

**The
True Gospel
and the
Ezekiel Warning**

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BOOK INTRODUCTION

What is the true gospel?

You might think you know. You might think you have heard, understood, and believed the true gospel. But do you really know what it is?

Millions think they know the true gospel. But millions also believe the traditions of the families they have been raised in, and those traditions often conflict in major ways with the religious traditions of other families who also believe they know the true gospel.

The true gospel is the gospel Jesus Christ preached. It is the good news of the kingdom of God.

Yet there can be false gospels. Notice the words of the apostle Paul: "I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel to you than that you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-9).

How do you know that the gospel you have heard is the same gospel preached by Jesus Christ almost 2,000 years ago?

There is a way to know. But there is also a price to pay.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like to a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." (Matthew 13:45). "Enter you in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads to life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

There is only one way to know the true gospel, and that is by the Bible. The Bible claims to be inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16), and God cannot lie (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18). Jesus Christ said that scripture cannot be broken (John 10:34-35).

For many people, the price to be paid for knowing the true gospel is a willingness to give up the traditions they were raised in and to learn knew truth from the Bible.

Would you be willing to pay that price? Are you willing to give up your traditions and your personal preferences to believe what God says in the Bible, even when that is hard?

Don't underestimate how hard it is for a person to give up his human traditions. Millions today believe what they believe because they were taught it growing up by their parents and others. They in turn teach their children, and their children teach their children, from generation to generation. Tradition can be a very powerful force in religious beliefs and practices. Beliefs acquired as children can be very hard to give up when people become adults. That is why traditional beliefs endure across centuries in many religions and churches, with each religion or church believing something different from the others.

Jesus rebuked many of the Jews of His day for holding to the traditions of men, the traditions they grew up with, rather than the Word of God (Mark 7:5-13).

At one time, the force of tradition made it so difficult for even Jesus' disciples to learn new knowledge that many of His own disciples left Him (John 6:60-66).

This book shows how to prove from fulfilled prophecy that the Bible is inspired by a God who is able to know and predict the future thousands of years ahead of time. For there has been fulfillment in the last couple of centuries of prophecies that were recorded thousands of years ago, fulfillment that is difficult or impossible to explain as coincidence.

With the proof of the inspiration of the Bible as a foundation, this book explains what the true gospel is, and it explains the truth of many important and basic doctrines from the Bible.

I also show what Bible prophecy predicts for the United States, Great Britain, and other nations in the world in the years just ahead, probably in the lifetimes of most people alive today.

This book is about the true gospel. It offers proof that the Bible is the word of God and can be trusted as the primary source of belief in all doctrine. It also explains the Ezekiel warning message, a message that is a warning for the English speaking nations today such as the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

There is a major theme that runs throughout this book. It is that the Bible is God's word and that the principle of faith requires that we believe the Bible more than any other source for our beliefs about religious doctrine. This means that we must believe the Bible more than any minister, more than tradition, and more than our own opinions and preferences if we want to know the truth. The true gospel includes a message of repentance.

I have never been ordained as a minister, or a deacon, or had any official standing in any church. I have no special training as a writer or teacher. I am a computer software developer by profession.

I have tried to give the relevant scriptures, history, and other reasons to support the positions I take so that the reader can judge for himself or herself the merits of what I

say. Since I am "nobody," I feel there is no risk anyone will believe what I say because I say it. I give all my reasons for what I believe, and what I have written can stand or fall on its own merits. Any reader who believes what God says in the Bible can check up on what I am saying, or what any writer says, and separate truth from error. That is the way it should be.

I also hope to receive, via email, constructive criticism, feedback, suggestions, and where I am wrong according to the Bible, according to other facts I relate, or according to logic, correction.

Bible prophecy indicates that the United States, Canada, and Great Britain will soon go through the most intense and greatest time of trouble, suffering, and death that the world has ever seen or will see. No one knows exact dates, but I think a good estimate is that this time of trouble will begin during the lifetimes of most people alive today, maybe in the next ten to twenty-five years, maybe sooner. I believe the Bible indicates that once it begins it will last two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half years. By the time it is over, about nine out of ten people or more will be dead, and most of the ten percent or less left alive will have gone through suffering most of us cannot imagine. This death and suffering will come as punishment for our national and individual sins, but there is a way that some may be spared. That is why there is a need for a warning.

Here is a preview of what is covered in each chapter:

Chapter 1 - The United States and Britain in prophecy.

This chapter shows you how to prove the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible. It points out the flaws in the theory of evolution, and it shows how the design of the universe, and even life, proves the existence of a Creator. It proves that God inspired the Bible by showing how prophecies written thousands of years ago have been fulfilled in the last two hundred years with an accuracy that cannot be reasonably explained as coincidence. It also shows what Bible prophecy says is just ahead for the world, especially the English-speaking nations of the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand.

Chapter 2 - What is the True Gospel?

This chapter explains from the Bible what the true gospel is. It explains the kingdom of God and God's plan for the salvation of mankind through Jesus Christ. It explains in detail the meaning of each of the seven annual feast and holy days of God.

Chapter 3 - Is Observance of the Weekly Sabbath and Annual Feast Days Required?

What does the Bible really teach about the weekly Sabbath and annual holy days and feasts given in the Old Testament? Are these days only part of the Old Covenant and obsolete, or should they be kept today? This chapter explains the answer from the Bible.

Chapter 4 - The Name of God

Is God's name "Jehovah"? Is "God" a name or a title only? Is Jesus Christ God, and has He existed forever, or was He created? Is God more than one person? Is it correct

to use "Lord" as God's name? These are some of the questions that will be answered from the Bible in this chapter.

Chapter 5 - How to Know the Truth

Seventh Day Adventists regard Helen White as a prophet. Mormons believe Joseph Smith was a prophet and that the Book of Mormon is inspired by God. Bible prophecy predicts both true and false prophets to appear between now and the return of Christ. It is important to know therefore how to tell if a man is a true prophet of God, or not. This short chapter covers the basics of the signs of a true prophet and what to look for in evaluating if a man or woman is a true prophet of God. It also discusses the issue of which is the higher authority for belief and doctrine, the Bible or the Church.

Chapter 6 - The Theory of Evolution and the Creation of Species.

This chapter shows that the physical evidence in fossils and genetics is entirely consistent with a literal understanding of Genesis. It also proves that evolution is a faith and that the scientific method itself prevents science from proving that evolution occurred. It also shows from the Bible how God views our materialistic society, a society that is dominated more and more by atheistic evolution.

Chapter 7 - The Ezekiel Warning

The Ezekiel warning is a warning of punishment upon the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and other nations for our sins. This chapter shows where to find that warning in the Bible, what our sins are, and what the punishment will be like.

I intend to continue to revise this book over time to improve it and to address new issues as they come up. The latest version can be found on the website for this book at <http://www.originalgospel.org>.

Bible quotes, unless otherwise indicated, are from the American King James Version of the Bible. The American King James Version of the Bible is a public domain version based on the King James Version. It is virtually identical to the King James Version except that archaic words are replaced with their modern equivalents. In some cases I quote from the King James Version. Quotes from the King James Version are indicated with the initials KJV or the words "King James Version." In the Bible quotes, I have retained the italics as they are in the text of whatever version I am quoting. I have also preserved the "all caps" rendering of God's name where it appears that way in the original text. I refer the reader to the Preface to the King James Version or to whatever version I am quoting for an explanation of the meaning of text in italics and putting God's name in all caps. I have also retained the capitalization of words as they are in the text I am quoting, even when the capitalization is for words that are the first word of a line in a poetic passage but not the first word in a sentence. I encourage readers to look up important passages in a modern literal version of the Bible, such as the New King James Version. Although I do not quote it in this book, the New King James Version is the version I use for personal Bible study. It is a literal translation like the King James Version, so it is close to the original inspired text, yet it is in modern English and corrects some of the mistakes of the King James Version.

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CHAPTER 1 - THE UNITED STATES AND BRITAIN IN PROPHECY

Why this Subject Is Important

This book is about the true gospel and the Ezekiel warning. Originally, I had planned to cover what the true gospel is in chapter one, then explain where the United States and Britain are prophetically identified in chapter two, with the Ezekiel warning explained in the last chapter. But I changed my mind and decided it was necessary to cover the U.S. and Britain in prophecy before explaining the true gospel.

Many may think that knowledge of Bible prophecy and the identity of modern nations in prophecy has no importance for the true gospel or for salvation.

I disagree.

There is some truth in saying that knowing the identity of modern nations and what prophecy says about them is not vital to our salvation, but in a sense, it can be. It is not the knowledge of the identities of nations and prophecies themselves that is vital. But in this case, these prophecies prove that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. That IS important for salvation!

Everything we can know about salvation comes from the Bible. The Bible is God speaking. In order to learn accurately about salvation and what God requires of us, we must know and believe what God says in the Bible.

Prophecies about modern nations have been recorded in the Bible thousands of years before they were to be fulfilled, and the history of events in the last several hundred years show the fulfillment of those prophecies. By studying those prophecies in the Bible, and then studying their historic fulfillment, one can prove that a God who was able to control world events and predict the future must have inspired the Bible. This is the proof that God is really the author of the Bible, not just men guessing about what might happen in the future.

Why is this important for understanding the true gospel and salvation?

Men have many different ideas about religion. There are many religions of the world with radically different ideas between them about the nature of God, salvation, the nature of man, life after death, and how men should live. Even among the churches and religions that call themselves Christian, there is wide disagreement over many issues

pertaining to the gospel and salvation. Different religious leaders say different things about these issues.

But God Himself knows what the truth is about salvation, the gospel, His nature, and how He wants men to live. Men may have different ideas and men make mistakes, but God KNOWS these things. By proving that God speaks through the Bible and then going to the Bible for the answers, one can know what God has to say about all of these religious issues that men have different opinions about. And if certain men or religious leaders or churches really do know the truth, one can go to the Bible to confirm and prove whether or not what these men teach is the truth.

The Bible teaches that faith is a requirement for salvation. A big part of faith is willingness to believe what God says and act on that belief by trusting God and doing what He says. Our example of this is Abraham. Romans 4:3 says, "For what said the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." And in James 2:23, "And the scripture was fulfilled which said, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." And finally, Genesis 15:4-6, "And, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, This shall not be your heir; but he that shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be your heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if you be able to number them: and he said to him, So shall your seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

In order to believe God, we have to know what God says. That is why the Bible is important. The Bible is God speaking to us. If we can prove that the Bible is really inspired by God, we can look to the Bible as authority for what we believe and do.

God gives us free moral agency. He does not force anyone to believe and obey Him. We can make a choice either to believe God or to disbelieve Him, but before we can make that choice, we have to know what He says. That is why the Bible is important and why it is important that we prove if it really is inspired by God.

This chapter is really about proving that the Bible is the Word of God.

This chapter will explain prophecies that have been fulfilled.

This chapter will cover certain prophecies that were to be fulfilled in our time and how those prophecies have been fulfilled in history. These prophecies primarily concern the English-speaking people in the United States and the British Commonwealth nations. I will also cover some additional prophecy that has been fulfilled that helps to prove that the Bible was inspired by God.

However, there are a number of prophecies concerning modern nations that are yet to be fulfilled. I will not cover those here, but I will cover prophecies for the future in the last chapter on the Ezekiel warning.

I feel it is best to get a strong background in proving that the Bible is God's word before learning, from the Bible, the true gospel and the other truths of God. If we are going to

let the Bible explain the gospel, we must first know that the Bible has authority. Otherwise, we would be less likely to believe what the Bible says about the gospel, salvation, or any other important subject.

Proving that God Exists

When I was a teenager, I felt challenged to prove the existence of God. Although I had never done so before, and was not even sure it was possible, I now wanted to PROVE whether or not God exists. I wasn't trying to be biased in proving it. I was ready to accept the truth whatever it was, whether the truth was that God exists or didn't exist. Either way, I just wanted to know. I didn't want to guess or assume anything anymore.

I read a booklet, "*Does God Exist?*" Science has always been an interest of mine, and I have read a number of science books on various subjects for pleasure, especially books about physics. I read the booklet and considered the points that it made, and I thought about the things I knew about science.

One of the points the booklet made is that creation requires a creator. I knew that many scientists believe in evolution. They use the concepts of random mutation, natural selection, and survival of the fittest to promote their theory that all life came into existence, in all its variety, merely through the operation of physical law.

But I also knew enough about physics to know that there is a lot more design in creation than we see in living creatures. Even apart from life, which scientists say evolved, the universe itself, with all its laws, its energy, and its matter, shows design that requires a designer. Even dead matter shows design. Choices had to be made on how the universe would be and what the laws that govern and define it would be. That requires a Creator God to make those choices in designing the universe.

Physicists can create experiments to probe the nature of matter, energy, time, and space, and the laws that control these entities, and they can devise mathematical formulas and equations and devise models to explain HOW the universe works, but they cannot explain WHY the universe is as it is.

They can learn that there are about 100 different kinds of atoms. They can learn that each atom consists of a collection of protons, electrons, and except for simple hydrogen, neutrons. They can learn that protons and electrons carry electric charge, and that there is normally the same number of each in an atom, but that neutrons carry no electric charge. They can learn that the mass of an atom is almost entirely in the protons and neutrons, and these particles are in the nucleus of the atom with the electrons organized in outer shells around the nucleus. They can develop theories to explain the results of their experiments, even theories that protons and neutrons are made up of "quarks." But WHY are there protons, neutrons, and electrons? Why are the laws that control those

particles the way they are? Scientists don't invent those laws. They merely discover them.

Scientists have discovered four forces that control matter and energy in the universe: the strong force, the electromagnetic force, the weak force, and gravity. The strong force is the strongest of the four and it holds the nucleus of an atom together, but though it is the strongest, it is very short range. Gravity and the electromagnetic forces are long-range forces. Any physicist can tell you many things about each of these forces, but he cannot tell you why they exist. Why four forces? Why not three? Why not two? Who decided there would be four forces and what their characteristics would be?

We live in a universe of four dimensions, one dimension of time and three dimensions of space. Scientists may speculate that there are more dimensions that exist in ways we are not normally aware of, but there are four we know about from everyday life. But why are there three dimensions of space? It doesn't have to be that way. Mathematicians can calculate results for a universe with only two space dimensions or a universe with four space dimensions, and each kind of universe could be just as logically consistent as the real universe we live in. Yet the universe has three space dimensions. Why? Who decided that there would be three space dimensions we experience in everyday life, and not two or four?

This universe, with its elegant complexity, shows design, and it shows that design decisions have been made, decisions about the forces that would exist, about the number and characteristics of the dimensions those forces would act in, about the nature of matter and energy and the kinds of fundamental particles that would exist, even about the characteristics of time itself. Someone had to make those design decisions. Someone had to decide how many fundamental forces there would be, how many different kinds of fundamental particles there would be, how many dimensions there would be. There isn't just one possible kind of universe. Someone had to decide that the universe would be the way it is and not some other way.

For me, the design of the universe requires a creator to determine what that design would be, and is a proof that God exists.

There is something else that I regard as a proof that I am more than just a collection of highly organized chemicals and therefore my existence cannot be explained by evolution, and that there must be a creator that created the human race. No theory of evolution, no explanation of science can explain human consciousness.

What is human consciousness? There may be a lot of confusion about the term among some science writers. I often am provoked into buying a science magazine when I see on the cover that there is an article about human consciousness. I am very curious and intrigued about what the writers have to say about it. But I am always disappointed because it turns out that they are not talking about consciousness at all. They are talking about intelligence, or focused attention, or something like that. They will describe experiments in which a radioactive element is ingested by a subject, and that element is in the bloodstream, and they can measure the radioactivity as the blood flows through the brain with their scanning machines. They can produce pictures of which

areas of the brain are most active because the blood flow increases to those areas. So they will have the subject look at pictures, or listen to some sound, or have the subject work on a problem, and they can see what parts of the brain "light up." Then they say, "See, that is where consciousness is, we can measure it." But all they are doing is learning a little more about how the physical brain works. They aren't really addressing the issue of consciousness head-on.

Regardless of how my brain works, human consciousness is the subjective sense of "me," my "awareness" inside my physical brain and body that actually experiences the thoughts and emotions I may have or feel. It is the difference between being awake and being asleep without dreams. It is something no machine, no computer, no matter how intelligent a future computer might be, can have. It is something that cannot be explained at all by any collection of atoms or molecules no matter how complexly organized they may be. Even if you could build a robot or an android that looked completely human, but was really a mechanical device, and even if you gave it a computer brain and such powerful software that it could speak and behave intelligently and could so perfectly mimic human emotions and behavior that no person could tell it from a real human without cutting it open, such a machine would never have true consciousness. Consciousness is a mystery science cannot explain. And it seems science magazine writers cannot even talk about the problem intelligently, though magazine publishers love to put the subject on the cover.

From what I know about biology and the theory of evolution, I believe it is impossible for the variety of life we see to have come about through the operation of natural forces only. But whether or not that is true, it is obvious to me that the design of the physical universe itself requires a designer, a Creator God who decided what the laws of the universe would be. And the consciousness of my mind is something that cannot be explained by physical laws alone, and the existence of my mind therefore requires a Creator God who made me.

For me, this was sufficient proof that God exists.

The design and existence of this vast universe as well as the human mind is proof of the existence of God, and shows us not only that God exists, but demonstrates His immense wisdom and power, vast beyond human comprehension. There are billions of galaxies, and our own galaxy contains billions of stars, each star comparable to our sun, which itself dwarfs the earth in its size. And on the other side of the scale, God has created atoms, too small to see even with ordinary microscopes, and has made atoms from electrons, protons, and neutrons, which are far smaller even than atoms. How great are both the mind and the power of the God who designed all this and brought it into existence from nothing!

But the next step for me was to prove whether or not the Bible is God's word. Did God inspire the Bible or is it merely a collection of writings of men? And if the Bible is not inspired by God, is there any other sacred text or book that is inspired by God? Also, how could I approach proving whether the Bible is God speaking or not?

In the Bible are a number of prophecies in which God says what will happen in the future. No man can predict the future hundreds or thousands of years in advance. If prophecies in the Bible have come true in history in a way that cannot be explained to a reasonable person as coincidence, that would be proof for me that the Bible is inspired by God and carries authority.

The rest of this chapter explains what I found in my efforts to prove whether or not the Bible is the word of God, and what I found in particular about prophecies and their fulfillment concerning the United States and the British people.

Promises Made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

Genesis 12:1-4 says, "Now the LORD had said to Abram, Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you: And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you: and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran." Notice that God promises Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham (Genesis 17:5), to make him into a great nation.

In Genesis 17:3-6, God changes Abram's name to Abraham, and promises him that He will make him a father of many nations: "And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. Neither shall your name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made you. And I will make you exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come out of you." Genesis 17:15-16 indicates that the many nations that would be descended from Abraham would be through Sarah, Abraham's wife: "And God said to Abraham, As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give you a son also of her: yes, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her."

Later, Abraham had a son by Sarah and he named him Isaac (Genesis 21:1-3). In Genesis 22:15-17, God promises to bless Abraham and to multiply his descendents exceedingly, and further promises that his descendents would possess the gate of their enemies. A "gate" can refer to a land passage or sea gate that is a place where traffic must pass through to get from one place to another.

Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the firstborn, but he sold his birthright to Jacob (Genesis 25:19-26, 29-34). When the time came near when Isaac would die, he blessed Jacob with this blessing in Genesis 27:27-29: "And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed: Therefore God give

you of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve you, and nations bow down to you: be lord over your brothers, and let your mother's sons bow down to you: cursed be every one that curses you, and blessed be he that blesses you." Read all of Genesis 27:1-40 to get the full story of how Jacob obtained the blessing.

Later, Isaac again blesses Jacob with this blessing: "And God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, that you may be a multitude of people; And give you the blessing of Abraham, to you, and to your seed with you; that you may inherit the land wherein you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham." (Genesis 28:3-4). Other translations indicate "multitude of people" is not just a large nation with a lot of people, but many nations, more than one people or nation. Notice two things: 1) the promises and blessings God made to Abraham were being passed on to Jacob, and 2) Jacob's descendants were to become an ASSEMBLY of peoples, that is, more than one people or nation. This blessing of national prosperity is repeated and confirmed by God in Genesis 28:13-15.

In Genesis 32:28 Jacob's name is changed to "Israel".

Genesis 35:9-12: "And God appeared to Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him. And God said to him, Your name is Jacob: your name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be your name: and he called his name Israel. And God said to him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of you, and kings shall come out of your loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to you I will give it, and to your seed after you will I give the land." Notice that Jacob's descendants were to become a nation AND a company of nations.

So Jacob, who became Israel, was promised to become a single nation and a company or group of nations.

Jacob had twelve sons including Joseph (Genesis 35:22-26).

Promises Passed on to the Sons of Joseph

Joseph had two sons in Egypt, Manasseh and Ephraim (Genesis 41:50-52).

When Jacob was sick and near death, he blessed the sons of Joseph before he died: "And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, your father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, your son Joseph comes to you: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat on the bed. And Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, And said to me, Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people; and will give this land to your seed

after you for an everlasting possession. And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. And your issue, which you beget after them, shall be yours, and shall be called after the name of their brothers in their inheritance. And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem. And Israel beheld Joseph's sons, and said, Who are these? And Joseph said to his father, They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place. And he said, Bring them, I pray you, to me, and I will bless them. Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And he brought them near to him; and he kissed them, and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, I had not thought to see your face: and, see, God has showed me also your seed. And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near to him. And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long to this day, The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the middle of the earth. And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head. And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations. And he blessed them that day, saying, In you shall Israel bless, saying, God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh" (Genesis 48:1-20).

Notice three things from the above passage:

- 1) Jacob gave his name to the sons of Joseph in a special way, saying "let my name be named on them." From this point on in the Bible, the names "Jacob" or "Israel" can refer, not only to all of Jacob's sons, but depending on the context may refer primarily to Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph.
- 2) Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, saying, "let them grow into a multitude in the middle of the earth."
- 3) Jacob said that Manasseh would become a great nation, but that Ephraim would become a MULTITUDE of nations. This exactly fits with what God promised Jacob in Genesis 35:11, that the descendents of Jacob would become a nation and a company of nations. Here we see that this prophecy

applies specifically to the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, not to all the sons of Jacob.

Later, Jacob blesses each of his twelve sons before he dies, and in doing so he prophesies about the destiny of the descendents of each of them in the "last days." Genesis 49:1: "And Jacob called to his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days."

We will see later in this chapter when the "last days" are and how we can know if this term applies to the days we are living in today.

In Genesis 49:2-21, and verse 27 Jacob pronounces a blessing and prophesies about each of his sons including Joseph. Here is what he says about Joseph: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow stayed in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from there is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) Even by the God of your father, who shall help you; and by the Almighty, who shall bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: The blessings of your father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brothers." (Genesis 49:22-26).

It is obvious that the greatest blessings of national power and prosperity would come to Joseph, and to his sons Ephraim and Manasseh, who would become a great nation (Manasseh) and a great company or multitude of nations (Ephraim).

The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah

After the death of Jacob, his descendents grew into a multitude in the land of Goshen in Egypt (Genesis 47:27, Exodus 1:1-7).

In due time, God brought Israel out of Egypt into the promised land, the land of Canaan (Exodus 3:7-20, 13:18, Joshua 1:1-2, 3:9, 4:1-11, 11:23). The descendants of each of the sons of Jacob became a tribe in Israel, and each tribe had its separate territory in the nation of Israel (Numbers 26:52-56, 33:50-54). The particular lands each tribe received are described in Joshua chapters 13 through 19. Ephraim and Manasseh were among the tribes that were settled in the northern part of Israel, and the tribe of Judah was settled in the south.

After God brought Israel out of Egypt, but before He brought them into the promised land, God had made a covenant with Israel. God promised to protect and bless Israel, and Israel was required to obey all of God's commandments (Exodus 19:3-9, 20:1-23, 24:1-8). God also pronounced blessings for obedience but curses for disobedience. See

Deuteronomy chapter 28. Israel was specifically warned that they would be conquered by their enemies and taken captive and removed from the land of Canaan if they failed to keep their part of the covenant by obeying God's commandments (Deuteronomy 28:15, 47-52, 58-66, Leviticus 26:3-45).

After the days of King Solomon, Israel was divided into two kingdoms (1 Kings 11:9-13, 29-40, 43, 12:1-24). The southern Kingdom of Judah consisted of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and the Levites, plus those individuals from any of the other tribes that chose to migrate to Judah. The northern Kingdom of Israel consisted of the other tribes including the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (1 Kings 12:21, 31, 2 Chronicles 11:13). Each kingdom had a series of kings. After the division into two kingdoms, the term "Israel" often referred to the northern Kingdom of Israel only, not Judah.

Those in the Kingdom of Judah became known as "Jews." In the King James Version of the Bible, they are specifically called Jews in 2 Kings 16:6-8 at a time when Israel was at war against the Jews: "At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drave the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day. So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, saying, I *am* thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent *it for* a present to the king of Assyria" (King James Version). So here was a situation in which Syria and Israel were allied against the Jews, and the Jews formed an alliance with Assyria to get help against Israel and Syria. This makes it clear that the term "Jews" is NOT a synonym for "Israel."

The term "Jew" only refers to the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and part of Levi and to a few individuals from other tribes who joined with the Kingdom of Judah. But the vast majority of Israelites from the other ten tribes of Israel, including Ephraim and Manasseh, were never called "Jews" and are not Jews today. They are Israelites but they are not Jews.

This is important because many Bible prophecies that foretell what will happen to Israel are not referring the Jews at all.

You can read the history of these two kingdoms for yourself in the books of 1 Kings, 2 Kings, and 2 Chronicles. For the various kings of these two kingdoms, God indicates whether or not each did what was right in God's sight. The kings of Judah were all descended from King David, and some were faithful to do what was right in God's sight, and some were not. In the Kingdom of Israel, none was descended from David, and there were a number of different dynasties, but none of the kings mentioned did what was right in God's sight.

In time, because of Israel's persistent unfaithfulness, God caused Assyria to conquer the Kingdom of Israel and take them into captivity (2 Kings 17:5-23). Notice 2 Kings 17:5-6: "Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took

Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes." This occurred around 720 B.C.

But the Jews did NOT go into captivity at this time, though they went into a separate captivity more than a hundred years later. And the Israelites who did go into captivity at this time included the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who were prophesied to become a great nation and a great company or group of nations in the last days.

Babylon waged war against Judah and conquered Judah and Jerusalem, with Jerusalem falling around 586 B.C., and the people of Judah, the Jews, were taken into Babylonian captivity more than a hundred years after Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria. See 2 Kings chapters 24 and 25, and 2 Chronicles 36:5-21. Not only was the captivity of Israel and the captivity of Judah separated by more than a century, but also the two groups were taken to different places. Israel was initially taken by Assyria to areas near the Habor River and in the cities of the Medes, areas to the northwest and northeast of Babylon, while the majority of the Jews were apparently taken by the Babylonians to Babylon and areas very close to Babylon.

Later, around the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, some of the Jews taken in the Babylonian captivity returned to the land of Judah and Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-5). Those who returned then and those who returned later became the ancestors of the Jews in Judea during the time of Jesus and the New Testament Church. The Jews that returned plus those Jews who remained in Babylon or went to other areas in the world became the ancestors of Jews today. But the other tribes of Israel, the ten tribes, taken in captivity by Assyria to areas north of Babylon 130 years before the captivity of Judah, never returned to Palestine and were never known as Jews. They became lost to history, with some calling them "the lost ten tribes."

Yet among these lost ten tribes are the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, which were destined to become a great nation and a company of nations in the last days.

The prophesied blessings of national prosperity and greatness in the last days do NOT apply to the Jews.

"Seven Times" Punishment for Sins

God prophesied that the descendents of Joseph would become a great nation and a company of nations, but that never occurred before those tribes went into captivity at the hands of the Assyrians as a punishment from God for their sins. Yet the prophecy must be fulfilled sometime after the captivity if God's word is true. This means that at some time God's punishment upon Israel would come to an end long enough for this prophecy to be fulfilled.

In Leviticus 26:1-45, God pronounces blessings for Israel for obedience and curses for disobedience. Notice Leviticus 26:18: "And if you will not yet for all this listen to me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins." And Leviticus 26:23-24: "And if you will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary to me; Then will I also walk contrary to you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins." There are several places in this chapter of Leviticus where God uses the phrase "seven times." This can refer to seven times greater intensity of punishment. But there is another possible application. A prophetic "time" in fulfillment is a prophetic year with each day of the year representing an actual year in fulfillment.

A prophetic year is 360 days. An example of the number of days in a year in the Bible is given in the account of the flood in Noah's day: "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened." (Genesis 7:11). The flood started on the seventeenth day of the second month. After 150 days, it ended on the seventeenth day of the seventh month: "And the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated. And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat." (Genesis 8:3-4). From the seventeenth day of the second month to the seventeenth day of the seventh month is exactly 5 months. It was also 150 days. One hundred and fifty days divided by five months is exactly 30 days per month.

There is also a year-for-a-day principle in the Bible. A prophetic day can represent a year in fulfillment. In the book of Numbers is the account of how Israel refused to enter the promised land because they did not trust God to protect them and help them against the inhabitants of Canaan. It took the spies from Israel forty days to spy out the land of Canaan. The full account is in Numbers chapters 13 and 14. Notice Numbers 13:25: "And they returned from searching of the land after forty days." After they returned, they gave a bad report of the land to the people because they didn't trust God to help them to take the land from the inhabitants. Then the people rebelled against God and Moses and wanted to return to Egypt. As a result, God pronounced judgment on them: "But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your prostitutions, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which you searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall you bear your iniquities, even forty years, and you shall know my breach of promise." (Numbers 14:32-34). Although the King James Version uses the term "breach of promise," in fact God was not obligated to fulfill His promise to that generation because they had failed to keep their end of the covenant, which was a condition for God to fulfill his promise. They rejected obedience to and trust in God so God rejected them.

Notice that there was a year of actual punishment for each day they spied out the land. This is just one example of the year-for-a-day principle in the Bible, but there are others.

Applying the year-for-a-day principle to God's statement that He would punish Israel "seven times" for their sins gives us a period of time of 2,520 years of punishment.

Israel went into captivity around 720 B.C. 2,520 years after that would be around 1800 A.D. So if the "seven times" punishment means seven prophetic times of duration, then the punishment of the ten tribes would end around 1800 A.D., and the prophesied blessing to come upon the sons of Joseph, that Ephraim would become a great company of nations and Manasseh would become a great nation, could begin to be fulfilled starting around that time.

The Dynasty of King David

We have seen how the twelve tribes of Israel became divided into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The Israelites in the kingdom of Israel, including the two tribes prophesied to become a great nation and company of nations, went into captivity first and became lost to history. The southern kingdom of Judah, the Jews, went into captivity about 130 years later, and they are the ancestors of Jews today.

But why did this division among the tribes of Israel occur?

The reason for the division has to do with a special promise and prophecy that David's sons would continue on the throne of David even if they proved unfaithful to God. God made an unconditional promise that David's dynasty would continue unbroken "forever."

For a long time after Israel entered the promised land, and after Joshua, who was faithful to God, died, there was no king in Israel (Judges 21:25). Then in the days of Samuel the prophet, the people asked Samuel for a king (1 Samuel 8:4-5). Samuel took their request to God, and God appointed Saul to be king over Israel (1 Samuel 9:15-20, 27, 10:1-13, 17-25, 11:14-15). But after Saul became king, he proved unfaithful to God, so God rejected him and sent Samuel to anoint one of the sons of Jesse king to eventually replace Saul on the throne (1 Samuel 16:1). That son of Jesse was David (1 Samuel 16:11-13). After David was anointed by Samuel, several years went by before David actually replaced Saul as king over all Israel. During this time, God allowed David to go through many experiences to test and train his character, and David proved loyal to God. You can read of these experiences in chapters 16 through 31 of 1 Samuel and chapters 1 through 4 of 2 Samuel. But eventually David became king over all Israel (2 Samuel 5:1-5).

David wanted to build a house for God's name, and he inquired of the prophet Nathan. God told Nathan to tell David that he was not to build a house for God's name, but that his son would do it. This is related in 2 Samuel 7:1-17. Notice God's message through Nathan to David in verses 12 through 17 of 2 Samuel chapter 7: "And when your days be fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, which shall proceed out of your bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I

will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established for ever before you: your throne shall be established for ever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak to David."

God promised David that his throne would be established forever. He said that even if David's son sinned, God would not take His mercy from him as He took it from Saul. How did God take His mercy from Saul?

Saul did not die immediately when God rejected him. 1 Samuel 13 describes an incident that occurred after Saul had reigned two years. He offered a burnt offering, which only the priests had the authority to do. As a result, Samuel told him that his kingdom would not continue. "And Samuel said to Saul, You have done foolishly: you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which he commanded you: for now would the LORD have established your kingdom on Israel for ever. But now your kingdom shall not continue: the LORD has sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be captain over his people, because you have not kept that which the LORD commanded you." (1 Samuel 13:13-14). Later, Saul disobeyed God again in the matter of the Amalekites (see chapter 15 of 2 Samuel). It was after this that God had Samuel anoint David as king to replace Saul.

But Saul was not removed from office right away. David was only a youth (1 Samuel 16:11). He was considered too young even to go to war (1 Samuel 17:12-15, 33). According to Numbers 1:2-3, those 20 years old and older were able to go to war. So David was probably no older than 20 and perhaps several years younger. God did not finally replace Saul with David until David was thirty (2 Samuel 5:4-5).

How did God remove his mercy from Saul? His dynasty ended. Saul wanted his son Jonathan to follow him on the throne (1 Samuel 20:30-31). But Jonathan was killed in battle when Saul died (1 Samuel 31:1-6). Another son of Saul, Ishbosheth, ruled Israel other than Judah for a time (2 Samuel 2:8-11), but he too died (2 Samuel 4:5-7).

But God would not do this with David's dynasty, even if his son sinned. This is exactly what God is promising David when he says "my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you" and "your house and your kingdom shall be established for ever before you: your throne shall be established for ever."

This is further illustrated by the history of the events that took place after this. Solomon was David's son who became king of Israel after David, and Solomon was the one who built God's temple. And Solomon did sin. "And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father" (1 Kings 11:6).

As a result of Solomon's sin, God determined to take the kingdom away from Solomon's son. But God had already promised David that He would not take His mercy from David's son as He took His mercy from Saul, and God promised David that his house and his throne would be established forever. So in order to keep his promise to David,

God had to allow David's dynasty to rule over part of Israel so that it could continue unbroken, even though most of Israel was taken away from Solomon's son.

We can read of this in 1 Kings 11:9-13: "And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared to him twice, And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. Why the LORD said to Solomon, For as much as this is done of you, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely rend the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Notwithstanding in your days I will not do it for David your father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to your son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen."

Psalms 89 describes God's commitment to maintaining David's dynasty forever. Notice verses 3-4: "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn to David my servant, Your seed will I establish for ever, and build up your throne to all generations." Also, verses 30-37: "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie to David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven."

Jeremiah chapter 33 adds a detail that David's throne will continue to rule over the children of Israel: "For thus said the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually. And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, Thus said the LORD; If you can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign on his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister to me. Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, Consider you not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the LORD has chosen, he has even cast them off? thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus said the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; Then will I cast away the seed of Jacob and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them" (Jeremiah 33:17-26).

The whole split between the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah and their separate histories occurred precisely because of God's commitment to continue David's dynasty forever, even when David's sons were unfaithful. It was a way God could show

his displeasure with Solomon's sin and punish David's line, but still allow the line to continue ruling over part of Israel.

The rest of 1 Kings, and also 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles describes the succession of kings in both Israel and Judah. None of Israel's kings did right in the sight of the Lord, but some of Judah's kings, the line of David, did. But though there was no long lasting dynasty in Israel, and though many kings of the line of David in Judah were unfaithful to God, David's dynasty continued unbroken in Judah, up to the captivity of Judah around 586 B.C. when they were conquered by the Babylonians.

What happened to David's dynasty after that?

It would appear that David's dynasty ended. Apparently the writer of Psalm 89 was discouraged because it seemed on the surface that God did not keep his promise that David's throne would continue forever. You can read Psalm 89:38-45.

However, there is a way that David's dynasty could have survived and continued out of sight of the biblical account. There are hints of this in the Bible, but details are not given directly.

At the time Judah was conquered and Jerusalem taken by the Babylonians, King Zedekiah, of David's line, was sitting on the throne of Judah. He was captured, his sons were killed, and his eyes were put out: "And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment on him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon" (2 Kings 25:5-7). Then the Babylonians appointed a governor, not a king and not of the line of David, over some poor Jews that they left in the land. But then that governor was killed by Ishmael the son of Nethaniah plus ten men, and after this the Jews who were left wanted to flee to Egypt because they were afraid of the king of Babylon (2 Kings 25:22-26).

But among those who were left in the land were the king's daughters (Jeremiah 41:10). After the governor was murdered, this group wanted to flee to Egypt. But Jeremiah was with them, and inquired of the Lord, and God told them through Jeremiah not to flee to Egypt but to remain in the land and be subject to the king of Babylon. Nevertheless, they did not obey. You can read the full account in the book of Jeremiah, chapters 40 through 44. But the significant thing here is that the Bible mentions the king's daughters, and that Jeremiah was with them.

In the beginning of the book of Jeremiah, he describes how God commissioned him as a prophet to the nations. "Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:9-10). Notice that God said that Jeremiah was to build and to plant, and this was said in the context of being over nations and kingdoms. What was Jeremiah to plant?

In Ezekiel chapter 17 God gives a parable and interprets its meaning, rebuking Zedekiah for rebelling against the king of Babylon and sending ambassadors to Egypt (2 Kings 24:17-20, 2 Chronicles 36:11-13), breaking the oath he made with the king of Babylon. This whole chapter is in the context of Zedekiah, the last king mentioned in the line of David. Now notice Ezekiel 17:22-24: "Thus said the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it on an high mountain and eminent: In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it."

God said He would take a young twig, "a tender one," from a high cedar and will plant it on a high and eminent mountain. What does this represent? If you read the whole chapter, you will see that God has previously used the symbol of a young twig from a cedar to represent the offspring of David's dynasty. Compare Ezekiel 17:2-6 with verses 12-14. Verses 2-6 of Ezekiel chapter 17 says, "Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel; And say, Thus said the Lord GOD; A great eagle with great wings, long winged, full of feathers, which had divers colors, came to Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar: He cropped off the top of his young twigs, and carried it into a land of traffic; he set it in a city of merchants. He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow tree. And it grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs." Later God interprets this in verses 12-14: "Say now to the rebellious house, Know you not what these things mean? tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and has taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon; And has taken of the king's seed, and made a covenant with him, and has taken an oath of him: he has also taken the mighty of the land: That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his covenant it might stand." It is obvious that the first eagle is the king of Babylon, and the young twig is the king's offspring which the king of Babylon made king over Judah.

Then a few verses later, God uses the symbolism of a young twig when He says he will plant it on a high mountain. A mountain is often a symbol for a nation. Would God change the symbolism of the young twig? Isn't it logical that the young twig God said He would plant would also represent the king's offspring?

Jeremiah was commissioned by God to build and to plant. God says He will take a young twig, a tender one, and plant it. After the imprisonment of Zedekiah and the death of his sons, Jeremiah was with the Jews left in the land of Judah and the Bible specifically mentions that the king's daughters were there. And though most of the Jews were taken captive to Babylon, except for a few left in the land of Judah, Israel had already left that area 130 years before and had been lost to history.

Considering the emphasis God has placed on his promise to David that his house and his throne would continue forever, doesn't it seem reasonable that God would use Jeremiah to plant that dynasty somewhere in Israel with one of the king's daughters? And wouldn't that royal dynasty still exist today?

Somewhere, among modern nations in our time, should be a royal dynasty that is descended from the dynasty of king David, and that dynasty will be a clue as to where the lost tribes of Israel are today.

God's 7,000 Year Plan -- Are We in the Last Days?

Joseph's descendants are prophesied to be greatly blessed with power and prosperity in the "last days" (Genesis 49:1, 22-26). Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were prophesied to become a company of nations and a great nation respectively (Genesis 49:17-19).

The next question is, when are the "last days?" Are we in the last days now?

The Bible reveals that God has a 7,000 year plan for accomplishing His purpose with mankind. God instituted the seven day week at the time of creation, with the first six days for work and the seventh day a day of rest and spiritual renewal (Genesis 1:1-31, 2:1-3). God renewed the face of the earth and made it fit for man and then created man by doing the work of creation for six days. Then God created the Sabbath day by resting on the seventh day.

God commanded Israel to keep the Sabbath day in Exodus 20:8-11: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: why the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."

The Sabbath day is intended to be a day of delight, of resting from our ordinary work and using the time, not to pursue our own pleasures and entertainment, but to spend time drawing closer to God. "If you turn away your foot from the sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shall honor him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: Then shall you delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it" (Isaiah 58:13-14).

The seven day week pictures God's plan for mankind. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:8: "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ will return to the earth to set up His Kingdom: "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said to them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power. But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come on you: and you shall be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:6-11).

Revelation 20:4 says, "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark on their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

This 1,000 year reign of Christ with the saints is referred to in the Church's teachings as the millennium. It begins when Christ returns to bring peace and prosperity to the earth, and it is a period of time described in many prophecies in the Old Testament as a time of great happiness for all mankind. I will explain this in more detail in the next chapter when I cover the subject of what is the true gospel. But the point here is that the weekly Sabbath is a picture of what the one thousand year millennium will be like. It will be a time of rest, a time of spiritual renewal, and a time of joy, happiness, peace, and prosperity.

But the first six thousand years of man's existence has been a time of conflict, war, and suffering.

God's purpose is to allow mankind to live its own way, cut off from God, where each person can do whatever he wants including breaking all of God's commandments, so that mankind can learn the lesson that man's ways, apart from God, lead only to suffering and destruction. After this, Christ will return and mankind will learn to live God's way according to God's commandments, and man will learn that God's ways lead to peace and happiness.

According to Bible chronology and secular history, we are near the end of about 6,000 years since the creation of Adam. There is sufficient information in the Old Testament about the ages of men from Adam on and how old each was when they had a son, to calculate a chronology from the creation of Adam to the events in the history of Israel that can be matched up with events in secular history that are dated. Different people have come up with slightly different chronologies, and because fractions of years are

not recorded, it is probably impossible to get an exact figure on how many years have passed since Adam, but most chronologies agree that from the time of Adam to the birth of Christ is about 4,000 years, and secular history records the number of years since Christ. James Ussher, whose dates are recorded in many editions of the King James Version of the Bible, records Adam's creation as occurring 4,004 B.C.

If the teaching about the 7,000 year plan of God is correct, we are indeed near the end of this age and the return of Christ, and our time can be described as the "last days."

Is this too thin? We have Peter's statement that a day is like a thousand years to God and a thousand years like a day. But the context of this statement is being patient in regards to waiting for God for the things God has promised, not specifically a description of God's plan. We have the fact that according to the Bible, by the time of Christ's birth, it was about 4,000 years since the creation of Adam, and we have secular history to show us that it has been about 2,000 years since the birth of Christ. But could this be just a coincidence that this is the time we are living in? The Bible clearly teaches that Christ will reign on the earth, with the saints, for 1,000 years. But does that prove, just on the basis of Peter's statement and the weekly cycle with the Sabbath day of rest as the last day of a seven day week, that Christ will return at the end of 6,000 years since Adam? Is this evidence too weak to prove the point?

I might not think it is too weak, but some might. But actually, there is another piece of corroborating evidence that I think cinches it. Anyone can say that all these things are coincidence, but this next thing proves for me that we are in the "last days" and near the end of a six thousand year period before the one thousand year millennial rule of Christ.

Chapter 12 of the book of Daniel describes end time events at the end of this age just prior to the return of Christ and the resurrection of the saints. This chapter is at the end of a long and detailed prophecy given in chapter 11. Describing conditions at the end of this age, Daniel is told, "But you, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (Daniel 12:4). Note that a characteristic of the end time is that knowledge will increase and men will run to and fro. This fits EXACTLY with the characteristics of this time we are in today.

Today we are in a knowledge explosion. Knowledge of and use of science and technology has made this modern time so different in the way people live their lives as to be virtually unimaginable to people living centuries ago. Almost all modern devices and conveniences such as radio, television, automobiles, jet planes, rockets, computers, telephones and cell phones, even electricity and the electric light have come into existence in just the last two hundred years. We have gone past the industrial age, atomic age, and space age into the "information" age. And all this coincides with a revolution in transportation enabled by the advances in knowledge. Men travel "to and fro" across many miles in just a few hours in their automobiles, and can travel across continents and even across the earth in a few hours by air. Today we have weapons of mass destruction, including atomic and hydrogen bombs, poison gas, and germ warfare agents that didn't exist even 100 years ago. A little more than a hundred years ago, scientists did not even know for sure if atoms existed! Today, they not only understand

the structure of atoms, but have advanced theories on the internal structure of some of the components of atoms such as protons and neutrons. And the advances in knowledge in science, technology, medicine, and many other fields continue at an ever-increasing pace.

This explosion in knowledge and in transportation has revolutionized the world and made our time utterly different from any previous time in history. And while man's fund of knowledge may have been increasing slowly throughout most of man's history, this knowledge explosion we are experiencing today has only just happened at an extremely rapid pace in the last two hundred years, and especially in the last one hundred years.

In Matthew 24:21-22, Christ says, describing end time events before His return, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." He is describing a time of trouble so great, that unless God cut short the time, no flesh would survive. In our time now, for the first time in man's history, the weapons exist that are able to destroy man from the face of the earth. That was never true in centuries past. You cannot exterminate all flesh on earth with swords and arrows. But you can with nuclear bombs, poison gas, and germ warfare. And none of these things existed as practical weapons of war more than about one hundred years ago.

I do not believe that it is just a coincidence that this explosion in knowledge comes just at the end of 6,000 according to Bible chronology. I believe this indicates that we are indeed in the "last days."

Therefore, according the prophesied blessings that Jacob pronounced on Joseph, that his descendents would be exceedingly prosperous and strong in the last days, and that his two sons would be a nation and a company of nations, we should expect to find the fulfillment of that prophecy today. Though the lost ten tribes of Israel, including the sons of Joseph, were lost to history after their conquest by Assyria, somewhere today Ephraim and Manasseh should be a company of nations and a great nation respectively.

Historic Fulfillment

Let's put this together.

To summarize, the Bible prophesies that the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, would become exceedingly prosperous and powerful, and would become a company of nations and a great single nation. This was prophesied to be their condition in the last days, and Bible chronology as well as the fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel that knowledge would increase and men would run to and fro indicate that we

are in the last days now. Further, God promises that a line of kings going back to King David would continue to exist and be ruling over at least a part of Israel. There is a strong indication that the prophecies concerning the sons of Joseph would begin to be fulfilled after the "seven times" or 2,520 years were completed around 1800 A.D.

Can we find such a picture of any nations or groupings of nations in history since 1800?

The British Empire and the United States grew vastly in power and wealth beginning around 1800. The United States perfectly fits the description of a great nation that Manasseh would become. The British Empire reached the height of its power around 1900 A.D., and became the British Commonwealth of nations, which included Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, and its history fits the description of Ephraim who was to become a great company or multitude of nations. Britain and the United States have controlled most of the important sea gates including the Panama canal, the Suez canal, the straits of Gibraltar, and many others (see Genesis 22:17). At the height of its power, the British Empire was the greatest empire the world has ever seen in terms of population, land area, and wealth. And Great Britain is one of the few major nations that still has a monarchy with a royal line going back to ancient times.

For confirmation of the historical facts of the tremendous growth of the United States and the British Empire, I recommend Winston Churchill's four-volume work, *History of the English Speaking People*.

How could Ephraim end up in the British Isles and Manasseh in North America? God says in Amos 9:9: "For, see, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall on the earth." God knows who the descendents of Israel are, every individual, and God has the power to work out circumstances to bring to Britain those who are descended from Ephraim and to the United States those who are descended from Manasseh, even if they migrate through many different lands and nations first. This does not mean every individual in Britain and America is a descendent of Joseph, and much intermarriage with non-Israelites probably has occurred, nevertheless, the historical fulfillment of prophecy indicates that there are enough people descended from each tribe in those nations for God to be able to bless those descendents by blessing those nations, and thus fulfill the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and fulfill the prophecies of the Bible.

Is all this coincidence?

In doing this research, I did not accept these things lightly. I read the whole Bible looking for any scriptures that had any bearing on the subject. I read Winston Churchill's *History of the English Speaking People*, as well as other books or articles on history. I looked for information on both sides of the issue.

The facts of history do indeed support Bible prophecy concerning Israel. When I looked at history, I found that indeed a great nation and a great company of nations came to power about 2,520 years after the original captivity of the house of Israel, that these two powers seemed to be related like brother nations, and that the chief nation of

the company of nations was one of the few major nations in the world to still have a reigning royal line that can be traced back to antiquity.

But again, could all this be coincidence? I had to ask myself that question. I had to try to estimate the odds of these things happening just by chance. Because if this is not a coincidence, then it shows that the Bible is not just a collection of writings of men, but it is truly inspired by a God who is able to know the future in advance.

I had to consider, if coincidence, how unlikely a coincidence this would be.

In all of human history, there has never been an empire like Britain's. They are the only power ever to possess, with the United States, the majority of the strategic sea passages of the world. At the peak, the combined wealth and power of the English speaking people was enormous compared with the rest of the world. All this, by itself, proves nothing.

But consider this. This fabulously prosperous people do comprise a great nation and a great grouping of nations. All this wealth and power did come rather suddenly starting around 1800, as statistics prove. There are few, if any, kings or queens sitting on thrones whose royal ancestry can be traced to antiquity, and only two among the major nations of the world that I know of, Britain and Japan. Of the three main races of mankind, the Japanese are of a completely different race than ancient Israel. That means there is only one major nation with an ancient monarchy in the same racial group as Israel. And that one nation is the same nation that is head of this group of nations just described.

I tried to think about other alternatives. What about the Arabs? Can they be considered a group of brother-nations? Weren't they a powerful empire at one time? But even at their peak they never achieved the fabulous wealth prophesied for Joseph. And where can you find a hereditary line of kings going back unbroken to ancient times among the Arabs? Also, they didn't come into their power 2520 years after Israel went into captivity. Nothing fits.

I had to consider the odds. What are the odds that all these things could have been fulfilled by chance?

What was the probability that any nation, empire, or people would ever in human history fit the profile that the Bible seemed to predict? One chance in ten? One chance in one hundred?

