hands?

3. After the Cross, Why Do Christians Need a High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek?

There is a movement within Protestantism called “the finished atonement.” Their position is that

God's atonement for sinners was completed at the cross. I do not believe the Bible supports this conclusion. Of course, when Jesus died on the cross, He paid the penalty for sin in full, but the atonement process, the redemption of sinners, was not completed at the cross.

The righteousness of Christ still has to be extended to sinners, one sinner at a time, and the gift of His righteousness does not occur when we receive Christ! Actually, it happens during judgment! Until we are judged, we are heirs of the promise that God will, in due time, give faith-full sinners the righteousness of Christ.

In ancient times, when a sinner put his sacrificial lamb on the altar and confessed his sins on the head of the lamb, two specific details occurred. First, the blood of the lamb was used to transfer the sinner's guilt to the temple. Second, the priest then blessed the sinner with "the innocence of the lamb." The innocence of the lamb represents the righteousness of Christ, the wedding garment which would be given to every sinner before he arrives at the wedding banquet. (Matthew 22:11,12)

How do we and when do we receive this wedding garment? The Father has set a time for the judgment of all mankind. (Acts 17:31) The one who will judge sinners to determine who is saved can only be our High Priest who serves in Heaven's temple. (John 5:22,23; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 6:19,20) The judgment of the dead began in 1844 (Daniel 7:9,10; 8:14) and the judgment of the living will soon begin – when the censer is cast down. (Revelation 8:5; 14:6,7; 3:10)

When these details are properly aligned, two marvelous truths are evident. First, God's atonement process for sinners involves the sinless life of Christ (Christ's righteousness), the death of Jesus which is God's payment for sin's penalty, and the application of Christ's righteousness by God's High Priest. (Romans 5:10; John 3:16; Romans 1:17)

Second, God's atonement process for sinners includes an investigative judgment, conducted by God's High Priest who serves today in Heaven's temple. This High Priest will carefully examine the records and determine who lived by faith and who lived in rebellion. In other words, Jesus will determine our eternal destiny at the appointed time. This is why we need a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. We need someone in Heaven who can save us from our sins!

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:15,16)

Larry Wilson

Will All Israel Be Saved?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Will All Israel Will Be Saved?

"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.' " (Romans 11:25,26, emphasis mine)

Many Christians use Romans 11:25,26 to reach and support a conclusion that has nothing to do with Paul's intent. I would like to illustrate three reasons for this aberration:

1. Improper use of Scripture to support a paradigm
2. Superficial treatment of subject material
3. Lifting words out of context and/or imposing a theological construct

1. Improper Use of Scripture to Support a Paradigm

Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, was written about 450 years before Jesus was born. Consider Malachi's final words: **"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."** (Malachi 4:5,6)

The Bible indicates that Elijah was taken to Heaven in a fiery chariot around 850 B.C. (2 Kings 2:11) During the time of Christ, Malachi's prediction fueled the idea that Elijah would appear before Messiah could appear. We see this anticipation when John 1 records the story of John the Baptist:

"Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Christ.' They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' . . . [Then] **'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' John** [the Baptist] **replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the desert, "Make straight the way for the Lord." ' "** (John 1:19-23, insertion mine)

John's parents were well known because his father, Zechariah, was a priest. The facts about John's miraculous birth were also well known. (Luke 1) The inquiry into John's identity is important because one of the strongest arguments the Jews used against Jesus was the

prophecy of Malachi. The Jews concluded that Messiah could not appear until Elijah arrived.

Because Malachi's "Elijah prophecy" was often used against Jesus, **"The disciples asked him** [Jesus]**, 'Why then do the teachers of the law say** [keep saying] **that Elijah must come first?' Jesus replied, 'To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist."** (Matthew 17:11-13, insertions mine)

Jesus could say that John was Elijah because spiritually speaking, John the Baptist was a parallel of Elijah. The Holy Spirit enabled Elijah to be a mighty prophet and the same Holy Spirit enabled John the Baptist to be a mighty prophet. In fact, Jesus said no prophet was greater than John the Baptist. (Matthew 11:11) Both men were heralds of God's efforts to establish His kingdom on Earth. Because the Jews misunderstood Malachi's prediction, they rejected Jesus. Their failure also illustrates how an improper use of Scripture can be devastating.

2. Superficial Treatment of Subject Material

Many wonderful Bible themes are given superficial treatment today. "Sound bites" are simplistic and worse, they can produce a concept that is totally wrong. For example, consider the role and importance of the Ten Commandments. Are the Ten Commandments a religious relic or a declaration of God's will that lives in perpetuity? Of course, this question cannot be addressed in this short article, but I wish to use this debate among Christians to illustrate a point.

If the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross, then there is no law against idolatry, the worship of images, taking God's name in vain, lying, adultery, murder, or stealing. Many Protestants will respond that there are laws against these behaviors after the cross because nine of the Ten Commandments are mentioned in the New Testament. So, many Protestants want to believe that just the fourth commandment was abolished at the cross. They simply do not want to observe God's seventh-day Sabbath; instead, they would rather protect an ancient tradition of Sunday observance. In spite of what many Protestant believers say, all of the Ten Commandments are mentioned in the New Testament, including the fourth. (Compare Genesis 2:1-3 with Hebrews 4:4,9,10.)

To prove their claim that the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross, Protestants will sometimes resort to a superficial treatment of Bible texts. For example, Romans 10:4 says, **"Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."** (Romans 10:4)

What does Paul mean when he says that **"Christ is the end of the law. . . "**? The key question is: Is a sinner declared righteous in God's sight after the cross because there is no law, or is a sinner declared righteous in God's sight after God covers him with the righteousness of Christ? Paul did not contradict himself in the book of Romans. Paul understood the Ten Commandments were obligatory after the cross and this is why he wrote, **"Do we, then, nullify**

the law [the Ten Commandments] **by this faith** [in Christ]**? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."** (Romans 3:31, insertions mine)

When Paul wrote **"Christ is the end** [Greek: teleos] **of the law. . ."**, he meant that Jesus met the goal of the law. The law could not find any imperfection in Him. Christ's perfect life is so important because He had to live a perfect life, overcoming every temptation before He could even go to the cross. The Father required Jesus to live a perfect life so that Jesus could transfer the "righteousness of Christ" to His believers. Then, after Jesus had established the righteousness needed for our salvation, the Father sent Jesus to the cross so that our death sentence could be transferred to Him. There is nothing within this process that required the Sabbath commandment to be abolished.

Romans 10:4 perfectly aligns with Romans 1:17: **"For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed** [a righteousness which a sinner cannot achieve or create]**, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.' "** [insertion mine] Jesus created this righteousness by overcoming every temptation. Sinners receive this righteousness through salvific faith (faith that results in salvation) through obeying the demands of the Holy Spirit without regard for the consequences! No sinner can enter Heaven and enjoy the wedding banquet unless he first receives and wears the righteousness of Christ! (Matthew 22:11-13)

I have used Romans 10:4 to illustrate how a Bible text can be distorted and used in a superficial way to support a tradition. Remember, Hebrews 10:31 says that if anyone willingly and knowingly distorts the Word of God, God will deal harshly with that person.

3. Lifting Words Out of Context and/or Imposing a Theological Construct

A sentiment widely held by Christians today is that after a pre-tribulation rapture occurs, the Jews will become believers in Jesus. They will repent of their rebellion and recognize Jesus as the Son of God and "all Israel" will be saved at the Second Coming.

Because this sentiment is a theological construct (i.e., a construct is made up of many supporting pieces), it is like a house of cards. Because of space limitations, we will consider one doctrine that ruins this construct, although several doctrines could be discussed. This doctrine concerns the heirs of Abraham. Let us discover how the Bible describes the heirs of Abraham.

The Bible teaches that all believers in Christ are Abraham's seed. (Galatians 3:29) Jesus said that only those who live by faith, as did Abraham, are Abraham's seed. (John 8:39) Paul reaffirms that it is not the natural children who are heirs of Abraham. (Romans 9:8) The book of James teaches that early believers in Christ considered themselves to be part of the twelve tribes of Israel. (James 1:1; 2:1) And last, but not least, **" . . . Jesus declared** [to Nicodemus]**, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' "** (John 3:3, insertion mine)

Before the cross, Jesus made an important declaration that John recorded in John 3. If we work backwards to the days of Abraham, the following declaration makes perfect sense just as it reads: **". . . For not all who are descended from Israel** [Jacob] **are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, *it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise* who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."** (Romans 9:6-8, insertion and italics mine)

Who are the children of the promise who will inherit Earth made new? One could say, "the children of the promise are the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," but he would be incorrect. Abraham had two sons and only one son, Isaac, participated in the promise. Isaac had two sons and only one son, Jacob, participated in the promise! Then, Jacob (Israel) had many sons with four women and Paul said of them, "not all who are descended from Jacob are Israel." So, "Who are the children of the promise?" Speaking for the Father, Jesus defined the heirs of Abraham when He said to Nicodemus: **". . . no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."** (John 3:3)

Given what Jesus said in John 3 and John 8, as well as what Paul wrote in Romans 9, it is necessary to take a closer look at Romans 11 to determine what Paul meant when he wrote, **". . . all Israel shall be saved, just as it is written."** Paul had something very different in mind than what millions of Protestants have in mind today when they read Paul's words.

Notice the whole phrase, **"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written . . ."** Paul is not postulating a new idea in Romans 11 when he says that all Israel will be saved. Paul has already said in Romans 9 that not everyone descended from the loins of Jacob are part of Israel and it is not the natural children who are Abraham's offspring. To prove these two points, Paul quotes from Isaiah: **" 'The Redeemer will come to Zion, *to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,*' declares the Lord. 'As for me, this is my covenant with them,' says the Lord. 'My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever,' says the Lord."** (Isaiah 59:20,21, italics mine)

This is the problem. Since Adam and Eve sinned, salvation has always had a simple qualification: God's people are people who obey His Word, believe His promises, and repent of their sins. All people who meet this qualification are the heirs of Abraham. Thus, all Israel will be saved and Isaiah confirms this!

Paul wrote the book of Romans and sent it to both Jew and Gentile believers in Rome for several reasons. One important reason was to clarify the true constituency of Israel. If we compare Paul's words in Ephesians 2 with Romans 9-11, there is perfect harmony. After the Levitical code was abolished (Colossians 2), Gentiles no longer were required to "become Jews." They can be grafted directly into the family of Abraham through faith in Christ! Long ago, Isaiah and Hosea predicted this wonderful development! (Isaiah 19, 56; Hosea 1) There is no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile because of Christ! All that matters to God is going forward in obedience, faith, and repentance.

Romans 11 has been grossly distorted and if Paul was alive today, he might write Romans 11:26 this way: “Soon, all of God’s children – those within every religious system on Earth – will be saved because God promised Abraham long ago that he would be the father of many nations.”

Larry Wilson

The Demons are Coming! The Demons are Coming!

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon." (Revelation 9:11)

It may surprise you that "[Paul] Revere did not shout the phrase later attributed to him, 'The British are coming!' His [April 1775] mission depended on secrecy, the countryside was filled with British army patrols, and most of the Massachusetts colonists, who were predominantly English in ethnic origin, still considered themselves British.

Revere's warning, according to eyewitness accounts of the ride and Revere's own description, was 'The Regulars are coming out.' "* Years later, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote the phrase, "The British are coming!" to dramatize Revere's courageous ride in a poem called "Paul Revere's Ride." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Revere [inserts mine])

Very few Americans are aware that Revere's famous warning was created by a poet. Even fewer people know that the entire world is nearing the end of a global war and demons are going to physically appear on Earth before Jesus returns. Of course, demons (fallen angels) have lived on Earth since the day Adam and Eve sinned and increasingly, we see the results of their predatory efforts in the news every day.

The title of this study parallels the warning message that Revere gave in Longfellow's poem because the world needs to hear a far more serious warning. Revelation 9 predicts a time is coming when Jesus will permit the devil and his demons to leave the spirit realm where they have been confined.

They will appear in the skies over large cities and descend in shows of magnificent power and glory. The devil will claim to be Almighty God. For five months he and his angels will do everything possible to make the people of Earth believe that he is God and now lives among men. After accomplishing this objective, the devil will change into his real character.

He will demand that one third of mankind be slaughtered, and overnight, he and his demons will take full control of Earth. Most of the people will receive his tattoo (the mark of the beast) and become slaves of a supernatural pharaoh. Incredible misery will follow. This sounds like science fiction, but do not be fooled.

Once you understand God's purpose for permitting this drama to unfold, it will make perfect sense.

Predatory Demons

From Adam's fall to Noah's flood, evil had permeated Earth like a virus. The whole world had became so degenerate that after a mere 1,646 years, God concluded that the only cure was total destruction. The same thing has happened all over again, albeit at a slower pace. Once again, our modern world society has become so degenerate from the virus of sin that destruction is the only cure. The combination of sinful human nature and predatory demons will cause this destruction. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms [unseen or spiritual realms]." (Ephesians 6:12, insertion mine)

Human nature is naturally rebellious toward God's laws. (Romans 8:5-7) The devil and his demons know this because they, too, are rebellious toward God and His laws. Demons know that if a person ignores and rejects the prompting of the Holy Spirit to do right, then he will succumb to the temptation to do evil. Demons know that human beings are like a piece of metal caught between two powerful magnets. The human sinful nature causes us to be naturally inclined toward doing evil. Fallen angels study us intimately to discover our weaknesses and prey on our weaknesses. Their objective is to lead us into sin. They want us to experience the painful consequences of sin, like Adam and Eve, and ultimately receive the penalty for sin. The consequences of sin always result in suffering for someone, such as illness, painful loss and separation, self-loathing, loneliness, and insatiable appetites for things that cannot bring joy or happiness. The penalty for sin is eternal death. Read Hebrews 11:25,26 and seriously consider if the consequences and penalty for sin are a fair exchange for enjoying the pleasures of sin for a short time.

The Cancer of Sin

When a majority of people ignore or reject the voice of the Holy Spirit, society spirals downhill quickly. When the next generation arrives, society races downhill even faster because the new generation has fewer inhibitions toward wrongdoing. Therefore, with each passing generation, society accelerates toward hopeless degeneracy and decadence. God does step in from time to time and slows this degeneracy by reducing or eliminating certain populations, thus cauterizing the cancer of sin.

The Bible teaches that people can be grossly evil and not know it. If God Himself were to enter each household and clearly point out each sinful thought, word, and action, He would be thrown out immediately. Unfortunately, most people are ignorant of God's will and His righteousness, and within the confines of our natural rebellion, we will do everything possible to remain ignorant. Billions of people have no knowledge that their thoughts, ways, and actions are exceedingly offensive to God. We are born into sin's pigpen and we have comfortably adapted to the constant stench (the customs and ways) of the sty. Pig farmers cannot smell the pungent and repulsive odor of their pigpens, and neither can a sinner detect his true condition before God without enlightenment from the Holy Spirit.

God Does Something That Causes People to Hate Him and Curse Him

God's ways are predictable because He is changeless. (Malachi 3:6) Unlike Lucifer, God is not arbitrary, obsessive, paranoid, capricious, double-minded, or impulsive. Although we cannot understand everything about Him, there are many things we can understand if we take the time. We can be sure that God is a God of love because His actions at Calvary speak clearly. (John 3:16) When 4,000 years of Bible history (from Creation to the first century A.D.) are reviewed, it is easy to conclude that God is infinitely wise, infinitely intelligent, very careful, very deliberate, very thoughtful, very patient, and very nurturing. When we study the plan of salvation, we observe that in terms of kindness, God has no equal. These properties of God's character are important to understand because He consistently does something which causes people to hate

Him and curse Him.

Because God is changeless, He has discernable patterns of behavior. I would like to investigate one pattern of behavior from the Old Testament: When groups of people reach an intolerable level of degenerate and decadent behavior so that even extended grace has no redemptive effect, God always responds with destruction. I call this pattern, The Full Cup Principle.* Consider these applications: A God of love drowned the whole world in Noah's day. A God of love burned Sodom and Gomorrah to the ground. A God of love caused the walls and buildings of Jericho to fall and bury most of the inhabitants of the city. A God of love empowered King Nebuchadnezzar to take Israel captive, destroy God's temple, and reduce the City of David to ashes. A God of love empowered Cyrus and Darius to overtake the mighty city of Babylon. A God of love empowered Alexander the Great to destroy the Persian Empire. This same God of love will, at the right time, release the demons from the spirit realm allowing them to overtake the wicked and dominate those who insisted on ignorance and defiance. (For an in-depth study on this topic, please see Chapter 2 in my book, Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled.)

When dealing with ignorant and arrogant people, God consistently follows The Full Cup Principle. When God sees that a future generation has no possibility for happiness because of the current generation's degeneracy and decadence, He sends redemptive judgments. If these judgments cannot achieve repentance and reformation, He sends totally destructive judgments. This pattern is described in the Bible in several places. For examples, see Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, and Ezekiel 14.

We need take a closer look at these two steps:

1. When a nation reaches a point where a majority of its people refuse to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, when a majority falls into idolatry, greed, hatred, meanness, rage, gluttony, and sexual immorality, God knows that recovery is impossible on a human scale. Therefore, He takes action with redemptive judgments so that, if possible, that nation might repent and reform. God's love and interest in the future generation is just as great as His love and interest in the present generation. Therefore, if a nation will repent and reform, it can once again enjoy the land which God gave it to inhabit, and future generations will have a chance to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and live upright lives.
   Of course, redemptive judgments always bring suffering, heartache, and pain. During these judgments, some people do wake up and discover their true condition in God's sight. They repent of their sins and reform. Corporately speaking, however, Bible history reveals this outcome is rare. The city of Nineveh is the only group of people who come to my mind who repented, but that repentance was short-lived and the city was only spared from destruction for 160 years. Most of the time, ignorant and arrogant people curse God on account of His plagues, and they stubbornly refuse to see any correlation between their behavior and His judgments. This is why destruction is the only solution. Isaiah wrote, "My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness. Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the Lord." (Isaiah

26:9,10)

2. After sending redemptive judgments, God waits to see what a nation will do. (See Daniel 5:18-31) If the people of that nation are unwilling to turn away from their wickedness, God responds by sending a destroyer to utterly destroy that nation. We see this process in the Old Testament several times. For example, speaking about the destruction of ancient Babylon, God said to Jeremiah "'But when the seventy years [of Israel's captivity] are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,' declares the Lord, 'and will make it desolate forever. I will bring upon that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.'" (Jeremiah 25:12-14, insertion mine)

The Seven Trumpets

I believe every nation on Earth has descended to a level of degeneracy and decadence that cannot be cured or reversed. The whole world is sick with a fatal virus, and no cure or solution is possible. Therefore, The Full Cup Principle is about to be invoked. God's wrath is coming. When the appointed hour arrives, God will release four angels who have been given power to hurt the Earth (Revelation 7:1-4) and four horrific judgments will strike Earth in quick succession. These judgments are described in Revelation 8. They will be redemptive in nature; that is, some people will come to their senses and repent of their wicked ways realizing there is a God. God's judgments will also have the effect of separating sheep (humble and repentant people) from goats (arrogant and defiant people). I do not have words to describe the global destruction that will be caused by the first four judgments. However, to offer some perspective, the Bible indicates in Revelation 6:8 that 25% of the world's population will be killed when God's wrath is released (1.75+ billion people). The misery index created by the first four judgments will cause billions of people to hate God and curse Him.

"The Demons Are Coming" and The Full Cup Principle

Today, Earth has become hopelessly decadent. Bible prophecy reveals the time has come when God will once again implement The Full Cup Principle. Prior to the Great Tribulation, God will select and empower 144,000 people as His spokespersons. Then, over a period of 64(?) days God will send four redemptive judgments (these are described in Revelation 8). These four judgments will destroy much of our planet and kill 1.75 billion people. Their purpose is to get the full attention of every survivor so that each person may thoughtfully consider God's Words, spoken only by the 144,000. Many people will hate God and go to their deaths cursing Him.

Nevertheless, God will wait for 890(?) days to see what choices each person will make. At the end of 890(?) days, there will still be many people who refuse to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God worsens the situation. He releases Lucifer and his angels from the spirit realm. God sends a destroyer who is eager to destroy the world. God does this so that in the process, some of those stubbornly wicked people will wake up and realize there are only two options in life. We either obey the voices of demons or we obey the voice of the Holy Spirit. A

few people will discover this profound truth and repent of their ignorance and rebellion. Next month, I will attempt to explain why it is only our response to the Holy Spirit which determines our eternal destiny.

Larry Wilson

Our Response to the Holy Spirit Determines Our Eternal Destiny

Author: Larry W. Wilson

" . . . . Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."
(Romans 8:14)

The Population Reference Bureau (PRB) in Washington D.C. estimated in 2011 that a total of 108 billion people have lived on Earth. (See http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2002/HowManyPeopleHaveEverLivedonEarth.aspx.) Since there is no census data on world population for most of Earth's history, all estimates are "best guesses." Even though I think this estimate is excessive, I have chosen to use PRB's total to demonstrate the love and fairness of God in terms of each person's eternal destiny. I believe the Bible teaches that God gives everyone on Earth the same opportunity for eternal life. You may ask, "How is this possible?" Actually, the process is simple. God sends the Holy Spirit to everyone and our response to the Holy Spirit determines our eternal destiny.

God loves each person equally. He will not keep a person out of Heaven because he lived 3,000 years ago in a remote village in Africa, the Amazon forest, or Siberia and worshiped a false God. There will be millions of people in Heaven (including deists, agnostics, and atheists) who know nothing about Jesus! Be assured, I am not advocating universal salvation. (Universal salvation is the notion that at the end of sin's drama, God will save everyone.) On the contrary, I believe the Bible teaches that God will condemn and destroy each person who has blasphemed the Holy Spirit. At the end of sin's drama, I believe this will prove to be a very large number of people. God's fairness in giving each person the same opportunity for eternal life may be a new thought, especially if you believe that your denomination has the only key to eternal life. When we consider that "God so loved the world (all 108 billion people) that He gave His only begotten Son," this becomes a very important concept to understand. This concept becomes critical because the fulfillment of Revelation's story is about to impact the last seven billion people who live on Earth (most of whom have never had a chance to thoughtfully consider the gospel of Jesus).

To get started, I have divided PRB's 108 billion people into four population groups:

1. From Creation to Noah's flood: ~0.5 billion people

2. From Noah's flood to 2014, unaware of the true God: ~90 billion people

3. The totality of Israel's population, from Noah/Abraham to A.D. 70: ~4 billion people

4. The totality of Christian population from Jesus to 2014: ~13.5 billion people

If these population groups are reasonably proportional, a shocking result occurs: More than 90% of the people who have lived on Earth have not heard about the true God. They missed out

on learning about God's love, God's plan to save sinners, the atonement voluntarily made by Jesus for sinners, and the promise of eternal life. It is true that almost everyone who has lived on Earth has had some kind of religious belief, but all religious beliefs are myths if they are not based on divine revelation. The Bible teaches that God does not condemn a person because he was born into Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, or Protestantism. (Romans 2:14,15; 3:29,30) Neither does God save a person because he was born of Christian parents. At all times and within every culture, God has children who have all sorts of religious views. So then, what is the timeless mechanism for salvation and how does it operate? The Bible teaches that there is one mechanism for salvation and it operates the same way for each person.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Jesus said four things about the Holy Spirit which many Christians fail to understand [I have numbered them]: "And so I tell you, [1] every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but [2] the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. [For example,] Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who [continues to] speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, [3] either in this age or [4] in the age to come." (Matthew 12:31,32, insertions mine)

What amazing grace! Forgiveness is possible for every sin and blasphemy except one. Jesus said blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in this age or during the age to come. Jesus added the phrase "in the age to come" because God blesses every being with a gift called "the power of choice" and this gift will continue "in the age to come." God gave this gift to the angels when He created them and He gave it to Adam and Eve. Because beings are free to exercise their power of choice, Lucifer and his followers became evil when they chose to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Adam and Eve became evil when they chose to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. The only way we can blaspheme the Holy Spirit is through choice.

The word "blasphemy" (Greek: blasphemia) means to insult, defy, denigrate, vilify, or to speak evil. For example, if a person speaks against the Father or Jesus, he can be forgiven. (Luke 23:34) However, blaspheming the Holy Spirit is different. Defying the Holy Spirit is dangerous because ignorance is not possible when the Holy Spirit speaks because the voice of the Holy Spirit within each person is strong, clear, and unmistakable. Therefore, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a willful act of defiance and everyone who has lived on Earth (except Jesus) has, at one time or another, blasphemed the Holy Spirit. However, do not be discouraged or overwhelmed, because a few mistakes do not automatically mean eternal death. (Matthew 18:21-35)

The Sinful Nature Is Like "Ancient Pharaoh on His Throne"

Each person is born with a sinful nature (this is the ongoing result of the curse of sin) and our sinful nature is hostile toward God's authority. (Romans 8:7) Because we have the power of choice, each child has a throne within his heart and shortly after birth, a contest for this throne begins. Jesus, our Creator, wants to sit on our throne and because of our vanity and self-seeking sinful nature, we want to sit on our throne. What is more satisfying to the carnal nature

than singing the Frank Sinatra version of “I did it my way”? Our sinful nature (I call it “Pharaoh” in this illustration) is an ego-centric, selfish, and self-centered king. Because of the curse of sin operating within us, Pharaoh definitely has the “home field” advantage. Parents do not have to teach a child to be selfish or self-centered. Little Pharaoh does not naturally share his toys or submit to a higher authority (just like Pharaoh in ancient Egypt). Anything that challenges “the will” of little Pharaoh is met with resistance (crying, screaming, pouting, defiance, and rebellion). Worse, as a child grows up, the Pharaoh within him also matures, and most of the time, he becomes more devious and difficult to admonish.

The battle between Jesus and Pharaoh is conducted by the Holy Spirit. His mission is to unseat Pharaoh and put him in “the closet” so that Jesus can reign as Lord and Master. When Jesus reigns on the throne in our heart, the fruit of the Spirit naturally occurs. There is peace, joy, and fullness of life, not only within the person, but for everyone around that person! (John 13:35; Galatians 5:22,23) Because God has given us the power of choice, the Holy Spirit cannot violate our will. Each person has the God-given right to determine his eternal destiny. The Holy Spirit will only install Jesus on the throne of our hearts if we allow it. Because Pharaoh is stubborn, the Holy Spirit applies pressure on us in two different ways. Sometimes, there are gentle and gradual steps (sanctification is a nurturing process which the Holy Spirit uses to draw us to God and into His ways), and sometimes there are bold tests of faith (to see if we will listen to God and obey His voice). In either case, we always respond to the Holy Spirit. We answer His prodding with submission or rebellion (blasphemy).

Sanctification is a one-on-one experience with God. God initiates sanctification shortly after each child is born so that each person might come to know Him and walk in His ways. The Holy Spirit knows how to speak to the heart of each unique person, and all 108 billion of us have been permitted, because of the power of choice, to speak back to the Holy Spirit. This communication is totally private – one-on-one. It occurs within the heart and no one else in the world is privy to the personal exchange. (1 Samuel 16:7; John 3:8) When the Holy Spirit speaks to us, a strong conviction arrives that requires action. No one else knows about the conviction unless we reveal it. Every Holy Spirit conviction is righteous because God is righteous. The problem with a Holy Spirit conviction is that doing right in God’s eyes is usually difficult to carry out, when doing wrong is so much easier (or cheaper).

When Holy Spirit conviction occurs, we communicate back to the Holy Spirit through action. Our lips can say anything, but our action reveals submission or rebellion. To put this in the clearest of terms, consider this: During the Great Tribulation, there will be four calls to action. The Holy Spirit will challenge everyone on Earth with four bold tests of faith (the 144,000 will deliver four messages from God) and everyone will communicate back to the Holy Spirit through action. Some people will obey the demands of the Holy Spirit and lose everything, including their lives, and many people will defy the Holy Spirit in an attempt to save themselves from pain and death. (John 12:25)

Holy Spirit Tools

The Holy Spirit works on us in many different ways. For example, each child is born with a

developing sense of fairness, as well as a basic ability to learn right from wrong. When possible, the Holy Spirit uses our conscience to draw us closer to God. When possible, the Holy Spirit uses parents to sanctify the child. Parental training and education, e.g., the home environment and parental example can accelerate the sanctifying process. Of course, some children do not have the blessing of a good role model at home. To compensate, the Holy Spirit may use school teachers, church leaders, grandparents, relatives, neighbors, etc.

As a child matures, so does the Pharaoh within. Therefore, the efforts of the Holy Spirit change with time. As a child becomes increasingly accountable for his decisions, the Holy Spirit respects the choices made by the teen which explains to some extent why rebellion overtakes some adolescents. If a teen does not want to hear from the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit does not give up, He simply steps back, sometimes for years, waiting for an open heart.

