

# TODAY'S THOUGHTS



VOLUME 2

WILLIAM E. WRIGHT



# Today's Thoughts

**Volume 2**  
Second Edition

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William E. Wright

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Doctrinal Ministries  
Houston, Texas

Second Edition  
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**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**

**Cover Photo: A sleepy Barred Owl, Refugio, Texas**

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## Preface

Just before Christmas, 2021, I decided to write devotionals and email them to family members. I got the idea from a friend of mine from church, Robert Sonnet, who did this. Robert is deceased. He was a strong believer in Jesus Christ. Over time my email list has expanded to additional family members and a few of their friends have also been added.

My daughter and grandsons surprised me for my birthday by compiling the first five and one-half months of devotionals into book form. She labeled the book as "Volume 1." So this book is Volume 2. She had enough copies printed for the members of the list. A couple of weeks after the birthday surprise, another member of the list suggested I put these devotionals into book form. This had not been my original intention.

These devotionals are written for believers in Jesus Christ. By believer I mean people who have obeyed the commands of the Bible such as John 3:16, "For God so (*in this way*) loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (The phrase in Italics are my understanding of the verse.)

The Apostle Paul was asked by the jailer in Philippi, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul's answer in Acts 16:31 was "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." Every person born into this world is born as a sinner. There is no way that a person can do enough good works to be able to live in the presence of God forever.

As Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." For anyone reading this book who has not trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and for eternal life, my invitation is to do so now.

A person once commented to me that "The Bible can be interpreted in many ways." What he should have said is, "The Bible is interpreted in many ways." Much of the Bible was actually written to correct people's misconceptions about God and about misunderstandings of what the writers of Scriptures had previously written.

My approach to the Bible follows a normal literal interpretation. By normal literal interpretation, I understand that there are figures of speech in the Bible that must be understood in the idiom of the time when they were written. When Jesus said, "I am the door ...," I don't expect that He had hinges attached to his back. By normal literal interpretation I am seeking to understand what the human author was trying to convey to his readers, and also how his original readers would have understood what was written. I also believe that the Holy Spirit oversaw what the writers of Scripture wrote, so that what we have in the Bible is the message that God wants us to know.

Since the Bible is interpreted in many ways, I don't find there to be a majority opinion for understanding any portion of Scripture. Every interpretation turns out to be a minority opinion. I don't have all the answers. I am still learning. I pray that my understanding is correct, but at times in the past I have changed my understanding of some of the Scriptures. The Roman church interprets the Bible but adds the traditions of the fathers. A lot of Bible interpretation still retains vestiges of the former teachings of the Roman church. This includes Reformed or Calvinist and Arminian theology. The Eastern churches split from the Roman church and have their own interpretations. The Pentecostals and Charismatics also have varying interpretations. My understanding is admittedly a minority viewpoint. As you read these devotionals, you will find my understanding follows two principal theological viewpoints.

First, from the standpoint of salvation, I follow what is known as "Free Grace,"

in contrast to Arminian and Reformed/Calvinist theology. Free Grace is summed up with the phrase that salvation is “by faith alone in Christ alone.” But the phrase is used by others outside of the Free Grace camp. From the Bible Eph. 2:8-9 expresses the Free Grace view: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” We can do nothing to earn or deserve our salvation. I believed the gospel message that Jesus Christ died for my sins.

When I believed, God saved me. He gave me forgiveness of my sins and eternal life. Yet most gospel presentations include an element of works along with faith in order for a person to be saved. Simple faith is not enough. Salvation requires that a person does some work along with believing or after believing he must demonstrate his faith by works. But the Bible says all we need to do is believe. Acts 16:31. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”

Second, from the standpoint of prophecy, I hold to a Pre-millennial, Pre-Tribulational understanding of the prophecies in the Bible. This also would involve an understanding of the Bible from a Dispensational viewpoint as opposed to Covenant Theology.

In these devotionals I try not to get too technical or too detailed. Each day’s devotional runs about 700 words. It has to fit on one page. Understanding some Bible verses does require going into more depth than others. My discussion does not cover every issue involved, but I do try to give enough information so that the reader can know why I understand the passage as I do.

I spend a lot of time discussing the context of the verses and what the Bible author is trying to say. I ask myself what does this mean to me and this is the devotional part. Most of the time I write this in the first person. Each of us will have different experiences each day. We need a framework of Biblical thinking in our minds from which to interact with whatever comes our way. Each of our applications will be different because the situations we face differ.

To answer a question that I have been asked, “How did you choose these verses for the subject of these devotionals? These are verses that had significant meaning to me. They were important enough that I have memorized the verses. However, there are a few of these passages that I have not yet memorized.

What about the birds and other photos? When my daughter had Volume 1 printed she included some special bird photos that I had sent to her. I have continued her idea. Where a devotional did not fill a page, I added a photo. I have taken all of these photos with my camera as I have enjoyed being outside and looking for birds and God’s other creations.

## Memorizing Scripture

In 2011 my wife and I were on a road trip to south Texas. We decided to see how well we could do quoting Bible verses to each other that we had memorized. I was shocked at the number of verses that I had memorized in the past, and forgotten. Of course, when I was growing up in Sunday School and in Vacation Bible School, we always had memory verses. Then following the Billy Graham Crusade in Houston in 1953, I was introduced to the Topical Memory System produced by The Navigators. I spent a few years seriously trying to memorize Bible verses. Retaining verses I had already memorized required constant review. I had not developed a systematic review procedure. Then there were time pressures and the need to study in school and college. I finally put the verse packs away. But in 2011 when I realized how many Bible verses I no longer could quote from memory, I started memorizing again. I have continued to do so.

Why memorize Scripture? Psa. 119:11 gives a reason. "Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You." Moses commanded the children of Israel in Deut. 6:6, "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart." Memorizing Bible verses is a way to obey this command.

There are now numerous phone apps available to help memorizing Scripture. I could not find one that I liked in a Bible translation that I wanted to use. Then one day my wife and I had lunch with one of the missionaries we support. He recommended Verse Locker® developed by Scripture Memory Fellowship. After looking at it, I found that it works well. Users can choose from most major Bible translations. I have used it now for several years.

One helpful feature of Verse Locker® is that the verses can be arranged into collections. This is in line with The Navigators' idea of memorizing verses topically. One of the first verses I memorized under the Navigators Topical Memory System was on the topic of "Assurance of Salvation." The Scripture was 1 John 5:11-12. John 3:16 would fit under several topics, but "Salvation" would be a key one.

I have also found that when I am memorizing a verse or reviewing a previously memorized verse that I also start to better understand what the verse means. Memorizing Bible verses is a way to obey the commands to meditate on God's word.