With the combined characteristics of fabulous wealth and power, a single nation and a group of nations, a royal throne traceable to ancient times, and the wealth and power coming at a particular time after about 2500 years, it is extremely unlikely that any people or empire would have all of these traits.

Where else in history, in any time in the last two thousand years, can you find a great nation and a company of nations, related to each other like brothers, coming into their greatness at about the same time, and enjoying the vast power and wealth as described

by God in the prophecies concerning Israel and Joseph? I know of no other occasion in history. But if such an occasion did occur by chance, what is the chance that it would happen after the end of 2,520 years in 1800 but before the end of the 6,000 years allotted to mankind before Christ returns? Now consider the odds that of the few monarchies with a royal line going back to ancient times left on the earth today, one would be sitting on the throne of the leading nation of the only prosperous company of nations in our time.

Now figure the odds that the prophecy in Daniel that knowledge would increase and men would run to and fro would come to pass in our time just before the end of the 6,000 year period.

At this point, I became convinced that the evidence pointing to the United States being descended primarily from Manasseh and the British Commonwealth being primarily descended from Ephraim was overwhelming, and that the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning these nations in the last two hundred years would be so unlikely a coincidence apart from the inspiration, knowledge, and intervention of God, that the fulfillment of these prophecies proves that they were inspired by a God who is able to know and determine the course of future events before they occur.

Skeptics can argue about whether certain prophecies were really written when the Bible says they were written. They may argue that the text could have been changed between 585 B.C. for example and the time of Christ. But the text could not be changed SINCE the first century Christian Church was established because from that point on both Jews and Christians kept and maintained copies of the Old Testament scriptures, and there could be no collaboration between those two groups to change the text. So the prophecies of the Old Testament are at least 1900 years old even if one wants to argue that certain texts may have been altered before the first century.

Some have wondered about the genetic mixing of the various tribes of Israel with non-Israelites and have suggested that this invalidates the proof of the identity of modern Israel. No doubt there has been intermarriage and mixing with non-Israelite nations over the centuries, and that can blur genetic differences between the tribes of Israel and other nations as well as increase the differences between the tribes of Israel. In fact, such intermarriage and mixing began even with the birth of Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph had an Egyptian wife (Genesis 41:45), so the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh started out genetically half-Egyptian. Judah took a Canaanite wife (Genesis 38:2). Each of the original twelve sons of Jacob could have taken wives of various nationalities, which would tend to make the twelve tribes genetically different from each other and also similar to other nations. Also, God said that Israel would be sifted through the nations (Amos 9:9), so it is likely that intermarriage and mixing with other nations would occur after the captivity and exile of Israel.

But this does not invalidate prophecy. This isn't about genetics, racial characteristics, or separation of the races. This has to do only with the ancestry of Israel and the prophecies God made about those who are descendants of Jacob. Those alive today who have Jacob as an ancestor are the children of Israel regardless of who else they have for ancestors. And God, who created this vast universe with billions of galaxies

and can number the hairs on our heads is well able to know who the descendents of Jacob are and to guide their migration. Those who have Ephraim or Manasseh as an ancestor are those who have fulfilled the prophecies concerning the specific blessings to come upon those two tribes at the end of the age. This is about fulfilled prophecy and prophecy to be fulfilled in the future, not racial characteristics.

I know that this will not convince anyone who prefers to believe that the Bible is not inspired by the Creator God. When I set out to prove these things one way or another, I tried to approach it with an open mind.

For me, the close correspondence between the history of the English speaking peoples and the history of mankind in the last few hundred years, with the prophecies in the Bible concerning the last days, plus the unlikelihood of these things happening by coincidence, was convincing proof for me that a God who is able to foretell or control the future was the One to inspire these prophecies.

In biblical prophecy, Manasseh represents the United States. Ephraim is Britain and the other English speaking members or former members of the British Commonwealth of Nations, such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Modern Jews today are descended primarily from Judah, Benjamin, and much of Levi. Several nations in northwestern Europe such as France, Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, Finland, Belgium, and Holland may be descended from the other tribes of Israel. Prophecies referring to Israel or Jacob in the Bible can sometimes refer to all twelve tribes, or to the ten tribes other than the Jews, or to the tribes of Joseph only, depending on the context and the particular application. But prophecies naming Jacob or Israel will always include the United States and British descended nations.

In the remaining chapters of this book, when I refer to "Israel", I am primarily referring to the English speaking nations such as the United States, Britain, and Canada, and also the Jews.

What About the New Testament?

Once I proved that the Old Testament was inspired by God, I had to also prove whether or not the New Testament was also inspired by God.

There are many prophecies referring to Christ in the Old Testament that are perfectly fulfilled in the accounts in the New Testament. But I could not regard this as proof because I figured that if the New Testament was not true, the New Testament authors could have written their books to be consistent with what they found in the Old Testament. It was clear that the Old Testament predicted a Messiah, but I wanted some kind of proof or evidence that from Old Testament scriptures and from history that Jesus Christ was indeed that Messiah before I could accept the New Testament as the word of God.

In the book of Daniel is a prophecy of WHEN the Messiah would appear. This prophecy is known as the seventy weeks prophecy. You can read all of Daniel chapter 9 to get the full story. Daniel 9:25 says, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem to the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and three score and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times." A score is twenty, so three score and two is sixty-two. The seven weeks and sixty-two weeks total to sixty-nine weeks. This is another example of the day for a year principle. Sixty-nine weeks times seven days per week are equal to 483 days. Applying the day for a year principle gives us 483 years. So this verse seems to indicate that from the giving of the command to rebuild Jerusalem until the appearing of the Messiah would be 483 years.

When was the command given to rebuild Jerusalem?

Although the Bible scholars and commentaries generally agree that each day represents a year, they have different opinions about when the command to rebuild Jerusalem was given. Some believe this was fulfilled in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes with the decree described in Ezra 7:11-28 around 457 B.C. Others believe that this was not fulfilled until the decree made later in the 20th year of Artaxerxes about 13 years later around 444 or 445 B.C. as described in Nehemiah 2:4-8. The decree described in the book of Ezra came first, so if this decree included a command to rebuild Jerusalem, then this would be the fulfillment, and the 483 year period would start around 457 B.C.

Some believe that the decree given to Ezra could not fulfill the requirements of the prophecy because it does not specifically mention rebuilding the city of Jerusalem, but rather focuses on beautifying the temple and worshipping God at the temple with sacrifices. However, I think this decree is so broad and all-encompassing in its scope, it virtually requires a rebuilding of the city to have its full effect. Although it is lengthy, I will quote all of it: "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with you. For as much as you are sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of your God which is in your hand; And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, And all the silver and gold that you can find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem: That you may buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. And whatever shall seem good to you, and to your brothers, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God. The vessels also that are given you for the service of the house of your God, those deliver you before the God of Jerusalem. And whatever more shall be needful for the house of your God, which you shall have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house. And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of

you, it be done speedily, To an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, on them. And you, Ezra, after the wisdom of your God, that is in your hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach you them that know them not. And whoever will not do the law of your God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be to death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment" (Ezra 7:12-26).

Note the broad scope of this decree and the wide latitude and authority Ezra was given. There is a lot more involved here than just giving Ezra expense money for the temple and for sacrifices. Ezra is commanded to set up a system for teaching God's law to the people and a judicial system to judge the people and enforce God's law. Notice again verses 25 and 26: "And you, Ezra, after the wisdom of your God, that is in your hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach you them that know them not. And whoever will not do the law of your God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be to death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment." Was Ezra expected to accomplish all this and maintain temple worship in the midst of a pile of ruins?

Finally, notice verse 18: "And whatever shall seem good to you, and to your brothers, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God." Was it the will of God that the Jews use some of this expense money to rebuild the city so that the temple of God was not sitting in the midst of ruins? Would that be something that would "seem good" to Ezra and his brethren? If so, it is included in the decree.

Also, although in the 20th year of Artaxerxes Nehemiah received permission to go to Jerusalem specifically for the purpose of helping to rebuild Jerusalem and its wall, which was not complete at that time, I do not see any mention of a decree that is broad-based like the one that was given to Ezra by Artaxerxes which we just read. Rather, it seems that Nehemiah only asked for and received letters from Artaxerxes to the governors of the area to allow Nehemiah free passage to Judah and to provide him with timber. Artaxerxes did not command Nehemiah or anyone at that time to rebuild Jerusalem and its wall. He only gave him permission to go to Jerusalem to help rebuild it and he authorized the supplying of timber to him.

So it seems to me that prophecy in Daniel that a command would go forth to rebuild Jerusalem was fulfilled around 457 B.C. Then 483 years later would bring us to around 27 A.D., the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus Christ (in calculating, note that there is no 0 year -- the year 1 A.D. immediately follows the year 1 B.C.).

When I was studying this prophecy to try to prove if the New Testament was God's word, I had already proved to my satisfaction that the Old Testament was inspired by a

God that was able to foretell the future. There are many prophecies in the Old Testament that predict that a Messiah will come. This particular prophecy indicates WHEN He will come. And it points directly to the New Testament account of Jesus Christ.

If Jesus Christ is not the prophesied Messiah, who is? The prophecy in Daniel predicts the coming of the Messiah. If it is not Jesus Christ, who is it? Even if I am off a few years in my calculations, the prophecy nevertheless points to the general time period of the beginning of Christianity, and no other Messiah has appeared anywhere near that time. There are no other candidates. Either Jesus Christ is the Messiah, or the prophecy in Daniel has failed. And it was the same God who inspired Daniel as inspired Moses and other writers when they predicted the rise of the sons of Joseph to become the greatest nation and commonwealth of nations in our time that the world has ever seen.

Also, if the New Testament is not true, if the miracles of Jesus Christ are a fraud, I have difficulty understanding why His followers would promote such a lie and then prove their sincerity by sacrificing their lives to die for something they know is a lie! For a man or a group of men to be able to invent such a fraud, then promote it so successfully, and yet leave no record or evidence in history that it was a fraud, seems implausible to me.

In addition, by the time I had gone this far in my studies, I had been able to see a harmony and a consistency in the entire Bible, Old Testament and New Testament together, that seems extremely unlikely if the Bible is just a collection of books written by different authors who were not inspired by one God.

Evolution versus the Creation Account in Genesis

In this section, I want to talk about the issue of evolution, intelligent design, and the creation account in Genesis.

Many people who believe in evolution try to refute the creation account in Genesis by saying that science proves that the earth is more than 6,000 years old. But this argument is based on a misunderstanding of Genesis. The Bible does not say that the earth is 6,000 years old. And I am not saying that the account in Genesis is using metaphor. The Genesis account is literal, but it does not indicate at all when the earth itself was created.

Let's start with Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." This is a simple statement that God created the earth and the entire universe. It does not say when He did it or how.

Now at this point in the narrative, the earth exists. Verse 1 just said God created the earth. Now look at the next verse, Genesis 1:2: "And the earth was without form, and

void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters." Verse two is describing the condition of the earth at this point in the narrative. It is covered with darkness and with water. But it exists. God had already created it in verse one.

How long did the earth exist in the condition described in verse two? How long was the earth covered with water and in darkness? A day? A week? A year? A million years? The Bible DOES NOT SAY.

Is there a period of time between verse 1 and verse 2? In other words, could the condition of the earth described in verse 2 NOT be the way God originally created it? Could God have created the earth, not covered with water, but with land areas and in light not darkness, even with life on it, in verse 1? And could something have happened later in time to cause the condition described in verse 2 with the earth covered in water and in darkness? Genesis itself DOES NOT SAY. However, there is an indication elsewhere in the Bible that shows that God did not originally create the earth "without form and void," that this must have been a condition that came upon the earth later, after God created the earth as stated in verse 1, but before verse 2.

Isaiah 45:18 says, "For thus said the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he has established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else."

Where this verse says that God did not create the earth in vain, the words "in vain" are translated from the same Hebrew word in the original text that is translated "without form" in Genesis 1:2. You can check this out with Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, which lists every word in the Bible and every place it is used and also gives the Hebrew and Greek words that each English word is translated from. So in effect, Isaiah 45:18 is saying that God did not create the earth without form and void. So the earth would not have been in this condition originally, without form and void, with water and darkness covering the earth. This condition of waste and desolation came later.

What could cause the earth to become "without form and void," completely covered in water and in darkness? This pictures the result of destruction and chaos, and can come about as a result of sin and rebellion against God and His ways. For example, this is why the flood came upon the earth in the days of Noah. Notice the reasons for the flood: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repents me that I have made them" (Genesis 6:5-7). "And God said to Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:13). "And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die" (Genesis 6:17). Then the flood came and covered the whole earth (Genesis 7:17-20).

The sins of mankind, especially violence, were the cause of the flood in the days of Noah. What could be a cause for the surface of the earth to be destroyed by water before man was even created?

When Adam was created, Satan, described as the serpent, was already on the earth. We first read of him in Genesis 3:1, yet he is not included in the description starting in Genesis 1:2 through all of chapter 2. Satan existed before Adam was created and before the six days of creation described in Genesis 1:2-31.

Before man existed, when the earth was first created, angels existed and were joyous at the creation of the earth (Job 38:4-7). Lucifer was not created evil by God. He was originally perfect in his ways until he sinned (Ezekiel 28:14-15). He was also on this earth, and he rebelled against God, desiring to rise above the heights of the clouds (Isaiah 14:12-14). There are indications that he led one third of God's angels into rebellion with him and they became demons (Revelation 12:3-4), suggesting that Lucifer and about a third of the angels inhabited this earth before man.

If this is the case, the sin and rebellion of Satan and his demons on the earth could have been the cause of the destruction of the surface of the earth that we see in Genesis 1:2, "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters," just as the sins of mankind resulted in the destruction of the earth in Noah's day. But if this is the case, and I believe it is, then as far as the Bible is concerned there could have been a period of time AFTER the earth was created and BEFORE the destruction described in the second verse of Genesis that lasted hundreds of millions of years, and the earth could have been filled with life at that time.

The Bible does not say anything about the plant and animal life forms that existed before Genesis 1:2 and how long ago they existed, but science does. Fossils have been found that appear to be millions of years old, and there have been found fossils of many species, such as the dinosaurs, that never existed in the days of Noah when he brought all the animals into the ark.

The account of the six days of creation contained in the first chapter of Genesis does not describe the original creation of the earth, but a re-creation, a refreshing, a renewal of the surface of the earth and of the positions of the other bodies in the solar system in preparation for the creation of Adam and Eve. When the earth was in darkness, the sun, moon, and stars were not visible from the surface of the earth, nor was there any light that reached the surface. This could have been due to dust clouds in space or in the atmosphere and perhaps also because the heavenly bodies were moved from their proper position at the time the disaster struck the earth.

The six days record the steps God took to restore the surface of the earth to a condition that could support life, to restore the species that had existed prior to the disaster that had destroyed the surface of the earth, and to create man. On the first day, God cleared away enough dust to allow light to reach the earth, though it was diffuse and did not allow the sun, moon, and stars to be clearly visible. On the second day, God restored the atmosphere to a condition where there was a right balance of air and water vapor,

allowing clouds that could provide a moderate amount of rain. On the third day, God caused dry land to appear and restored plant life. On the fourth day, God completely cleared any remaining dust that obscured a clear view of the sun, moon, and stars and made them into signs visible at the earth's surface to mark days, months, and years. On the fifth day, God restored the species of sea life and birds that had existed. On the sixth day, God restored the species of animal life and created man. On the seventh day, God created the Sabbath by resting and made it a special day.

Some will say that radiocarbon dating establishes dates for humans and their artifacts that cannot be reconciled with Bible chronology. But radiocarbon dating is based on an assumption that the intensity of cosmic rays that bombard the atmosphere of the earth from space has always been constant, and this assumption is unproven. If the intensity of cosmic rays reaching the earth was different in the past, dates established by radiocarbon dating by scientists today would be inaccurate. Also, fossils of creatures that are similar in their skeletal structure to humans today could be fossils of animals, similar to humans, but not human, just as the great apes today are similar in body structure to humans but are not human.

Therefore, fossil evidence does not prove that the creation account in Genesis is wrong.

But though there is no contradiction between physical evidence and the creation account in Genesis, I believe there are very serious problems with the theory of evolution itself.

I will state right here that although I have done some reading on the subject of the theory of evolution, I am not an expert on it. But what I have learned suggests serious problems with the theory, and I invite the interested reader to do his or her own research on the subject with these problems in mind.

Although a majority of scientists support evolution, some do not, and they point out a number of problems. They point out that the fossil record does not really show evidence of evolution, but the opposite. Darwin's theory proposes that new species gradually emerge from old species through small changes due to random mutation and natural selection. But if that were the case, there should be transitional forms in the fossil record. But that is not what the fossil record shows. Instead, it shows species that appear and disappear abruptly, with no transitional species to indicate gradual change. Thus, these scientists say, the fossil record actually DISPROVES evolution.

They also point out that almost all genetic mutations are harmful, that natural selection works to weed out harmful change, and that while some change can occur within a species over time to produce varieties, genetic change operates within limits and does not change a species from one kind into another.

One of the main problems with evolution is that the theory does not explain how complex organ systems and biological mechanisms can gradually come into existence through a process of random mutation and natural selection, when MANY changes would have to occur together in the genetic blueprint before any of them would confer any advantage to survival and the propagation of the species. This is called "irreducible complexity."

One example of this is the woodpecker. While most birds eat seeds or insects that are found out in the open, the woodpecker eats insects found inside of the trunks or branches of trees. This bird gets these insects out of the tree by drilling a hole into the wood with its beak, then getting the insects that are inside with its tongue. This requires a combination of highly sophisticated organs and instincts all working together, which other birds do not have, in order for any of them to have a benefit.

In order to find the insects, such as ants, that have tunneled into the tree, the woodpecker uses its hearing to find them as they are moving around or digging tunnels. This requires a specially developed sense of hearing. In order to drill into the wood, the woodpecker has specialized feet and tail feathers that enable the bird to maintain a strong and favorable grip and position on the tree, as well as an especially hard beak that other birds do not have. The beak has to be hard enough to drill a hole into the tree. Once the bird has drilled a hole to reach the tunnel containing the insects, it inserts a long, sticky tongue into the tunnel, and the insects stick to the woodpecker's tongue. Other birds do not have tongues of this type. The woodpecker has especially strong neck muscles for delivering blows strong enough to penetrate the tree, and to do so repeatedly in rapid succession without fatigue. Finally and most importantly, the bird must have the right instincts to use all these specialized organs together to actually obtain its food this way, and other birds do not have these instincts. It would do a bird no good to have an especially hard beak, special claws and tail feathers for maintaining a strong position for drilling on the trunk, extra strong neck muscles, specialized hearing that can locate the insects in the tree, and a specialized long, sticky tongue, if it did not have the instincts to use these organs together to find and catch insects inside the trunk of a tree.

How could all these characteristics have evolved gradually if most of them have no particular advantage unless all are present, fully developed, at the same time? Generally, there is a biological cost, in energy, growth time, and nutritional requirements, to any organ or system, and highly developed and sophisticated organs tend to diminish if they are not useful to a species. A bird would not tend to have extra strong neck muscles if those muscles are not being used to drill into a tree. Even if random genetic mutations produced a bird with stronger-than-average neck muscles (one mutation would not likely be enough for such a muscle system - it would likely require many genetic changes because it takes a whole group of muscles working together along with neck bones that can take the stress), unless that extra strength is used, not only does the group of mutations provide no survival advantage, but it actually will hurt the bird's chances for survival, since more food would be required to grow and maintain muscles that are larger and stronger than necessary.

So in order for ANY of these special characteristics of a woodpecker to be developed and continue, each one has to be an advantage, not a disadvantage, to the bird's survival and reproduction. Yet for these characteristics to be an advantage, all have to be present at the same time. How can this happen gradually? A bird would have to have thousands, maybe tens or hundreds of thousands of genetic mutations, or more, in order for all these characteristics to appear fully developed, or else the bird would not be able

to obtain its food this way. The odds against this ever happening even in hundreds of millions of years are astronomical.

Another example is the archer fish. This fish obtains insect food by squirting a jet of water from its mouth above the surface of the water to knock an insect off a low-lying branch or twig of a tree that is over the water. The fish eats the insect after it is shot down and falls into the water. To do this successfully requires not only the ability to squirt water out of its mouth at high speed, but extremely complex and highly developed instincts to see the insect above water, aim the stream of water accurately, and allow for the distortion due to the bending of light as it passes from air to water at the surface.

There are many other examples of irreducible complexity in cell structure, symbiotic relationships between species where one species helps another (bees and flowers for example), migration of birds and fish, etc.

From what I have read, I think some scientists have acknowledged that the development of complex systems that require many genetic changes all at once before any of them confer a survival advantage is a problem with the current theory, and they have started to say that evolution must happen in sudden spurts, not gradually. But I have read of no explanation as to HOW this could occur.

I believe there is another flaw in the theory of evolution that has been identified more recently, and it comes from information theory. Biologists realize that the genes of a species are a genetic code similar in many ways to computer code. The genes are a coded blueprint that determines the characteristics of the species just as computer code determines the characteristics of a piece of computer software. But the amount and complexity of information coded in the genes of even a relatively simple species are so vast that, even if it were possible for species to evolve, even billions of years would not be sufficient to produce the quantity of code and the information in it. In other words, even if evolution were possible, and based on the impossibility of complex systems developing suddenly I believe evolution is not possible, but even if it were, some scientists suggest there has not been enough time on the earth, even after hundreds of millions of years, for evolution to have produced the species that exist today.

In a sense, without explanations for irreducible complexity, the absence of transitional fossils, and the problem of the vastness of information in the genetic code, evolution is not a complete theory. It states that random genetic changes that give a species an advantage can be preserved and spread through natural selection, and it states that this can result in new species, even all species that exist, but I have not heard of any explanation of how this can occur that actually works. Scientists and teachers who promote the theory of evolution like to say that just because they do not know all the details of how it occurred does not mean that the theory is wrong. But this is misleading. The reason they do not know the details is not that there are many possible ways it could have occurred and they just don't know which one actually happened. I think the reason they do not know the details is that they know of NO possible way it could have occurred.

Why would scientists and teachers believe evolution in the absence of any real workable explanation as to how it could have occurred? I think that for many scientists and educators, evolution is a faith. It is like a religion for them. They believe it because they want to believe it. In this respect, they are like millions of people who believe their religious ideas because they want to. Just as millions of people who practice their traditional religious beliefs and customs find that belief in God and in an afterlife comforts them, so those who believe in evolution find comfort in the idea that there is no God who has the authority to tell them how to live their lives and they will never be held accountable by a higher power for what they do in this physical life.

Most people have a built-in bias against God telling them what to do. Some people deal with this by choosing religions that express their own inclinations and opinions, and some deal with this by denying the existence of God altogether. The theory of evolution, as a faith, despite its logical flaws, enables those who believe in it to believe that there is no God who intervenes in human affairs and has the authority to tell men how to live.

Even if evolution were possible, it could never be proved by science. Science operates within the limits of the scientific method. The scientific method, as practiced by scientists today, excludes consideration of supernatural causes for any evidence. No scientist in his work can suggest design by God as an explanation for any evidence found in life if he is to work within the scientific method and have his work accepted by the scientific community.

But every reasonable person knows you cannot prove something by looking only at one side of an issue. You have to be willing to look at both sides without bias. Science cannot look at both sides without bias because it cannot consider or accept the supernatural. Science is the study of NATURAL processes only. Science can only look for physical causes. It can only look at one side. That is not how you find truth.

The key to the theory of evolution is "natural causes only." Any proposed explanation for species that includes design or guidance by God in any way is not evolution as taught in the public schools.

Yet "natural causes only" cannot be proved. No scientist can prove that there is no God who has intervened to design and guide the development of species. No scientist can prove God did not design and supernaturally intervene to guide the development of species.

So even if evolution were true and could be proved, and I believe that it is not, the scientific method as practiced by science would not allow science to prove it. You would have to go outside the limits of science to prove evolution if it were true.

Could the Days in Genesis Be Figurative and Not Literal?

Some people claim that they believe that the Genesis account is true, but that the six days are only figurative days, not literal days, and could represent indefinite periods of time. Could this be true?

I think this is only true if God uses figurative language to deceive people, and I do not think this is the case.

God does use figurative language in the Bible. So how can we know if a particular scripture is meant by God to be taken literally or figuratively? This issue does not just affect our understanding of Genesis but it affects our understanding of many doctrinal matters. In regards to many doctrines, the question of whether a given passage in the Bible is to be taken literally or figuratively often is controversial among differing groups and churches. We do not seem to have this problem with other books. Nor do we usually have difficulty knowing if a person we are talking with is speaking figuratively or literally. Yet when God speaks to us through the pages of the Bible, men do not agree on what God means.

Why is it that we do not have the same confusion about figurative speaking with other books or in our daily conversation with each other? We expect that when people speak to us figuratively, it will be obvious. We take them literally unless they use a figure of speech familiar to us, and we expect others to take what we say literally unless it is obvious that we are speaking figuratively. If there is doubt, we clarify. We do not speak in a manner we know will be misunderstood, unless our intent is to deceive or to hide our meaning.

Suppose that you have a job that you hate, and one morning you get up to go to work, see that it is a beautiful day, and decide to call in sick so you can go to an afternoon baseball game. You call in and ask for the boss. The secretary says, "He's not in today, but he will call in later this morning to get his messages." "Tell him I won't be in today because I am sick", you say. That afternoon you go to the baseball game. The seat next to you is empty. Then someone takes the seat. It is your boss.

In the ensuing conversation, your boss says, "I can understand that you may need a day off once in a while, but you left a message for me that you were sick, and I cannot stand being lied to." You say, "I wasn't really lying. I was speaking figuratively, not literally. When I said I was sick, I meant I was sick of coming to work every day. It was a metaphor. What I said was not true literally, but it was true figuratively" (don't try this at home).

That story might sound ridiculous, but here is something that I know actually happened to someone. A man I know was once evicted from an apartment because he was unemployed and couldn't pay the rent. Later on when he was considering getting another apartment, he was worried that he would not be accepted because he would be

required to list on the application the last place he lived where he was evicted. A woman he knew wanted to help him and told him, "No problem. Just say you rented from me for the last several years and I'll give you a good reference." He said, "That would be a lie." She said, "It's not really a lie. When they ask for references, what they are really asking is, 'are you a good tenant who won't make noise and tear up the place?'"

One of the most common lies I ever hear is, "That's not really a lie."

If our intent is to communicate and tell the truth to someone, and we say something figuratively, if we sense any doubt in the other person, we clarify, "I'm speaking figuratively", or, "I don't mean that literally." We don't deliberately allow others to misunderstand us. We don't use figures of speech to deceive unless we are intentionally lying.

I think it is a valid point that a reader or listener will know when someone is speaking figuratively, either because a well-known figure of speech is used or because it wouldn't make any sense literally, and that if the speaker or writer thinks his audience might accidentally take the metaphor literally, he will clarify the matter or not use the figure of speech. For example, after God brought Israel out of Egyptian slavery and through the Red Sea, He said to them, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself" (Exodus 19:4). No one would have misunderstood. Israel knew that God was speaking figuratively because they saw how they were rescued and they remembered walking out of Egypt. They knew they did not literally ride on the wings of eagles. God could use this figure of speech because He knew that the Israelites would never accidentally take Him literally. It was obvious to all concerned that "eagles' wings" was a metaphor.

Yet today, many try to interpret figuratively verses that use no figure of speech, make sense literally, is consistent with the rest of the Bible when taken literally, and would have been universally understood to be literal at the time they were written and given to God's people, and are understood literally by many Christians today.

In Genesis 1:1-31, God describes the creation or renewing of the surface of the earth in six days. Were these literal, twenty-four hour days, or figurative days? Is the entire first chapter of Genesis a metaphor to teach us only that God is creator?

Though the structure of these verses may or may not be poetic, the descriptions of the six days are not made using well-known Hebrew figures of speech. There are no figures of speech like the English phrase "a frog in my throat." The language here used is literal. It makes sense literally. A literal understanding of these verses is not inconsistent with anything else in the Bible. There is no reason the ancient Israelites or the early Church would not have taken this literally as an accurate description of how God did His work of creation.

God does not teach fables. I have heard some say God used the account of renewing the face of the earth in six days because the ancient Israelites did not have scientific knowledge and could not understand a process that might have taken millions of years.

But this doesn't make sense. Even though ancient people did not have the scientific knowledge we have today, God did not have to resort to fables to explain that He is the creator. If the six days of creation never literally occurred, and if the real process of creation took billions of years, God could simply have explained the creation in general terms, stating that He made the land, sea, plant and animal life in general terms without giving specific time periods.

In the history of mankind, only relatively recently have scientists had the information to even try to challenge the Genesis account. Ancient Israel would have understood these verses literally, and so would the early Church. Even today, many Christians take God at His word and understand these verses literally, choosing to believe God rather than scientists, even to the point of enduring ridicule for their beliefs. Why would God make untrue statements that would mislead the very people that look to God and His word as a source of truth?

And if God did this with the Genesis account, how could we trust anything God told us in the rest of the Bible? Everything would be in doubt because anything might be a figure of speech.

I think the reason many people say that the six days of creation are figurative is that they either don't really believe that the Bible is the word of God or they aren't willing to believe what God says. And rather than reject the Bible, they prefer to call "metaphor" anything in the Bible that they do not agree with literally.

Of course, there are many figurative passages in Scripture that are not controversial. The Bible makes it clear that symbols are being used and often explains what those symbols mean. There are many examples. Jesus Christ is called "the Lamb of God." Nations in prophecy are often symbolized as "beasts." Everyone understands that these statements are figurative.

But that's the point. A figure of speech is understood as such. We may not always agree on what a symbol means, but at least God makes clear that we should not take such a statement literally. God knows how to communicate. He doesn't use figures of speech that would be misunderstood as being literal. God doesn't play tricks with us, He won't make statements that many Christians who trust Him will take literally, then tell us in the Kingdom, "I'm sorry you misunderstood, I was only speaking figuratively."

The rule of thumb is this. If God is speaking figuratively, He will make that much clear by the language or context or by something else in the Bible. A figurative statement will not make sense literally when you take the whole Bible into account. Something in the immediate context or elsewhere in the Bible will show that the statement cannot be taken literally. People should not be deceived by taking something literally which God meant figuratively. If God uses a symbol or metaphor, there may be times when we do not know what it represents. I do not understand all of the symbols, beasts, etc. used in prophetic visions for example. But we know they are symbols.

When God uses literal language to make statements that would be taken literally in their natural sense by ancient Israel or by many Christians today, and there is nothing

elsewhere in the Bible that shows that the language cannot be literal, we should not interpret those statements figuratively.

God commands us to live by His Word (Matthew 4:3-4). We are to look to God for the answers to our questions about doctrinal matters, and God requires that we believe Him. How can we do this if we always have doubts that anything God says to us may only be a metaphor? If that is the case, every man will interpret the Bible to mean what he thinks it should mean.

The Bible says that God cannot lie (Titus 1:1-3, Hebrews 6:18). I believe it is part of God's nature that He always speaks the truth, and truthfulness is part of the character God wants us to have. I do not believe God would deceive men by using metaphors that we might take literally even when taking the whole Bible into account. When God uses a figure of speech, He makes it clear to those He is addressing that it is a figure of speech, and not literal. This is true even in those cases where we may not immediately understand the meaning of the figure of speech. We still know it is not literal.

In the creation account in Genesis, no well-known figure of speech is used to describe the six days of creation. It makes sense literally and would make sense literally to ancient Israel and to the first century Church. There is nothing else in the Bible to indicate that the six days are figurative. The account of creation in Genesis is literal, not figurative.

Our Attitude and Approach Towards God's Word

Many in the world today have an attitude of scorn and ridicule towards the Bible. Many of these people are atheists or agnostics. They are often well educated in the things of this world, and they may be very successful materially, even highly respected. Some are writers, some are journalists, and some are TV personalities. Many are teachers and professors in colleges and universities. They may sometimes have an interest in religious subjects, even the Bible itself, but their whole approach towards the Bible is the very opposite of respect. This may not be apparent when they start a conversation or discussion about the Bible - they may start out very polite - but it becomes obvious later that they think of the Bible as something to be laughed at or looked down upon, and they tend to look down on those who believe and respect the Bible. They love to try to build contradictions where there are none by the way they interpret different scriptures. They love to judge the Bible, interpret passages unfavorably, and criticize and contradict what the Bible teaches. They love to try to find fault with the Bible or argue about it, but they will not learn from it or obey it. Arguing about the Bible is a form of entertainment for them.

I once saw a news story on TV about serious drought in some southern states of the United States and how some people in those states were praying for rain and trusting in

God to answer their prayers. When the story ended, the anchorman was on the screen, and his expression was that of a man who was struggling to restrain his laughter.

I have proved to my satisfaction that the Bible is inspired by a God who is able to know the future in advance. What does the Bible itself say about being the Word of God, and what does it say about the attitude we should have towards God's Word?

"To whom will you liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he makes it a god: they fall down, yes, they worship. They bear him on the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he stands; from his place shall he not remove: yes, one shall cry to him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble. Remember this, and show yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O you transgressors. Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:5-10).

"Produce your cause, said the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, said the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods: yes, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together. Behold, you are of nothing, and your work of nothing: an abomination is he that chooses you" (Isaiah 41:21-24).

"To whom then will you liken me, or shall I be equal? said the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who has created these things, that brings out their host by number: he calls them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one fails" (Isaiah 40:25-26).

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

"Thus said the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that you build to me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things has my hand made, and all those things have been, said the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isaiah 66:1-2).

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

"Every word of God is pure: he is a shield to them that put their trust in him" (Proverbs 30:5).

"And he humbled you, and suffered you to hunger, and fed you with manna, which you knew not, neither did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD does man live" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

"Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If you be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:1-4). Also see Luke 4:1-4 for the parallel version of the same event. Also notice that for every temptation that Satan used to tempt Jesus, Jesus countered the temptation by quoting Old Testament scripture.

Note, the Bible says, God cannot lie. "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:1-2, see also Hebrews 6:18).

The Bible also says, Scripture cannot be broken. "Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, You are gods? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say you of him, whom the Father has sanctified, and sent into the world, You blaspheme; because I said, I am the Son of God?" (John 10:34-36). Along this line, if you read the gospel accounts, you will find many places where the Bible says that such-and-such thing happened in the life of Jesus so that Old Testament scriptures would be fulfilled. Examples I have found are, Matthew 1:22-23, 2:14, 2:23, 4:13-16, 8:16-17, 12:16-21, 13:34-35, 21:4-5, 26:55-56, 27:35, John 12:37-41, 15:24-25, John 17:12, 19:23-24.

God requires that we believe His word. Abraham believed what God promised him, and God counted that belief in God's promises as righteousness. "And Abram said, LORD God, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me you have given no seed: and, see, one born in my house is my heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, This shall not be your heir; but he that shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be your heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if you be able to number them: and he said to him, So shall your seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:2-6). This is confirmed by Paul. Note what Paul says about this in Romans. "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he has whereof to glory; but not before God. For what said the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:1-3). Also, "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it

was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:19-25). And James wrote, "See you how faith worked with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which said, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God" (James 2:22-23).

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Refusal to believe God's promises and word is a reason God rejected the generation of Israel that came out of Egypt and would not let them enter the promised land. "For some, when they had heard, did provoke: however, not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:16-19). Also, Paul wrote in Romans, "You will say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Be not high minded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not you. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness: otherwise you also shall be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again" (Romans 11:19-23).

It is clear from the above quotes that the Bible claims to be the word of God, that is, God speaking, and that it claims to be infallible, and teaches that God cannot lie. The Bible also teaches that it is vitally important to God that His people believe what He says. It is clear to me from fulfilled prophecy that the Bible is indeed the word of God, and that God requires me to approach it in an attitude of belief and respect.

I might add, that in seeking to prove whether the Bible is God's word or not, I also checked the literature of various other major religions in the world besides Judaism and Christianity. For each book or piece of literature I found that is regarded as sacred literature by some other religion, I read through it to look for any claims to being the word of God and to look for prophecy that could be verified against history. I found no other book besides the Bible that claimed to be the word of the creator God and that made predictions of events to take place between the time the prophecies were written and today, prophecies that could be checked against history. If there is any such book besides the Bible, I never found it.

After I had proved that the Bible is God's word, I had to make a decision whether to believe what God says. I simply made a decision to believe God, to believe the Bible, wherever that belief would lead me. I chose to believe that God is trustworthy and that He never lies, that He is perfectly righteous and truthful just as He says that He is in the Bible, and I made a commitment to myself and to God that for the rest of my life I would believe God and strive to base my decisions on that belief in God's truthfulness and trustworthiness. This decision to believe what God says is a free choice, but I could

not have made this choice until after I proved that the Bible is God speaking. I believe that this choice to believe what God says is an important element of the faith that God requires of us.

How to Understand the Bible

There are many points on how to study the Bible. I will mention a few that I have found to be valuable.

The first and most important point is to approach the Bible with an attitude of respect and a willingness to believe what God says. I think it is clear from the quotes I just covered that God looks with favor upon those who "tremble" at His word. This indicates we need to have a high degree of respect, based on knowledge that it is the God who created the universe and all humanity that speaks to us through the Bible, and that God, as creator, has authority over our lives.

It is also important to understand that God helps those who believe and obey Him to understand the Bible, but that He does not help those who disbelieve or treat lightly the things that He says. God says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments" (Psalm 111:10). If we want to understand the Bible, it is vital that we have an attitude that is willing to believe and obey what God says. Understanding does not come all at once, but it comes over time as we study the Bible and strive to obey God. As we believe and obey we can go to God in prayer and ask Him to help us understand the Bible more.

Some people are concerned when they find what appears to them to be contradictions in the Bible. I have found from experience that these apparent contradictions generally disappear with further study. In some cases, there may be a mistranslation involved. In other cases, two scriptures that may give different accounts may be complementing each other by describing different aspects of the same event or principle, not contradicting each other. I do not claim to know the answer to every apparent contradiction just as I do not claim to fully understand everything in the Bible, but I have found that the more I learn about the Bible the more I have found that apparent contradictions disappear upon further study.

God cannot contradict Himself, for to do so would make God a false witness in one place or another. God cannot lie (Titus 1:1-2, Hebrews 6:18). You either choose to believe this or you don't. This is also an important principle of Bible study, to know that God cannot contradict Himself. Sometimes you have to look at the context of what is being said to get the real meaning, and sometimes you have to let scriptures that are clear and easy to understand interpret those scriptures that are less clear.

Some scriptures are clear and easy to understand and some are not clear. We should let clear scriptures interpret unclear scriptures. I have already covered the subject of

figurative language in the Bible. If it is obvious from the Bible that figurative language is being used, we should look to the Bible to give us the meaning of the symbols or metaphors being used, and not try to read our own meaning into it.

When studying a particular doctrine or topic, we need to get ALL the scriptures on that particular subject. One way to do this is to use an exhaustive concordance such as Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, which lists the words used in the Bible and every place they appear in the Bible. There are many Bible software packages that will help you find where certain words are used in the Bible. So for example, if you wanted to find out what the Bible teaches about the Sabbath, you could look up the word "Sabbath" in an exhaustive concordance and find every place in the Bible where that word is mentioned, and you could study those scriptures to find out what the Bible teaches about the Sabbath. There have been times when I wanted to find every verse that applied to a broad topic that could not be condensed in a few words, and I read the entire Bible cover-to-cover to make sure I found everything the Bible said about the subject. For example, when I was trying to prove if the Bible was God's word, I wanted to find EVERY prophecy in the Bible that might be verified in history, so I read the entire Bible looking for such prophecies.

When studying a particular passage we need to consider the context of statements made in the Bible. This is especially true for scriptures that are unclear or difficult to understand. We need to read what comes before and what comes after the particular passage we are looking at. Words in any language can have multiple meanings depending on how they are used. The local context is very important for getting the intended meaning and a correct translation from the original language.

Finally, all these principles need to be used together in resolving doctrinal issues. We need to approach the Bible in an attitude of respect and belief, be willing to obey God and to live by every word of God, read all the scriptures that relate to the subject we are studying, look at the local context of each scripture, especially those that are difficult to understand, let clear scriptures interpret unclear scriptures, and let the Bible interpret its own symbols rather than reading our own opinions into them.

Some people may wonder which translation to use. There are many translations, but those that are literal translations are the most accurate. I think two of the best translations are the King James Version and the New King James Version. Also, the American King James Version is nearly identical to the King James Version but with many obsolete words replaced with their modern equivalent. And for difficult or important scriptures, it is often a good idea to look up a scripture in more than one translation.

Summary

The design that exists in creation, not just life, but the laws of physics and the universe itself proves the existence of a master designer, a creator God who made design choices that determine the characteristics of all of creation.

Fulfilled prophecy, particularly the prophecies concerning Israel that have been fulfilled in the last 200 years, together with prophecies in Daniel concerning the timing of the coming of the Messiah and end time conditions, prove that the Bible is God's word. Bible prophecy, together with modern history, shows that the United States and the British Commonwealth nations are identified in prophecy as Israel, specifically the sons of Joseph. The Bible teaches that God commands respect for His Word and we need to have a willingness to believe and obey what God tells us in the Bible.

With the knowledge that the Bible is God speaking and has authority over what we believe and practice, and that God requires that we trust His word and believe what He says, we can approach the Bible to learn the major truths of the gospel in an attitude of godly fear and respect. We can choose to believe what God says by letting the Bible teach us what to believe about the true gospel and all of the truths of God.

In the next chapter I will explain some of the major truths of the true gospel that you can learn from the Bible. The Bible is about the gospel of the kingdom of God, and everything about the kingdom of God is part of the true gospel, and that really includes all the truth of the Bible. Nearly everything in the Bible relates to the true gospel in one way or another.

Most people believe the traditions they grew up with, and many religions and churches base their beliefs on their traditions rather than the Bible. But if you let the Bible interpret the Bible and are willing to put the Bible first, even at the cost of being willing, if necessary, to set aside the traditional beliefs you were raised in, then you may learn many new truths from the Bible that traditional Christianity does not have.

In the chapter that follows will be surprises. The Bible in many things does NOT teach what traditional Christianity teaches. I was raised Catholic. When I saw these differences, I had to make a choice of whether to believe the traditions I grew up with and the authority of the church I was a member of, or to believe what God says in the Bible. Understanding that God requires that I believe Him more than man, I made the choice to believe God, and I have never turned back on that choice.

Anyone who proves that the Bible is God's word and reads what the Bible says will be faced with that same choice and will have to decide for themselves one way or another whether to believe God or not.

CHAPTER 2 - WHAT IS THE TRUE GOSPEL?

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to show, from the Bible, what the true gospel is, and in doing so to give an overview of the major teachings of the Bible in regard to God's plan for mankind.

I can start by stating simply that the true gospel is the good news of the Kingdom of God which Christ will establish on the earth as a literal world-ruling government at His second coming, and it includes everything in the Bible that relates to that kingdom. It includes everything about Jesus Christ because He is the king of that kingdom. It includes everything about salvation, which enables us to enter that kingdom, including the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our sins so we may be forgiven, and including the resurrection of Christ which enables Him to continue His saving work as our high priest and head of His church. It also includes God's law of love as a way of life that will be practiced in the Kingdom of God and which we should be learning to practice now.

I will explain the details of all these things and more in the rest of this chapter. I will also give the scriptures for these doctrines, and you can check them for yourself and also do your own independent research to prove whether these things are true or not.

God commands us to "prove" or "test" all things and to hold fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). God commends the Bereans who listened to the word preached to them and checked the scriptures to find out if the things being preached to them were true (Acts 17:10-11). I hope that you likewise will consider these doctrines with an open mind and prove from the Bible whether they are true or not.

There are reasons for starting our study of the true gospel with a study of the Sabbath.

The true gospel is about the kingdom of God that Christ will establish over the earth at His second coming. The gospel includes everything about that kingdom, including the laws of God, the Ten Commandments, which Christ will teach the nations to obey at that time. And among the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath particularly relates to understanding the true gospel of the kingdom of God. The Sabbath actually represents the coming millennial rule of Christ for 1,000 years after this six thousand year age of man. And the Sabbath is a test command. It is a test of our willingness to believe what God says and obey Him, as we will see. Without that willingness to believe what God says, we will not be able to understand the rest of the gospel. If we are not willing to

believe what God says about the Sabbath, we will not believe the other things God teaches us in the Bible, and we will not understand and believe the true gospel and God's plan for the salvation of mankind.

The Weekly Sabbath Day

Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for mankind. "And he said to them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). The account of when the Sabbath was made is given in Genesis. After renewing the face of the earth in six days, God created the Sabbath by resting. "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Genesis 2:1-3).

Later, Abram was born, whose name was changed to Abraham, and God called him and promised to make him into a great nation (Genesis 12:1-4, Genesis 17:1-5). Jacob was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham, and Jacob's name was changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28). In time, the children of Israel multiplied in the land of Egypt until they became a nation, and when God brought them out of Egypt to bring them into the promised land, he told them they would be a special nation and a special treasure to Him. See Exodus chapters 1, 3, 6, and 19. "And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure to me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel" (Exodus 19:3-6).

God intended the nation of Israel to obey God's laws, and by obeying God's laws and way of life to be a positive example for all other nations on the earth. God would bless Israel for obedience, and the rest of the world would learn from Israel's example that obedience to God's laws brings happiness and prosperity. "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do so in the land where you go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deuteronomy 4:5-6). See also Deuteronomy 7:12-15, 8:11-19, 11:13-32, 26:16-19, and Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 for the blessings that would result from obedience and the curses that would result from disobedience. Especially note Deuteronomy 11:26-28: "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a

curse, if you will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which you have not known."

God gave Israel his laws. The Ten Commandments are the ten main points of God's law and are recorded in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:1-22. Although the individual commandments listed in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 are not individually numbered, Deuteronomy 4:13 and Exodus 34:28 show that the number of commandments was ten. The importance of this will be shown later.

Although the Ten Commandments are not listed in the Bible before the book of Exodus, it is evident that God's law existed before that time, because God specifically stated that Abraham obeyed God's laws. "And I will make your seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give to your seed all these countries; and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Genesis 26:4-5).

Among the Ten Commandments is the commandment to rest on the Sabbath day. "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: why the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:8-11). Notice that in this command, God directly ties it in with the creation of the Sabbath day in Genesis. Notice the parallel statements:

Genesis: "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it"

Exodus: "why the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it"

This confirms that the Sabbath day that God commanded Israel to observe by resting is the same Sabbath day God created in Genesis immediately after He created the first man, Adam, on the sixth day. This answers the question of when God created the Sabbath. Jesus said the Sabbath was created for man. Genesis and Exodus show that God created the Sabbath when He created man. This is very consistent.

God was not so tired or exhausted by the first six days of creation that He needed to rest. But by resting on the seventh day of creation, God created the Sabbath day for mankind by setting an example for mankind to follow.

It is clear that observing the Sabbath is included in the Ten Commandments. Are the Ten Commandments still in force for Christians today? Yes they are. Notice James 2:10-11, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if you commit no adultery, yet if you kill, you are become a transgressor of the law." This is written in the New Testament, after Jesus Christ died for our sins and was resurrected and ascended into heaven. It is written by James, one of the "pillars" of the first century Church mentioned by the apostle Paul (Galatians 2:9). James says that if someone breaks one point of God's law, he is guilty of all. What "points" of God's law is James talking about? It is clear that he is talking about the Ten Commandments, with each

commandment being a "point" of God's law, for James uses two of the Ten Commandments as examples, calling them "points." Why is it true that if a person breaks one of these commandments that he has become guilty of breaking "all"? Because, as James points out, the same God who commanded we keep one point also commanded we keep all of them. Therefore the Ten Commandments are still in force today.

This is consistent with what Jesus taught His disciples in the sermon on the mount when He said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, Till heaven and earth pass, one stroke or one pronounciation mark shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19).

There are no passages in the New Testament that teach that God's Sabbath day is done away, or that the Ten Commandments are no longer in force, or that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday.

Paul said, "Why the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7:12). Jesus said, in answer to the young man who asked Him how he may find eternal life, "keep the commandments." When asked which, Jesus quoted a number of the Ten Commandments. Here is the full passage: "And, behold, one came and said to him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said to him, Why call you me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if you will enter into life, keep the commandments. He said to him, Which? Jesus said, You shall do no murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and your mother: and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 19:16-19). Jesus quoted a number of the Ten Commandments, plus the commandment to love one's neighbor as himself (Leviticus 19:18). He quoted these commandments to point the man to the Ten Commandments and to the two great commandments (Matthew 22:35-40). Why did He not quote all of the commandments? Because apparently it was with the commandments relating to loving one's neighbor that the man had a problem. Notice what the young man answered, and Jesus' reply in Matthew 19:20-22: "The young man said to him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said to him, If you will be perfect, go and sell that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." Apparently, this man needed to have more love for his neighbor and for the poor and he had too much love for himself and his possessions.

The law of God expresses God's nature. The way of life that God teaches and commands men to live is the way of life that God Himself practices. God practices what He preaches. God sent Jesus Christ to live a perfect life, obeying all the commandments of God, to set an example for us, that we should live as He lived. It is a way of life that leads to everything right and good.

That way of life can be described with the one word, "love." Love can be described as an outgoing concern for the welfare and happiness of others. It can also be described with the one word, "give."

There are two possible ways of life, the "give" way and the "get" way. The give way of life is the way of outgoing concern for others, the way of honesty, the way of helping, of serving, of cooperating. It is the way that leads to peace, unity, and happiness. It is also the way of truth. This is the way that God practices and teaches.

The Bible teaches that God is love. Notice 1 John 4:7-11, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not knows not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." Also, 1 John 4:16, "And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him." God expresses this love by giving. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Also, James 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no fickleness, neither shadow of turning." See also Matthew 5:42, 43-48, 7:7-11.

The "give" way of life is the way that God lives. But the opposite way of life is the "get" way. It is the way of trying to selfishly take from others and get more for the self. It is the way of selfishness, hostile competition, vanity, greed, deception, and resentment towards others. This is the way of life that Satan the devil lives. Jesus said that Satan was a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies (John 8:44). This is the way of life that leads to suffering, destruction, and death.

God's law is an expression of God's very nature. It can be summed up in one word, love. It is the way of life that God lives and commands and teaches men to live. God's commandments teach us HOW to love. According to the Bible, there is a direct connection between practicing love and keeping God's commandments. Notice, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:2-3). Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

The two great commandments teach us how to love God and love other people. Someone asked Jesus what the greatest commandment is. "Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like to it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). In answering, Jesus was quoting the Old Testament scriptures (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). "The law and the prophets" is a reference to the Old Testament scriptures, which are composed of the "law" (the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible), the "prophets" (books such as Isaiah,

Jeremiah, and Ezekiel as well as the other prophets), and the "writings" (such as Psalms). Jesus is saying that the Old Testament scriptures are based on love towards God and love towards neighbor.