Each child comes into this world needing instruction and training, and each child should learn these essential concepts by age seven: Respect and reverence for God; respect for parents, elders, authorities, and the property of others; self-control; and respect for himself and his/her body. Teaching these concepts takes a lot of time, patience, effort, and determination. Wise parents know about the battle for the throne and they have to allow room for the Holy Spirit to battle directly with the little Pharaoh sitting on the throne. When overprotective parents do not give room for the work of the Holy Spirit, they can create a rebellious child because one Pharaoh (the parent) is struggling with the other Pharaoh inside the child.

If a person responds to the ongoing sanctification efforts of the Holy Spirit, he will eventually reach a “tipping point.” When this moment arrives, Pharaoh is dethroned and sent to the closet and Jesus takes over the throne. Even though Jesus ascends the throne, Pharaoh can (and does) jump out of the closet and return to the throne from time to time. (Romans 7:14-25) Because God is patient and not willing that anyone should perish (2 Peter 3:9), the Holy Spirit does not give up on us with one or even ten blasphemies. Instead, the Holy Spirit only gives up on us when rebellion becomes constant.

Each time we blaspheme the Holy Spirit, our willingness to blaspheme the Holy Sprit grows stronger. If we continue in defiant rebellion, there will come a point where the Holy Spirit can do nothing more. He cannot violate our will. Therefore, our response to the Holy Spirit is far more serious than many people understand because no one wants to have a relationship with God after the Holy Spirit abandons him. People who commit the unpardonable sin have no desire or interest in doing right. The devil knows this and he uses every imaginable effort to keep Pharaoh seated on the throne.

During the past 6,000 years, 108 billion people have participated in a contest. Paul called this contest the good fight of faith. (2 Timothy 4:7) This fight will continue for all people until the sealing occurs. During the Great Tribulation, millions of people will hear and obey the demands of the Holy Spirit and be sealed. In simplistic terms this means Jesus will take over the throne and slay Pharaoh in His saints and finally, Pharaoh’s closet will be sealed shut.

Rebirth

In closing, let us suppose that “rebirth” occurs when the tipping point (mentioned earlier) occurs. When sanctification reaches a point where Pharaoh is dethroned, Jesus takes charge of our life through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This tipping point could come as the result of an altar call at church. At this point, a conscious decision is made to surrender 100% to the authority of Jesus. In such a case, a person might act on a desire that has been forming in his or her heart for some time. The tipping point could also come through a test of faith where the Holy Spirit brings a strong conviction to do something right and submission follows. Either situation is evidence that Jesus is on the throne. Rebirth in an atmosphere of divine truth looks quite different than rebirth in the absence of such knowledge, but whenever rebirth is present, a person obeys the demands of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

Each person’s eternal destiny is determined by his response to the Holy Spirit. God has given 108 billion people an equal chance for salvation. Such is God’s amazing grace. One blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not fatal and one rebirth experience does not mean the battle for the throne is over. Remember, because we have a sinful nature, there will be a lifelong battle for the throne of our hearts. We have to fight the good fight of faith every day. The only way we can walk with God is through submission to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness – for they will be filled.” (Matthew 5:6) The greatest evidence of rebirth is a hunger and thirst to know God, to understand His truth and experience His righteousness. If allowed, the Holy Spirit will ramp up the sanctifying process. He will cause us to grow up spiritually by imposing new convictions on us. He does this to keep us living in the realm of faith where justification is granted.

Using PRB’s 108 billion people estimate, it is fair to say that God loves 94.5 billion non-Christians just as much as He loves 13.5 billion Christians! God is no respecter of people. He made all 108 billion of us and from His point of view, everyone having a sinful nature and is willing to obey the demands of the Holy Spirit will be given eternal life for two reasons. First, Jesus provided the righteousness and paid the penalty for every sinner – whether a sinner is aware or unaware of this fact is immaterial. Second, when our actions indicate that we are willing to live by faith (which occurs when we obey the voice the Holy Spirit), God knows that we are safe to save! From God’s point of view, He knows that once the sinful nature is removed (that is, there is no more Pharaoh), sinners who obeyed the Holy Spirit will have no problem obeying the Holy Spirit throughout the ages to come!

At this point, you may be wondering about the importance of the gospel of Jesus. If salvation is determined by our response to the Holy Spirit, why did Jesus command that His gospel should be presented to the world? The answer is simple: Jesus said, “. . . . I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10) The gospel of Jesus, when embraced through faith, elevates life to a dimension that is not otherwise possible. The gospel of Jesus, when properly understood, brings knowledge, fullness, peace, and joy to life that cannot be matched. This is why Jesus wants His gospel presented throughout the world. What is sweeter than communion with God? Salvation is not an exclusive offer for post-Calvary Christians. All 108 billion people have had the same opportunity for salvation. Such is the largess of God’s love.

However, those who are led by the Holy Spirit to embrace the gospel of Jesus will have a more abundant life. Remember, whether Christian or non-Christian, those willing to obey the Holy Spirit are Sons of God. (Romans 8:14)

Larry Wilson

The False Prophet of Revelation

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"But the [composite] **beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he** [the false prophet] **had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur."**
(Revelation 19:20)

During the July 2014 Lake Tahoe Seminar, the question was asked, "Who is the false prophet in the book of Revelation?" As the discussion unfolded, several people also wanted to know about the three frogs that come out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. (Revelation 16:13) I will address the identity and purpose of the three frogs next month, but this month let us see what the Bible has to say about the false prophet.

There are four beasts in the book of Revelation:

1. A lamb having seven eyes and seven horns (This beast represents Jesus.)
2. A great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns (This beast represents Lucifer in an invisible state.)
3. A beast coming out of the Earth/Abyss* having two horns like the lamb, but speaking like the dragon. (This beast represents Lucifer in a visible state.)
4. A composite beast coming from the sea having seven heads and ten horns (This beast represents the global government that will form in response to the chaos of the first four trumpets. The world's religious and political leaders will unite in an effort to appease God's wrath.)

*Note: The ancients thought Earth was flat, much like a dinner plate. For them, the bottomless pit was a mysterious shaft that pierced Earth. They believed that if a person fell into the bottomless pit, he would find himself in an underground region where evil spirits lived and endless fires burned. Volcanoes were thought to be chimneys for the fires that burned beneath Earth. God used these concepts to illustrate the book of Revelation for John.

Keeping these four beast entities separate and distinct can be somewhat challenging for two reasons. First, the book of Revelation uses many pronouns which can be very confusing. For example, Revelation 13 has more than 20 pronouns in it! Second, tracing the devil's actions takes a bit of work because he sometimes operates as an invisible entity and sometimes as a visible entity within the book of Revelation. When operating as an invisible entity, he is described as a great red dragon. When operating as a visible entity, he is described with different phrases such as "the beast from the Abyss," or "the angel of the Abyss," or "the beast that comes up out of the Earth having two horns like the Lamb."

What Is a False Prophet?

"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. . . . That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because *he preached rebellion against the Lord your God,* who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; *he has tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow.* You must purge the evil from among you." (Deuteronomy 13:1-5, italics mine)

A false prophet is an entity who demonstrates supernatural power, but preaches rebellion against the Lord and tries to turn people away from God's ways and commands. This explanation, along with the following two verses taken from Revelation [italics mine], will help us discover the identity of the false prophet:

Rev 12:9 **The great dragon** [Lucifer] **was hurled down–that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.**

Rev 18:23 **The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. *By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.***

Who Is the Devil?

Before the world was created, Lucifer was the greatest and most powerful angel of all created beings. God highly favored Lucifer until he became jealous of Jesus and hatred filled his heart. Lucifer was given enormous powers and abilities that mankind cannot understand. He travels faster than the speed of light, he can pass through solid walls undetected, he can see us and hear our words, he knows each person intimately because he has watched our behavior, and without notice, he can influence people to do wicked things. He is also a master of entrapment. He trapped Eve with his enticements and led her into sin. Through her, Lucifer was able to entice Adam to sin, so watch out! The devil can do many things which human beings cannot explain or understand. Hatred is the game he knows best. I am highlighting some of his amazing powers and abilities because increasingly, much of the evil we see happening around us bears his invisible signature.

The devil becomes exceedingly successful when he gains control of people who have religious, military, and/or civil power. For example, when Jesus was born, an invisible Lucifer attempted to kill Baby Jesus through a demon possessed king (King Herod). (Revelation 12:1-6) Because Lucifer often works through wicked people to achieve his demonic goals, God describes Lucifer in the book of Revelation as an invisible force, but a time is coming when Lucifer will not always be an invisible force. This is a profound point which many students of Revelation do not give adequate consideration. The coming Antichrist will not be a human being – not even close! It will be the devil, accompanied by his angels, who will be given glorious bodies so that they can physically appear on Earth, in plain view! Therefore, God describes Lucifer as a visible being in

the book of Revelation with phrases like: **“The beast from the Abyss”** (the Abyss means the spirit realm) or the beast **“that once was** [visible]**, now is not** [visible] **and will come up out of the Abyss** [and be visible]**.”** (Revelation 17:8)

When God permits Lucifer and his angels to physically appear and walk on Earth, the Bible says his appearing will be an overwhelming delusion for the wicked. (Revelation 17:8) His glory will be so brilliant that people will shield their faces. The angelic host who hovers around him will be so numerous that nations will cower with intimidation. There is no parallel in ancient history for such a display of awesome power and authority. Even the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai will pale by comparison. Because the devil is both invisible and visible in Revelation’s story and because he can do things that human beings cannot do, God has given Lucifer different names and described him in different ways so that no one should be deceived. When God describes him as a dragon in the book of Revelation, Lucifer is working as an invisible adversary. (See Revelation 13:2) When God describes him as the beast from the Abyss, Lucifer will be working as a visible adversary. (See Revelation 11:7)

Why Does God Permit the Devil to Physically Appear?

The apostle Paul explains, with amazing detail, the physical appearing of the devil in 2 Thessalonians 2 and why God permits it. Paul calls Lucifer “the man of lawlessness” for a simple reason. When the devil and his angels appear, he will not obey or respect any of man’s laws. The devil and his angels will trample underfoot everything (laws, boundaries, religions, and governments) that man honors and no one will be able to stop him. Lucifer will be an unstoppable bully and after leading the world to believe that he is God, he will become an insatiable predator.

Paul describes the situation this way: **“Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day** [the Second Coming of Jesus] **will not come until** [a] **the rebellion occurs** [before Jesus returns, the 144,000 will boldly proclaim the testimony of Jesus and the whole world will hear it. The demand to worship Jesus on His seventh day Sabbath will create a global rebellion.] **and** [b] [before Jesus can return] **the man of lawlessness is** [must be] **revealed, the man** [thought to be indestructible will be] **doomed to destruction.** [Prior to the Second Coming, the devil will be released from the spirit realm or Abyss where he is now confined. When he is released,] **He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped** [The devil will have no respect for the religious systems or governments on Earth. He will oppose and abolish all religion and authority.]**, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple** [he will not occupy a building made by man, instead he will sit on the tops of the mountains]**, proclaiming himself to be God** [to the world below]. . . .
The coming of the lawless one [the physical appearing of the devil will have the appearance of divinity living among men, but his great performance] **will be in accordance with the** [deceitful] **work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They** [the wicked who rebelled against the gospel of Jesus will] **perish because** [they clearly heard the will of God which was faithfully delivered by the 144,000, but] **they refused to love the truth and so be saved** [because of their stubborn rebellion and hard hearts]**. For this reason God sends them**

a powerful delusion [the physical appearing of Lucifer and his demons] **so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."** (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, insertions mine)

The False Prophet Identified

Given the information that we have examined thus far, please consider the following passage and especially notice that the devil will flatter the leadership of Babylon during the fifth trumpet by performing miracles "on behalf" of the composite beast (Babylon): **"And he** [a visible Lucifer] **performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men** [attempting to prove to the world that his lie is truth, that he truly is Almighty God]. **Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast** [Babylon, the composite beast]**, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth** [and led them astray]**.** [Eventually,] **He ordered them to set up an image** [a one world church state] **in honor of the** [composite] **beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived."** (Revelation 13:13,14)

The Bible says that the visible Lucifer will perform amazing miracles "on behalf" of the leadership of Babylon. His time to complete this is short. During the fifth trumpet, the devil is limited to five months to create **a bandwagon effect**. Lucifer knows that if he is accepted and endorsed by the religious leaders of Babylon as Almighty God, a multitude of people claiming to be religious, who rejected the testimony of Jesus (which was spoken through the lips of the 144,000) will quickly and wholeheartedly embrace Lucifer as Almighty God. Therefore, to achieve his goal, the devil will praise and extol the leaders of Babylon, he will exalt and praise them for "the good job" they have been doing (by persecuting rebels who are actually the saints, etc.). As soon as the sixth trumpet sounds and the devil is permitted to kill people, the devil will throw the religious and political leadership of the world "under the bus" so that he can take over as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Jumping forward to the Second Coming of Jesus, please notice the contents of this verse: **"But the** [composite] **beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he** [the false prophet, the beast from the Abyss, a visible Lucifer] **had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image** [Lucifer's one-world-church-state]**. The two of them** [the devil's physical body and the composite beast that he empowered – Rev 13:2] **were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur."** (Revelation 19:20, insertions and underlining mine)

Bottom line: We find the false prophet performed miraculous signs on behalf of the composite beast. We found in Revelation 13:13 that the lamb-like beast [a visible Lucifer] performed miraculous signs on behalf of the composite beast. We know that a false prophet is defined as someone having supernatural power, and he uses that power to lead people away from God's ways and commands. Given these specifications, clearly the false prophet is another identity describing Lucifer in his visible state.
Larry Wilson

The Three Frogs of Revelation 16:13

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty."
(Revelation 16:13,14)

Last month, I wrote that we would continue our study on the false prophet by discussing the three frogs. We must review some of the events of the Great Tribulation to appreciate the purpose, meaning, and timing of the three evil spirits that John describes.

The Birth of the Composite Beast

Given the growth of hatred in our world, I believe a nuclear exchange will occur and the whole world will erupt in war and chaos in a single day. Shortly after this war begins, Jesus will enter the fray with a display of awesome authority and power. There will be deafening peals of thunder, huge sheets of lightning, rumblings from deep within the earth, and a global earthquake which will destroy the many infrastructures on which we depend.

Shortly after the earthquake, Jesus will send a meteoric firestorm and two great asteroid impacts which will cause unimaginable death and destruction. He will also cause volcanos to erupt, and the resulting soot and ash will cause darkness to occur on Earth. Twenty-five percent of the world's population will die during these judgments (Revelation 6:8) and the survivors will fearfully anticipate more judgments from God.

Man's response to God's judgments is represented in Revelation 13:1 as a beast. After world leaders see God's wrath, they will unite in a desperate effort to appease the anger of Almighty God. Leaders from the world's seven religious systems and its 219 sovereign nations will do whatever it takes to appease God.

The political leaders of the world will look to their religious experts for direction on what must be done to appease God so that His wrath will end. The religious leaders of the world will confer among themselves and they will recommend the establishment of a global authority that addresses God's wrath. The irony behind this response will be twofold. First, the religious leaders of the world do not understand God's plans because they do not properly understand apocalyptic prophecy. This will be demonstrated by their directives to the nations. Their directions will be contrary to God's will! Second, the Bible states that God will not continue sending horrific judgments after the fourth judgment, but the religious leaders will not know this. Instead, they will boast that their efforts are succeeding because God's judgments have ceased. And of course, billions of ignorant people will believe their claim.

Who Speaks for God?

Are there many Gods on Earth or is there one God called by different names? When the judgments of God begin, the religions of the world will conclude there is only one Almighty God, but “Which religion knows Him best?” Mankind has argued about the nature and will of God ever since Cain killed Abel. Today, there is endless hatred and religious gridlock because no one religion can prove that it understands God better than another. To overcome this problem, Jesus has a simple solution and it will not include the services of a religious body! Jesus will select 144,000 people just before the Great Tribulation begins. During the Great Tribulation, Jesus Himself will speak through the lips of His chosen people. Therefore, everyone on Earth will hear “the testimony of Jesus” and they will hear the dictates of the beast (Babylon). Everyone will find himself in a valley of decision.

Great Tribulation is a Testing Time

The Bible indicates a painful separation will occur during the Great Tribulation. The demands of Jesus and the demands of Babylon will be in opposition. Those who put their faith in Jesus and obey His commands will have to disobey the laws of Babylon and be unjustly persecuted. On the other hand, the Creator of Heaven and Earth will destroy those who defy His demands at His Second Coming. Therefore, the Great Tribulation will be a time of testing to see who we will obey. (Revelation 13:18)

As the Great Tribulation progresses, circumstances will force people to make a choice. A third group of people will form who opposes the demands of Jesus and Babylon. God has a big surprise for this group. According to the apostle Paul, the devil will be permitted to physically appear and masquerade as Almighty God. He will perform amazing signs and wonders that are so great that if possible, the saints would be deceived. The prophet John indicates the devil will eliminate the third group by torturing them into submission. (Revelation 9:4-6) Jesus allows the devil to do this so that all who have rejected His demands will be forced to recognize there are higher beings than humans. If people will not voluntarily humble themselves and obey the Creator of Heaven and Earth, there will be no alternative than to obey “the prince of this world.” Paul explains why the devil physically appears: **“. . . .They** [the wicked] **perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.”** (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, insertion mine)

God Will Challenge Mankind

From God’s point of view, the sinful nature is cursed with two properties that are difficult to overcome. Arrogance is the bloom of haughtiness and ignorance is the absence of truth. When the sinful nature is challenged, hostility is often the result. During the Great Tribulation, God will challenge the arrogance and ignorance of mankind. He will speak through His prophets and through the Holy Spirit. Of course, the devil will speak through his authorities (the leaders of Babylon) and this will produce a great contest for souls between Christ and Satan. Everyone will have to decide whether to put their faith in Jesus, obey His demands, and receive the seal of God or obey the laws of Babylon and receive the mark of the beast. After the devil physically

appears, the wicked will find acquiescing to the devil's demands will be expedient because the penalty for defiance will be torture and/or death.
At the sixth trumpet, the devil will set up a counterfeit theocracy. He will say words to this effect: "Now that God lives among men, there is no room for religious or political diversity. Let there be one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. The world will become the kingdom of God and its king will be Almighty God." Billions of wicked people will join with the devil to build up and establish the kingdom of God. These people will do everything the devil requires. They will worship him as Almighty God and when Lucifer demands that all of God's saints should be killed, they will not hesitate. **"This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus."** (Revelation 14:12)

The Seven Bowls (Plagues)

Because the three evil spirits that look like three frogs appear during the seven bowls (the seven last plagues), a few words about the seven bowls are necessary. The seven bowls only begin after all people on Earth have made their decision. Because Jesus and Lucifer both promise death for defiance, the people of Earth will be separated by their choices. Those who choose to obey Jesus receive the seal of God. (Many of the saints will perish as martyrs.) Those who choose to obey Lucifer receive the mark of the beast. Thus, two distinct and separate groups of people (sheep and goats) will exist on Earth when the time comes for the seven bowls.

"I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues – last, because with them God's wrath is completed." (Revelation 15:1) The seven bowls represent seven horrible judgments which God forces the wicked to "drink, swallow, and experience." The wicked are guilty of defying God. They heard the testimony of Jesus with their own ears, they heard the voice of the Holy Spirit, they saw the signs and wonders which affirmed the ministry of the 144,000, and yet they chose to disobey the demands of the King of Heaven and Earth. Moreover, many of the wicked participated in the torture, persecution, and death of God's saints. These people chose to obey Lucifer and they willingly received his mark (a tattoo on their right hand) because they hated righteousness and loved evil. Therefore, Jesus will punish the wicked for their actions.

The first four bowls are horrific. God sends ugly and painful boils on everyone having the mark of the beast. (Revelation 16:2) The wicked will suffer agonizing pain. Next, all sea life is terminated, and since global famine will be pandemic, the absence of sea food will be devastating. After this, all drinking water turns to blood and finally, the Sun will scorch the Earth with intense heat. The devil, who claims to be Almighty God on Earth, will be powerless to prevent these plagues. His followers will cry out for deliverance. He will blame these plagues on the saints who are practicing "voodoo and witchcraft." During the third bowl, the devil will set up a universal death decree for the saints. This decree will be meaningless and none of God's children will perish. (Daniel 12:1) During the fifth bowl, Jesus will bring Lucifer's charade and government to an end. God will cause the eyes and flesh of Lucifer's captains and staff to rot while they are standing on their feet. (Compare Zechariah 14:12,13 with Revelation 16:10,11.) Lucifer's empire will implode and the remaining wicked, who are not a part of Lucifer's

government, will have a great awakening. They will cry out, **"Oh no! The 144,000 were right. We were deceived! This glorious being we trusted is the devil because no God would destroy his own people and government in a single day!"**

The Three Frogs

This moment of truth, this punishing reality, will leave the wicked in a state of hopeless gloom. Each wicked person will suddenly understand his dire situation. He deliberately defied the God of Heaven in order to save himself from death and now, there will be no escape from death. The devil also knows that his deception is over, so he will send three of his most powerful demons to the ten kings of the Earth. God represented these demons to John as frogs because frogs catch their prey with their tongues. These lying demons will perform a series of impressive miracles before each king saying: "Join with Lucifer and his mighty angels because Jesus Christ will soon appear. Working together we can destroy Jesus, so gather up your armies and weapons and be prepared for the final battle, the battle of Armageddon. Otherwise, He will kill you and your armies will surely perish."

"Then I saw the [composite] **beast and the kings of the Earth and their armies gathered together to make war against** [Jesus] **the rider on the horse and his army. But the** [composite] **beast was captured, and with him the false prophet** [Lucifer, the lamb-like beast] **who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he** [the devil] **had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them** [all of the wicked who were not soldiers] **were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh."** (Revelation 19:19-21, insertions mine)

During the sixth bowl, the kings of Earth will realize that Lucifer is the devil, but they will still listen to his demons. Unaided by the influence of the Holy Spirit because they committed the unpardonable sin, they will join with the devil and attempt to destroy Jesus when He appears. This is a fact: The sinful nature would rather destroy God than surrender to His authority. **"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."** (Romans 8:7,8) For those who have ears to hear, it should now be clear why God's "sudden death law" is both righteous and perpetual throughout eternity.

Larry Wilson

Why Was Jesus Beaten and Scourged?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

As I have studied the Bible for the past 42 years, I have received untold blessings from an increasing understanding of God and His Word. This growth has been a work in progress and I have also found that if a discovery proves to be a genuine discovery, I may have to rethink everything that I once thought about the topic. Because no human being has or knows absolute truth, what appears to be true today is subject to change tomorrow. This discovery process has occurred several times in my life and it has become necessary to publish corrections whenever a topic becomes clearer. Some people view any change in religious matters as a sign of inferiority, but who is more foolish: The person (or religious organization) who thinks he knows everything about God and His Word or the person who is willing to let go of a cherished idea because compelling evidence now requires it?

God's ways are not our ways. (Isaiah 55:9) God's Word is comprehensive and our understanding of God's truth and His Word should be constantly advancing. Advancing truth and our progress in understanding it comes with a price and that price is change. With that said, I am announcing a change in my understanding and I think it deserves a published correction. This correction is not earthshaking, but I hope it brings you the blessing it has brought me. My thought process started when I began wondering why Jesus was beaten and scourged before His death on the cross. Remember, the penalty for sin is death, not torture, and I believe I have found the reason why Jesus was tortured in the extreme.

Jesus Makes the Restitution

In my book, Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega, on page 208 (First Ed., 2001) or Page 211 (Second Ed., 2014), I wrote, "Many sins go beyond the possibility of restitution. . . . If a person commits an evil deed and makes a gallant effort to restore whatever he or she can, truly repents of the sin, and is seeking God's mercy, God will make Lucifer, the originator of sin, provide full restitution for the wrong that goes beyond what man can offer." I now understand the last part of the quote should read, "God will transfer the debt to Jesus who made restitution for any wrongdoing by His extreme suffering."

We need to consider some background information to understand the reasons for my correction. The doctrine of restitution is based on the second law of love which says: "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself." If a person (a predator) willfully causes harm or diminishes his neighbor, two sins are committed: First, the predator sinned against God (broke God's law that requires he love his neighbor) and the predator also sinned against his neighbor (he willfully injured or violated his neighbor). God requires the predator to make amends with his victim before He will allow the sinner to be freed of his guilt. This is why Jesus said, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23,24) So, if you want to be right with God, go first and make things right with your victim(s).

When Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, became a born again Christian, he made restitution with everyone that he had wronged. When Jesus passed by and saw Zacchaeus in the tree, Jesus commended Zacchaeus by declaring that even “a tax collector” had become a son of Abraham. (Luke 19:2-10) Justice in God’s sight can be quite different than what we might think. For example, immediately after the flood, God demanded justice when He said to Noah: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.” (Genesis 9:6) About 1,000 years later, God again demanded justice when He told Moses, “Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death. . . . Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it.” (Numbers 35:31,33) It may seem harsh today, but God demanded a murderer’s life for a victim’s life because God requires restitution for every injustice. This is how justice is served.

God loves each person the same and if one person willfully harms another person, the predator must pay for the harm he has caused. God demands that every injustice be made right. Just as a loving parent cannot look at his injured child and tolerate injustice, neither can God ignore injustice. So, let us understand that the basis for restitution is love. People may scoff at the Old Testament, but remember that it is an omniscient God of love who declared the principles of restitution: “But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.” (Exodus 21:23-25) “If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.” (Exodus 22:1)

The doctrine of restitution is derived from the commandment, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:18) It can be very difficult to forgive a predator because human nature prefers revenge and retaliation. Making restitution often is as difficult for the predator as forgiving the predator is for the victim. Nevertheless, God requires that we restore (make restitution to) our victims and forgive our predators. God has promised that He will repay those who refuse to make restitution: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay. . . . Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commands. But those who hate Him He will repay to their face by destruction; He will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate Him. . . .” (Deuteronomy 32:35; 7:9-11)

Did Jesus Cancel the Restitution Doctrine?

Some people believe that Jesus cancelled the doctrine of restitution when He said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” (Matthew 5:38-41) Let us be clear, Jesus did not declare from Mt. Sinai an “eye for eye and tooth for tooth” and then 1,400 years later cancel His own words. The Sermon on the Mount does not advocate giving the world over to predators. Instead, it stresses that we should exercise love for our neighbors. For example, if a Roman soldier

demanded that a Jew carry his weapons or backpack for a mile (which often happened because Roman soldiers were permitted to make this humiliating demand of non-Romans), Jesus said, “Take up his load and carry it two miles.” If someone sues you in civil claims court, “Give him more than he requires.” If someone is unkind and strikes you on the cheek, “Be patient and humble, keep your mouth shut, and be slow to anger.”

The commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” is far more than a suggestion; it is a divine command that has divine consequences when it is not followed. The Golden Rule, in its totality, expresses the following idea: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you because if you willfully hurt your neighbor and do not restore him, God will do unto you as you have done unto others, plus tax, penalty, and interest. Remember the phrase, “Do not seek revenge . . . ,” in Leviticus 19:18? There is a reason for it. God says, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay. . . ” (Deuteronomy 32:35) If you think this is merely Old Testament theology, think again! Paul affirms the doctrine of restitution in Romans: “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19)

Now, two more issues need explanation before my correction will make sense. First, the penalty for sin is death, not death plus torture. (Romans 6:23) This means that contrary to what many people believe, the Bible does not teach that the penalty for sin is writhing in Hell for eternity. If the penalty for sin was endless torture, Jesus did not pay the penalty for our sins. Consider this: If Adam and Eve’s sentence had not been stayed, they would have been put to death the very day they sinned. (Genesis 2:17) If God had put them to death that very day, would this God of love and justice have tortured Adam and Eve for eternity because they ate forbidden fruit?

This brings us to the second issue. The suffering which the wicked will suffer in the lake of fire at the end of the 1,000 years is the fulfillment of the promise, “I will repay.” The saints will sit with Jesus in judgment during the 1,000 years and together they will determine what each wicked person must suffer. (1 Corinthians 6:2,3) After this judgment is completed, God will then resurrect the wicked and repay them according to the suffering they have imposed on others. When each wicked person has suffered according to the demands of justice (require restitution), the sinner will then die – he will be reduced to ashes. (Malachi 4:1-3) Thus, the penalty for sin (death by execution) will be enforced, but only after God has repaid the predators for the harm and suffering they have caused.

When I wrote the book, Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega, I made the comment that there are instances where a sorrowful and repentant person cannot make restitution. Upon further study into the life, death, and ministry of Jesus, I now have a solution to the question: “Why was Jesus tortured in the extreme before going to the cross?” Jesus was beaten and scourged beyond the point of human endurance. I have concluded that the Father sustained Jesus to endure more suffering than any human being could possibly endure to ensure that there is no debt of suffering left unpaid by any sinner who will be saved. Jesus voluntarily did this for you and me. This is why Isaiah said, “. . . by His wounds we are healed [restored].”