But I also still use individual memory cards. Whether you do it with a phone app or using the old fashioned paper card method, here are some tips that help me.

1. I like to memorize multiple verses at a time, typically three on each card. I have one card with nine verses, Psa. 136:1-9. Since Phil. 4:13 was one of the first verses I memorized under The Navigators' TMS, I find it easy to remember. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." But a verse I memorized later like Nahum 1:7, I have a tougher time recalling it. "The LORD *is* good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him." My wife does better remembering that one than I do. When I have forgotten it, I ask her, and she quotes it readily. It takes more work to memorize three verses than one short verse. So I think the added work to memorize three verses helps with the retention. Also memorizing three verses at a time gives a better feel for the context. To what do the "all things" of Phil. 4:13 refer? I now have Phil 4:11-13 on one memory card and the context helps me understand what Paul means by "all things." It doesn't mean that I can still hike the Windows Trail at Big Bend National Park to see the Colima Warbler as I once did when I was forty years younger. But it does mean that through Christ's help I can handle any situation in life that comes my way. As Paul wrote, "to be abased or to be abound, ... to be full or to be hungry." Christ strengthens me so I can handle any situation I face in life.

2. I try to work on memory verses every day. The Navigators idea was that we do a lot of waiting for appointments or other things. Just pull out your memory pack and work on a verse. I do a lot of driving. If traffic permits, I can work on verses while driving. Verse Locker® will read the verses out loud and using BlueTooth I can hear them through the car radio. I also try to walk every day. That is the time I really use to work on verses. Instead of counting sheep trying to fall asleep, I will review the verses I worked on earlier in the day. That keeps me from fretting over the problems of the day that would keep me awake longer.
3. I buy business card stock from an office supply store in 8-1/2"x11" sheets. I copy verses from a Bible text on my computer, paste into a word processor. Then print out ten business cards of verses per sheet to memorize.
4. When memorizing a verse or a group of verses, I start at the end of the verse and work my way forward memorizing one clause or sentence at a time. When I used to start at the first of the passage, the end of the passage did not get as repeated as often. Now the end of the passage gets the most attention. If I can remember how the verse I have memorized starts, then the rest of the passage follows easily.
5. How do I choose verses to memorize? Initially, I just re-learned some of the old verses I learned growing up and were in The Navigators verse packs. Now when I hear a good verse in one of my pastor's messages, I will add it to the list of verses to be memorized. I still have a bunch to learn. Sometimes a pastor will recommend a verse for memorizing. I have a long list of potential memory verses that Dr. Robert L. Dean has recommended to his congregation.
6. I typically carry 16 verse cards in my memory pack, although at times the number may vary. I work on each card until I can repeat it correctly without pause. Then move to the next card. After a week or two, I can usually quote a verse without prompting or looking at the card. Then I move it out of the pack and replace it with another card.
7. My retention may be improving. The last time around, it took me about 18 months to work my way through all the previously memorized verse cards. Previously, it had taken two to three years.
8. My wife takes a less formalized approach. She chooses a verse, a chapter, or section of Scripture that she wants to memorize. She will make a photocopy of the Bible page with the passage. She carries that in a pocket or her purse and can work on it when time permits.
9. In real estate people talk about three important things: Location, Location, Location. When pastors teach the Bible, they often emphasize Context, Context, Context. So with memorizing the Bible, it is important to Review, Review, Review.
10. Have a partner who will listen to you quoting a verse and correct any mistakes you make. As The Navigators taught, strive for word for word accuracy. The Acronym they used was **At** one sitting, **C**orrectly **Q**uoted, **U**nassisted, **I**ncluding **R**eferences, **E**liminating **D**oubt (**ACQUIRED**)..

You can start with one verse at a time. Work at your own pace. A friend of mine does this and will review the verse daily for a month to be sure it is learned well, then move to another verse.

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Gen. 1:1-2. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Thousands of pages have been written to describe what is happening in these verses. I will state my understanding and why I think it is correct. But first, Gen. 1-11 must be understood in a literal sense. These eleven chapters tell us how this world ("the heavens and the earth") began. It tells us the origin of sin and why we need a Savior. We also see God as a judge of sin and evil. Without these, the rest of the Bible loses its significance. My understanding of the first two verses in Genesis is the common understanding among Christians up to about 200 years ago.

When were angels created? The Bible doesn't tell us. But Job 38:4-7 says, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? ... When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy?" In Gen. 1:1 human beings had not been created or any animals or plants of any kind. The "morning stars" and "sons of God" could only refer to angels. That is also the way many people in the past understood these verses in Job. The angels shouted for joy because God created the earth for what I call a playground for the angels.

God created "the heavens and earth" out of nothing. This is a unique idea. Whether it is the old Greek and Roman myths or the thinking of modern scientists, they have this world arising out of something that previously existed. Today we are told "once upon a time, like 13.8 billion years ago, there was a big bang." They all assume that matter and energy have always existed. But even from a scientific standpoint this is impossible. If matter and energy had always existed the laws of thermodynamics tell us that all the matter and energy in this world would have long ago cooled down to a gray inert blob at a temperature of absolute zero.

The ancient Hebrew language had a limited vocabulary. In Gen. 1 all the verses from verse 2 through verse 31 begin with the same word, a conjunction. Technically, verses 3 through 31 are said to begin with the conjunction "waw" with a consecutive structure. So most of the verses in English begin with the word "then." This happened and then this happened followed by this happening. But verse 2 begins with a "waw" disjunctive forming a break with God's creation in verse 1. The world in Gen. 1:2 is not the world God created in Gen. 1:1. Something happened.

The way the earth is described in Gen. 1:2, "without form and void" and "darkness," are words indicating a judgment. I take it that sometime before Gen. 1:1 God created angels. He then created the heavens and the earth for angels. Satan fell and one-third of the angels followed him. God judged Satan and the fallen angels, but has not yet executed the judgment. The execution of this judgment will take place as it says in Revelation when the devil and the fallen angels will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10). God destroyed this first "heavens and earth" of Gen. 1:1 leaving a dark mass of matter and water. There is no physical evidence of this former heavens and earth that we can see or discover. In Gen. 1:3-28, God completely remakes the heavens and the earth.

This is the "Young Earth Gap Interpretation" of Gen. 1:1-2 and not the same as what is called the "Gap Theory." The Gap Theory was man's attempt in the 1800s to rethink Gen. 1-11 in terms of the atheistic ideas of modern science and the explanation of science as to how we got here. The remaking of the heavens and the earth in Gen. 1:3-28 occurred between 6,000 and 8,000 years ago.