The two great commandments are further defined by the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments fill in details about HOW to love God and love our neighbor. The first four of the Ten Commandments teach us how to love God, and the last six teach us how to love our neighbor. Then the whole rest of the Bible further teaches us how to practice the way of love and how to keep God's commandments in their practical application in our lives.

Jesus obeyed God's commandments and set an example for us in doing so. "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them" (John 13:14-17).

The fact that Jesus kept God's law and commandments also means that Jesus did not sin, for sin is the transgression of the law. 1 John 3:4 says "Whoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." By defining God's law, God's commandments teach us what sin is. Paul wrote, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. No, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, You shall not covet" (Romans 7:7). Jesus obeyed His Father's law. Jesus had to live a sinless life so that when He died He would pay the penalty for the sins of mankind, not his own sins. Jesus magnified the law, and taught us to keep the spiritual intent of the law, not just the letter of the law (Matthew 5:21-28, Isaiah 42:21).

The first four of the Ten Commandments teach us how to love God and the last six commandments teach us how to love our neighbor. The Sabbath commandment is the fourth commandment. This may come as a surprise to some Catholics who may read this, because many Catholics have been taught that the Sabbath commandment is the third commandment, and I will explain why this is later in this chapter.

It takes faith for a person who has not been keeping the seventh day Sabbath to begin to keep it. This is true about the Sabbath commandment in a way in which it is not true for the other commandments. Why?

Faith is believing God. It means believing what God says, not just believing that God exists. Even the demons believe that God exists (James 2:19), but they do not believe in the way of life that God teaches. I do not think the demons believe what Jesus said when Jesus said that it is better ("more blessed") to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Abraham became what some call the "father of the faithful" when He believed God's promises (Romans 4:3, James 2:23, Genesis 15:4-6). Note especially Romans 4:16-22: "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith

of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made you a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who vivifies the dead, and calls those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall your seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."

Why does it take faith to keep the Sabbath for someone who was not raised in a Sabbath tradition? Because it requires that person to believe what God says. This is not true to the same extent for the other nine commandments because often men have been able to discern the moral principles behind the other commandments without believing God or the Bible. For example, most societies all over the world are able to figure out that it is wrong to steal, murder, and commit adultery, and some people may even be able to understand that it is wrong to worship idols or to use God's name disrespectfully. But human reason cannot determine, apart from the revelation from God, that we should rest one day out of seven, and WHICH day to rest on. Even societies that may rest one day each week often do not rest on the seventh day, but some other day of the week. But God tells us to rest on the SEVENTH day. God counts days from sunset to sunset (Leviticus 23:32), so God's Sabbath is from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

It can require faith to obey the Sabbath commandment because keeping it can involve sacrifice. It can make one seem different from other people. It can sometimes involve financial sacrifice and some people have lost their jobs because of their obedience to the Sabbath commandment.

But there are also benefits that arise from keeping the Sabbath. But generally, one does not fully learn about those benefits until one begins to keep the Sabbath, and it takes faith to begin to keep it.

The Sabbath day provides much needed rest for man by providing one day a week to rest from his labors. God did not intend for a person to work non-stop without rest seven days a week. But there are many other benefits. It is a time for people to draw closer to God in prayer, Bible study, thinking about God and His greatness, and assembling together for instruction and worship with others who also fear God. The Sabbath is not a time for personal entertainment and recreation, such as watching football games, playing cards, and watching movies. Notice Isaiah 58:13-14: "If you turn away your foot from the sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shall honor him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: Then shall you delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it." The Sabbath is a day for a man or woman to build a closer relationship with God. It is part of properly keeping the greatest commandment, to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:36-40).

The weekly Sabbath also helps picture and symbolize God's plan for mankind. When Adam chose to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and thus disobeyed God, he cut himself off from the kind of relationship he could have had with God if he had obeyed. Adam and Eve were driven out from the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24). From that point on, mankind in general has refused to obey God and has chosen instead to rule himself, living his own way, deciding for himself right and wrong. When Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was taking to himself the prerogative of deciding what is good and evil, what is right and wrong, and mankind has followed that way ever since. Instead of allowing God to set moral standards men are to live by and looking to God's word to see what God says is right and wrong, each person decides for himself or herself what is right or wrong, and then lives according to his or her own standards, not God's.

But man's ways are not God's ways. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, said the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9). "There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12, also see Proverbs 16:25). It is God who has the right to decide what is right and wrong, what is sin and what is not sin. Man can only decide WHETHER to sin. But Adam and Eve rejected God's rule and chose to decide for themselves, under Satan's influence, their own standards of belief and behavior. They chose to "go their own way", independent of God. And by their choice, they rejected God's government over them. And since all mankind has come from Adam and Eve, by making the decision to reject God's government over them, they made that decision not only for themselves but for their children and the whole human race which came from them, and all mankind has been suffering the consequences ever since.

By following Satan, Adam and Eve rejected God's rule over them. Man's nature, under Satan's influence, has become evil. Note the following scriptures. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). In the sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:11). Notice that it is to His own disciples that Jesus said, "you...being evil". This shows that the evil and wickedness of man's heart is not just the characteristic of a few wicked men, but mankind in general. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Just as Satan deceived Eve about the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, so Satan deceives the whole world into following the wrong way of life (Revelation 12:9).

God intends that the human race learn a lesson from experience that man's ways, apart from God's rule, lead to suffering, destruction, and death. Mankind is not able to rightly rule itself. "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Man needs the rule and government of God over him for his own good and welfare. This is true individually as well as for the whole human race. God's laws define the way that leads to life and happiness, but men

do not obey those laws because they do not believe what God says. So God is allowing man to go his own way, make his own decisions, decide for himself what he thinks is right and wrong, create his own moral standards for belief and behavior, and reap the painful consequences of rejecting God's rule and laws. The result has been war, sickness, suffering, and death from the time of Adam until now. And Jesus prophesied that by the time of the end conditions would be so bad that unless He returned the whole human race would bring destruction upon itself. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:21-22).

But then, at the time of the end, Jesus Christ will return to the earth in power to establish the Kingdom of God ruling over the nations on the earth, and God's rule will not only save man from destroying himself, but will bring an unprecedented period of peace, prosperity, and happiness to the earth. As God has allowed man to rule himself for six thousand years, under Satan's influence whose ways Adam and Eve chose, so God will establish a period of one thousand years when Christ will rule the earth, teach all mankind God's law, and bring peace, happiness, and prosperity to mankind. "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark on their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4). "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, said the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, said the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:33-34). "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

Mankind is not learning the lesson now, but man is writing the lesson in painful history, that man's ways apart from God lead to suffering and death. But when God establishes Christ's rule over the earth and at last brings peace and happiness to mankind, mankind will be able to compare the fruits of his own rule with the fruits of God's rule, and then man will begin to learn that God's ways and laws are for man's good and are the true way to happiness.

The Sabbath pictures the millennial rule of Christ. Just as the weekly Sabbath is the last day of a seven day week, so the one thousand year rule of Christ over the earth will be the last one thousand years of a seven thousand year period from the time of Adam. Properly kept, the weekly Sabbath can be a day of delight, a day of rest, and a day of drawing closer to God, just as the millennial reign of Christ will be a day when all mankind learns the ways of God and enjoys peace and happiness.

The Sabbath commandment is also a test commandment. As I mentioned before, men can often figure out on their own that they should not murder, steal, commit adultery,

and that they should honor their mother and father, and some have even been able to learn that it is wrong to worship an idol. But a man or woman must trust and believe God in order to begin keeping the Sabbath day according to God's word. This is why it is a test commandment. It tests man's belief and trust in God and in His word. God actually used the Sabbath to test ancient Israel in the wilderness after He brought them out of Egypt. "Then said the LORD to Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily" (Exodus 16:4-5). Notice that God says He will TEST Israel. "And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said to them, This is that which the LORD has said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath to the LORD: bake that which you will bake to day, and seethe that you will seethe; and that which remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath to the LORD: to day you shall not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none. And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, How long refuse you to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the LORD has given you the sabbath, therefore he gives you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide you every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day" (Exodus 16:22-30). Notice that the Sabbath existed BEFORE the Ten Commandments were given as recorded in Exodus 20, and BEFORE the old covenant was made with Israel as recorded in Exodus 24:1-8.

I will mention one more purpose of the Sabbath, and that is that it is a special SIGN between God and His people. A sign identifies. The Sabbath sign identifies to God's people who the true God is, and it identifies to God who his people are. Notice Exodus 31:12-17: "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it *is* a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that *ye* may know that I *am* the LORD that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it *is* holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth *any* work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh *is* the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth *any* work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, *for* a perpetual covenant. It *is* a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (KJV). It is a sign that identifies God because it points to the day that God rested after His work of creation, and thus identifies the true God as the Creator. Notice Ezekiel 20:18-20: "But I said to their children in the wilderness, Walk you not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols: I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the

LORD your God." Notice that God says, "that you may know that I am the LORD your God." This shows that the Sabbath day, properly kept, will help the Sabbath-keeper know who the true God is. It also identifies to God those who are willing to obey what he says, so the sign works both ways.

It is also good to point out that Sunday is not God's Sabbath and does not point to the true God of creation. It is the seventh day of the week, not the first, that points to the day God rested from the six days of creation, and it is the seventh day of the seven day week that points to the future millennial rule of Christ for one thousand years following six thousand years of man's rule over himself.

Some people think that the Church changed the Sabbath from the last day of the week to the first day of the week in the first century. Many people think this occurred because of the traditional belief of many churches today that Jesus Christ died on a Friday and was resurrected on a Sunday morning. But God's true Church never tried to change the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day of the week, and the Bible indicates that the Friday-crucifixion, Sunday morning-resurrection tradition cannot be true.

Jesus said He would be in the grave for three days and three nights. He further indicated that this would be the sign that He was the Messiah. Notice these scriptures. "But he answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:39-40). "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17). From Friday night to Sunday morning would be one day and two nights, so that tradition cannot be true.

Many people are confused about this when they read scriptures that indicate that Jesus was buried right around the beginning of a sabbath, such as the following: "And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea, an honorable counselor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly to Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. And Pilate marveled if he were already dead: and calling to him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulcher which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone to the door of the sepulcher" (Mark 15:42-46). Many assume that the sabbath referred to above is the weekly Sabbath, that is, the seventh day of the week. But there are annual sabbaths also, days of commanded rest that are called "sabbath" that fall on particular dates in the Hebrew calendar and can fall on any day of the week.

There are seven annual sabbaths given by God, and six of them fall on particular days of particular months in the Hebrew calendar (all except Pentecost). These are days of rest and assembly, just as the weekly Sabbath is a day of rest and assembly, and they are called "sabbaths". Information about these days can be found in chapter 23 of Leviticus. These days are called "holy days," "sabbaths," and except for Atonement they are called "feast days." Notice, for example, that the Day of Atonement, an annual

holy day, is called a sabbath in Leviticus 23:32: "It shall be to you a sabbath of rest, and you shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even to even, shall you celebrate your sabbath." Also, Leviticus 23:24: "Speak to the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall you have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation." More information can be found about these days in Deuteronomy chapter 16 and many other places, and I will review these days in detail, and their meaning, in the next section.

Was there an annual sabbath day around the time of the crucifixion that could fall on a weekday? Yes. There is an annual Sabbath that follows the day of Passover. The Passover day, which is not a sabbath but is the day that God commanded ancient Israel to observe by eating the lamb they had slaughtered, is a memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Passover lamb represents Jesus Christ. "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Here, Christ is called "our passover," and elsewhere, He is called "the Lamb" as in John 1:29: "The next day John sees Jesus coming to him, and said, Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world." The sacrifice of the lamb in ancient Israel represented the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. And in fulfillment of that day, Jesus died on Passover day. Remember, as God counts days, they begin and end at sunset. As God counts days, the day of Passover began at sunset the evening that Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples. The night that Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples was same day therefore that he was crucified and died. See Matthew chapters 26 and 27, Mark chapters 14 and 15, Luke chapters 22 and 23, and John chapters 13 through 19. What was the annual holy day, a Sabbath, that follows Passover? The First Day of Unleavened Bread. Notice Leviticus 23:5-7: "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD's passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread to the LORD: seven days you must eat unleavened bread. In the first day you shall have an holy convocation: you shall do no servile work therein."

It was the First Day of Unleavened Bread, an annual sabbath, not the weekly Sabbath, that was the sabbath that immediately followed the crucifixion of Christ. An annual sabbath can fall on any day of the week. Which day of the week did this day fall on when Jesus was crucified?

Jesus said He would be in the grave for three days and three nights, that is, 72 hours. He died in the afternoon on Passover day and was buried right around the time of sunset that marked the end of Passover day and the beginning of the annual sabbath known as the First Day of Unleavened Bread (Matthew 27:45-60, Mark 15:33-46, Luke 23:44-54, John 19:31-42). His resurrection would then also be around the time of sunset, 72 hours later, in order for Him to be in the grave for three days and three nights as the sign of the prophet Jonah. Keeping in mind that His resurrection would be around the time of sunset, which day of the week was He resurrected?

When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb as the first day of the week began to dawn, Jesus Christ had already been resurrected, and the angel told the women that He was going before them into Galilee. Notice Matthew 28:1-7: "In the

end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said to the women, Fear not you: for I know that you seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there shall you see him: see, I have told you." See also Mark 16:1-7, Luke 24:1-7, and John 20:1-2.

Jesus was buried around the time of sunset. Since Jesus was already resurrected when the women went to the grave early Sunday morning, and if Jesus was to be resurrected after three days and nights, 72 hours, then He must have been resurrected no later than around sunset that marked the end of the sabbath, the seventh day of the week, not the first. Three days prior to this would be Wednesday around sunset, and the First Day of Unleavened Bread, an annual sabbath, would be on a Thursday that year.

Some will notice Mark 16:9, "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils." Many people think this refers to a Sunday morning resurrection. If this were true, it would contradict the other verses we have covered, and the Bible cannot contradict itself. What is the explanation?

I can think of three possible explanations. One, a footnote in my Bible indicates that verses 9 through 20 are bracketed in some manuscripts as not in the original text and some manuscripts do not contain them at all. This indicates to me at least the possibility that these verses were not in the original inspired text and were added later, as far as I can tell. Secondly, the original inspired Greek text did not have punctuation marks, so translators supply the comma that appears after the word "week" in most translations. Without the comma, or with the comma after "risen," the phrase "early the first day of the week" can apply to when Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene. For example, if the comma was placed after "risen," the verse would read, "Now when Jesus was risen, early the first day of the week he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils." The translators in their decisions about where to place punctuation can be influenced by their own religious beliefs just like anyone else and can make mistakes accordingly. If these verses are truly part of the original inspired text, then the comma could go after "risen," and the first day of the week is day when Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene, not the day when He was resurrected. The third explanation is that Christ may have left the grave just *after* sunset if his burial was also completed a few minutes after sunset. This would technically place the resurrection on the first day of the week, but not what we call "Sunday." It would be Saturday night, just after sunset. This is not the Sunday traditional Christianity observes.

Some people think that in the controversies with the Pharisees, Jesus taught against the Sabbath or taught that the Sabbath was done away. That is not true. Jesus kept His Father's commandments (John 15:10). Jesus attended the synagogue on the Sabbath day as His custom was (Luke 4:16). But the Pharisees added many requirements and

traditions to Sabbath observance, which God never intended, and made the Sabbath a burden rather than a day of delight. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and taught that it is lawful to heal and to do good on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1-6, Matthew 12:9-13, Luke 13:10-16, Luke 6:6-10).

The Annual Holy Days and the Plan of God

Besides the weekly Sabbath, God gave annual feasts and holy days or Sabbaths to Israel, and these days are still in effect for the Church today.

I have already touched on the fact that the weekly seventh-day Sabbath helps Christians who keep it properly to understand the coming millennial reign of Christ on the earth. But the annual Sabbaths and feasts of God help to reveal and illustrate much more detail about God's overall plan for mankind.

In this section I want to give a brief overview and introduction to what the annual feasts and holy days of God are, and I want to briefly explain what they represent and help to illustrate about God's plan and purpose for mankind. In the process, I will also be covering what that plan is.

Passover -- the Sacrifice of Christ

The first day which God commands to be observed is Passover. Passover is not a sabbath. Work is permitted. Like all days, it begins and ends at sunset. It is to be kept on the 14th day of the first month in the Hebrew calendar. You can read the details of the institution of Passover in Exodus chapter 12. Every household of Israel in Egypt was told to kill a lamb just after sunset when the 14th day had just begun, but before it was completely dark. They were to splatter the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their house, roast the lamb, and eat it in their house and remain indoors until morning. Around midnight God killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, but God "passed over" any house that had the blood on the doorposts and did not kill the firstborn in that house. For ancient Israel, this was a lesson that God protected them and saved them from the plague with which He plagued the Egyptians. But for Christians today, there is a deeper meaning.

The symbolism with Jesus Christ is unmistakable. Jesus is called "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29) and "our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Revelation 7:14 and 12:11 makes reference to the "blood of the Lamb" in reference to the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote that we are justified with God by the blood of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:9).

The penalty of sin is death. "For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23, KJV). All have sinned, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, KJV). Therefore, all mankind has fallen under the death penalty. God the Father sent Jesus Christ to live a sinless life and die to pay the penalty for our sins in our place so that the death penalty could be removed and we can be forgiven of our past sins. "But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5-6, KJV). I think traditional Christianity understands this particular point of God's plan pretty well.

When Jesus kept the Passover with His disciples before He died, He made a change in the Passover ritual for the Church, but not the date that Passover should be kept. Jesus instituted the symbols of the bread, to represent His body which was about to be scourged and broken, and the wine, to represent His blood which was about to be shed (Matthew 26:26-28). He also instituted a foot washing ceremony, which most churches today do not observe, to teach the lesson of humility and service to others (John 13:2-17). It is the shed blood of Christ that pays the death penalty in our stead so we can be forgiven and so we do not have to die the second death in the lake of fire (Matthew 26:28, Isaiah 53:4-12, Hebrews 9:11-15, 1 John 1:7-9, Colossians 1:19-22). It is the suffering that He endured and His broken and scourged body that enables us to be healed physically and spiritually (Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 8:16-17, 1 Peter 2:21-24, Psalm 103:2-3, Matthew 9:1-7, Mark 2:5-12, Luke 5:20-24, James 5:14-17).

The penalty for our sins is death, that is, the second death in the lake of fire. Christ paid that penalty with His own death, His blood being shed for us, so we do not have to die in the lake of fire, a permanent death from which there will be no resurrection. This paves the way for God to give us the gift of eternal life so we can live forever. However, death is not the only penalty for our sins. We also suffer because of our sins. When we sin, our character is damaged and our minds are corrupted. When Adam and Eve first sinned, something happened to their minds. They began to have an attitude of rebellion against God. Their minds became sinful, wicked, perverted, hostile against God, evil, as the heart of man is described by Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 8:7, Matthew 7:11, Luke 18:19). Sin leads to more sin, which leads to the habit of sin and a sinful character and nature. And sin causes suffering. Sin is the violation of God's perfect law, and God's law when obeyed leads to happiness and everything good. The violation of God's law leads to unhappiness, suffering, and death. So in addition to death, suffering is a penalty of sin, and sin leads to an evil sinful mind and nature leading to more sin and more suffering. We become trapped in a vicious cycle of sin leading to more sin and suffering.

A comparison with the laws of health can help illustrate this. God designed and put into motion physical laws regulating health. When we violate those laws by abusing our bodies and not taking care of our health, sickness or injury results. This is a type and analogy of how violating God's spiritual law by sinning leads to a damaged character and evil nature, a nature that leads to more sin and more suffering. And the history of

mankind with its violence, crime, war, broken homes, poverty, and sickness shows the consequences of violating God's laws.

But Jesus not only paid the death penalty in our place, He also suffered for us, paying the penalty of suffering in our place for our violation of God's physical and spiritual laws. This paves the way for God to remove the penalty from us by healing our diseases and cleaning up our character, and replacing our evil nature leading to sin and suffering with His perfect, righteous character leading to happiness and everything good.

It would not do us much good if God removed the death penalty and gave us eternal life, but left us with our evil, sinning nature. If He did that, we would live forever in a sinful state, sinning and cause grief and suffering for ourselves and those around us for all eternity. Living forever only has positive value for us if the eternal life we have is a happy one. So God needs to clean up our character and replace our evil nature with His righteous nature for our salvation to be complete. How this is done is illustrated by the rest of the holy days and will be described in the next sections in this chapter.

Isaiah 53:5-6 shows that we are healed by the stripes Christ suffered when He was scourged (Matthew 27:26). This certainly applies to physical healing, and James 5:14-16 gives instructions for being healed by God of our physical sicknesses. And when we trust God for physical healing, we must also trust God to heal us at the time and in the manner He chooses, and some are not healed until the resurrection. Miraculous healing of physical diseases was a major part of Jesus Christ's ministry, and this illustrates God's mind and shows His love and that it is His will to heal us. But I also believe that Isaiah 53:5-6 in principle applies to spiritual healing and opens the way for God to heal and clean up our minds and character. The actual process by which this is done includes our repentance (illustrated by the days of unleavened bread) and God's gift to us of the Holy Spirit (illustrated by the day of Pentecost) described in the next sections.

The effect of cleaning up our character so we can live righteously in God's kingdom is to remove the penalty of suffering we have brought on ourselves by our sins, because it is our sinful nature that leads to sin which causes the suffering. Though we still suffer trials in this life, our suffering will end in the Kingdom of God when our salvation is complete (Revelation 21:4).

This is the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ, represented by the Passover symbols of the unleavened bread and wine. The wine represents Christ's shed blood and His death which pays the death penalty for our sins in our stead so we do not have to die the second death. The unleavened bread represents Christ's body and the suffering He endured in the flesh so we can be healed both physically and spiritually.

The Church observes Passover once a year the evening after sunset which begins the 14th day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar, the same day Jesus observed the Passover with His disciples. We observe it by assembling for services, partaking of the symbols of wine and unleavened bread, and participating in a foot washing service.

The Days of Unleavened Bread - Repentance

Immediately after Passover day are the seven days of unleavened bread. The first day and the last day of the seven (the seventh day) are holy days, sabbaths, days of rest and assembly. The instructions for these days are given in Exodus 12:14-20, and Exodus 13:3-10, as well as various other places. During these days, only unleavened bread is to be eaten, and nothing with leavening is to be eaten or even kept in the home. For ancient Israel, this represented leaving Egypt in haste because they had no time to prepare leavened bread. But like Passover, these days are still in effect today for God's Church, and like Passover, they have deep meaning beyond the limited understanding given to ancient Israel.

What does leavened or unleavened bread represent in the New Testament? In the context of the time of Passover and the days of unleavened bread, Paul used leavening to represent sin, and unleavened bread to represent righteousness. Notice what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8: "Your glorying is not good. Know you not that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." He also says, "let us keep the feast." What feast is he talking about? The context indicates that he is talking about the Feast of Unleavened Bread that God gave Israel at the time of the Exodus. This shows that the days of unleavened bread were being kept by Paul and the New Testament Church of God. And since Paul was primarily an apostle to the gentiles (Romans 15:15-16, Galatians 2:7-9), this indicates that Paul understood that these days were not just for the Jews but were for gentile Christians as well.

What lessons can we learn from the days of unleavened bread? Jesus Christ was sacrificed for us so we can be forgiven, and this is pictured by Passover. But we also have our part to perform. We must repent and strive to put sin out of our lives. Christ paid the penalty for our sins so our sins can be forgiven, but that does not give us permission to continue sinning. We have to repent. After the disciples received the Holy Spirit, when Peter spoke to the crowd, he told them to repent. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brothers, what shall we do? Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call" (Acts 2:37-39). Paul wrote, "sin not" (1 Corinthians 15:34).

Keeping the days of unleavened bread represents and helps to teach us our part in God's plan, that we have to repent and strive to put sin out of our lives. We avoid leavening for seven days to learn that we need to avoid sin in our lives, and we eat unleavened bread for seven days to help learn the lesson that we need to put the righteousness of

Jesus Christ into our lives. We need to study His teachings, obey His commands, and follow His examples.

The Bible commands that men repent. What do we need to repent of? We need to repent of sin, but we also need to repent of our own sinful nature and be willing to let God clean up our character and give us a new nature based on God's righteousness, not our own. We need to repent of the entire direction of our lives and be willing to begin to go in a new direction. We have to be willing to give our lives to God in one hundred percent obedience and service for the rest of our lives. We have to be willing to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. This love is more than just an emotion, though it may have an emotional quality, but it is a strong commitment of the will. Love towards God must include the submitting of the human will to God's will, as Jesus did, setting an example for us. We have to be willing to strive to live by every word of God.

The writer of Hebrews says that repentance from dead works is one of the elementary principles we need to understand (Hebrews 6:1). We need to repent of sin, but to do this, we need to know what sin is. Many people think that sin is doing what they think is wrong. They think that sin is whatever violates their conscience. This is not true. Sin is not the violation of our conscience, it is the violation of God's law. 1 John 3:4 states, "Whoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." It is the law of God that defines sin, not our conscience. Paul gives an example. In Romans 7:7 he says, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. No, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, You shall not covet." It is the commandment against coveting that taught Paul that it was a sin to covet, because God's law and commandments DEFINE right and wrong. That is why sin is the transgression of the law of God.

Many people think that whatever a person does, it is not a sin if they don't think it is wrong. That is not true. A person can be sinning against God and not even know it. Notice what Jesus said about those who sinned but did not think they were doing anything wrong. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For to whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47-48). Notice that Jesus did not say that those who did not know their master's will were free from guilt and would not be beaten at all. He said their guilt was less in comparison with the person who knew God's will and knew what he was doing was wrong, and therefore their punishment would be lighter, nevertheless, this shows that there is guilt, and punishment, for the person who violates God's law even if that person does not know it, and therefore the violation of God's law is sin.

Mankind has taken the path of each person deciding for himself or herself what is right or wrong instead of recognizing that it is God only who had the prerogative to decide right from wrong, sin from righteousness. Repentance involves acknowledging that God defines sin, and we have to look to God and His Word the Bible and to God's law

and commandments to know what is right and wrong, and then strive to live the right way according to God's will and instructions.

Repentance includes a lifelong commitment to turn from the direction of pleasing the self to the direction of loving God with all our being and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). It is a new way of life based on God's law of love. It requires striving to live, not only according to the letter of God's law, but the spiritual intent of God's law as well. Notice the examples Jesus gave about the requirement to obey the spirit of the law as well as the letter. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21-22, KJV). "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28, KJV).

Also, since we are required by God's law to love God with all our being and might, this includes living our lives to please Him in everything we do and striving to submit our wills to His will in everything. This goes beyond just obeying God's explicit commandments. This includes striving to know God's will (by studying and believing God's word, the Bible), and then striving to DO God's will. Jesus set the example by doing not only what the Father commanded Him, but the Father's will also. "Jesus said to them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Just before Jesus was crucified, He prayed to the Father that if it was the Father's will, Jesus would be spared this suffering. Nevertheless, Jesus requested that this be done ONLY if it was the Father's will. "And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:41-42, KJV). Notice also John 5:30, "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (KJV). And John 6:38, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (KJV). And John 8:29, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (KJV). Repentance involves making a lifetime commitment to strive to always do the things that please God, because this is part of obeying the greatest commandment, you shall love God with all your heart.

Repentance requires a commitment to strive to live by every word of God. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, he resisted and countered every temptation by referring to Old Testament scripture. For example, note Matthew 4:3-4, "And when the tempter came to him, he said, If you be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

Repentance also requires that we acknowledge our guilt before God, that we are sinners, and ask God to clean us up. We have to come to realize that our very nature is sinful.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Everyone has sinned and is in need of forgiveness, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, see also Romans 5:12). When David repented after his sin in the matter of Uriah the Hittite, he acknowledged his guilt before God. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving kindness: according to the multitude of your tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight: that you might be justified when you speak, and be clear when you judge" (Psalm 51:1-4). "Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:9-10).

The days of unleavened bread are given to us by God to help teach us the lesson that we have to repent and strive to put sin out of our lives, represented by leavening, and to put God's righteousness into our lives, represented by the unleavened bread that we eat. This is one of the major steps in God's plan for the salvation of mankind, and it is illustrated by this feast of God.

The Church observes the days of unleavened bread by getting all leaven and leavened products out of our homes and avoiding eating anything with leavening in it (yeast, baking soda, baking powder, etc.) for seven days, and also eating unleavened bread during this time (matzos for example, although some members make their own unleavened bread). We observe the first and last of the seven days by refraining from work and by assembling for church services, as on the weekly Sabbath, as commanded by God (Exodus 12:16). Also, on the evening of the First Day of Unleavened Bread (the next night after the Passover observance), we keep the Night to Be Much Observed, which is a separate event from Passover, by getting together in families and small groups in each others' homes or meeting places and sharing a meal. For ancient Israel, this observance represented coming out of Egypt, which occurred on the night following Passover night (Exodus 12:40-42). For the Church, it represents coming out of the bondage of Satan's deception and the sinful ways of this world.

Pentecost - the Gift of the Holy Spirit

The next day is Pentecost. In the Old Testament, it is called the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:9-11) and is sometimes called the Feast of Firstfruits (Numbers 28:26). Its description is given in Leviticus 23:15-21. It is observed 50 days from the Sabbath that falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread, so it always falls on a Sunday. In the New Testament, it is called Pentecost (Acts 2:1), which means, I believe, "count fifty." In the Old Testament, it is connected with the small, early summer harvest. In the New Testament, it is associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Before Jesus was crucified, He told His disciples that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "These things have I spoken to you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said to you" (John 14:25-26). After His resurrection and before His ascension into heaven, Jesus told His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit. "And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, you have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:4-5). The actual coming of the Holy Spirit is recorded in Acts 2:1-4, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

The Holy Spirit helps a person understand the Bible and understand spiritual knowledge in a way that the natural mind of man is not able to do. I already quoted the verse above where Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would help His disciples to remember the things Jesus taught them. Note also these scriptures. "But God has revealed them to us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). Note that Paul said that there is a spirit in man. There is a vast difference in intelligence between humans and animals such as dogs, chimpanzees, elephants, and dolphins that can be explained by the spirit in every human that God has added to the human brain to empower the human mind with a quality of intellect that animals do not have. But just as the human spirit empowers humans to understand physical knowledge, such as knowledge about science, engineering, literature, and languages, in a way that animals are not able to understand, so the Spirit of God empowers a Christian to understand, as Paul put it, "the deep things of God" in a way that the human mind, apart from God's Spirit, cannot understand.

The Holy Spirit also empowers a Christian. "For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). You can study the gospel accounts and the book of Acts to see how the disciples behaved differently, more courageously for example, after they received the Holy Spirit than before. When Jesus was taken to be crucified, almost all His disciples left Him, even though they previously said they would die with him, and even Peter denied Christ. But after they received the Holy Spirit they were willing to suffer and even die for Christ.

It is actually the presence of the Holy Spirit in the mind that makes one a Christian and a member of God's true Church. Paul wrote, "But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you" (Romans 8:9-11).

The conditions for receiving the Holy Spirit are repentance and faith in God and in Christ, and baptism by immersion in water as a symbol of our faith in the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sins and a symbol of the burial of the old self. God then gives the gift of His Holy Spirit upon the laying on of hands by the ministry. Notice, "Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). On the subject of baptism see also Colossians 2:11-12, Matthew 28:18-20, and Acts 8:36-39. On the subject of the laying on of hands and the receiving of the Holy Spirit, see Acts 8:14-17 and 1 Timothy 4:14.

After one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, he is a Christian, and must then live a life of spiritual growth, developing God's righteous character with God's help, and overcoming sin. Those who overcome and endure to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13, Mark 13:13, Matthew 10:22, Revelation 2:11, 3:5). The Church encourages its members to spend time on a regular basis in prayer, Bible study, fasting, and meditation as a way of drawing closer to God. Meditation in this sense is basically thinking about God and His laws, learning how to apply spiritual principles to everyday decisions, thinking about the lessons of the Bible, thinking about God's creation, etc., as David did (Psalm 119:97, Psalm 1:2). Prayer is talking to God in prayer, but not repeating memorized prayers (Matthew 6:7).

It is obvious that the Day of Pentecost represents the next step in God's plan after repentance, the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-39). The Church keeps Pentecost today to commemorate the gift of the Holy Spirit and the founding of the New Testament Church. But is there a connection between the meaning of the "first fruits" harvest and the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Church? Yes there is, but this will take some explaining. There is truth about this that most traditional churches do not know.

Most traditional Christian churches believe that this is the time when God is trying to save all mankind. Some believe that those who do not accept Jesus Christ in this life, in this age, are forever lost. But this is not the case. God has provided a plan for EVERY human that has ever lived to exercise free moral agency to repent, to believe God and Christ, to accept Jesus Christ as savior, and to be converted and be saved. But this plan is being worked out in stages. This six thousand year age of man is not the main spiritual harvest. This is not the time when God is trying to save everyone.

Ancient Israel never had access to God's Spirit or to spiritual salvation. They never had the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. They were never promised eternal life. They were promised physical protection and blessings if they obeyed God's law, but not eternal life.

Even since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the founding of the Church, most of the billions of people that have lived on this earth never heard the true gospel or had an opportunity for salvation.

The fact is, God has allowed Satan to blind and deceive the whole human race for this six thousand year age of man. It is God's purpose to allow man to write the painful

lesson in history that Satan's way of "get" and being independent of God's rule, with each person deciding for himself what is right and wrong, is a way that leads to suffering and destruction. Those lessons are being written in history right now, and according to prophecy the suffering of this world is going to increase even more before Christ returns. This is Satan's world right now, not God's. Satan can only do what God allows, and in God's time Satan and his evil influence will be put away, but right now it suits God's purpose to allow Satan to deceive the majority of mankind.

There is no "contest" between God and Satan over the salvation of men with God trying to save as many as possible right now and Satan opposing Him. Satan has absolutely NO POWER against God, and can do NOTHING apart from what God allows according to His will. For proof of this, read the first two chapters of the book of Job. Satan could not go one millimeter beyond what God allowed Him to go in attacking Job. If God wanted to open salvation to all mankind at this time, He would do it and Satan has no power to hinder God's efforts in the slightest.

God has allowed Satan to blind the minds and hearts of most people to God's truth so they CANNOT understand the truth and be converted. Only the few that God specifically calls and "draws" can be converted at this time. Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). Jesus did not try to save everyone, but rather He often spoke in parables, not to make the meaning clear, but to HIDE the meaning from all except those few who were His disciples, whom the Father was drawing to Christ. Notice what Jesus said. "And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said to them, To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but to them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them" (Mark 4:10-12). Here is a plain statement from Jesus that He spoke in parables to the crowds for the purpose of PREVENTING them from understanding so that they would NOT turn and have their sins forgiven them. It was NOT the Father's will that the crowds repent and receive forgiveness of their sins, AT THAT TIME. But for His disciples, Jesus explained the parables because they were the few that God was calling and drawing to Christ at that time. But not the majority.

I do not say that every parable told by Jesus was for the purpose of hiding the meaning. There were some parables Jesus spoke for the purpose of making His teachings clear. Often these had to do with expounding on God's law and teaching right from wrong. For example, the parable of the good Samaritan recorded in Luke 10:25-37 was given to make clear how men should live. It is obvious that the parable was given to make the meaning of God's commandment to love your neighbor as yourself clear to the one who asked Jesus "who is my neighbor?", and it is equally clear that the man got the point, because at the end of the parable when Jesus asked the man who was neighbor to the man who fell among thieves, the man answered, "he that showed mercy on him," and Jesus said, "Go, and do thou likewise."

Nevertheless, Jesus did often speak in parables to hide His meaning from the majority, and when it came to the secrets of the Kingdom of God, these things were revealed only to the disciples, not the crowds.

From the time before man existed, Lucifer was on a throne of the earth. Isaiah 14:12-14 says, "How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how are you cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also on the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." When Jesus was tempted by Satan, Satan, as ruler over the earth, offered to give his kingdom to Jesus if Jesus would worship him. "And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, showed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to him, All this power will I give you, and the glory of them: for that is delivered to me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If you therefore will worship me, all shall be yours. And Jesus answered and said to him, Get you behind me, Satan: for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve" (Luke 4:5-8). Before He was crucified, Jesus said, "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world comes, and has nothing in me" (John 14:30). This is Satan's world, his civilization, his system, his way of life that men practice, not God's.

But God is calling a few now into His true Church to learn and live a different way of life. Eventually, God will remove Satan and make salvation available to every human that has ever lived. That will be the great spiritual harvest. I will go into more detail about that later. But right now, in this age of man, is the smaller spiritual harvest of the few that God is saving now. Christians in this age are called "firstfruits" (James 1:18, Revelation 14:4). These are the firstfruits, the early harvest, as pictured in the Old Testament Feast of Weeks or Feast of Firstfruits, and this is the connection between the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in the book of Acts, and the same day picturing the early summer harvest in the Old Testament. And this is another valuable lesson God uses His holy days to teach us.

Jesus Christ is also called the firstfruits in 1 Corinthians 15:23, and he is pictured in the wave sheaf offering in Leviticus 23:9-11. Christ is the first of the firstfruits, and after Him are those called and drawn by God to Christ to be saved in this age. But the majority of mankind is not now being offered salvation.

God is only saving a few now. But why? This will become clear as we go through the rest of God's holy days.

The Day of Trumpets - the Second Coming of Christ

The next holy day is the Feast of Trumpets. This is given in Leviticus 23:23-25. It is called "a memorial of blowing of trumpets." It is a sabbath day, a day of rest, and a day

of assembly for worship services. Apart from the association with trumpets, no special meaning for this day is explained in this passage in the Old Testament. However, since Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost, all feasts of God commanded in the Old Testament, each have an important application and meaning in the New Testament and help us to understand various aspects of God's plan, it seems likely that the Day of Trumpets also has meaning for the Church.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind was a major milestone for God's plan, and is pictured by Passover. The days of unleavened bread show the need for Christians to repent and put sin out of their lives. The major milestone in God's plan of the Holy Spirit being given to the Church is pictured by the Day of Pentecost. After Jesus' first coming, death, and resurrection, and after the Holy Spirit was given to the Church, what is the next great event to occur in the plan of God?

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11). The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ will return to this earth.

Since the Day of Trumpets is the next of God's holy days in the Hebrew calendar after Pentecost, and since the return of Jesus Christ to the earth is the next great event in God's plan, is there any connection between the two in Scripture? The answer is yes. There are a number of scriptures in the New Testament that associate the return of Christ with the blowing of trumpets.

The next great event in God's plan is the return of Jesus Christ in great power and glory to the earth. Notice what Jesus said in Matthew 24:29-31: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Notice that Jesus said that when He returns He will send His angels with the sound of a trumpet to gather the elect. This shows that there will be the sound of a trumpet at the return of Christ.

Notice that at the time of Christ's return, true Christians who have died will be resurrected, and those who are alive will be changed to immortality. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up

together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). Also, "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). Notice that both of these passages refer to the sounding of a trumpet.

The book of Revelation speaks of end time events shortly before the return of Christ. Revelation 8:2 speaks of seven trumpets that are to sound: "And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets." Other scriptures show that these seven trumpets sound one at a time during God's punishment of the world in a period called the "Day of the Lord." But it is at the LAST of the seven trumpets that Christ returns to rule the earth and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

When Christ returns, He will rule the earth and establish the Kingdom of God ruling over all the nations of the earth. The resurrected saints will rule with Christ for 1,000 years. Notice Revelation 20:4-6: "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark on their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Those resurrected or changed from mortal to immortal at this time will rule with Christ over the nations of the earth. These are the few that are called and drawn to Christ by the Father in this age pictured by the Day of Pentecost. The majority of mankind will still be physical and mortal. Note also that this resurrection of the saints is called, "the FIRST resurrection," indicating that there is more than one resurrection. I will talk about another resurrection when I explain the meaning of the holy days that follow the Day of Trumpets.

The return of Christ and the resurrection of true Christians will bring to an end the 6,000 years of man ruling himself in opposition to the ways of God, and it begins a period of one thousand years of God's direct rule over the nations of the earth.

Christ and the saints will then teach mankind then living the laws of God and the way of life that leads to peace, happiness, and prosperity. Christ will rule the nations, establish justice, and enforce the ways of peace, bringing to pass the prophecy of Isaiah 2:2-4: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall

rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." This is the time when Jesus' statement to his twelve apostles in Matthew 19:28 will be fulfilled: "And Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, That you which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." This will be a time when salvation is open to all men then living, not just the few. All will be taught God's truth and all will have an opportunity to repent of their sins and their sinful nature, to have faith in God and in Jesus Christ, to accept Christ as their savior, and to be baptized and converted and to be saved.

I will explain more about this period of one thousand years when I cover the meaning of the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. But before I go to that I want to explain more about the resurrection of the saints.

Christians who have died are described in the Bible as having fallen asleep. Note these scriptures. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16). "For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:29-30). "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

How does the concept of falling asleep in death, and then later being resurrected from the dead, fit with the concept of traditional mainstream Christianity that all humans have immortal souls that live on after the death of the body and can never die?

As a child, I was raised Catholic. If I remember correctly, I was taught that I had an immortal soul. The soul was pictured as the "real me", the real consciousness that in a sense lived inside my body. I was taught that when I died, if I had a mortal sin on my conscience that had not yet been forgiven, I would go to an ever-burning hell fire where I would be tortured for all eternity, but if not, then I would eventually go to heaven where I would be happy looking at the face of God for all eternity, but first I would have to spend time in a place called purgatory, which is a place of suffering, where I would be punished for whatever sins I had committed that were not "mortal sins", and after a time in that place, which might be many years, I would then be allowed into heaven. I think I was also taught that among those outside the Catholic Church and those who were never baptized, which is the majority of mankind, if anyone lived a good life, they might go to a place called limbo instead of hell for all eternity. Limbo was a place of happiness, but not as happy as heaven, not as close to God.

I do not know what Protestants teach about the ideas of purgatory or limbo. I do know that they teach that man has an immortal soul ("immortal" meaning it cannot die). I do not know what they teach about the fate of the billions of people who have lived on the earth and died who never heard of Jesus Christ or had the opportunity to become Christians. Perhaps some Protestants believe that those who died without an opportunity to become Christians will be tortured forever in hell fire.

I have not found these ideas in the Bible.

Ezekiel 18:4 says, "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die." If you look up in Strong's Concordance the word translated "soul" in the statement in Ezekiel 18:4 that the soul that sins shall die, you will find that it corresponds to Strong's number 5315 and is translated from the Hebrew word, "nephesh". Some of the definitions of this Hebrew word given in Strong's Concordance include "that which breathes", "living being", "the man himself", and "activity of mind". In the King James Version, nephesh is most frequently translated into the English word "soul", but is also sometimes translated "life", "person", "mind", "heart", "creature", etc.

Genesis 2:7 states, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." The word translated as "soul" is the same Hebrew word "nephesh." This is a plain statement that the soul is made from the dust of the ground.

Genesis 2:7 clearly states that God made man physical, from the dust of the ground, and that man, made from the dust of the ground, became a living soul. Ezekiel 18:4 clearly states that the soul that sins shall die. The word "immortal" means, "cannot die". There is no evidence from the verses we have looked at so far that the soul is immortal, but rather, the soul can die.

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). "And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. And the serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:2-4).

Genesis 2:7 says that man became a soul. Adam and Eve were souls. God said they would die if they took of the forbidden fruit, or in other words, they were not immortal souls because immortal refers to that which cannot die. But it was Satan who said they would not die, or in other words, they were immortal souls. God says the soul is mortal. Satan says the soul is immortal. Who do you believe?

In Ezekiel 18:4, God says that the soul can die. In Matthew 10:28, Jesus says that the soul can be destroyed. "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

The Bible pictures those who have died to be asleep, unconscious, as we are when we sleep without dreams (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16, 1 Corinthians 11:29-30, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, John 11:11-14, Luke 8:52-55, Mark 5:39-42, Matthew 9:24-25). Man is described as mortal, subject to death, in need of immortality, but not having it yet. At the first resurrection when Christ returns to the earth, Christians must be changed from being mortal to being immortal, both those who are resurrected from the dead and those who are alive and are changed. "Now this I say, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

This is the purpose of the resurrection, to bring back to life those who are dead in their graves. If we have immortal souls that live on after we die, and if those souls go to heaven or hell when we die, what need is there for a resurrection?

The prophecy given to Daniel shows that at the end time many will be resurrected back to life from the dead. "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Daniel himself is told that he will be among those who come up from the dead. "But go you your way till the end be: for you shall rest, and stand in your lot at the end of the days" (Daniel 12:13). The time between Daniel's death and his resurrection is described as "rest," which is metaphor very similar to the one Paul uses when he describes those who are dead as "asleep."

Man does not yet have immortality, that is, eternal life. We must receive it as a gift from God. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "And, behold, one came and said to him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said to him, Why call you me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if you will enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:16-17). The reward of the saved is to RECEIVE immortality. We do not have it yet as immortal souls.

The Bible does teach that there is a spirit in man. "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding" (Job 32:8). "Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:6-7). It is the spirit in man that empowers the human brain with intellect and enables every human to know and understand the things that animals cannot understand, just as the Spirit of God enables a Christian to understand knowledge of the things of God in a way that the unconverted mind cannot understand. "But God has revealed them to us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man,

but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10-12). The spirit in man empowers the human brain with intellect and gives understanding, but it is not a "soul." It does not provide life and consciousness apart from the human brain, and it does not live on as a conscious entity after death, but as Solomon says, when a man dies the body returns to the earth and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

There is no consciousness, no awareness, in those who have died. The only hope for life after death is a resurrection from the dead, which is yet future. Solomon wrote, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Speaking of the condition of those who have died in this age, apart from a future resurrection, Solomon wrote, "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6). "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:3-4).

For proof that a resurrection from the dead is NEEDED for anyone to have life after death, consider what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:12-22 and 1 Corinthians 15:30-32. First, 1 Corinthians 15:12-22: "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Now see 1 Corinthians 15:30-32 where Paul says, "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our LORD, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantages it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die." Why would Paul say that if there is no future resurrection from the dead, it would be better for him to say, "let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die" if Christians who die go to heaven upon death? That would not make any sense, nor would there be any need for a resurrection if we are really immortal souls who go to heaven when we die. The answer is, Christians who have died are not in heaven with Christ and do not have immortal souls. They died and are unconscious in their graves, and they will be raised back to life from the dead and given immortality at the second coming of Christ to the earth, which is yet future. That is why a resurrection from the dead is needed. Without the resurrection, there would be no life after death at all, and there would be no hope of reward after this physical life.

Have the righteous who have died gone to heaven?

According to John 3:13, "And no man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." After Jesus died and was resurrected, Peter spoke to the crowds on the day of Pentecost about king David, saying, "Men and brothers, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). "For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he said himself, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit you on my right hand, Until I make your foes your footstool" (Acts 2:34-35).

Some may refer to Elijah as one who was carried into "heaven." But in the Bible, the term "heaven" can refer to this earth's atmosphere, or outer space with its planets, stars, and galaxies, or the heaven that is God's throne. Notice the phrase "fouls [birds] of heaven" in Job 35:11 and Jeremiah 16:4 referring to the heaven that is this earth's atmosphere. These verses refer to birds flying in the atmosphere of the earth.

2 Kings 2:1 says, "And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal." Then in 2 Kings 2:11: "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." But did Elijah go into the heaven that is God's throne, or just into the air to be set down someplace else where it would not be known where he was? It is clear that Elijah's work as the prophet in that area for that time was finished, and it was God's time that Elijah be removed and Elisha take Elijah's office and carry on his work (1 Kings 19:16). But was it time for Elijah to die? Or was Elijah to be taken to the heaven that is God's throne? If so, it would contradict John 3:13 which says that no man has ascended into heaven.

Those with Elisha after Elijah ascended did not assume that Elijah went up to the heaven of God's throne. "And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah does rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him. And they said to him, Behold now, there be with your servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray you, and seek your master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up, and cast him on some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, You shall not send. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not. And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said to them, Did I not say to you, Go not?" (2 Kings 2:15-18).

Some time after this, a letter came from Elijah to the king of Judah, proving that Elijah was still alive and someplace on the earth. Notice that Elisha was already prophet in place of Elijah while Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was still alive. "But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him" (2 Kings 3:11-12). The fact that the servant said that Elisha

"poured" water on the hands of Elijah, past tense, shows that Elisha was not still serving Elijah. This occurred AFTER Elijah went into the atmosphere by a whirlwind and Elisha received his office. Now, AFTER Jehoshaphat died, his son Jehoram became king of Judah in his place. "Now Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And Jehoram his son reigned in his stead" (2 Chronicles 21:1). And it was to Jehoram, AFTER Jehoshaphat died and AFTER Elijah was taken into "heaven" by a whirlwind, that a letter came from Elijah, proving Elijah was still alive and on the earth. "Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he worked that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 21:5-6). "And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus said the LORD God of David your father, Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, But have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the prostitutions of the house of Ahab, and also have slain your brothers of your father's house, which were better than yourself: Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite your people, and your children, and your wives, and all your goods: And you shall have great sickness by disease of your bowels, until your bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day" (2 Chronicles 21:12-15).

What is the reward of the saved? Is it our destiny to go to heaven to be with God after we are resurrected? I have already covered the scriptures that show that Christ will return to the earth to rule the earth with the resurrected saints, now made immortal, for 1,000 years. What happens after that? Revelation 21:1-4 indicates that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and that New Jerusalem will come down from heaven to the earth, and God will be with men on the earth. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." The New Jerusalem, on earth, will be God's headquarters over the universe.

Jesus said, "Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12). Does this mean our reward is to go to heaven when we die? No, because Jesus said our reward is IN heaven, now, present tense, though we ourselves are not in heaven. Our reward is reserved IN heaven, and Jesus will bring it to us when He comes to the earth. Note: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith to salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter

1:3-5). Peter's statement that our reward is reserved in heaven is consistent with Jesus' instruction to store up treasure in heaven. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust does corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). But Christ will bring our reward to us when He returns to the earth. "From now on there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

Some have assumed that since the reward of the saved is to enter the "Kingdom of Heaven", that this means they will be in heaven itself. Notice Matthew 7:21, "Not every one that said to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven." However, the word "of" indicates OWNERSHIP, not location. The "Kingdom of Heaven" is the Kingdom that is OWNED by God who is on His throne now in heaven. It is basically synonymous with "Kingdom of God", as the term is used in Matthew 19:24. Previously, in the same sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). The Christian's reward is to inherit the earth and to be with Christ on the earth.