Restitution is not always possible or available when a predator attempts to restore justice to a crime victim. However, if the predator repents of his evil, makes a gallant effort at restoration,

and exercises faith and has a sorrowful heart, he can claim God's mercy. Then, God will transfer the predator's debt to Jesus who has absorbed every ounce of suffering that you and I cannot repay. Isaiah wrote, "But He was pierced for our transgressions [the penalty for sin], He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace [repaying the restitution we cannot pay] was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5, insertions mine)

Guilt and Restitution Are Transferred

Temple services in the Old Testament teach us three important things. First, if we put our faith in Jesus (the Lamb of God) and surrender our will and life to Him, our guilt is transferred via the blood of Jesus into Heaven's temple. Second, if we should harm someone and make restitution, and God sees that our sorrow and repentance is genuine, He will allow our sin to be transferred into the temple. If we have caused suffering and confessed the guilt to the victim(s), but appropriate restitution cannot be made, God will transfer the suffering that we should endure to Jesus. Finally, at the close of salvation's offer, all of the guilt collected in the temple will be transferred to the head of the scapegoat which represents Lucifer. Lucifer will receive the penalty of death that previously belonged to the saints.

If a predator has violated his victim so that restitution is not possible (like rape), God will work two miracles on behalf of the victim – if the victim is willing. The first miracle is that of bestowing the gift of forgiveness. God will take away any desire or thought of revenge and replace it with divine compassion and love for the predator. (We see this gift manifested in Jesus while hanging on the cross and in Stephen when he was stoned.) Second, God will give the victim a special package of grace to deal with and overcome whatever damage the predator may have caused. God is able to restore and/or recreate whatever was lost! "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20,21)

Larry Wilson

God's Love and God's Wrath

Author: Larry W. Wilson

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Soon, billions of people will be forced by dire circumstances to seriously contemplate God’s love and God’s wrath. Earth is rapidly approaching a rendezvous with God’s wrath, and now is the time to consider the harmony that operates within God’s love and wrath. God is not internally conflicted. His love and justice operate in perfect harmony, and this harmony is not difficult to understand if a person is willing to consider all that the Bible has to say about these two matters.

John 3:16 may be one of the most popular verses in the Bible, but very few people realize that it describes two different levels of God’s love, which makes a very interesting study. God deals with mankind on two distinct levels: One is “corporate love” and the other is “love for individuals.” Sometimes God’s actions on one level make His action appear inconsistent when viewed from the other level, so a closer look at these issues may help alleviate the confusion.

God is Angry when People or Nations Corporately Violate His Moral Laws

The Bible declares that God, a God of love, destroyed all but eight people with a flood in Noah’s day. (Genesis 6-9) The Bible also declares that God, a God of love, will destroy every wicked person at the end of the thousand years. (Revelation 20) These actions seem completely inconsistent with a God of love. It may surprise you that God’s omnipotent and omniscient character of love does not respond with the same type of impatience and anger that humans do. God does get angry (Deuteronomy 32:22; Hebrews 3:11), but the basis for His indignation is never self-centered. Corporately speaking, God’s anger is aroused when a majority of people in a city or nation openly and defiantly violate the moral values necessary for the well being of society. God hates wickedness. (1 Corinthians 6:9,10) He becomes especially angry when lawlessness and immoral conduct reach a point where the oncoming generation (that is, innocent children) have no choice but to experience the deadly and painful consequences of their fathers’ sins. (See Exodus 20:5 and Jeremiah 32:17-19.)

The curse of sin is inescapable. History reveals that no nation or civilization can save itself from the slippery slope of moral degeneracy. It is just a matter of time before a majority of people within a city or nation will fail to exalt or heed righteous counsel. When this occurs, God’s wrath is aroused because He knows that future generations will be ruined from birth. (Genesis 18:20; Jonah 12:2; Colossians 3:5,6) Even though the city of Nineveh temporarily repented of its wickedness after Jonah warned them of God’s coming wrath, the Ninevites eventually returned to their wicked ways (Nahum 1:14) and God responded by sending King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy them. God also used Nebuchadnezzar as “His servant” to destroy Israel, His own people. (Jeremiah 25:9)

God's intimate view of man's behavior and moral degeneracy (1 Kings 16:7) explains why a God of love required ancient Israel to kill every man, woman, child, and all livestock belonging to the Amalekites. (1 Samuel 15:3) When nations become hopelessly evil and defiant, God may first send "redemptive" judgments to see if the people will repent. (Ezekiel 14:12-21) If the people will not repent, God either destroys them Himself or raises up a destroyer to eliminate them from Earth. This truly is an act of love so that future generations can live and enjoy the land previously occupied by a decadent and degenerate people. (Leviticus 18:24,25) Innocent people may perish in these corporate events, but this does not mean that all are eternally lost! The Bible indicates that Rahab, the prostitute, was saved when Jericho was destroyed. (See James 2:25.) The Bible indicates that Daniel and some of his friends were saved from death when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. (Daniel 1) However, the Bible also indicates that sometimes God's people perish as a result or consequence of His wrath! (Revelation 6:9-11; 17:6)

Unfortunately, corporately speaking, children rarely rise to a higher, more noble standard of conduct than that of their parents. Children may have more materialistic wealth, but seldom do they embrace a higher standard of moral conduct. Man's nature is sinful and attracted to rebellion and wickedness. Each generation of teens push the envelope of decency, and each generation delights in greater rebellion. As generations come and go, each generation becomes more ignorant of God's will, and then it insults God with greater indifference and degeneracy than their parents did. This slippery slope leads each successive generation into greater wickedness.

When we violate God's design for living, the suffering index increases, and agony and death occur. There comes a point within man's misery where God's patience runs out and He takes matters into His own hands by cauterizing the cancer of sin. Ironically, what God is unable to achieve through patience and longsuffering with individuals, He can sometimes achieve through His wrath. (2 Peter 2) It is so important to properly understand both levels of God's love. In His love, God does all He can to save the maximum number of individuals, and at appropriate times, He must "prune back" the curse of sin so that the people of Earth will not self-destruct or drown in wickedness.

Does God Protect His Saints from His Wrath?

Many Christians believe that God protects His saints from persecution and suffering. This idea is "theological ear candy." Beginning with Abel, scan down through the centuries of recorded history, review the persecution of God's people, and you will find many biblical and present day examples of persecution and death of Christians. Under the spotlight of all this evidence, how can anyone believe that God will shield His saints? Jesus told His disciples, **". . . 'No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.' . . . . All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God."** (John 15:20; 16:1,2) Did you know that the traditional understanding is that nine of the twelve disciples were martyred for their faith?

The book of Daniel indicates that God handed "His saints" over to the little horn power for 1,260 years (538-1798) of persecution. (Daniel 7:25) The book of Revelation indicates that many saints will perish during the Great Tribulation. **"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. . . This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.' "** (Revelation 6:9; 14:12,13)

God may have His own reasons why He allows His saints to be persecuted and put to death, but I will offer two reasons I believe are important. First, persecution and hardship for Christ's sake separates the sheep from the goats, the "wannabes" from the committed. When faithfulness to God and His commandments comes with a serious price, only those who are wealthy in the currency of salvific faith are not ashamed or afraid to pay the price. (See Daniel 3 and Mark 8:34-37.) Second, God uses His suffering saints to demonstrate to unbelievers the importance of His Word and the reality of His sustaining grace. When unbelievers see the suffering that God's saints are willing to endure because of their faith in God, they are forced to witness God's presence and His sustaining grace within His suffering people. This is the most powerful testimony that a human being can give, and God allows His saints to suffer at times so that He might save many unbelievers.

The Bible teaches that God has three types of wrath which are outlined in the following paragraphs:

1. Redemptive and Destructive Judgments: We have discussed how persistent rebellion and degenerate behavior causes God's wrath. When the limits of God's patience are reached, He deals with rebellion. His wrath sometimes comes in two phases. First, there are redemptive judgments and if they are not effective, He sends destructive judgments. We find both phases of God's wrath in the book of Revelation. The seven trumpets are seven redemptive judgments and the seven bowls are seven destructive judgments.

2. The Consequences for Wrong Doing: If we ignorantly or willfully violate a physical or moral law, an injurious consequence follows. This consequence is called "wrath." Paul wrote, **"Because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression."** (Romans 4:15) If a man accidentally falls off of the roof while cleaning the gutters, he will likely suffer some injury (a form of wrath) because the law of gravity will propel him toward the ground with enough force to break his neck and other bones.

If a man engages in adultery (violating the seventh commandment), that man will suffer wrath when his spouse learns of his wrong doing. Of course, adulterers may try to cover up their transgression to avoid the wrath they are due, but sin will surely find them out. (Numbers 32:23) We reap what we sow. (Galatians 6:7) These two examples show that whether a physical or moral law is violated, injurious consequences follow and these consequences are a form of wrath.

3. The Penalty for Sin Is Eternal Death: When Adam and Eve were put in the Garden of Eden, they were placed under the obligation of law. God said, **"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."** (Genesis 2:17, KJV, underline mine)

Adam and Eve were to be executed on the very day they ate the fruit of the forbidden tree because the penalty for sin is death. (Note: The death of Adam and Eve was stayed because the Father accepted the offer of Jesus to mediate for man and die in man's place. This stay of execution will be lifted at the end of the 1,000 years and after justly suffering for their wicked deeds, the wicked will be put to death.)

This may seem strange, but the penalty for sin is death by execution. Jesus demonstrated this penalty by dying on the cross. Every sacrificial lamb that died in the temple service also demonstrated this truth. These lambs could not die of natural causes. Jesus did not die of natural causes. The death that is common to all mankind at the present time IS NOT the penalty for sin. Instead, death from accidents, old age, and disease is a consequence of sin (wrath #2).

The penalty for sin (wrath #3) will be imposed upon the wicked at the end of the 1,000 years when God executes the wicked with fire. Because the penalty for sin is death by execution, Jesus was executed on the cross. (1 Thessalonians 2:14,15) Other than Jesus who became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21), no wicked person has yet experienced the penalty for sin (wrath #3).

For God So Loved the World

In review, God has three types of wrath: Divine judgments (redemptive and destructive); the consequences for wrong doing; and the penalty for wrong doing. I believe we need to know there are three distinct types of wrath because God wants everyone to know that all of His faithful children will escape the penalty for sin. This is what Paul meant when he wrote: **"For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath** [execution for our sins] **but to receive salvation** [eternal life] **through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us** [He was executed in our place] **so that, whether we are awake or asleep** [in the grave]**, we may live together with him."** (1 Thessalonians 5:9,10, insertions mine) **"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath** [the penalty for sin] **through him!"** (Romans 5:9, insertions mine)

I hope that you can see that these verses do not support the notion of Christians leaving Earth before God's wrath begins. On the contrary, the book of Revelation indicates several times that the saints of God will be on Earth during the Great Tribulation and for the two reasons presented earlier, they will experience persecution and wrath during the Great Tribulation. Hopefully, the following texts will now make more sense in light of the information we have covered:

"He [the beast] **was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. . . . If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the**

sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. . . .This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." (Revelation 13:7, 10; 14:12, insertion mine)

Now that we have considered that God has two levels of love and three kinds of wrath, I hope John 3:16 shines brighter than ever before. **"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not** [eternally] **perish but have eternal life."** (John 3:16, insertion mine) Think about this, God loved the world enough to give us His Son and the words, "whoever believes in Him" refers to individuals, like you and me.

Larry Wilson

God's Sabbath: A Conflict That Comes with a Blessing

Author: Larry W. Wilson

'If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.' The mouth of the Lord has spoken." (Isaiah 58:13,14)

Adam and Eve were created in God's image. (Genesis 1:26, 27) They enjoyed a natural proclivity to live in harmony with God and His laws because His laws were written in their hearts and minds. Adam and Eve did not need a published set of laws by which to live because selflessness and righteousness came naturally. However, when Adam and Eve sinned, there was an immediate change in their natures, attitudes, and dispositions. They suddenly became hostile toward God and His authority. This curse has plagued mankind ever since.

After they sinned and when Adam and Eve began to have children, all of their offspring were born with sinful natures. (Romans 5:12) Cain, their firstborn, was born with a sinful nature that was predatory, selfish, and self-centered. Succumbing to his sinful nature caused him to become a murderer. What makes this situation so terrible is that the curse continues to multiply as the population grows, resulting in escalating violence, wickedness, and decadent behavior. This explains why God has to step in at times to cauterize the malignancy of sin's cancer. He destroyed the world in Noah's day, Sodom and Gomorrah, Jericho, and the empires of the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Grecians, and the Romans. Ultimately, because of wickedness, He destroyed even His own people and the city of Jerusalem.

God Requires a Change of Heart

To inherit eternal life, Jesus said a person has to be "born again." (John 3:3) Since a person cannot create a "born again" heart within himself, how does this occur? There are three steps involved with receiving the miracle of a born again heart. First, we must listen for the Holy Spirit's voice. (Revelation 22:17) When God speaks, and He will, we must surrender to His demand. (Note: The voice of God is unlike all of "the other voices" that can be heard. When God speaks, there comes a nudge to do better, to make things right, and to live in harmony with His laws of love and righteousness.) God speaks to everyone who will listen because He is not willing that any should perish. (2 Peter 3:9, KJV) When God speaks, He wants to see a response. (Matthew 3:8) Second, we respond by admitting our failure(s) and by making things right with God and man. Third, we must be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to refine our tastes, thoughts, habits, and attitudes. He does this by drawing us into the study of God's Word. These three steps create a problem. Everything God wants from us in these steps is contrary to our rebellious, predatory, and selfish natures.

If a person is willing to walk with God by gratefully accepting the refining condemnation which

the Holy Spirit creates within him, he will grow spiritually and be genuinely happy. God blesses everyone who is willing to live the born again life with a peace and joy that passes understanding. Keep in mind that living the "born again" life is a daily experience. This is important because many Christians get started in the "born again" process, but soon "fall off the wagon" because the battle with self is just too hard.

The apostle Paul summarized the Christian experience this way: **"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."** (Romans 8:5-7)

Being Born Again Starts with the Sinner's Prayer

Generally speaking, the rebirth process begins with "a sinner's prayer." It goes something like this: "Lord, I am guilty of the following sin(s) (fill in the blank _____) and I know the curse of sin lives within me. Thank You for promising to forgive my sins if I confess them and make them right. I understand the death penalty that looms over all sinners. I cannot deny or escape the curse of sin on my own. Nevertheless, I want to be a part of Your coming kingdom. I want to please You so that I may walk with You. I recognize the incredible sacrifice You made for me on Calvary and my desire is to glorify You before others. I want to serve You and I believe that You have made salvation possible for anyone who will surrender their hearts to You. I believe that You will enable me, through the indwelling power and direction of the Holy Spirit, to overcome bad habits, tastes, thoughts, attitudes, rebellion, selfishness, and my predatory ways. I am willing to go wherever You direct, to become all that You want, and to do all that You command. I want to be Your child. I surrender to Your Lordship. Please be my King and Savior. Transform me and bless me so that I may live blamelessly in Your sight, so that when we meet face to face, You will be mine and I will be Yours. Amen." Every time a heartfelt prayer like this is made, God is pleased and the angels rejoice!

Paul wrote, **"Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts <u>as a deposit, guaranteeing what is</u>** [yet] **<u>to come</u>."** (2 Corinthians 1:21,22, underline and insertion mine) As Paul said, the Holy Spirit is a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Whenever a person attempts to live by faith, he soon discovers an enormous struggle within himself. The sinful nature and the spiritual nature are strongly opposed to one another, and the only solution to this conflict is the death of one nature. **"For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the** [indwelling power of the] **Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body** [you overcome the passions of the sinful nature]**, you will live, because those who are <u>led by the Spirit of God are sons of God</u>."** (Romans 8:13,14, insertions mine)

The profound problem with the "born again" life is that the sinful nature <u>will not stay dead very long</u>. The sinful nature comes to life every few hours after being put to death. It is a Christian's worst nightmare. Paul wrote about his own experience after being a Christian for more than 25 years: **"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual,** [that is, I came into this world

at birth] **sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin** [my own natural rebellion] **living in me."** (Romans 7:14-17, underlining and insertion mine)

God Will Soon Seal His People

Now that we have discussed the nature of mankind before and after the fall of Adam, consider this short summary: All have sinned. (Romans 3:23) Therefore, each person is born with a natural predisposition to be predatory, selfish, and rebellious toward God's laws because the curse of sin lives within us. When a person realizes his true condition before God and the penalty that looms over his head, he has two choices. He can remain rebellious and die the second death for his own sins, or he can surrender to God's terms and conditions of salvation and receive eternal life. If a sinner surrenders to God's voice each day and puts his faith in Christ for salvation, God puts His seal of ownership (as a son or daughter of God) upon him. The evidence of this seal of ownership is "a deposit" of Holy Spirit power within us, "guaranteeing what is to come." The promise to come is this: **"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."** (Hebrews 8:10)

The Bible describes a time when our sinful natures will be removed and God's children will no longer have to deal with the curse of sin that lives within our hearts and minds. What began with a deposit will someday be paid in full. The saints who live during the 1,260 days of the Two Witnesses will experience the marvelous fulfillment of this promise. Of course, everyone who is resurrected at the Second Coming will also experience this marvelous fulfillment. Meanwhile, until we reach the 1,260 days given to the Two Witnesses, those living the "born again" life must live with two natures warring over the mastery of their souls. This war is not hopeless; it is just difficult. Paul understood the challenge. He wrote, **"I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."** (Philippians 4:13)

God's Sabbath Rest and Isaiah 58:13,14

Now that we have considered the ways of the sinful nature, we can examine God's Sabbath and how it relates to the sinful nature. Genesis 2:1-3 indicates that God created the seventh day and made it holy during Creation Week. Contrary to what most Christians believe, Hebrews 4:9,10 indicates that God's Sabbath rest has not been abolished. Before their fall, we can be sure that Adam and Eve naturally looked forward to each Sabbath rest, especially those Sabbaths when the Creator Himself came to visit. Sin ruined this perspective. Not only did Adam and Eve lose their garden home, they also lost their natural proclivity to love and obey God. As a result, the Sabbath became an obstacle for them as it is for everyone when the sinful nature is dominant. God foreknew that Adam and Eve would sin . Before He created His Sabbath, God foreknew they would fall into the curse of sin. God deliberately created the Sabbath, and later, He underscored its perpetual importance with the fourth commandment so that it would not be forgotten. God created the Sabbath for man so that man can test his

relationship with God each week. God's Sabbath is a spiritual "weather vane" indicating within each of us whether the sinful or the spiritual nature is dominant. This weather vane is a fitting illustration because it faithfully reveals which wind has the strongest influence.

The sinful nature does not want to give up one seventh of its time to God. The sinful nature is naturally hostile to God's laws and when the laws of God are imposed upon the sinful nature, man's rebellion deepens into open defiance. This was the state of Israel in Isaiah's day and the same can be said today of many Christians. God said to Isaiah: **"The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.' "** (Isaiah 29:13)

Isaiah 58:13,14 is a simple test. If you find that honoring God's Sabbath by "not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words" and you find it a delight, your spiritual nature is dominant! Your walk with the Lord is on track! If this is not the case, your sinful nature is dominant. The sinful nature can say many things that are not in keeping with God's plan for His holy day.

The Sabbath was made for man. (Mark 2:27,28) God's Sabbath was created to be a sign between Him and His people. (Exodus 31:17, Ezekiel 20:12) In a world cursed by sin and controlled by the sinful nature, God's Sabbath can only be a delight when the spiritual nature is in control. God's Sabbath is a spiritual "weather vane" indicating which nature has dominance. When the spiritual nature is dominant, God's Sabbath is a deliberate conflict that comes with a blessing.

Larry Wilson

Why I Worship the God of Abraham - Part 1

Author: Larry W. Wilson

". . . . Worship Him who made the Heavens, the Earth, the sea and the springs of water."
(Revelation 14:7)

The expression "I believe in God," has different meanings for different people because there are many "Gods." Jehovah is not Allah and Jesus is not Shiva, Vishnu, or Shakti (Hindu Gods). Even within Christianity, Catholics and Protestants have very different views about "God." Therefore, the phrase "I believe in God" is just a catch-all phrase.

Belief "in God" or "the absence of God" really does matter Beliefs shape behavior and behaviors have consequences. Currently, the radical Islamic group, ISIS, is waging a brutal war against so-called "non-believers" in the Middle East. ISIS is killing men, women and children, beheading non-muslims and forcing young girls into sex slavery. ISIS claims that "Allah" fully approves of its actions. Do you see how beliefs shape behavior? When people believe their identity is concealed, they are more likely to do things that they would not otherwise do. Beliefs shape behavior. With increasing frequency, people are doing terrible things to one another. Hatred and violence are rising, immoral behavior is pandemic, and ethnic relations are at a breaking point. We have reached this point because today's harvest is the result of seeds sown yesterday. Beliefs shape behavior and man's behavior has produced the conflicted environment we now see.

Does God Exist?

Beliefs about God can range from total denial to wholehearted commitment. Because this wide spectrum exists and space is limited, this study will focus on two aspects of believing in God. The first aspect will be "Does God exist?" and if so, "Who is He?"

For authority in spiritual matters, I have accepted the Bible as God's Word. Even though there are other "so-called" sacred writings, I accept the Bible based on five reasons that will be presented in this study. The Bible declares there is only one God* who is to be worshiped. He is unlike all other deities called "God." The God of the Bible is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is called "Jehovah" in the Old Testament and "Jesus" in the New Testament. Notice what Jesus says of Himself: **"This is what the Lord says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God."** (Isaiah 44:6) This declaration in the Old Testament is amplified in the New Testament. Jesus said to John, **". . . 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever And I hold the keys of death and Hades.' "**
(Revelation 1:17,18)

(*Note: The Bible teaches tritheism, that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob actually consists of three separate and distinct Gods functioning as one God. The Bible teaches that the plan of salvation required the services of three Gods. One God, Jesus, voluntarily died for our

sins. Another God, the Father, raised Jesus from the dead. The gospel which Jesus spoke came directly from the Father through the ministry of yet a third God, the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the only visible member of the Godhead. Jesus is also the spokesman (The Logos) for the Trinity. Ninety-five percent of the references in the Old Testament pertaining to Jehovah/Lord/God/Almighty pertain to Jesus. Because the Trinity is united in purpose, plan, and action, to the casual reader they may appear to be one God. However, as a husband and wife become one flesh at marriage, so three Gods surrendered their rights and prerogatives to each other in order to become one unified Trinity. For additional study on this fascinating topic, please see The Wake Up Report, December 2012.)

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is eternal and changeless. (Genesis 21:33, Malachi 3:6) He is omniscient. He knows the very number of hairs on each person's head. (Matthew 10:30) He sees everything that occurs on Earth: **"The Lord looks down from Heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God."** (Psalm 14:2) **"For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the Earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. . . ."** (2 Chronicles 16:9) There is a great deal of confusion about God, so I ask you to consider five reasons why I worship and love the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Of course, my reasons may not be adequate for you, but I offer these thoughts in hope that they may help you to know God better. This month I will share the first two of the five reasons.

Heaven and Earth are the Products of Intelligent Design

My first reason for loving and worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is this: Heaven and Earth are products of an intelligent designer. Jesus Himself made them. He is the Creator of everything that exists. The Bible says:

"This is what God the Lord says – He who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the Earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it." (Isaiah 42:5)

"For by Him all things were created: things in Heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him." (Colossians 1:16)

Even though the Bible makes these declarations, we must find support around us to affirm what the Bible says. The difference between a symphony and random notes is that music has a design, while random notes do not. The Mona Lisa is separated from random lines and patches of color because the Mona Lisa has a design, while random lines and colors do not. A jet airplane is a marvelous creation. Jet airplanes do not accidently or randomly occur without the handiwork of intelligent designers and builders. However, jet airplanes are very simple creations when compared to the human genome.

The total length of the human genome contains more than 3 billion orderly base pairs. Is the human genome the work of an Intelligent Designer or is it the result of 3 billion freakish accidents that just happened to occur in perfect order? When I consider the diversity of the

plants, animals, fish, birds, and human beings that live on Earth, when I consider that each specie brings with it a unique contribution to life on Earth, when I consider that each specie has its own unique DNA and the ability to procreate, when I consider that all forms of life require the simultaneous presence of perfectly formed DNA, different types of solutions, and essential three-dimensional proteins, the evidence declares this is the work of an Intelligent Designer. When I consider Earth's orbit around the Sun, I am impressed that Earth's orbit is no cosmic accident. If Earth's distance from the Sun varied by a mere 10%, life on Earth could not exist. The winters would be so cold and the summers would be so hot that nothing could live Looking at the structures of Earth, I conclude that it defies reason and mocks reasonableness to claim that life is the result of billions of freakish accidents that began with lifeless ocean slime.

If we take the probability of intelligent design one step further, we find that science itself declares the handiwork of God It is baffling and ironic that many scientists deny the existence of God when science, by definition, involves the process of discovering and applying the laws that govern life Intelligent laws, like jet airplanes, do not naturally occur. When we consider the laws of physics that govern this planet, when we consider the laws of biology that govern life on this planet, when we consider the laws governing the behavior of atoms, when we consider the laws governing mathematics, thermodynamics, economics, and the procreation of all living things, these profound designs point to an infinitely wise Creator. Of course, no one understands all of the mysteries of God's Creation, but there is more than enough evidence to convince me that Heaven and Earth are not a freakish accident. The Bible tells the truth. Earth and all that is in it is the handiwork of Jesus, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob He created Adam and Eve on the sixth day of Creation.

God Has Accurately Declared the Future

I love and worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because He knows and declares the future with 100% accuracy. Here are three examples:

1. **"Then the Lord said to him** [Abraham] **'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."** (Genesis 15:13-16, insertion mine)God gave this prophecy about 500 years before it was fulfilled in 1437 B.C. When God delivered Israel out of Egyptian slavery, the fourth generation returned to Canaan. The four generations are counted as Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Moses.
2. God said to Jeremiah: **"This whole country** [belonging to Israel] **will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years."** (Jeremiah 25:11, insertion mine) With uncanny accuracy, the captivity of Israel by the Babylonians began in 605 B.C. and ended, right on time, in 536 B.C. The Bible says: **"The land** [belonging to Israel] **enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the**

word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah." (2 Chronicles 36:21, insertion mine)

3. Just before His death in A.D. 30, Jesus made a startling prediction: **"Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.' "** (Matthew 24:1,2)

This prophecy was fulfilled with astonishing accuracy in A.D. 70 after the Romans set fire to the temple in Jerusalem. The gold that adorned the interior of the temple melted and ran into the joints of the massive stones that made up the temple. The Romans devised a system of pulleys and levers to pull the stones apart to retrieve the gold.

These prophecies (and there are many more in the Bible) demonstrate a profound fact. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob can foretell the future with 100% accuracy. Jesus said, **"Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."** (Matthew 24:35) No other God can do this. Jesus said: **"See, the former things** [I predicted] **have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you. . . . I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please** [there is nothing that can stop me]**"** (Isaiah 42:9; 46:9,10, insertions mine)

Next month, we will look into the next three reasons.

Larry Wilson

Read Part 2 of this Article

Why I Worship the God of Abraham - Part 2

Author: Larry W. Wilson

". . . . Worship Him who made the Heavens, the Earth, the sea and the springs of water." (Revelation 14:7)

Read Part 1 of this Article

Last month, we examined two of the five reasons for worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were:

1. He is the infinite Creator, who is the Intelligent Designer of Heaven and Earth and everything in them.
2. He knows and declares the future with 100% accuracy. No other God can do this.

So, let us conclude this study by examining the three final reasons.

The Weekly Cycle

The third reason for loving and worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob concerns the weekly cycle. I believe God designed the weekly cycle so there would be no reason or explanation for its existence. This includes God's seventh-day Sabbath rest. I believe God did it this way to draw attention to the uniqueness of creation "week." The weekly cycle existed before God gave the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 16) The weekly cycle is not biological. Nothing in nature identifies which day is the first day of the week or the seventh day of the week. The weekly cycle is not self-evident and it cannot be "discovered" because every day looks the same. Amazingly, even though the weekly cycle is invisible, it is recognized and used to chronicle time in every nation on Earth! The weekly cycle has outlasted every civilization and every effort to change it! It is ironic that billions of people, separated by oceans, languages, and cultures recognize the same weekly cycle and yet do not recognize its Creator!

Even more incredible is the fact that three opposing religious bodies agree on the order of days within the weekly cycle! (This is about the only thing they do agree on.) Muslims tell us that Friday is the sixth day of the week, Jews tell us that Saturday is the seventh day of the week, and Catholics tell us that Sunday is the first day of the week. The histories of these three religious bodies span the centuries and prove that time has never been lost. The weekly cycle today remains synchronous with the weekly cycle that began with Creation! Sunday aligns with the first day of Creation and God's seventh day Sabbath aligns with Saturday.