Gen. 1:1-5. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that *it* was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

I am repeating the first two verses in Genesis to clarify a couple of questions I have received. I called the original creation of "the heavens and the earth" a "playground" for the angels. I did this in a sense of levity, and not in a sense of seriousness. As the Job passage suggests, I think that the original creation of "the heavens and the earth" was for the angels. In the same way that Adam and Eve were able to have fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden, God will also live with us in the new heaven and a new earth of Rev. 21:1ff. I think that God was dwelling with the angels in the original heavens and earth. God created the angels and gave them their own home.

In the mid-1800s when Lyell and Darwin came along and started back-dating the age of the earth, Christians mistakenly compromised the Biblical text by placing dinosaurs, a pre-creation race of mankind and animals and the geological ages in the gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2. This is known as the Gap Theory. In 1960 Dr. Henry Morris and Dr. John Whitcomb published their premier book, *The Genesis Flood*. This book clearly disproves the Gap Theory. The Young Earth Gap Interpretation (YEGI) which I first heard in 2005 and 2006 from two different Bible teachers, rang a bell with me. It follows the Hebrew text of the Bible, and does not compromise the Bible's account of creation with the false ideas of atheistic scientists.

YEGI does not disagree with what the various creation ministries teach that there was no death before Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve sinned. Angels do not die and never did die. God spoke our present world into shape in six literal 24 hour days between 6,000 and 8,000 years ago.

The six days of Gen. 1 follow a pattern. "Then God said ..." and God created or made something. God looks at what He has made and says it "is good." He is not saying that it is morally good, but that He had achieved His purpose and plan. I often build models of trains or buildings. After I build a model, if I don't like the way it looks, I do it again. If I like it, I consider it good and move on to the next project. In Gen. 2:18, "God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone.'" If the word "good" in Gen. 1-2 is used in the sense of morally good, then celibacy among men (or women) would also be morally wrong. Of course, sin had not yet entered the world in Gen. 1-2 and the word "good" can have moral connotations. But moral good does not fit the usage in Gen. 1-2. Satan and his cadre of fallen angels (we call demons) have already fallen and God had judged them. Their judgment, however, is yet to be executed.

How can there be light if there is no sun, moon or stars? 1 John 1:5 tells us that "God is light, and in Him there is not darkness at all." Rev. 21:23 says of the New Jerusalem, "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light."

"Then God said." Thinking of God speaking reminds me of Isa. 55:11. "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." What God has spoken, I need to know. I need to do what God says. John 1:1 calls Jesus the Word. John 1:3, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." God said, and the result is that we are here.

Gen. 1:6-13. Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. "Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament from the waters which *were* above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day. And God called the dry *land* Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that *it was* good. Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed, *and* the fruit tree *that* yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed *is* in itself, on the earth"; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed according to its kind, and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed *is* in itself according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good. So the evening and the morning were the third day.

The statements for each day follows a similar format. Here is the pattern.

- 1). God speaks.
- 2). He commands that something be made or created.
- 3). On many of the days the text says, "and it was so." God's command is obeyed. When God commands, everything in the world obeys Him, except for the fallen angels and for human beings who follow the example of Satan and then of Adam and Eve.
- 3). God looks at what He has done and says "it is good."
- 4). God may name what He has made.
- 5). Each day is numbered and the days are defined as including "the evening and the morning." A straight forward understanding of the text is that these are literal days.

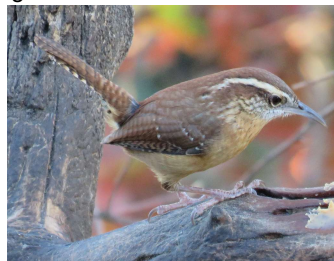
The first three days make the earth productive. The second three days place living creatures and mankind on the earth.

The challenge in verse 6 is what does the text mean by "firmament"? When I was a young boy, I had no idea what "a firmament" was. Fortunately, God gives the "firmament" a name in verse 8, "Heaven." Paul also helps us in 2 Cor. 12:2 when he says he knows a man in Christ who was "caught up to the third heaven." The "third heaven," is where God is. The "firmament" is the earth's atmosphere. Everything in between is the second heaven. So when God created the heavens (plural) in verse 1, this probably refers to the first and second heaven.

So what is this stuff about the waters "under the firmament" and the waters "above the firmament"? Since no one around has ever seen this, we only have this text from the viewpoint of the eye witness, God. This seems to say that the earth was wrapped in a band of water, like the white of an egg. The yolk of the egg being the earth and its atmosphere. The genealogies of Gen. 5 tell us that life spans often ran over 900 years. The earth at this time was very different than our present earth. Apparently, all of animal and human life were vegetarians until the time of Noah's worldwide flood. In Gen. 9:3-5 God gives us the right to eat meat.

In today's passage God separates the continent or continents and the seas. He also provides plant life with it fruit and seed as food for the life He will make in the last three days of creation week.

God is following His plan which He established before Gen. 1:1. Nothing that has happened was a surprise to God. I can only marvel that God has allowed me to be a part of His plan.



Carolina Wren, Lake of the Hills, Texas

Gen 1:14-19. Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. *He made* the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that *it was good*. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

What was the light that God made on the first day? Did God establish the physics of light only or was the world illuminated by God's divine light? Of course, the answer could be "Yes and yes." Probably the physical laws that govern our universe were created in Gen. 1:1. The light of Gen. 1:3 could then be God's divine light or maybe the universe was still dark waiting for light sources to be made on the fourth day. I hope everyone has had experiences like I have of being outside at night far from any city or man made lights. The moon and the stars of the night appear in all their brilliance and beauty and are not washed out by the lights of urban areas.

In Gen. 15:5 God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as uncountable as the stars. Abraham did not have to worry about light pollution that we have today. God has given us a marvelous world in which to live. He also has promised "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1) in Eternity which will be beyond imagination. As Psa. 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork."

How do we reconcile the seven days of Gen. 1 with the billions of years it takes the light of some stars to reach the earth? Scientists who leave God out of the picture use mathematical equations to come up with the billions of years. But they also have to throw in a couple of humongous fudge factors to make their equations work. The fudge factors say that most of the universe consists of dark matter and dark energy which we cannot see and cannot measure. The only way we can know they exist is because they make the equations work.

The creation ministries have also addressed this question. Two books I have read are the classic *Starlight and Time* written by Dr. Russell Humphries in 1994; and *Starlight, Time and the New Physics* by Dr. John Hartnett in 2007. We still have much to learn in this area. A statement repeated multiple times in Isaiah and Jeremiah sets the pattern for the Humphries/Hartnett analyses. For example, Isa. 51:13. "And you forget the LORD your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens And laid the foundations of the earth."