Those who are saved will be given immortality at the resurrection and will live forever. But what about the unrepentant wicked? What is their punishment? Traditional mainstream Christianity teaches that the wicked are tortured forever in hell. What does the Bible teach?

There is indeed a hell fire that will burn the wicked, but they will not burn forever. They will be burnt up, consumed by the fire, turned to ashes, because they are mortal, physical, subject to death, not immortal souls. There will be suffering, probably mental as well as physical when the wicked realize what they have lost forever. As Jesus said, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:28). But for humans the suffering will be temporary until they are destroyed forever in the fire.

John the Baptist said of Jesus Christ, "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12). This hell fire that burns up the wicked is called the lake of fire, and being cast into it is described as the second death in Revelation 20:14-15: "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." God will destroy the wicked in hell fire. Jesus said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). After this destruction, the wicked are described as ashes and non-existent. "For the day of the LORD is near on all the heathen: as you have done, it shall be done to you: your reward shall return on your own head. For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yes, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not

been" (Obadiah 15-16). "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do *this*, saith the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 4:2-3, KJV).

The Bible pictures the punishment of the wicked as death, not eternal life in hell fire. Notice Ezekiel 18:21-24: "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: *and* not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die" (KJV). If you read the entire chapter of Ezekiel 18, you will see that the comparison between the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked is always life and death, not living forever in heaven or hell. The righteous will be given life and will never die the second death, but will be with Christ forever. The wicked will die and cease to exist, and will be as if they never existed.

The Bible often talks about everlasting or eternal punishment, as in the passage where Jesus describes the separation of the sheep and the goats. "Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we you an hungered, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you? Then shall he answer them, saying, Truly I say to you, Inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 25:44-46). Some think that this means that the suffering continues for eternity. That is not the case, according to the verses we have looked at previously. Everlasting ***punishment*** does not mean everlasting ***punishing***. The punishment is everlasting, eternal, because it is a permanent death from which there will never be a resurrection. For all eternity, the wicked will never be brought back to life. There will never be a release from that penalty. As Paul puts it, "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (2 Thessalonians 1:9-10). As it says in Obadiah 16, the wicked will be as if they had never existed.

The idea that God, who is love (1 John 4:8, 4:16), would create human beings with immortal souls so that some would suffer for all eternity, being tortured in pain for trillions and trillions of years without end, with no hope of release or anything to look forward to but unending pain and agony forever, seems very inconsistent to me. I doubt if any people I know would wish this kind of thing on anyone. I wouldn't wish this on an animal much less a human being. And if we humans, being evil in comparison with God, have enough compassion to not wish this on anyone, why would God do this to someone, even an unrepentant sinner? I have never heard any explanation of this that makes any sense. But it does make sense that God in His love and wisdom would put unrepentant sinners out of their misery by destroying them so that they no longer exist,

so that they do not make themselves and others miserable for all eternity with their wicked ways leading to conflict, hostility, war, and destruction. The wicked will be burned up and will be as if they had never been created. Their suffering will be over, and they will not be around to any longer inflict suffering on themselves or others by their evil ways.

It also makes sense that it would suit Satan's purpose to promote false teaching and deceive sincere religious people into thinking that God created us with immortal souls and that sinners who have not accepted Christ are tortured forever. I think this teaching, however it is packaged or explained, would give the impression to any reasonable person that God is a cruel God. Most religious people who believe this teaching would not explicitly say that God is cruel, but I find it hard to believe that they don't really think this deep down if they really believe God tortures humans, any humans, forever. It was Satan who told Eve, "You shall not surely die," so this false doctrine probably started early in man's history. In my opinion, it is one of Satan's slanders against God. In the New Testament, the Greek word *diabolos* (Strong's number 1228), which is often translated "the devil," includes the meaning of "slanderer" and "false accuser," according to Strong's Concordance.

God's mercy is great. He does not torture sinners for eternity in hellfire, but He puts them out of their misery forever. The idea that He tortures men forever in hell is a slander against Him. God is a good and wise and merciful God, not a cruel God.

The Day of Pentecost pictures the giving of the Holy Spirit to the few that God calls in this life and this age and draws them to Christ, not the majority of mankind at this time. The Day of Trumpets looks forward to the return of Jesus Christ to this earth as King of the earth, and also to the resurrection from the dead and instantaneous change from mortal life to immortal eternal life of those few who are true Christians and have received God's Holy Spirit and have overcome and endured to the end in this 6,000 year age of man. This is the first resurrection, and those few who are in this resurrection will sit with Christ on His throne ruling the nations of the earth and teaching all mankind the ways of God, bringing peace and happiness to the earth for one thousand years. Jesus said, "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations" (Revelation 2:26, KJV). And, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:21, KJV). And, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (Revelation 2:11, KJV).

The Church observes the Day of Trumpets as a Sabbath day of rest and assembly for church services.

The Day of Trumpets represents the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the saints to rule the earth with Christ so that mankind can learn that God's ways lead to peace, prosperity, and happiness. But before there can be true happiness on the earth, another step must be taken, and the next holy day, the Day of Atonement, helps us understand that next step.

The Day of Atonement - the Putting Away of Satan

In this present 6,000 year age of man, Satan is the ruler of this earth. He has a throne on the earth. "How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how are you cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also on the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north" (Isaiah 14:12-13). Satan now has authority over the kingdoms and nations of the earth. "And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, showed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to him, All this power will I give you, and the glory of them: for that is delivered to me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If you therefore will worship me, all shall be yours" (Luke 4:5-7). See also Matthew 4:8-9. Satan is the ruler of this world, this civilization, this system. Before He was crucified, Jesus said, "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world comes, and has nothing in me" (John 14:30). Satan can only do what God allows him to do, as shown in the first two chapters of Job, but right now it suits God's purpose to allow Satan to be on the throne of the earth and to deceive the nations.

Satan is called "the prince of the power of the air." "And you has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Ephesians 2:1-3). Paul calls him, the "god of this world." "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine to them" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). As ruler of the world, Satan deceives the whole world. "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:9).

Before there can be true peace and happiness on this earth, Satan must be removed from his throne and position of influence over mankind. When Christ comes, He is coming not only to take over rulership of the earth, but to replace Satan as ruler of the earth. Satan will be removed and put into a condition of restraint so he can no longer influence men and deceive the nations as he does now.

After Christ returns to the earth, Satan will be removed from his throne and bound in a condition of restraint for one thousand years. "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on

him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season" (Revelation 20:1-3).

The next holy day after the Day of Trumpets is the Day of Atonement. The instructions for Atonement are given in Leviticus 23:26-32. It is a sabbath, a day of rest and assembly, and also a day of fasting, a day of refraining from food and drink for twenty-four hours ("you shall afflict your souls"). "It shall be to you a sabbath of rest, and you shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even to even, shall you celebrate your sabbath" (Leviticus 23:32).

If you have read the instructions for the holy days given in the Old Testament, you will notice that there are instructions for offering animal sacrifices for each of them. The Church rests on these days and assembles for worship, fellowship, and instruction, but does not offer animal sacrifices. Why is that?

The animal sacrifices in the Old Testament were a substitute for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They could only be offered by the Levitical priesthood. King Saul offered animal sacrifices and was rebuked by God. "And Samuel said, What have you done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you came not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now on me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. And Samuel said to Saul, You have done foolishly: you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which he commanded you: for now would the LORD have established your kingdom on Israel for ever. But now your kingdom shall not continue: the LORD has sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be captain over his people, because you have not kept that which the LORD commanded you" (1 Samuel 13:11-14).

Since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Church is under the priesthood of Jesus Christ, not the Levitical priesthood. As explained in the book of Hebrews, there is a change in the law because there is a change in the priesthood. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Hebrews 7:12). The Levitical priesthood, which offered animal sacrifices, has been replaced by Jesus Christ our high priest, who is the real sacrifice that animals only represented. The Church does not offer animal sacrifices today.

But the animal sacrifices are designed to teach us lessons, primarily about the meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which they represent. We can learn lessons about the sacrifice of Christ by studying the instructions for animal sacrifices given in the Old Testament. They are written for our learning. The sacrifice of the Passover lamb is an example. We do not sacrifice a lamb at Passover today, rather we use the symbols of the bread and wine that Jesus Christ instituted for the Church. Nevertheless, we can study the Passover sacrifice of the lamb as recorded in the Old Testament to help us learn lessons about how the sacrifice of Christ pays the penalty of our sins so that we do not have to ultimately die in the second death.

There are instructions for sacrificing an animal on the Day of Atonement given in the Old Testament, and we can learn lessons about the meaning of this day from those instructions.

Two goats were to be presented before the Lord at the tabernacle. One was to be sacrificed and the other turned loose in the wilderness. "And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering" (Leviticus 16:5). "And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the LORD's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness" (Leviticus 16:7-10). Notice that it is God who decides which goat is which, not the priest.

"Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat: And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remains among them in the middle of their uncleanness" (Leviticus 16:15-16). This goat is killed for the sins of the people. This clearly represents the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our sins in our place.

What about the other goat that is not killed? What does that represent? Some have thought that this other goat also represents Christ. Does it? "And when he has made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear on him all their iniquities to a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. And Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall put off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there: And he shall wash his flesh with water in the holy place, and put on his garments, and come forth, and offer his burnt offering, and the burnt offering of the people, and make an atonement for himself, and for the people. And the fat of the sin offering shall he burn on the altar. And he that let go the goat for the scapegoat shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward come into the camp" (Leviticus 16:20-26).

Notice concerning the live goat that it does NOT die, but it is taken away from the tabernacle and God's presence and away from Israel, and notice that those who have come into contact with the live goat have to bath in water afterwards, implying that there is some uncleanness about the live goat, some influence that must be removed from those who came into contact with it. These things cannot represent Jesus Christ, but they can represent Satan very well.

Why are the sins of the people placed on the head of the live goat if that goat represents Satan?

It is Satan that deceives the whole world and leads the world in sin (Revelation 12:9). Ephesians 2:2 says he works in the children of disobedience. He is called "the tempter" who tried to tempt Jesus into sinning (Matthew 4:3). It was Satan who deceived Eve and led her to take of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Adam ate of the fruit also, and thus Satan led the whole human race to take the wrong path (Genesis 3:1-6). Thus Satan is partly responsible for the sins of mankind. He shares in the responsibility, and the guilt, of the sins of man.

When Satan tempts people into sinning, and people give in to the temptation and sin or are deceived into sinning, the responsibility and guilt for the sin is twofold. The person who sins is responsible for committing the sin, but also Satan is responsible, and guilty, for tempting or deceiving the person into sinning.

By becoming a human being, living a sinless life as a man, and then dying to pay the penalty for our sins, Jesus Christ took on himself the penalty for the share of the guilt for our sins that falls on human beings. But Jesus did not pay the penalty for Satan's share of the responsibility. He did not pay the penalty for Satan's sin. Satan must bear his own penalty. But Satan, like the angels of God, cannot die (Luke 20:35-36). Satan will be removed from his throne over the earth, put into a condition of restraint so he cannot influence man, taken away from the presence of God and mankind, but he cannot die. Likewise, the live goat is taken away from the presence of Israel and God's tabernacle and let loose in the wilderness, but does not die.

Leviticus 16:21 says, "And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness." The "fit man" parallels the angel in Revelation 20:1-2: "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,"

There is also a lesson in the fact that lots had to be cast to decide between the two goats. It was not left to the priests to decide. God had to reveal which goat would be sacrificed and which was the one to be taken into the wilderness. Before lots were cast and God revealed which goat was to be sacrificed (representing Jesus Christ) and which goat was to be taken into the wilderness (representing Satan), the people could not know which goat was which.

Satan deceives all mankind right now (Revelation 12:9). He has blinded the minds of men (2 Corinthians 4:4). As part of the deception of mankind, Satan also practices religious deception, deceiving false ministers into teaching error. "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end

shall be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). It is even possible for false ministers, who may be sincere, not realizing that they themselves are victims of Satan's deceptions, to teach a false concept of Jesus Christ and a counterfeit Jesus. Notice what Paul warned about in 2 Corinthians 11:3-4: "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that comes preaches another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if you receive another spirit, which you have not received, or another gospel, which you have not accepted, you might well bear with him."

How do we tell false ministers from true? How can we tell who are the ministers of the true Jesus Christ and who are the counterfeit ministers? How do we tell the true concept of Jesus Christ from a false Jesus, or as Paul put it, "another Jesus whom we have not preached"? Just as the priest in ancient Israel had to look to God to reveal which goat was which on the Day of Atonement, so we must also look to God to know who the real Jesus Christ and His true ministers are, not by casting lots but by looking to God's Word, the Bible. Notice this instruction in Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." We have to look to the Bible and be willing to believe the Bible to know who is speaking the truth. The Bible must come first, not the ministry, the church we attend, the traditions we were raised in, or the traditions we have adopted and become comfortable with. God's ministers have a role in teaching and helping us find answers in the Bible. But we should not look to the ministers to teach us what the Bible means or to "interpret" the Bible for us. The Bible interprets itself, and difficult scriptures are interpreted by clear scriptures. Rather than look to ministers to interpret the Bible for us, we should look to the Bible to tell us who the true ministers are.

The Day of Atonement represents the application of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind, but also the future removal of Satan from his position of rulership and influence over the earth. The Church observes this day by resting from work, assembling for church services, and refraining from all food and water during this day.

The Feast of Tabernacles - the Millennial Rule of Christ

When Christ returns He will rule the nations of the earth, and the Church, resurrected and made immortal, will rule with Him (Revelation 2:26, 3:21, 20:6). Then Satan will be put away and will no longer be allowed to deceive the nations and tempt men to sin (Revelation 20:1-3). There will follow a thousand years of unprecedented peace, prosperity, joy, and happiness all over the earth.

The Bible is filled with descriptions of what that time will be like.

Jesus Christ will be king over all the earth. Those who have been converted and received God's Holy Spirit and overcame and endured to the end from the time of Adam until the second coming of Christ will be in the first resurrection and will receive positions of authority under Christ, helping Christ to rule, judge, and teach the nations. "But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them." (Jeremiah 30:9, KJV). "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28, KJV). "And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this *man* to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities" (Luke 19:11-19, KJV).

In this age of man, God is only saving a few. But in the millennium God will finally open salvation to all mankind. Christ and the saints will judge the earth and teach mankind God's law. All Israel and mankind will finally have the opportunity to learn God's truth and be converted. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:2-4, KJV).

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the

sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:1-9, KJV).

God will make a new covenant with Israel, this time writing His law in their hearts so they will obey, by giving them His Holy Spirit. "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34, KJV). "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you" (Ezekiel 36:24-29, KJV).

Not only Israel, but all nations will have the opportunity to know God and be converted. "And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee" (Zechariah 2:11, KJV). "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; *It shall yet come to pass*, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD" (Zechariah 8:20-22, KJV).

The result of God's rule and the conversion of the world will be unprecedented peace, prosperity, and happiness, for all Israel, but also for all nations that learn to obey God. "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, *even* a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed *be* Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance" (Isaiah 19:23-25, KJV). "And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isaiah 25:6, KJV). "Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal; and bread of the increase of the earth, and it

shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures" (Isaiah 30:23, KJV). "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame *man* leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, *shall be* grass with reeds and rushes. And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it *shall be* for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*. No lion shall be there, nor *any* ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk *there*: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:5-10, KJV). "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt" (Amos 9:13, KJV). "For the seed *shall be* prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these *things*" (Zechariah 8:12, KJV).

The next feast of God after the Day of Atonement is the Feast of Tabernacles. This is a seven-day festival to rejoice before God. The instructions God gave ancient Israel for this Feast are in Leviticus 23:33-43 and Deuteronomy 16:13. Israel was to observe a Sabbath rest on the first of the seven days, and on the eighth day. The eighth day, though closely related to the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, is actually a separate feast, and I will cover it next. The Feast of Tabernacles came after the fall harvest in ancient Israel, and was a celebration of the prosperity God gave to Israel.

God commanded Israel to tithe of their income ("tithe" meaning "one tenth"). One tenth of their increase belongs to God (Leviticus 27:30, Malachi 3:8-10), and God gave this tithe to the priests and Levites (Numbers 18:21-22). Since the Levitical priesthood has been replaced by the priesthood of Jesus Christ for the New Testament Church, members of the Church pay their tithes to the ministry of the Church for the expenses of the Church including feeding the flock and preaching the gospel to the world (1 Corinthians 9:8-14). But in addition to this tithe (we call "first tithe"), God gave Israel instructions for SAVING a tithe of their increase (we call "second tithe") to spend or consume at the Feast of Tabernacles, to help them rejoice before God (Deuteronomy 14:22-26). And on the subject of tithing, Israel was to pay a third tithe every third and sixth year in a seven-year cycle to support the widows and the poor.

Also, God commanded that Israel dwell in temporary dwellings, called booths, during the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:39-43).

The Church observes the Feast of Tabernacles by going to one of several festival sites that the Church organizes each year, staying in temporary dwellings (called "motels" or "hotels") for seven days (plus the eighth day that follows), resting on the first and eighth days as commanded by God, and attending church services for worship and instruction. During the Feast we rejoice before God and enjoy food and various recreational activities available at the site. We save a tenth of our income (second tithe) during the

year and use this money for the expenses of attending the Feast. For us, the Feast of Tabernacles pictures the happiness that will exist all over the earth after the return of Jesus Christ.

During the millennial rule of Christ, He will teach the nations to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. Notice Zechariah 14:16-19: "And it shall come to pass, *that* every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, *that* whoso will not come up of *all* the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, *that have no rain*; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles" (KJV).

The Last Great Day - the White Throne Judgment

During this six thousand year age of man, almost complete, only a few are called by God to salvation. The rest are blinded by Satan. After the return of Christ, Satan will be removed and salvation will be opened to all mankind.

But what about all of humanity that has lived and died without ever having a real chance for salvation? What about the billions of people who have lived on the earth since Adam and Eve without even hearing the name of Jesus Christ? Will they have an opportunity for salvation?

The answer is yes. Every human being that has ever lived will have the opportunity to accept God's way of life, to repent, to exercise faith in God and in Jesus Christ, to have their sins forgiven, and to be saved and receive eternal life. For those who have lived and died before Christ returns, this will require a resurrection from the dead, not to immortality as with the saints in the first resurrection when Christ returns, but a future resurrection back to physical life so they can be taught the truth of God and have an opportunity, free from Satan's deceptions, to choose life. As Paul says, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Corinthians 15:22-23). Everyone will be resurrected, but there is an order to the resurrections. "For God has concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy on all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:32-33).

There is a specific prophecy in the Bible that describes this resurrection back to physical life of those who lived and died without being converted in this life. This prophecy applies to Israel specifically, but it can be shown that this prophecy about Israel will also apply to all mankind. "The hand of the LORD was on me, and carried me out in

the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the middle of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, see, they were very dry. And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, you know. Again he said to me, Prophecy on these bones, and say to them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus said the Lord GOD to these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: And I will lay sinews on you, and will bring up flesh on you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, see, the sinews and the flesh came up on them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he to me, Prophecy to the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus said the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophecy and say to them, Thus said the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall you know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, said the LORD" (Ezekiel 37:1-14). This has to be a different resurrection than the first resurrection to immortality and spirit life of the saints at the return of Christ. This is a physical resurrection back to physical, mortal life. Those that are resurrected in this resurrection need the breath of air to enter their lungs before they can live.

Does this apply only to Israel? God judges all without partiality (1 Peter 1:17, Ephesians 6:9). "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that fears him, and works righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). "For there is no respect of persons with God" (Romans 2:11).

Jesus gave examples of gentiles who would rise in a resurrection with Israel. "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (Luke 11:31-32). The men of Nineveh that Jesus referred to, and the "queen of the South" who sought the wisdom of Solomon, are dead and in their graves. The only way that they can rise up in the judgment with Israel is to be resurrected from the dead when Israel is resurrected from the dead. So even though the prophecy of the valley of dry bones given to Ezekiel mentions only Israel by name, the gentiles must be resurrected at the same time.

When does this take place?

Notice again Revelation 20:4-6: "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark on their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Notice that it says, "the REST of the dead" did not live again until AFTER the thousand years are finished. Now, a few verses later, Revelation 20:11-13 says, "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works." This is where the name "White Throne Judgment" comes from. It is a time when the valley of dry bones prophecy will be fulfilled, and when, as Jesus said, the men of Nineveh will also be resurrected. It is the time when the billions who have lived and died will rise from their graves back to physical life, and each individual will be judged. But it will be a time when men can learn the truth of God, and repent, and be forgiven. Note that the above verses say that the Book of Life will be opened, implying that men's names can be written in it. Note also what God says in Ezekiel 33:18-20: "When the righteous turns from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. Yet you say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O you house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways."

Those who come up in this resurrection will have every opportunity to learn the truth. They will be able to learn and know the history of mankind, both the six thousand year age of man in which there was war and suffering, and the one thousand year reign of Christ, in which there was peace and joy. They will be able to see and know that living according to the "get" way of life in rebellion and disobedience to God and His law leads to suffering, destruction, and death, but living according to God's law of love and submitting to God's rule over them leads to peace and happiness. They will learn that they are guilty of sin they have committed in their past life ("for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" - Romans 3:23), but they will also learn that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for their sins so that they can be forgiven if they repent and turn to God. And then each individual can make his own choice. Those who repent and are forgiven can have their names written in the Book of Life and receive eternal life. Those who choose not to repent will die in the second death. "And whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). There they will be destroyed so that they cannot continue to bring suffering upon themselves and others by their evil ways. After that will be fulfilled what is written in Revelation 21:1-4: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned

for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

No wonder Paul said, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33). God truly is fair and merciful, and He gives everyone a chance for salvation. No one is left out because of circumstances of birth or circumstances in their lives over which they have no control.

As the White Throne Judgment follows the one thousand year period, so the eighth day of the feast follows the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles. Note what Jesus said on the eighth day of the Feast: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink. He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spoke he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)" (John 7:37-39). During the White Throne Judgment following the one thousand years, for the first time all mankind, all those who have died without knowing the truth and having a chance for salvation, will have the opportunity to repent and come to Christ and receive the Holy Spirit, thus fulfilling Jesus' words which He spoke on the last day of the Feast.

The Church calls this "the Last Great Day" and observes it as a sabbath day of rest and assembly for church services immediately following the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles.

Traditional Christian Holidays

God commanded that the annual holy days be kept, and there are examples in the New Testament that show that they were kept by the first century Church of God, not just by Jewish Christians, but by gentile Christians also. The annual holy days help to teach and illustrate God's plan and purpose for mankind. Today, not only has traditional mainstream Christianity rejected the holy days instituted by God, they have substituted other days borrowed from pagan traditions, such as Christmas and Easter.

Where did these days come from? You will not find any instructions or commandments from God in the Bible for keeping Christmas, Easter, Halloween, or similar days. Rather, if you look up their origins in encyclopedias, you will find that many of the customs of those days and even the times of the year of the days themselves come directly from paganism.

Have you ever wondered what an evergreen tree has to do with the birth of Jesus Christ, or why Christmas falls on December 25 around the time of the winter solace? Or what rabbits and eggs have to do with the resurrection of Christ? Rabbits, eggs, or evergreen trees are often fertility symbols in ancient pagan religions, and the winter solace is the time when the days stop getting shorter and start getting longer, which is a factor in sun worship. In ancient times, after the time of the original apostles, many of those who wanted to spread Christianity realized that the masses did not want to give up their pagan holidays, so they reasoned that they could make it easier for people to accept Christianity if they allowed them to keep their traditional pagan holidays with their pagan symbols, and just change the meaning to fit Christianity.

Is this lawful in God's eyes? What does God say in the Bible?

"Thus said the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cuts a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not" (Jeremiah 10:2-4).

"When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations from before you, where you go to possess them, and you succeed them, and dwell in their land; Take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before you; and that you inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. You shall not do so to the LORD your God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hates, have they done to their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deuteronomy 12:29-32). Note that God says, "You shall not do so to the LORD your God" and "What thing soever I command you... you shall not add thereto." Here God clearly states that we are not to use pagan methods and practices to worship God, but only to worship God in the way He commands without adding any customs to it that are borrowed from paganism.

Does God accept any kinds and methods of worship as long as it is towards Him, even in disobedience to God's commands? I don't think so. Jesus said, "And why call you me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). God rejected ancient king Saul because he offered sacrifices to God, but it was not lawful for him to do so because he was not a priest (1 Samuel 13:8-14). In a later incident, Saul again disobeyed God in order to save animals that he was commanded to destroy so they could be sacrificed to God. Did God accept Saul's act of worship because Saul had good intentions? "And Samuel said, Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king" (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

Therefore the Church does not observe Christmas, Easter, Halloween, and other religious holidays whose customs and observance have been borrowed from paganism, but rather we observe the annual holy days commanded by God in the Bible.

Using Images in Worship

As I mentioned earlier, I was raised Catholic. When I read non-Catholic literature, I was surprised at references to the commandment to observe the Sabbath as "the fourth commandment." I always thought the Sabbath commandment was the third commandment.

Catholics and non-Catholics agree that there are Ten Commandments, but they number them differently.

The Ten Commandments are listed in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21. In the listings of the Ten Commandments, they are not numbered. If the commandments are not numbered in the places where they are listed, how do we know there are ten of them? There are two verses elsewhere that indicate the number of commandments is actually ten. "And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote on the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments" (Exodus 34:28). Also, Deuteronomy 4:13: "And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them on two tables of stone." Now, how should they be numbered? By this I mean, where does one commandment end and the next begin?

Notice how the Ten Commandments start out in Deuteronomy 5:6-10: "I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall have none other gods before me. You shall not make you any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And showing mercy to thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments." Catholics consider verses 6 through 10 to be all one commandment against worshipping false gods. Most Protestants consider verses 6 and 7 to be the first commandment against worshipping false gods, "I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall have none other gods before me" and verses 8-10 to be the second commandment against using images and pictures as an aid in worship, "You shall not make you any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And showing mercy to thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments." Then Catholics continue numbering the rest of the

commandments starting with the command against using God's name in vain as the second commandment while most non-Catholics continue numbering the rest of the commandments starting with the commandment against using God's name in vain as the third commandment.

Now, if Catholics and non-Catholics are one number off from each other in the way they number the commandments, how do they both end up with ten? Non-Catholics count the verses that command us not to covet as one commandment, the tenth commandment. Catholics consider the verses telling us not to covet as two commandments. They would paraphrase the commandments as "you shall not covet your neighbor's wife" as the ninth commandment and "you shall not covet your neighbor's goods" as the tenth commandment. Here is the verse from Deuteronomy 5:21: "Neither shall you desire your neighbor's wife, neither shall you covet your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is your neighbor's." Catholics would consider the first part of the verse "neither shall you desire your neighbor's wife" as the ninth commandment and the second part of the verse "neither shall you covet your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is your neighbor's" as the tenth commandment.

Which is right? The Ten Commandments are listed in two places, and though both carry the same meaning they are worded differently in the two places. In Deuteronomy 5:21, neighbor's wife is listed before neighbor's goods, and all of the words pertaining to neighbor's goods are together, and conceivably could be thought of as a separate commandment. But not in the listing given in Exodus. Exodus 20:17 says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is your neighbor's." Coveting your neighbor's wife is in the middle of coveting your neighbor's goods, right between "neighbor's house" and "manservant." I see no way that the words in this verse could be correctly separated into two commandments.

And that means that the commandment against worshipping false gods in Deuteronomy 5:6-7 and the commandment against using images in worship in Deuteronomy 5:8-10 are two separate commandments.

Why is this important?

I think it is well understood that God commands us not to worship any other gods but the one true God. But God also commands us not to use images as an aid to worshipping even the true God. Those who use holy pictures and statues of God or Christ to look at while they pray to "help them" focus on God may think they are pleasing God. If you tell them that using images in worship is a form of idolatry, they will say, "Oh, no. I don't WORSHIP the image. I only use it to picture what God looks like. I only worship the true God." But that is exactly what the second commandment forbids. Not the first commandment. The first commandment forbids worshipping false gods and putting anything in place of the true God. But the second commandment forbids using images to worship even the TRUE God.

No finite image can represent the infinite God, and God does not accept worship using images.

There is an example in the Bible that proves that God does not accept worship using images to represent what people think He looks like. "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. And Aaron said to them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them to me. And all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a engraving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play" (Exodus 32:1-6). Notice, this was NOT a different pagan god that Aaron was making or teaching the Israelites to worship. It was a representation of what they thought the true God LOOKED like. It was an aid to worship, since Moses was no longer with them. They weren't trying to turn away from the true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that had just brought them out of Egypt by a tremendous series of miracles. Notice that Aaron said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD." That word Lord is in all-caps in many Bibles to indicate that it is a translation from God's name as He gave to Moses when He spoke to him from the burning bush. "And Moses said to God, Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and shall say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say to them? And God said to Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shall you say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you. And God said moreover to Moses, Thus shall you say to the children of Israel, the LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial to all generations" (Exodus 3:13-15). God's name can be translated "I Am" or "the Ever-living One" or "the Eternal." The Hebrew word means, the One Who Is Self-existent. I make this point because this is the name Aaron used when he proclaimed a feast "to the LORD." He was using God's exact name that the Israelites already knew Him by. He wasn't trying to point them to a different god. He was trying to point them to the true God but using the image of a calf to do it, using the image to represent what they thought God might look like!

What was God's reaction to the Israelites' use of an image to help them worship Him?

"And the LORD said to Moses, Go, get you down; for your people, which you brought out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be your gods, O Israel, which have brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And the LORD said to Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff necked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I

will make of you a great nation" (Exodus 32:7-10). God was so angry He was ready to kill them all and start over with Moses. From Israel's point of view, they were using the image to worship "the LORD," but from God's point of view they weren't really worshipping Him at all because they were disobeying His commands. He did not accept their worship when they tried to worship Him using an image as an aid.

Also, God points out in Deuteronomy 4:15-19 that the Israelites saw no form of God when God spoke to them and gave them the Ten Commandments, and this is said in the context of commanding them to make no images to worship Him. This is further evidence that God commands us not to use images even in worshipping the true God because it was for that reason that God did not allow them to see His form when He spoke to them from the burning mountain. See also Deuteronomy 12:3-4 in which God tells Israel to destroy all the images they found in the land of Canaan and not to worship God with that way ("you shall not do so unto the LORD your God"). See also Deuteronomy 12:29-32 which I have previously quoted in the context of not using pagan customs and days to worship God. Not using pagan customs to worship God also applies to images, for the use of images in worship is a custom borrowed directly from paganism.

The greatest commandment is to love God with all our being. But God decides HOW we are to express that love, and we are not free to express that love in any manner we choose, even in disobedience to God's instructions. God tells us HOW we should love Him, and loving God with all our heart and all our mind includes obedience to God's commands and submitting our wills to God. The first four of the Ten Commandments teach us HOW to love God. The fourth commandment teaches us to rest on the seventh day and use that time to draw closer to God. The first commandment teaches us to love God above everything else and to put no other god or no other thing first in our lives in place of the true God. The second commandment teaches us not to use images, holy pictures, and statues as an aid in worshipping God to help us picture or visualize what He might look like.

God's Purpose for Mankind

This chapter is about the true gospel. In order to understand this fully, we must understand the destiny of man and God's purpose in creating mankind.

We have seen from Scripture that God created man mortal, of the dust of the ground, subject to death, but that God gives every human who is willing to learn to live the way that God lives, the way of love, an opportunity for eternal life, an opportunity to live forever.

But why did God create man in the first place? What is God's true purpose for mankind? Why did God create man, and what does God intend man to become?

Much of mainstream traditional Christianity teaches that it is our destiny to be happy forever looking at the face of God in heaven. At least that is what I was taught growing up. But that view pictures an eternal life of passive inactivity. The image I learned is somewhat like the idea of a dog lying on the floor looking at his master's face. Is that really man's destiny?

1 Corinthians 2:9 says "But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him." Could it be that God has in mind for man much more than what the traditional religions of this world have taught?

The Bible calls Christians "children of God" and "sons of God." "For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:14-17). "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Romans 8:18-19). "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

Jesus Christ calls Christians, "brothers." "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brothers, Saying, I will declare your name to my brothers, in the middle of the church will I sing praise to you" (Hebrews 2:10-12). "But he answered and said to him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brothers? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brothers! For whoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew 12:48-50).

In the resurrection to immortality, Christians will be like Jesus Christ and God. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

We are to be conformed to the image of Christ so that Jesus Christ might be the FIRSTBORN among MANY brothers. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Romans 8:28-30).

The Church of God is called the wife of Christ and will marry Jesus Christ at His return. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he said to me, Write, Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:7-9). "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:22-32).

As I covered previously, we will be made immortal, and will be given eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:51-53, Mark 10:29-30, Romans 6:23, Matthew 19:16-17, Matthew 25:46).

Those in the first resurrection will sit with Christ on His throne. "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:21).

We will be higher than angels, just as Christ is higher than angels, because we will rule and judge angels. "Know you not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians 6:3).

We will be worthy of worship, and we will bear God's name. "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come on all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown. Him that overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God: and I will write on him my new name" (Revelation 3:9-12). Notice that Christ clearly says He will cause some to WORSHIP before our feet!

Yet the Bible is very consistent that no man or angel should ever be worshipped, but only God may be worshipped. "And the devil said to him, All this power will I give you, and the glory of them: for that is delivered to me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If you therefore will worship me, all shall be yours. And Jesus answered and said to him, Get you behind me, Satan: for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve" (Luke 4:6-8). "And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:25-26). "And he said to me, Write, Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, See you do it not: I am your fellow servant, and of your brothers that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:9-10). "And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then said he to me, See you do it not: for I am your fellow servant, and of your brothers the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God" (Revelation 22:8-9).

After God created animal life on the earth, each after its own kind, He made man after God's image and likeness. "And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creeps on the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:24-28). Would it be fair to say that after God created the animals, each after its own "kind," that in making man in the image of God, He made man after the God "kind?"

Let's summarize what we have so far:

- After creating the animals each after its own kind, God made man, not after the animal kind or after "his own kind," but after GOD's image and likeness.
- At the resurrection of the saints we will be given eternal life, immortality.
- Christians are called "sons of God" and "children of God."
- We are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.
- In the resurrection, Christians will be LIKE Jesus Christ and God.

- Christ is the firstborn among many brethren, referring to Christians, and we are to be conformed to His image.
- Collectively, the Church is the bride of Christ who will marry Christ at His second coming.
- Those in the first resurrection will sit with Christ on His throne as He has sat on His Father's throne.
- We will be greater than angels.
- We will bear the name of God and of Jesus Christ.
- We will be worthy of worship.
- Only God may be worshipped.

What does all this add up to? What is man's destiny to become?

Christians who overcome and endure to the end are destined to become full sons of God. We will be God's offspring in the fullest sense of the term. Just as the offspring of an animal shares in the characteristics of its parent, just as a human son shares in the characteristics of his human father, fully human as his father is human, so we will share in God's divine nature, power, glory, and immortality. You could say, in a sense, God is reproducing Himself in man.

God is a divine family of persons, and Christians can become part of that family. We will be God as Jesus Christ, who is our example and pioneer, the firstborn from the dead, is God, for as the scriptures say, we will be like Christ.

Is this blasphemy? Are we taking these verses too far in saying that God is reproducing Himself in man, that we will become members of the God family, that we will become God?

Why?

When the Jews accused Jesus Christ of blasphemy for saying He was the Son of God, Jesus quoted Scripture. Notice John 10:31-36: "Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do you stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone you not; but for blasphemy; and because that you, being a man, make yourself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, You are gods? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say you of him, whom the Father has sanctified, and sent into the world, You blaspheme; because I said, I am the Son of God?"

Is God able to reproduce Himself? Jesus said that for God all things are possible, and nothing is impossible for God (Matthew 19:25-26).

God's purpose in creating mankind is to reproduce Himself. And our destiny, if we exercise our free moral agency to submit to God and His way of life by repenting, believing what God says, and obeying God and letting Him rule our lives, is to become God as members of God's Family under the authority and supervision of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

I have heard some make the argument that we cannot become God because one of the attributes that defines God is that God is uncreated, eternal, and He has existed forever. They say that, no matter what we become, we will always be less than God because we had a beginning, we were created, we did not exist for all past eternity.

It will always be true that we did not exist for all past eternity. It will always be true that God the Father and Jesus Christ will have greater honor, glory, and authority than us. But in many other ways we will be like God.

In all the examples given of our relationship with God, all indicate a FAMILY relationship. We will be sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and collectively those in the first resurrection will be the wife of Jesus Christ. This does not indicate that we will be so far below God that we will be like a dog looking at his master's face for all eternity.

Most importantly, in the resurrection at the return of Christ, we will be worthy of WORSHIP (Revelation 3:9). The Bible is absolutely clear that ONLY GOD may be worshipped. Not even angels may be worshipped. Anyone can object to the terminology of saying that Christians will become God by setting their own definition of the term "God" to mean "only that which has never been created," and then pointing out that this can never apply to Christians, but I do not find this definition in the Bible. Rather, the Bible is very consistent that only God should be worshipped. Therefore, a more biblical definition of God would be: that which is worthy of worship. And God says in Revelation 3:9 that He will make men come and worship before the feet of those He is addressing in the message to the Church in Philadelphia.

Just as God provided a wife for Adam that was comparable to him and like him, human as he was human, so God will provide a bride for Christ that will be like Him, God as He is God. Read Genesis 2:18-24 and compare with Revelation 19:6-8. Jesus is called the "last Adam" and compared with the first man Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:42-49. If God provided a wife for the first Adam that was like him, at his same level, of the same "kind," the human kind, not a lower animal, why would it seem so strange to us that God would also provide a wife for Jesus Christ that will be like Him, at His same level, of the same "kind," the God kind? Are all things possible for God or not? That wife will be the whole Church whose members will be resurrected if dead or changed to immortality if alive at the second coming of Jesus Christ and will rise to meet Christ in the air (1 Corinthians 15:51-54, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Can a man become God?

IT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED! Jesus Christ is called a "forerunner" (Hebrews 6:19-20). He was God who became flesh, became a man just like us (John 1:14). He died for our sins and was in the grave, and then was resurrected back to life as God. God has shown by the resurrection of Christ from being a man, dead in the grave, to being God again with the glory He had with the Father before the world existed (John 17:5), that it IS possible for a man to become God!

Why is this so important?

Besides understanding the greatness of God's love for us and the greatness of the gift that God wants to give us, there is a great misconception that we must get rid of if we are to fully understand how we should be living our lives now, the WAY we should be living, and why we need to be living that way. It is the same misconception I had when I was taught the traditional religious beliefs I was raised in.

There are two opposite ways of life, the "give" way, and the "get" way. The give way of life can be described by the word "love." It is the way of righteousness. It is the way of outgoing concern for others. It is the way of giving, helping, cooperating, serving, and doing good. It is the way of truth. It is the way that God Himself lives, the way that Jesus Christ lived as a man on the earth, and the way God teaches us in the Bible to live. The opposite way is the "get" way of life. It is the way of hostility, of trying to get for the self by taking away from others. It is the way of vanity, envy, greed, and violence, and the way of selfishness. It is the way of hostile competition against others. It is the way of dishonesty, deception, and lying. This is the way that Satan lives, and it is the way of this world to the extent that men are influenced by Satan to live this way.

God teaches us to love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Anyone who has read and believes the Bible knows that this is important to God. Why?

Part of the reason is that loving God and our fellow man is the way of life that brings happiness to ourselves and others, in this life. But it is also important, as are all of the spiritual principles of God's laws in the Bible, because it is the way of life we need to live for all eternity if we are to have the happiness God intends for us.

This is where the misconception comes in.

Many people have the idea, as I did, that the eternal life God intends for us in His Kingdom is a life of inactivity, passively looking at the face of God, perhaps singing and praising God, but nothing more. Somehow they think, though God has given us ability in this life and a need to work and a desire to accomplish things, that in the Kingdom of God we will be doing nothing, accomplishing nothing. It seems to me that would be very boring.

I think the Bible reveals a different picture. The book of Hebrews quotes the writer of Psalm 8 in reference to putting all things under man's feet: "For to the angels has he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that you are mindful of him? or the son of man that you

visit him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor, and did set him over the works of your hands: You have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:5-9). What are "all things"? Not just this earth. The universe. Hebrews says that all things, the universe, are to be put under man's feet, but NOT YET.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now" (Romans 8:18-22).

Christ rules the universe (Matthew 28:18). The destiny of the Church is to be resurrected at the return of Christ to sit with Him on His throne. When we sit with Christ, we will rule the universe with Christ. Jesus gave the parables of the talents and the pounds (or minas) (Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-27) indicating there will be organization and positions of authority and we will be rewarded according to our works (Revelation 2:23). The twelve apostles will be over the individual tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). This indicates organization and teamwork. Paul refers to the whole creation (the universe) waiting for the Sons of God to be revealed (Romans 8:18-22). God did not create this vast universe, with the billions of galaxies, each containing billions of stars, each star similar to our sun, some smaller and some larger, and with planets orbiting many or all of these stars, in vain, for no purpose. God created the universe for a purpose.

All of this paints a picture, I think, of future creative activity and accomplishment for us in the Kingdom of God. God reveals some things about the millennium on earth, but does not go into very much detail about what we will be doing for all eternity. But God is a Creator, and we will be serving with and under the Father and Jesus Christ for all eternity.

What does this have to do with how we live our lives now? Everything!

God wants us to learn, in this physical life, the lessons we need in order to learn to live the way of life that God lives, the way of love, the way of giving, the way of helping, serving, and cooperating with others as a team and as a family, because that is the way we will be living for all eternity. It is the only way that will produce happiness. Its importance is not so evident if we are going to be idly looking at the face of God, doing nothing, but if we are going to be part of God's Family and a team, serving under Jesus Christ in whatever creative projects God has in mind concerning this whole vast universe, we are going to have to get along with each other. In fact, I think it is safe to say we will have to get along with each other much better than humans are getting along with each other right now on this earth. We will be working with each other,

cooperating with each other. God is not going to give eternal life in His Kingdom to someone who is going to live the "get" way of life, the way of hostile competition, trying to take from others to get for the self. That wrong way of life will produce misery, not only for the person himself, but for everyone else around that person.

This physical life we are living now is a model of how the two ways of life work. We can often see by the fruits which way works best as far as producing a happy environment is concerned. Consider the family environment. Which is a happier environment, a home where there is love and cooperation, everyone working together for a common purpose, or a home where there is hostility, fighting, and hatred? Or look at the workplace. Many people have held a variety of jobs at different companies during their life. Many of us have seen workplaces and situations that are dominated by contentions, competition, lying, politics, back stabbing, people maneuvering to get ahead at the expense of others, but we may have also seen places and situations that are dominated by a spirit of cooperation, helping, teamwork, even friendship between employees, where people are each willing to help the other person succeed. Which is best? Which way of life produces the most happiness and the most accomplishment?

God's purpose for humans is that we learn to live the right way of life, the way that produces happiness for ourselves and others so that we can be part of God's divine Family and share in God's power and rule this universe with Jesus Christ and work together in harmony, cooperation, teamwork, and love in accomplishing whatever creative projects God gives us to do for all eternity. This physical life is the testing and training ground to determine who is willing to learn that way of life and to give those who are willing the opportunity to build the kind of righteous character, with God's help through His Holy Spirit, that God Himself has.

How righteous God is, and how great is His wisdom, His power, and His love that He would offer such a tremendous future to the people He has created! He can give us nothing greater than to bring us into His divine family as His very sons and daughters and share with us His tremendous life, power, and authority over the universe. There can be no greater generosity towards us on God's part.

This is an important part of the "good news" of the Kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit

Before Jesus Christ was crucified, He told His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit, which Jesus called the "Helper" and the "Spirit of truth". Jesus said to His disciples, "If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees him not, neither knows him: but you know him; for he dwells with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:15-18). Jesus further said that this Comforter

was the Holy Spirit which would help His disciples remember the things which Jesus taught them. "These things have I spoken to you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said to you" (John 14:25-26). Later, after Jesus' resurrection but before He ascended into heaven, He told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem. "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father on you: but tarry you in the city of Jerusalem, until you be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). "And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, you have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:4-5). Note that Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as "power from on high" in Luke 24:49.

On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples received the Holy Spirit. "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). This had a dramatic effect on the disciples. They now had courage, even to suffer and risk death to stand up for the truth, which they did not have previously (Matthew 26:31-35,56, 69-75, Acts 5:40-42). Note what Paul said to Timothy about the Holy Spirit: "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:6-7, KJV).

The Spirit of God helps us to understand spiritual truth. "But God has revealed them to us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10-12).

The New Testament reveals that God's Holy Spirit is a Spirit of love, of power, of a sound mind, that it brings to remembrance the teachings of Jesus Christ, that it helps us to understand spiritual knowledge.

The Old Testament also speaks about God's Spirit. Here is an example. "And the Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded: And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him, Hear you me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while you be with him; and if you seek him, he will be found of you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chronicles 15:1-2). Also, Genesis 41:37-40: "And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said to Joseph, For as much as God has showed you all this, there is none so discreet and wise as you are: You shall be over my house, and according to your word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than you." King David had God's Holy Spirit, for he said in Psalm 51:11: "Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your holy spirit from me."

The Jews in Jesus' day must have known from the Old Testament scriptures that the Spirit of God existed. But I doubt if they thought of the Spirit of God as a person. Probably most of them did not think of the coming Messiah as being God, a person distinct from God the Father, yet also God. Jews today do not think of God as more than one person.

We know that Jesus Christ is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, and that both God the Father and Jesus Christ are distinct persons, yet both are God. There may be ways to prove from Old Testament scriptures only that the Messiah is God and that God is more than one person. In the creation account in Genesis for example, God says, "Let US make man in OUR image," indicating that the Creator God is more than one person. In Psalm 110:1, David says, "The LORD said to my Lord, Sit you at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." There is no evidence David had any "Lord" but God, yet here he speaks of God making David's "Lord" sit at His right hand. Abraham, Moses, and even the elders of Israel SAW the God of Israel, and Jacob even wrestled with Him (Genesis 18:1-33, Exodus 33:11, Numbers 12:7-8, Exodus 24:9-11, Genesis 32:22-30), yet on another occasion Moses was told that no man could see God's face and live (Exodus 33:17-23), suggesting that that Moses was allowed to see Christ, but not the Father (compare this with John 1:18 and 1 John 4:12). So it may be possible to prove from Old Testament scriptures alone that there is more than one person who is God and that both the Father and the Messiah, Christ, are God. But if so, it seems that most of the Jews of Jesus' day and today have missed it. Nevertheless, the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that God the Father is a person and that Jesus Christ is a different person, and both are God (John 1:1-14, Philippians 2:5-11, John 17:1-5, 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, Hebrews 1:6-8).

What about the Holy Spirit?

Traditional mainstream Christianity teaches that God is a trinity, and that the Holy Spirit is a person. Besides being a tradition of the Catholic and Protestant churches, there are scriptures some use to support this teaching. For example, 1 John 5:7-8 says, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." But a marginal note in my Bible indicates that the words starting with "in heaven" in verse 7 through "in earth" in verse 8 are not in any early manuscripts but only a very few late manuscripts, indicating they were added later, not in the original Greek text inspired by God and written by the apostle John. In the original, this would read, "For there are three that bear record, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

Why would someone add these words to the text? Apparently there was some controversy in the early traditional church over whether God is a trinity or not, and someone added these words to the Bible to support the trinity doctrine.

Many will also point to personal pronouns that refer to the Holy Spirit as "He," not "it." I am no expert in Greek, but I understand and have been taught that like many languages (not English), Greek assigns gender to nouns that do not all refer to persons. In English, this is not the case, but in some languages, everything is either masculine or

feminine, even things that are not persons, and some languages allow masculine, feminine, and neuter articles, nouns, and pronouns, but again, masculine and feminine genders are assigned even to inanimate objects. When a word is masculine in one language, when it is translated into English, the translators determine whether to treat it as masculine ("he") or neuter ("it") based on whether it is a person or not. But since many translators of the Bible already believe, based on their personal religious upbringing and training, that the Holy Spirit is a person, it seems to me that their personal beliefs may influence whether they translate a reference to the Holy Spirit as "He" or "it," and if their beliefs are wrong, the choices they make in translating these pronouns could be wrong.

I have studied the scriptures relating to the Holy Spirit, and while I do not claim to know and understand everything about this subject, I believe the preponderance of evidence is that, though God's Holy Spirit is divine and comes from God, it is not a distinct person with an individual will and center of consciousness like God the Father and Jesus Christ. Rather, the Bible seems to show that the Spirit of God is the power of God that emanates from the Father and Christ, and it is the power through which God acts in His creation. The Holy Spirit indwelling in the mind of the converted Christian is also the mind of God, both of the Father and of Christ, imparting to the Christian the love, power, and understanding of God that enables the Christian to live the right way of life and to build God's righteous character. When the Holy Spirit acts, it is the Father or Christ who is acting through the power of the Holy Spirit.

For example, it is clear that God the Father is the Father of Jesus Christ, yet Mary became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. "And the angel said to her, Fear not, Mary: for you have found favor with God. And, behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give to him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary to the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said to her, The Holy Ghost shall come on you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:30-35). It is clear that it was the Holy Spirit that impregnated Mary. Now, if the Holy Spirit is a person, then the Holy Spirit would be the Father of Jesus Christ, not the one Jesus referred to as "my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). But if the Holy Spirit is the POWER of God the Father which emanates from God and is the power through which God acts, as the angel Gabriel called it, "the power of the Highest", then it was the FATHER who was the person who impregnated Mary acting THROUGH His Spirit, which is His power in action.

In John 14:16-18, Jesus said, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees him not, neither knows him: but you know him; for he dwells with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." Notice, in saying that the Holy Spirit will be given to His disciples, Jesus said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you," implying that it is Christ, acting through the power of the Holy Spirit, who will come to them. Notice also John

14:23, which says, "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (KJV). Jesus is indicating that the Father and Christ will dwell IN the disciples. How? By the power of the Holy Spirit.

Look at this passage in Romans 8:9-11: "But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you." This whole passage speaks of the Holy Spirit, being called alternatively "the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead" and "the Spirit of Christ," dwelling IN a Christian as being synonymous with both Christ and the Father dwelling IN a Christian. In other words, Jesus Christ and the Father dwell IN a Christian by the power of their Spirit in the mind of the Christian.