The weekly cycle may be invisible, but because it is globally recognized, it is a perpetual witness pointing to Creation Week. The weekly cycle has been hiding "in plain sight" for about 6,000 years. I suspect the only reason for the perpetual duration of the weekly cycle is that Jesus Himself has sustained it. I believe it is important to Him that human beings recognize He created us for the following reasons:

- Acknowledging the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the Creator produces accountability. He owns us by right of creation. He sees everything that occurs on Earth and His judgments are righteous. He is the source of life, knowledge, inerrant truth, and eternal law. He is Sovereign and we are His subjects. The better we know Him and His love, the more we will adore and exalt Him.
- Acknowledging the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob eliminates the possibility of all other gods. In His words, other gods are not gods at all. This world, even in its fallen condition, would be the opposite of the way it is today if its inhabitants worshiped and loved the Creator who claims to be the only God. The God who has faithfully declared what is right from what is wrong, who has given us a perfect example of a selfless life and sinless behavior, and who offers to live within us and transform us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- Further, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has a gospel that separates order from chaos, separates toxic faith from genuine faith, leaves no one in poverty and gives no one absolute authority, ennobles the human experience, and gives joyful purpose and fulfillment to every child of God. When properly understood and applied, the gospel of Jesus shows us God's character which is purer, wiser, and far beyond anything that finite man can create. God created the seventh day Sabbath rest to serve two purposes: First, the Sabbath rest is a perpetual memorial to His magnificent work of Creation that was completed in six days. Second, His Sabbath is a wonderful day for rest and inspiration. The top priority for every human being should be to continue learning more about God. How thrilling it is to have those "a-ha" moments as we study and discover again the loving ways of an infinite God.

Jesus Promises that Sinners Can Have Salvation

Another reason for loving and worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob centers around the birth, ministry, death, and ascension of Jesus. Jesus promised Abraham that the Messiah would come through the lineage of Isaac and Jacob to redeem sinners and about 2,000 years later, Jesus kept this promise and came to Earth. Jesus never fails to keep a promise! He is trustworthy! His Word is sure! Even though there may be many other manmade gods who they worship, no other God has loved sinners enough to give up His life to give sinners an opportunity to have what belonged to Him! No other God has died the second death! No other God has promised to destroy the curse of sin and create a new Heaven and a new Earth. (Revelation 21:1) No other God can equal the actions and promises of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!

When Jesus came to Earth, He came with a profound gospel. The gospel of Jesus explains many things about God that would otherwise have no answer. The gospel of Jesus explains man's origin and fall, how the curse of sin behaves within us, and how sinners can be saved. It also explains God's forthcoming plans to bring sin's curse to an end. If a person honestly and thoughtfully considers the gospel of Jesus and responds with a submissive heart, he will find enlightenment, understanding, and joy that cannot be expressed in words! The gospel of Jesus is transforming, ennobling, and enriching. When properly understood, there is nothing on Earth that compares to the gospel of Jesus. It is a gospel of love and I love it!

God Does Speak to Us

I worship and love the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because it is possible to walk with Him and hear from Him. He speaks in two ways. First, He speaks plainly through His written Word, the Bible. Second, He speaks through the Holy Spirit. It is important to always remember that "the voice of God," never disagrees with the teachings of the Bible. The Holy Spirit and the Bible are always in agreement.

Sometimes, the concepts taught in the Bible can be hard to understand. Complicating the situation even more, the Bible uses three types of language: literal language, analogous language, and symbolic language. These three types of language are necessary because there is no other way to explain eternal concepts to finite minds. This should not come as a surprise to us. We use mathematical symbols and numbers every day as a form of language. We also use musical notation to express how songs are to be played. Therefore, the Bible has its own language. The challenge for many of us is to remember that the Bible reads "just as it reads" and as strange as this may seem, it takes training and effort. Here is a passage showing how literal and analogous language flows together:

"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. [Notice the sinful nature and born again nature are contrasted.] The mind of sinful man is [headed toward] **death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is** [headed toward] **life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."** (Romans 8:5-7, insertions mine)

This passage means that Jesus attempts to speak to every person through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, **"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."** (John 10:27,28) If we listen and surrender to Jesus' voice and allow Him to dwell within us, the following consequences will occur: **". . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."** (Galatians 5:22,23) Loving and worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob changes everything. He gives us the power to forgive those who have done us wrong. He gives us power to overcome addictions. He gives us strength to endure a difficult situation. He gives us peace in the middle of a storm, even when everything appears to be sinking or falling apart.

Belief in God Matters

In closing, we need to reconsider a question that was asked last month. "Does belief 'in God' or 'the absence of God' really matter?" Yes! Beliefs shape behavior and behaviors have consequences. Man's behavior is telling. Each of us are a reflection of what we believe about God. Deeds speak louder than words.

I believe there are at least five reasons for believing in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (I

am sure there are many more):

1. He is the infinite Creator, the Intelligent Designer of Heaven and Earth, and everything in them.
2. He knows and declares the future with 100% accuracy. No other God can do this.
3. He created the weekly cycle and gave us His seventh day Sabbath rest.
4. He keeps His promises. He provided salvation through the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Sinners can be saved through Christ's death from sin's penalty.
5. He offers a joyful and exciting experience to everyone, a life with purpose and fulfillment beyond imagination. We can walk with Him and hear from Him.

Of course, I am not perfect, but I have experienced enormous joy walking with the Lord. I have tasted the happiness and peace, fullness, and contentment that comes through the presence of His Spirit in my life. I wish the same for you! Beliefs do matter, they shape our behavior and behaviors produce consequences. If you or someone you know is searching for a better life than what you now have, if you want more joy, love, peace, and happiness than what you now know, you should get to know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If you choose to worship Him in spirit and truth, He will lead you into a happiness that goes beyond expression!

Larry Wilson

Is God's Grace Sufficient?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8,9)

According to Joe Carter, an editor for The Gospel Coalition, "62 percent of the United States identified as Protestant in 1972 and only 51 percent did so in 2010." (http://news360.com/article/283344690#) It is a well-known fact that membership in mainline Protestant denominations has been in decline for several decades. Here are some examples dating from 1965 to 2013: The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a 67% decline; the Reformed Church in America, a 62% decline; the United Church of Christ (Congregationalist), a 52% decline; the Episcopal Church, a 49% decline; the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), a 47% decline; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a 27% decline, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, a 20% decline. Many people who left these mainline churches did not give up their faith. Instead, they migrated to denominations that more closely followed the Bible. Therefore, other Protestant denominations have enjoyed significant increases in membership during this time period. Regardless, the overall picture is not good. These declines are especially troublesome when we factor in a growth of 125 million people in the U.S. (a 63% increase). Protestantism did increase by 28 million members between 1972 and 2013, most of this growth was due to Protestants having children. Today, fewer non-Christians are becoming Protestants and there were fewer Protestants in 2013 as a percent of U.S. population than there were in 1972.

Measuring church growth or decline is a difficult and complicated task and it is even more difficult to identify specific causes. Historically, Christians have been a fractious group of people. Since the first century A.D., Christians have constantly divided and separated from each other to create new groups because of differing theological, social, or administrative views. Undoubtedly, Christians will continue to separate over differences in understanding the will, ways, and plans of God and how sinners are saved.

Protestants Do Not Understand Grace

I believe mainline Protestantism has fallen because the doctrine of God's grace has been distorted and abused for decades. God's love for sinners is truly amazing and overwhelming. God's grace is a powerful doctrine when it is properly understood and applied, but its power becomes spiritually destructive when grace is misunderstood and wrongly applied. Spiritual decline and atrophy can be the only result when church members believe that "God's grace is sufficient," that human conduct and behavior have nothing to do with salvation, and that salvation costs nothing, requires nothing, and demands nothing, spiritual decline and atrophy will surely follow.

Just sixty-five years after returning to Heaven, Jesus appeared to the prophet John while he was in exile on Patmos. Jesus had some choice words for seven churches in Asia Minor and

“grace” was not one of them. Jesus specifically identified many sinful behaviors that had infiltrated His church and then gave the churches stern warnings, followed by seven promises. In each case the assurance of salvation came with the same prerequisite: “To him that overcomes. . . .” When the doctrine of grace is used to diminish the necessity and importance of overcoming sin, the doctrine of grace has been distorted and abused. Do not be deceived. A large crowd attending a megachurch does not necessarily mean a large number of people are overcoming sin. Man’s sinful nature is not inclined to overcome sin. Dealing with our sinful natures is a daily struggle that will not end until the sealing occurs. There was a time when mainline Protestant churches thrived with inspirational preachers and large crowds. In those early days, ministers believed and taught the importance of overcoming sin. Then slowly, almost imperceptibly, the doctrine of grace was lifted out of its context, distorted, and abused, resulting in the demise of mainline Protestantism.

The Doctrine of Grace

Every Christian should understand three codependent doctrines which are “Grace, Law, and Faith,” and they operate similarly to a three-legged stool. No single doctrine can operate by itself. For a three-legged stool to perform correctly, each leg has to be sturdy and securely planted. If one leg fails, the entire stool will fail and whatever it supports will fall. Similarly, if these three doctrines are separated from each other or if one is improperly advanced to the detriment of the other two, the result will be a spiritually toxic experience. These three doctrines flow together in a profound way and understanding that flow is important for overcoming sin.

God is love and His laws are righteous, comprehensive, and eternal. God’s entire kingdom is governed by the rule of His laws. He places His law within the hearts and minds of His children when they are created. God never changes. Grace became necessary when Adam and Eve violated His law. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were not defiant. Instead, they sinned due to the Lucifer’s predatory efforts. God extended grace to Adam and Eve (and their offspring) by staying their execution. Remember, anyone eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was to be executed on the very day he sinned. (Genesis 2:17)
When Adam and Eve sinned, they were no longer in harmony with God’s laws. Sin transformed them from being selfless to being selfish. Since Adam and Eve’s first sin, the cancer of sin continues to grow within their offspring. All human beings have sinned and because the wages of sin is death, God extended grace to Adam and Eve and their offspring. This grace has several dimensions. For example, God has allowed human beings to live for a period of time. God has given us time to mature spiritually so that we might begin to comprehend His love and choose to walk in His ways. God has provided atonement for our sins and through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, God has made a way to overcome any sin. Finally, God has given us the assurance that He will save everyone who fights “the good fight of faith.”

God requires each sinner to trust Him. Only through faith in God’s care and wisdom can we stay on the path of righteousness. The doctrine of faith teaches us that faith means obeying God without regard for the consequences. (Hebrews 11) God has promised that He will take care of the circumstances if we place our trust in Him first and obey Him. (Romans 8:28) Therefore, when tempted to do wrong, we can overcome temptation by asking God for the

desire to do right and for the strength and courage to stay on track. When God hears our cry for help, He immediately sends the power to achieve victory and transformation! (Romans 6:14, 1 John 1:9-2:1)

For many people, the book of Romans is often difficult to understand. Paul seems to contradict himself with every other verse and for centuries, Bible expositors have exploited these "apparent contradictions" to appease man's sinful nature. (2 Peter 3:16) However, if we understand that Paul was attempting to address misconceptions of believers in Rome, the contradictions will disappear. Paul is addressing two toxic conditions affecting early Christians in Rome. The first condition was legalism (Jewish converts to Christianity were captives of this religious experience). The second condition was a distortion of grace (Gentile converts to Christianity were captives of this religious experience). These opposing problems explain why Paul appears to contradict himself. He was attempting to get Jewish converts out of the ditch of legalism while trying to get Gentile converts out of the other ditch of distorted grace. So where is the middle of the road?

Paul's summary can be found in Romans 7 and 8. Believing that obeying God's law alone produces salvation is wrong, but believing God's grace is sufficient and has nothing to do with the necessity of changing human behavior is just as wrong. If we continue to behave in ways that we know are wrong, we do not love God or have faith in Him. (1 John 2:4-6) Jesus said no one can serve two masters. Informed Christians know that sinners cannot overcome sin on their own. (Jeremiah 13:23) Revelation 20 says a huge number of people will be thrown into the lake of fire at the end of the age. The cause for their annihilation is because a God of love does not offer grace to defiant people, but to repentant sinners. Grace is offered to each sinner in three ways:

1. **Time:** God delayed the annihilation of Adam, Eve, and their offspring. He gives us time to discover and know Him that we might choose to walk in His ways.
2. **Sacrifice:** God provided a perfect sacrifice at Calvary so that our guilt might be transferred to Heaven's altar.
3. **Deposit:** To make overcoming sin possible, God has given a measure of faith to every person. He has also given us the deposit of the Holy Spirit and the promise of a new heart and a new mind. Transformation is possible through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

The Doctrine of Grace Illustrated

A college teacher assigned a term paper. He told the students the project would represent 75% of their grade. He said the due date was six weeks away, "Monday, October 10, no exceptions." (Teacher declared his law.) John and two classmates were injured in a auto accident (through no fault of their own) five days before the term paper was due. They were released from the hospital three days later. So, there was not enough time for the recovering students to meet the deadline. They contacted the teacher (they asked for grace). Given their circumstances, the teacher said he would accept their submission by Wednesday noon (grace was given). The injured students struggled to meet the deadline (they believed the teacher

would do as promised), burnt some midnight oil, and all three passed the course.

In this illustration, grace (an extension of time) was given to three students because the teacher cared enough to help the students. He wanted them to complete the course even though they had been notified six weeks earlier of the due date. The injured students accepted the teacher's grace and after putting forth extra effort, they met the deadline and the requirement for the course. They were grateful for the grace they had received and their efforts (works) reflected their appreciation.

God's grace requires a human response. We are saved through faith because God has given us grace in the form of time, sacrifice, and deposit. Many Protestants will ask, "How can grace be called grace if overcoming sin is required (works)?" God's grace exists because God's laws have penalties. We show God that we appreciate His amazing grace by putting faith in Him and obeying His commands. How fair would it be to the other students if the teacher had told the injured students, "You do not have to submit the term paper, I will give each of you an A."? Would such a dispensation of grace be appropriate given the accreditation of the institution or would it be academic deception (giving passing grades to students when there is no evidence the students met academic requirements)? If a peer review by his colleagues was conducted, would the teacher's extension of grace be viewed as unauthorized use of authority to defeat course requirements or would the jury conclude the teacher was justified by his actions?

The Bible does not teach that we are saved by a dispensation of grace, but instead, the Bible teaches that salvation has been made possible because God has extended grace to all sinners. His grace comes in the form of time, sacrifice, and deposit. When properly understood, the doctrine of grace is a story of overwhelming love because God has taken every initiative necessary to save sinners. On the other hand, when the doctrine of grace is distorted and abused it causes harm to individuals and ultimately denominations. Here's a simple test: If overcoming sin is diminished so that grace can be exalted, God is not honored and the importance of the doctrines of Law and Faith are denigrated. Salvation does not come through grace, grace makes God's offer of salvation possible. Salvation always has come through faith in God. The life of Christ is a flawless example: "Not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42) Given the attention which is given to a distorted doctrine of grace today, I think it is fitting that we thoughtfully consider Jesus' words, " . . . However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the Earth?" (Luke 18:8, emphasis mine)

Larry Wilson

Bible Chart - From Creation to an Earth Made New

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then He said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' " (Revelation 21:5)

- **NEW CHARTS!** Charts outlining events from Creation to the New Earth
  - Events from Creation to the "New Creation"
    HTML Version | JPG Version | PDF Version | Apple Computer Version | Apple IPAD Version
  - The Grand Week/Seven Grand Days/7,000 Years
    HTML Version | JPG Version | PDF Version | Apple Computer Version | Apple IPAD Version

The June 2015 *Wake Up Report!* is two charts that you may find interesting. When you have time, we encourage you to become acquainted with both charts. I realize that some of you may not like charts that provide so many details, but I cannot think of a better way to show the intricate relationships that exist between so many prophetic elements. When several events are occurring at the same time, a schematic drawing has no equal. For example, chemists often draw charts showing molecular arrangement and electrical bonds, electronic engineers draw charts showing electron flow in electrical circuits, architects draw charts showing building structures, and anatomists draw charts showing the arrangement and location of bones, muscles, and nerves. So charts can bring a certain amount of definition and perspective to topics that would otherwise remain ethereal or abstract.

These two charts depict many events, but there are two specific topics I hope you will thoughtfully consider:

1. The Progression of Events and The Progression of Time

Carefully review the chart titled, From Creation to Re-Creation. Follow the road and notice the order of events in history and that God has revealed in Bible prophecy. When properly understood, the books of Daniel and Revelation produce a traceable progression of events that moves us toward the day when God will re-create Earth. Now, flip the chart over and study The Grand Week. Notice how genealogy, the Jubilee Calendar, and the prophetic time periods given in Daniel and Revelation also move us toward the re-creation of Earth. I find it interesting that God separately uses events and timing to convey the same message. God has not forgotten this planet. Actually, He is methodically and faithfully executing a very wonderful plan. When I view the night sky full of stars and planets, I find myself overwhelmed when I realize how God keeps a vigil over this tiny speck called Earth. (See Exodus 12:42.)

2. The Seventh Millennium

Here are a few thoughts as you contemplate The Grand Week chart. When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in the Garden of Eden. There is an incredible beauty and significance of God preparing a garden for the couple's home which naturally produced everything they needed, a place that flowed with "milk and honey." At Creation, God actually placed Adam and Eve in "His rest." They did not have to work the ground to survive. The garden naturally produced everything they could want. When Adam and Eve sinned, all this abruptly changed. God drove them from the Garden and the ground (outside the garden) was cursed. God told Adam that he would have to reap what he needed through painful toil. Adam would have to work the ground to survive. (Genesis 3:17)

After sin, God elevated His Sabbath rest to a higher level of significance. Prior to Adam's sin, God's Sabbath was a day to rest from creating and studying and was a day for spiritual renewal and fellowship with the Creator. After sin began, God expanded His Sabbath rest in two ways. First, it became a day of release from the painful toil of having to work the ground to survive. As Adam and Eve soon learned, if you depend upon your very own garden to survive, faith in God was absolutely necessary to let your field rest for a whole day during the planting or reaping season. Later, after the Exodus, God expanded His Sabbath rest to include a whole year. Every seventh year, Israel was required to stop working the land and let it rest. To encourage Israel's faith in God, He promised a bumper crop every sixth year. Every action God requires has a purpose and is part of His marvelous plan. God used the requirement of a Sabbath rest as a prophetic signpost indicating that He intended to lead His children into His ultimate rest, the "beautiful land" that flowed with milk and honey. God did this to give the human race hope, even before the problem with sin was resolved!

If you have watched my video seminar on the book of Hebrews, you will recall that God has attempted to establish His kingdom on Earth several times. You may also recall that before God delivered Israel from Egypt, He required them to rest from their painful toil on His Sabbath. (Exodus 5) This development made Pharaoh furious, and he forced his slaves to work much harder. The physical abuse heaped on the Israelites was awful. God was testing their faith in Him. Would they rest from their painful toil on His Sabbath in order to be set free? As time passed, Israel failed to enter into His rest because of their rebellion and unbelief. Later when Jesus came to Earth, He again was unable to get Israel to enter into His rest. Looking ahead, we see the same test is coming around the bend. A day is coming when our faith in God will be tested. Will we be willing to rest on God's Sabbath in order to be set free from sin's curse?

The seventh millennium is a wonderful topic because the promise of entering His rest still remains. Of course, you need to understand God's promise before its location on any chart is meaningful. It is my hope that you will look over both charts and be sure to include a study on the seventh millennium.

If you want to better understand “The Great Tribulation” portion on the Creation to Re-Creation chart, please read or reread the yellow book, *A Study on the Seven Trumpets, Two Witnesses, and Four Beasts*. You can also review Prophecies 6 through 12 in my book, *Jesus’ Final Victory*. We have also printed a limited supply of larger-sized (24"x36") charts. If you find the print on the smaller size chart difficult to read, you can purchase a set of two charts (each chart printed on one side) for $20. (This price includes shipping, but Ohio and Texas residents must be sure to include sales tax.) We also have charts printed on two sides like the one enclosed if you wish to purchase additional charts for sharing. The price is $4 per chart (plus appropriate sales tax). These charts can be used to start discussions with friends, especially when used with the book *A Study on the Seven Trumpets, Two Witnesses, and Four Beasts*.

Larry Wilson

Conflicts In Bible Texts About Heaven and Hell

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Conflicts in the Bible?

Bible students occasionally are troubled by Bible passages that seem to be in conflict with other verses. I believe this “textual conflict” in the Bible is deliberate, beneficial, and purposefully frustrating.

God uses these conflicts to motivate sincere Bible students to keep studying so they obtain a deeper understanding of His Word. Since God speaks the truth (John 17:17), there must be a resolution for every conflict in Scripture. Resolving these conflicts may require much effort, but the ultimate result is very rewarding for the serious Bible student.

A textual conflict forces a “truth-seeking” Christian to make a decision. This Christian has to ask himself, “Is it academically honest to ‘cherry pick’ the Bible for verses that support my position? Does it please God if I ignore the texts that I cannot explain?

Should I reach a temporary conclusion based on the weight of evidence as I understand it, or should I leave my conclusion unanswered until I can satisfactorily align everything the Bible says about a subject?” Ultimately, is the Christian willing to allow the Bible to reveal conclusions that he does not want to believe?

If a Christian seeking truth accepts the popular premise that the Bible contains conflicts (that is, one passage cancels the content of another passage), he is forced to admit that it can be manipulated according to bias, preconceptions, traditions, and prejudice. This admission only makes things worse, because ultimately, the Bible cannot be trusted if it is internally conflicted, has texts in opposition to each other, and can be made to say whatever someone wants it to say. If the Bible cannot be trusted, it has no value or authority.

On the other hand, if a seeker of truth believes God's Word is consistent and truth is proven by the harmony that comes from the sum of all the Bible texts on a subject, then he has assurance that the Holy Spirit will provide a proper understanding in due time. Experienced Bible students know that apparent conflicts are beneficial because they require deeper study into God's Word.

Precious stones generally do not lie on the surface of the Earth, but instead must be mined with substantial effort and determination from deep within the Earth. Mining God's Word for hidden gems can take just as much effort. Many Bible concepts are easy to understand, but other elements may not be as easy. Even though textual conflicts can be frustrating, resolving them can be exciting because each discovery always proves to be a glorious gem just waiting to be exposed.

For example, I was puzzled for more than twenty-five years why two Passover feasts were observed during the week of Christ's crucifixion. The gospels indicate that Jesus and His disciples observed the Feast of Passover in the upper room before His death (Luke 22:15) and the nation of Israel observed the Feast of Passover after Jesus was crucified. (John 18:28)

Knowing that God had said it was a sin to observe Passover at any other time than the appointed time (Numbers 9:13) and that Jesus never sinned (Hebrews 4:15), I could not understand what led the nation of Israel to sin by observing Passover at the wrong time.

My frustration disappeared when I discovered that two different calendars were used during the time of Christ and these two calendars are typically two days apart!***** Ironically, the discovery of two calendars occurred while I was working on another textual conflict. Sometimes, solving one conflict can lead to solutions for other conflicts!

***Note:** For an explanation of this matter, please see Chapter 6, "God's Timing is Perfect," in my book, Daniel: Unlocked for the Final Generation or go HERE.

The Difference Between Bible Review and Bible Study

For many Christians, "Bible study" actually means "Bible review." Although Bible review is a very good thing to do, it differs from Bible study because Bible review is a limited process. When a Bible student reads verses to affirm ideas he already believes, it is Bible review.

True Bible study is an unlimited quest for truth. Bible study means to search the Bible with no restraint to determine what God's character, love, plans, and will are all about. The Christian involved in sincere Bible study may prayerfully begin his study by saying, "Lord Jesus, I do not care what Your truth is or where it may lead, I just want to know and love your truth." As you can see, Bible review (limited review) varies significantly from true Bible study (unlimited searching for the truth).

Very few laymen concern themselves with true Bible study because trusting "the experts" is easy to do. Each religious leader enjoys a measure of religious authority and/or leadership within his religious body and rightly so. However, laymen should be aware that clergy serve their

denominations as “Defenders of the Faith.” Clergy do not want social unrest in the church or theological conflict.

When they are challenged on various topics, a clergyman will uphold the traditions of his church 99% of the time. The Protestant reformation ended more than a hundred years ago, but it appears that Christian leadership is returning to the Dark Ages. It seems that the majority of Protestantism has embraced the medieval concept that “the church” is to be exalted because truth is owned by the church.

This means that Protestant clergy primarily serve as “keepers of the church” rather than shepherds leading the flock toward greater light. To prove my point, ask your clergyperson to recount the last time new light came from the Bible and the whole church embraced it. I think many Protestant pastors have sacrificed the importance of unlimited Bible study on the “Altar of Unity.”

It is true that Christianity is much larger than ideas derived from “Bible study.” One does not have to travel the whole world to realize that Christianity is a mixture of cultural values, religious ideas, and social interactions. When these properties are combined, they produce an enormous amount of inertia. Wouldn’t it be great if each generation of Christians cleared its own piece of virgin ground, dug its own theological footers, and erected its own theological structures instead of occupying a paradigm built by previous generations?

When “Bible study” is limited to “Bible review,” church members go away with the idea that Bible study is all about affirming and unifying what is already known. No student likes to study last year’s text book. When Bible study is not fresh, challenging, and transforming, people lose interest because once the boundaries are known, there is no point of continuing more research.

However, seekers of truth have a very different relationship with the Bible. They want to see every facet of truth with their own eyes and understand it with their own minds. They are wary of traditions because they know there is Bible review and there is Bible study. They hunger for the fullness and beauty of Bible truth. They also know that they are pilgrims in this world and following the leading of the Holy Spirit is not optional.

There is no other way to arrive at truth than by following the directives of the Holy Spirit. (John 16:13)

Now that we have reviewed these concepts about the nature and importance of unlimited Bible study, let us consider some textual conflicts:

Does a Person Go to Heaven or Hell at Death?

Millions of Christians believe that a person goes to Heaven or Hell at the time of death. The Bible teaches something different.***** When a person dies, two things happen. First, whether the dead person was good or evil, the breath of life (Hebrew: ruwach) returns to God who gave it and second, his body returns to dust. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

This means that when a person dies, he ceases to exist. When Jesus came to Earth, He declared that He will resurrect all dead people. Those judged to be righteous will be resurrected at the Second Coming (John 6:40-44; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and those judged to be wicked will be resurrected at the end of the 1,000 years. (Revelation 20:5; John 5:28,29; 12:48)

Because space is not available for a comprehensive study on death, judgment, and the two resurrections, these four passages will have to suffice.

*Note: For more in-depth discussion on this matter, please see Chapter 13, “What Happens at Death?” in my book, Jesus: The Alpha and The Omega or go HERE.

“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten.” (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” (John 5:28,29)

“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:40)

“According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Thessalonians 4:15)

If we allow the four statements above (one by Solomon, two by Jesus, and one by Paul) to mean that a dead person ceases to exist, and there is no intelligence while waiting for his resurrection, we find what appears to be a textual conflict with the book of Philippians. Paul appears to support the idea that upon his death, he would immediately be with Christ. As you study Paul’s words below, keep two things in mind.

First, Paul was languishing in a Roman prison when he wrote to the believers in Philippi and second, years earlier Paul had experienced the most wonderful experience that a human being can have. Paul was taken to Heaven in a vision (2 Corinthians 12:1-9), just like John (Revelation 4:1,2). With these two thoughts in mind, consider Paul’s words to the church at Philippi [insertions mine]:

“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed [of Jesus and His gospel]**, but will have sufficient courage** [when I am summoned before Caesar] **so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is** [to serve] **Christ and to die is gain [is desirable].**

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me [even in prison]**. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart** [this world and be free of sin’s curse] **and be with Christ** [which I have already experienced]**, which is better by far** [than my present circumstances]**; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the**

body.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain [alive for as long as the Lord wants]**, and I will continue with all of you** [serving the Lord and praying] **for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again** [whether in person or in letters] **your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me."** (Philippians 1:20-26, insertions mine)

Conflict resolved: The apparent conflict in Philippians comes from this phrase which is often understood to mean: **"I desire to depart** [this world] **and be with Christ** [immediately]." If this statement was the only mention which Paul had written on the topic of death, it would be reasonable to say that Paul believed that he would be with Christ at the time of death.

But, Paul also wrote 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15 where he clearly says that the righteous dead and the righteous living will be resurrected at the Second Coming. Moreover, the righteous living and the righteous dead will meet the Lord together in the air when He appears.

Therefore, we can resolve this conflict with this understanding of Paul's thoughts: **"I desire to depart** [this world] **and** [to once again] **be with Christ** [which will occur at the resurrection of all His saints]**."** This understanding of Philippians 1:20-26 aligns with the four statements by Solomon, Jesus, and Paul and the conflict is resolved.