Reading their books, I see the stretching "out of the heavens" like the operation of a "white hole" (the opposite of a black hole). During the six days God instantaneously stretched out the whole universe from the earth. Using Einstein's Theories of General and Special Relativity and the related equations, Dr. Hartnett demonstrates that the passage of time on the earth is significantly slowed compared to that of the surrounding universe which is being stretched out and in which the passage of time was accelerated. Dr. Hartnett does not need to use the dark matter and dark energy fudge factors in his equations. Sixty-two years ago, fresh out of engineering school, I probably could have followed Dr. Hartnett's equations he has in his appendix.

Like a haunted house with ghosts is a universe filled with dark matter and energy. I don't have all the answers, but I prefer to believe what God has told us, and not to accept the guesses that leave God out. All these other explanations have problems and issues. "Since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, ... even His eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20).

Gen. 1:20-25. Then God said, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens." So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." So the evening and the morning were the fifth day. Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, *each* according to its kind"; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good.

On the fifth day God made birds and everything that lives in the sea: mammals like whales and dolphins, fish, crustaceans, and all other non-plant aquatic life. "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures and let birds fly above the earth." Evolution tells us that fish evolved into reptiles and then reptiles into birds. But reptiles sound like "everything that creeps on the earth in verse 25. So the Bible gives us a different order.

Those who try to superimpose evolution on God's account of creation in Gen. 1 have a problem. Fifty plus years ago when I tried to teach my children the Gap Theory, I realized it wouldn't work. So I quit in the middle of the discussion. It wasn't until I attended a conference presented by one of the creation ministries that I began to understand what God wants us to know about origins.

"So God created great sea creatures ..." God through Moses mentions these "great sea creatures" to differentiate God's truth from all the false cosmogonies (a word meaning the history and development of the origin of the universe) of the pagan people living in the world at that time. They worshiped the dragons, dinosaurs, and other great sea creatures. A lot of the other verses in Gen. 1 do the same thing. So there are some people who falsely say that in Genesis Moses was just spinning his own tale of how the world began taking his ideas from the pagan myths. Actually, it was the other way around. The old myths are distortions of the Genesis account of God's creation.

"Be fruitful and multiply." God made life in this world quite different from that of the angels. Angels do not procreate. God created each angel individually. Angels also do not die.

When Adam sinned, his condemnation was passed on to the entire human race that descends from him. Therefore Jesus, a perfect man, without a human father, could die for every person. But this is not so for fallen angels. The death of one perfect angel could not save any of the third of angels who followed Satan.

So when James 2:19 says, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble." They know what is coming to them, so they tremble. Jesus did not die for the angels. God will give salvation to every human person who believes in Jesus Christ.

"Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind." "Kind" does not refer to species. It is a broader reference probably at the genus or family level. Micro-evolution can and does occur within these kinds that God made. Macro-evolution in which some reptilian creature turned its scales into feathers and sprouted wings and started to fly like a bird never happened. The hummingbird I saw yesterday has many "cousins" among all the species of hummingbirds.

The Bible gives us God's perspective and plan from the creation of the world to the provision of a New Heaven and a New Earth at the end of Revelation. God wants me to learn more about Him.

Gen. 1:26-31. Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, 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 He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "See, I have given you every herb *that* yields seed which *is* on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. "Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which *there is* life, *I have given* every green herb for food"; and it was so. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was* very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

"Let us make man in our image." ... "So God created man in His own image." We also must consider Gen. 2:7, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Do we have one creation account in Gen. 1 and a second account, perhaps by a different author, in Gen 2? No, we do not have two different accounts. The New Testament confirms that Moses wrote Genesis. This is simply a common Hebrew narrative style: To tell a story and then to repeat it with additional details or from a different perspective.

What is the image of God? "God is spirit" (John 4:14). The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* is typical of how I have heard the image of God described: That we "share, ... in God's nature, that is, in His communicable attributes (life, personality, truth, wisdom, love, holiness, justice) and so have the capacity for spiritual fellowship with Him." None of these are physical characteristics. The "image of God" in which He created us must refer to the our immaterial nature. The Bible refers to this elsewhere as our "soul" or "spirit."

*Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* quotes Dr. Waltke to say, God "created human beings so we could carry out His desires. Thus the image of God involves the capacity to interact with God in order to serve as His representative on the earth." Both commentaries mention the relationship that we can have with God because we are in His image.

God is omnipotent. He does not need another entity to do what He wants to have done. Being omnipotent He can speak and it is done. *Psa. 33:9* says of God: "For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." When I drive a car, I manipulate the gas pedal, the steering wheel and other controls and the car does what I want. But that doesn't mean I have a personal relationship with the car. In the same way God didn't have to create robotic humans to do what He wants done.

There are three members of the Godhead, so God did not even need to create us in order to have someone with whom He could talk. But He did create us to rule in His place over this world. He also gave us the ability of self-determination to decide how we would exercise our dominion over the world and how we would choose to relate to God. Without self-determination, we would simply be God's robots.

"The dust of the ground" in Gen. 2 could refer to the material make up of mankind.

My wife and I, in our daily Bible reading together, have just finished reading through the Psalms. The last few Psalms are praise Psalms, many beginning and ending with "Praise the LORD." God created this world to show forth His glory. *Psa. 150:2*. "Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness." I can never praise God enough for what He has done.



Gen. 2:15-17. Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. 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, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

In the first two chapters of Genesis, God required five things of Adam. In Gen. 1:28, (1) mankind was to "be fruitful and multiply." (2) Also mankind was to "fill the earth and subdue it." The filling of the earth is a result of being fruitful. Subduing the earth would make it fit and useful as a place for man to live. (3) "Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing." This does not give us the right to trash and destroy the earth as some ecologists seem to think it says. Then in Gen. 2:15 (4) we are to "tend and keep it." Adam (and subsequently Eve) were to care for and enjoy the Garden of Eden. After the Fall in Gen. 3 this responsibility includes the entire world. (5) Adam could eat of every tree of the garden, except for "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

God created Adam and Eve with the ability to follow God's instructions and to obey this command to not eat the forbidden fruit. God is omniscient, so He knew what Adam and Eve would do. Gen. 3 did not catch God by surprise. God did not have to go back to the drawing board and devise plan "B."

God told Adam: "In the day you eat of it you shall surely die." In Gen. 3 Eve ate of the tree and she shared the meal with Adam. Gen. 5:5 says that Adam lived 930 years. But God said that "In the day you eat of it you shall surely die." Some think this means that was the day Adam and Eve began the process of dying. Some say that the statement "surely die" is an idiom for the certainty that they will die. Yes, it does state absolutely that they would die. But it seems to me that a plain reading of the text is that they would die that day, not 930 years later. Since they did not physically die that day, they must have died spiritually. They even tried to hide themselves from God. Every descendant of Adam born into this world has been born spiritually dead. Therefore Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3-5 that we must be "born again" ... "of water and the Spirit." Everyone is born of the flesh. When we believe in Jesus Christ, we are then born again. This time "of the spirit" (John 3:6).