Likewise, when the Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit acting, doing this thing or that thing, or telling the disciples one thing or another, it is God the Father or Jesus Christ who are acting and speaking to the disciples, not in person as Christ did when He was with His disciples after His resurrection, but through the Spirit of God dwelling in the minds of the disciples. This does not picture the Holy Spirit as a person with a will and consciousness distinct from the Father and Christ, but rather the extension or power of the Father and Christ acting miraculously in Their creation. So when the Bible says that the Holy Spirit told the disciples to do this thing or that thing, it is Christ as head of the church telling the disciples, not in person face-to-face, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. Saying it is the Holy Spirit doing or saying these things is a figure of speech.

We can sometimes speak in a similar manner today. John Smith might send me a letter, and if I tell someone about what John said in the letter, I might say, "the letter said...." If someone writes an article in a magazine, or a book, someone might say, "what did the article say?" or "the book says that...." We understand that it is not a letter or an article or a book that speaks, but the person who wrote the letter, article, or book. These are just ways that the writer communicates. Likewise, saying that the Holy Spirit said something is not proof that the Holy Spirit is a person. The Holy Spirit can be power through which God the Father or Jesus Christ speaks to us.

Furthermore, some passages that may seem to imply that the Holy Spirit is a person may be using figurative language. Notice what Jesus said in John 16:25: "These things have I spoken to you in proverbs: but the time comes, when I shall no more speak to you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father." This statement in John 16 follows chapter 14 where Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit being the Comforter. God used figurative language before in personifying wisdom as if it were a person in Proverbs 1:20-33 and Proverbs 3:13-18, calling wisdom "she" as in Proverbs 3:15, which says, "She is more precious than rubies: and all the things you can desire are not to be compared to her," even though wisdom is not really a person.

If you look at the greetings in the epistles of Paul, you will notice a pattern that greetings are sent from God the Father and Jesus Christ, but not the Holy Spirit. If God is a trinity and the Holy Spirit is a person, doesn't it seem that Paul would send greetings from all three persons in the trinity? Notice: "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:7). "Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:3). "Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:2). Those are just examples, you can check the other epistles. Also notice this statement from the apostle John: "That which we have seen and heard declare we to you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). John does not say we have fellowship with the Holy Spirit. What John says would not make sense if the Holy Spirit were a person, because if the Spirit was itself a person, we would indeed have fellowship with the Spirit. But it makes perfect sense if the Holy Spirit is the power, the presence, the mind of the Father and Christ because then, as John says, our fellowship is really with the Father and Christ. Notice also John's greeting: "Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love" (2 John 3). Again, no greeting from the Holy Spirit.

Notice Colossians 2:2-3: "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Here Paul speaks of the knowledge of God, both of the Father and Christ, indicating both the Father and Christ are God. But Paul does not mention the Holy Spirit as being a person who is God as the Father and Christ are. This omission would not make sense if God is a trinity and the Holy Spirit is a person.

There is also the evidence of the absence of teaching in the New Testament that the concept that the Jews had of the Holy Spirit being the power of God was being changed. Consider that the original apostles and disciples grew up in a Jewish culture. The Jews must have known that the Spirit of God exists because the Old Testament refers to the Spirit of God and David asks God not to take His Holy Spirit from him in Psalm 51:11. The Jews never thought of God as a trinity or the Holy Spirit as a distinct person, but always thought of the Spirit of God as the power or presence of God acting in His creation. This was the tradition the disciples were raised in.

For Jesus to teach His disciples that the Holy Spirit is a person and God is a trinity would be a major doctrinal change and very controversial among the Jews. Saying that the Holy Spirit is a person, or that God is three persons, would be just as offensive to the Jews as the teaching that Jesus is the Messiah and is God. The teaching that the Holy Spirit is a person would be a raging controversy as great as the controversy over the teaching that Jesus is God, and I would expect to see evidence of this in the entire New Testament, not only in the gospel accounts, but also in Acts and the epistles in the form of proofs, arguments, and teachings, just as there is to show that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God and is God. But I see no sign of controversy with the Jews in the New Testament about the nature of the Holy Spirit. I think it is obvious that there was

no controversy because Jesus and the early church did not teach that the Holy Spirit is a person or that God is a trinity.

God is not a closed trinity, but rather God is a family into which humans can be born. God's family consists now of the Father and Christ, and will include those humans who are given eternal life. The Spirit of God is the power and presence of God through which God acts in His creation and the mind of God (both the Father and Christ) dwelling in Christians that empowers them with spiritual love and understanding beyond what is possible only on the human level.

Clean and Unclean Foods

God gave instructions in the Old Testament for which animal foods Israel could eat and which ones to avoid. These instructions are given in Deuteronomy 14:3-20 and elsewhere. Some examples of meat from four-footed animals that God calls "clean" and may be eaten include beef, lamb, and deer. Most other animals are unclean for food, such as pork, rabbit, mouse, etc. Seafood that may be eaten includes fish with fins and scales, but does not include catfish, lobster, shrimp, and crab. Poultry such as chicken, turkey, and duck are clean, but there are a number of other types of birds that are listed as unclean.

The distinction between clean and unclean animals existed before Moses and before the Old Covenant was made with Israel because Noah was instructed to take a different number of clean animals with him on the ark than unclean animals (Genesis 7:1-3). Moreover, Peter understood the law of clean and unclean foods to be still in effect after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ because when God gave him a vision telling him to eat unclean animals, Peter said he never ate anything unclean and did not want to eat them (Acts 10:9-16). Many people interpret this vision to mean that God has cleansed meats that were previously unclean, but Peter did not jump to this conclusion and wondered what the vision really meant (Acts 10:17). Later he learned that the vision meant that he should not call any man "unclean" and that salvation was open to the gentiles (Acts 10:26-28).

God does not reveal in the Bible why he wants us to avoid certain meats, but since God designed and created both the human body and all animals, it seems likely that some animals are more fit for food and healthy to eat than others, and that by declaring certain foods "unclean" He is commanding us to avoid them because they are not really fit for food. Scientists may or may not know of anything harmful in unclean animals, but as much as scientists and doctors have learned, they still know only a fraction of everything that God knows about food and human health, and they are very far from knowing all the causes of all diseases. Therefore, the Church observes the dietary laws of the Bible and teaches them as a matter of good health.

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

Jesus began his ministry by preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent you, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15). He also prophesied that the gospel would be preached to all nations. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). He trained His disciples and sent them out also to preach the gospel (Luke 9:1-6).

What is the true gospel?

It is important to ask and answer that question, because not every gospel is a true gospel. There can be false gospels.

The true gospel is the gospel that Jesus Christ preached. It is the same gospel that Peter, Paul, and the other apostles preached.

But Paul warned the members of the Church that he had taught that they should beware of any false gospel. "I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel" (Galatians 1:6). "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

So I ask again, what is the true gospel?

Jesus Christ preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23, 6:33, Mark 1:14-15, Luke 9:11, 12:31, Acts 1:1-3). "Gospel" means "good news" or "glad tidings" (Luke 8:1). So the true gospel is the good news of the Kingdom of God.

This gospel is also called the "gospel of Jesus Christ" or "the gospel of Christ" (Mark 1:1, Romans 15:19, 1 Corinthians 9:18). The word "of" can indicate ownership. The gospel of Christ is Christ's gospel (2 Corinthians 2:12). It is His message, the message God the Father gave Him to preach to the world and to give understanding of to the Church.

In Matthew, the term "Kingdom of Heaven" is used. This is synonymous with Kingdom of God. "Of" denotes ownership, not location. The Kingdom of God is the kingdom owned by God. It is God's kingdom. Likewise, the Kingdom of Heaven is the kingdom owned by heaven. It is the same as the Kingdom of God.

What is the Kingdom of God?

One of the accounts in the Bible about the Kingdom of God and how it will be established is in the book of Daniel. Daniel interpreted a dream that King

Nebuchadnezzar had about an image. This dream was from God, and God inspired Daniel to understand its meaning (Daniel 2:1-30). Nebuchadnezzar had dreamt that he saw a great image. The head of this image was made of gold, the chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, the legs of iron, and its feet were made of iron and clay. Then a stone struck the feet of the image and crushed the whole image and became a great mountain that filled the earth. Daniel gave the interpretation of this dream from God. "You, O king, are a king of kings: for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wherever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven has he given into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all. You are this head of gold. And after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to you, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: for as much as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things: and as iron that breaks all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise" (Daniel 2:37-40). The different metals represented different kingdoms that would rule on the earth in sequence, with the head of gold first and the feet of iron and clay last. Then Daniel explained the meaning of the stone that crushed the image in the days of the last kingdom made of iron and clay. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. For as much as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (Daniel 2:44-45).

This kingdom that God will set up to rule over all the earth is the Kingdom of God, and it will replace man's kingdoms. This will happen in the days of the last kingdom, the one represented by the feet and toes of iron and clay, at the end of the age. This will happen at the last trumpet, when Christ returns and the Church is resurrected. "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

The Kingdom of God is a coming world ruling government that Christ will establish over the entire earth at His second coming. It is also the divine family of God and it will include the resurrected saints as members of God's family, sons of God the Father and brethren of Jesus Christ. It is the members of God's family, including the resurrected Church, that will make up that government that will rule over all the earth.

The gospel of the Kingdom of God is the good news of that kingdom, and it includes the knowledge about all aspects of that kingdom. In its broadest sense, it includes the whole truth of the Bible.

There are many aspects of a kingdom.

A kingdom has a king. The king of the Kingdom of God is Jesus Christ. He was born to be that king (Luke 1:31-33, John 18:37). Christ shall return to the earth as king of

kings, to rule the earth. Everything about Jesus Christ is therefore included in the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

A kingdom has a headquarters location. The headquarters of the Kingdom of God will be Jerusalem on this earth after the return of Christ (Zechariah 14:16-19, Revelation 21:1-2).

A kingdom has laws. In the kingdom of God, the basic law is the law of love. In the Kingdom of God, God's law will be a way of life. It will be the way of life that causes peace and happiness for all eternity. This way of life is expressed by the two great commandments in the Bible, to love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus Christ, the king of the Kingdom of God, lived a perfect life, not only so He would be a perfect sacrifice so that His death would be payment for our sins, but to teach us by His example (John 13:12-17, 1 Peter 2:21-22). We can learn much about the Kingdom of God and the law of love that will be the way of life in that kingdom by studying the life of Christ and seeing the examples of how He put obedience to God and love towards men into action. He went around doing good, healing the sick, and teaching the people for their good.

The law of God is defined in further detail by the Ten Commandments, the first four of which teach us how to love God and the last six which teach us how to love our neighbor. The law also includes as major principles the three things Jesus said were the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23). The Ten Commandments and the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faith will all be taught in the Kingdom of God as a way of life.

This way of life is further illustrated by an abundance of instruction in the entire Bible. The gospel accounts and the epistles of the apostles in the New Testament are filled with detailed instructions about how we should live to practice the way of life of the Kingdom of God, and the Old Testament is filled with examples, both good and bad, that help to illustrate the consequences of obedience or disobedience to God's law, examples we can learn from (Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:1-11, Hebrews 4:11, James 5:10, 2 Peter 2:4-9, Jude 5-7). We need to learn that way of life by putting God's laws into practice in our lives now and making that way of life a part of our character if we want to be in God's kingdom (Matthew 7:21, 19:17, 1 Corinthians 6:10). Instruction in that way of life, the laws of the Kingdom of God, is all part of the true gospel, and that includes the entire Bible.

The gospel includes the good news that God will send Jesus Christ to return to this earth to rule the nations and teach all mankind God's truth, opening salvation to everyone and bringing peace, justice, prosperity, and happiness to all the earth. It includes the good news of the happiness and blessings that will be experienced in the kingdom, and the Old Testament prophecies are filled with teaching about the peace, righteousness, prosperity, and happiness that will reign all over the earth after Christ returns and establishes the Kingdom of God over all the earth, which I have already covered.

The good news of the Kingdom of God includes instructions in how we can be saved and enter that kingdom. The Kingdom of God is the ruling family of God, and to enter

that kingdom means to enter the family of God as a member of that ruling family. But if we could never be saved and enter that kingdom because of our sins and because this physical life was the only life we could have, that would not be good news. If we merely lived out our physical lives now, then died and ceased to exist for all eternity, just like any animal, that would not be good news for us personally. But God has provided a way for all men to be saved and to enter that Kingdom. That way is called salvation, and everything in the Bible that teaches us how we can be saved and enter into God's kingdom is part of the good news of the Kingdom of God.

And as I have already covered, it is the king of that kingdom, our savior Jesus Christ, who makes salvation possible. Without His saving work, including being born as a man, living a sinless life, preaching the message of the Kingdom of God that the Father gave Him to preach, training His disciples, dying a torturous death to pay the penalty for our sins, sending the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to build the Church, and His present work of interceding for us as high priest and leading the Church as head of the Church, our salvation would not be possible and we would not be able to enter the Kingdom of God. It is His sacrifice that makes forgiveness of sins and our entry into the Kingdom of God possible. And it is His resurrection from the dead that is the sign of His Messiahship and a proof that what He taught was from God. It is also His resurrection from the dead back to life that enables Him to continue His saving work today as head of the Church and our high priest and to be the king of the Kingdom of God (Romans 5:8-10, Ephesians 5:23, Hebrews 2:17, 3:1-2, 4:14, 6:19-20, 7:24-27, 8:1-2, 9:11). And it is Christ who will resurrect us so we can be in that kingdom (John 6:39-40).

Therefore everything about salvation through Jesus Christ and the life and saving work of Jesus Christ is a vital part of the true gospel of the Kingdom of God. It is salvation through Christ that makes the Kingdom of God good news for us personally, and this includes what Christ has done in the past, what He is doing now, and what He will do in the future.

The good news of the Kingdom of God includes the whole plan of God for building and increasing that kingdom and providing for men to be saved and to enter into that kingdom, as outlined by the holy days. It includes the truth that Christ will return to this earth and put an end to suffering and bring peace and happiness to this earth.

The gospel of the Kingdom of God includes the truth that God is reproducing Himself in man and that man can enter into the divine family of God. It is that divine family that IS the Kingdom of God.

If you look up in the Bible every instance of the term "gospel" or "kingdom of God," you will see the broad scope of what these terms cover. These terms include salvation through Jesus Christ and much more besides.

A variety of terms is used for the true gospel. In various places, the gospel is called, "the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14), "the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1), "the gospel of Christ" (Romans 15:19), "Christ's gospel" (2 Corinthians 2:12), "the gospel of God" (2 Corinthians 11:7), "gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24), "gospel

of peace" (Romans 10:15), "the gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13), "our gospel" (2 Thessalonians 2:14), and "my gospel" (2 Timothy 2:8). But all these terms refer to the same gospel.

Paul taught that God's judgment of men through Christ is part of the gospel (Romans 2:16). The gospel includes God's law because the gospel is something that must be obeyed (Romans 10:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, 1 Timothy 1:8-11, 1 Peter 4:17). The gospel was preached to Abraham and to ancient Israel (Romans 10:16, Galatians 3:8). The gospel was also preached to Israel in the wilderness, but because they lacked faith and did not believe it, they could not enter the promised land (Hebrews 3:16-19, 4:2), yet there is no record that Moses taught ancient Israel about the future life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. They had certain elements that referred to Christ such as the Passover ritual and the instruction about a future prophet who we know is Jesus Christ (Deuteronomy 18:15, Acts 3:22, 7:37), but they were not given enough information to fully know what these things meant. Yet the gospel was preached to them. What was preached to them? The law of God and the prophecies of the blessings that would come from obedience to that law. Those things are part of the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

The gospel is also called "the gospel of your salvation" in Ephesians 1:13, so it includes everything relating to the subject of how to be saved.

Can you see how the good news of the Kingdom of God expands to include the whole truth of God from the Bible? It includes everything about the way of life that will be lived in the Kingdom of God, the law of God, and that means it includes the laws and instructions in the Bible and the examples both good and bad that are written for our learning, in both the old and new testaments. It includes the whole plan of God recorded in the Bible for establishing that kingdom, including the history of what God has accomplished so far and the prophecies about what God will do in the future. It includes everything about Jesus Christ including what He has done in the past, what He is doing now, and what He will do in the future as the King of the Kingdom of God. It includes everything about salvation through Christ because that is how we can enter the Kingdom of God. There is little if anything in the Bible that does not relate to one or more aspects of the good news of the Kingdom of God. That is why the true gospel IS the truth of the whole Bible.

And while there are many aspects of the gospel, they all center on the one theme of the Kingdom of God. And actually, the good news of Kingdom of God is the central theme that runs through the whole Bible.

Does the Kingdom of God refer only to future events, or can it also apply in the present tense?

Jesus taught His disciple to pray to the Father, "Your kingdom come." Christ will return to set up that kingdom on the earth at the end of this age, and that is what Christians should look forward to. The establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth and the resurrection of the saints into that kingdom is yet future. But while the coming of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth is yet future, there

is also an aspect of the Kingdom of God that is in the present because the Bible sometimes speaks of the Kingdom of God in the present tense. Jesus Christ is the king of the Kingdom of God and He represents that kingdom now. The law of God, the law of love as defined in the Bible, is the law of the Kingdom of God, and that law represents the way of life of that kingdom. When we obey God's law we are placing ourselves under the rule of God, and we are learning the way of life of God's kingdom now.

Notice Luke 17:20-21: "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God comes not with observation: Neither shall they say, See here! or, see there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Jesus was not telling the evil Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was within their hearts. Rather, Jesus as king of that kingdom, representing the teachings and way of life of that kingdom, was within their midst.

Paul considered himself an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), and in Colossians 1:13-14 he writes, "Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." How are we translated or put into the kingdom of Christ? When we repent of our sins and believe the gospel and are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, we then belong to Christ. We come under the rule and authority of the Kingdom of God, and as we submit to God and obey His word, we are learning to practice the way of life of the Kingdom of God. Our citizenship in that Kingdom is reserved in heaven (Philippians 3:20-21).

So while the main fulfillment of the Kingdom of God is yet future, we can learn the way of life of that kingdom and submit to the authority of that kingdom now.

I believe all the doctrines of God's Church could be written as a single book about the Kingdom of God, with every doctrinal teaching organized around one or more of the aspects of that kingdom. It is all part of the gospel.

I started by saying there can be false gospels. What is a false gospel?

There can be more than one false gospel, but only one true gospel. There can be many lies, but only one truth.

Let me say here that mistakes in small matters do not make the overall teaching of a church false. None of us is perfect and we all make mistakes because we are human. God commands us to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:17-18). There is a learning process involved. None of us starts out perfect and none of us achieves perfection in this physical life. Perfection must be our goal, and when we are resurrected into the Kingdom of God after a life of growth and overcoming, we will indeed be perfect (Matthew 5:48). We make mistakes, but we should strive to correct our mistakes as soon as we learn about them from the Bible. Paul wrote, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9) and "For now we see through a

glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (verse 12).

But men can teach a false gospel if they remove major aspects of the true gospel from their message or if they introduce major false doctrines and heresies.

Some today teach a gospel about Jesus Christ, but they omit teaching the laws of the Kingdom of God, and they omit the prophecies concerning the return of Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth. They also introduce many false concepts into their message, doctrines based on the traditions of men, the traditions of their church, not on the Bible. They preach a message about the messenger, Jesus Christ, but they omit the true message that the messenger brought. The true gospel includes the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, but it includes much more. If you preach ONLY about Jesus Christ, but omit teaching the other aspects of the Kingdom of God including the way of life of that kingdom as defined by God's law, you are preaching a false gospel.

Jesus Christ preached the true gospel, but He did not just talk about Himself. He taught a way of life, and He taught His followers to keep the commandments of God. He also prophesied and taught His disciples what was to come.

Sometimes those who preach the gospel may place special emphasis on one part or another according to the needs of their audience. This is not wrong, as long as all the major aspects of the gospel are also taught.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "Moreover, brothers, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you have received, and wherein you stand; By which also you are saved, if you keep in memory what I preached to you, unless you have believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:1-5). Notice that Paul says that he FIRST of all preached that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was resurrected. This was not the only thing Paul taught, for if you read all his epistles you will notice that he taught the way of life of the Kingdom of God as well as prophecies about the future. But he taught the Corinthians about Jesus Christ first.

Why did he start with knowledge about Jesus Christ and not the other aspects of the Kingdom of God? Because that is what they needed to hear first. They were already able to know about the fact that God will establish His kingdom over the earth. They could know that from the teachings of the Jews in the synagogues. The Jews knew something about the Kingdom of God from the book of Daniel and other prophecies in the major and minor prophets. They also knew about the Ten Commandments and the law of God (Acts 15:21). But they didn't know about Jesus Christ. So Paul first taught them the part that they lacked, but needed to know.

Notice the emphasis that Paul placed on Jesus Christ and His sacrifice when he first began to teach the Corinthians about the true gospel: "And I, brothers, when I came to

you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). Paul was so determined to place emphasis on Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, that he made a decision that when he first began to teach the Corinthians he would teach nothing else, and not get sidetracked with other matters, for a time.

It is not wrong to place special emphasis on one part or the other of the true gospel in order to first teach those things that your audience most urgently needs to learn, and then teach the other parts that they may already know later. The Corinthians were able to know many things about the Kingdom of God and the law of that kingdom from Moses and the prophets. But they knew nothing about Jesus Christ, so Paul covered that topic first.

But Paul certainly taught other things later. Notice how he taught and emphasized and expounded one of the points of the law of God, the seventh commandment against adultery, in chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians. In chapter 6 he taught principles about one of the major points of God's law, loving our neighbor as our self, saying it is better to accept wrong than to sue a brother in court, and he also taught that in the Kingdom of God we will judge angels. In that same chapter he explained that those who practice sin as a way of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God, and he mentions a number of sins that are violations of the law of God. These are just examples. You can go through all the chapters of the two letters to the Corinthians to see that Paul did teach them many things about the Kingdom of God besides the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And you can continue in his other epistles to see that he gave the churches under his care a broad range of instruction. This is all part of the gospel (Romans 1:15).

The first century Church of God placed emphasis on the name of Jesus Christ and the personal salvation made possible by His life, death, and resurrection because this was new knowledge at that time. But they also taught the other aspects of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. In several places in the book of Acts the Bible says that Paul or some other teacher taught "things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ," or words to that effect (Acts 8:12, 28:23, 28:31). It is all part of the one true gospel.

Today, there exists an opposite problem. Most people in our western nations have heard about Jesus Christ, and every person who claims to be a Christian, and many who don't, have heard the teaching that Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins so we can be forgiven and saved. But people are not so much aware of other aspects of the gospel message, the coming Kingdom of God that will rule over all the earth and the way of life and laws of that kingdom.

There may also be times when certain subjects or points may be emphasized at first, not because your audience does not know these things, but to establish common ground with your audience and to speak to your audience from their point of view. Paul did this when he spoke to the men of Athens. You can read of this in Acts 17:22-34. Paul began by speaking of things the Athenians already were familiar with, such as their inscription to "the unknown God," and Paul referred to the writings of their own poets.

He did this to establish common ground. This is part of the principle that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 of being "all things to all men."

These are all decisions made on judgments about the best and most effective way to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God. But all these things are about the kingdom, and as long as all are taught, no major aspect of the gospel is removed, and no major falsehoods are added, the message is the true gospel.

The true gospel is the gospel Jesus Christ preached, the gospel given to Him by God the Father, the message about the good news of the Kingdom of God. In its widest sense, that message includes all the truth of the Bible, the whole message of truth from God. It includes everything about Jesus Christ because He is the king of that kingdom. It includes salvation through Jesus Christ, because that enables us to enter that kingdom. It includes the prophecies about the Kingdom of God that show how it will be established on the earth and the peace and happiness that will result. It includes everything about the law of God, the law of love, and all the commandments of God because that is the way of life of the Kingdom of God that we should be learning now, and it is the way of life that will be practiced in the Kingdom of God.

The true gospel is about all these truths, but it centers on the Kingdom of God.

The truth of God is indeed "good news." It is happier news than the materialistic view of the universe that says that there is no God who created man and that this life is all there is, and once you die, that's it forever. It is happier news than any pagan religion ever offered. Very few in this world have heard this message, even in Western nations with Christian cultures. But it is God's will that the message of this truth go to all the world before the end comes, "for a witness" (Matthew 24:14).

Christ will return and bring happiness to the earth, and there are indications I think in Bible prophecy and chronology and in the conditions of the world today that suggest this will be soon. But prophecy also indicates that there are severe troubles that all Israel and the world will go through before this happens, and that is the subject of the chapter on the Ezekiel warning later in this book.

CHAPTER 3 - Is Observance of the Weekly Sabbath and Annual Feast Days Required?

Introduction

The majority of mainstream churches do not observe the seventh-day Sabbath or the annual holy days and festivals that God gave Israel in the Old Testament. Yet there is evidence in the Bible that these days have not been abolished and should still be kept by God's Church today. I have covered some of that evidence in the sections on the Sabbath and the annual holy days in chapter two.

Many people today think that the seventh-day Sabbath, from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, was either abolished or changed to Sunday. Even among the few churches that observe the seventh-day Sabbath, most believe that the annual holy days and festivals were only in effect under the Old Covenant and were abolished when Jesus Christ died.

In chapter two I focused on the meaning of the Sabbath and the holy days more than on proving that they are still in force today. Many people who do not keep these days will acknowledge their meaning. They can see that the weekly Sabbath pictures the millennial reign of Christ. They can see that Passover represents the sacrifice of Christ, that the Days of Unleavened Bread represent repentance, that Pentecost represents the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, that the Day of Trumpets represents the second coming of Christ, etc. But they do not actually observe these days.

In this chapter, I want to focus in depth on the Bible evidence that proves that these days should still be kept by Christians today.

Paul's Epistles Are Not Always Clear

In looking to the Bible for evidence for or against observance of the weekly Sabbath and annual holy days, I will not start with the epistles of Paul. Peter warns that there are things in Paul's writings that are hard to understand, and a principle I follow is letting clear scriptures interpret unclear and difficult scriptures (2 Peter 3:15-16). I have found no scriptures in Paul's writings that definitely and specifically mention the weekly Sabbath, or annual holy days by name, either individually ("Pentecost", "Day of

Trumpets", etc.) or as a group ("the feasts of the Lord"), saying that we do not need to observe them. Every passage from Paul used by those who oppose Sabbath and holy day observance is a general reference to "law" or to "days" without being specific as to whether we should or should not observe God's ordained sabbaths. I will cover some of those passages later.

But I will start with the teaching of Jesus Christ in the gospel according to Matthew, which IS clear and easy to understand. With the clear teachings of Christ and other clear scriptures in the Bible, we will have a background that will allow those clear scriptures to interpret any unclear scriptures in Paul's writings that God inspired Peter to warn are hard to understand.

Jesus said that till heaven and earth pass away and all things are fulfilled in the law and the prophets (the "law" in this case is a common reference to the books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy, and the "prophets" includes the books that make up the major and minor prophets, Isaiah through Malachi), nothing would pass from the law (Matthew 5:17-18). When will this be? All things will be fulfilled when the prophecy in Isaiah 65:17 is fulfilled and the old heavens and earth have passed away and there is a new heaven and earth - see also Revelation 21:1. This has not yet been fulfilled.

This shows that we need to be very cautious about assuming that anything in the law has been abolished without strong scriptural evidence that it has been abolished. The law commands observance of God's annual feasts and holy days (sabbaths) in Leviticus 23. The seventh-day Sabbath is included in the Ten Commandments. The weekly Sabbath and annual holy days and feasts continue unless we can clearly prove from the New Testament that God has ended them for the Church.

It is not a matter of assuming all Old Testament law is ended, and then looking to the New Testament to see what has been continued. Jesus said the law continues. We can look to the New Testament to see what God has changed or what has been abolished for the Church, but if the New Testament is silent on a matter, it continues. So if the New Testament said NOTHING about God's weekly and annual sabbaths, they would continue. In fact, the New Testament is not silent on this matter, but reaffirms observance of these days.

The Weekly Sabbath

Many people think the weekly seventh-day Sabbath is only an Old Covenant ritual. It is not. It is part of the Ten Commandments and existed from the time of Adam and still exists today.

The Sabbath was not made for Israel, nor for the Jew. It was made for mankind. "And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27, KJV). The phrase "for man" is not there by accident. It does not mean, "for

Israel" or "for the Jew." "For man" is the phrase Jesus Christ chose to use in teaching about the Sabbath, and He always taught as the Father commanded Him (John 12:48-50). "For man" is what Jesus said and what the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to write in recording this incident.

In understanding scripture, we should consider the local context of the passage and what is being taught at that time. But we should also consider the greater context of what God is teaching us today through the scriptures. From the perspective of the local context of Jesus teaching the Pharisees, it might not make much difference in the lesson Jesus was teaching whether He used the term "man" or "Jew." The Pharisees were probably not much interested in mankind anyway and would be content to think the Sabbath was just for them and their nation only. But it makes a difference to us today. The greater context is that God, who knows the future and knew at that time that there would be sincere believers today who would look to the Bible to know about the Sabbath, inspired the recording of this incident in which Jesus is telling us today and throughout the church age that the Sabbath was made for all mankind, not just Israel under the Old Covenant. In fact, since mankind as a whole was never under the Old Covenant, this proves that the Sabbath is not an Old Covenant ritual. The Sabbath was not made as an Old Covenant ritual for Israel. It was made for the entire human race. Something made for all mankind cannot be just an Old Covenant ritual.

The Sabbath is also commanded in the Ten Commandments.

Are the Ten Commandments in force today for the Church?

Many mainstream Christians think that the law is done away under the New Covenant. Nothing could be more wrong.

The first mention of the New Covenant is in the Old Testament, believe it or not! "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34, KJV). Notice that there is not a new law involved, nor is the old law abolished. This passage shows that one of the differences between the old and new covenants is that the Holy Spirit is given in the New Covenant which enables God's law to be written, not on stone, but in our hearts and minds. This results in a new attitude in the minds of the people under the covenant. Not a new law. But a new willingness to obey the law, a willingness and a submissive heart that Old Testament Israel never had. But it is the same law, God's law, as God said, "My law."

Jesus illustrated the difference in our approach to God's law in the sermon on the mount. Notice: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:27, KJV). Under the Old Covenant, a person could simply refrain from physically acting out his lust and he would not be guilty of breaking the letter of the law that said, "You shall not commit adultery." But under the New Covenant, we are to obey God's commandments in the spirit as well as the letter. This means that not only are we to avoid committing the physical act of adultery, we are to avoid entertaining lust in our minds. Thus, under the New Covenant, the principles in the Ten Commandments are actually expanded and magnified. This is why it was said of Christ, "The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make *it* honourable" (Isaiah 42:21, KJV). Rather than abolish the law, Christ expanded and magnified it.

The authority of the Ten Commandments under the New Covenant is directly affirmed by Jesus Christ. A young man asked Jesus a question about the New Covenant. "And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16, KJV). This is a New Covenant question. It has nothing to do with the Old Covenant. Why? Because the man was asking about ETERNAL LIFE, not about national blessings that were the reward of obeying the terms of the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant never offered eternal life. You can read the promises of the Old Covenant in Exodus and Deuteronomy and you will find that God promised health, national prosperity, and protection from enemies for the nation as a whole, but NOT eternal life for the individual. So the young man's question was 100% about New Covenant doctrine. Jesus' answer? "And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is*, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 19:17-19, KJV). Jesus told the young man to keep the commandments if he wanted to receive eternal life under the New Covenant, and mentioned several of the Ten Commandments as examples. Why did Jesus use as examples the commandments that teach us love towards neighbor and not the first four of the Ten Commandments? Probably it was because it was with loving his neighbor that the young man had trouble. Later, he went away sorrowful because he did not want to give away his possessions to help the poor (Matthew 19:21-22). But the New Covenant answer that Jesus gave to the New Covenant question was, "keep the commandments." Here is a parallel account in Luke: "And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none *is* good, save one, *that is*, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up." (Luke 18:18-21, KJV). Notice, before the young man asked "which," Jesus gave the answer, "you know the commandments." Which commandments did the man know? The Ten Commandments, all ten of them. That includes the fourth commandment to observe the Sabbath. We are to observe God's weekly Sabbath if we want to enter into eternal life under the terms of the New Covenant.

James wrote, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law" (James 2:10-11, KJV). Notice the REASON James said that if you violate one point, you violate all. The reason is that the same God who commanded one point of the law commanded the other points of the law as well. The authority of the law comes from the One who gave the law, God. What are these "points" of the law that James speaks of? The Ten Commandments. This is obvious because each point he uses as an example is one of the Ten Commandments. So according to the logic James is using, if you violate any point, or commandment, in the Ten Commandments, you violate all. He could just as well have used the example, if you break the Sabbath, but do not commit adultery, you are guilty of all, because He who commanded you to not commit adultery also commanded you to keep the Sabbath. It is the same logic exactly. This passage proves that the authority of the Ten Commandments continues in the church age because this was written after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If the Ten Commandments ended when Christ died, God would not have inspired James to write as he did.

If you want to know the importance of the seventh-day Sabbath, look at the context in which it is defined. It is given as one of the commandments along with "you shall have no other God's before me," "you shall not murder," "you shall not commit adultery," etc. God shows its importance and its permanence by putting it in the context of commandments that are obviously important and permanent.

Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for mankind. Since it was made, when did this event occur? It did not occur when God gave the Ten Commandments, nor when God gave Israel manna in the wilderness. It was made when man was made.

In Genesis is the account of the creation of man. God renewed the face of the earth in six days of creation and made man on the sixth day. Then on the seventh day God made the Sabbath by resting on it, setting man an example to follow. There was no other reason for God to rest on that day, since God does not get tired. God created the Sabbath by His example. This seventh day was the first Sabbath. You can read the account of the creation of the Sabbath in Genesis alongside the fourth of the Ten Commandments in Exodus and you will see the close parallel language, showing they are talking about the same thing: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates: For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:8-11, KJV). "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." (Genesis 2:2-3, KJV). When you compare "wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Exodus) with "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it" (Genesis), you can see that both accounts are talking about God's seventh-day Sabbath.

So the seventh day after the sixth day of creation in Genesis was the first Sabbath. God created the weekly Sabbath day for mankind the very next day after He created mankind. This proves that it is not an Old Covenant ritual that became obsolete after Christ died. The Sabbath is as permanent as mankind and as permanent as the commandments against murder, adultery, and stealing.

Some people think that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday because they believe Christ was crucified Friday afternoon and resurrected Sunday morning. But the Friday crucifixion-Sunday morning resurrection tradition is false. Jesus said He would be three days and three nights in the grave (Matthew 12:40) just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish (Jonah 1:17). Jesus died late afternoon and was buried just before or around sunset (Matthew 27:45-50, 57-60, Mark 15:33-37, 42-46, Luke 23:44-46, 50-54, John 19:30-33, 38-42). If this was a Friday and He was resurrected early Sunday morning, He would have been in the grave one day and two nights. This would also mean that Jonah was in the belly of the fish one day and two nights, but that is not the case. Jonah 1:17 is clear that Jonah was in the fish for three days and three nights, and Jesus is clear in His statement that as sign of His Messiahship He would be in the grave for three days and nights (Matthew 12:39-40).

Jesus IS the Messiah. The sign He gave came to pass. He was buried just around sunset and He left the grave just around sunset 72 hours later.

Since the grave was empty when the women and the disciples visited the grave early Sunday morning, Jesus must have been resurrected around sunset late Saturday at the latest. Three days and nights before this would put His burial late Wednesday before sunset.

Why do people think Jesus was buried late Friday? There are numerous scriptures that say that the Sabbath was drawing near (Mark 15:42-43, Luke 23:52-54, John 19:31, 42). Traditional Christians falsely assume that these scriptures are referring to the weekly Sabbath. Why? Because TRADITIONAL CHRISTIANITY DOES NOT OBSERVE GOD'S ANNUAL SABBATHS. This is a perfect example of why we need to keep the annual sabbaths of God to really know them. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, there are some who understand that the annual holy days represent things and can teach us lessons about God's plan of salvation for mankind, but they think they can learn the lessons of the holy days by reading about them but not observing them. But that is not true. Traditional Christianity has lost knowledge of these days precisely because it does not observe them. No Christian who observes God's annual holy days year by year would make the mistake of thinking that the sabbath that was drawing near when Christ died was the weekly Sabbath.

That sabbath was not an ordinary weekly Sabbath. It is called in the New Testament a "high day" (John 19:31). It was an annual sabbath. It was ordained by God to fall on the fifteenth day of the first month every year (Leviticus 23:4-7, Numbers 28:16-18). It can fall on ANY day of the week, just like the fourth of July, Independence Day in the United States, can fall on any day of the week. The Sabbath that was drawing near was the annual Sabbath that falls on the fifteen day of the first month known as the First Day

of Unleavened Bread. This day directly follows Passover day, which is the fourteenth day of the first month. So since the 15th day of the first month follows the 14th day of the first month, the First Day of Unleavened Bread, an ANNUAL Sabbath, follows Passover day. Christ, our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), died on the very day of Passover, the day that represents His sacrifice, and the Sabbath that was drawing near after He died was the annual Sabbath known as the First Day of Unleavened Bread. Christ did not die on Friday and was not resurrected Sunday morning. Yet that is the ONLY reason traditional Christians give for observing Sunday as a day of rest and worshipping God instead of God's Sabbath.

Paul himself affirms the validity of the law, calling it holy, just, and good, and stating that the law is spiritual. "Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7:12, KJV). "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31, KJV). "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Romans 7:14, KJV). Paul said that it was by the law that he understood what sin is, and he used one of the Ten Commandments, the tenth commandment against coveting, as an example. "What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Romans 7:7, KJV). This exactly fits with what John wrote: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). Likewise, it is by the law of God, the fourth commandment in the Ten Commandments, that we can know it is a sin to work on God's seventh-day Sabbath, the weekly Sabbath, from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset as God counts days (Genesis 1:5, Leviticus 23:32). I said we CAN know. We can know IF we are willing to believe the Bible more than our opinions, ministers, or traditions (Matthew 15:3-9).

Later I will discuss the scriptures in Paul's letters that some try to use to refute the Sabbath. Many of those scriptures are used also to try to refute the annual holy days, and I will cover all these together after I show what the rest of the Bible says about the annual holy days. But there is not a single scripture in any of Paul's writings or any other part of the Bible that clearly overturns the law of the Sabbath or changes it to Sunday. Every scripture that people use is vague enough that it can refer to other days or other things. Those scriptures CANNOT be saying that God's Sabbath is done away, because if they did they would be contradicting the rest of the Bible, and God does not contradict himself. To know what Paul may be referring to or not referring to, we have to let the clear scriptures we have covered interpret difficult scriptures in Paul's writings.

In fact, Paul's writings actually support observance the annual festivals and holy days of God.

A Misconception about Shadows

Before going into the specific proofs for annual holy days and festivals, I want to try to clear up a misconception about "shadows."

Some people think that the weekly Sabbath and annual holy days are shadows of the reality of Jesus Christ and should therefore not be observed today. They will say something like, "These days are only shadows that have been fulfilled by Christ, and since we have the reality, we do not need the shadow." They will also say that these days do not need to be kept because the sacrifice of Christ is "sufficient." In their minds, to observe a shadow is to deny the reality, that is, to deny Christ. These people often quote Colossians 2:16-17 in this regard. But Paul is not saying that all shadows are obsolete. He is simply pointing out that the reality of what a shadow represents is always more important than the shadow. This passage used the Greek word skia, Strong's Concordance number 4639, translated "shadow." It literally means shadow, the image of something made on a background from a source of light. What does Paul mean by a shadow? A shadow can be a ritual, ceremony, or symbol that represents and pictures something. It is a physical act whose value lies in what it represents.

Animal sacrifices are a shadow of the sacrifice of Christ, and they have ended for the Church. But not all shadows have ended. The New Testament itself ordains rituals, ceremonies, and symbols that are shadows of something else.

A ritual, ceremony, symbol, or "shadow" can point backwards to remind us of what has been fulfilled or can point forward to teach us about something that is yet to be fulfilled.

The New Testament ordains ceremonies, rituals, and symbols, which are shadows. The New Testament symbols of bread and wine representing the body and blood of Christ, baptism, the laying on of hands for the receiving of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 6:2, Acts 8:16-17), foot washing (John 13:3-17), and the anointing of the sick with oil (James 5:14-15) are all examples of New Testament rituals, ceremonies, and symbols which are shadows of things.

Why does God use shadows?

God uses shadows or symbols as teaching tools, to help us understand the meaning of what they represent and to keep us in remembrance of things past. They help us understand and remember what has happened in the past and what will happen in the future in God's plan.

A shadow is not wrong, nor do all shadows end when they are fulfilled. If you want to know if a shadow ends, you have to look to the scriptures to see if that particular shadow or ritual has ended. For example, there are clear scriptures that show that physical circumcision is no longer required for the Church. There is no such scripture saying that the Sabbath and holy days have ended.

God's seven annual feasts and holy days are indeed shadows, because each one of these seven represents or is an image of a greater reality. Each one represents something different. Some have been fulfilled and some have not yet been fulfilled, but all of the holy days continue. Those which have been fulfilled remind us of what has been fulfilled and those which have not been fulfilled teach us about what is to come.

Yet the annual sabbath days are more than shadows. They are commanded days of rest and assembly that provide opportunities for drawing closer to God in prayer, Bible study, and assembling for instruction and fellowship. God wants us to spend time with Him on these days just as on the weekly Sabbath.

Likewise the weekly seventh-day Sabbath is also a shadow of something to come. It is a symbol of the coming 1,000 year millennial reign of Christ after 6,000 years of mankind ruling himself. It is also a symbol or shadow of the spiritual rest we have in Christ. But it is more than a shadow because we use that time to draw closer to God. It has a very practical effect on our relationship with God.

If it were wrong to observe something that is a shadow or symbol, just because it is a shadow, then it would be wrong to take the symbols of bread and wine, which are shadows of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which Jesus commanded that we do in remembrance of His sacrifice (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24-26). It would be wrong to practice baptism, which is a shadow of the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and also pictures our repentance and coming up out of the water in newness of life (Colossians 2:12).

So to determine if a ritual or shadow is to be observed, we have to look to see what the Bible says about the particular shadow or ritual. If the Bible teaches that it is no longer to be observed, then we do not observe it, but if the Bible teaches that it continues, then we should continue to observe it. Calling something a "shadow," by itself, proves nothing.

Likewise, to say that observance of the seventh day Sabbath or the annual holy days is not "necessary" because the sacrifice of Christ is "sufficient" misses the point entirely. Christ was sacrificed to pay for our past sins so we can be forgiven when we repent, but His sacrifice is not permission to deliberately continue to sin. Before Christ's sacrifice can be applied to us and our sins be forgiven, we must repent. Part of repentance is to surrender one hundred percent to God to do His will in everything, and we know His will by what He says in the Bible. The question thus becomes, does the Bible show that it is God's will that we observe these days today? If it is God's will, we must keep them. A person who refuses to submit to God's will in this matter is showing God that he has not yet fully repented, and if that is the case, he cannot rely on the sacrifice of Christ being applied to him because he has not fulfilled one of the requirements for conversion - repentance. So we must look to scripture to determine if it is God's will that we keep these days.

Animal Sacrifices

If a shadow does not necessarily end when it is fulfilled, why do we not offer animal sacrifices?

We do not offer animal sacrifices because only the priesthood of Aaron is authorized to offer the sacrifices at the alter and do priestly duties (1 Samuel 13:7-14, 2 Chronicles 26:16-21). It would be a sin for anyone else to do it. The Church is not represented by the priesthood of Aaron, but by the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

The priesthood of Aaron was a national priesthood and was strictly limited to the Old Covenant. It required a national system of the twelve tribes, each with its own farmland, supporting the tribe of Levi with their tithes, and the tribe of Levi supporting the priesthood of Aaron. When the priests offered animal sacrifices for the annual feasts and holy days, they did it on behalf of the nation. The Church is not a nation. We are an assembly of Christians living among the nations of this world. The rules of the Levitical priesthood do not apply to the Church. Likewise, we do not stone people for murder, return to our inherited land every 50 years, etc. Those were national laws for the nation of Israel. Those things associated with the priesthood of Aaron and associated with national laws for the government and nation of Israel do not continue today for the Church.

But the annual holy days are not limited to the priesthood of Aaron. The common people from all the tribes did not offer holy day sacrifices - only the priests did that - but the people rested and assembled for services just as they did on the weekly Sabbath, and just as God's Church does today.

Understand this concept, because it is a key to understanding which laws of the Old Testament continue for the Church today.

Animal sacrifices = priesthood of Aaron = national priesthood representing a nation = Old Covenant promises to the NATION of Israel. ONLY the priesthood of Aaron was authorized to offer animal sacrifices at the alter. The common people, the individual Israelites, were not allowed to do this. They could contribute and kill animals in some cases (not for the holy days), they could observe, but they could not offer the sacrifices to God at the alter. The offering of animal sacrifices for the holy days and festivals was not a part of the observance of those days for the ordinary citizens of Israel. They rested, they assembled for services, they observed, that's it. The priests offered the sacrifices on behalf of the nation so that the nation could have a relationship with God that enabled it to receive the promises of the Old Covenant: prosperity and protection.

Spiritual sacrifices = priesthood of Jesus Christ = priesthood representing individual members of the Church = New Covenant promises to the Church and its members. Jesus Christ is the sacrifice and our high priest, completely separate from the priesthood of Aaron. His sacrifice is not for us a nation, but for the members of the Church individually. That sacrifice has been made once for all, and it is applied to the members

of God's Church so we can receive the New Covenant promises of the Holy Spirit and eternal life.

The Church cannot offer animals, even if we wanted to, because we do not have the priesthood of Aaron to offer them. The priesthood of Aaron was supported by a national system of organized tribes, with the tribes supporting the tribe of Levi with its tithes and offerings and the tribe of Levi supporting the priesthood of Aaron. The priesthood of Aaron, together with the judges and later kings, helped to rule and govern the nation (Deuteronomy 17:9-13, Matthew 23:1-3, Acts 23:1-5). The priests had the authority to set rules concerning obedience to the law of Moses. They could make binding judgments on details of observing the law of Moses. By the time of Christ, they had abused that authority, building a system of traditions that made God's law a burden (Matthew 23:4-5, Matthew 23:13-33, Luke 11:37-54, Matthew 15:1-9, Mark 7:1-13). They added a lot of do's and don'ts that God never intended, requiring ceremonial washing of hands before eating for example.

But that system does not now exist for the Church. Why? Because we are not a nation. The Church is the body of all those who have God's Holy Spirit dwelling in them, and that includes people of all races and nationalities. We live scattered among the nations of this world, living under the governments of those nations, subject to their civil laws, which are not based on the law and government of God. We are to respect civil governments of this world and obey their laws when they do not conflict with God's law, but these governments are not God's governments as the government of ancient Israel was.

After Christ returns, the nation of Israel under God's government will be established again, and there will be animal sacrifices and a Levitical priesthood to offer them once again. This may be surprising to some, but prophetic scripture is absolutely clear about this. In the book of Ezekiel, chapters 40 through 48, is a long prophecy about temple worship in the millennium after Christ returns. This has to be in the future after Christ returns because the healing waters described in Ezekiel 47:7-12 has never occurred in the past. It is also not speaking of the church age at this time because it describes the settlement of Israel by tribes, something that has not happened since the captivity of Israel about 700 years before Christ (Ezekiel 47:13-23, 48:1-35). Animal sacrifices will be offered at that time. See Ezekiel 43:18-27. Why would Jesus Christ, king of kings after He returns to this earth, re-establish animal sacrifices for Israel? Isn't His own sacrifice sufficient? Of course it is! But animal sacrifices, like any ritual such as baptism, the taking of the symbols of bread and wine, etc. are TEACHING TOOLS. They teach us lessons. They help us to understand better the sacrifice of Christ. It is the sacrifice of Christ that justifies us with God. But rituals or "shadows" can help us understand that sacrifice better.

Even today, ministers and lay members of traditional churches often study the sacrificial system in the Old Testament for the lessons it can teach us about the sacrifice of Christ. Those lessons will be more compelling in the millennium when animal sacrifices are restored and will actually be seen as they are offered.

So in reading the Old Testament, keep in mind that there is a body of law and a priesthood and a sacrificial system that is NATIONAL in character, and those laws that were national laws do not apply to the Church today. It is for that reason that the Church does not stone people for murder or adultery. We are not a government. Stoning was a civil penalty of a nation, just as death in the electric chair or gas chamber or by lethal injection is a penalty for murder in many states in the United States. Church members do not return to a land inheritance every fifty years - we can't. Those kinds of laws relate to nations and we live under the laws of the nations of this world, laws that are very different than the laws God gave the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant. Animal sacrifices on the holy days fall into the same category. Animals were offered only by a national priesthood, an agency of the government of Israel if you want to think of it that way, and that system has ended for Israel during this church age. To compare it with governments today, it would be as if the United States government offered animal sacrifices on behalf of the whole nation, with an agency of the federal government in charge of the process. It is not a matter for the Church.

The Law Has Been Changed

Although the law has not been abolished, it has been changed "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For *it is* evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood" (Hebrews 7:12-14, KJV). This passage in Hebrews shows that the priesthood of Aaron has been replaced by the priesthood of Jesus Christ for the Church. The fact that the law has been CHANGED shows that it has not been abolished, because you do not change something if you abolish it.

Also, this passage give a guiding principle as to what changes and why. The law was changed out of NECESSITY. It is those things that must change out of necessity that are changed. There is no such necessity to change the law of the holy days, except that animal sacrifices are no longer offered by the priesthood of Aaron for the nation of Israel.

It is clear in the New Testament that physical circumcision is not required for the Church. This is an example of how God makes it very clear that something is no longer required. Paul mentions circumcision very clearly and specifically by name (Acts 15:1, 24, Romans 2:25-29, Romans 4:9-12, 1 Corinthians 7:17-19, Galatians 5:1-2, 11, Galatians 6:11-15, Colossians 3:11) and says clearly that it is not required. There is nothing like that in the New Testament about the holy days and feasts saying we should not keep them, referring either to the general term "feasts of the Lord" or specific feasts such as "the Feast of Trumpets" or "the Feast of Pentecost."

Why is circumcision no longer required? Circumcision was given to Abraham, but in the time of Moses it came to represent being a citizen of the nation of Israel. When a

Gentile wanted to become a citizen of Israel, he was circumcised (Exodus 12:48-49). Likewise, in the time of Paul, a Gentile could become a Jew and thus a citizen of the nation of Israel by being circumcised. By so doing, he could be represented by the priesthood of Aaron, which was a national priesthood, and come into all the rules and regulations taught by that priesthood (Matthew 23:1-4, Matthew 15:1-3) as well as the promises made to the nation of Israel under the terms of the Old Covenant. But that is not necessary for the Church because we are under the terms of the New Covenant and are represented by the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Circumcision is an example of a law that is changed, not abolished. For the Church, circumcision is of the heart, not of the flesh "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God" (Romans 2:28-29, KJV).