In future months we will examine additional conflicts from more difficult passages.

Larry Wilson

Same Sex Marriage - The Created Versus the Creator

Author: Larry W. Wilson

(Due to the Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage (June 26, 2015), Part II of the study on confronting textual conflicts has been postponed until next month.)

The Supreme Court of the United States now has clearly stated that same-sex marriage is now permissible in all 50 states and marriage between a man and a woman is legally equivalent to same-sex unions. Since 36 states had already approved same-sex marriage, the justices may have concluded that eventually the remaining states would approve the matter anyway. Even if the verdict of the Supreme Court reflects decisions made by a majority of the 50 states, the verdict should be sobering to Christians because the United States' highest court has formally insulted the Creator of the universe. Arm yourself with the following 14 statements and the supporting Bible quotations:

1. Daniel and Paul indicate that governments are ordained by the Creator and they serve at God's pleasure.

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." *(Romans 13:1,2)*

". . . He sets up kings and deposes them. . . . . The holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men." *(Daniel 2:21; 4:17)*

These verses do not imply that citizens should obey earthly authorities when they overstep the boundaries set by the Creator. When a conflict between the laws of man and the laws of God exists, we show our allegiance by complying with the authority we deem highest. Notice how early Christians responded to this challenge:

"Having brought the apostles *[from prison]****, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,' he said. 'Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.' Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than men!' "*** *(Acts 5:27,29)*

2. The Earth is but a footstool of the Creator. After eating grass like an animal for seven years, King Nebuchadnezzar finally discovered that God has dominion over everything on Earth.

"This is what the Lord says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.' " *(Isaiah*

66:1)

". . . His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?' " *(Daniel 4:34,35)*

3. God raises up nations and He takes them down. His patience with nations is limited.

"The word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men – Noah, Daniel and Job – were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord.'" *(Ezekiel 14:12,13)*

4. God declares that homosexual acts are detestable to Him.

" 'Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.' " *(Leviticus 18:22,23)*

5. God warned Israel to stay away from sexual immorality.

" 'Do not defile yourselves in any of these [sexual] ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants." *(Leviticus 18:24,25)*

6. Jesus declared that sexually immoral people cannot enter the Holy City.

" I [Jesus] am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." *(Revelation 22:13-15)*

7. Paul says those who practice homosexual behavior deserve death.

". . . They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. . . . Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." *(Romans 1:24-32)*

8. God's wrath will come upon those who participate in sexual immorality.

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." *(1 Corinthians 6:9,10)*

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming." *(Colossians 3:5,6)*

"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them." *(Ephesians 5:6,7)*

"But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.' To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." *(Romans 2:5-8)*

9. Marriage began when God united Adam and Eve during Creation Week.

"The man** [Adam] **said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be

called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man. *[And God said]* ***For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."*** *(Genesis 2:23,24)*

[Jesus said] ***" 'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.' "*** *(Matthew 19:4-6)*

10. God loves all sinners and all human beings are born sinners.

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." *(Romans 5:8)*

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." *(Romans 3:23)*

11. The penalty for sin is death. This penalty will be executed on those sinners who do not have a Savior at the end of sin's drama.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." *(Romans 6:23)*

"If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." *(Revelation 20:15)*

12. Eternal life cannot be purchased or earned by sinners, but God has made eternal life freely available for everyone willing to overcome the desires of the sinful nature.

"For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." *(Romans 8:13,14)*

13. Overcoming the misdeeds of the body is required and possible through faith in Christ.

"I can do everything through him who gives me strength." *(Philippians 4:13)*

"Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." *(1 John 2:6)*

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? . . . You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.' " *(James 2:14-22)*

"This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the *[evil ways and desires of the]* ***world."*** *(1 John 5:3)*

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." *(1 John 1:9)*

14. Overcoming sexual immorality is not optional.

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God."
(1 Thessalonians 4:3-5)

". . . These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. . . .You have people there [in your church] who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality . . . Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. . ."
(Revelation 2:12-17)

". . . These are the words of the Son of God . . . I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel *[this is not king Ahab's wife who lived centuries earlier]****, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the***

eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. . .” *(Revelation 2:18-28)*

The Creator has declared His position on sexual immorality. God is changeless. (Malachi 3:6) He holds us accountable for our actions. ***“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”*** *(2 Corinthians 5:10)* ***Nothing escapes His view: “For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”*** *(Ecclesiastes 12;14) Judgment day is coming.* ***“. . . He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.”*** *(Psalm 96:13)* ***“. . . The Lord is coming . . . to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”*** *(Jude 14,15)*

Our changeless Creator has never called something “detestable” and later called it “good.” Marriage was ordained as the union of a man and a woman in the Garden of Eden. Sexual immorality is a sexual experience with another person outside of marriage and a homosexual act is a sexual experience with someone of the same sex. The Supreme Court of the United States has spoken, but its words will be nullified when the Lord reveals His anger with man’s arrogance, rebellion, and blasphemy. Soon, the Supreme Ruler of Heaven and Earth will rise up and show sinners that He means business. When He does, 25% of Earth’s population will quickly perish (Revelation 6:8) and the survivors will tremble. Joel saw this, too: ***“Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand – a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come.”*** *(Joel 2:1-2)*

Larry Wilson

Conflicting Bible Texts About Eternal Hell

Author: Larry W. Wilson

In the July 2015 Wake Up Report, we examined a textual conflict in Philippians 1:20-26. This month, we will consider another textual conflict – Eternally Burning Hell.

Perhaps the most difficult textual conflict in Scripture concerns God's punishment of the wicked. Millions of Christians assume the wicked will languish with the devil in hell forever. This is the opposite of the reward for the righteous – living forever with God in eternal bliss. Of course, an assumption of eternal hell does require the person to believe in immortal souls (not subject to death), but this detail is not considered important. To be fair, certain Bible verses seem to support the concept of an eternally burning hell. Let us begin this study by considering 1 Peter 3:18-22 (within all following Bible quotations, underlines, italics, and insertions in parenthesis or brackets mine):

1 Peter 3:18-22 **"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. . . "**

This text could be interpreted to mean that after Jesus died on the cross, He preached salvation to wicked spirits who have been tortured in hell (prison) since Noah's day. An individual's belief about how God punishes wicked people will influence the interpretation of 1 Peter 3. So, with Peter's words in mind, consider five passages:

Jude 1:7 **"In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal** (Greek: aionios) **fire."**

Revelation 14:11 **"And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."**

Revelation 19:3 **"And again they shouted: 'Hallelujah! The smoke from her [the great whore] goes up for ever and ever.' "**

Revelation 20:10 **"And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."**

Matthew 18:8 **"If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal** (aionios) **fire."**

For those people who believe that textual conflicts can only be resolved by digging deeply into the catacombs of the original Greek language, the confusion only gets worse. Jude and Jesus used the Greek word aionios to describe fire because aionios generally means eternal, everlasting, or forever. Notice how aionios is used in other Bible passages: **"As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. 'Good teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal** (aionios) **life?' "** (Mark 10:17) **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal** (aionios) **life."** (John 3:16) Jesus said, **"But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal** (aionios) **life."** (John 4:14)

A man once said to me, "I have proof texts! Jesus said 'eternal fire' and 'eternal life' and that's how it is! I'm not budging." Do you understand the problem? If we "cherry pick" the Bible and limit our study on God's punishment of the wicked to the six passages presented previously, we leave the Scripture in a state of internal conflict because there are other Bible verses which have equal authority that contradict these texts. Truth is proven true by the harmony that comes from the sum of its parts. Also, consider these words that Jesus spoke:

John 6:40 **"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."**

Luke 14:13,14 **"But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."**

John 12:47, 48 **"As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."**

Luke 20:35, 36 **"But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection."**

John 5:28, 29 **"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."**

With these five passages in mind, consider this: If Abel was murdered and went to Heaven 6,000 years ago, why does he need to be resurrected "at the last day?" If Cain died and went to Hell 6,000 years ago, why does he need to be resurrected at the end of the 1,000 years?

Some people believe Cain and Abel will be resurrected to receive new bodies. This does not make sense to me because why would Cain need a new body after 6,000 years in Hell? Why would Abel, Enoch, Elijah, Moses, and the 24 elders have to wait for the Second Coming to get

a new body? Elijah and Moses already have new bodies. The disciples saw them on the Mount of Transfiguration and John saw the 24 elders with new bodies around the throne! (Luke 9:30; Revelation 4:4) Advocates for an eternally burning hell cannot offer a biblical reason why Able and Cain are resurrected. However, when we understand God's ways and plans, the Bible reveals why separate resurrections are needed for the righteous and the wicked!

This confusion about God's punishment of the wicked can be resolved, but the solution requires some knowledge of the following four Bible topics: The creation of man, the state of man in death, the judgment of man, and the doctrine of restitution. These topics perfectly fit into a wonderful judicial system because God is generous, reasonable, fair, loving, and changeless. Please consider a few summary statements on these four topics:

The creation of man and the state of man in death: **"The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."** (Genesis 2:7) After Adam sinned, God said: **"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."** (Genesis 3:19) Solomon wrote, **"For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. . . . And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit** [breath of life] **returns to God who gave it."** (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6; 12:7)

David was astonished at the power of death: **"What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave?"** (Psalm 89:48) David knew that dead people are not in Heaven: **"It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to silence; it is we** [the living] **who extol the Lord, both now and forevermore. . . ."** (Psalm 115:17,18) God told Ezekiel, **"For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son – both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die."** (Ezekiel 18:4) Paul summarizes the human condition: **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God** [and all must die because]**. . . For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 3:23; 6:23)

The Bible teaches that man is made of dust. He has no intelligence before birth and he has no intelligence after he dies. When a person dies, his body returns to dust, the gift of life (the spirit) returns to God, and his soul (his intelligence and personality) no longer exists. However, when God resurrects each dead person, He will faithfully reconstruct that person from His perfect record of each person. (Ecclesiastes 12:14; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 15:42,49)

The judgment of man: The Bible teaches that God has appointed a time, near the end of the world, when He will judge mankind. **"For he** [the Father] **has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man** [Jesus] **he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."** (Acts 17:31)

Jesus is the judge: **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."** (2 Corinthians 5:10) Every word and deed will be reviewed. **"For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."**

(Ecclesiastes 12:14) Prior to the Second Coming, the eternal destiny of every person will be determined. (Revelation 14;19) At the Second Coming, the wicked dead will not be disturbed, but the wicked who are alive will be killed. (Revelation 19:20,21) The righteous dead will be resurrected and together with the righteous living they will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) The saints will ascend to the Holy City and reign with Christ in Heaven for 1,000 years. (John 14:1-3; Revelation 20:4)

The doctrine of restitution: During the 1,000 years the saints will be given authority with Jesus to review the record of each wicked person and determine the amount of suffering which each wicked person must endure. (1 Corinthians 6:2,3) God's justice requires that predators must suffer according to the amount of suffering they caused, e.g., an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, bruise for bruise, etc. (Exodus 21; 2 Thessalonians 1:6; Romans 12:19; Revelation 2:23)

At the end of the 1,000 years, the Holy City will descend from Heaven with the saints inside. (Revelation 21:2) All of the wicked will be resurrected. (Revelation 20:12-15) Jesus will then explain to each wicked person why He could not save them and He will also reveal the judgment decreed by the saints, e.g., the amount of suffering required for restitution. This declaration will enrage the wicked. The devil will lead the wicked to attack the Holy City and fire will fall from Heaven and Hell will begin. (Revelation 20:7-10) Hell will linger for each person according to the length of time determined by the saints. When justice has been served, the fires of Hell will go out. (Malachi 4:1-3) Then a new Heaven and Earth will be created. (Revelation 21:1)
Given what the Bible teaches on these four topics and my desire to harmonize everything said in the Bible about God's judicial system, I understand the following passages to mean:

Jude 1:7 **"In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who** [will] s**uffer the punishment of eternal** [the age of unquenchable] **fire."**

Revelation 14:11 **"And the smoke of their torment rises** [for as long as they burn] **for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."**

Revelation 19:3 **"And again they shouted: 'Hallelujah! The smoke from her [the great whore] goes up [for as long as she burns] for ever and ever.' "**

Revelation 20:10 **"And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night** [for as long as needed] **for ever and ever."**

Matthew 18:8 **"If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal** [the age of unquenchable] **fire."**

Read the Next Segment

Larry Wilson

P.S. Read the enclosure to find out about the next seminar scheduled at Fort Walton Beach, Florida the last week of
February!

Eternal Hell, Baptism of the Dead, and Who Went to Heaven

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Eternally Burning Hell (Continued)

Last month we examined a few Bible verses used to support the idea of an eternally burning hell. This month we will consider a few more verses on this topic before moving on to other conflicts. To begin this study, please consider a critical point: The Bible is like the human body in that both have many different systems operating in perfect harmony. Many specialties in medicine exist today because each system of the body is complicated. The Bible also has many complicated topics. A wise physician knows that every system in the body is related to all of the other systems. No system can be treated or isolated without affecting the others. Similarly, wise Bible students know that if only certain Bible verses are used or isolated from other Bible topics the result will be internal conflict.

The topic of eternal reward is complex and this leads to diversity and confusion. I like to think of eternal reward as an umbrella topic because it includes many sub-topics such as God's character, justice, mercy, grace, law, His judgment of mankind, man's fallen nature, the state of man in death, the atonement provided by Jesus, the rescue of God's people, and the annihilation of the wicked. So, no position on eternal reward can be considered trustworthy until all of the sub-topics operate in perfect harmony.

About A.D. 65, the apostle Peter wrote two letters to Christian converts suffering in Asia Minor because of their life and faith in Jesus. His first letter is important in this study because Peter's choice of words in 1 Peter 3 and 4 are sometimes used to support the idea that when Jesus died on the cross, He went into Hell and offered salvation to those who had been there since the days of Noah. After you read my commentary below, you may want to read all of 1 Peter 3 and 4 in your own Bible so that you can consider Peter's thoughts without interruption. My comments are in brackets []:

1 Peter 3:18-22 **"For Christ died for** [your] **sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you** [near] **to God. He** [Jesus] **was put to death in the body but** [on the third day He was] **made alive by the** [Holy] **Spirit** [Romans 8:11]**, through whom also He** [Jesus] **went and preached** [for 120 years through His servant Noah – Genesis 6:3] **to the spirits** [the people who were living then*] **in** [a] **prison** [of godlessness and rebellion – see Isaiah 42:6,7] **who disobeyed** [blasphemed the Holy Spirit] **long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through** [from] **water, and this water** [that cleansed the Earth of rebellion and godless people] **symbolizes baptism that now saves you also –** [I'm speaking] **not** [of] **the removal of dirt from the body but** [of your faith and your public affirmation to follow Jesus and] **the pledge of** [allegiance that you have made to Jesus, and that of maintaining] **a good conscience toward God. It** [is your submission to God's Spirit through faith that] **saves you** [and this gift of salvation has been made possible] **by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has** [come out of the tomb and] **gone into Heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels,**

authorities and powers in submission to Him.

- *** Note:** In Bible times, the word "spirit" was used in different ways. A spirit could be an invisible demon. (1 Timothy 4:1) A spirit could be an angel from God. (Hebrews 1:14) A spirit could be a human being. (1 Corinthians 14:32, Hebrews 12:9) The Greek word for spirit is pneumas which means wind. The ancients generally thought of spirits in two ways. If a spirit had no body, it was a ghost. (Acts 23:8) If a spirit had a body, it was a human (or an angel in human form). (Hebrews 13:2, 2 Corinthians 7:13) If Peter's expression "spirits in prison" is understood from his perspective that Jesus preached through Noah to the antediluvians, textual conflict dissolves.

1 Peter 4:1,2 **"Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body** [from evil people]**, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body** [from evil people] **is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."**

1 Peter 4:3-5 **"For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation** [immoral and careless living]**, and they heap abuse on you** [because they hate righteousness]**. But they will have to give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."**

1 Peter 4:6,7 **"**[Dear brothers, God is not willing that any should perish.] **For this is the reason the gospel was preached** [among you and] **even to those who are now** [physically alive but spiritually] **dead, so that** [upon hearing the gospel] **they might be** [awakened and] **judged** [condemned within their hearts by their sins. All of us have sinned] **according to men in regard to the body, but** [men who repent and] **live according to God in regard to the Spirit** [will be saved.] **The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray** [for God's sustaining power and grace every day]**."**

Summary: Does Peter mean to say that Jesus offered people in Hell a second chance? If so, what sinner would choose to remain in Hell? If God had wanted to save everyone before the flood came, why did He close the door of the ark before it began to rain? The Bible teaches there is no second chance for salvation after death. (Hebrews 3:7,8; 9:7,28) We determine our eternal destiny in this life. Again we see that if apparent conflicts are not properly resolved, they will put the Bible in a state of internal conflict. Given the many sub-topics involved with eternal reward, Peter's words can be resolved. Peter is not advocating the idea that while His body was resting in the tomb, Jesus's spirit went to Hell and offered evil ghosts (who had been captives since the days of Noah) eternal life.

If we read all of 1 Peter, we find that Peter is advocating a glorious and powerful truth. Peter had seen the manifestation and power of the Holy Spirit in his own life many times. Peter saw the Holy Spirit bring a young man to life (Luke 7), bring Dorcas to life (Acts 9), and put a husband and wife to death. (Acts 5) Therefore, Peter exalted the ministry of the Holy Spirit in 1 Peter 3 and 4 by reminding his readers that (a) rejecting the Holy Spirit leads to death – this explains why so few were saved from Noah's flood and (b) the same Holy Spirit that raised

Jesus from the dead can give a spiritually dead person a new life in Christ! Peter's thoughts are focused on the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit, and when his choice of words are put within this framework, the textual conflict dissolves.

I would like to close this discussion on eternally burning hell with a short explanation. Last month, we noticed that Jesus spoke of "eternal fire" when He said, **"If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire."** (Matthew 18:8) Of course, this text can be used to support the idea of an eternally burning hell. The Greek word in Matthew 18:8 translated "eternal" is aionios which is often translated as everlasting or eternal. However, the root word for aionios is aion and it means an age or a period of time which develops the idea of something being eternal or everlasting.

With this information in mind, please consider Jesus' words: **"Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."** (Matthew 12:31) The Greek word for "age" is aion and it is translated "world" in the KJV. Given the nature of the Greek language, I understand Jesus meant that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven during this period or the period to come. At the end of the 1,000 years, the Bible indicates that fire will fall from the sky and devour the wicked (Revelation 20:9) and they will be reduced to ashes. (Malachi 4:3) Because the fire will burn for a period of time to purify Earth of sin's curse, aionios is the appropriate word in Matthew 18:8. Instead of translating the word to mean eternal or everlasting fire, this phrase could be better translated to mean, "It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the fire that will annihilate the wicked at the end of the age." Of course, translators are not concerned with internal conflicts, their work is to translate each Greek sentence into an English equivalent. Resolving textual conflicts is another task altogether, reserved for Bible students who love God's Word.

Apparent Conflict #3 – Baptism for the Dead

Does the Bible teach that one person can be baptized for another? Mormons believe this is the case. Please consider the following quote taken from the official Mormon website and as you read, look for their underlying reason:

"Jesus Himself, though without sin, was baptized to fulfill all righteousness and to show the way for all mankind (see Matthew 3:13-17; 2 Nephi 31:5-12). Thus, baptism is essential for salvation in the kingdom of God. We learn in the New Testament that baptisms for the dead were done during the Apostle Paul's time (see 1 Corinthians 15:29). This practice has been restored with the establishment of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Prophet Joseph Smith first taught about the ordinance of baptism for the dead during a funeral sermon in August 1840. He read much of 1 Corinthians 15, including verse 29, and announced that the Lord would permit Church members to be baptized in behalf of their friends and relatives who had departed this life. He told them "the plan of salvation was calculated to save all who were willing to obey the requirements of the law of God" (Journal History of the Church, 15 Aug. 1840).

“Because all who have lived on the earth have not had the opportunity to be baptized by proper authority during life on earth, baptisms may be performed by proxy, meaning a living person may be baptized in behalf of a deceased person. Baptisms for the dead are performed by Church members in temples throughout the world. People have occasionally wondered if the mortal remains of the deceased are somehow disturbed in this process; they are not. The person acting as a proxy uses only the name of the deceased. To prevent duplication the Church keeps a record of the deceased persons who have been baptized. Some have misunderstood that when baptisms for the dead are performed the names of deceased persons are being added to the membership records of the Church. This is not the case.” (Source: https://www.mormon.org/faq/baptism-for-the-dead)
Three observations: First, Mormons view baptism as a sacrament instead of an ordinance. A sacrament is something required for salvation, an ordinance is something recommended for salvation. Because Mormons believe a person cannot be saved without baptism, they practice baptism for the dead. Second, Mormons recognize that millions of people have lived and died without any chance of hearing the gospel of Jesus. Therefore, they consider it an act of kindness to serve as baptismal proxies for people who would not otherwise be saved. Finally, Mormons believe that at death, the mortal body is temporarily separated from an immortal soul.

Notice this quote: “Death is not the end. Death is really a beginning — another step forward in Heavenly Father’s plan for His children. Someday, like everyone else, your physical body will die. But your spirit does not die, it goes to the spirit world, where you will continue to learn and progress and may be with loved ones who have passed on. Death is a necessary step in your progression, just as your birth was. Sometime after your death, your spirit and your body will be reunited – never to be separated again. This is called resurrection, and it was made possible by the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (See 1 Corinthians 15:20-22).” (Source: https://www.mormon.org/faq/topic/death/question/life-after-death)

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (~A.D. 55), Christianity was about 25 years old. The believers had hundreds of unanswered questions and endless confusion. There were many reports of miracles, but very little knowledge. The apostles had their hands full because Christianity had attracted a diverse body of people who were eager, but ignorant, excited, but frustrated with endless conflict. The New Testament had not been written so Christian doctrine was up for grabs. Some converts in Corinth had been Pharisees and others had been Sadducees. When they joined the church, they brought their religious baggage with them. This explains why some converts were conducting proxy baptisms. As former Pharisees, they believed among other things (like circumcision), that baptism was required for eternal life. On the other hand, many of those converts who had been Sadducees still denied there was a resurrection.

Paul wrote chapter 15 to specifically clear many questions about the death and resurrection of the saints. If you understand the setting in Corinth, that Paul is actually pitting Pharisee against Sadducee converts in 1 Corinthians, his style and explanation of things will make you smile. First, he takes on the Sadducees:

“For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be

pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, [He is] **the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when He comes, those who belong to him** [will be raised]**."** (1 Corinthians 15:16-23)

After these verses, Paul briefly explains that Jesus had to be resurrected and taken to Heaven so that He could accomplish certain tasks which end with Jesus destroying death itself! (See verses 24-28.) Then, Paul returns to the subject at hand by contrasting the actions of the Pharisees. It is as though Paul wrote, "Look at the Pharisees. They are baptizing for the dead and yet, the Sadducees say the dead will not live again. How foolish is this for both groups?" **"Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?"** (1 Corinthians 15:29)

Paul does not advocate baptism for the dead. He simply highlights the conflict between Pharisees and Sadducees because both sides are advocating positions that do not belong within Christianity. Paul does not validate baptism for the dead in any of his writings because the whole idea is contrary to the way that God saves individuals. One man cannot be circumcised for another man. Likewise, one man's faith cannot save another or one man's sins condemn another. God has not overlooked the salvation of millions of people who never heard the gospel of Jesus. (John 10:16; Romans 2:14-16)

One more point: The believers at Corinth were curious and confused about the nature of the body that would be given to the saints at the resurrection. Therefore, Paul wrote: **"But someone may ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come** [out of the grave]**?' How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as He has determined, and to each kind of seed He gives its own body.**

"All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies [Sun, moon, stars] **and there are earthly bodies** [trees, mountains and fields]**; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.**

The Sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable [the body that dies returns to dust, later]**, it is raised imperishable** [a body made for everlasting life]**; it is sown in dishonor** [our bodies are cursed by the ravages of sin]**, it is raised in glory** [free from sin's curse]**; it is sown in weakness** [subject to sickness]**, it is raised in power** [free from sickness and deformity]**; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body** [not the body of a ghost, but a glorified body, like the body that Jesus was given at His resurrection*]**. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."** (1 Corinthians 15:35-44)

- *** Note:** Jesus is called the firstfruits of the dead because He is an example of what we

will be after we are resurrected or translated. (1 John 3:2)

The saints will know each another (1 Corinthians 13:12) and have physical bodies in Heaven, just like Adam and Eve did before the fall.

Apparent Conflict #4 – Who Went to Heaven?

For centuries, there has been confusion about 2 Corinthians 12. The question is whether Paul was taken in vision to meet a man who had died and gone to Heaven or Paul himself went to Heaven.

To appreciate the importance of 2 Corinthians 12, some background information is necessary. (When resolving apparent conflicts, circumstances and setting always have to be considered.) When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he was confined to a prison in Rome. Some Messianic Jews (Pharisee converts, also known as Judaizers) had gone from Jerusalem to Corinth and their "sophisticated teachings" had gained considerable traction in Corinth. Messianic Jews were visiting the churches Paul established because they thought it was their religious duty to restore the importance of Jewish traditions by "cleaning up" the false teachings which Paul had been promoting. Since Paul was not present to rebuke their teachings, they faced little opposition at Corinth.

Naturally, Paul was not pleased to hear about the impact which the Messianic Jews had at Corinth because it was the same impact which they had had in other places as well. Several years earlier, Paul had a face to face confrontation with them and the story goes like this:

"When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. . . . Before certain men came [to Antioch] **from James** [the president of the church in Jerusalem]**, he** [Peter] **used to eat with the Gentiles** [which was not permitted for a Jew to do]**. But when they** [the Messianic Jews] **arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group** [those insisting that a man must be circumcised in order to be an heir of Abraham and thus be saved]**. . . .** [Then] **The other Jews [with Peter] joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas** [my dear companion in the Lord] **was led astray. . . When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile** [when the Messianic Jews are not around] **and not like a Jew. How is it, then** [when the Judaizers show up]**, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"** (Galatians 2:11-14)

The Messianic Jews had argued quite successfully among Jewish converts that Christians must not leave the traditions and rituals of Judaism behind and the Judaizers insisted that new Gentile converts must embrace circumcision and baptism, and other Jewish practices as sacraments. This created conflict in the church at Corinth, because Gentile converts did not want to be identified with Jews or as Jews. Because the "credentials" of the Messianic Jews (they were rabbis) made them "experts" in religious matters, Paul challenged the church at Corinth to compare his credentials with the credentials of the Judaizers:

"Are they [the Messianic Jews] **Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's** [biological] **descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."** (2 Corinthians 11:22-28)

"If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying [exaggerating]**. I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. (So that you can determine for yourselves who is better prepared to speak for the Lord?) I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven** [where God dwells]**. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know--God knows. And I know that this man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows– was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say."** (2 Corinthians 11:30-12:6)

Of course, no one among the Messianic Jews came close to matching Paul's dedication, experience, or credentials. However, did you notice that near the end of Paul's report that he suddenly begins to speak of himself in the third person. "I know a man. . . ." Paul used this literary technique so separate himself from self-promotion. Consider two problems:

First, everyone knows that dreams and visions cannot be investigated. The event cannot be replicated, studied, validated, or even confirmed. Liars know this. Therefore, a person can report a dream and no one can say if it is a lie or the truth. For this reason, dreams and visions do not have any corporate value unless (a) they come with a revelation from God, that is, information otherwise unknown is revealed and there is corroborating evidence that God has spoken, and (b) the report of the dream conforms with the Word of God in terms of present truth. (See Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and Ezekiel 13:1;16.) God does give dreams, but 99% of the time their value is limited to one individual, the person who received the dream. (Joel 2:28)

Second, there is a simple rule about boasting: Jesus referred to this rule when He said: **"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid."** (John 5:31) Anyone can say anything about himself that he wants, but truth is established by two or more witnesses. (1 Timothy 5:19) This is why Jesus said: **" 'There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his**

testimony about me is valid. You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth.' " (John 5:32,33) Anyone can boast because boasting is vanity, but validation by two or three witnesses establishes a fact.

Paul spoke of being taken to Paradise in the third person because he did not want to escalate boasting among the Messianic Jews by playing "ego-cards." Any of the rabbis could have duplicated Paul's boast of being in Paradise and no one in Corinth would have known the difference. Saying you have received a vision from God does not prove that a vision was received. Paul acknowledged the foolishness of telling the church about his vision and he added an interesting twist. He told the church that God gave him a thorn in the flesh to keep him from being overcome with vanity. Paul knew that he was telling the truth, but Paul also knew the Holy Spirit would somehow validate his testimony before the church.

"Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 2:6-10) I believe Paul's vision was permanently degraded on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:11) and although God improved his sight, it was still poor. As a scholar, this limitation was "a real thorn in his flesh." If this conclusion is true, this verse confirms it. **"See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!"** (Galatains 6:11)

Given the conflict, setting, and circumstances in Corinth, the mystery concerning 2 Corinthians 12 is resolved. Paul was taken to Heaven in a vision (just like John in Revelation 4) to see realities to wonderful to express. I would like to close this report by expressing my deepest appreciation to the apostle Paul. He not only deserves "The Medal of Honor," he deserves a golden crown! His incredible sacrifices for Jesus continue to influence lives and his expansive knowledge of God's ways and plans continues to expand my understanding of God's great love. When we all get to Heaven, I am going to find him as soon as possible and give him a hug!

Larry Wilson

Predestination and Free Will are Partners

Author: Larry W. Wilson

The Bible contains many apparent conflicts and some of these were discussed in the July, September, and October Wake Up Reports. This month we will consider another textual conflict. This conflict can be resolved so that all Bible passages are harmonious, but the resolution does not come easy. I would like to begin this article by saying “yes,” it is true that God has predestined certain things; and “yes,” it is also true that God permits people to exercise free will in other things. The key to resolving this conflict is in knowing which “things” were predestined and which “things” are free will.

Predistination Does Not Mean Forcing the Outcome

The topic of predestination involves several subjects which have to be included in the study. Even though many Bible texts do not use the word predestination, the texts are related to the topic! Remember, truth is proven true by the harmony that comes from the sum of its parts. For example, God’s omnipotence and omniscience have substantial roles within the topic of predestination. Many people believe that since God is all powerful and all knowing, He has predetermined who will be saved and who will not and there is no possibility of changing the outcome. For these people, there is no difference between God knowing the outcome and forcing the outcome.

Consider the ramifications of this logic: If God has predetermined the outcome of all things, He is responsible for everything that happens. This logic makes Him responsible for sin because He predetermined that Lucifer and a third of Heaven’s angels would sin and be cast out of Heaven. Then, He forced Adam and Eve to sin; and to save certain people from death, He forced Jesus to die on the cross. This logic makes God the Creator of sorrow, sickness, and death. Worse yet, He is the source of dishonesty, hatred, cruelty, and sexual immorality because these behaviors exist in many people! If all of these dreadful things about God are true, then predetermining who will go to Heaven and burn in Hell is not out of character. Moreover, if these things are true, then God is the greatest liar in the universe. He claims to be a God of love, He claims that righteousness and justice are the foundations of His throne, but these words are lies if God created some people to end up in Heaven and others to end up in Hell.

God is not a liar. He is righteous and does not force anyone into sin. If He did such things, no one would want to spend eternity with Him. There is a simple solution to harmonizing predestination with free will. Knowing the outcome is not the same thing as forcing the outcome. For example, if I set an alarm clock to go off at 6 a.m., I am forcing the event to occur (Predestination). However, if I walk into a room and see that the alarm clock is set to go off at 5 p.m., I am not forcing the event, even though I know the outcome (Foreknowledge). It is possible that the divine powers, foreknowledge and omnipotence, can operate in God’s heart without interference.

A Living Trust

Before Heaven and Earth were created, the Father foreknew that sin would occur and this would separate mankind from His presence (no sinner can live in God's glorious presence). Therefore, He created a plan to save sinners and He designed this plan to operate as a living trust.

A living trust is a process whereby the assets of a benefactor are distributed to beneficiaries through the services of a trustee or trustees. Trustees have specific obligations established by the trust. They are to complete the terms and conditions of the trust and distribute the assets of the benefactor to beneficiaries. *Trustees are servants of the trust. They are not free to act on their own, they do not own the assets of the trust, and they are not permitted to appropriate the assets of the trust to themselves.*

After Adam and Eve sinned, God chose patriarchs to be the trustees of His gospel. However, the sons of God (the patriarchs, the spiritual leaders) became distracted with beautiful women who had no interest in spiritual matters. Consequently, the world became so wicked and degenerate that after 1,600 years, God cleansed the Earth with a flood and started over. Then, He chose the descendants of Abraham to serve as the trustees of His gospel. Israel became so wicked and rebellious that after God patiently waited 1,400 years, He sent Jesus to win Israel over, but they killed Him. So, God started over with a new covenant with believers in Christ (Christians) to serve as the trustees of His gospel. However, after 1,600 years of apostasy, He had to make a change and caused a reformation with Christians and Protestants. After a mere 200 years, these trustees became so divided, confused, and blasphemous that God gave up on them. When the Great Tribulation begins, God will start over for the last time. He will choose 144,000 individuals to be His trustees and these people will accomplish within a mere 1,260 days all He wants done.

If the plan of salvation does operate as a living trust, the textual conflict is resolved. Predestination and free will are not in conflict within a living trust. Before creation, God predestined that groups of people would serve as trustees of His gospel. Because He gives people free will, they may choose to receive or reject the gospel. During the Christian era, God appointed trustees to serve His beneficiaries: **"It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."** (Ephesians 4:11,12)

After Jesus came to Earth, we see that individuals have a choice to believe or disbelieve: **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever [chooses to] believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."** (John 3:16) **"The** [Holy] **Spirit and the bride** [the people of God] **say, 'Come!' And let him who hears** [the invitation also] **say, 'Come!' Whoever is** [hungry and] **thirsty** [for truth and peace]**, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life** [which flows from the throne of God]**."** (Revelation 22:17)

The Bible teaches that God has predestined certain events. For example, He told Noah He would send the flood 120 years later. (Genesis 6:3) He told Daniel that Messiah would die in the middle of the 70th week. (Daniel 9:26,27) He revealed to John that the date of the sixth trumpet has been set, down to the very hour, day, month, and year. (Revelation 9:15) Jesus plainly told His inquiring disciples just before He ascended that the Father has set dates and times according to His own authority. **"He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.' "** (Acts 1:7) **Note:** Jesus said that it was not for them to know certain dates because He did not want His disciples to understand that His return would be 2,000 years later. If Jesus had revealed this, Christianity would have died before the end of the first century A.D.

When Israel camped at the base of Mt. Sinai, God let Abraham's descendants know from the beginning that their position as trustees of His covenant (gospel) was conditional. He sent Moses to Israel with the big "if." **"Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob. . . 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant,* then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole Earth is mine, you will be for me *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'*** [my trustees]**. . . . So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak."** (Exodus 19:3-7, italics mine) **"The people all responded together, 'We will do everything the Lord has said.' So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord."** (Exodus 19:8) **Note:** Please review Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 if you have any question about the conditional nature of God's arrangement with Israel. God's appointment of trustees is always conditional.

The Lord gave Israel these instructions: **"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison** [of sin's curse] **and to release from the dungeon those who sit in [spiritual] darkness."** (Isaiah 42:6,7)

Israel failed to meet these terms and God's patience ended when Israel refused to receive Jesus as the Messiah. This is why Jesus terminated the trusteeship of Israel shortly before His death saying: **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "** (Matthew 23:37-39, italics mine)

After Jesus ascended, the Jews persecuted the apostles and the believers in Jesus. One reason was that early Christians understood that God had abandoned old Israel and created a new Israel. (James 1:1; 2:1; Galatians 3:28,29; Ephesians 2) Christians also understood that under the new covenant, all believers in Christ are trustees and commissioned to proclaim the gospel. (Matthew 28:19,20) Paul and Barnabas affirmed this transition in their thinking when speaking to the Gentiles: **"For this is what the Lord has commanded us** [that is, all believers

in Christ]**: 'I have made you** [to be a new Israel, you are now the seed of Abraham, heirs of the promise given to him, you are now] **a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the Earth.' When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."** (Acts 13:47,48)

The last nine words of Acts 13:48 are often used to justify the idea that God has predetermined who receives eternal life. If these were the only words on the topic of predestination, the conclusion would be reasonable. Since many other texts were written and the setting during which these words were spoken should be considered, they have a different meaning. These nine words mean, "Gentiles can receive salvation without becoming Jews." When God established Christians as His trustees, God opened the door to salvation to the Gentiles through Christ whereas the door to salvation had previously been through Israel. Under the new covenant, God ordained that Gentiles could become heirs of Abraham through Christ and this took old Israel entirely out of the loop. Therefore, the phrase, "all who were appointed [that is, the Father had predestined that the Gentiles should hear the gospel and those who were convicted of their need] for eternal life," believed.

From the very beginning, it was God's plan that after Jesus died, there would no longer be any distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Of course, the Jews could not know this (and it remains unknown to them) until God revealed this fact to Paul. Notice his words to the church at Ephesus: **"In reading this** [Paul is referring to his comments in Chapter 2]**, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."** (Ephesians 3:4-6)

"For He [the Father] **chose us** [all who believe] **in Him** [Jesus] **before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ** [whether Jew or Gentile]**, in accordance with His pleasure and will – to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves. . . In Him** [Jesus] **we were also chosen** [to become trustees]**, having been predestined** [for this task] **according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.** (Ephesians 1:4-6, 11,12)
James understood that old Israel had lost its trusteeship and new Israel had been appointed as trustees. This is why he defined "the 12 tribes of Israel" as believers in Christ. (James 1:1, 2:1) **He wrote, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us** [Christians] **birth through the word of truth, that we** [as believers in Christ] **might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created."** (James 1:17,18)

God has always had an "elect" on Earth who are appointed to serve as trustees. His chosen people have the task of distributing the love of the Father to His beneficiaries. **"But you** [believers in Christ] **are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you** [as trustees of His gospel] **may declare the praises of Him who**

called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you [Gentiles] **were not a people** [you were not a chosen nation like old Israel]**, but now you are the people of God** [as believers in Jesus you are the new Israel]**; once you had not received mercy** [such favor]**, but now** [through Jesus] **you have received mercy** [astonishing favor]**."** (1 Peter 2:9,10)

Larry Wilson

Debunking the "Repent or Else" Message

Author: Larry W. Wilson

“The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets and seers: ‘Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.’ But they would not listen . . . Therefore the Lord rejected all the people of Israel; He afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until He thrust them from His presence.” (2 Kings 17:13,14,20)

Thoughtful Christians are worried. They keep asking themselves how much longer God’s patience will last. Surely, the alarm on God’s “evil detector” is emitting a scary noise in Heaven’s courtroom. Christians know that God’s patience with evil has a limit. God destroyed the whole world in Noah’s day. God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God destroyed the ten northern tribes of Israel in the seventh century B.C. God destroyed the two remaining tribes in the fifth century B.C. Finally, God destroyed Jerusalem in the first century A.D. God also destroyed Babylon, Medo-Persia, Grecia, and Rome! God is changeless and so are His policies. His patience with degenerate and decadent behavior has a limit and when that limit is reached, destruction always follows. Today, many pastors and TV evangelists are warning the United States that God’s judgments are coming unless its citizens repent of their ways. These clergy support their “repent or else” message by citing God’s consistency in the past. They use examples like same sex marriage, dishonesty, corruption, rebellion, greed, predatory behavior, violence, and flagrant sexual immorality to make the point that the U.S. is going in the wrong direction.

A democracy can only flourish when people uphold the highest standards of personal responsibility and moral conduct. The United States is failing in both standards and is becoming a restless nation unfit and unprepared for self-rule. The seeds of hatred and revolution are popping up like dandelions. In the pursuit of riches, pleasure, and prosperity, the U.S. has forgotten its Creator and His rules. Spiritually speaking, the U.S. has been in moral decline for decades, and spiritual poverty is now mirrored by national poverty. More people are living in poverty than ever before!

The devil controls the owners of the media, and he sees to it that violence, sexual immorality, and idolatry are big moneymakers. A culture of sin is glamorized and glorified because the perpetrators believe their edgy programming rakes in “big bucks.” For decades, the media has fed a growing appetite for disgusting music, movies, TV programs, and magazine articles that delight in overstepping the boundaries of decency. Fewer people than ever attend church. The idea of doing right to please God has either been eclipsed by the goddesses of pleasure or the gods of idolatry and arrogance. A huge demonic force is causing a wave of opposition toward God’s laws throughout the United States. Open your eyes; this wave is more powerful and sophisticated than human prowess. *The United States has become alive to sin and dead to righteousness.* This is “the state of the union.”

The Problem with “Repent or Else”

You may not realize it, but there is a significant problem wrapped up in the “repent or else” message, and we cannot do anything about this problem right now. Nevertheless, you need to know about it, because a little foreknowledge will be helpful in days to come. Consider this: Corporate repentance within the United States is not going to happen. The “repent or else” message that we are hearing has accomplished nothing, because too many people are spiritually dead and they insist on remaining this way. Corporately speaking, there is no remedy for America’s decline or for that matter, the world’s decline. Looking at the distant future, the Lord said to Isaiah, **“The Earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the Earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore Earth’s inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left.”** (Isaiah 24:5,6)

The Bible gives one example when corporate repentance took place and God’s wrath was avoided. The prophet Jonah warned Nineveh of God’s coming wrath and the city repented, but repentance did not last long. Later, God sent king Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the city because God’s policies do not change. God consistently destroys cities and nations (and if necessary, the whole world) for one reason: *When a group of people reach a point where extended mercy has no redeeming effect, God’s wrath is aroused and His judgments follow.*

This brings me to another point: Even if the United States wakes up spiritually, it is too late to stop God’s oncoming wrath. The U.S. represents 5% of the world’s population, and the sins of the whole world are so great that mankind cannot atone for them. Of course, it is not too late for any individual to repent, forsake his sins, and receive the gift of salvation; but corporately speaking, it is too late for this nation or any other nation to repent. The world is polluted with bloodshed. Its religions are polluted with blasphemy and man-made traditions. Schools are polluted with a view of science that denies the existence of our Creator and Redeemer. The media and airwaves are polluted with every imaginable display of sin.

There is not enough time left to turn the world around. Long ago, the Father set a date for the end of the world. He foreknew that corporate repentance would not happen, and I believe His patience with Earth expired in 1994 (when the Jubilee Calendar ended). Even though God’s patience has ended, He is not willing that any should perish. Revelation 7 indicates that since 1994, four angels have been waiting for God’s servants to be sealed before they hurt the Earth. This date set by the Father must arrive before corporate destruction occurs. Christians have been preaching the gospel of Jesus for two thousand years, and this only proves that no amount of preaching or evangelizing can change the world corporately. It’s over. Earth is doomed. I think the “repent or else” message is a well-intentioned effort that will soon produce unexpected consequences.

God’s Coming Judgments

The books of Daniel and Revelation contain a road map revealing God’s plans. They describe a series of judgments that will soon fall on notably wicked places. When God releases His

wrath, there will be death, sorrow, suffering, and destruction on an unimaginable scale. The survivors will quickly conclude that God has spoken, because everyone will see that God's wrath fell on *notably wicked places*. The first judgment will be a meteoric firestorm that burns up a third of the Earth. (Revelation 8:7) A few days later, thousands of wicked cities will be washed off the map by an asteroid impacting an ocean. The resulting tsunami (several hundred feet high) will cause a ring of destruction around that ocean that is unimaginable. Then, the third judgment will be a second asteroid impacting a continent well known for its wickedness. This impact will fracture the geologic strata. Underground rivers and aquifers will be contaminated with buried sewage and toxic waste. Even though the impact will kill everyone at ground zero, millions of people who live hundreds of miles from the impact zone will also die after drinking the contaminated water. (Revelation 8:10,11) Finally, a series of volcano eruptions will occur. This judgment will bury hundreds of cities with ash and ejecta. Moreover, billions of tons of ash and soot will enter the jet stream, and the result will be darkness over the middle third of the planet, where most people live. The survivors will huddle in darkness as nuclear winter begins. There will be an extended period of darkness. No sunlight means no crops, and no crops mean global famine.

According to Revelation 6:8, these four judgments will destroy about two billion people. When these terrors occur, clergy of all faiths, who have been reluctant to call sin by its right name, will manage to wake up; and with a great show of solemn authority they will tell the survivors the obvious, "God is angry with all mankind." In this setting, everyone will be ready to listen to the "repent or else" pastors and TV evangelists. These pastors and TV evangelists will point to their record and say with the utmost confidence, "I told you so." With these leaders' advanced insight into the Bible, many people will suddenly find them credible, because the people did not know that: (a) corporate repentance was not possible, (b) time had run out, and (c) God's judgments were coming anyway. This level of credibility is exactly what Lucifer wants for these clergy!

The first four judgments described in Revelation 8 will occur quickly (according to my calculation, within a span of about two months). During the darkness of the fourth judgment, the religious and political leaders of the world will manage to assemble. The political leaders of the world will hear the clergy explain the following: God is obviously angry with all nations because notably wicked places within all nations have been destroyed; and man's only hope for survival is simple: Appease God or die. There must be swift repentance and reformation otherwise, He will kill us all.

The terrified survivors respond to the idea of repentance and reformation by trembling with fear of more judgments to come. Many will say, "Whatever God wants, we will gladly do." Given this voluntary acquiescence and fearing more wrath to come, the religious and political leaders of the world will proceed to fulfill a terrible prophecy. Revelation 13:1-8 describes man's response to the first four trumpets. The leaders of the world will create "a beast of a government." This crisis government will be given authority over every nation. The name for this government will be called "Babylon" ("confusion") in the book of Revelation because its laws and directives will be maddening.

Babylon will be given authority to do whatever is necessary to appease the Almighty, but a

religiously diverse world cannot appease one God. What is proper for Catholics is not proper for Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Atheists, or Protestants. Therefore, Babylon will create laws for appeasing God that are in direct opposition with its own laws! Depending on the majority religion of each nation, Babylon will create a series of "sin-less laws." The idea is that each nation needs to sin less, therefore each nation will be given laws that are in harmony with the prevailing religion of that nation. These laws will be enacted and enforced within each nation by its own military and police.

You may be wondering about two things. First, how can one angry God be appeased when Babylon commands Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Protestants, Hindus, and Atheists to do different things to appease the same God? No global solution, not even Babylon, can overcome man's religious diversity, but this fact will not concern the leadership of Babylon. This is why the laws created by Babylon will be so maddening. You may also wonder, how will Babylon be able to impose its will on all nations? When God's judgments begin, all nations will be forced into crisis mode. All constitutional rights and freedoms will be suspended. *Martial law will be put into effect.* This sudden change in the governance of all nations will enable the leaders of Babylon to impose its laws on the political leaders of the nations, and none will disobey Babylon. Babylon will dictate behavior and impose worship. Babylon's laws will have very powerful teeth, and the penalty for disobedience will be severe. The irony of this story is that God's judgments will *appear* to suddenly stop! (Note: The apparent cessation of God's judgments will have nothing to do with Babylon's efforts. The next judgment (the fifth trumpet) does not occur until 2½ years later.)

The leaders of Babylon will rejoice and think their dramatic efforts to appease God has caused His judgments to cease. The people of Earth will hear the religious and political leaders of Babylon boasting, "Behold! The laws of Babylon are a good thing. God is pleased, there have been no more judgments. We are doing the right things!" During this time, Babylon will blaspheme God, slander God, and make war against His saints. Babylon will conquer the saints and force everyone on Earth to bend to its demonic will. See Revelation 13:1-8.

I know that it sounds crazy that anyone should want to debunk the "repent or else" message that is being espoused today, but Bible prophecy does not support this message. It is too late and repentance at this late date is not going to happen anyway. I have written this report because I think this "fine-sounding message" will have a terrible outcome. In a similar vein, when the leaders of Babylon boast that their extreme efforts to end sinful behavior brought a sudden end to God's judgments, it will be perfectly clear that those speaking for God have no understanding of God's Word or His will. And in case you are wondering, the Bible has a message for right now: **"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."** (Colossians 3:5,6)

Larry Wilson

The Book of Galatians (Part 1)

Author: Larry W. Wilson

> **"He** [Paul] **writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."** (2 Peter 3:16, insertion mine)

The King James Version of the Old Testament only mentions the word "faith" twice while the New Testament uses it 245 times. Given this striking imbalance, some people might conclude that prior to the cross, salvation came through obedience. (This lack of discussion on faith in the Old Testament is sometimes used by advocates of dispensationalism; the idea that salvation is offered to people in different ways at different times.)

I believe that faith is only mentioned twice in the Old Testament because God wanted to demonstrate the properties of salvific faith before revealing the intricate details of how He uses grace, law, faith, and works to determine our eternal destiny. The Bible says faith without works is meaningless. (James 2:17) So, the Old Testament is full of examples of obedience exercised due to faith. For example, there is Abel and his sacrifice, Noah and his ark, Abraham leaving home and later offering Isaac on the altar, and Rahab protecting the spies. When writing Hebrews 11, Paul used these Old Testament examples to show the works that faith will produce, and to demonstrate that God's salvation has been faith-based since sin began. I am sure one of Paul's favorite Bible verses was, ". . . but the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4) and he knew that Abraham, ". . . believed in the Lord; and He [the Lord] counted it to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15;6, insertion mine)

Jews and Gentiles in the Early Church

The early Christian church was energized by a series of miracles such as Jesus' resurrection and ascension and many marvelous manifestations of the Holy Spirit. However, miracles were not the main attraction of early Christianity; it was its message. Christians had a new gospel that taught salvation comes to anyone who believes and obeys! A Christian believes that Jesus came to Earth as "the Lamb of God" and ascended to Heaven where He sits on God's throne. A born-again Christian is willing to obey Jesus' commandments. (Matthew 28:19,20) For Gentiles in the first century A.D., Jesus' gospel meant there was no need to become a Jew. For Jews, Jesus' gospel ended the anxiety of not knowing if good works were enough to atone for sins.

During the first century A.D., the Pharisees controlled religious thought within Judaism. The Sadducees differed in some respects with Pharisees, but both groups united in the belief that God required rigorous obedience to the law for salvation. If a Jew died with enough "good works" to outweigh his sins, God would save him because he was a son of Abraham and could participate in the promises God gave Abraham. (Luke 3:8) The Pharisees understood that salvation could not be attained through works alone, this was very important to be a descendant

of Abraham. The righteousness of Abraham (Genesis 15:6) was also needed for salvation. Therefore, a man could only inherit the righteousness of Abraham if he was a descendant of Abraham and all descendants had to be circumcised per the everlasting covenant. (Genesis 17:13)

Of course, the realities that faced the early Christian church cannot be expressed in one or two paragraphs. I have oversimplified the issues so you can better appreciate the “can of worms” Paul opened when he began confronting Gentile and Jewish converts with their distortions of faith. Their religious baggage was about to derail the early church, so God empowered a former Pharisee to keep it from imploding.

Paul's Combined Message to the Early Church

It did not take long before Christians observed that Paul’s letters and logic were easy to abuse because he spoke simultaneously to two opposing schools of thought. Jewish converts came into the church heavily influenced by legalism. (Acts 15:5) Gentile converts came into the church with deep-seated feelings of anti-Semitism and a disdain for obeying religious rules. (Galatians 5:15-21) Jewish converts wanted to continue circumcision, the laws of Moses, and Jewish traditions. The Gentiles wanted a salvation that had nothing to do with sanctification. The church was a mess. Ironically, these two extremes still exist today within the body of Christ and each continues to use Paul’s writings to defend their position.

Justification Before God

As you read Paul’s letter, remember both sides of the conflict. The primary issue of Galatians is whether justification before God comes through faith, obedience, or a combination of the two. The nature of justification was a crucial topic in the early church because the outcome determines behavior. Does God actually want His children to do anything specific? I have added commentary within brackets [ ].

Galatians 1:1-5 **“Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead – and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”**

Galatians 1:6-9 **“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting** [my gospel. I am] **the one who called you by the grace of Christ and** [now you] **are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from Heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned** [because the gospel I presented to you came straight from Jesus Himself]**! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted** [from me]**, let him be eternally condemned!”**

Galatians 1:10-17 [My words are harsh and I know some of you will become angry.] **Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men** [as I did when I lived as a Pharisee]**, I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I** [hated Christians and I] **persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in** [the rigors and leadership of] **Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into** [the wilderness of] **Arabia and later returned to Damascus."**

Galatians 1:18-24 **"Then after three years** [in the wilderness, carefully aligning Scripture with the revelations that were given me]**, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord's brother** [the overseer of the church in Jerusalem]**. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' And** [after they heard my gospel] **they praised God because of me."**

Galatians 2:1-3 [After my conversion, I lived and worked among the Gentiles for a long time.] **Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation** [that was given to me] **and** [I] **set before them** [the leaders of the church] **the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running** [contrary to the teachings of the other apostles] **or had run my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled** [by the apostles] **to be circumcised, even though he was a** [an uncircumcised] **Greek."**

Galatians 2:4-8 **"This matter** [of circumcision] **arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves** [to the law of Moses where circumcision was thought to be a means for justification]**. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. As for those** [others who were present] **who seemed to be important – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance – those men added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they saw** [that my ordination and gospel had come from Jesus Himself] **that I had been** [chosen and] **entrusted with the task of preaching the** [same] **gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles."**

Galatians 2:9-11 **"James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars** [in the church]**, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the** [divine] **grace**

given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. [But the problem started] **When Peter came to Antioch, I** [Paul] **opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.** [Even though Peter, one of the closest companions of Jesus while He was on Earth, was highly respected as a Christian leader, but he needed to be rebuked in public for the cause of Christ.]"

Galatians 2:12 **"Before certain men came from James** [the overseer of the church in Jerusalem]**, he** [Peter] **used to eat** [and freely socialize] **with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he** [Peter] **began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group."**

The so-called "circumcision group" was a group of Jewish converts who insisted that all Gentile converts must enter into the covenant of circumcision. (Genesis 17:13) The group believed that only Abraham's heirs could be saved. Therefore, if any man wanted to be an heir of the promises made to Abraham, he had to be circumcised.
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Galatians 2:13-16 **"The other Jews** [belonging to the church] **joined him** [Peter] **in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was** [confused and] **led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel** [of Christ which treats Jew and Gentile alike]**, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew** [because here in Galatia you have ignored numerous Jewish laws and traditions such as eating with the Gentiles and foods offered to idols]**. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'**

'We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified [made perfect in God's sight] **by observing the law, but** [we know that justification comes] **by faith** [alone] **in Jesus Christ. So we, too** [as Jews]**, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be** [or can be] **justified.** [It is impossible for a sinner to perfectly obey God's law. Given enough time, every man will fail. Therefore, it is impossible for a sinner to stand before God as though he never sinned – fully justified by his works.]**"**

Galatians 2:17-19 **"If, while we seek to be justified** [through faith] **in Christ,** [and] **it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners** [because faith does not abolish the law of God that defines sin]**, does that mean that Christ promotes sin?** [Does trusting in Christ for justification permit us to freely violate God's laws?] **Absolutely not!** [Consider my reaction to Peter.] **If I rebuild what I** [have recently] **destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker.** [In other words, if I return to my Jewish religion and I set out to obey its laws to be perfect before God, I will clearly prove that I am a lawbreaker and I cannot possibly justify myself in God's sight because I cannot perfectly obey all those laws all consistently!] **For through the** [condemnation of the] **law I died to the law** [I admitted that I could not save myself, therefore] **so that I might live for God."**

Galatians 2:20-21 **"I have been crucified with Christ** [He died for my sins] **and I no longer**

live [to glorify in a manmade righteousness]**, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body** [is directed at glorifying Christ through obedience to His commands, but I cannot justify myself according to my works, therefore]**, I live by faith in the Son of God,** [trusting in Him for my justification, doing all that He has commanded – not to be declared righteous through works, but I do obey His laws and commands out of love for Him] **who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God** [by trying to establish my own righteousness through works]**, for if righteousness could be gained through** [obeying] **the law, Christ died for nothing!"**

To be continued. Read the rest of this article at this **link**.

Larry Wilson

The Book of Galatians (Part 2)

Author: Larry W. Wilson

This is the continuation of the January 2016 *Wake Up Report!* To see the first part of the article click this **link**.

Legalism and Faith

The book of Galatians centers on a controversy that existed in the early Christian church which still exists today. Every Christian today should thoughtfully consider the proper relationship between grace and law, faith and obedience. God chose Paul to address this matter because he had years of experience on both sides of the issue. Formerly, Paul had been "a Pharisee of the Pharisees," a well-studied legalist. After his conversion to Christ and several years of study, Paul became a relentless advocate for the idea that "salvation comes through faith alone." He had physical wounds and scars of persecution to prove that "faith alone" is far more than intellectual assent. If Paul's "faith alone" position could be summarized, I think Paul would say: "Faith in God means depending on God to do things which are beyond human ability and believing that God will keep His promises. Faith in God includes doing right in God's sight (obeying God's laws) without regard for consequences. All believers must understand that obeying God's laws cannot produce the righteousness needed for salvation. God provides that righteousness and grants it only to those who will live by faith. This returns us to depending on God to do things that are beyond human ability."

Let's continue reading the book of Galatians. My commentary is included within brackets [ ].