This is the first prophecy in the Bible. "In the day you eat of it you shall surely die." God spoke this prophecy and it was literally fulfilled. There is no need to allegorize or spiritualize this or any other prophecy. We can look at how God has fulfilled past prophecies and know that He will also fulfill the remaining prophecies in the Bible. Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). He was born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). Isa. 53:1-12 tells that the Messiah would suffer and die. Jesus was crucified.

God did not create Adam and Eve with some innate instinct by which they would do everything God's way. He created mankind in the image of God with the ability to choose to do things the way they want to do them or to do things God's way. God has promised us in John 3:16, "For God loved the world in this way that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." After Adam's and Eve's fall in Gen. 3, God gave them a promise. Adam and Eve believed God's promise and God saved them. He even prepared a sacrifice on the spot for them in anticipation of Jesus' sacrifice. Now God gives each person in the world a free choice: to believe in Jesus Christ. Each person who does so, God will save.



Eastern Screech Owls, Rio Grande Valley, Texas

Gen. 3:14-15. So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

Gen. 2:17 may have been the first prophecy in the Bible, but Gen. 3:15 is the first prophecy of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In Gen 2:17 God told Adam that in the day you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil "you will surely die." That was the first prophecy in the Bible.

The serpent appears in Gen. 3:1. Which says "Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field." Genesis does not tell us who the serpent is. The serpent is just a snake, or a dragon that will lose its legs, but who has ever heard a snake talk? Rev. 12:9 identifies the serpent for us. "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world." The serpent in Gen. 3 is Satan who takes possession of one of the snakes in the garden. So it is not the snake which is talking, but Satan who possessed the snake.

Satan asked a question and Eve answered. But her answer went beyond what God had commanded Adam in Gen. 2. God commanded Adam not to eat of the tree. Eve adds in verse 3, "nor shall you touch it." We need to be careful not to add to God's word. For example: Eph. 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, ..." Notice this verse does not say that we save ourselves by faith. It is God who saves us when we have faith, when we believe. But many people add works, so that our salvation would no longer a free gift of God. People add baptism or confessing Jesus as Lord to simply trusting in Jesus Christ. Or some say you have to prove that you believed by having good works in your life. Without works, your faith is simply a head belief and not a heart belief.

Gen. 3:15 is the prophecy of the Messiah who is called the Seed of the woman. Jesus was not the seed of Adam. The seed of Adam and Eve is all mankind, but Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. But that is a conclusion based on hindsight since this verse is not an explicit prophecy of a virgin birth. In fact, some people understand Eve's statement in Gen. 4:1, "I have acquired a man from the LORD" to indicate that she thought Cain was the promised Seed. The seed of the serpent are the third of the angels who rebelled against God and followed Satan. We also can add to Satan's seed all people who fail to believe in Jesus Christ.

"He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." While Satan would inflict a non-fatal wound on the Seed, "bruise His heel," the Seed would inflict a fatal wound on Satan "bruise His heel."

Cracker Jacks (caramel covered popcorn) used to have a prize in each small box. The prize I found in one box when I was in high school was a plastic monkey. As an evolutionary spoof, I called it Adam (Evolution says the first man was a monkey. Right?) and hung it on the rear view mirror of my car. At this point in Gen. 3 Adam listened to God and believed in the promise of the future Seed. Adam and Eve believed and God saved them. Salvation has always been by faith. As a sign of their salvation, God killed animals as the first sacrifice and made tunics of skin for them.



**Genista Broom, moth, Houston, Texas**

Gen. 9:5-7. "Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a *reckoning*; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man. And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it."

God is speaking to Noah and his family after they left the Ark. They are now standing on solid ground. God gives Noah instructions that Noah and all mankind that come after Noah should follow. In the earlier verses in this chapter, God tells Noah that we could eat meat. God had not previously given commandments as to what could or could not be eaten. It may be that all mankind were only vegetarians before this. This is what many teach, but the Bible is silent on the subject. There is also no reason to believe on the basis of these early chapters in Genesis that a vegetarian diet is more healthy or more pleasing to God than a diet that includes meat.

"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed." God prescribes capital punishment for any person who kills another person. Bible teachers say that God is establishing human government with delegated authority to execute capital punishment. Capital punishment is not for the purpose of getting revenge. The reason God gives is: "For in the image of God He made man." Since we are in the image of God, when we kill another person it is as if we were killing God. It is OK to kill animals and to swat that mosquito which is annoying you. God did not create them in His image. God puts a higher value on people's lives because we are in His image.

God then repeats the Gen. 1 mandate to "be fruitful and multiply." 2 Pet. 2:5 confirms what Genesis tells us that God preserved the lives of eight people on the Ark: Noah and his wife, their three sons, and their wives. Every person on earth descends from one of Noah's sons.

God is a God of love. But He also is a just God. By the time of Gen. 6:5, God had given the people on the earth all the time they needed to turn from their wickedness and to believe in God. But He gave them another 120 years. Then God brought on them the judgment of the Flood. The Flood covered the entire world as described in the Bible. In the same way there is a future judgment coming on the earth and on all who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Heb. 9:27-28 says: "And as it is appointed to men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." I look forward to the Judgment Seat of Christ. I do not want to have my works displayed from the books of works at the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:10-15.

In Gen. 9:11 following today's passage, God said: "Thus I establish My covenant with you; Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." 2 Pet. 3:10, tells us that this future destruction of the earth will be with fire. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat but the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." Some of our Bibles change the word for "burned up," but Peter wanted to be sure we understood what he meant. So in 2 Pet. 3:12 he wrote, "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat." I look forward to Jesus' coming.

Gen. 12:1-3. Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."



**Northern Cardinal, near Rhome, Texas**

These verses are the central passage in the book of Genesis. They also set the stage for the entire rest of the Bible. We have Adam and Eve's disobedience, the wickedness of the world leading to the Flood, and the arrogance of trying to build a tower to heaven in Gen. 11. Now we come to Abram, whom God re-named Abraham. Abraham is the father of God's chosen people, Israel.

The story of Abraham starts in Gen. 11:26. But Gen. 12:1 is an illustration of the way Hebrew narrative is written. In Gen. 11:29, Abram leaves his home. Gen. 12 tells us why Abram left his home. This Hebrew narrative style introduces a topic. Then goes back and repeats the idea with more details. Gen. 1 and 2 is another example. In Gen. 1 God makes this world in six days. But Gen. 2 gives us more details about the creation of man.