Supporting Evidence for the Holy Days

God sometimes shows the importance of something by the context in which He commands or teaches it. Thus, the importance of the weekly Sabbath is shown by the fact that God included it in the Ten Commandments along with commands to have no other gods besides God, to avoid using images in worship, to honor our father and mother, to avoid adultery, murder, stealing, etc. But God also shows the importance of the annual feasts and holy days by listing them with the weekly Sabbath in Leviticus 23. This puts the annual holy days in the same category as the weekly Sabbath.

Jesus Christ and the saints will teach the nations to keep God's annual feasts and holy days after He returns. Zechariah 14:16-19 shows that the Feast of Tabernacles will be kept in the millennium. "And it shall come to pass, *that* every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, *that* whoso will not come up of *all* the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that *have* no *rain*; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16-19, KJV). Notice that the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles is so important to God, that He will punish any nation of earth with drought and potential starvation if that nation refuses to observe the Feast of Tabernacles.

There is evidence in the New Testament that Paul kept the holy days and instructed his Gentile congregations to keep them. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8, KJV). This is

in the context of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for it is here that God inspired Paul to teach what the Days of Unleavened Bread represent. Some object saying that "keeping the feast" here is figurative and it means living in Christ. But Christ is nowhere referred to in the Bible as "keeping a feast," and the contrast Paul paints is not between keeping the feast physically or spiritually as he would if this were a controversy. He is talking about literally keeping a feast, a feast his congregation already knew about and was keeping. He is showing them that they needed to fulfill the spiritual meaning of the feast even as they kept it physically (see verses 6 and 7).

Acts 18:21 shows Paul telling those in Ephesus that he intended to keep a coming feast in Jerusalem. "When they desired *him* to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus" (Acts 18:20-21, KJV). Some object saying that the words "I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem" is missing from some manuscripts. But the following word "but" is not missing, and it seems to me that it would make no sense for that word to be there except as a connecting word between two clauses. And if this clause is in some manuscripts but not others, then it was either added or removed. The Jews had no custody of the Christian scriptures. The Church would not change the Bible. The only groups that might try to change the original writings and had the power to do it are the large groups such as those that became the Greek Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, and neither of these would have the motive to add this in support of Old Testament holy days. But they might have the motive to remove it. And if it was an honest mistake in copying, it could have been accidentally omitted, but not added.

These seven annual feasts and holy days have important symbolic meaning, meaning that ancient Israel never understood. They did not understand, for example, that Passover represented the future sacrifice of Christ. They did not understand that Pentecost represents the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Church so that we are a kind of firstfruits of God's salvation. God gives rituals and shadows as a tool to teach. Common sense indicates that God would want us, who understand the meaning of these days, to keep them, even more than ancient Israel who did not understand what they meant.

Some Arguments against the Holy Days

Some say that only the law written on tables of stone continues (the Ten Commandments) and not other Old Testament law not written on stone. But Jesus said that the two great commandments are to love God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40), and these commandments are greater than the Ten Commandments because all the law and the prophets hang on them, including the Ten Commandments. Yet those two great commandments are not written on stone (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18).

Some object to the holy days because there is no record of them in Genesis. But there is no record of any of the Ten Commandments being given as instructions from God in Genesis, yet the Ten Commandments continue. Silence in Genesis proves nothing.

Some say that because sacrifices were offered on the holy days that this means the holy days do not continue. But sacrifices were also offered on the weekly Sabbath, so the offering of sacrifices on a day does not mean the day is abolished when the sacrifices end.

Some point out Old Testament scriptures and prophecies where God seems to speak against feasts that Israel was keeping. These can refer to pagan feasts that Israel was keeping instead of God's feasts, or it could refer to Israel keeping the feasts with a wrong attitude or mixing God's feasts with sinful practices. Here are some scriptures some use:

Hosea 2:11 and 5:5-7 - This is referring to a prophesied punishment for sins. Israel and/or Judah would suffer the punishment of no longer being able to keep the annual days they were keeping. This is not necessarily God's rejection of the holy days, but His rejection of Israel who was sinning and was about to go into punishment and captivity. But also, these days are not even necessarily God's holy days. Jeroboam rejected God's ordained feasts days and set up different days, and the northern kingdom of Israel probably never returned to God's true feast days (1 Kings 12:25-33).

Isaiah 1:13-14 - God is rejecting Israel because of their sins. Verse 13 and verse 15 explain. They may have been keeping God's holy days, but their lives were full of sin and God could not endure their hypocrisy of appearing before Him in their sacred meetings while their hands were full of blood.

Amos 5:21 - This is a message to the northern kingdom of Israel (Amos 1:1). Jeroboam rejected God's ordained days and practices and started his own, in some cases on different days, and with different priests and with idols (1 Kings 12:25-33). If you read the history of the different kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, not one was righteous in God's sight, so it is unlikely that Israel ever returned to keeping God's true feasts and holy days as God ordained. They were no longer God's feasts but the feasts of men.

Some may feel that the holy days are not required because they are not commanded in the New Testament. But the weekly Sabbath is also not commanded in the New Testament, yet it continues. Silence in the New Testament does not change what God has commanded in the Old Testament.

Likewise Acts 15 does not mention the holy days, but it also does not mention the weekly Sabbath, clean and unclean meats, etc. Acts 15 was an administrative decision on Church policy concerning what would be taught and commanded the Gentile members of the Church at that time, and is not intended to be an all-inclusive description of God's law.

Galatians 4:21-31, 5:1-4 - The Galatians had an attitude problem, some of them. Verse 4 of chapter 5 is the key. They wanted to be circumcised because they thought it was necessary and they thought they could be justified by law keeping rather than through faith in the sacrifice of Christ.

Ephesians 2:14-17 - Paul is not specific about what He is calling the "enmity," the "law of commandments contained in ordinances" as it is translated. There is absolutely no mention of the feasts of the Lord or annual sabbaths. In fact, by calling the "law of commandments contained in ordinances" the "enmity," this rules out the possibility that he could be talking about God's holy days, because there is nothing about those days that constitutes enmity of any kind.

Colossians 2:13-14 - "handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us" cannot refer to the holy days and feasts of God. I have kept them for about 25 years and I know from experience what a blessing they are and that they are not against me any more than the weekly Sabbath is against me. Probably Paul is referring the requirement of the death penalty for our sins, which was nailed to the cross.

Colossians 2:16-23 - Verse 16 seems to be saying, do not let any man judge you in how you keep the feasts and sabbaths. In the phrase "the body is of Christ" (KJV), the word "is" is not in the original Greek. The phrase is, "the body of Christ." So this could mean, it is the body of Christ, the Church, which is to judge these matters, not any man. There is also in verses 20-23 a rebuke of those who practice the commandments and doctrines of men. This cannot refer to the holy days, which were given by God.

How Are the Holy Days Kept by the Church?

Why are there not more explicit instruction in the New Testament showing us that we should keep the annual feasts and holy days of God, and how to keep them?

There are some things God wants us to seek and dig out of His Word and prove our zeal in doing this. He does not always cram His truth down our throats.

How does the Church know where to keep the feasts and holy days and how to keep them?

Just as God gave the priesthood of Aaron authority, so God has given the ministry of the Church binding authority to make certain decisions (Matthew 16:18-19). The ministry of the Church has the authority to make decisions, guided by God, in matters of where these days should be observed and format of services and how they are to be observed for the members of the church that they pastor.

In some cases, a Christian may not be able to attend with a group that observes these days. In that case, I would recommend that a Christian rest on the holy days and keep the days on his own with the wisdom and guidance God gives through the Bible and the Holy Spirit until such time as God provides the opportunity to attend with a church that observes these days. But it is better to keep these days with a church that keeps them whenever possible.

Some Christians have been wrongly taught for years that to keep God's holy days means to deny Christ, and these Christians may have a conscience problem with keeping these days. We should certainly pay attention to our conscience in matters that are optional as far as God's word is concerned (Romans 14:22-23), so for example, if I feel guilty eating meat, I should not eat meat. But there is no commandment of God that I eat meat. In matters where God's will is clear in the Bible, God's word must override our conscience (Matthew 4:4).

Summary

God ordained the weekly seventh-day Sabbath and the annual holy days and festivals to give us time to rest from our labor, to seek Him in prayer and Bible study, and to assemble for instruction and worship services. These days are also teaching tools to help us understand God's plan for mankind. They have symbolic meaning, just as Passover bread and wine, baptism, and other New Testament ceremonies and rituals have symbolic meaning, and observance of these days with their meaning in mind helps us understand what God has done, is doing, and will do for mankind.

God ordained the Sabbath and the annual holy days and festivals for mankind, not just Israel, and it is God's will that they be observed today. They were not abolished for the Church when Jesus Christ died and was resurrected. Paul and the early Church of God kept these days, and Jesus Christ and the saints will teach all mankind to observe them when He returns to rule the earth.

CHAPTER 4 - The Name of God

Introduction

In this chapter, I want to ask and answer two questions about God's name. One, what is God's name and is it wrong or incorrect to use some of the words people use for God's name such as God, Lord, or the Eternal as the name of God? Or should we only consider Jehovah or Yahweh as God's true name? The second question is, who is referred to by the name some pronounce Jehovah? My text editor I am typing this with does not use Hebrew letters, but the Hebrew letters transliterated into our Western alphabet is YHWH. So my question is, who exactly is YHWH? This may seem like an odd question, but I will explain what I mean later.

First, what is a name? A name is a word or group of words that identify a particular person, place, or thing. The word or words that make up the name symbolically represent the entity they are naming. It can be a single person or a family. For example, John Smith might have a son named Jim. John Smith is the name of the father and Jim Smith is the name of the son, but Smith is the family name and the name of both of them. Jim's name is Smith and John's name is Smith.

Also, even in the same family, more than one person can have the same personal name. Many fathers name their son after themselves. So John Smith may also name his son "John." Both persons are "John Smith."

The word or words that make the name can be written, spoken, or both.

Also, a person can have more than one name.

One of the names of God that He gives is recorded in Exodus chapter 3: "And Moses said unto God, Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is* his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this *is* my name for ever, and this *is* my memorial unto all generations" (Exodus 3:13-15, KJV). The word LORD in verse 15 in all caps indicates this is translated from four Hebrew letters I cannot type with my text editor, but in our alphabet it is written as YHWH. This is God's name, which comes from the Hebrew word translated "I AM" in verse 14. So in this article, I will use YHWH as the written

form of the name of God, but keep in mind that when I type YHWH I am only trying to represent the Hebrew form of God's name in Hebrew lettering.

How is God's name YHWH pronounced when it is spoken? There is no way to know how the name was pronounced in ancient times because pronunciation changes over time (Judges 12:5-6). Today, some think it was pronounced like "Jehovah" and some say it was pronounced more like "Yahweh." But it is impossible to know with certainty.

Names also often carry meaning, and this is especially important with names in the Bible. The meaning of God's name is important. Most definitions I have looked at indicate that YHWH means "ever living one" or "self existent one." The Moffatt translation translates YHWH as "the Eternal." It means the one who has always existed, never was created, never having a beginning. In the King James Version, you can tell when the word LORD or GOD is translated from YHWH in the Old Testament because the letters will all be uppercase.

If you want to check the original Hebrew or Greek words and their meanings in certain passages, you can do this with Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. To use this, first look up the passage in the King James Version to get the word in the English, then look up that word in the concordance, then find the book, chapter, and verse number for that word, note the number listed, and look up the number in the Hebrew or Greek dictionaries in the back of the concordance to get the original Hebrew or Greek word and its meaning.

Who Is YHWH?

A MYSTERY!

Notice Exodus 6:2-3: "And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD. And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them" (KJV). The word LORD in all capital letters in verse 2 is YHWH in the Hebrew. This corresponds to number 3068 in Strong's Concordance and Strong gives the meaning as "the existing one." In verse 3, the word JEHOVAH in all caps is the same word, YHWH, Strong's number 3068. In the King James Version, whenever LORD or GOD appear in all caps, that means the Hebrew word is YHWH, the name of God as given to Moses. When Lord or God appear not in all capital letters, it is not YHWH in the Hebrew.

So here, God tells Moses that His name is YHWH, but that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew Him only as "God Almighty" and they did not know His name was YHWH.

Now look at Genesis 14:22-23: "And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (KJV). This is quoting Abram (whose name was changed to Abraham, see Genesis 17:5) as saying that God's name is LORD. This word LORD in caps in verse 22 is YHWH in the Hebrew, the same name for God as used in Exodus 6:2-3 where God says Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not know Him as YHWH.

Genesis 24:3 confirms that Abraham knew God as the LORD (Hebrew YHWH) when he tells his servant, "And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth...." (KJV). The word LORD here is YHWH in the Hebrew. Isaac also knew God's name was LORD (YHWH) - see Genesis chapter 27. Also Jacob prayed to the LORD (YHWH) (Genesis 32:9-12).

So Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all knew God as the LORD (YHWH). Yet the LORD told Moses that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew Him as God Almighty but not as the LORD (YHWH).

Is this a contradiction? How can these verses be reconciled?

The Bible is the Word of God and God cannot contradict Himself. I have proven through fulfilled prophecy that God inspired the Bible, and I have documented this proof in chapter one. So I know that the Bible is God speaking. And God says of Himself that He cannot lie (Titus 1:1-2). I have chosen to believe that God is perfectly righteous and never lies. I made a commitment to believe what God says. So I know the Bible cannot contradict itself. There must be a way to reconcile these verses.

I said before that a name, such as "Smith," can be a family name, the name of more than one person, and also that more than one person in the same family can have the same personal name. Could it be that there are two who are God who share the same name YHWH, and that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew one as YHWH and the other as "God Almighty"? If this were the case, then both are named YHWH, but Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not know this. They knew one of them as YHWH and the other as "God Almighty" and they did not know that God Almighty was also named YHWH. Yet both are God and both are YHWH. Then the one Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew as God Almighty revealed to Moses that His name also is YHWH. Is this possible? Is this the correct way to reconcile Exodus 6:2-3 with Genesis?

This is one of the things I will try to answer in this chapter.

Is God More than One Person?

The first verse in the Bible, Genesis 1:1, says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (KJV). The word for "God" here in the Hebrew is "Elohiym," and it corresponds to Strong's number 430. It is plural, and could be translated "Gods," indicating there was more than one person who is God who created the heavens and the earth. In verse 26 God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (KJV). Verse 27 confirms that man is made in the image of God. This rules out the possibility that when God says, "let US make man in OUR image," He means Himself and the angels. He is not speaking to angels. Verse 27 shows that man is made in the image of God, not angels.

This is the first indication in the Bible that God is more than one person.

In the New Testament, John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (KJV). This shows that someone called "the Word" existed in the beginning, and the one called the Word was with God. So you have God and the Word. Then this scripture says that the Word was also God. This confirms that God is more than one person. You have two mentioned here, God and the Word, and both are God. Also, this passage indicates that the Word did the actual creating, and He created everything that has ever been created. This seems to exclude the possibility that the Word Himself was created by God, since everything created was created by the Word and the Word could not create Himself.

Who is the Word? Verses 14-15 say, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me" (KJV). Then in John 1:29-30: "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me" (KJV).

So the Word who is God and with God from the beginning became flesh, that is, became the man known as Jesus Christ.

When Gabriel told Mary she would bear a son and name him "Jesus," the angel told her she would become pregnant by the power of God's Holy Spirit and that Jesus would be the Son of God (Luke 1:26-35). There are many New Testament scriptures that confirm that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 4:14-15). And Jesus called God "Father" (Matthew 6:9, John 17:1-5).

Is Jesus Christ God?

Is Jesus Christ God? There is an abundance of evidence in the Bible that He is. Notice the following scriptures:

Matthew 8:2-3: "And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean" (KJV). A leper worshipped Jesus and Jesus permitted it. Yet only God may be worshipped (Luke 4:6-8, Acts 10:25-26, Revelation 19:9-10, 22:8-9). The word for worship in Matthew 8:2 in the Greek is *proskuneo*, Strong's number 4352. It is the same word used for worship in Luke 4:6-8, Acts 10:25-26, Revelation 19:9-10, and Revelation 22:8-9, and all these verses indicate it is unlawful to worship anyone other than God. Jesus could not have permitted men to worship Him if He were not God.

John 9:35-39: "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind" (KJV). Here is another example of someone worshipping Jesus and Jesus permitting it.

John 20:26-29: "And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (KJV). Here Thomas calls Jesus "God" and Jesus does not correct him.

Philippians 2:5-8: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (KJV). This shows that BEFORE Jesus was born as a human, He was with God and in the "form of God" and thought it not robbery to "be equal with God." In other words, He was God, just as John 1:1 shows when it says the Word was with God and the Word was God. All of this is consistent.

Colossians 1:12-19: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have

redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell" (KJV). This shows that Christ, who is the Son, existed before anything was created that was created, and Christ created all things. This seems to indicate that Christ Himself was never created since He could not create Himself. He must have existed for all eternity with the Father, without beginning, just like the Father.

Hebrews 1:5-6: "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him" (KJV). The fact that this passage says that all the angels of God should worship the Son shows that Christ is God because only God may be worshipped.

Hebrews 1:8: "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom" (KJV). Here the Father calls the Son "O God," indicating that Christ is God. The writer of Hebrews is quoting Psalm 45.

Hebrews 3:1-4: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God" (KJV). This passage first indicates that Jesus Christ has more glory than Moses because He who builds a house has more glory than the house, indicating Jesus is the builder. Then it says, He who has built all things is God, showing Jesus Christ is God.

Was Christ God of Old Testament Israel?

Christ was with Moses and Israel in the wilderness after they came out of Egypt. It was Christ who fed Israel spiritually with instruction in God's law. Notice 1 Corinthians 10:1-5: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness" (KJV). God is often called a Rock in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32:1-4, 15, 18, 30, 2 Samuel 22:1-2, Psalm 18:1-2). Also

notice 1 Corinthians 10:9: "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents" (KJV).

It was Christ who spoke with Moses face to face. Notice Exodus 33:11: "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend..." (KJV). See also Numbers 12:4-9. Notice also Exodus 24:9-11: "Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink" (KJV). This must have been Christ, not God the Father, because no man has seen the Father's face. Speaking of the Father, John wrote, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18, KJV). Speaking to the Jews generally, as a nation, Jesus said, "And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape" (John 5:37, KJV). No man has seen the Father, but Moses and Israel saw the God of Israel. This must have been Christ, the One that Paul said was the Rock that followed Israel, that Israel was spiritually fed from, "and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:1-5, KJV).

David also speaks of Christ as His Lord in Psalm 110:1: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (KJV). Here David calls God the Father "LORD" (Hebrew YHWH) and Christ "my Lord." This could not be a man because David acknowledged no man his Lord except God.

I have shown in the previous sections that God is more than one person, and that Jesus Christ is God. God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are a family with a Father-Son relationship. And since there is only one God, God must be that family. God is a family made up of the Father and Son, and both the Father and Son are the God of Israel.

In reading the Old Testament, in cases where man is not permitted to see God's face, this is talking about God the Father (Exodus 33:19-23), but where man is permitted to see God's face, this is talking about Christ (Exodus 33:11, Exodus 24:9-11).

There are many places in the Bible that say that there is only one God. But that one God is a family, one family. One God = One God family. That FAMILY is the one, true God. And that family is made up of more than one person. The family is the Father and the Son. Both are members of the one God family, and there is no other God but that one family. That family is the only true God.

It should not seem strange that God speaks of members of a family as being one, not many. God speaks that way of a husband and wife (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5-6, Mark 10:8). Just as a man and his wife are two persons, but one flesh in the eyes of God, so the Father and Christ are two persons but one God, one God family. See also Genesis 1:27.

Jesus directly states, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30, KJV).

So both God the Father and Christ are a family, the God family. Both the Father and Christ are God. And they are one God.

And in most of the examples I have seen of God dealing with Israel, while certain men of God such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Elijah knew both God the Father and Christ, when God dealt with the whole nation of Israel, it seems that it is Christ that has the most direct role. So it is accurate to say that Christ was God of Old Testament Israel.

Who Is YHWH? - Conclusion

Who is YHWH, "the LORD," as translated in the King James Version, pronounced "Jehovah" by Jehovah's Witnesses? Is it only God the Father or is YHWH also Jesus Christ? Does the name YHWH belong to both the Father and Christ?

Notice the following points I have shown so far from the Bible:

- 1) God is more than one person (Genesis 1:1, Genesis 1:26-27, John 1:1).
- 2) Both Christ and the Father are God (John 20:26-29, John 1:1-14, Hebrews 1:8, and other verses I have covered).
- 3) Christ was the Rock that was with Israel and God of Israel in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:1-5).
- 4) The LORD spoke with Moses face to face (Exodus 33:11), yet in another place the LORD said that no man can see His face and live, and the LORD would not permit Moses to see His face (Exodus 33:19-23).
- 5) Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew God's name was YHWH ("the LORD") (Genesis 14:22-23, Genesis 24:3, Genesis 27:27, Genesis 32:9-12).
- 6) In Exodus 6:2-3, God says His name is the LORD (YHWH) but to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob He was not known as the LORD (YHWH) but as "God Almighty."
- 7) If only one person who is God is named LORD, Exodus 6:2-3 would contradict Genesis 14:22-23, Genesis 24:3, Genesis 27:27, and Genesis 32:9-12 which show that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew God as the LORD (YHWH).
- 8) The Bible cannot contradict itself because it is inspired by God and God cannot contradict Himself (Titus 1:1-2).

There is only one possible conclusion. Both Christ and God the Father are named "YHWH." Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew God the Father as YHWH, "the LORD" as it is in the King James Version. They knew Christ as "God Almighty." Christ is also named YHWH, but they didn't know that. Then it was revealed to Moses that not only is God the Father named YHWH (which Abraham knew), but also Christ, the one Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew only as "God Almighty" is also named YHWH. It is the name of both God the Father and Jesus Christ. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses had dealings with both God the Father and Christ. But it was to Moses that Christ revealed that He also shared in the name YHWH because it is Christ's name as well as the Father's name. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not know this.

Now read Exodus 6:2-3 and realize that it is Christ speaking to Moses and it makes sense: "And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD. And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them" (KJV). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew Christ as God Almighty. They knew God was two persons. But they didn't know that both were named YHWH, "the LORD."

Notice also that Jesus said, in John 8:58, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (KJV). Immediately after this, the Jews tried to stone Him. Why? Because they understood that when Jesus said, "I am," He was applying the same name to Himself that God revealed to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. They understood He was claiming to be God. And they considered it blasphemy because they thought Jesus was lying. But Jesus was telling the truth.

Who is YHWH, "the LORD," in the Old Testament?

Both God the Father and Jesus Christ are YHWH.

Is It Proper to Use "Lord" as God's Name?

Is it proper to use "Lord" as God's name when we pray to God or talk about Him?

Some may feel we should only use "Jehovah" or "Yahweh" as God's personal name, reproducing the original pronunciation of God's name as given in the Hebrew to Moses as best we know how. Others use the English words "Lord" or "Eternal" as God's name, translating the Hebrew word YHWH into an English word with meaning in the English.

Is it permissible in God's sight to use an English translation of YHWH such as "Lord" or "Eternal" as God's name when we address God in prayer or talk about Him? In short, is "Lord" God's proper name?

God gives the answer in the New Testament. God actually sets an example for us in this matter.

The Old Testament is inspired by God and almost all of it was written in Hebrew. The New Testament also is inspired by God and was written in the Greek language. Both old and new testaments were inspired by God in their original writings. In the New Testament are many quotes of Old Testament scriptures. The New Testament writers were inspired by God not only in their original writings but also in the way they quote the Old Testament. We can look to those quotes to see how God inspired New Testament writers such as Matthew, John, Paul, Peter, etc. to quote the Old Testament scriptures that contain God's name YHWH.

When the New Testament writers quote Old Testament scriptures that contain God's name YHWH, did God inspire them to write a word that tries to preserve the original pronunciation in the Hebrew, such as "Jehovah?" Or did God inspire them to use the Hebrew letters for "YHWH" exactly as it is in the Hebrew even though the other words in the New Testament were written in Greek? Or did God inspire them to TRANSLATE the Hebrew word for God's name YHWH into a Greek word that had meaning in the Greek language?

I looked several of these passages up in Strong's Concordance to see the original word used and its meaning. In every case I looked up, God inspired the New Testament writers, when quoting an Old Testament scripture that contained God's name YHWH, to translate YHWH into the Greek word "kurios" (Strong's lexicon spells it "kurios" but I notice in other articles that some writers spell it "kyrios." The Greek letters are somewhat different from our Western alphabet. For the rest of this chapter I will spell it "kurios" as it is in Strong's Concordance). The Greek word "kurios" means lord, master, ruler, boss, the one who has authority. So God Himself uses "Kurios" as His name in the New Testament. It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word YHWH. And it means the same thing as the English word "Lord."

You can check this out for yourself with Strong's Concordance or any other Bible reference work that you can use to check the original Greek words in the New Testament. There are many examples in the New Testament, but I will quote just one to illustrate what I am talking about. You can find many others. Matthew 3:3 says, "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (KJV). This is a quote of Isaiah 40:3 which says, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (KJV). If you look up LORD in Strong's Concordance, and under that word find Isaiah 40:3, you will find Strong's number 3068. If you look up 3068 in the back of the concordance in the Hebrew dictionary, you will find that it corresponds to the Hebrew YHWH, God's name, which some pronounce "Jehovah." Now if you look up "Lord" in the concordance and Matthew 3:3, you will find Strong's number 2962. If you look up 2962 in the Greek dictionary in the back of the concordance, it corresponds to the Greek word "kurios" and it gives the definition of that word. It means Lord.

I won't try to list every place the New Testament quotes the Old Testament YHWH, but here are a couple of other examples you could check, and you can find many others besides: Matthew 4:7 and Matthew 22:37.

I have not found a single example contrary to this pattern. God inspired the New Testament writers to translate the Hebrew "YHWH" into the Greek "Kurios" as God's name. And Kurios means the same thing as the English word Lord.

So here, by God's own example of how He inspired the New Testament to be written, God shows that He wanted His name translated into a word that had meaning in the language the New Testament was written in. God did not use "Jehovah," "Yahweh," or any other word that tries to mimic the pronunciation of God's name in Hebrew but would have no meaning for Greek readers. And He did not inspire the New Testament writers to use Hebrew letters for YHWH. God inspired them to translate His name into a Greek word with meaning for Greek speaking people. That word is the Greek word "Kurios" and Kurios is God's name in the Greek language.

Why?

I think the answer is obvious. God's name has meaning, and God wants that meaning communicated to the readers of the Bible in whatever language they understand. Readers of the Greek New Testament understood Greek but not necessarily Hebrew. Words like "YHWH" or "Jehovah" would mean nothing to Greek readers, but "Kurios" they understood.

To God, the MEANING of His name is more important than the pronunciation or spelling of His name in the original Hebrew. Therefore, God wants His name translated into whatever language the person who uses God's name understands.

Some people claim that the New Testament was not originally written in the Greek language but in the Hebrew language, that the original Hebrew text has been lost, and that any Greek text we have has been corrupted. But that makes no sense. The Bible is God's Word and God requires that we believe what He says. God has to preserve the original inspired text, even though it may be copied many times, and prevent the text from being corrupted, or we cannot trust anything in the Bible. Although individual manuscripts may vary slightly due to errors in copying, the overall integrity of the text must be preserved or we cannot trust the Bible at all. Small errors in a few manuscripts can be resolved by comparing manuscripts, but if whole books or the whole New Testament in its original inspired writing has been lost, how can we trust the Bible and live by every word of God as Jesus said (Matthew 4:4)? God cannot permit that.

Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35, KJV). See also Mark 13:31, and Luke 21:33.

Peter wrote, "But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Peter 1:25, KJV).

I trust God that He has preserved the text of the New Testament in its original language and text through the manuscripts that have been copied one from another over the generations. And that original text is Greek.

There is no evidence from the Bible that the New Testament was written in Hebrew originally. Any speculation by some scholars that the New Testament was written in Hebrew, or that all the Greek texts available today have been corrupted, is only the opinion of men. I trust God.

If we cannot trust that the New Testament Greek texts we have available today are reliable, then we cannot trust anything in the New Testament. But I believe God has preserved the accuracy of the original text because it is necessary for us to be able to trust the text in order for God's Word to have authority. If God permitted all the places where New Testament writers have quoted God's name in the Old Testament to be corrupted, then how can we know other parts of the New Testament have not been corrupted? How could we trust anything in the Bible? But God intends us to view the Bible as our authority in doctrinal beliefs and we have to trust that God has preserved the original writings of Paul and other New Testament writers accurately in order for us to trust the Bible at all.

Either the Bible, both old and new testaments, has been preserved accurately in its original languages to our time, or we cannot trust anything that the Bible says and we are left to our own opinions. If we are to rely and trust the Bible as the infallible Word of God, we must be able to trust that God has preserved it accurately in its original language thru manuscripts that have come to us today.

The Meaning of God's Name

What does "YHWH" mean?

It is similar to the Hebrew word for "I AM" and the Hebrew dictionary and Bible commentaries I have looked at indicate it means "the Eternal" or "the Self-existent One" or "Ever-living One." It shows that God exists by His own power and has always existed for all past eternity. There was never a time in the past when God did not exist. He has always existed and always will exist.

But YHWH also means Lord, Ruler, One having authority to rule. This is proven by the fact that God inspired His name YHWH to be translated into the Greek word for Lord in the New Testament.

I do not say it is wrong to use "Jehovah" as God's name provided you understand what it means. "Jehovah" has meaning for Jehovah's Witnesses who have been raised to understand what it means in terms of God being ruler of the universe and being eternally self-existing. But for most English speaking people, the word Jehovah has no meaning, except that they associate it with the Jehovah's Witnesses church. It is better to use "Lord" or "the Eternal" as God's name, translating God's name YHWH into a word with meaning in the language of the person using the name, just as God Himself

sets the example, translating His name into the Greek word for Lord, "Kurios," in the Greek New Testament.

When Bible translators such as the translators of the King James Version translate the Hebrew YHWH as "LORD" in the Old Testament, they are following God's own example, and they are correct in doing this. God sets the example in the New Testament. He wants His name translated into a word with meaning in the language that the Bible is translated in. For Hebrew readers, it is "YHWH." For Greek readers, it is "Kurios." For English readers, it is "Lord."

Remember, God inspired the whole New Testament, and the whole Bible as written in the original languages is God's Word. God would never have allowed Matthew, John, Peter, or Paul to write God's name as "Kurios" if it was wrong to translate God's name YHWH into a different language. Regardless if "Jehovah" accurately represents how YHWH was pronounced, "Kurios" sounds nothing like Jehovah or the original YHWH. It has a totally different spelling and pronunciation. But it has meaning in the Greek language, and it is the meaning of God's name that is important to God.

Some readers might object by saying that New Testament writers were not quoting the Old Testament Hebrew and translating it, but were quoting a Greek translation of the Old Testament called the "Septuagint," and that the Jews who translated the Old Testament into Greek were not inspired by God and could have been mistaken when they translated the Hebrew "YHWH" into the Greek "Kurios." It may be true that the New Testament writers were quoting the Septuagint, but they were still inspired by God, and if the Septuagint was in error in the sight of God because it translated YHWH into Kurios, God would not have allowed the New Testament writers to include this error in their writings. God would have inspired them to correct the error, or the Bible cannot be trusted as the infallible Word of God. The apostle Paul was inspired by God, close to God, worked miracles, was highly educated, and was very familiar with both Greek and Hebrew, and God certainly would have revealed it to him if using the Greek "Kurios" as God's name was wrong.

So it is proper to use "Lord" as God's name in the English language.

Is "God" a Name or a Title Only?

Is "God" a name or a title only?

It can be both. Depending on the context, it can be used as a title or as a name for the true God.

As an example, consider the statement, "God is my God." The first instance of "God" in that sentence is a name. The second instance is a title. A name is any written or spoken representation that identifies a particular person, place, or thing. If it is a family

name, it can identify a family, in this case, the family of God. Therefore, "God" is a name for God when it is used as a name.

I have found nothing in the Bible that restricts the word "God" to being a title only and not a name. Since a name is a word that identifies a particular person, place, or thing, or even a particular family, when the context indicates that the word "God" is being used to identify the one true God, it is being used as a name.

Jesus prayed to the Father that the Church would be kept in God's name, and the name of the Church in the New Testament is "Church of God" (Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 1:1-3, 1 Corinthians 10:32, 1 Corinthians 11:16, 1 Corinthians 11:22, 1 Corinthians 15:9, 2 Corinthians 1:1-2, Galatians 1:13, 1 Thessalonians 2:14, 2 Thessalonians 1:4, 1 Timothy 3:1-5). "God" is actually the *family name* of God, as I will show later.

Can God have more than one name? Yes. Christ is God and will be given a new name, or already has a new name, because He says in Revelation 3:12, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name" (KJV). I have already shown that Christ's name is YHWH. Christ's name is also "the Word of God" (John 1:1, Revelation 19:13) and "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:16).

The Third Commandment

The Third of the Ten Commandments says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7, KJV).

We see examples of people violating this command in our country constantly. It is human nature to yield to Satan's temptations to break every one of the Ten Commandments, and this commandment is no exception. People in the work place, in movies, on TV, constantly use the names of "Jesus," "Christ," "God," and "Lord" in a careless, frivolous manner, as curse words, expressions of anger, or expressions of surprise. These are all violations of the third commandment because they show disrespect to God and to His name.

But if "Jehovah" only is God's name, and "Jesus Christ," "God," and "Lord" are not names for God, then the people who use these words in a careless manner without reverence or true meaning in movies and on TV are not breaking the third commandment, right? But I think that those with spiritual discernment know that what these people are doing is wrong and is in violation of the third commandment. These are all names of God.

Did Christ Always Exist?

I have said that Christ's name is YHWH, and that one of the meanings of YHWH is One who has existed for all eternity.

Yet some may think that the one who was born as Jesus Christ, the "Word" spoken of in John 1:1, was created by God the Father before He was born as a human being. They might cite Revelation 3:14, "And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God" (KJV). They believe this verse says that Christ was the first thing that God the Father created because it says He is "the beginning of the creation of God."

I have looked up this word "beginning" in Strong's concordance and looked up the word in the Greek dictionary or lexicon in the back of the concordance. It is the Greek word "arche" and corresponds to Strong's number 746. Strong gives this definition and explanation of its usage in the Bible: "AV translates as "beginning" 40 times, "principality" eight times, "corner" twice, "first" twice, and translated miscellaneously six times. 1 beginning, origin. 2 the person or thing that commences, the first person or thing in a series, the leader. 3 that by which anything begins to be, the origin, the active cause. 4 the extremity of a thing. 4a of the corners of a sail. 5 the first place, principality, rule, magistracy. 5a of angels and demons." AV refers to the Authorized Version of the Bible, which is the same thing as the King James Version.

Notice that this word can mean "the leader," "that by which anything begins to be," "the active cause," "principality," "magistracy." This indicates that in this context, referring to Christ, this word could mean "beginner," that is, the one who began to create all that has been created. Also, "principality" and "magistracy" refer to high office of authority, which would also fit Christ. This word "beginning" could thus be translated "beginner," so the verse would read, "the beginner of the creation of God." Other translations and articles I have looked at seem to support this. This verse does not mean that Christ was created. In fact, there is evidence in the rest of the Bible that Christ was not created, that He existed for all past eternity.

John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (KJV). Notice that verse 1 does not say, "In the beginning God created the Word." At whatever time the "beginning" was, the Word and God both already existed. The Word WAS in the beginning because the Word always "was." He never had a beginning. Notice also that this passage says all things were made by the Word and without the Word nothing was made that was made. Christ created all things. This is confirmed by Colossians 1:12-17: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption

through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (KJV). The "firstborn of every creature" refers to Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead. Colossians 1:18 calls Jesus Christ the firstborn from the dead.

My point is, Christ created everything that has been created. This means Christ could not Himself be a created being because He cannot have created Himself.

And I have already shown that Christ must have been the "God Almighty" that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew, and who revealed to Moses that His name was also YHWH. And YHWH includes the meaning of "eternally self-existing" from every definition I have seen.

And there is no verse anywhere that says anything about God creating Christ.

I think the preponderance of evidence in the Bible is that the One who is Christ, called the Word in John 1:1, always existed for all past eternity, was never created, and never had a beginning. Like the Father, He always existed.

God's Family Name

When I was first writing up the results of my research, I likened YHWH to God's family name, like the last name of a family called "Smith." But this is not an accurate analogy. Rather, if we use the analogy of the name of the "Smith" family, it would be as if a father named "John Smith" named his son "John" after himself. He may have other sons and daughters with other names, but one of his sons is John, having the same personal name as the father of the family. In this analogy, YHWH is a name of God the Father and Christ, just as "John" may be the name of a man and one of his sons. But it is not the *family* name of God.

I have already shown that "God" when used as a name is a name of God. Actually, "God" is the family name of God, just as Smith is the family name of the Smith family.

Why?

God is a family. The relationship between the Father and Christ is a family relationship. And human beings can enter into that family relationship. Christians are called "children of God" (Romans 8:14-17) and "sons of God" (Matthew 5:9, Romans 8:18-19). We are called brethren of Christ (Matthew 12:48-50, Hebrews 2:10-12). Jesus instructed His disciples to address God as "our Father" (Matthew 6:9). And the

Church is called the wife or bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2-3, Ephesians 5:22-32, Revelation 19:7-9). These are all family relationships.

As astounding as it may seem to most who have not learned the truth, not only does God describe a Christian's relationship with Him in family terms now, but in the resurrection to immortality we will fully enter God's family and become God with the Father and Christ!

That's right. It is a Christian's destiny to become God!

God is reproducing Himself in man. That is God's purpose for mankind from the beginning, the very reason God created mankind in the first place. For proof that this is what the Bible teaches, see chapter two, the section titled "God's Purpose for Mankind."

Jesus prayed to the Father "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (John 17:11, KJV). In the New Testament, the Church is called the "Church of God" (Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 10:32, 15:9, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:13, 1 Timothy 3:5). "God" is God's family name, and we will share that name as members of His family in the resurrection of the saints.

But I find no indication that the name "YHWH" will ever apply to anyone else but God the Father and Jesus Christ. "YHWH" indicates eternal self-existence, without beginning, and I do not see how that can ever apply to the saints in the kingdom of God, since we all had a beginning.

Conclusion and Summary

God is more than one person. God is a family, consisting of the Father and the Son Jesus Christ. Both existed for all eternity. Both are God. And both share the name YHWH, which means eternally self-existing Lord.

It is not wrong to use "Lord" as God's name because that is God's name in English. God set the example for us that it is right to translate His name into other languages when He inspired New Testament writers to translate the Hebrew name YHWH into the Greek word for Lord "Kurios."

God can have more than one name. "God" can be used as a title but it can also be used as a name for God. "Jesus," "Christ," "God Almighty," "the Word of God," and "Lord" are all names for the one who was born as Jesus Christ. And He has the same name YHWH as God the Father.

To obey the third of the Ten Commandments, not to take God's name in vain, we must be careful to never use the words "Lord," "God," "Jesus," or "Christ" in a careless manner as a curse, an expression of anger, or an expression of surprise or other emotion as is so commonly done in the world among people in conversation, in movies, and on TV.

There is only one true God and that God is a family of two persons, the Father and the Son. Christians who remain faithful will be resurrected immortal into the kingdom of God and can enter that family of God as sons and daughters of God the Father and as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and the Church will also be the bride of Christ.

CHAPTER 5 - How to Know the Truth

How to Know a Prophet

Bible prophecy shows that at the end time there will be both true and false prophets. "And I will give *power* unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days, clothed in sackcloth....And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth" (Revelation 11:3, 10, KJV). "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before" (Matthew 24:24-25, KJV). Even in our time now, there are churches whose members believe or practice the teachings of one or more of their past leaders whom they regard as prophets. The Mormon church regards Joseph Smith as a prophet and the Book of Mormon as inspired writing. Seventh Day Adventists regard Ellen White as a prophetess. In the days ahead, before Christ returns, there will be those who claim to be or will be regarded by some as prophets. Some may be true prophets of God, such as the two witnesses Revelation speaks about, and some may be false prophets (Revelation 16:13). It is important to know what the Bible says about prophets, including how to know a true prophet from a false prophet.

The word "prophet" can be used two ways in the Bible. First, it can be used in a general sense for those who preach on God's behalf. In this general sense, it can refer to any minister or preacher and when he preaches he can be said to be prophesying (1 Kings 18:4, 2 Kings 2:15-17). I am not talking about prophets in this general sense to refer to the ministry or to those who teach from the Bible. There is a more specific meaning of the word "prophet," and it refers to one who receives direct divine revelation from God to deliver a message from God to the people or to an individual, and it is this kind of prophet that is the subject of this chapter. This is the way the term is understood by most people today.

Prophetic Communication

There are a number of ways God may communicate with a prophet. God appeared and spoke to Moses face-to-face (Exodus 33:11). God sometimes speaks to a prophet in a dream (Numbers 12:6, Daniel 7:1-2). God may communicate in a special vision (Numbers 12:6, Ezekiel 8:1-4). In the case of Samuel, he heard a voice speaking to him, and that voice was the voice of God (1 Samuel 3:1-10). The example of Samuel

also is a good example of why God often communicates with a prophet. God gave Samuel a message to give to the priest (1 Samuel 3:11-21). God often communicates supernaturally with a prophet so that prophet can deliver a message to someone else. The message can be for a particular person, such as when Nathan delivered messages from God to David (2 Samuel 7:4-5, 2 Samuel 12:1-14) or to a group of people (Jeremiah chapters 42 and 43, Ezekiel chapters 2 and 3). The message can be delivered in person, or put in writing. Ezekiel was given a message for the house of Israel, but he was not able to deliver the message in person because Israel had gone into captivity years before, and the message to the house of Israel was not for that generation anyway. The message is for our generation today, and Ezekiel did his part to deliver that message by RECORDING it in writing in the book of Ezekiel which we have in our Bibles.

So God can give a message to a prophet in a number of ways, and that prophet can deliver the message to a person or group personally or in writing. But always it is a direct message from God, not the prophet. The prophet only delivers the message, as a postman delivers the mail. If the prophet is a faithful and true prophet of God, then the message he delivers is from God and not the prophet's opinion.

Can a true prophet make mistakes in his general teachings? Yes. When delivering a message from God, the prophet must faithfully deliver the exact message as God gave it to him, and God does not make mistakes in the messages He gives. But the prophet himself is not infallible in his opinions, and when he teaches or speaks on God's behalf APART from delivering a particular message God has given him to deliver, he can make a mistake. There is example of this in scripture. David wanted to build a house or temple for God, and he told Nathan the prophet what he wanted to do. "Now it came to pass, as David sat in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD *remaineth* under curtains. Then Nathan said unto David, Do all that *is* in thine heart; for God *is* with thee. And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, Go and tell David my servant, Thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not build me an house to dwell in" (1 Chronicles 17:1-4, KJV). Nathan was a true and faithful prophet of God, and he did not sin when he told David it would be fine for David to build a temple for God. But the prophet was speaking his opinion, and he did not know God's will in that matter. It was an easy mistake for the prophet to make because building a temple to God seemed like a good thing to him and he knew of no reason why David should not be the one to build it. But while building a temple was a good thing, it was God's will that David's son build the temple, not David. So God promptly corrected Nathan giving him a direct message for David that David was NOT to build the temple, and Nathan then delivered that message to David.

So if a minister or prophet of God expounds and teaches from the Bible or from his personal experience, he can make mistakes. His overall teaching may be right, but he can misunderstand portions of scripture. Even though he is faithful, he is also human. But if God gives him a direct message by divine revelation, that message contains no mistakes.

The writings of the Old and New Testament, whether written by a prophet or an apostle (Ephesians 2:19-22), are infallibly correct because they are inspired by God as God's word (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18, John 10:34-36). So prophets and apostles are not infallible. The Bible gives examples of their mistakes and shortcomings. But when a prophet or apostle faithfully delivers a direct message from God he has received through a dream, a vision, or through some other direct, miraculous revelation, the message from God is true and right. And when prophets and apostles wrote the books of the Bible, God inspired them to write those books correctly, and we can trust their writings in the Bible.

Actually, there is an example in the Bible of a man who received and delivered a true prophetic message from God, yet he was not personally a righteous man. Look at the example of Balaam (Numbers chapters 22 through 24, 2 Peter 2:15-16, Jude 11, Revelation 2:14). Balaam was not a righteous man, yet God caused him to bless Israel and deliver a true prophetic message to Balak. So the truth of a prophet's message does not depend on the prophet being a perfectly righteous man.

How to Know a True or a False Prophet

So how does one know today if someone claiming to be a prophet, or someone that others claim is a prophet, is a true and faithful prophet from God? If a man or woman claims to have received direct revelation from God and delivers that revelation to the people, how can we know if the message can be trusted? This is important, because there are groups, such as the ones I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that regard one or more of their past teachers as prophets, and there are prophecies in the Bible that say there will be true and false prophets in these end times, including the great false prophet (Revelation 16:13) and the two witnesses, who are true prophets (Revelation 11:3, 10).

A false prophet may be sincere. He or she may truly have received a message through unusual means such as a dream, a vision, or a supernatural voice. But that message may not be from God. It could be from Satan or a lying demon (2 Corinthians 11:13-15, Matthew 24:24, 1 Kings 22:5-28). So a false prophet is not necessarily a liar or an insincere person. A false prophet can simply be a victim of Satan's deception, or of self-deception.

The Bible gives guidelines on how to know if a prophet is a true prophet and if his prophetic message is from God.

Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good

fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:15-20, KJV).

What is meant by fruits?

Fruits of a minister or prophet certainly include his teachings. In fact, what a man says and teaches may be the primary fruit Jesus is talking about. Notice how He talks about what a man says and teaches as like fruit, comparing a man with a tree that is good or bad and his words to the fruit of that tree: "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by *his* fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12:33-37, KJV).

God inspired Moses to write, "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him" (Deuteronomy 13:1-4, KJV). Also notice Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them" (KJV).

One of the primary ways to determine if a man is a true prophet or not is to compare his doctrines with the teaching of the Bible. Anyone can make small mistakes in understanding the Bible, and a converted mind is willing to learn and admit mistakes and turn from them over time (1 Corinthians 13:9, 2 Peter 3:18), but if he teaches a false gospel overall, he is not a true prophet of God (see chapter two on the true gospel). Also, although a man may make small mistakes in expounding the truth of God from the Bible, if he claims to have received a message from God through direct revelation, that message cannot contain any errors if it is from God. There can be no contradiction between a message from God and the Bible.

God cannot contradict himself. He will not give a prophet a message that contradicts the Bible.

So the first test is, is the man overall teaching the truth from the Bible or is he teaching a false gospel? If a man has doctrinal errors so serious that the gospel he teaches is a false gospel, rule that man out from being a true prophet - do not believe his message. And the test of whether or not the man teaches the true gospel is not how his teachings measure up with the mainstream doctrines of traditional Christianity but how his teachings measure up with the Bible.

Secondly, if his message is from God, the message itself cannot contradict the Bible. God cannot lie and God cannot contradict Himself. If a message that a man or woman claims is from God contradicts the Bible, it cannot really be from God.

These two criteria are more important than whether the man or woman claiming to be a prophet can predict the future or can show signs and wonders. As God points out in Deuteronomy 13:1-4, He may test us by allowing Satan and his demons to work false miracles or to make successful predictions through a false prophet who teaches against God's truth in the Bible in order to see if we will remain loyal to God and God's word. Revelation 13:11-15 shows that Satan will be allowed to work signs and wonders to deceive people, and the great false prophet will show signs and wonders (Revelation 16:12-14). So God can TEST us by allowing Satan to back up a false prophet with supernatural signs and wonders and successful predictions. To pass the test, we have to know our Bibles.

My experience tells me you cannot learn the truth of the Bible in a day. If you want to be protected from Satan's deceptions including the deception of false prophets and prophecies, you have to be reading or studying the Bible on a regular basis. It is those who already know their Bibles and the true gospel because they believe what God says and have made regular Bible study a part of their lives for years who will be protected from the deception of false prophets. You cannot neglect Bible study all your life and wait until a false prophet appears working signs and wonders, and then "cram" to study your Bible to see if his message is true or false. In that case, you are likely to be deceived. You will reap the penalty for neglecting your Bible for years and for putting God's word in second place in your life.

Finally, if the prophet and his message pass the first two tests, there is one more test to determine if his message must be believed.

God does not expect us to be naive and gullible. God backs up his prophets and apostles when they deliver a direct prophetic message from Him. We can require evidence that the message is from God, and if there is no evidence, I do not think God would require us to believe the message.

God backed up Moses with miracles that all Israel witnessed. Notice how God provided evidence that He was working through Moses and Moses was speaking what God commanded him to speak: "And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this *is* my name for ever, and this *is* my memorial unto all generations. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and *seen* that which is done to you in Egypt: And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey....And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee. And the LORD said unto him, What *is* that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said,

Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee. And the LORD said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand *was* leprous as snow. And he said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his *other* flesh. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour *it* upon the dry *land*: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry *land*" (Exodus 3:15-17, 4:1-9, KJV). Right from the beginning of Moses' job as prophet, God backed up his message with the ability to work miraculous sign. See also Exodus 4:29-31.

The people of Israel saw the supernatural plagues upon Egypt (Exodus chapters 7 through 12). They witnessed the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:10-31). They saw miracle after miracle. Many Old Testament prophets such as Elijah and Elisha worked miracles (1 Kings 18:21-39, 2 Kings 2:13-15, 2 Kings 8:1-6). Jesus Christ and the apostles worked miracles such as healing the sick and raising the dead (Matthew 11:2-6, Mark 6:7-13, Acts 19:11-12, 2 Corinthians 12:11-12). We are told to test or prove all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

God did not expect people to believe the messages He gave through prophets and apostles without supernatural evidence of some kind that they were God's prophets.

What about today?

Today we have the Bible, complete and readily available via mass printing and publishing, which was not available in old or new testament times because it was not complete and most people did not have copies even of the parts that were written. Today we also have the evidence of prophecy fulfilled in the last two hundred years that proves that the Bible is inspired by God.

So when God speaks to mankind, He provides evidence that it is He who is speaking. In Bible times, God provided the evidence of miracles by his prophets and apostles who preached His word. In our time, God provides the Bible and proof in fulfilled prophecy that He inspired the Bible.