Galatians 3:1-5 **"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you** [with religious bamboozle that demands circumcision]**? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified** [for your sins]**. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the** [manifestations of the Holy] **Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you** [how can you be] **so foolish? After beginning** [your walk] **with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal** [of justification] **by human effort? Have you suffered so much** [ridicule and persecution] **for nothing– if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?"**

Galatians 3:6-8 **"Consider Abraham: 'He believed God** [when God said he would become the father of many nations]**, and it was credited to him as righteousness** [because he did not doubt that God would fulfill His promise]**.' Understand, then, that those who believe** [who fully rely on God's promises] **are children of Abraham** [because they believe God's promises just as Abraham did (John 8:39)]**. The** [Old Testament] **Scripture foresaw** [centuries ago] **that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and** [God] **announced** [this mystery in] **the gospel in advance to Abraham** [when He said]**: 'All nations [on Earth] will be blessed through you.' "**

Galatians 3:9-12 **"So those who have faith** [in God, instead of trying to justify themselves through works] **are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. All who rely on observing the law** [to be saved] **are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.' Clearly no one is justified** [or can be justified] **before God by** [obeying] **the law, because,** [the Scriptures say in Habakkuk 2:4] **'The righteous will live by faith.'** [This is a critical point: No one, not even Abraham, has ever been justified before God through obedience. Abraham was not perfect. He lied about his wife Sarah, committed adultery with Hagar, and at times, let his trust in God's promises go.]

The law is not based on faith [God's laws are divine obligations which He created and imposed on mankind for our benefit]; **on the contrary,** [God has said, Ezekiel 20:11,] **'The man who does these things will live by them.' "**

This declaration means that the man who obeys God's laws will be blessed because God's laws are not harmful. Instead, His laws are the product of divine wisdom and they bring good results into our lives. Do not be confused, the blessings that come with obeying God's laws and the righteousness needed for salvation are two separate topics. For example, the law says 'Thou shalt not steal.' If I do not steal his possessions, my neighbor is blessed and so am I. My neighbor suffers no loss and I am not condemned as a thief. However, I have not necessarily fulfilled the intent of God's law if I do not steal my neighbor's possessions. The law is only fulfilled when I love my neighbor enough that I would rather cut off my hand than to steal his property. Such love is only acquired through faith in Christ. God has promised to remove our selfishness and unrighteousness. If I am tempted to steal (which is a selfish desire), I can overcome this temptation through the gift of the Spirit. Jesus has made two promises: He has promised to give us victory over sin by replacing selfish passions with divine power. (Romans 6:14) We ask for this gift of power for Him to send it! Jesus has also promised to put a new heart in every person who asks for it. (Ezekiel 36:26) The purpose of the law is to show our weaknesses, our deviation from righteousness, and our need for a Savior. The law is not opposed to the Spirit; it is opposed to our sinful nature. The law is indispensable and reveals our need for a righteousness that we cannot produce. The gospel of Jesus is this: He promises transforming power for everyone who seeks it. (Romans 1;16; Acts 1:8) Do you believe His promise?

Galatians 3:13-15 **"Christ redeemed us** [those who put their faith in Him] **from the curse of the law** [which has condemned all sinners to eternal death] **by becoming a curse for us,** [I can say that Jesus was cursed for us] **for it is written** [Deuteronomy 21:23]**: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.' He redeemed us in order that the** [promised] **blessing given to Abraham might** [also] **come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we** [Jews and Gentiles alike] **might receive the promise of the** [Holy] **Spirit** [who changes our rebellious minds and sanctifies our sinful hearts. He causes us to love God and one another wholeheartedly because this is humanly impossible]**. Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case."**

The Promises God Gave to Abraham

God gave three promises to Abraham. First, God promised that his descendants would be given possession of the land. Second, God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. Third, God promised Abraham that through him, the nations of Earth would be blessed, meaning that the Savior of the world would come through his bloodline.

Galatians 3:16-18 **The** [three] **promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed** [singular]**.** [If you examine Genesis13:15,16; 15:5,13,18] **The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,'** [plural] **meaning many people, but** [the promise says] **'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law** [Ten Commandments and the laws of Moses, were] **introduced 430 years later** [after God gave the three promises to Abraham. The law]**, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the** [three] **promise**[s]**. For if the inheritance depends on** [observing] **the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise."**

Galatians 3:19,20 [I know that this letter will be challenged by those false brothers who have come in among you. They will scoff,] **What, then, was the purpose of the law** [if salvation depends on faith]**?** [The answer is obvious.] **It** [the Law] **was added because of** [man's darkness and ignorance. God kindly chose to enlighten mankind by giving us His laws so we would be blessed and understand the curse, nature, and behavior of sin and the penalty for] **transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.** [We know that any violation of God's laws, whether willful or through ignorance, always brings sorrow, pain, and death, therefore] **The law was put into effect through** [the ministry of] **angels** [who were directed] **by a mediator** [who represents us before the Father]**. A mediator, however, does not represent just one party;** [our mediator understands the needs of fallen man as well as the objectives of the Father] **but** [the] **God** [head] **is one** [in purpose, plan, and action]**."**

Galatians 3:21-22 **"Is the law, therefore, opposed to the** [three] **promises of God** [given to Abraham]**? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart** [eternal] **life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin,** [we have all sinned, we are soiled by our sins and no one can live very long without sinning] **so** [God has provided a better way for us to receive] **that what was promised** [to Abraham]**,** [the promise] **being given** [has been extended to all of us] **through faith in Jesus Christ,** [who are Abraham's seed, so that everything] **might be given to those who believe** [in God as Abraham believed in God]**."**

Galatians 3:23,24 **"Before this faith** [our knowledge of Jesus and His gospel] **came** [to Earth]**, we** [Jews] **were held prisoners by the law,** [we were] **locked up** [and confused in matters of faith and obedience] **until faith** [in God] **should be revealed** [properly demonstrated and clarified by Jesus]**. So the law was put in charge to** [show us our sinful nature and our natural weakness. This knowledge was supposed to] **lead us to** [our need for a Savior who could save us from our sins. For centuries, Israel conducted sacrifices on the Altar of Burnt Offering, but we did not understand our need for the Lamb of God. We thought we were righteous because we

did what God commanded, but little did we know. This foolishness changed when] **Christ** [came and died. We now see] **that we might be justified by faith** [alone]**."**

Gal 3:25 **Now that faith** [has been demonstrated and clarified through Christ who] **has come** [into the world]**, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.**

The law acts as a guardian so we can understand our need of a Savior. Because the law could not be changed, Jesus had to die. This demonstrates the relationship between faith and law much more clearly. The promise of salvation has been extended to all repentant sinners and this promise is only possible through faith in the perfect life (His righteousness) and death of Christ (His atonement). God insists that sanctification and discipleship must never end. Living by faith means overcoming temptation. Living by faith means granting the Holy Spirit freedom and authority to impose guilt within our hearts whenever we sin. Living by faith also means giving the Holy Spirit permission to transform our self-seeking hearts so that we increasingly live in harmony with God and His laws. Justification can only come through faith. Sanctification comes through the sweet prompting and the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit leads us into joyful obedience to prepare us to live in God's presence. Do not confuse justification with sanctification. God Himself has provided admission to Heaven through faith in Jesus (He is our righteousness). The Holy Spirit is concerned with transforming our selfish hearts so that we might love God and our neighbors wholeheartedly (He is the source of power for sanctification). The Spirit of God will not promote rebellion against God's laws. If we are willing, the Holy Spirit will put the law of God within our hearts and minds! (Hebrews 8:10)

Galatians 3:26-29 [In summary, if you live by faith, then] **"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ** ['s righteousness]**. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** [The covenant of circumcision ended at the cross. God no longer considers a man to be an heir of Abraham because of circumcision. Because] **If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed** [sperm]**, and heirs according to the** [three] **promise** [(s) that await fulfillment]**."**

Paul Writes to the Jews

Galatians 4:1-7 "[To my Jewish brothers in the church at Galatia, I have a few words. Compare the promise of justification with a well-known civil process.] **What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we** [Jews] **were** [spiritually ignorant and immature like] **children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world** [that is, we Jews wrongly thought for centuries that we were justified by rigorous obedience.] **But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under** [the obligations imposed by] **law, to redeem those under** [who lived under the obligations of] **law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.** ['Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.' (Romans 8:14)] **Because you are sons, God sent the** [Holy] **Spirit** [to you, the Holy Spirit serves under the authority] **of his Son** [and He has been sent] **into our hearts, the Spirit who** [directs us to consider the goodness of the Father,

who also] **calls out, "Abba,** [meaning, God is our] **Father." So you** [my Jewish brothers in Christ] **are no longer a slave** [subject to guardians and trustees]**, but** [you are] **a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."**

Paul Writes to the Gentiles

Galatians 4:8-12 "[To my Gentile brothers in the church at Galatia, I have a few words.] **Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those** [idols] **who by nature are not gods** [at all]**.** [Formerly, you believed it was necessary to appease those gods for fear you would suffer great harm if you did not.] **But now that you know** [the truth about the living] **God – or rather are** [now] **known by God** [as His sons] **– how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles** [of living as a slave to some god]**? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?** [Look at your foolishness!] **You** [have embraced the teachings of the false brothers from Jerusalem and you] **are observing special days** [feast days] **and** [you are observing the arrival of new] **months** [with new moon feasts. These religious traditions have nothing to do with serving Christ.] **and** [you are observing the growing] **seasons** [with the presentation of first fruits and the wave sheaf offering] **and** [even attempting to observe Sabbath**] years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. I plead with you, brothers, become** [free of these matters] **like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong."**

The final segment will be published next month. If you do not want to wait, you can read the final segment at this **link**.

The Book of Galatians (Part 3)

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This is a continuation of two previous articles. If you would like to read the previous articles, you can click on the following links: **Part 1** **Part 2**

Paul continues his messages to the Jews and Gentiles in Galatia.

Galatians 4:13-16 "[I have been told that some in the church have had a change of heart towards me. I am no longer welcome in Galatia.] **As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you** [you were very supportive of my physical needs during my recovery]**, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"**

Galatians 4:17- 20 **"Those people** [from Jerusalem belonging to the circumcision group] **are zealous to win you over** [to a gospel of justification through obedience]**, but** [it is] **for no good. What they** [really] **want is to alienate you from us** [who know freedom in Christ]**, so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until** [the ways and joy of] **Christ is** [are] **formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!"**

Galatians 4:21-26 **"Tell me, you who want to be under the law** [you who want to be justified through obedience]**, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman** [Hagar] **and the other by the free woman** [Sarah]**. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way** [through the works of the flesh]**; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise** [Sarah was too old to conceive]**. These things may be taken figuratively, for the** [two] **women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and** [it produces] **bears children who are to be slaves** [to the law]**: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia** [where the law was given] **and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she** [Hagar] **is in slavery with her children** [Jerusalem]**.** [The children of Hagar think they can be saved through obedience and they are slaves to the idea that salvation comes through works of the flesh. I know this well, for it was my zealous experience and religion at one time!] **But the** [New] **Jerusalem that is above** [is comprised of those who believe God's promises. They are truly] **is free, and she** [New Jerusalem] **is our mother."**

Galatians 4:27- 30 **"For it is written** [in an oracle – Isaiah 54:1]**: "Be glad, O barren woman** [Sarah]**, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman** [Sarah] **than of her who has a husband."** [This oracle caricatures Sarah, who was a barren woman for most of her life. But

God kept His promise and she miraculously conceived. The idea is that Sarah, the barren woman, would have many times more children than any ordinary woman could possibly have through the works of the flesh.] **Now you,** [Gentile and Jewish] **brothers** [in the Lord are]**, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time, the son born in the ordinary way** [Ishmael] **persecuted the son** [Isaac] **born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? "**[God commanded Abraham] **Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."**

Galatians 4:31 **"Therefore, brothers, we** [who are believers in Jesus] **are not children of the slave woman** [our righteousness does not come from our obedience]**, but** [we are] **of the free woman** [our righteousness comes from Christ through faith]**."**

Although obedience is required of all mankind, we cannot justify ourselves before God through obedience. We are truly free even though the law imposes its obligations on us. Our joy is in knowing that Christ is our Savior. He is our righteousness. We want to please Him for He has provided the righteousness we need. Paul told the brothers in Rome the same thing: **"For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.' "** (Romans 1:17)

Salvation Comes to Those Who Have Faith

Galatians 5:1,2 **"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all."**

Paul was writing that if the church from Galatia listened to the men from Jerusalem and submitted to circumcision, their confidence before God would be found in the deeds of the flesh and they would slip deeper and deeper into the slavery that legalism demands. Their religious experience would be reduced to do's and don'ts (the life of a slave) and the joy of knowing the riches of Christ would fade away. Their religious experience would become a ritual and their growth in Christ would become stale because there was no faith. Do we want to deceive ourselves and think that we save ourselves from eternal death by obedience or do we want to know God and walk with Him in Spirit and Truth? Salvation comes to everyone who believes the promises of God. **"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."** (Romans 3:8)

Galatians 5:3-6 **"Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.** [You are obligated to obey more laws than you can possibly remember!] **You who are trying to be justified by** [obeying the] **law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace** [God's favor]**.** [Your efforts and Christ's sacrifice will have no value.] **But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for** [the fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham in] **which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any** [salvific] **value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."**

Galatians 5:7-10 "[My dear children,] **You were running a good race. Who cut in on you** [pun intended] **and kept you from obeying the truth?** [I know who. I am well acquainted with the circumcision group. They love their slavery and self-righteousness. They foolishly think obedience makes them righteous in God's sight.] **That kind of persuasion does not come from the one** [the Holy Spirit] **who calls you** [to follow Christ]**.** [Jesus said,] **'A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.'** [This means a little heresy contaminates the whole religion.] **I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view** [than believing in God's promises]**. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be."**

Galatians 5:11 **"Brothers,** [if you submit to circumcision, you will forfeit Christ to become a Jew] **if I am still preaching circumcision** [as some brothers from Jerusalem falsely claim]**, why am I still being persecuted** [by the Jews]**?** [If I was advocating the teachings of Judaism] **In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.**

The Jews did not accept this truth: Jesus terminated the "everlasting covenant" of circumcision given to Abraham which was a covenant in the flesh. The Lord showed Paul that **"A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."** (Romans 2:28,29)]

Galatians 5:12-15 **"As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!** [If they did this, they would have no more offspring!] **You, my brothers, were called to be free** [in Christ]**. But** [be careful,] **do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature** [which is naturally hostile toward the laws of God]**; rather,** [humbly accept God's justification through the atonement and righteousness provided by Christ and] **serve one another in love. The entire law** [pertaining to man's duty to man] **is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."**

Live by the Holy Spirit, Not Our Sinful Nature

Galatians 5:16-17 **"So I say, live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.** ["Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace. The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not and cannot submit to God's law. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." (Romans 8:5-8)] **For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."**

Galatians 5:18-24 **"But if you are led by the Spirit** [to obey God's laws]**, you are not under law** [as a means for justification]**.** [Notice how rebellion against God's law works:] **The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and**

witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. [This is a crucial truth. Do not be deceived. You cannot claim that you are led by the Spirit when you rebel against the laws of God! The Holy Spirit's objective is to put God's laws in our hearts and minds so that we might enjoy eternity with God!] **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and** [rebellious and sensual] **desires."**

Galatians 5:25-6:5 **"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit** [who knows our thoughts and mind]**. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens** [concern yourselves with the suffering of those around you]**, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something** [righteous] **when** [actually,] **he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions [by looking into the intent of the law and after noticing his own failures and** successes through faith] **Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load** [of responsibilities as far as possible]**."**

Galatians 6:6-10 **"Anyone who receives instruction in the Word must share all good things with his instructor.** [Be charitable to those who teach the Word and carry its burden.] **Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a** [good] **harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."**

Galatians 6:11,12 **"See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!** [Because I am nearly blind and no one around me can take dictation, I have written this letter with my own hand.] **Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.** [They foolishly think that the Jews will approve of us if we consent to circumcision. This is totally false. Any compromise or dilution on the importance of the perfect life and sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross will derail the gospel of Christ and in due time, Christianity will be absorbed within the confusion and darkness of Judaism.]**"**

Galatians 6:13-18 **"Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.** [They want to return to Jerusalem and say to the high priest, "Look, here are the 'backsliders' that returned to Judaism!"] **May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything** [now]**; what counts** [in God's sight] **is a new creation.** [Believe God's promises, walk by faith, allow the law to serve its purpose, and the Holy Spirit will make you a new

creation! When God's laws are written in our hearts and minds His image is restored in us!] **Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule** ["Stop thinking that obedience will bring salvation." I say this]**, even to the Israel of God** [who has been separated from ancient Israel. (James 1:1; 2:1)]**. Finally, let no one cause me trouble** [dispute the things which the Lord has revealed to me]**, for I** [am a servant of the Lord Jesus and I] **bear on my body the marks** [and stripes] **of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen."**

Larry Wilson
March 2016

Should Sinners Shun Sinners? (Part 1)

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Church Rejection

Shunning is a religious practice in which a religious body chooses to socially and emotionally avoid a person or group of people. Shunning can take the form of censure (a person is not permitted to speak openly or hold church office) or it can be as serious as expulsion from membership. If a church shuns a person or group, it almost always causes or is the result of agitation within the church. One party in the church will find the practice hurtful and offensive; the opposing party will say it is a necessity. Religious shunning or rejection invariably results in divisiveness and bitterness which can last for decades.

In some circumstances, it is biblically sound for Christians to practice shunning after a period of grace has been extended to the person or persons who are at fault. The Bible teaches the practice of shunning is proper and necessary. Shunning is the only tool a church has for dealing with defiance.

God knows that every person on Earth is a sinner. The Bible declares: **"For *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:23, italics mine) Many Christians (and especially non-Christians) do not know that God divides sinners into three categories. These categories are (a) defiant sinners, (b) sinners who are serious about overcoming sin and pleasing God, and (c) spiritually dead sinners, who are totally ignorant of their offensive ways in God's sight.

God is willing to forgive any repentant sinner, but He will only forgive when the sinner is willing to admit the sin and turn away from it. **"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice** [no atonement] **for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."** (Hebrews 10:26, insertion mine) The Bible also assures us that, **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** (1 John 1:9)

God Leads By Example

The first case of shunning actually began in Heaven. When God's patience with Lucifer and his followers reached the limit of divine forbearance, God cast the devil and his angels out of heaven. He "cut off" the devil and his angels from the blessings and benefits of Heaven because of their defiance. Centuries later, in Noah's day, the entire world "shunned" Noah and God's offer of safety in the ark. This demonstrates the point that shunning works both ways; defiant sinners will shun God's messengers. After the Exodus, God told Moses to announce that anyone who **sinned defiantly** must be "cut off" from Israel. In those days, the phrase, "cut off" meant death because shunned people were not permitted to receive food, water or any form of support. In Isreal, defiance came with a stiff price. To put shunning in context, please

consider God's declarations:

"Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it [the incense used in the temple] **holy to the Lord. Whoever makes any like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from his people."** (Exodus 30:37,38, insertion mine)

"And wherever you live, you must not eat the blood of any bird or animal. If anyone eats blood, that person must be cut off from his people." (Leviticus 7:26,27)

"Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it instead of bringing it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to the Lord in front of the tabernacle of the Lord – that man shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood and must be cut off from his people." (Leviticus 17:3,4)

"Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people." (Exodus 31:14)

"Do not approach a woman to have sexual relations during the uncleanness of her monthly period. Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her. . . Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. . . . Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. . . . And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. Everyone who does any of these detestable things – such persons must be cut off from their people." (See all of Leviticus 18:6-29.)

After reviewing these few verses, we can see that a God of love will not tolerate defiance indefinitely. Of course, He extends a period of grace to all sinners, but when He concludes that extended mercy has no redeeming effect, He deals with the guilty. In fact, the Bible teaches that if a person commits the unpardonable sin God will shun him until he is destroyed! God requires shunning because defiance is contagious and once it infects a group of people, rebellion can quickly spread. For example, if a captain allows one or two soldiers to display defiance in the ranks day after day, it will not take long until the entire company is out of control. In Numbers 16, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram began a rebellion against Moses which grew to 250 men. These men were angry with Moses because Moses was doing everything the Lord had commanded. The Lord Himself opened up the earth and swallowed the families of the rebels because they too were contaminated with the virus of defiance. Then, He burned the 250 men to death. **"And fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense."** (Numbers 16:35)

Sexual Sins in the Corinth Church

About A.D. 50, the apostle Paul went to Corinth, a city of about 100,000 inhabitants, where he

stayed for 18 months. During this time, he taught the gospel of Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles. Paul's efforts to establish a Christian church in Corinth were somewhat successful, but the church in Corinth was not stable. The Jewish and Gentile converts were constantly struggling over the practice and direction of Christianity. About five years after Paul left Corinth, he learned the church was in serious trouble. Many of the Gentile converts in the church had embraced a theological virus, which historians believe Nicolas of Alexandria, Egypt crafted. He taught that the "holiness of the mind" was insulated from the "deeds of the flesh." The Gentile converts liked the concept of a gulf between the holiness of the mind and the deeds of the flesh because it meant that the "legal perfection" favored by the Jewish converts was unnecessary. The Nicolaitans believed that as long as people properly believed that Jesus died for their sins, their salvation was guaranteed. Therefore, let the flesh have its way!

When Paul heard about this, he sent a strongly worded letter to the church saying: **"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived** [with the false doctrine of the Nicolaitans]**: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed** [of your guilt]**, you were sanctified** [through repentance]**, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God** [and I can't believe you have returned to your sins.]**."** (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, insertions mine)

Paul made a declaration because members of the church at Corinth were engaging in sexual immorality: **"I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother** [a Christian] **but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat."** (1 Corinthians 5:9-11, insertion mine)

Paul cites the Biblical basis for shunning in his second letter to the church at Corinth: **"What harmony is there between Christ and [the god] Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.' 'Therefore come out from them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.' "** (2 Corinthians 6:15-17) God required believers to shun defiant sinners and has plainly said in Leviticus 18 that sexual misconduct is defiant sin. Therefore, sexually immoral Christians must be cut off from the church if they insist on living in defiance! Notice these two verses: **"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge** [Greek: condemn] **the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."** (Hebrews 13:4) The last words Jesus uttered in the book of Revelation are perfectly clear. **"Blessed are those who** [repent and choose to] **wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the** [holy] **city** [New Jerusalem]**. Outside** [the city] **are the dogs** [those who rejected my love and defied my commands]**, those who practice magic arts** [spiritists who practice voodoo and the occult]**, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."** (Revelation 22:14,15,

insertions mine)

Sexual Sins in Revelation

About A.D. 95, Jesus appeared to John on the island of Patmos. He asked John to write down seven messages and send them to seven of the churches in Asia Minor. Notice this message to the church at Thyatira. Jesus Himself condemned the church because they had not shunned a woman in the church named Jezebel, not the notorious wife of king Ahab:

"Nevertheless, I have this against you: You *tolerate* [in your church] that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. *I have given her time to repent of her immorality,* but she is unwilling [she is defiant]**. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds."** (Revelation 2:20-23, insertion and italics mine)

Notice a similar rebuke the Lord sent to the church at Pergamum: **". . . I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore!** [Expel these people from the church!] **Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."** (Revelation 2:14-16, insertion mine)

In Leviticus 18, God plainly told Moses that anyone who engaged in sexual misconduct must be cut off from Israel. Five years after leaving Corinth, Paul rebuked the church at Corinth for tolerating members who engaged in sexual immorality. Sixty years after His ascension, Jesus Himself rebuked the churches at Thyatira and Pergamum because they failed to shun sexually immoral people. Finally, Jesus says in the last chapter of Revelation that no sexually immoral person will enter the Holy City! God does not want His people embracing and supporting people who willingly and knowingly participate in sexual misconduct. God instructs His people to shun the individual after a period of grace. Of course, shunning is only to be directed at people who claim to be believers and who claim to belong to God. When Christians learn God's will and still refuse to change after a period of grace, they should be shunned if there is no reformation.

Conversely, the world is full of people who do not know anything about God's will. These people should not be shunned; they need to know how to live a life which will result in happiness and eternal joy. They need to learn that sin has its pleasure for a short season, but sin always produces sorrow, pain, suffering, and eventual death. Our duty as Christians is to guide and encourage these people to follow God's will. Defiance is a deadly virus and sadly, it often influences the youngest and most impressionable members of the body of Christ.

The Bible offers wonderful assurance to every sinner who will confess his sins and forsake

them. **“All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.”** (1 John 5:17,18)

Larry Wilson

To be continued next month.

Should Sinners Shun Sinners? (Part 2)

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Previously, we examined several references in the Bible showing situations where shunning may be appropriate. For example, God required that people be ostracized for sexually immoral behavior. (Leviticus 18:29; Revelation 2:14, 20; 1 Corinthians 5:11) God's commands are for our benefit even if we do not understand His wisdom. God's commandment to shun defiant sinners is based on "the yeast effect." Yeast is used in the Bible to represent defiance and rebellion. (Luke 12:1; Galatians 5:9) God commanded Israel to observe an object lesson every spring called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. **"For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off** [shunned] **from Israel."** (Exodus 12:15, insertion mine) The reason why God commanded them to throw all yeast out of the house and eat "yeast free" bread for seven days is that God wanted Israel to understand that sin is like yeast. If a little sin is ignored and left unchecked, it will permeate every aspect of life. (1 Corinthians 5:6) Corporately speaking, God wants His people to be on guard against the evils of gradualism. Given human nature, it is less embarrassing and much easier to "go along to get along." We must be on guard against the relentless encroachment of sin. God said to Cain, **"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."** (Genesis 4:7)

Should Christians Shun Non-Christians?

Depending on the situation, it may be appropriate for Christians to shun non-Christians. For example, it is appropriate for a recovering alcoholic to shun former drinking partners and places where alcohol is easily available. A recovering drug addict should shun friends who sell and use drugs. A person struggling to overcome a sexually immoral relationship should shun their romantic partner. A "born again" Christian with a degenerate past should shun former friends who have no understanding about the new Christian's struggle to please God. Christians struggling with specific temptations from their past must shun non-Christian friends that are associated with those temptations. Paul wrote, **"Do not be misled** [do not be stupid]**: 'Bad company corrupts good character.' "** (1 Corinthians 15:33, insertion mine) The apostle Peter wrote to some new converts saying: **"For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They** [your former friends] **think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation** [worthless behaviors]**, and they heap abuse** [ridicule] **on you. But they will have to give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached** [to you and] **even to those who are now** [spiritually] **dead, so that they might** [wake up and] **be judged** [condemned with guilt from the Holy Spirit. For God will judge each of us] **according to** [our deeds as] **men in regard to the body** [whether our deeds were good or evil]**, but** [He will forgive our sins if we will wake up and] **live according to God in regard to the Spirit."** (1 Peter 4:3-6, insertions mine)

Born again Christians know the struggle that goes with living in this world, without becoming a part of this world. James wrote, **"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: To look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."** (James 1:27) Even though the Christian life is antagonistic toward the ways of the world, Jesus does not want Christians to shun the people of the world. He wants us to shun the practices of the world. If Christians do not go out into the world and make disciples of all nations no one will hear the gospel of Jesus. No one will see God's kindness, patience, and love. No one will learn of God's truth, righteousness, humility, and faithful promises. Jesus told His followers, **"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven."** (Matthew 5:13-16)

A Christian cannot have a friend who is a non-Christian friend for long. Two people cannot walk and talk together if their hearts are set on different things. Suppose one person wants to go to a Bible study and the other wants to go to a rock concert. What happens? Suppose one person wants to hang with friends who drink and are sexually immoral and the other finds the behavior of the people and their conversations offensive. What happens? A born again Christian is "a weird duck" in the eyes of a nonbeliever. They cannot understand the enormous gulf that exists between the passions of the sinful nature and higher desires of the born again nature. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Enmity Between You and the Woman

When Adam and Eve sinned, Jesus came quickly to Earth. He called a meeting which included Lucifer, the serpent. Speaking to the devil, Jesus said: **"And I will put enmity** [friction, angst, hostility] **between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He** [the Savior of sinners] **will crush your head** [you will be destroyed someday]**, and you will strike his heel** [I will also die in the process]**."** (Genesis 3:15)

The serpent's offspring represent those controlled by the sinful nature. The woman's offspring represent those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, there has been enmity between these two classes of people. Everyone on Earth belongs to one class or the other. Adam and Eve did not have to wait very long to see this enmity. The story of Cain and Abel illustrates that no middle ground exists between the offspring of Lucifer and the offspring of God. Paul summarized the conflict between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman saying, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and [the gods of this world] Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: **'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.' 'Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.' 'I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.' Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from**

everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1)

Satan Attacks Our Sinful Nature

We as sinners who are trying to live a spirit-led life, face three enormous disadvantages. First, we have an extremely intelligent enemy who never sleeps. He and his demons are crouched at the door, ready to lead us into temptation in a moment of weakness. Second, every child comes into this world having a sinful nature. We are born with a natural predisposition to be self-centered and rebellious toward God. Rebellion against God is normal. Third, we live in a world where TV and movies make sinful conduct appear interesting and exciting. The media glamorizes sinful ideas and thoughts. Sinful living is common and is the way that almost everyone lives. "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21) Paul told Timothy: **"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God– having a form of godliness but denying its power.** [Shun them,] **Have nothing to do with them."** (2 Timothy 3:1-5, insertion mine)

"Born again" Christians have to be thoughtful about associating and shunning. A wise Christian will not interact with people and situations in which they may encounter temptation. They will not be tempted or attracted to the pleasures of sin. They know the devil lurks in the shadows and has declared war on everyone who claims to be a disciple of Christ. The devil knows our strengths and weaknesses and uses this knowledge to attack us. This is why it is so critical for Christians to abide in Christ. Sin separates us from the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Remember mighty Samson sinned and lost all his strength. Jesus said, **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."** (John 15:5-8)

God's Sends the Bible and Holy Spirit

God understands the three disadvantages that every sinner faces and He has three amazing solutions for them. First, He sends the gift of the Holy Spirit to each person. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God will do things for us and within us that we cannot do for ourselves. Second, God gives us the Bible so that we can read for ourselves what He has to say. Third, He has paid the price for salvation so that every sinner willing to live by faith will escape the penalty for sin!