Gen. 12:1-3 contains two commands that God gave to Abraham. Following each command are three promises. Most of our English translations do not bring out this second command. Command #1 in Gen. 12:1, in today's jargon, "Get out of Dodge." The three promises: Abram would father a great nation, receive a blessing, and his name would be great. Command #2 is at the end of Gen. 12:2. God commanded Abram to "be a blessing." The three promises: God "will bless those who bless" Abram; God will curse those who treat you with contempt" (This translation is from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*); and in Abram "all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The commentaries do not really say what Abram was to do in order to "be a blessing." Gen. 15:6 tells us that Abram "believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." This verse refers to Abram believing God and leaving his home in Gen. 11.

Even though Abram had some failures in his life, like we all do, it was his faith and obedience to God by which he obeyed God's command to "be a blessing." Abram's descendants, the nation Israel, were to be God's witness to the world.

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, was a descendant of Abram. All who believe in Him are blessed when God saves us, forgives our sins, and gives us eternal life. I, too, can be a blessing to others and tell them about Jesus Christ.

Gen. 15:4-7. And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be. "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. Then He said to him, "I *am* the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

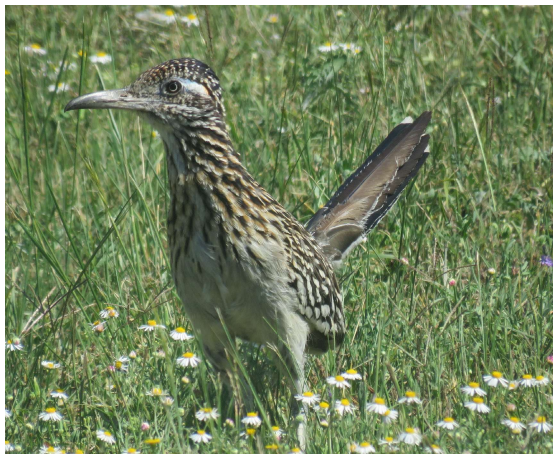
Now in Gen. 15 Abraham faces a new test. God had promised Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3 that he would become a great nation. Abraham and Sarah were getting old and had no children. Verse 3 says that Eliezer was his heir. In verse 4 God answers Abram's prayer. Eliezer will not be Abram's heir, but a son of his own would be. Not only that, but Abraham's descendants would be too many to count. When God brought Abraham outside to see the stars and to count them, God was not telling Abraham that the number of his descendants would equal the number of stars. What God was saying was that his descendants would be uncountable.

"And he hath believed in Jehovah, and He reckoneth to him – righteousness." That is from *Young's Literal Translation* published in 1862. None of our recent translations use the correct tense of the verb, "believed." The NKJV is typical: "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Back when Abraham was living in "Ur of the Chaldeans," he had believed in the Lord. The moment Abraham believed, God credited him with perfect righteousness. Salvation has always been by believing God and what God has revealed about Himself. Heb. 11:8 tells us: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going." The word "inheritance" is used in the sense of "possession."

The five syllable theological term for God crediting a believer's account with righteousness is "justification." God credits our account with the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. He doesn't make us righteous. Genesis tells us that Abraham lied not once, but twice, calling Sarah his sister, and not saying she was his wife. I still have choices to make daily: Will I obey God in my daily walk? 2 Cor. 5:21 says, "For He has made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Jesus did not become a sinner when He died on the cross for my sins. In the same way when God sees Jesus' righteousness in me, does not make me righteous in my daily life. God has given me His word and the Holy Spirit to enable me to live righteously, if I so choose. But no matter how many times I disobey, I have Jesus' righteousness.

Then God reminds Abraham of when Abraham had believed in the Lord. He does this in verse 7. "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

God gave Abraham a command and a promise. Abraham believed God and "got out of Dodge."



**Greater Roadrunner, Whispering Oaks Ranch, Uvalde, Texas**



Exo. 3:14-15. And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall 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 forever, and this *is* My memorial to all generations.'

Moses' life can be divided into three forty year segments: The first forty years as a prince in Egypt. Moses knew he was an Israelite. He visited the Hebrew people and saw their hardship as slaves. When he saw an Egyptian abusing one of the Hebrews, he killed the Egyptian. Then fearing that Pharaoh would find out, he ran away to Midian and herded sheep for forty years. Moses was enjoying a good life working for his father-in-law. He had no thoughts of ever returning to Egypt. Suddenly, he saw fire burning in a bush. This is desert country, good for raising sheep. But this bush was on fire, and the fire must have been continuing so that the bush did not burn up. Moses went to check this out. Then a voice out of the bush called his name. God was talking to Moses. God wanted Moses to return to Egypt and to rescue his people, Israel, from Egypt.

Moses's responded in effect saying, "Not me!" "I can't go back there." "The children of Israel will ask me stuff I can't answer like, 'What is Your name?'" Moses was making all kinds of excuses. God was patient with Moses. It is from God's answers, "I AM WHO I AM" and "I AM has sent me to you," that we get the name for God as "Jehovah," or "Yahweh." So the final forty year phase of Moses' life begins.

Jesus identified Himself with this name for God in John 8:58 when He answered a question by the Jews. Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, 'Before Abraham was, I AM.'" So what did the Jews do? Verse 58: "Then they took up stones to throw at Him." To the Jews, Jesus had spoken blasphemy, claiming to be God. He should be stoned to death. But Jesus' "I AM" claim was true.

The children of Israel have been in Egypt for almost 400 years. They had been told the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They knew about Joseph not wanting his bones to be buried in Egypt. But those days are past. They were now an oppressed people serving as slaves of the Egyptians. They were working seven days a week. The Sabbath day would not be instituted for another 17 chapters of Exodus. There were no weekends in which to play. "Who was this God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?" "Has God forgotten us?" "Maybe the Egyptians have the right idea with the hundreds of gods they worship."

2 Pet. 3:9 comes to my mind: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Peter is using the word "repentance" in the sense of a change of mind about God (and for us, about Jesus Christ). For the children of Israel in Egypt this meant faith in the God of Abraham, and not in one or more of the hundreds of the gods of the Egyptians.

Moses received his marching orders from God. He was to return to Egypt and lead the children of Israel back to the land God had promised to Abraham. Moses had a choice. He could obey God or he could stay where he was in his comfort zone. He could continue to take care of Jethro's sheep and raise his own family. To return to Egypt and lead the children of Israel to the promised land would bring on a bunch of more challenges. As a believer in Jesus Christ, God has told me in His word (not in a burning bush), how I should live my life. It is up to me to do it.