So if a man claims to be a prophet of God delivering a message from God, I think it would be reasonable for me to want to see some evidence that the man is really a prophet before I could be certain his message is really from God. This is in addition to the two tests that the man's teachings and message must be consistent with the Bible.

The main thing to remember is that if we want to be protected from Satan's deceptions, including deceptions through false prophets and false prophecies, we have to make

God's word a part of our lives. We need to learn to live by every word of God. We need to put God first and study the Bible on a regular basis in an attitude that is willing to believe and obey what God says. Then God can help us understand the Bible and bring the scriptures to mind that will protect us from being deceived (John 14:25-26).

How Can You Know the Truth?

There are many different views about religion in the world. You have atheists who believe there is no God and agnostics who do not know. Those who believe in God are divided into various groups. There is the Jewish religion, Islam, and Christianity for example. Even mainstream Christianity is divided between Catholics, Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc. All these groups and categories believe and teach different things, though some of them share some common points of doctrine.

How can you know the truth?

Most people just assume whatever they were taught growing up is true. That is why these groups continue from generation to generation in the same families. Most Catholics, for example, believe and practice the Catholic tradition because their parents did.

But just going along blindly with the religious beliefs of your parents can't be the right way to know the truth. Your parents could be wrong and their parents before them. In fact, most parents in the world are wrong in their religious beliefs simply because most people are wrong. In a world of differing religions, only one, at most, can be right - the rest are wrong in varying degrees. No set of religious (or non-religious) beliefs is embraced by a majority of mankind, so if there is a true religion (there is), it is certainly believed by a minority of the seven billion humans on earth.

Most people feel comfortable staying with the beliefs, customs, and traditions of their families, and they are not really looking for truth. Maybe deep down inside they think there is no real way to know anyway, so the lie they already believe is more comfortable to them than any other potential lie, so they stay with what they have.

If you are in that category, you probably will not benefit from this book. But if that is the case, you probably wouldn't have read this far already.

In chapter one, I spent time showing you how to prove if God exists and if the Bible is His inspired word. Many people cannot accept those proofs because they do not *want* to believe them. Nevertheless, if your mind is open, you can prove these things logically and objectively. You can know that the Bible is God speaking.

But for some people raised in traditional Christian churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church or the Greek Orthodox Church, this can pose a dilemma. Some have been taught that God guides their church to understand the Bible and all true Christian doctrine infallibly, and for these people, that can be an article of faith that they are committed to as deeply as they are committed to faith in God.

If you ask these people, what do you believe, the Bible or your church's teachings, they will say, "both". And if you ask them, what if they contradict, they will answer, "they can't", or "they don't". They have a deeply held faith in *two* things. One, the Bible is true because God, who is perfect and infallible, inspired it. And two, the leaders of their church correctly understand the Bible and true Christian doctrine because God inspires those leaders to correctly *interpret* the Bible.

In other words, they believe that God inspired the Bible and then provided ministers and leaders in the church to interpret the Bible. The same God who inspired the Bible and ensured its accuracy also inspired the church to understand and interpret it correctly, and as the Bible is infallibly true, so too is church doctrine. So in this view, there can be no contradiction between their church's doctrines and the Bible because God provided the church to interpret the Bible.

Why do they believe this?

For some, they believe because they believe because they believe. They feel a certainty in their minds which they believe is a gift of faith from God, and they don't question it.

It is a different path to belief than presented in this book. It is not the path of first proving God's existence, then proving through fulfilled prophecy that the Bible is inspired by God, then choosing to believe what God says in the Bible, then proving everything else by the Bible, which is what this book tries to do. It is rather the path of acquiring a certainty of mind that one's church's teachings and the Bible are equally true along with a certainty of belief that this belief itself is a gift from God and therefore should not be questioned.

In fact, the Bible teaches that *no* church's teachings are infallible, not even the teachings of the true church.

The Bible warns against false churches founded by or led by false ministers and leaders. Just because a church claims to be Christian does not mean it is Christian in God's sight. "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). There can be false gospels and false churches worshipping and teaching a false Jesus in their doctrines. "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that comes preaches another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if you receive another spirit, which you have not received, or another gospel, which you have not accepted, you might well bear with him" (2 Corinthians 11:3-4). "I marvel that

you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel to you than that you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-9). Obviously, the teachings and doctrines of a false church can be false. Such a church may teach a mixture of truth and error. The fact that it has some true teachings (such as, "Christ died for our sins") tends to give it credibility in the minds of its followers, but overall it is false.

But even the true church can make mistakes. It's overall body of doctrine will be correct, but it can make mistakes and have problems in its teachings on various points here and there. If you look at Christ's messages to the seven churches in Revelation, you will notice that Christ rebukes most of them, sometimes severely, for their errors, some of which are doctrinal (Revelation 1:11-20, 2:4, 14-16, 20-23, 3:1-4, 15-17). "But I have a few things against you, because you have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate." (Revelation 2:14-15). Yet these are Christ's churches (Revelation 1:12-13, 20). They were congregations, all part of God's true Church.

True ministers, leaders, apostles, and prophets can make mistakes, according to the Bible. Paul rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11-13). Paul and Barnabas had contention (Acts 15:37-40). Nathan, a true prophet of God, gave a wrong answer to David about David's desire to build a temple for God, until God corrected Nathan (1 Chronicles 17:1-4). Only God's word, the Bible, can be trusted to be infallible and 100% free from error, because it was directly inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:15-17, 2 Peter 1:20-21). As Jesus said, scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35).

We may think it is right to have faith in our churches' teachings, but if we do, we are trusting in men and in ourselves, our opinions and our feelings. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). God pronounces a curse on those who trust in people (Jeremiah 17:5, Psalm 146:3).

If you believe your church and think your church cannot contradict the Bible, you will consciously or unconsciously try to fit or "interpret" everything you find in the Bible into the framework of your church's teaching. And if anyone points out, by the Bible, an error in your church's teaching, that point of truth will seem odd, out of place, out of sync. Of course! It won't fit with the other errors in what you have believed.

You have to get the whole picture.

Yet God reveals the truth a little at a time.

Satan is the deceiver of the whole world (Revelation 12:9). By our own human strength alone we cannot escape Satan's deceptions. We need God's help to properly understand the Bible, and God gives that help to those who believe and obey Him (Psalm 111:10).

The secular world follows the scientific method of experimentation, observation, and interpretation. The religious world follows its traditions and its "faith" in those traditions. But God has a different method for revealing truth to those willing and able to receive the truth. I call it the "faith method".

It works like this.

You read the Bible. You find something that corrects you, shows you that you are wrong about something, either in your behavior or your beliefs (or both). If it is something hard to understand, you may do more research in the Bible, getting all the scriptures on that subject to let the Bible interpret the Bible, letting clear scriptures interpret difficult ones. You should do this with an open mind.

Now, let's say that after your research, the Bible still shows you that you are wrong. Will you accept the correction? Will you let God teach you something new and surprising? Will you believe God and change the doctrine you have been believing up to that point? Will you obey God and strive to change your behavior?

If you do, God will then help you to understand more truth. He will work with your mind to free you from the deceptions of Satan's world and help you to understand more of the Bible. In this way, God will teach you more truth one point at a time.

But if you refuse to believe God, if you reject God's knowledge, either by deliberately rejecting the Bible or by mentally twisting scriptures to make them fit what you want them to mean, the understanding stops. God stops helping you understand once you choose to reject God's revelation.

It is a test, and it is a choice you must make.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

"But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

"For all those things has my hand made, and all those things have been, said the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isaiah 66:2).

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endures for ever" (Psalm 111:10).

I challenge you to really believe what God says in the Bible, to prove what is true by God's word, and not just believe what you want to believe or what other people tell you.

CHAPTER 6 - The Theory of Evolution and the Creation of Species

Introduction

The dominant culture in the United States has become materialistic. This materialism is based on a combination of atheism, agnosticism, and indifference to religion. A large segment of our population believes there is no God or does not know if God exists or not.

This nation was founded by people who believed in God. Our Declaration of Independence, the foundational document for the existence of our nation, states that it is self-evident that all men are created by a Creator. Many people came to this land for the purpose of finding freedom to practice their religion, and the founding fathers wrote a constitution that guarantees that freedom. As the Supreme Court and other courts have interpreted the Constitution, all levels of government should be neutral in regards to religion, neither prohibiting or endorsing religion in general or any religion in particular.

But there is an element in our society that is pushing a culture of materialism in entertainment, news reporting, education, and government, and they have succeeded in making atheistic materialism the dominant point of view in all these realms. Those who promote this culture base their worldview on the theory of evolution and their own belief that God does not exist. They have a sense of morality, but it is a morality without God and a morality they invent based on their own human ideas and reasoning apart from God and the Bible.

They have succeeded to the point that the religious freedom that our founding fathers tried to guarantee has been weakened, and in the realm of public education, destroyed. Government is no longer neutral in regards to God and religion. Government is now anti-God and anti-religion. And we as a people have allowed this to happen.

Government supported grammar schools, high schools, and colleges and universities now teach as fact the belief of atheists that all species came into existence through common descent, random mutation, and selection through natural forces only with no guidance, design, or intervention from a creator God whatsoever. This belief is called the theory of evolution and it is taught as established fact, as known truth, even though evolutionists, when pinned down, will admit that evolution cannot be proved logically.

This materialistic worldview and culture is anti-God and anti-Bible. It denies the existence and authority of the God who created the earth and mankind and inspired the Bible.

How God Views Our Materialistic Society

God calls atheists "fools."

Psalm 14:1: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good" (KJV).

Psalm 53:1-3: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (KJV).

Why does God call them fools? Because creation is the proof of God's existence.

Speaking of God's wrath against the unrighteousness that mankind has practiced, Paul wrote: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit

such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Romans 1:18-32, KJV).

Paul wrote that the invisible things of God and His eternal power can be clearly seen by the things that are made - the creation.

Creation is the evidence of God's existence. The proof is the same whether a man knows a lot or a little about science. The people in Paul's day and prior knew little about science, but they could see the wonders of God's creation in the heavens, the earth, and in all life. People today know much more about science, but science teaches us today about fundamental laws that show design in the universe that proves there must be a Designer who made design choices. Science has revealed a universe far larger and more complex than people in Paul's day could have imagined.

As I pointed out in chapter one, the universe with its laws shows that design choices have been made. There are a limited number of fundamental forces, and each force has its own characteristics in terms of attraction or repulsion, strength, and how quickly the force diminishes over distance. These forces make possible the creation we see today, including life. Had these forces been slightly different, our physical life could not exist. There is no fundamental logical reason why these forces have to exist the way they are. God as master designer chose these forces and their characteristics. Likewise, these forces and the matter and energy that exist operate in space and time, each with its dimensions and characteristics. Everyone is aware that ordinary space is three-dimensional. But there is no logical reason why space has to be three-dimensional. A universe with four space dimensions or two would be just as logical and self-consistent as the three-dimensional space we live in, and mathematicians and physicists can calculate the characteristics of such space. But God chose three dimensions of space, not two or four.

There are fundamental constants in the universe, such as the speed of light. There are a limited number of fundamental particles, each with its characteristics.

All these laws and characteristics of the physical universe we live in show that design choices have been made by a master designer.

We also have the evidence of the consciousness of our minds, which science does not even define much less explain. Science can say nothing about it because it does not relate to any physical processes that science is able to deal with. Some scientists and science writers dance around the issue, calling intelligence or mental focus "consciousness," but that is not what it is. They may analyze the physical processes in the brain, but they know that no combination of physical matter and energy can account for the subjective experience that is a characteristic of the human mind.

But as God inspired Paul to write, men do not like to retain God in their knowledge. For many, it is easier to conclude that there is no God than to face the reality that there is a God who has authority over how every person lives his life and that we will all have to face God's judgment for what we do.

The evidence of God's existence is obvious to anyone who is willing to look at creation with an unbiased mind. That is why God says, they are without excuse.

And while evolution is being accepted and promoted in education and the media, our society is also moving farther and farther away from the moral standards set by the God of all creation. Most people find time for movies, television, games, sports, and all types of pleasure, recreation, and entertainment, but few people find time for seeking God through Bible study, personal prayer, and fasting, except when they are in trouble.

And trouble is coming, as the next chapter will show.

No Contradiction between Physical Evidence and the Bible

As I pointed out in chapter one, the Bible does not say that the earth was created 6,000 years ago. The creation account in Genesis is literal, not figurative. The six days of creation were literal 24-hour days, not periods of time that could have lasted millions of years. But the earth existed BEFORE the six days of creation!

Look at Genesis again! The earth was created in verse 1. It existed and is described in verse 2, BEFORE the six days that are described in the verses that follow.

The language of Genesis allows an undefined period of time between the original creation of the earth and the first of the six days when God renewed the surface of the earth. Genesis says nothing about this period of time, whether it was long or short, whether the earth was in darkness and covered with water for most of this time or just at the end of this period, whether there was life on the earth BEFORE the earth was engulfed in darkness and water, etc. But as I pointed out in chapter one, there are indications elsewhere in the Bible that suggest that the earth was NOT created in darkness and covered in water, originally. This was a condition that came after the original creation of the earth. It could well have come as a result of a catastrophe that engulfed the earth as a result of the rebellion and sin of Lucifer and his angels, just as the flood in Noah's day came as a result of the sins of mankind (Genesis 6:5-8).

Life could have existed before that catastrophe, as far as Genesis is concerned, and this period could have lasted millions of years. Then after the surface of the earth was destroyed, God in six days renewed the surface of the earth. He re-created the life forms that had previously existed, using the same genetic code those life forms had previously. He separated land areas from oceans, cleaned up the atmosphere, and made the heavenly bodies clearly visible from the surface of the earth to act as seasonal signs and to provide light on the earth.

Science claims to have found evidence that life forms existed in the earth for millions of years, and there is no contradiction between that and the Bible, even with a literal understanding of the Bible.

Can Science Prove Evolution?

How did life come about? The life forms that exist today are descended from the life forms God made in six days approximately 6,000 years ago, as described in Genesis. But where did the design of those life forms come from originally?

Scientists see a similarity between the fossils that were laid in the earth many thousands of years ago and species that exist today. There is apparently no sudden change between species that existed tens of thousands of years ago or even millions of years ago and species that exist today. This seems to indicate that when God renewed the surface of the earth in six days and made the ancestors of today's species, He did not create new life forms. He re-created, or restored, the same life forms that had existed at the time the surface of the earth was destroyed and engulfed in water and darkness. God restored the surface of the earth to the condition it was in before the catastrophe struck.

The characteristics of each species are determined by the genetic code for that species. To restore the species that existed, God could simply have re-created the life forms with the same genetic code that existed before.

But how did that code come into existence in the first place? What is the real origin of species?

Evolutionists vehemently claim that all species came into existence through natural forces only. The theory of evolution claims that all species came into existence through descent from a common ancestor and through random mutation and natural selection. Their theory excludes the possibility that God designed the species or guided their development. The mutation that evolution uses to explain genetic change is always natural mutation, never changes planned, designed, and made by God for an intelligent purpose. The selection of the fittest for survival is always natural selection, never selection by God or any supernatural agent.

Some people believe in a kind of "theistic evolution." They believe in a kind of evolution and they also believe in God. Many of these people may believe that there was evolution, but God may have helped the process along, guiding it here and there.

But that is emphatically NOT the evolution that is taught in the public schools. Public school students are taught that all species came into existence through natural forces only. The idea that God created life or even guided its development is excluded from consideration.

Science teaches evolution as fact. They teach it as something that is known by science to be true. They do not teach it as a possibility. Public school students are taught that evolution, that is, the development of species through natural causes ONLY, definitely is how all species came into existence.

But can science prove that evolution is true? And if it cannot prove that it is true, what right does it have to teach it as truth, as fact, to students in government supported schools?

The origin of life and the species of life is intimately involved in people's religious beliefs, or lack thereof. Creation is one of the proofs of God's existence. Government is supposed to be neutral in regards to religion. The founding fathers of this nation sought to establish freedom in this country for people to practice their religious faith, including teaching their faith to their children, without government interference.

Can evolution be proved by science?

I will show that it cannot.

Essential to the theory of evolution as taught in the public schools is the principle that species of life came into existence through natural forces only. But that cannot be proven. No scientist can prove that God has not intervened supernaturally to create the species or to guide their development. Even if a scientist could show that all species had a common ancestor, and that the species branched out over millions of years, each species slightly different than its ancestors, science cannot prove that God did not intervene and guide the process. And if God intervened, then the species did not come into existence through natural forces only. God's creative intervention could explain any difficulties science may have in explaining how the species came about, but in its investigations, science refuses to acknowledge the possibility of a Creator God who intervenes in physical processes.

The method science uses to do research in science is the scientific method. The scientific method is the only method of investigation that is allowed in scientific work. And the scientific method, as practiced by science, does not allow consideration of supernatural causes for physical evidence. Therefore, science cannot consider even the possibility that God created or guided the development of species. It cannot try to prove or disprove God's intervention, nor can it examine it as a possibility, not even long enough to rule it out.

Science only investigates natural processes. In fact, a definition of science is the observation, description, investigation, and explanation of NATURAL processes.

You cannot prove something by only looking at one side and ignoring any alternative possibilities. Science never looks at the possibility that God may intervene in physical processes. Science never considers that as a possibility. It is ruled out arbitrarily without rational examination. Science is therefore biased and its conclusions are untrustworthy.

You cannot prove something by looking at one side. If you are after truth, you have to be unbiased in your examination. You have to consider both sides. But science has placed a limitation on itself, and because of this self-imposed limitation, it cannot consider both sides, which would be necessary for proof.

If both sides of an argument are reasonable and neither can be disproved, then both should be considered possible.

If science cannot prove evolution, why does it insist it is true?

For atheists and hard-core evolutionists, evolution is a faith. It is not a religious faith. It is an anti-religious faith. It is a chosen belief system not subject to logical proof based on physical evidence. It is a worldview based on subjective personal choice, not physical evidence. Evolutionists believe their theory because they want to and because they choose to. Most of them do not want to believe there is a God who has the authority to tell them how to live their lives and to whom they will be accountable in judgment.

Evolution is the atheist's explanation for creation without a Creator. It is an anti-God faith that an atheist may hold to just as zealously and even as militantly as any religious fanatic might hold to his faith.

Here is a test that can show that the theory of evolution is a kind of faith for those who believe it. The next time a scientist, advocate of evolution, biology teacher, or college professor challenges you on evolution and wants to know why you don't believe it, try asking, "Can you prove evolution according to the rules of formal logic?" Many colleges offer courses in formal logic. Formal logic is logic based on deductive reasoning. This is the same kind of reasoning used to produce proofs in geometry. It is illustrated by the example, "All dogs bark. Sandy is a dog. Therefore, Sandy barks." Used properly it can be very accurate, but it has a limitation. It can only reason from assumed premises. In the above example, it is assumed that all dogs bark. Then, based on this assumption, if Sandy is a dog, you can prove that Sandy barks. But if the premise is wrong, your conclusion can be wrong.

The false premise in evolution that the scientific community assumes is that there is no God who intervenes in physical processes.

People often think of science as a field of knowledge, a category of information, a subject matter. This is often how the term "science" is used. Courses in school for example are divided into categories such as science, mathematics, history, etc., and books in libraries and bookstores are grouped in similar ways. But science is more than a category or field of knowledge. It is a way of looking at the world and a way of trying to discover knowledge.

Science is a culture, a community, a process for trying to discover new knowledge, and a way of thinking. The foundation of this community and way of thinking is the scientific method. The scientific method is the only method for investigating questions

of science that the scientific community will accept. It is the basis for discussion of scientific issues. Reasoning outside of the scientific method is not allowed in a scientist's work. And a basic premise of the scientific method as practiced by the scientific community is that no supernatural explanation for any physical evidence is even to be considered. In other words, the possibility that there is a God who might intervene in any physical process is excluded in scientific thinking. The scientific method therefore rules out even considering the possibility that God created life on the earth, even before any physical evidence is examined. And the scientific method is the only method of investigation a scientist may use in his work.

Science requires that scientific theories be empirically testable and be based on multiple observation, often in the form of controlled, repeatable experiments. This alone excludes consideration of supernatural causes for physical evidence. The intervention of God is not subject to repeatable experiment. God chooses when and how to intervene in physical processes, and such choices are not predictable in their details.

The scientific method works fine in the laboratory and in investigating everyday processes because God allows the universe to follow the natural laws He has created and does not ordinarily interfere with natural law. He does not make His presence known by constantly intervening in the physical operation of the universe. God wants man to be able to work with matter and energy and to be able to control his environment to a degree, and physical processes need to be predictable for men to understand and work with them. Also, it is not God's will to reveal Himself to mankind at this time in such a way that men cannot deny His existence. At this time, God is giving mankind a free choice about this, and so He stays in the background right now. But that does not mean that God did not create the universe, or life itself. This assumption, that God never intervenes in physical processes, does not work well in explaining how things came into existence in the first place, or the past history of how everything came to be the way it is. When scientists use the scientific method in the laboratory, they are using it properly, but when they try to use it to explain the origins of life, they are using for a purpose to which it is ill suited, and it fails miserably.

According to the scientific method, there is no God who intervenes in physical processes, and the scientific method is the only way of thinking most scientists and educators will acknowledge as a way of investigating the origin of species. So their thinking about evolution is distorted and biased from the beginning.

This is why the scientific community, with the cultural bias it presently has, cannot accept or even objectively consider creation by God as an explanation for life on earth.

Some opponents of evolution use the term "intelligent design" to refer to the concept that life shows design by an intelligent being. This is sometimes promoted as a scientific theory without stating who the intelligent designer is. But scientists know that the term "intelligent design" usually refers to design and creation by an intelligent God. And in the minds of most scientists, even to consider such a possibility as an explanation for physical evidence would be a violation of the scientific method.

Therefore, scientists within the scope of their scientific work and teaching CANNOT accept creation by God or intelligent design. They have no choice but to try to fit all physical evidence into the evolutionary framework if they are to work within the limits of the scientific method. They are required to be biased against creation even before they look at the evidence, and they have no choice but to explain the evidence in evolutionary terms. If a scientist thought he found evidence of creation, he could not even succeed in publishing it in mainstream scientific journals. Although a minority of scientists may personally believe in a creator God who controls and intervenes in the universe, those scientists must keep those personal views out of their scientific work and teaching. The scientific community as a whole rejects the idea of a creator God. And this rejection is based on the community's faith in the scientific method, not on logical proof.

In science, the scientific method is the lens through which all physical evidence is evaluated. The scientific method is the basis for all reasoning that scientists are expected to employ in their work as scientists. Reasoning outside of the scientific method is not allowed. This approach, when applied to the origin of things, denies even the possibility of a creator God before any evidence is even examined. One who adopts this method in exploring the origins of things has no choice but to search only for physical explanations for any evidence he finds. The scientific community is made up of hundreds of thousands of scientists who spend their whole lives evaluating physical evidence and proposing explanations from this point of view. Millions of man-years have been expended to explain fossils, radio carbon dating, DNA, etc. from an evolutionary point of view.

Scientists and science teachers may challenge those who believe in creation to explain some point of physical evidence, such as radiocarbon measurements, fossils, or evidence regarding the rate of genetic mutations, and say to a believer in creation, perhaps a young student, "How can you explain this apart from evolution?" Then the student or believer in creation is expected to come up with an alternative explanation in the next couple of seconds or the teacher may say, "See, there is no explanation apart from evolution, therefore this proves that evolution is true." But that is not logical. If a student does not think of an alternative explanation, that is not proof that there is no explanation. To be fair, not only should the student have an equal number of years to explain the evidence according to intelligent design, the same number of years scientists have had to explain it according to the theory of evolution, but the student would need access to the original physical evidence itself as well as the equipment and training needed to examine the evidence, not just published reports of the evidence after it has been selected and interpreted by those who accept and practice the evolutionary faith.

The point is, the whole field of study of the physical evidence in life and in the earth is dominated by a community of scientists who are biased right from the beginning of their education and training against belief in a creator God who can intervene in natural processes, and therefore their conclusions and explanations are untrustworthy. To use an analogy, if this were a court case, if a prospective jury member had such a degree of bias one way or another, he could rightly be dismissed from being on the jury.

Scientists and educators cannot prove evolution according to formal logic without setting as a premise that there is no God who intervenes in physical processes, and this premise is false. Nevertheless, they accept this premise without proof. For them, though they will not call it a faith, it is a faith and it is like a religion to them.

And in the educational system and scientific community, the majority who practice this faith are in a position of power and influence that enables them to put enormous pressure to conform upon those who do not want to accept this faith.

There is another problem with evolution, and that is the way it is taught in the schools. Though it is called a theory, it is not taught just as a possibility of how life and all the species might have come into existence. It is taught as fact, as the way life actually came to be. One of the principles that the scientific community claims to follow is that for a theory to qualify as scientific, it should be considered provisional or tentative, admitting that it might not be correct rather than asserting certainty. Yet that is not how evolution is taught. Evolution is presented in the classroom and textbooks as a certainty. No room is allowed for doubt about whether evolution actually occurred or not. Yet evolution is unproved and unprovable. What is happening is that the scientific and educational communities are trying to impose their faith in evolution upon their students. And in many cases they are succeeding.

Evolution cannot be proved by science. The scientific method itself rules out such proof.

Evolutionists point to physical evidence to try to show that evolution is possible, and they believe that evolution is actually the process by which all the species came into existence. But trying to prove that evolution as a process is possible and may have occurred, and trying to prove that evolution actually happened, are two different things. A scientist could show that evolution is possible and may have occurred if he could demonstrate that evolution is consistent with all known evidence. But to prove that it actually did happen he would have to go a step further. He would have to prove that no other reasonable explanation is consistent with all the evidence. He would have to show that evolution is the only way life could have come into existence and is the only explanation that fits the evidence. So how could he do that?

The alternative to evolution is creation by God. To prove that evolution must have happened a scientist would have to prove that the evidence cannot be explained by creation by God.

Evolutionists can become quite vehement in their defense of their faith in evolution, and many of them become offended or angry if you call evolution a faith and unproven. But they are being emotional, not rational. The only way science can know something is true is to prove it, and the only way you can prove something by the physical evidence is to show that your explanation covers all the facts (which evolution does not) and that no other explanation can explain all the facts (which science never attempts to prove).

For science to prove evolution happened, it has to show: a) evolution can explain the evidence, and b) creation cannot explain the evidence. It can try to prove (a) but the scientific method does not allow science to try to prove (b).

To rule out creation or intelligent design, an evolutionist would have to show that no creationist explanation is consistent with the evidence. If he cannot do that, then he would have to be content merely to acknowledge that evolution is one possible explanation for life, but not the only one. But if he takes that route, he is in conflict with how evolution is actually taught in schools. It is not taught as a possible way life may have come into existence, it is taught as the only way, the one way, the way it definitely happened.

The best science can say, if it is honest, is that evolution is science's best explanation for how the species of life might have arisen naturally if God did not create or develop species supernaturally. But science cannot prove that evolution actually happened.

I am not saying that I agree that evolution through natural forces only is sufficient to explain the species, but let's say for the moment that it is. Does that mean it actually happened? If creation by God is also sufficient to explain how life arrived at its present variety, then how can we know that life came through evolution and not intelligent design by a creator God?

If both evolution and intelligent design by God can explain the species, then either of these is possible and evolution has not been proved to be the origin of the species. Then it is wrong to teach it as a fact or as truth.

As an illustration, if there was a crime committed, it is not sufficient to prove a suspect guilty only by showing that he could have committed the crime. Maybe a second person also could have committed the crime. You prove which one did it by eliminating the possibility that the other did it. You narrow it down to one by eliminating any other possibility. Science has never done that. It has never eliminated the possibility that God created the species by intelligent design.

If a scientist wants to prove that evolution definitely happened by showing that no creationist explanation is consistent with the evidence, how would he go about doing that? He has a bigger job than just showing that the physical evidence suggests an earth older than 6,000 years. For one thing, not all creationists believe that the earth is only 6,000 years old; some people, like myself, believe the earth is several billions or at least hundreds of millions of years old, and that life existed on the earth millions of years ago as indicated in the fossil record, but that God nevertheless designed and created life. Even among those who think the earth is only 6,000 years old, many of these people have explanations for the physical evidence consistent with a 6,000 year old earth. A scientist may not agree with these explanations, but can he prove them wrong logically?

How can a scientist prove that intelligent design never occurred? How can he prove that no logical self-consistent creationist explanation for the evidence is possible? To put it another way, how can he prove that every creationist explanation is inconsistent with the evidence? Many or most of those who believe in creation believe in a God that

can do anything, create anything out of nothing, change anything, and perform any miracle. How could a scientist prove that such a God did not design and create life and the different species of life outside the normal workings of physical law, and do it in a way that is consistent with the physical evidence?

Since such a God is capable of creating any kind of life, at any time and in any way He chooses, there is no question of whether an all-powerful God is able to create life the way it appears in the fossil record and in life forms today. The question becomes, why would God choose to create life the way that He did? And that becomes a theological question, which science cannot deal with. Not knowing God's reasons for every choice He makes does not prove that God did not create life.

How could a scientist, following the scientific method, even approach such a problem? The scientific method does not allow for supernatural explanations of evidence. So even if it were possible to prove that the evidence cannot be explained by creation, a scientist could not do it in the course of his work. To do this, he would have to consider, evaluate, and then rule out supernatural explanations for the origin of life. He would have to get involved in theology in order to try to rule out any explanation that God created life in a way consistent with the evidence. He can try to do this as a private individual, but it can't be part of his work, his writing, his publishing, and his teaching as a scientist because the scientific method rules out consideration of supernatural explanations for evidence.

I repeat, you cannot objectively prove something by only looking at one side of an issue. The question is, did God create life or did life evolve through natural processes? If you are really after truth, you have to look at both sides of a question objectively and without bias. But scientists, in their work as scientists, cannot do that with evolution and creation. The scientific method forbids it, as does peer pressure of the scientific community. The scientific method as it is applied forbids the consideration of supernatural explanations for evidence. So the scientific method cannot examine both sides of the issue, which is necessary for proof.

So the scientific method itself prevents science from trying to prove evolution rationally. That is why evolution cannot be proved.

Some evolutionists will say that it is a lack of evidence of the supernatural that causes science to ignore the possibility that God intervened to develop the species. But the greatest evidence of God's existence, power, and intervention in physical processes is the universe itself. The design and existence of this vast universe with its matter, energy, and laws is proof of God's supernatural acts, yet science rejects that evidence, which only demonstrates that the bias of science against God is real.

And if a scientist as an individual really examined both sides of the issue carefully and without bias, I believe he would conclude that the evidence is consistent only with creation and not with evolution, and he could prove for himself that evolution never occurred. But he would have great difficulty if he tried teaching that in the course of his work, and would risk rejection by the scientific and educational communities.

You can't know from scientific experiments and observations what God may have done in the past. You can't use scientific experiments to prove that God did not create life. The best a scientist can do is to try to show that evolution is possible, but he can't prove it actually happened. And I personally do not believe that evolution is even possible.

Many people who look at this issue with an open mind are troubled by the idea that God created life because the fossil evidence appears to them to indicate that the different life forms appeared gradually on the earth over hundreds of millions of years, with the simplest life forms appearing first and the more complex life forms appearing later. Also, there are fossils of life forms such as the dinosaurs that have become extinct. They cannot imagine why an all-powerful creator God would choose to create the various life forms in this order and over such a long period of time, or why God would create some life forms only to allow them to become extinct later.

I do not know all the events that may have taken place on the earth before the account of the six days in Genesis. The Bible does not give details. I also do not know if scientists accurately know the ages of various fossils they find. Scientists may or may not be mistaken in estimating the ages of the fossils that appear to be tens or even hundreds of millions of years old. But suppose scientists are right about the ages of the fossils of dinosaurs and various other ancient species. Suppose scientists are right that the fossils of simpler life forms are older than the more complex life forms. Does that prove that evolution is the process by which all the species came to be? Absolutely not.

Because the Bible does not tell us how and when God created different species before the earth was covered with water and God renewed the face of the earth in six days, we cannot know exactly how, when, and why God created the life forms that resulted in fossils of dinosaurs and other animals. He may have had particular reasons for creating the simpler life forms first and the more complex life forms later, and reasons for allowing the dinosaurs and many other life forms to become extinct, reasons we cannot know since God does not reveal them in the Bible. But because we do not know what those reasons are does not mean that God did not have reasons. We could speculate about God's reasons, and our speculations might be right or wrong. I will have more to say about God's reasons later. But our lack of knowledge about reasons God might have for creating life in the order in which it appears in the fossil record does not prove that God did not create the species of life. And if you can't prove that God did not create species, you cannot prove that evolution happened.

No scientist in his work or his private writings has ever proved that God did not create life or that God did not guide the development of species. And if God did create or guide the development of species, then evolution is false.

The premise contained in the scientific method as it is practiced that there is no God who intervenes in physical processes is itself unproved and unprovable. Yet it is the basis for all scientific investigation into the origin of species. This is why evolution is a faith.

Those who believe in evolution have made a choice to believe something they cannot prove from physical evidence, whether they realize it or not. Evolution has never been proved. It is a faith held by those who choose to believe it.

The theory of evolution is false. God did create life. The vast variety of life on earth demonstrates God's awesome creative powers and His greatness. Mankind should give thanks to God for His creation, but rather than give God thanks for what He has done, man has found ways to deny God's works and His existence, and the theory of evolution is an idea man has invented to avoid giving God the honor and glory due to Him. Nevertheless, God created life in all its variety, and this life is testimony to His tremendous wisdom and power.

Are the Evils of this World Evidence Against God's Existence?

Some atheists reason that there cannot be a God because of the suffering in the world. They reason that if God exists and He is good, He would not allow the wars, the injustice, the poverty, and the general suffering of mankind that occurs on this earth. But this is shortsighted. God is allowing mankind to experience lessons that show that the way of man, cut off from God, leads to suffering and destruction. God has a purpose and a plan, and this plan is revealed in the Bible, as I have shown in chapters one and two. This physical life is temporary, and God has a plan for teaching mankind lessons, lessons that will bring benefits for all eternity, and the suffering of this life is part of that plan. It will work for good in the end. But the atheist is unwilling to trust in the goodness and wisdom of God and will not look to the Bible for answers with an open mind.

The suffering in this world may be the atheists' excuse for denying God's existence. I do not think it is the real reason. I think the idea that there is a God who has authority to tell them how to live their lives is personally distasteful to them, and denying God's existence helps them feel free of that authority.

The Bible reveals God's plan for mankind, and God helps those who are willing to believe and obey Him to understand the Bible. Though God allows us to suffer many evils in this life, that suffering will work good in the end, to teach us lessons that will last for eternity, and to test us. Paul writes in Romans 8:18-39 that the suffering in this life is not worthy to be compared with the glory will be revealed after this age. God permits us to suffer just as a loving father disciplines his children for their long-term good.

The seven day week is a model of God's seven thousand year plan for mankind (2 Peter 3:8). Just as the seventh day, the weekly Sabbath of rest from the burdens of the work

week, follows the six days of labor, so a one thousand year period of peace and happiness will follow six thousand years of war and suffering. God has allotted mankind six thousand years to be cut off from His rule and to write the lesson in human suffering that man's ways cut off from God only lead to suffering and death. Then Christ will return to rule the earth for one thousand years and teach mankind God's law and way of life (Revelation 20:1-4), and God's rule will bring peace and happiness to the earth. Then men can compare the history of the six thousand years of man's self-rule with the one thousand years of God's rule and see which way is best.

God's says in His word that He is a God of love, mercy, righteousness, justice, wisdom, and power, but the atheist is not willing to believe that. It takes faith in God's righteousness and truthfulness to believe Him and trust His plan for mankind, and the atheist is not willing to trust that God knows what He doing and has mankind's best interest at heart.

God has far more wisdom than man, and God requires that we trust Him even when we do not understand every reason for God's judgments (Isaiah 55:8-9).

There are answers to the question of why God allows suffering. But science cannot examine that question because it limits itself to the study of natural causes only and cannot look at questions about God and His ways.

An atheist may conclude there is no God because of the suffering in this world, and that conclusion may drive his decision to believe in evolution. But that is not science. That reinforces my point, that within the discipline of science, one cannot prove that there is no God who intervenes in physical processes or that evolution is true. Any reasoning a person might use about the existence of God goes outside of science, into philosophy or theology. And since it is not part of science, it is hidden from students in the science classroom. Students are taught that evolution occurred through natural forces only, but they are not told that the reason evolutionists are certain of this is that they think God is ridiculous or that the suffering of this world shows that God does not exist. They are only told the conclusion, evolution, but not the real reasons behind the conclusion.

So atheists and evolutionists use science and the scientific method as a shield and a cover for the real reasons they believe in evolution.

My point is, you have to go outside the role of scientist and outside the scientific method even to begin to explore the issues involved here. Science has never explored the issue of God's existence in light of the suffering that exists on earth. It can't. It doesn't want to. It shouldn't.

Individual scientists can study this on their own and reach their own private conclusions, but that is not part of their work and teaching as scientists.

The problem is that science teaches evolution as fact without examining the evidence that a believer in God might present for the existence and intervention of God. Why is that wrong? The problem is not that it doesn't examine theological issues of "why does God allow suffering?" The problem is that science doesn't acknowledge that such an

examination is necessary to refute the evidence a believer of God might present to show that God exists and intervenes in the physical universe.

Evolutionists can't counter the arguments of those who believe in God within the bounds of science and the scientific method. You have to step outside of science and talk about, "How can an all-powerful, all-benevolent God allow so much suffering? Therefore, since there is no answer, there must be no God." That may be philosophy, but it is not science.

The problem is that the unspoken reasoning of evolutionist writers and teachers that the suffering in the world is evidence for them that there is no God is never openly discussed or put on the table for students to examine themselves. This is important, because many of those students and their families have considered that same issue, "why does God allow suffering?" and reached a different conclusion. They believe that suffering is not evidence against the existence of God.

There are hidden reasons, having nothing to do with science, why evolutionists believe in evolution, and these reasons are not openly acknowledged to students in the classroom so they can decide for themselves if they agree with them or not.

Teachers and advocates of evolution in public school classrooms should acknowledge that their teaching of evolution through natural causes only as definite fact is partially based on their belief that there is no God who intervenes in physical processes. This would be a way of laying the biases of science on the table, which now are partially hidden. It would help to clarify in the minds of the students the limitations of science and the scientific method.

Is the Teaching of Evolution in the Public Schools Constitutional?

The United States is considered to be a free country. Our constitution guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion. People should be free to practice their religious beliefs. Freedom of religion also includes freedom of parents to teach their religious beliefs to their children without government interference.

Public school science teachers teach their students that all of the species of life that exist today came into existence through mutation and selection through natural forces only. That is what the theory of evolution is, and that is how it is taught. Students are taught that the forces that shaped the species are natural forces only, which excludes the possibility that God designed and created the species through supernatural forces.

Most public school science teachers probably do not tell their students, "There is no God who intervenes in physical processes." They probably do not say, "God did not guide the process of genetic change and selection," or, "God did not create life." Most

probably do not mention God unless it is in response to a question or comment from a student. But the message is the same. Origin of species through natural forces only automatically excludes creation by God whether the word "God" is mentioned or not.

Thus, tax-supported schools, attendance at which is mandatory for those who do not attend private schools or are home schooled, are teaching many students that the religious beliefs they were raised in, that God is creator who created the species of life that exist, are false.

Is this justified or is it a violation of the principle that people should be able to practice their religion free from government interference?

Freedom of religion is not an absolute, nor should it be. People are not allowed to do whatever they want in the name of religion. Courts have recognized that freedom of religion has limits. For example, a person cannot commit crimes against others because his religion teaches him to do so. If science can prove its case, that life evolved through natural forces only, it should be able to teach it.

But it cannot prove its case. In order to prove that life evolved through natural forces only, it would have to be able to disprove the possibility that God guided and influenced the origin of species. Science has not even attempted to do that.

Why not?

Why not consider two hypothetical causes for origin of species? One, random mutation and natural selection only produced the species. Two, God supernaturally intervened and guided the development of the species. Then examine the evidence in the light of both hypotheses. If the evidence is incompatible with one of them, then that one is disproved. Then it would be reasonable to say that the other is true.

Has science done that? Has science considered evolution on the one hand, creation by God on the other, and examined the evidence in light of both possibilities? And has science found that the evidence is incompatible with any process guided and supernaturally influenced by God, thus proving that God did not create or influence the development of species?

No.

And if not, what right does science have to teach in the public schools that evolution occurred if it cannot prove it?

Or in other words, what right does science have to teach in government supported and mandated schools that the religious beliefs of students and their families are wrong if it cannot prove it?

Evolutionists may reply, science doesn't "prove" things, that "proof" is the domain of logic or mathematics, not science. But that doesn't seem to prevent science from teaching evolution as true. And evolutionists will often say, "Evolution is a fact." Also,

it is not true that science does not deal in "proof." Evolutionists may not use that term and may try to avoid it when it suits them, but proof is a concept and word often used by scientists in their work and writings.

The way textbooks and science teachers talk about evolution teaches that evolution, the teaching that species came from natural forces only, is definitely true, not just a possibility. It is taught as a fact whether or not the terms "fact" or "proof" are ever used.

Evolutionists like to say that the evidence "points" to evolution, not creation. But evidence, by itself, doesn't point to anything apart from human interpretation. And human interpretation is influenced by the biases and the assumptions made by the person doing the interpreting. From the perspective and the bias of evolutionists, based on their assumptions about causes, the evidence does indeed point to evolution. But that is only because their bias and assumptions do not permit them to consider creation or any supernatural cause. When creation is considered, the physical evidence points to design by a creator as much or more than it does to evolution.

If you point out that science cannot disprove creation by God, evolutionists sometimes reply, "You cannot disprove flying spaghetti monsters either." Other examples I have heard of things that cannot be disproved include, flat tires are caused by invisible dinosaurs and dogs are really spies from Venus. The point they are making is that just because something cannot be disproved does not mean it should be considered. But in every case, they use an example that is ridiculous. They cannot make their case in any other way. They cannot make their point, that just because something cannot be proved does not mean it should be considered, by using an example that is reasonable, not ridiculous, but unproven, because if they did that, they would see that it should be considered.

But to hard-core evolutionists, the examples fit because whether they acknowledge it openly or not, to them the idea of God's existence is ridiculous.

The bottom line is that creation by God is considered just as ridiculous as flying spaghetti monsters by atheists and hard-core evolutionists. That is really the basis for teaching evolution as truth in the public schools. Since belief in God is ridiculous, it does not need to be disproved, just ignored. Without God, the only other possible explanation for the origin of species is evolution.

I have said several times that the theory of evolution is a faith. What do I mean by "faith" as applied to evolution? Ask several people to give a definition of "faith," and you will get several different answers. Faith means different things to different people, and the meaning of the word itself can vary from one context to another.

When I say that the theory of evolution is a faith, I mean it is a ***chosen belief system that cannot be proved by physical evidence***. There is no physical proof that evolution occurred, yet hard-core evolutionists are zealous even to the point of militancy in their adherence and promotion of evolution. Why? Simply because it is their choice. They believe what they want to believe and make a decision to believe. It is a personal decision of the evolutionist to believe it and embrace it. It is very subjective.

It is in this sense that I call the evolutionist's belief in evolution a "faith." It is not a religious faith. It is an anti-religious faith. Evolution cannot be proved by the evidence. Those who believe in it believe it because that is their choice.

That is their right, but they do not have the right to force their faith in evolution on their students in government supported schools.

The scientific method is the methodology science uses for discovering knowledge. It is not the only methodology anyone can use for discovering truth, but it is the one that science has adopted. It is an excellent way of discovering knowledge but it has limitations. It is ideally suited for learning about everyday physical processes, such as in the fields of physics, chemistry, biology, etc. It can be used to learn how organs of the body work, what effects medicines can have, how to treat injuries and illnesses, how to be more productive growing crops, etc. The scientific method is how science works.

But evolution is not just a science issue. It is also a theological and religious issue and it is a legal and constitutional issue. Science has no right to try to impose its scientific method on those other fields. It does that when it uses only the scientific method to investigate the origin of species, reaches a conclusion that species came from natural forces only, then teaches that conclusion as if it were fact in public schools to students who are taught just the opposite by their families and religious traditions. Science does not have the right to use its limited methods for discovering knowledge, and then impose them on those other fields as the only path to truth.

In matters of religion, the government and its agencies should be neutral. The entire evolution vs. creation issue is as much a domain of religious thought as it is a domain of scientific thought. Public schools should not teach a philosophy that contradicts the belief that God designed and supernaturally intervened to create the species unless they can show evidence that disproves God's intervention. Private schools can teach what they want.

The scientific method should be used only to address questions of how physical matter and energy work today, right now. Experience shows that it works well when used that way. The scientific method should not be used to determine how things originated in the past, except maybe to produce speculations, as long as those speculations are not taught as fact.

Science has put limitations on its methods of investigation and interpretation, and it should acknowledge those same limitations in its conclusions. Its methodology restricts science to the examination of physical, repeatable processes only, and it should restrict its conclusions to repeatable processes and not be dogmatic about origins.

Science is the study of natural processes. But that should not be construed by science as license to assume that all processes are natural processes and that the supernatural does not exist.

Students are not told that evolution is science's best theory as to how the species came into existence if there were no supernatural causes. Students are told that evolution is how species came into existence, period.

Science students are not openly told the biases of science upon which evolution is based. Science courses do not start with a statement on the first day of class, "What you are about to be taught is based on the premise that belief in God and his creative intervention in life is ridiculous." They are not told, "Science's teaching about evolution is based on the premise that there is no God who intervenes in physical processes, and if that premise is false, science's teaching about evolution may be false."

Yet that is exactly the case, whether evolutionists are willing to admit it openly or not.

This universe and the natural laws that science has discovered are abundant evidence that a Creator God exists and that He has not only intervened in physical processes but has created those very physical processes and can intervene whenever He chooses. It is the personal bias of atheists that prevents them from seeing that. In the mind of an atheist, the idea of God is ridiculous, but somehow he is not able to see that the idea that there is no God who created the universe is itself ridiculous. That the universe exists is evident. That God created it is the only reasonable explanation.

Evolution is the atheist's attempt to explain creation without a creator. Evolution does not attempt to explain the universe. It limits itself to trying to explain how the vast variety of life came into existence without a creator God. It is a faith, and the evolutionists have managed to enlist the power of government to pressure others into accepting their faith.

They have succeeded in making evolution the dominant culture, and I believe they have succeeded in this because of the apathy of those who believe in God and have allowed this to occur.

Not everyone who says he believes in evolution is an atheist. Some people who are deeply religious believe in some version of evolution. Often (not always), a person who says he believes in God and evolution will say that God used evolution to create the species and may have guided the process, intervening here and there to make sure that the species came into existence. Evolution believed by those who also believe in God has been termed "theistic evolution." Some believe that God exists and created the universe with its laws and used evolution to create the species, not by directly intervening in physical processes, but by creating the matter and laws that allowed evolution to happen naturally without His intervention. Others believe that God intervened and guided an evolutionary process.

But theistic evolution is not the version of evolution taught in public schools. Atheistic evolution is what is taught in the public schools.

One may argue that public schools do not teach that God does not exist and therefore are not teaching against anyone's religious beliefs. But religious beliefs include more than just the existence of God. People's religious beliefs include their beliefs about how

and when God created life. They include beliefs regarding the Bible. Public schools teach directly against the religious beliefs of many people who believe that God directly intervened to create or guide the development of life. And public schools do this without objective proof that those beliefs are wrong.

Why Would God Develop Species Gradually?

In chapter one I explained why Genesis does not say that the earth is 6,000 years old, even when you take the Genesis account of the six days of creation literally. The earth already existed before the six days of creation began. Life could have existed for millions of years before a catastrophe destroyed the surface of the earth and knocked the heavenly bodies out of their positions in relation to the earth or obscured them with dust and the earth came to be covered in water and in darkness. Then in six days God renewed the surface of the earth, restoring it to the condition it was in before the catastrophe that destroyed it, and restoring the life forms that had previously existed.

Scientists say that fossil evidence indicates that it took millions of years for species to be developed, and they say that genetic evidence points to an inter-relatedness of species. They believe that all species had a common ancestor, and that new species branched off from existing species and species changed over millions of years.

The Bible does not say how God created life BEFORE the six days of creation. Could God have developed the species of life through descent from a common ancestor and the branching off and modification of species over millions of years prior to the condition described in Genesis 1:2?

The Bible does not say how God created the species of life or over what time span, but there is nothing in the Bible that rules that out.

So instead of random mutation and natural selection, God could have directly and intelligently made genetic modifications to allow one species to branch from another. He could have intervened supernaturally to make small genetic changes when needed to produce new species gradually over time. And in cases where the fossil record shows species appearing abruptly with no transitional forms, God could have made all the genetic changes necessary, all at once, to design and make a new species out of an older, similar species.

But why would God do that? God has all power. Why would God not simply create whatever species He wanted all at once?

I think many people are troubled by that question. They believe in God, perhaps, and they see evidence that science presents suggesting that species have arisen and changed over millions of years. They know God could create species gradually, but they cannot think of any reason why God would want to develop the vast variety of species

gradually instead of all at once. God could have created the species gradually, from a common ancestor, by guiding genetic modifications from one generation to the next, but why?

Asking the question, why would God create develop species gradually, does not prove that He did not. Nevertheless, it is a good question to ask.

It probably is not possible to know definitely, even if we can find possible reasons why God may have done it. God does not say in the Bible that He did develop species gradually before the six days of creation and before a catastrophe destroyed the surface of the earth, much less WHY He may have done that. There is no Bible evidence for biological life before the six days of creation. The Bible account only ALLOWS for it. The only evidence of life on earth before the six days is physical, such as fossils of dinosaurs. And fossils do not tell us why God may have done this or that. Any reasons I might suggest therefore are speculative.

Ultimately, we can only know God's reasons for what He does as He tells us His reasons, and where the Bible is silent, we cannot know for certain. God may have five reasons for doing a certain thing, or ten reasons, and with our limited minds and knowledge, we may not even be able to guess what many of them are.

Nevertheless, knowing at least a possible reason may help those who have difficulty believing God might have developed species gradually because they cannot think of any possible reason for God, who is infinite in power, to create species gradually rather than all at once.

I have previously shown that before the creation of man during the six days described in Genesis, angels existed (Job 38:4-7). Lucifer was a great angel, and God did not create him evil. Originally, Lucifer was not evil. But God gave him free moral agency and the power to choose between good and evil. He was perfect in his ways until sin was found in him (Ezekiel 28:14-15). Apparently, before he sinned, God placed Lucifer and one-third of the angels on this earth. Lucifer was in a position of leadership over those angels. His job was to supervise those angels under God's overall rulership.