The difficult task for the Holy Spirit is to offer every sinner a pair of “spiritual ears” so that sinners can hear God’s very soft voice. If we are willing to receive “spiritual ears,” during the second phase the Holy Spirit will attempt to create a strong desire within us for Biblical truth. If phase two is successful, He leads us into the discovery of Biblical truth. Phase three is where “the rubber meets the road.” The Holy Spirit confronts us with some aspect of truth to see whether we will obey or defy God. Each test is a matter of spiritual life and death. If we refuse to obey the truth, God’s very soft voice will become inaudible. The power of the Holy Spirit will fade. “When a man who is honestly mistaken hears the truth, he will either quit being mistaken or cease being honest.” (Richard J. Humpal, JD) The work of the Holy Spirit in the third phase is one of revealing truth, testing our obedience and taking us one step at a time up the ladder of faith.

Jesus Transforms People

It is proper for church groups to shun people who openly and defiantly practice sexual immorality. It is proper for Christians to shun non-Christians in certain circumstances. Jesus wants His disciples to let their light shine. It is difficult for born again Christians to be in the world without becoming part of the world. **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”** (1 John 2:15-17) A sinner can only get to a place where he does not love the world through faith in Christ. If Jesus sees that we are willing to live by faith, He will tell the Holy Spirit to make this miracle happen.

Born again Christians have an experience and a gospel that is truly exciting. Jesus is willing to transform any sinner who is ready to forsake his sin, but Jesus will only begin the transforming process after we acknowledge our sin and show determination to turn away from it. The Bible says, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and *purify* us from all unrighteousness.”** (1 John 1:9, italics mine) Like Paul, we can say, **“I have been crucified with Christ [my natural ways and desires were crucified this morning] and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me** [today]**. The life I** [now] **live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God** [I am trusting Him to give me the attitude I need today, and He will because He]**, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”** (Galatians 2:20, insertion mine)

Larry Wilson

Are You Ready for the Second Coming? (Part 1)

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Commentary on Matthew 24

One day, as Jesus and His disciples were leaving the temple, Jesus directed His followers to consider the magnificent buildings that made up the temple complex. **" 'Do you see all these things?' He asked. 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.' "** (Matthew 24:2) Jesus' declaration was shocking and the disciples must have wondered what He really meant. The disciples probably thought that pulling apart stones weighing between two and five tons was impossible, so Jesus must have been telling them a parable or sharing a spiritual concept.

To put Jesus' words in perspective, consider Noah's story. Noah predicted God would use rain to destroy the whole world. The antedulivans were probably amused and thought Noah was really crazy. They may have concluded there must have been a spiritual meaning to his words because logically, water is so heavy that it cannot rise into the air and then fall from the sky. Prior to the flood, rain had not fallen. (Genesis 2:5) Today, people rationalize in the same way. The book of Revelation predicts that God is about to destroy 25% of Earth's population and burn a third of the Earth and I believe He is going to do this in our time. Many Christians would dispute this conclusion by saying Revelation is symbolic; it does not really mean what it says. There must be a spiritual application because no one knows what Revelation means.

Later, the disciples approached Jesus while He was gazing at Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. They wanted to know more about the destruction of the temple. " **. . . 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' "** (Matthew 24:3) It appears they thought Jesus would destroy the temple when He returned to establish God's kingdom. Jesus responded with noticeable sadness. First, He gave them an overview of the rejection that His followers would experience after His departure; then, He told them what would happen to the city of Jerusalem; and finally, He told them about His return.

"Jesus answered, 'Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.' Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:4-14)

There are three general elements in this passage. First, wars, famines, and earthquakes are "birth pains" which will grow in frequency and intensity over time, just like birth pains. Second, people will be deceived and due to persecution, many will abandon their faith in Jesus. Finally, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world" to proclaim that Jesus will return and establish His kingdom before the end comes.

Jesus said, **"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel –** [Matthew adds] **let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath."** (Matthew 24:15-20, insertion mine)

The Romans hated the Jews long before Jesus was born because the Jews endlessly and strenuously opposed Roman authority. This hatred explains why Nero declared Judea and Jerusalem to be utterly destroyed. About A.D. 66, he sent the Roman general, Vespasian to terminate a Jewish revolt. Vespasian destroyed many towns in Judea and killed tens of thousands of Jews. Then, in an effort to eliminate the rebellion "once and for all," Vespasian besieged the city of Jerusalem. After waiting for the Jews to starve to death for several months, news came that Nero had committed suicide. Vespasian immediately lifted the siege and returned to Rome so that he could become the next Caesar (April A.D. 69). A few months later Vespasian sent his son, Titus, to renew the siege around Jerusalem. This siege began in February A.D. 70 and the Romans destroyed the city in September. During the siege, the temple was burned. The cedar walls fueled an immense fire. Many Bible students believe the gold and silver that decorated the temple melted and ran into the cracks between the stones that made up the walls. After the fire, the Romans separated every stone to recover the precious metals precisely fulfilling Jesus' words to His disciples.

The interval between the two sieges was the opportunity that Jesus predicted. Jesus told His followers to leave the city after an enemy came and surrounded Jerusalem. The phrase Matthew used, "the abomination that causes desolation" was a religious idiom. To the Jews, it meant that uncircumcised foreigners would arrive intent on destroying God's property. The Gentile equivalent of this phrase is found in Luke 21:20. Of course, no one could escape during a siege, but Jesus prepared His followers to be prepared to escape the moment the siege was lifted.

Jesus said, "Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath" because winter travel was especially risky for the young and elderly. Jesus also recognized that traveling on the Sabbath would be a consideration. Therefore, before going to the cross Jesus highlighted two key facts about the Sabbath. First, He indicated the fourth commandment would not be abolished at the cross because the seventh day Sabbath should still be considered holy forty years later. Second, Jesus knew that resting in the wilderness on the Sabbath would be risky because the pilgrims would be easy prey for warlords and gangs who preyed on travelers. Therefore, He encouraged His followers to pray that God would help them avoid both issues and God heard their prayers!

Then, focusing on the end of the world, Jesus gave His disciples a summary statement saying, **"For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."** (Matthew 24:21-22) Jesus told His disciples that He would return when the world was caught up in a time of distress, called the "Great Tribulation," which has no equal in Earth's history. We know from apocalyptic prophecy that God's wrath in the form of fourteen judgments will cause this global distress prior to Jesus' return. The seven first plagues (or seven trumpets described in Revelation 8, 9 and 11) will inflict a mortal blow on the Earth and kill half its population. The seven last plagues (or seven bowls in Revelation 16) will follow and they will kill everyone who receives the mark of the beast. These horrific, fourteen judgments will create this great time of distress.

Jesus told His disciples the Father had shortened the length of "the great distress" for the saints. We know from Daniel 12:11,12, the length of time established was 1,335 days. However, Jesus indicated the original length of "the great distress" was longer. My understanding is that if Israel had been a faithful trustee of God's covenant, God would have established His kingdom on Earth soon after Jesus began His ministry. (Mark 1:15) If God had done this, the end of the world would have played out in a very different manner than what is coming. The great distress and the end of the age under "Plan A" would have lasted 70 years for some nations and 40 years for others. (See Isaiah 23 and Ezekiel 29.) Compare these periods of tribulation with that of Israel in Babylon for seventy years. This means that "the great distress" for the whole world under Plan A would have been longer, but less intense than it will be under the shortened "Plan B." For this reason, the Father reduced the time of great distress under Plan B to 1,335 days and sealed this information in the book of Daniel until the time of the end. For further study on this topic, please see Appendix D in my book, Jesus' Final Victory. https://wake-up.org/Commentary/AppendixD.pdf

"At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ [Messiah]**!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time."** (Matthew 24:24-25, insertion mine)

Jesus warned His followers to be on the lookout for imposters during the time of "great distress." The Bible tells us that a great imposter, Lucifer, will appear physically during the Great Tribulation. God will permit the devil and his angels to exit the Abyss (the spirit realm) and be visible on Earth at the fifth trumpet. The devil will masquerade as Almighty God and perform incredible signs and wonders. Lucifer's signs and miracles will be so amazing that if possible, the saints would be deceived. (Revelation 13:13,14.) Therefore, Jesus warned, do not go out to see any miracles.

"So if anyone tells you, 'There he [the Messiah] **is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms** [a secret meeting place]**,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.' "** (Matthew 24:26-28, insertions mine)

Jesus described His return with a metaphor and a proverb. As lightning illuminates the Earth from horizon to horizon, so He will illuminate the Earth from horizon to horizon. To make His warning even stronger, Jesus used an ancient proverb that had a disgusting association. The proverb says that vultures are naturally drawn to dead flesh in the same way that wicked people are naturally drawn to false miracles. (See Matthew 16:4.)

"Immediately after the distress of those days 'the Sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' 'At that time the Son of Man in heaven will appear in the sky and all the peoples of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.' " (Matthew 24:29-30)

I believe the book of Revelation indicates the seven last plagues (seven bowls) will last 70 days. Assuming each plague is ten days in length, "the sign of the Son of Man" will appear in the sky on Day 1,325, about ten days before the 1,335 days are concluded. This sign will be a small cloud that grows larger and larger as it approaches Earth. (Luke 21:27) Soon after the cloud appears, a gigantic explosion will fill up the whole sky. The sky will recede like a scroll. The stars will fall, the Sun's fiery blaze will be snuffed out and the moon will not be seen. With the exception of a fiery cloud that continues to expand in size and brilliance, terrible darkness will cover the Earth. The one thing that will demand everyone's attention will be this expanding cloud filled with powerful lightning, thunder, and energy. At the appointed time, billions of glorious angels will come out of the cloud and encircle the Earth. They will be visible from horizon to horizon. As Earth rotates inside a sphere of billions of fiery beings, every eye will see Jesus who sits at the right hand of "the Mighty One." (Matthew 26:64) All nations will tremble for good reason. Jesus has come to destroy His enemies and rescue His children. For the wicked, He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. For the saints, He is the Lamb of God. Jesus will speak and Lucifer and all of his operatives will land in a lake of fire. Then, Jesus will speak to the remaining wicked and they will drop dead. The master of the universe will then call His children out of their graves and they will come forth with new bodies, free from the ravages of sin's curse!

"And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other." (Matthew 24:31)

When Jesus calls His sleeping saints, the holy angels will descend to each grave, even those in the deepest parts of the ocean, to meet and greet God's sons and daughters as they come to life. Then, the angels will escort the redeemed to the hovering throne where Jesus and the Father wait. The Holy Spirit will be filling each child of God with the magnificent power of eternal life. He will connect every heart and soul with an excited Jesus and a longing Father. There will be perfect unison in spirit and truth! At last, God's children will be gathered up and, together with the Trinity, they will head for Heaven to inherit a glorious city prepared for them from the foundations of the world! The joy and awe of this event cannot be told. It has to be experienced.

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things [the great distress which has no equal in Earth's history], you know that it [the Second

Coming] **is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation** [the human race] **will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."** (Matthew 24:21-35, insertions mine)

Are You Ready for the Second Coming (Part 2)

Author: Larry W. Wilson

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in Heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Matthew 24:36)

People who wish to silence any excitement that Jesus may return very soon use this verse as an "intellectual refuge." Many Christians interpret this verse to say, "No one [will ever] know the day or hour," but Jesus said, "No one knows [at this time] the day or hour."

A few days before Jesus ascended to Heaven, the disciples asked Him, **" 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.' "** (Acts 1:6,7) What did Jesus mean by these words? Did Jesus mean, "no one will ever know the times and dates which the Father has set," or did Jesus mean, "future times and dates the Father sets could not be revealed *at that time*?"

The latter meaning is correct because the Father has revealed times and dates in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. What would have happened to the disciples if Jesus had explained how the little horn in Daniel 7 would persecute the saints for more than a thousand years? What would have happened if Jesus had told the disciples He would judge mankind in about two thousand years? This knowledge would have destroyed early Christians and the Christian movement. This is why Jesus said on another occasion, **"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth."** (John 16:12,13)

With God, the time for truth is as important as truth itself. When the time is right, He releases truth. *No one can discover something before the Father permits it.* For example, thousands of years ago, the Father foreknew that we would use light bulbs, airplanes, automobiles, antibiotics, refrigeration, and computers in the 21st century. He also foreknew the supporting infrastructures that would be necessary *before* each of these discoveries could thrive. Therefore, He began releasing truth about the physical sciences in little packets over time so that more complex discoveries could occur later on in an orderly way. The Father has blessed mankind tremendously during the past two centuries through this dramatic increase in knowledge.

God also releases more truth about Himself, His plans, and His ways *when the time is right*. For example, God hid many secrets in the books of Daniel and Revelation until "the appointed time of the end" arrives. (Daniel 12:4,9) Because we have arrived at the appointed time, the Father has unsealed these mysterious books because *the time for their fulfillment has come*. This is a prophetic mechanism that never fails: On or about the time of fulfillment, God ensures that students of His Word discover "present truth." For example, this process explains why and how the wise men found Baby Jesus!

After the apostle Paul converted to follow Jesus, Paul was overjoyed when God explained a mystery that had been hidden for ages! Notice Paul's words: **"Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, *the mystery made known to me by revelation*, as I have already written briefly. . . Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: To preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of *this mystery*, *which for ages past was kept hidden in God,* who created all things."** (Ephesians 3:2,3, 8,9 italics mine) The mystery that had been kept hidden for ages past was, **"that through the gospel *the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body*, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."** (Ephesians 3:6, italics mine)

When the time came for "present truth" (a truth which had been hidden from Israel) to unfold in Paul's day, God revealed it. Unfortunately, Israel's leaders rejected "present truth" because of traditions, arrogance, and ignorance. Given what Paul wrote, we know today that from the beginning of time the Father planned that a time would come when there would be no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews refused to "present truth" and refused to understand that in Christ there is only one body of people. This truth became one of many that separated Christianity from Judaism.

Like Israel's leaders, many Christians use Matthew 24:36 to support their tradition, arrogance, and ignorance. They think that Matthew 24:36 is true forever, but this is not the case! God has unsealed the book of Daniel revealing four rules of interpretation. There are eighteen prophetic time periods in apocalyptic prophecy and the Bible tells everyone willing to listen that Jesus will appear on the 1,335th day of the Great Tribulation. Gabriel said to Daniel: **"Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days** [the last day of the Great Tribulation]**. As for you** [Daniel]**, go your way till the end** [of life]**. You will rest** [in the grave]**, and then at the end of the** [1,335] **days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."** (Daniel 12:12,13, insertions mine) Gabriel's statement perfectly aligns with Jesus' testimony. He said: **"And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given me, *but raise them up at the last day*."** (John 6:39, italics mine)

When Jesus said that no one knew the day and hour of His return in Matthew 24:36, He spoke the truth for that time. Now, the Father has revealed *more truth* about the times and dates which He set by His own authority, so Jesus' return (Daniel 12:4,9) is no longer a secret. Of course, currently no one knows when the 1,335th day of the Great Tribulation will occur, but it will be very easy to calculate after "Day One" of the Great Tribulation begins. The whole world will recognize Day One when it occurs. Jesus will cast the censer in Revelation 8:5 down and there will be peals of thunder, flashes of lightning, rumblings, and a global earthquake. Shortly after, a meteoric firestorm will burn a third of the Earth. No one will be able to ignore Day One.

One last point about the day and hour of the Second Coming. The Bible indicates that Jesus will show up during the seventh bowl. (Compare Revelation 16:17-21 with Revelation 6:12-17.) During the seventh bowl, there will be a great war called, "Armageddon." Preparation for this war occurs during the sixth bowl (Revelation 16:12-16). I understand the battle of Armageddon will be finished before the dead in Christ are resurrected on *the last day*, Day 1,335. The devil will send three powerful demons to visit the kings of the Earth. These demons will tell the kings

that Jesus is on His way to destroy them (the truth) and their only hope for saving their kingdoms is to unite their armies under Lucifer's command. Together, they can destroy Jesus and His army (the lie). There will be a timely battle with dramatic consequences (Revelation 19:11-21), but the question remains, how can this battle be completed by Day 1,334 if no one knows the day and hour of Christ's return?

"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man." (Matthew 24:37-39)

Jesus compared His return with the days of Noah in a way that many Christians do not grasp because they do not understand apocalyptic prophecy. They do not appreciate the importance of the eighteen prophetic time periods given in Daniel and Revelation. Consider Jesus' words in this passage and you will see that Jesus *does not* compare the wickedness, violence, or depravity of the antediluvians with world conditions at the Second Coming. Instead, Jesus speaks about another matter – timing!

God announced His plans regarding the world's upcoming destruction through Noah. (Genesis 6:11-18; 2 Peter 2:5) In addition to Noah's pronouncements to the antediluvians, his ark was a visual monument that everyone could see. It was a unusual structure that drew attention to a most unusual warning. Even though they were forewarned, the antediluvians did not know *when to enter* the ark. As the decades rolled by, they became distracted and busy with things that were not inherently evil. In fact, Jesus used the expression, **"They were eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage"** to indicate the antediluvians were doing the usual things that people do. Jesus said nothing about evil conduct because it was the usual stuff that went with life that kept the antediluvians from checking on the ark. They did not see the animals enter the ark or hear God say, "All aboard." (Genesis 7:1) The antediluvians became too busy to go out of their way to check with Noah to see if God had given further instruction (present truth).

The antediluvians did not know that the great door of the ark would be closed seven days before the rain began. The parallel for today is that God's wrath is coming upon the world *again*. This time around, almost everyone will be caught by surprise *again*. Approximately two billion people will soon perish during the first two months of the Great Tribulation and very few people know about this. Billions of people will be caught by surprise just like millions of the antediluvians who were doing the usual, "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage."

I do not believe that everyone who perished in Noah's flood or everyone that perishes during the first four trumpets will lose eternal life because Jesus will review each life and makes His judgment based on each person's record. The lesson we should learn from Noah's day is that the cares of this life will shut off your spiritual ears and eat up all of your precious time. Present truth has appeared and God's Word is speaking more clearly than ever before. Pay attention!

"Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. 'Therefore keep watch,

because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.' " (Matthew 24:40-42)

These verses magnify verses 37-39. Jesus indicates that intimate associations do not matter. Each person has to prepare his own soul by reading God's Word, listening to the Holy Spirit, watching Wake Up America videos, and praying for the wisdom to separate truth from error. (I could not resist a comment about the videos!) We need to better understand the Bible, especially the books of Daniel and Revelation, because they have so much to say! Jesus will accomplish many objectives during the Great Tribulation and the better we understand His plans and purposes, the stronger our faith and endurance will be when the world descends into total chaos.

"But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him." (Matthew 24:43,44)

The issue is present truth. The door of the ark was closed seven days before rain began. If the antediluvians had known this fact, I am sure they would have been more careful. For our day, here is a fact that most Christians do not know. The Second Coming of Jesus is a process that takes 1,335 days! Jesus is not talking about Day 1,335 in this passage; He is speaking about Day One. The first events of the Great Tribulation will catch the whole world by surprise. Do not become consumed with "eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." Reserve time to study the Bible and meditate. Say "no" to things that you would like to do, but really should not waste the time doing. If your head is in the Word, your heart will not be in the world.

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. " (Matthew 24:45-47)

Watching and waiting for the Lord to return is a way of life. Jesus calls us to a higher level of joy and happiness than the foolish indulgences of this world can offer. Increase the silence in your life. Turn off the TV and increase your free time. Turn off work and pleasure. Provide more money to do good things by stopping spending on selfish indulgences. Our daily choices explain why one person will be taken and the other is left behind. Believers have a commission that will bring a lot of joy.

When properly understood, there is no story more beautiful to tell than the gospel of Jesus. So, tell the story and the Master will be pleased that you were giving food to those around you when He returns!

"But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 24:47-51)

Point made. No commentary needed!

For the first article in this series, click this LINK

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With God, the time for truth is as important as truth itself. When the time is right, He releases truth. *No one can discover something before the Father permits it.* For example, thousands of years ago, the Father foreknew that we would use light bulbs, airplanes, automobiles, antibiotics, refrigeration, and computers in the 21st century. He also foreknew the supporting infrastructures that would be necessary *before* each of these discoveries could thrive. Therefore, He began releasing truth about the physical sciences in little packets over time so that more complex discoveries could occur later on in an orderly way. The Father has blessed mankind tremendously during the past two centuries through this dramatic increase in knowledge.

God also releases more truth about Himself, His plans, and His ways *when the time is right*. For example, God hid many secrets in the books of Daniel and Revelation until "the appointed time of the end" arrives. (Daniel 12:4,9) Because we have arrived at the appointed time, the Father has unsealed these mysterious books because *the time for their fulfillment has come*. This is a prophetic mechanism that never fails: On or about the time of fulfillment, God ensures that students of His Word discover "present truth." For example, this process explains why and how the wise men found Baby Jesus!

After the apostle Paul converted to follow Jesus, Paul was overjoyed when God explained a mystery that had been hidden for ages! Notice Paul's words: **"Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, *the mystery made known to me by revelation*, as I have already written briefly. . . Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: To preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of *this mystery*, *which for ages past was kept hidden in God,* who created all things."** (Ephesians 3:2,3, 8,9 italics mine) The mystery that had been kept hidden for ages past was, **"that through the gospel *the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body*, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."** (Ephesians 3:6, italics mine)

When the time came for "present truth" (a truth which had been hidden from Israel) to unfold in Paul's day, God revealed it. Unfortunately, Israel's leaders rejected "present truth" because of traditions, arrogance, and ignorance. Given what Paul wrote, we know today that from the beginning of time the Father planned that a time would come when there would be no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews refused to "present truth" and refused to understand that in Christ there is only one body of people. This truth became one of many that separated Christianity from Judaism.

Like Israel's leaders, many Christians use Matthew 24:36 to support their tradition, arrogance, and ignorance. They think that Matthew 24:36 is true forever, but this is not the case! God has unsealed the book of Daniel revealing four rules of interpretation. There are eighteen prophetic time periods in apocalyptic prophecy and the Bible tells everyone willing to listen that Jesus will appear on the 1,335th day of the Great Tribulation. Gabriel said to Daniel: **"Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days** [the last day of the Great Tribulation]**. As for you** [Daniel]**, go your way till the end** [of life]**. You will rest** [in the grave]**, and then at the end of the** [1,335] **days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."** (Daniel 12:12,13, insertions mine) Gabriel's statement perfectly aligns with Jesus' testimony. He said: **"And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given me, *but raise them up at the last day*."** (John 6:39, italics mine)

When Jesus said that no one knew the day and hour of His return in Matthew 24:36, He spoke the truth for that time. Now, the Father has revealed *more truth* about the times and dates which He set by His own authority, so Jesus' return (Daniel 12:4,9) is no longer a secret. Of course, currently no one knows when the 1,335th day of the Great Tribulation will occur, but it will be very easy to calculate after "Day One" of the Great Tribulation begins. The whole world will recognize Day One when it occurs. Jesus will cast the censer in Revelation 8:5 down and there will be peals of thunder, flashes of lightning, rumblings, and a global earthquake. Shortly after, a meteoric firestorm will burn a third of the Earth. No one will be able to ignore Day One.

One last point about the day and hour of the Second Coming. The Bible indicates that Jesus will show up during the seventh bowl. (Compare Revelation 16:17-21 with Revelation 6:12-17.) During the seventh bowl, there will be a great war called, "Armageddon." Preparation for this war occurs during the sixth bowl (Revelation 16:12-16). I understand the battle of Armageddon will be finished before the dead in Christ are resurrected on *the last day*, Day 1,335. The devil will send three powerful demons to visit the kings of the Earth. These demons will tell the kings

that Jesus is on His way to destroy them (the truth) and their only hope for saving their kingdoms is to unite their armies under Lucifer's command. Together, they can destroy Jesus and His army (the lie). There will be a timely battle with dramatic consequences (Revelation 19:11-21), but the question remains, how can this battle be completed by Day 1,334 if no one knows the day and hour of Christ's return?

"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man." (Matthew 24:37-39)

Jesus compared His return with the days of Noah in a way that many Christians do not grasp because they do not understand apocalyptic prophecy. They do not appreciate the importance of the eighteen prophetic time periods given in Daniel and Revelation. Consider Jesus' words in this passage and you will see that Jesus *does not* compare the wickedness, violence, or depravity of the antediluvians with world conditions at the Second Coming. Instead, Jesus speaks about another matter – timing!

God announced His plans regarding the world's upcoming destruction through Noah. (Genesis 6:11-18; 2 Peter 2:5) In addition to Noah's pronouncements to the antediluvians, his ark was a visual monument that everyone could see. It was a unusual structure that drew attention to a most unusual warning. Even though they were forewarned, the antediluvians did not know *when to enter* the ark. As the decades rolled by, they became distracted and busy with things that were not inherently evil. In fact, Jesus used the expression, **"They were eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage"** to indicate the antediluvians were doing the usual things that people do. Jesus said nothing about evil conduct because it was the usual stuff that went with life that kept the antediluvians from checking on the ark. They did not see the animals enter the ark or hear God say, "All aboard." (Genesis 7:1) The antediluvians became too busy to go out of their way to check with Noah to see if God had given further instruction (present truth).

The antediluvians did not know that the great door of the ark would be closed seven days before the rain began. The parallel for today is that God's wrath is coming upon the world *again*. This time around, almost everyone will be caught by surprise *again*. Approximately two billion people will soon perish during the first two months of the Great Tribulation and very few people know about this. Billions of people will be caught by surprise just like millions of the antediluvians who were doing the usual, "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage."

I do not believe that everyone who perished in Noah's flood or everyone that perishes during the first four trumpets will lose eternal life because Jesus will review each life and makes His judgment based on each person's record. The lesson we should learn from Noah's day is that the cares of this life will shut off your spiritual ears and eat up all of your precious time. Present truth has appeared and God's Word is speaking more clearly than ever before. Pay attention!

"Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. 'Therefore keep watch,

because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.' " (Matthew 24:40-42)

These verses magnify verses 37-39. Jesus indicates that intimate associations do not matter. Each person has to prepare his own soul by reading God's Word, listening to the Holy Spirit, watching Wake Up America videos, and praying for the wisdom to separate truth from error. (I could not resist a comment about the videos!) We need to better understand the Bible, especially the books of Daniel and Revelation, because they have so much to say! Jesus will accomplish many objectives during the Great Tribulation and the better we understand His plans and purposes, the stronger our faith and endurance will be when the world descends into total chaos.

"But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him." (Matthew 24:43,44)

The issue is present truth. The door of the ark was closed seven days before rain began. If the antediluvians had known this fact, I am sure they would have been more careful. For our day, here is a fact that most Christians do not know. The Second Coming of Jesus is a process that takes 1,335 days! Jesus is not talking about Day 1,335 in this passage; He is speaking about Day One. The first events of the Great Tribulation will catch the whole world by surprise. Do not become consumed with "eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." Reserve time to study the Bible and meditate. Say "no" to things that you would like to do, but really should not waste the time doing. If your head is in the Word, your heart will not be in the world.

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. " (Matthew 24:45-47)

Watching and waiting for the Lord to return is a way of life. Jesus calls us to a higher level of joy and happiness than the foolish indulgences of this world can offer. Increase the silence in your life. Turn off the TV and increase your free time. Turn off work and pleasure. Provide more money to do good things by stopping spending on selfish indulgences. Our daily choices explain why one person will be taken and the other is left behind. Believers have a commission that will bring a lot of joy.

When properly understood, there is no story more beautiful to tell than the gospel of Jesus. So, tell the story and the Master will be pleased that you were giving food to those around you when He returns!

"But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 24:47-51)

Point made. No commentary needed!

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