**White-crowned Sparrow, Houston, Texas**

Exo. 15:11-13. "Who *is* like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who *is* like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders? You stretched out Your right hand; The earth swallowed them. You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom You have redeemed; You have guided *them* in Your strength To Your holy habitation.

This is a fascinating passage. This entire chapter is a song of praise to God. Looking at the context will help to understand these praises.

In Exo. 13, Pharaoh gives Moses permission for the children of Israel to leave Egypt. They move out and after a day or two come to the Red Sea. In chapter 14 Pharaoh has second thoughts. He musters his army to go after the children of Israel. Israel has the Red Sea ahead of them and Pharaoh's army behind them. The people panic and complain as if to say, "Why have you brought us here to die. We would have been better off as slaves in Egypt."

Is this the way I should handle tough situations in which I find myself? Moses answered well: Exo. 14:13, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." If I am walking with the Lord, just keep on keeping on.

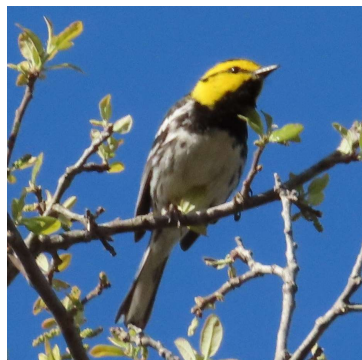
We know the story. God parted the Red Sea and the children of Israel crossed on dry land. When Pharaoh's army followed, the Red Sea closed over them. The Egyptian economy already decimated by the ten plagues now was completely destroyed. Egypt is not mentioned in the Bible again for another 400 years.

Exo. 14:31 states the result of this deliverance by God. "Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses." The Bible tells us that the children of Israel were at this point believers in the LORD. They were a saved people even though in hindsight we can see their many failures over the forty years of wanderings in the wilderness. Could these people really be saved? Yes, they were saved because this verse says that they had believed in the Lord. Not only that, but the testimony of what God had done for the children of Israel spread throughout the world. In Josh. 2:9-10, Rahab reported that she had heard about the loss of Pharaoh's army. As a result she was a believer.

So in today's verses: "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods?" The Egyptians had hundreds of gods, but none were like Israel's God. "Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?" I can praise God for His holiness. For the great things He has done.

"You stretched out Your right hand; The earth swallowed them." The sea as part of the earth swallowed up the Egyptian army.

"You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength To your holy habitation." God had redeemed the children of Israel from slavery to the Egyptians. God is guiding them to the promised land, but God also led them as a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire in the night (Exo. 13:7). God's presence would be with them in the tabernacle and then in Solomon's temple until the Babylonian captivity. Because of Israel's continued idolatry, God withdrew His presence and let Israel go into captivity. When I praise God, do I simply say or sing "Praise God," or do I know enough of His word to praise Him for the wonders He has done? Do my praises recount these wonders?



**Golden-cheeked Warbler, Pedernales Falls State Park, Texas**

Exo. 20:11-12. For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

These are the fourth and fifth commandments of the Ten Commandments. All the other eight commandments are negative: "Thou Shalt not ..." These were positive commandments for Israel.

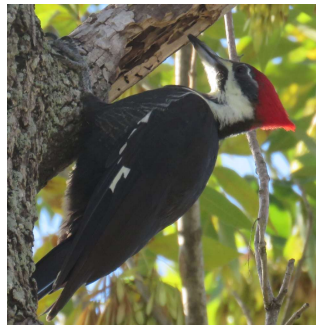
The actual Sabbath day commandment is in verse 8: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." "Remember" is not used in the sense of recalling to mind, but tells the children of Israel to act appropriately because of the significance of the day. Verse 11 tells us what the significance of the Sabbath Day was. God created this world in six days. He finished that work. Then He rested. Keeping the Sabbath Day holy meant simply that the day is set apart for a purpose. That purpose is stated in verse 10. In contrast to their years of slavery in Egypt where they had to work seven days a week, the children of Israel were to do no work on the seventh day. It was to be a day of rest. The Sabbath Day was not set apart by God as a day of worship. Of the Ten Commandments the fourth commandment is the only one not repeated in the New Testament.

I have heard a misguided scientist who acts as a pseudo-theologian say that the six days of Gen. 1 represent six long ages during which all life evolved and all the rest of the long age myths. So now God is resting in this present age. This is the "Day-Age Theory" of the interpretation of Gen. 1. But God is still very active in this world. The Bible tells us what God is now doing and continues to do.

The Old Testament Law actually required Israel to keep three different Sabbaths. The seventh day Sabbath, a sabbatical year Sabbath every seventh year, and a jubilee year every fiftieth year. These Sabbaths were tests for Israel. Would they trust in the Lord to provide for them during each Sabbath when they were resting from their work? Because we live in a sinful world, we also regularly face various tests of our faith. Do I apply God's word to each of the tests I face?

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum in his book, *Israelology* has a lengthy discussion on the subject of the Sabbath which I have largely followed in the above discussion. The Jewish Sabbath was not a day of worship, but a day of rest. Sunday is not a Biblical replacement for the Jewish Sabbath. The New Testament does say that the early churches met on the first day of the week. To me it appears that the way Christians treat the subject of the Sabbath today is a hangover from 1600 or more years of apostate legalism derived from the Roman church.

"Honor your Father and Mother." As the apostle Paul said in Eph. 6:1-3, this "is the first commandment with promise." The promise only relates to Israel. "That your days may be long upon the land." The "land" was given to Israel by God. The Church is never promised a land. But the commandment itself was repeated in the New Testament for us to obey. Col. 3:20 says, "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord." Jesus also repeated the commandment in Matt. 15:4, "saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father and mother, let him be put to death.'" These commands are not qualified by saying that I am to honor my father and mother because they are godly. The family is a divine institution authorized by God. God's plan and will included a father and a mother in each family.



**Pileated Woodpecker, Houston, Texas**



Exo. 25:1-2. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering.

We think of Old Testament giving as mandatory gifts of a tithe (or tithes). What attracted me to these verses is that the gifts were to be voluntary. It is not until Exo. 25:8 that God tells Moses the reason for this voluntary offering. "And let them make Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. The voluntary gifts were for construction of the tabernacle. When we looked at Exo. 15:11:13, we saw verse 13 which says, "You have guided them in Your strength to Your Holy habitation."

We think of God as being in heaven. But God also dwelt in the tabernacle and then in the Holy of Holies of Solomon's Temple. Today God does not dwell in buildings. Instead, all three members of the Godhead indwell each of us as believers.