Lucifer and the angels under his authority sinned and rebelled against God. His name was changed to Satan and his angels became demons (Isaiah 14:12-14, Ezekiel 28:12-17, Revelation 12:3-4, 7-9).

But before he sinned, he was perfect in his ways (Ezekiel 28:15). God had placed him and the angels under his authority on the earth for a purpose. The Bible does not directly reveal what that purpose was.

But God must have given them some job and activity to do. Angels have great powers and minds, probably much greater than man's. God did not put them on the earth to be idle. God intended that they use their abilities in some accomplishment and challenge to match their great abilities, not existing in a state of boredom with nothing to do. And they must have started on the right track with whatever job God gave them to do. Lucifer was perfect in his ways, living righteously for a time, before eventually turning

to sin. Even after that, it may have taken a long time for him to lead his angels into sin also.

Might God have used the angels and given them a job relating to physical life on the earth?

After God renewed the face of the earth in six days and created Adam, God gave Adam rule and authority over all plant and animal life on the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). He then placed Adam in the garden God had planted to "dress it and keep it," or in other words, to manage and control the garden with its plant and animal life (Genesis 2:15).

Could God have given Lucifer and the angels a similar kind of job, to manage the ecology of the species of the earth?

Why not?

And while God is infinite in wisdom and power, angels are not. They may be more brilliant and more powerful than man, but they are still created beings and they are limited.

God may have given Lucifer and the angels a role to play in managing the ecology of life on the earth, and because of their limitations, not God's, God may have developed species and the entire complex ecological system gradually so they could learn lessons and skills with a simpler ecology before managing a more complex one. God could have increased the variety and complexity of the species at a pace that the angels, charged with managing the ecology, could learn how to handle.

God himself is all wise and all powerful. Nothing is impossible for Him. His powers are infinite. But not so the angels. Though their powers are greater than man's, they are finite. Their powers are less than God's. They have to learn through experience and it takes them time to do what they do, just as with man.

That may be one reason.

I also do not rule out the possibility that God may have used the angels to help develop species, just as man is able to develop and change varieties and breeds of animals and plants today through selective breeding or through genetic engineering.

Why would God give the angels a role to play? Why would God not do everything Himself, instantly and perfectly?

Actually, whatever work God wanted the angels to do, God could do it Himself easier and more quickly, but God did not put angels on earth to be idle. He wanted them to have work and activity that would match their abilities, keep them challenged, provide intellectual and emotional fulfillment for them, and provide the proving ground to test Lucifer and his angels to see if they would remain loyal, to see if they would obey God and work together harmoniously. This would be a test of their character and at the same time give them the opportunity to participate in one of God's great creative projects.

The principle is the same in the Church. God accomplishes His will in the Church through imperfect instruments, human beings, yet it is God who supervises and leads His Church. God has given the Church ministers to help teach. God used imperfect prophets and apostles to accomplish His will in biblical times and to put pen to parchment to record the words of the Bible.

Anything a man or angel can do, God can do it directly more perfectly and more quickly. Yet God wants to share opportunities for service and accomplishment in having a part to play in God's creative works. So God uses men and angels as servants, not because He needs them, but for our good to share with us the opportunity for service and accomplishment.

Giving Lucifer and the angels a role to play in managing a growing and expanding ecology would also be a perfect testing ground to test their character and see if they would remain loyal and obedient to God and if they would work harmoniously as a team. And it could take time, even millions of years, to test their character this way.

But at some point in time, Lucifer sinned, became Satan the adversary, and began to sway the angels under his influence to join him in rebelling against God. It may have taken Lucifer a long time to persuade many of the angels under his leadership to join him in rebelling against God. And God may have allowed the angels time to each make his decision.

But at some point, after hundreds of millions of years, and after life forms were developed identical to those that exist today, destruction came to the surface of the earth, either through an act of Lucifer and the angels or as a punishment from God for the sins of Lucifer and the angels, just as God destroyed the surface of the earth in the days of Noah for the sins and wickedness of mankind. This destruction was so vast that even the heavenly bodies could have been affected and the atmosphere so filled with dust that no light could reach the earth's surface.

Then, in six days God renewed the face of the earth, restored the species that had existed at the time of the destruction (with the exact same genetic code), and made man.

This scenario, though different from what is taught in most churches, is entirely consistent with a literal reading the Bible and with physical and scientific evidence.

When the surface of the earth was destroyed and became "without form, and void," covered with water and in darkness as described in Genesis 1:2, all plant and animal life in existence at that time died. But though they died, a great many species of plants and animals had been DESIGNED AND TESTED. The genetic code had been developed. There had been a working ecology that was tested and was successful.

When God recreated plant and animal life in the six days of creation, did He design everything from scratch? Did He re-invent the wheel so to speak? A great deal of work had been accomplished in designing and testing the genetic blueprints for a great variety of species of life. According to fossil evidence, the fossils that appear to be only a few

tens of thousands of years old or younger appear for the most part the same as species alive on earth today. If these designs for life were complete, tested together in an ecology that had been developed over millions of years, why would God throw away what could be useful to Him and start from scratch? Why not simply recreate or re-assemble those species exactly according to the genetic coding or "blueprints" that had already been designed and tested?

This could explain why scientists find such a close relationship and similarity between the genetic coding of similar species today. The existing species, though not descended from common ancestors (they were created, brought into physical existence directly by God during the six days of creation week six thousand years ago), could have been created according to the PATTERN, the GENETIC DESIGN, of species that were developed over millions of years of breeding and genetic engineering from a common ancestor. They would have the same DNA, the same genes as the species that existed before. They would have the same body structure, appearance, and behavior. God restored whatever was good that was already designed.

As I said before, I am only suggesting this as a possibility and I am not saying this is what definitely happened. But it can illustrate the general principle, that events could have occurred in the distant past, events managed and directed by God, which can account for the fossil evidence. I have tried to suggest a possible reason for God to create life gradually, using angels as His agents to manage an ecology that was growing in size and complexity at a pace the angels could learn to handle. Perhaps it was not this way at all, and God has other reasons for creating life the way it appears in the fossil record. I do not know. But I know that scientists cannot prove that God did not create species even gradually over hundreds millions of years. And if they cannot prove that God did not develop species gradually by designed change from one generation to the next, all from a common ancestor, then they cannot prove that evolution is true.

And I know of nothing in the Bible that rules out the hypothetical scenario I described.

How the Theory of Evolution Dominates Our Society

Our society as a whole is turning farther and farther away from God, and rejection of faith in the existence of God and in the truth of the Bible is a big part of this trend. Atheistic evolution teaches the idea that there is no God who intervenes in this world and this life, and that the variety of life that exists came about through natural causes only.

Hard-code evolutionists are very militant in promoting their faith in "no God" to the point that they use whatever influence and powers they have to silence or marginalize their critics.

Scientists, educators, and journalists who believe in God and His intervention and who reject atheistic evolution are often persecuted if they voice their views on this subject. They can lose their jobs if they question evolution or voice support for the principle of intelligent design. Academic and scientific freedom to question evolution or consider design by an intelligent creator does not exist, except on the fringes. Mainstream institutions as a whole do not allow freedom of expression and ideas in this area. Those who suggest that God had a hand in the development of species are ridiculed.

Evolutionists may justify this by saying that there is a consensus view in science that evolution is true and that scientists should subscribe to the consensus view. But the consensus can be wrong, and science has often been advanced by those who have challenged the consensus view. Besides that, one of the reasons that the pro-evolution consensus view exists today is that freedom to disagree or challenge evolution in scientific teaching and work has been suppressed. It is a consensus based on group pressure, intimidation, persecution, and enforcement, not on reason. Dissent is not tolerated. Scientists know that if they speak or write against evolution or even question evolution it will be difficult or impossible for them to obtain research grants, to obtain peer review, to be published, or to work at respected institutions.

Questioning evolution can be a career-destroyer for a scientist, teacher, or journalist.

Among themselves, evolutionists will acknowledge problems with the theory of evolution, but not publicly, and when challenged by anyone outside their belief system, they close ranks to present a unified front and attack anyone who questions evolution. And they do it with a fanaticism and vehemence that reminds me of the great religious persecutions of the past.

Atheistic evolutionists regard belief in God as irrational and those who believe in God as irrational. Some will not hesitate to question openly the sanity of those who look at the evidence and disagree with evolution, or will sometimes calling them "stupid" or "idiots."

This vehemence suggests to me that hard-core evolutionists are afraid of honest scrutiny. They passionately believe in Darwinism, but they know that they cannot prove evolution really happened. They do not want publicity for the problems that exist in the theory of evolution. They are afraid of competition from ideas that challenge their evolutionist ideology.

If a scientist sees a characteristic in a living organism that cannot be explained by random mutation and natural selection, and he suggests that this characteristic may be evidence of intelligent design, he is accused of trying to introduce religion into science.

Atheistic evolutionists behave as if they are involved in a great crusade to "enlighten" the masses and to minimize, marginalize, or stamp out belief in God. Most will not say this openly. But this is the pattern of their teaching and behavior. And they have succeeded in making their belief system the dominant, guiding view in science research, education, and public media.

Most believers in God who have debated this issue, and many who have not, have experienced the emotional response, sometimes to the point of viciousness, of those who promote evolution. Hard-core evolutionists take it very personal when someone challenges their faith.

I have no doubt that one of the effects of the persecution against those who do not accept the evolutionary faith is to cause many who disagree with evolution to keep silent to protect their careers. Amos 5:13 describes an evil time when the prudent keep silent. The militancy of those who promote the theory of evolution and the silence of those who oppose it only increases the dominance of the theory in our national culture and public life.

But this dominance is based on intimidation, not on proof or on objective examination of the evidence. Evidence is only interpreted according to the assumption that there is no God who intervenes in physical processes, and examination of evidence according to this assumption can never be objective.

The effect is that honest scientific investigation into the origin of species is hindered.

Can Darwinism explain the origin of all species? Are the mechanisms of undirected mutation and natural selection sufficient to explain the species that exist today? That is a question that science cannot answer honestly because science never examines that issue honestly. Those who would examine that question honestly are silenced. Intimidation and persecution are used to promote only one answer to that question. It has never been decided on the merits of evolution verse intelligent design, nor has it ever been decided on the basis of objective examination and interpretation of evidence.

As long as freedom to examine that question is hindered, it can never be honestly answered by science, and science's teaching on this subject can never be trusted.

Atheistic evolution has become the dominant worldview of government, science research institutions, education, and media in the United States.

And while evolution is dominating our culture more and more, our moral values and interest in and respect for the Bible are declining.

I do not think this is a coincidence. The teaching of evolution promotes disrespect for God and the Bible and weakens right moral values.

Even atheists usually have some "moral values." But their moral values are misguided attempts of man to define right and wrong without God, and they are actually in competition with God who establishes the right moral values in the Bible. Likewise, the scientific community sets itself up as the ultimate discoverer of truth. It believes its scientific method is the best and only reliable method for learning about the world, and it has no regard for divine revelation from God in the Bible. In effect, a materialistic scientific community sets itself up as god in place of the true God of the Bible.

The scientific community has a high opinion of itself.

Many scientists consider their profession to be superior to other professions. They regard their method of seeking truth as superior to all other methods. They consider science higher than other fields of study, superior, more accurate, more trustworthy. They trust science more than anything else and expect others outside of science to do the same. They consider themselves more objective, more honest, more rational than those in other fields. Not all scientists feel this way, but many do.

Many non-scientists also have a high regard for science. To call something "scientific" is high praise, virtually synonymous with saying that it is true. To call something "unscientific" is like saying it is wrong.

Many people are impressed with science because of the technical achievements of our society. We are impressed with modern inventions such as automobiles, televisions, spacecraft, computers, etc. Most people attribute those inventions mostly to advanced scientific knowledge, and the scientific community is highly esteemed as a result. Many people are not aware, however, that most inventions are produced through a system of trial and error more than exact scientific insight. Inventors and engineers may try and fail a hundred times to make an idea work before finally succeeding, just a little. Then they may try and fail a hundred times more before they succeed in improving an invention slightly. The public does not see the failures. They see the final results, the inventions that work well enough to sell.

Science is also a process of trial and error. Scientific theories are advanced and accepted, only to be found to be wrong and overturned later.

And the same human frailties and faults that exist among all people exist in the scientific community. There is the same politics, dishonesty, self-seeking, and self-deception among scientists as exists in any human community.

The scientific community trusts itself and its methods for finding truth. But God in the Bible teaches that man's ways and knowledge are not to be trusted (Psalm 146:3-4, Jeremiah 17:5-8). "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9, KJV). "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God...Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:1-7, KJV). "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22, KJV).

The Future of Atheism and Evolution

What does the future hold for the theory of evolution, and what is the future of atheism?

What is the relationship between evolution and atheism?

Atheism needs evolution, but evolution does not need atheism. One can believe there is a God and also believe that all species came into existence through evolution through natural forces only. Some believe exactly that. But that is not the dominant worldview that is driving the evolution agenda today.

Atheism has become the dominant culture in the western world. But this is likely to change in the next few years.

Right now, there is a marriage of convenience between evolution and atheism. Evolution gives atheism an explanation for life without a creator.

But atheism has a weakness. It has no viable explanation for the universe itself. Evolution is no help here.

There are Bible prophecies that show that near the end of this age before the return of Christ there will be supernatural signs and wonders worked by both true and false prophets (Matthew 24:23-25, Revelation 11:3-6, 13:11-15). At that time there will be a great religious deception. It will be hard for mankind to deny the existence of the supernatural then. I think there will not be many atheists when this occurs.

But the theory of evolution is not primarily an attack against belief in the existence of God and the supernatural realm. Evolution can be used by atheists to support their belief that there is no God, but primarily evolution is an attack against the authority of the Bible. And that challenge to the authority of the Bible will continue even when false prophets are working supernatural signs and wonders.

One can believe God exists and also believe that evolution is true. But you cannot believe the Bible and evolution.

According to the Bible, God created the ancestors of the plants and animals we see today in six days about 6,000 years ago. He may have made the existing species according to a similar genetic pattern as species that existed millions of years ago as far as Genesis is concerned, but it was still a separate creation. And man is not a product of evolution. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were created 6,000 years ago. Our ancestors did not evolve. The theory of evolution therefore is directly contrary to the authority of the Bible.

But false religion is itself contrary to the Bible. False religious teachers, who themselves may be sincere but are misled and deceived, teach doctrines contrary to the Bible. They may pay lip service to the Bible, but they do not believe what the Bible

actually says. Instead, they follow their traditions and opinions and twist selected scriptures from the Bible to fit their doctrines.

How do they do this? In many cases, they say that the Bible should not be taken literally, that it does not mean what it says. This is often done with the creation account in Genesis. They will tell you that the six days of creation are not six literal days, but indefinite periods of time that could have lasted millions of years. It is a subtle way of calling God a liar. And this pattern of changing any passage of scripture into allegory, metaphor, and symbolic language can be used to refute what the Bible clearly says about any major doctrine.

This is one reason why there are many churches with many different beliefs all claiming to get their beliefs from the Bible. Each group reads its beliefs INTO the Bible instead of believing what the Bible literally says.

Can false religion be compatible with the theory of evolution? Yes! Both are against the authority of the Bible. Both disbelieve what the Bible plainly says.

And the theory of evolution can be used by false religion to contradict a literal understanding of the Bible. It starts with Genesis. How you read Genesis sets the pattern for how you will read the rest of the Bible.

The theory of evolution can be used to contradict a literal understanding of Genesis. Once a person, thoroughly trained in the doctrine of evolution, reads Genesis thinking it is symbolic only and doesn't really mean what it plainly says, the pattern is set for the reader to read the rest of the Bible in the same attitude of doubt and disbelief. Then it simply becomes a matter of anyone interpreting the rest of the Bible to mean anything he wants it to mean. This opens the door for false religious teachers to teach false doctrines based on their personal or traditional interpretation of the Bible. Those teachers may be sincere, but deceived by the traditions they were raised in.

Thus, the theory of evolution can become a tool of false religion just as it is presently a tool of atheism. Evolution serves false religion as well as atheism because it weakens the authority of the Bible in the minds of those who read it allowing false teachers to contradict the Bible and get away with it.

The Bible can be a protection against false religious doctrines IF the reader is willing to believe and obey what it says. But if the reader is conditioned to think that God doesn't mean what He says and that anything in the Bible can be interpreted symbolically, then the door is open for the reader to believe the false interpretation of Bible scriptures by false religious teachers. And the theory of evolution opens that door by training people to believe that Genesis cannot be literally true.

Science in the Millennium

God is not against scientific investigation of the natural world. God created the laws of the universe and allows them to work predictably so men can discover those laws and control his environment to a degree. Also, the laws of nature that man can discover glorify God by showing His tremendous wisdom and creative power.

Science is the study of natural processes. There is nothing wrong with science limiting itself to the study of natural processes only. Science is not equipped to do anything else. But the science community should not assume on faith that natural processes are the only processes and then try to promote that faith in the name of science. Science should accept the fact that its limitation in studying natural processes is also a limitation on what processes science can study and what truths science can discover, and that there is truth that other fields of study can discover that are out of bounds for science, truth that is as legitimate and important, even more so, than any truth science can discover.

Bible prophecy shows that after Jesus Christ returns to the earth, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God (Isaiah 11:9). There will be no atheists at that time.

At that time, science can still be used to investigate the physical world. But science will know and accept its limitations. No scientist will promote the view that the physical world is all there is. Scientific knowledge will be secondary to and guided by revelation and teaching from God. It can be used to study repeatable processes in the laboratory, but will not be used to construct human invented theories that contradict God's revelation about the origins of life and the universe.

Conclusion

The vast universe and the design of the laws of the universe are evidence of a creator God who planned, designed, and created the universe. The creation is proof that God exists and has supreme power and intelligence.

The founding fathers of our country understood this. The founding document for our nation, the Declaration of Independence, states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights..." The leaders of our country knew that it was self-evident that men were created by a creator God. They did not think that the idea of God was as ridiculous as flying spaghetti monsters.

But we are not the same kind of people today. We have become consumed with the pursuit of pleasure and materialism and have denied the God who created us. Atheistic evolution is the atheist's explanation for a creation without a creator. Faith in evolution

makes it easier for the atheist to deny the existence of God. And denying the existence of God helps the atheist to feel free from any obligation to obey God's laws.

Evolution can never be proved by science because science will not look at both sides of the question of creation vs. evolution without bias, which is required for rational proof. It is an anti-religion, anti-God faith. It is a chosen belief system, chosen for subjective reasons, without physical proof. And this faith is a faith taught by government supported schools in the United States today. Materialism based on belief in evolution has become the dominant culture in the United States. Public education and mainstream media adhere to this faith. Those who voice opposition are marginalized.

God calls the atheist "fool" and lists the belief that there is no God among the general sins and unrighteousness of mankind. And atheistic evolution is among our national sins that are leading us to total ruin.

I quoted the Declaration of Independence, but I cut the sentence short. Here is the complete quote: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." As a nation, we are founded on the principle that it is God who has endowed human beings with the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But as a nation, we are abandoning that principle.

How ironic that at a time when we are denying the existence of God, whom the founders of this nation attributed as the giver of the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that we are soon to lose our lives, our liberties, and our opportunities to pursue happiness. Bible prophecy shows that that we will soon lose our lives and our freedom and be subjected to slavery and incredible suffering.

The Bible warns about a great time of trouble and punishment called the great tribulation, and Bible prophecy warns that this punishment will soon fall upon the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand for our sins. This great time of trouble is greater than any time of trouble and suffering in all human history, so great in fact that about 90% of our people will die and the remainder will suffer horribly in a great captivity and slavery.

The warning of this punishment and the details of the prophecies about it are the subject of the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER 7 - THE EZEKIEL WARNING

Introduction

Chapter one on the United States and Britain in Prophecy showed that the United States, Britain, Canada, and other English-speaking nations are among the lost ten tribes of Israel that were taken into captivity by ancient Assyria around 720 B.C. and that their punishment would last 2,520 years, or until around 1800 A.D. Since then, the prophecies and promises concerning the prosperity and power of the descendents of Joseph have been fulfilled in the English-speaking people of the world. That chapter also covered Bible prophecy indicating that in the last days knowledge would increase and men would run to and fro. Bible chronology shows that we are now near the end of 6,000 years of man's history, and the Bible shows that Christ will return to rule the earth for 1,000 years. Every indication therefore is that the return of Christ is near.

But it is not yet. Christ will not return in the next one, two, or three years. Some major events must occur first. These events will have a major impact on the entire world, but most particularly the United States, Great Britain, and other English-speaking nations around the world.

The Great Tribulation

The disciples asked Jesus what would be the sign of His coming and the end of this age. You can read the whole account of what Jesus said in Matthew 24:4-46. I want to draw your attention to one statement. In Matthew 24:21-22 Jesus said, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (KJV). Jesus said that there would a time of trouble (tribulation) greater than any time of trouble before, and it would be so bad, that unless the days were cut short, no flesh would be saved. To me this seems to indicate that the tribulation would be so bad that unless God intervened, man would destroy himself.

There is a parallel verse in the Old Testament that speaks of a day of trouble so great that none is like it. Notice Jeremiah 30:7: "Alas! for that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it: it *is* even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it" (KJV).

There cannot be two times of trouble greater than any other time of trouble. Jesus and Jeremiah must be referring to the same tribulation or time of trouble. But Jeremiah adds the information that it is JACOB's trouble. Jacob is Israel, particularly the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 32:27-28, Genesis 48:2-5). Notice what Jacob said about Ephraim and Manasseh. "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (Genesis 48:16, KJV). When the Bible says "Jacob's trouble", it is referring to the trouble of Ephraim and Manasseh in the end time just before the return of Christ. And I have shown in chapter one that Ephraim is Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and that Manasseh is the United States.

So prior to the return of Christ there will come upon the English-speaking nations of the world a time of trouble greater than any time of trouble in history. We will see as we go how great that time of trouble will be.

Old Testament prophecies indicate that at the time of the end when Christ returns to set up His Kingdom on the earth, all Israel, the 10 tribes as well as the Jews, will be gathered back to their original land in Palestine that God gave them when they came out of Egypt. However, the descriptions of this return to the land of Israel indicate that Israel will be returning from a scattered condition of captivity, not freedom and prosperity. God will rescue all Israel, including the United States, Britain, and the Jews, from the suffering and captivity of the great tribulation that Jesus talked about. Furthermore, these prophecies indicate that the suffering Israel goes through and their resulting scattered condition of captivity to enemy nations will occur because of God's punishment upon them for their sins. God will first punish our nations for our sins, then will rescue and regather the survivors at the time of the return of Christ. Notice the following scriptures.

"Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. And these *are* the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it: it *is* even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, *that* I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them. Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and

shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make *him* afraid. For I *am* with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished" (Jeremiah 30:2-11, KJV). This passage directly relates to the great tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble, which places the time frame just ahead of us but before the return of Christ. Notice that it is GOD that scatters Israel, and that God does this as a punishment to correct Israel, yet afterwards He will save them and bring them back from a condition of captivity.

"And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; After that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made *them* afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; Then shall they know that I *am* the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezekiel 39:23-29, KJV). This is talking about the "house of Israel," not just the Jews. It clearly says that God will send them into captivity for their unfaithfulness, as a punishment, but then will regather them FROM a condition of captivity at the time when He will pour out His Spirit on the house of Israel, so this must be in the next few years: the captivity, the rescue, and the conversion.

You can find other supporting scriptures that show that at the end time prior to the return of Christ all Israel, not just the Jews but the lost ten tribes also, will go into captivity as a punishment from God for their sins, but after they have suffered and been humbled Christ will rescue them and save them from their enemies and regather them into the land of Palestine, and also convert them. See Isaiah 11:11-12, Isaiah 60:10-12, Jeremiah 3:18, Jeremiah 16:14-18, Jeremiah 23:5-8, Jeremiah 30:15-18, Jeremiah 31:10-14, Jeremiah 46:27-28, Jeremiah 50:4-5, Ezekiel 28:25-26, Ezekiel 36:16-19 and 24-28, Ezekiel 37:15-23, and Ezekiel 39:23-29.

Why will Israel be punished?

The Blessings and Curses

When God established His covenant with ancient Israel after He brought them out of Egyptian slavery, He gave them his laws which lead to peace, safety, and happiness,

and He commanded Israel to obey Him. He told them that if they obeyed they would be blessed but if they did not obey God's law they would be cursed and God would punish them with grievous punishments. Israel agreed to the covenant and promised to obey God (Exodus 24:1-8). God pronounced a blessing and a curse. "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28, KJV).

Notice the blessings that would come upon Israel for obedience. "If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely" (Leviticus 26:3-5, KJV). "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe *and* to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed *shalt* thou *be* in the city, and blessed *shalt* thou *be* in the field. Blessed *shall be* the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed *shall be* thy basket and thy store. Blessed *shalt* thou *be* when thou comest in, and blessed *shalt* thou *be* when thou goest out" (Deuteronomy 28:1-6, KJV).

But if Israel did not obey there would be curses and punishments from God. "But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, *but* that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you" (Leviticus 26:14-17, KJV). There would be drought and famine. "And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass: And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits" (Leviticus 26:19-20, KJV). There would be disease epidemics, and Israel would be defeated by our enemies. "And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of *my* covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy" (Leviticus 26:25, KJV).

You can read the whole chapter of Deuteronomy 28 for a full description of God's curses and punishments for disobedience. These prophecies describe drought, famine, disease, conquest by enemy nations, and captivity as a result of disobedience to God's commands.

Many of these prophecies have been fulfilled, at least in part, in the punishments and captivities that came upon first the house of Israel and then also the house of Judah in ancient times. But they are also yet to be fulfilled in our time among the modern descendents of Israel including the American and British peoples.

God has prospered our English-speaking people these last two hundred years as probably no nations on earth have ever been prospered before, in spite of our sins. God has done this to fulfill the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because of Abraham's faith and obedience, and to fulfill the prophecies that the sons of Joseph would become a great nation and a great company of nations. But those promises have been kept and those prophecies have been fulfilled. God is not obligated to continue to bless us in spite of our sins and disobedience. The curses are about to go into effect once again, and more severely than ever.

God's role for Israel has always been for Israel to be a model nation that would show the other nations in the whole world how obedience to God's law leads to peace, prosperity, and happiness. This was true from the beginning. "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people" (Deuteronomy 4:5-6, KJV). But ancient Israel failed to be that role model, and our modern descendents of Israel have also failed to be a positive role model of morality for the rest of the world. Today, we are anything but a model of God's way of life.

Have we obeyed God? Based on how we live today, should we expect blessings or curses from God?

Using the United States as an example, if I wanted to catalogue our sins as a nation in detail, I could make this the longest chapter in this book. I think anyone with spiritual discernment can observe that we are not keeping God's commandments as a nation.

The vast majority violate God's Sabbath commandment by working or pursuing their own recreation and pleasure. Even among those who observe the weekly Sabbath, few observe God's annual sabbaths and the Feast of Tabernacles, which God instituted to help man understand God's plan and purpose for mankind. Instead, mainstream Christianity has borrowed customs from paganism, observing holidays like Christmas and Easter, which God commanded our forefathers not to do. As a nation we are consumed with a love of money and a love of pleasure. We make money and pleasure our god which we serve and worship rather than the true God who created us and blessed us. How much time do Americans, on average, spend watching TV and movies and playing games per day? How much time do we, on average, spend each day reading or studying the Bible? That comparison is just one measure of where our priorities are.

Within some mainstream churches, many use images and "holy pictures" as an aid to worship, which God in the Bible forbids.

Tens of millions of unborn children have been aborted for the sake of the convenience of the mothers or of society. Abortion advocates talk about the "right to choose" to justify this practice, but little is said about the unborn child's right to choose. The mother has had the opportunity to make many choices in her life, but for the sake of the convenience of the mother, every choice that the baby could ever make in his or her life is taken away. Despite the "pro-choice" label abortion advocates place on their position, abortion is NOT "pro-choice;" It is anti-choice because it robs the unborn child of every choice he or she could ever make. God has harsh words for those who have innocent blood on their hands, and you can't get more innocent than a baby who has never even had the opportunity to choose between right and wrong. Notice what God says in Jeremiah 2:34: "Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents: I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these" (KJV).

Our land is filled with violence, injustice, pornography, and immorality of every sort. Violence and illicit sex are staples of entertainment. Lying is common in the workplace and the home. Promises made by men cannot be trusted. Bible standards for marriage and family life are ignored and ridiculed. Schools at every level teach a philosophy and way of thinking that denies the existence of God. This society clearly is practicing Satan's "get" way of life of selfishness, greed, and dishonesty.

The taking of God's name in vain, using God's name carelessly as an expression of surprise or anger, is so common in TV and movies that it is hard now to even find a movie or TV show that doesn't have this expression of disrespect towards God in it, even among movies rated PG-13. Not only do screen writers write such dialog and actors perform it, but millions of people pay money to watch and listen to this. The actor who takes God's name in vain may do it only once, but the millions of people who watch it and listen to it with their VCRs and DVD players replay it and listen to it millions of times. Who is more guilty?

Our morality is sinking so low that many foreign nations want to try to keep our culture out of their nations because they realize that our entertainment and lifestyle is a corrupting influence on their own people and society.

Even most of those who consider themselves to be religious disobey God's commands in the Bible regarding how they should worship God, inventing their own customs or following the customs they were raised in rather than obeying what God commands in the Bible. So people substitute Sunday for the Sabbath, Christmas and Easter for God's holy days, and use holy pictures and statues as an aid to worship when God clearly commands His people not to follow such practices.

I could go on, but I think the point is made.

But God still intends to make our people, the modern descendents of ancient Israel, a role model for other nations to follow, an example of the right way of life. He will make Israel a role model in the beginning of the millennium. He will convert Israel and give them His Holy Spirit. But before we can receive His Spirit we need to repent. And as a loving mother or father will punish their children to teach them right from wrong for their own good, so God will use suffering to teach our nations a painful

lesson to bring us to repentance so we can be converted at the beginning of the millennium. "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee" (Deuteronomy 8:5, KJV). "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Hebrews 12:6-7, KJV).

The Responsibility of a Watchman

One of the two main points of God's law is, you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27, Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:29-31, Leviticus 19:18). One of the applications of this law of love is to warn someone who is headed for disaster but they don't know it. Proverbs 24:11-12 says, "If you forbear to deliver them that are drawn to death, and those that are ready to be slain; If you say, Behold, we knew it not; does not he that ponders the heart consider it? and he that keeps your soul, does not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?"

Ezekiel was a prophet sent by God with a message for the house of Israel (Ezekiel chapter 2 and Ezekiel 3:3-11). God told Ezekiel he was to be a watchman for the house of Israel with a responsibility to warn about a coming disaster, and that if Ezekiel failed to warn Israel, Israel's blood would be on Ezekiel's head! "And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous *man* doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous *man*, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul" (Ezekiel 3:16-21, KJV).

The rest of the book of Ezekiel shows the sins of Israel, and the punishment that is to come upon them if they do not repent.

Ezekiel was told that when God gave him a warning for Israel that He was about to punish them for their sins, if he failed to deliver the warning, Israel would still be punished for their sins, but their blood would be on Ezekiel's head. He would share the responsibility because he failed to warn Israel. But if Ezekiel delivered the warning message, if Israel did not repent, they would die for their sins but Ezekiel would not be guilty.

Furthermore, God extends this principle beyond just Ezekiel or anyone whom God makes a watchman to Israel, but even to a watchman for Israel whom God did not put into the position of watchman. Notice Ezekiel 33:1-6: "Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand" (KJV). Notice, in this case it is not God who makes the person the watchman, but the people. Nevertheless, even though God did not make him the watchman, he is a watchman nevertheless, and God holds him responsible for delivering the warning. Verses 7 through 9 then repeat what was said earlier, that God made Ezekiel a watchman and he was therefore responsible for delivering the warning God gave him for the people.

God gives the warning so that people can repent and escape the punishment. But what about someone who has led a sinful life for a long time? Is it too late for them? Are they going to be punished no matter what they do now because of all the evil they have done in the past? "Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins *be* upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:10-11, KJV). "Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; *If* the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live" (Ezekiel 33:14-16, KJV).

What about a righteous person who has lived righteously for a long time, and then turns to sin? "Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his *righteousness* in the day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the righteous, *that* he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it" (Ezekiel 33:12-13, KJV). "When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways" (Ezekiel 33:18-20, KJV).

If you love someone, and you see that they are headed towards disaster, but you have information that they don't have, information that can help them avoid the disaster if they act upon it, you will share that information. You will tell someone what you know, to help them, if you love them. You can't force someone to believe you or to act upon the information, but you can at least share it. That way, the person you warn has a chance. They might listen and heed the warning. But if they never hear the warning, if they never receive the information, they have no chance to escape.

This does not mean that a Christian should cram his religion down other people's throats. It does not mean that one should force or pressure someone who does not want to listen. But one can answer questions, even tactfully offer information, without trying to push. If the person wants to learn more, they will ask. If not, we don't have to pursue the subject any further. And a Christian can support the ordained ministry of the Church who offer the public information to warn the nation over TV, radio, and with magazines and booklets. Those who are willing to listen and heed may do so. Those who do not are not forced to.

The Ezekiel Warning

God sent Ezekiel specifically to "the house of Israel." "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me" (Ezekiel 3:17, KJV). See also Ezekiel 2:2 and 3:1-4. We know from the separate histories of Israel and Judah that the "house of Israel" and the "house of Judah" are two different houses (see Jeremiah 3:18, 5:11, 11:10, 13:11, 31:27 and 31, 33:14, Ezekiel 4:1-6, Zechariah 8:13, and Hebrews 8:8). The house of Judah is the Jews and the house of Israel is the ten tribes especially Ephraim and Manasseh, which are the English-speaking nations today.

Ezekiel was to warn the house of Israel of God's punishments to come if they did not repent of their sins. Does that warning apply today or only in Ezekiel's time? It could not primarily apply in Ezekiel's day because the vast majority of the house of Israel had already been conquered by their enemies and taken into captivity as punishment from God for their sins about one hundred years before Ezekiel's time! You can determine when Ezekiel received his vision in comparison to the captivity of Israel by comparing Ezekiel 1:1-3, which says that Ezekiel received the vision from God in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity with the chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel given in 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, and 2 Chronicles. See 2 Kings chapter 17 for the account of the conquest and captivity of the house of Israel, which occurred during the reign of Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah (2 Kings 18:1-3). Hezekiah was several generations before Jehoiachin.

Ezekiel's warnings apply to the house of Judah also (Ezekiel 4:6, Ezekiel 8:17). But the primary application of the warning is to the house of Israel. And in the book of Ezekiel,

the prophecies against Jerusalem apply to the house of Israel because a small number of Israelites from the ten tribes were in Jerusalem and because Jerusalem, as the former capital city of all Israel, can represent the house of Israel (Ezekiel 4:1-16).

The prophecies given to Ezekiel which are written in the book of Ezekiel for us today apply to the modern descendents of the house of Israel, namely the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other English-speaking countries, as well as several nations in Northwestern Europe who are descended from various tribes of Israel.

What are the sins of Israel?

The book of Ezekiel often describes the sins in a general sense, as rebellion against God's laws, disobedience, and wickedness (Ezekiel 5:5-7), and you can look at God's laws, the Ten Commandments, and compare them with the behavior of our peoples today to see what our sins are. There are also many other prophecies in other books of the Bible where God rebukes those who commit specific sins, and many of these apply to us today. But there are some sins that Ezekiel specifically mentions.

"Then say you, Thus said the Lord GOD, The city sheds blood in the middle of it, that her time may come, and makes idols against herself to defile herself. You are become guilty in your blood that you have shed; and have defiled yourself in your idols which you have made; and you have caused your days to draw near, and are come even to your years: therefore have I made you a reproach to the heathen, and a mocking to all countries" (Ezekiel 22:3-4).

"In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow. Thou hast despised mine holy things, and hast profaned my sabbaths. In thee are men that carry tales to shed blood: and in thee they eat upon the mountains: in the midst of thee they commit lewdness. In thee have they discovered their fathers' nakedness: in thee have they humbled her that was set apart for pollution. And one hath committed abomination with his neighbour's wife; and another hath lewdly defiled his daughter in law; and another in thee hath humbled his sister, his father's daughter. In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord GOD. Behold, therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made, and at thy blood which hath been in the midst of thee" (Ezekiel 22:7-13, KJV).

"As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter *also*, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols" (Ezekiel 20:39, KJV).

"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto her, Thou *art* the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. *There is* a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests have violated my law, and have

profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed *difference* between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst thereof *are* like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, *and* to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed them with untempered *morter*, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully" (Ezekiel 22:23-29, KJV).

"Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and madest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them, And tookest thy broidered garments, and coveredst them: and thou hast set mine oil and mine incense before them. My meat also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, *wherewith* I fed thee, thou hast even set it before them for a sweet savour: and *thus* it was, saith the Lord GOD. Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. *Is this* of thy whoredoms a small matter, That thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through *the fire* for them?" (Ezekiel 16:17-21, KJV).

What will be Israel's punishment?

Ezekiel and other books in the Bible indicate that God will punish our nations with drought, famine, disease epidemics, and death from war. We will be defeated by our enemies, invaded and conquered, taken captive, and scattered among the nations. The vast majority will die in the famine, disease, warfare, and captivity.

"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, And say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys; Behold, I, *even* I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain *men* before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars. In all your dwellingplaces the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD" (Ezekiel 6:1-7, KJV).

"Thus saith the Lord GOD; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot, and say, Alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. He that is far off shall die of the pestilence; and he that is near shall fall by the sword; and he that remaineth and is besieged shall die by the famine: thus will I accomplish my fury upon them" (Ezekiel 6:11-12, KJV).

"And I will scatter you among the heathen, and disperse you in the countries, and will consume your filthiness out of you" (Ezekiel 22:15).

The prophecies of Ezekiel indicate that one-third of our population will die in famine and disease epidemics, one-third will die in war, and one-third will be taken captive by enemy nations and many will die in captivity. "A third part of you shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the middle of you: and a third part shall fall by the sword round about you; and I will scatter a third part into all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them" (Ezekiel 5:12).

How many will be left in the end? According to the book of Amos, perhaps one-tenth will survive. "Hear you this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel. The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise: she is forsaken on her land; there is none to raise her up. For thus said the Lord GOD; The city that went out by a thousand shall leave an hundred, and that which went forth by an hundred shall leave ten, to the house of Israel" (Amos 5:1-3). It is not clear to me if this one-tenth refers to the whole population before the deaths caused by famine and war, or only to the third that goes into captivity. If the latter, then only about 3% of our population will survive! No wonder Jesus said this would be the greatest time of trouble ever!

Once the tribulation begins, how long will it last? There are scriptures that indicate that there will be a total time of three and one-half years from the beginning of the tribulation to the return of Christ (Daniel 12:6-7, Revelation 11:1-3, Revelation 12:6, Revelation 13:5).

If you read the whole book of Ezekiel, you will find not only warnings for Israel, but for other nations in the world also. You will also find warnings directed towards the ministry, who have not properly instructed and cared for their flocks. Not all the warnings about the sins of Israel and the world are in the book of Ezekiel, but many can be found in other prophetic books in the Bible. But the book of Ezekiel outlines and lays out basic principles about the sins of the world, Israel, and the ministry, and the punishments coming from God for these sins, and also the responsibility to warn those who need to repent and are about to be punished. It also sets the principle that those who have done evil can be forgiven if they repent and turn from the evil they have done and learn to do good.

One of the best ways to get a good feel about how God looks at Israel, and how God looks at everything, is to read the whole Bible. If you have never done this before, I recommend it. You can use a literal translation such as the King James Version or the New King James Version, start with the first verse in Genesis, and read from that point, little by little each day, till you read through Revelation. You will not understand everything you read, and you can keep a notebook for listing questions, but you will understand a great deal if you are willing to believe and obey what God says. Then over time, as you continue to read and study the Bible and believe and obey what God says, you will understand more and more.

The Church has the responsibility to deliver the Ezekiel warning message to the modern descendents of Israel today. We have the responsibility to tell the nations their sins, call

them to repentance, and warn our nations about God's punishments to come if they don't repent. Some who hear the message may heed, and many probably will not heed. Those who hear and heed may be spared. But if the Church does not do its part to warn the people, then the responsibility for that failure rests on us.

I find it interesting that the information that can be used to prove that the Bible is the word of God, that is, the seven thousand year plan of God and the prophecies and history that identify the English-speaking people as the tribes of Joseph, is also the same information needed to understand the responsibility to give a warning to Israel about the punishments to come. These two things come "bundled together." It is as if the proof of God's Word comes at a price. It carries with it a responsibility to put that knowledge to good use. It cannot be rightly used just to selfishly help one's own self only. It has to be used in God's service to help others also.

In other words, as soon as God gives us the knowledge that the Bible is God's word, He also gives us a job to do: warn Israel. He gives the gift, and at the same time tells us how to use it. But also, with the responsibility, God gives the gift we need to be able to fulfill it. Without the knowledge of who Israel is, we would not know who to warn. Without the knowledge of the seven thousand year plan of God, we would not know when to warn.

I think that those who have any spiritual discernment at all can see that our nations are declining in moral values. But at the same time, we are becoming weaker and we are losing our dominance and our strength as compared with other nations. I am sure that many do not see this and perhaps think that the United States will remain the strongest, richest, most powerful nation in the world for another hundred years or more. Still others may see that we will not remain dominant for very long, but they put their faith in a kind of collective world peace based on democracy and the enlightened good behavior of all nations on earth.

But I do not think that is the reality. The world has been at relative peace for the last sixty years (by relative peace I mean an absence of a world war of the scope of World War I or World War II), but it has been because of the economic and military strength of the United States and its allies as a force for peace, not the good will of all nations on earth. And now, that strength is declining.

The United States has declined and is declining at such a rate that it has reached a point that any objective, informed observer can tell we are in trouble, even without recourse to Bible prophecy. Our recent history and current affairs tells the story. We helped to win World War II because of our enormous industrial capacity and capital resources. We defeated the Japanese and German forces not because our soldiers were braver or our officers more skillful in the military arts, but because we out-built our enemies and we had superior technology. No other nation even had the scientific and industrial resources to build the atomic bomb at that time, although several nations had considered it and even started on the project. But since that time, we have been losing blue collar jobs and our industrial base to other nations continuously, and in the last decade we have also begun to lose white collar jobs and our technological and scientific superiority to other nations. In the modern world, information handling jobs can be done anyplace

in the world over computer networks. Computer programming and engineering jobs are just two examples of jobs that American workers have been losing to overseas workers who do the same work for less pay.

I think most economists agree that our balance-of-payments deficit cannot continue to grow indefinitely at an ever-increasing pace, but there is no painless solution in sight. Agreement breaks down when speculation turns to what will actually happen, when it will happen, and how it will happen, but I think most experts agree that something has to happen sooner or later.

God taught ancient Israel to trust Him for their protection. As a nation today, the United States trusts in its military and in its allies for its protection, not God. As a nation our military obligations are far extended, yet recruitment is not providing the manpower in sufficient numbers for the military that this nation relies on. At the same time our relationships with our allies are deteriorating.

Our population is aging, and there is a looming crisis as more "baby boomers" reach retirement age and more and more money is required to take care of them while proportionately fewer younger workers are earning money and paying taxes. And as the population ages, medical science and technology continue to provide more treatments, but these treatments come at an ever-increasing price, and medical care is consuming a greater and greater proportion of our earnings.

At the same time, there is a potential world-wide problem growing out of the convergence of two and possibly three trends. One, this world's economy is dependent on oil, and there is only a limited amount of available oil in the earth, and the world is approaching a point where it will be more and more difficult to find and extract more oil. Experts do not agree on how much oil is left, but all agree it is limited, and the supply is running down. There will come a time when it is no longer possible to extract the amount of oil this world's economy needs each year. Two, the rate of consumption of oil is rapidly increasing, not decreasing, year by year. This puts the nations of this earth on a collision course with the inevitable reality that a point will soon be reached when there is not enough oil to go around. At that point, the nations that control the oil will survive and the economies of the nations that cannot obtain oil will collapse, or be greatly reduced. There may be alternatives to oil, such as converting coal into oil or gasoline, but that is expensive and takes time to gear up, and sudden disruptions in the supply of oil can still hurt any nation's economy. And third, nuclear technology and the ability of nations to make nuclear weapons as well as the delivery vehicles to use them is spreading.

And while the whole world, and especially the most powerful nation on earth, the United States, is facing unprecedented problems and dangers, I think it should be apparent to those with a sense of the times we live in that there is a decline in the quality of leadership in the United States at every level of government and business. It is more and more difficult to find examples of the kind of integrity, strong competence, diligence, and effectiveness needed to solve problems and get jobs done among those in leadership positions. Our response to hurricane Katrina is one example. Our leaders are making too many mistakes and are not working effectively and cooperatively with

each other. The decline in moral values, in family stability, in respect for authority, in discipline, in basic honesty is all taking a toll. I don't think we are producing the caliber of leaders we used to. It may be that what is prophesied in Isaiah 3:1-5, where God says He will take away the "mighty man," the "honorable man," and the "counselor," is being fulfilled today.

At the same time, our internal divisions hinder our efforts to solve our problems. We are not united as a nation. We were mostly united during World War II, but since then we have become one of the most divided nations on earth. Jesus Christ said that a house divided cannot stand (Luke 11:17). We are divided Democrat vs. Republican, liberal vs. conservative, rich vs. the poor, religious vs. the secular, and by race. The predominance of negative campaign ads shows how divided we have become. Politicians prefer to belittle and attack their opponents rather than propose solutions to our problems.

So at a time when we are about to face our greatest dangers and challenges, we seem to be equipped with less and less wisdom and skill to deal with them. That is a very dangerous combination. We are still the richest, most powerful nation on earth, but we are living off of the sacrifices and accomplishments of generations past who paid the price to build this country, and I don't think today's generation is the same sort. That cannot last indefinitely.

God has blessed this nation far more than we ever deserved, but we have not sufficiently appreciated what God has done for us, nor have we obeyed and acknowledged the God who blessed us, and now God is taking our blessings away.

The Ezekiel warning is two-fold. Firstly, it is a warning message for our time today to the modern descendents of the house of Israel, especially the United States, Britain, and Canada, and also a warning to the Jews. But secondly, it is a warning to the Church that they better DELIVER the warning to Israel. Notice that in Ezekiel 33:1-6, Ezekiel is told to tell the PEOPLE about the watchman's responsibility. In other words, the warning about the responsibility of the watchman to warn is not just for Ezekiel. It is also for the people. The warning about the responsibility to warn is as much a part of the Ezekiel warning as the warning to repent of our sins. See also Isaiah 58:1. The Church, plus those who learn the truth from the Church and from the Bible, have that responsibility today.

This is the meaning of the Ezekiel warning.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

God wants to give every man and woman eternal life in His kingdom, a life filled with exciting and rewarding accomplishment in ruling this universe forever, a life filled with joy and happiness. But for that eternal life to be happy, we must cooperate with each other as a team and as a family and love each other and submit to God's rule forever. God will not have rebels in His kingdom who will cause trouble and misery for themselves and others for all eternity.

So before God will give any person eternal life, God must first train and test that person in His way of life, the way of give, of love, of outgoing concern for the good of others, and of believing, trusting, and obeying God. That way of life is defined by God's spiritual law. And God has designed and implemented a plan for man's salvation that will give every person who has ever lived an opportunity to learn that way of life. But each of us must make his or her choice.

Those who choose to believe and obey God and follow His instructions will, after a physical life of training, practice, and testing in God's law and way of life, be given eternal life in God's kingdom. Those who reject that opportunity will pay the penalty of eternal death and will never be in that kingdom. That choice is yours and mine.

This physical life is the testing and training ground. We are near the end of the 6,000 year age of man, an age in which man is permitted to rule himself under Satan's influence. This is a time when God is allowing man to write a lesson in history of death, destruction, and suffering, which come as a result of sin. God will soon send Jesus Christ back to this earth to establish God's government over the earth and teach mankind obedience to God's law, which will result in peace and happiness all over the earth for 1,000 years. Mankind will be able to compare the history of the suffering in the 6,000 year age of man with the 1,000 year period under the rule of the kingdom of God, and mankind will be able to see that God's way is best.

The United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are all descended from Joseph, one of the sons of Jacob, and are part of Israel. In the millennium, God will establish Israel as the model nation to set the right example for the rest of the nations of the earth to follow, but in order for that to happen, we must repent of our sinful ways and turn to God and obedience to His commandments. To prepare us and bring us to repentance, God will punish our nations in the great tribulation just prior to the return of Christ. That punishment is just ahead, if we don't repent. But even if our nations do not repent, there is hope for the individual who repents that God may spare him from the worst of the punishment and protect him during the tribulation.

To repent we need to turn to the God of the Bible, learn to live by every word of God, believe what God says, and obey His commandments. We have to keep the weekly Sabbath from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset and learn to keep the annual holy days as God commands. We have to give up our idols, both the images some use as an aid to worship and our love of the pleasures of this life more than God. We have to put God first and strive to believe and obey all that He says in the Bible.

I saw in a Christian website a rhetorical question which asked in effect, "If you had to choose the most important verse in the Bible, could you choose anything else but John 3:16?" John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

That is certainly an important verse, but it leaves out God's instructions concerning our responsibility to believe and obey Him. God gave mankind the Bible to teach us what we need to know and do. God expresses His love towards us, not just by the gift of the sacrifice of His Son, but by teaching us the way we should live that will bring every benefit that is good for us. God shows His love for us by commanding us to obey Him and by correcting and punishing us for our good when we do not obey Him.

We must also remember that Christ had to die for us because God does not compromise with sin. The penalty for sin is death, and God requires that the penalty be paid. Christ had to die to pay that penalty for us, or we could not be saved. This certainly shows God's love for us, but it also shows the seriousness of sin.

The Bible teaches us not only that God loves us, but how we should respond to that love. God teaches us that we must learn to love God, and we express love towards God by our obedience to His commandments. God knows what is best for us, and He wants us to trust and believe Him with the kind of faith that leads to obedience.

The whole Bible is important, but if I had to pick one verse that is the most important verse and summarizes everything, I would choose the verse that starts out, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:..." That verse is Ecclesiastes 12:13.

Here is the whole verse: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13, KJV). The King James Version shows the word "duty" in italics, indicating it is not in the original text. So the original text would say, "this is the whole of man." And verse 14: "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil" (KJV).