Gal. 2:20 tells us that Christ lives in us. "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

In John 14:17, Jesus tells His disciples that the Holy Spirit would be in them: "The Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you." At the time that Jesus said this, the Holy Spirit was dwelling with the disciples because they were still in the Age of Israel. But in the future, after Jesus' ascension, He would send the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit would then indwell every believer in the Church Age. 1 Cor. 6:19, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you."

John 14:23 speaks of both God the Father and the Son making their home with believers. "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love Him, and we will come to Him and make our home with him." So all three members of the Godhead indwell believers during the Church Age. I can have an eternal relationship with God.

The Old Testament standard for giving was tithing. Under the Law God gave to Moses, Israel was required to pay three tithes. The first tithe was to support the Levites who served Israel as priests. Num. 18:21: "Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting."

The second tithe was for the maintenance of the festivals and sacrifices of the Lord. It is mentioned in Deut. 14:22-23. "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always."

The third tithe was to be given every third year for the poor according to Deut. 14:28-29. "At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do."

Paul sets a grace standard for giving during the Church age. 2 Cor. 9:7. "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." When I consider all that God has done for me, what is a ten per cent tithe? I leave larger tips when I eat at a restaurant. In the New Testament we are not under the Law. Giving is to be done in grace.

Lev. 25:9-10. 'Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. 'And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family.

These verses describe a part of the Law God gave to Moses that is not well known. We have nothing like it either in our present legal system or in any of the cultures of the world of which I am aware. We are familiar with the seventh day Sabbath prescribed for Israel in the Ten Commandments. The seventh day Sabbath was to be a day of rest. It was not set aside as a day of worship.

The Law of Moses also included a Sabbatical Year. Every seventh year was to be a year of rest. The land was to remain fallow, all debts were to be forgiven, and slaves were to go free to return home.

These verses in Leviticus deal with a year of Jubilee which was to be every fiftieth year. The requirements were similar. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says the land of Israel was God's property. The land was divided among the tribes and within the tribes the land was re-divided to the various families. The land was to be kept within each family line. If the land was "sold" or mortgaged, in the year of Jubilee the mortgages would be released and the "sold" land returned to the family to whom it was originally given. Therefore, Lev. 25:10 says, "each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family." These laws and commandments were to be a benefit to keep people from being in perpetual poverty.

Israel did not do a good job of keeping these Sabbatical years. 2 Chron. 36:21 looks back on the captivity saying, "to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years."

Jer. 25:11-12 prophesied that the Babylonian captivity would last seventy years. Jer. 34:13-14 says that Israel had failed to keep the Sabbatical years.

In Dan. 9 Daniel prayed to God and confessed Israel's sins. Daniel reminded the Lord that the seventy years of captivity were coming to an end. The missing seventy Sabbatical years would have occurred over a 490 year period (7 times 70). Is it coincidental then that in Dan. 9:24-27 the angel's message to Daniel was that seventy sevens (of years) would remain after Israel was established back in the land before Messiah's kingdom would come?

The seventh day Sabbath, the Sabbatical years, and the year of Jubilee were tests for Israel. Would Israel trust the Lord to provide for them during the days and years of rest? Would the sin of covetousness and greed drive them to ignore these times of rest and to continue working. The primary sin that resulted in the captivity was the worship of idols and false gods. The missing Sabbatical years determined the duration of the captivity.

For me I went through a time fifty years ago when I lost everything and had to learn to trust the Lord to provide. He did so in an amazing way and also bailed my partners out in ways they never understood. As one pastor put it sometimes we are blessed by association with people whom the Lord blesses.

Am I prepared to trust the Lord in the difficult days that seem to be coming? Will I try to solve the problems my own way or in the ways the world would like me to do?

I see a second application if it is not too far-fetched. I have talked today about passages in Leviticus, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah and Daniel today and connected them together. The Sabbatical year commandment is linked in each of these disparate books of the Bible. God's word is amazing.

Num. 23:19-22. "God *is* not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a *command* to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God *is* with him, And the shout of a King *is* among them. God brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox.

This is in the middle of the three chapter account of Balaam the prophet. Balaam is mentioned three times in the New Testament. Num. 31:16 also mentions Balaam showing us that Balaam finally told Balak king of Moab a way by which Balak could discredit Israel to God. But I get ahead of the story. With three chapters telling this story of Balaam, there must be a message here for me.

Israel had just been through the golden serpent incident of the Exodus. Then they defeated the Amorites in battle. They were now approaching the country of Moab. Balak the King of Moab sent messengers to Balaam asking Balaam to curse Israel and protect Moab from defeat.

Balaam's story has a talking donkey. Balaam was riding his donkey on the path to Moab. At a narrow part of the path the donkey came to a standstill, refusing to move. Num. 22:22-35 gives the details. The donkey crushed Balaam's foot against the wall, lay down under Balaam, and started talking. Balaam replied! Then the Angel of the LORD (the preincarnate Jesus Christ), sword in hand, revealed Himself. The Angel gave Balaam permission to proceed, but only to speak the words that the Angel tells him to say. So what does Balaam say?

"God is not a man, that He should lie." One of God's divine attributes is His veracity. God always speaks the truth. What God says will happen, happens. "Nor a son of man, that He should repent." The *NET Bible* and the *English Standard Version* translate the word "repent" as "change his mind." Another of God's attributes is His immutability. God never changes. The rest of the verse says: "Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken and will He not make it good?"

"He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor ... wickedness in Israel." What about Israel's complaints to Moses in Num. 21:4 resulting in an infestation of serpents leading to the golden serpent incident? Yet Balaam speaking words the Angel gave him, speaks of the righteousness of Israel. They are believers in God and like Abraham, God has accounted righteousness to them.

Then the words Balak did not want to hear. "The shout of a king is among them. God brings them out of Egypt. He has strength like a wild ox." The words the Angel gave to Balaam to speak to Balak warn Balak that with God's help Israel's army will defeat Moab.

2 Pet. 2:14-15 describes Balaam's failures: "having eyes full of adultery ...

They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." The adultery that Balaam taught Balak was to send all his street walkers to entice Israel into an orgy worshiping Moab's idols (Num. 25:1-3). The covetousness is Balaam's lust for the great reward that Balak had promised him. The message to me is that the Lord Jesus Christ needs to be first in my life. I need to watch out for people who teach His word falsely. A church is not a house of entertainment. Singing, giving and good Bible teaching are all worship.



Northern Flicker, Liberty County, Texas

Deut. 6:4-7. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD alone! "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

I have changed the translation of verse 4 to conform to the 1985 translation by The Jewish Publication Society called the "Tanakh." Instead of "the LORD is one," it reads, "the LORD alone." While this rendering does not establish definitively that God is not a singularity, it does allow for a trinitarian interpretation. This verse is known as the "Shema" among Jews which is the Anglicized rendering of the first word in the Hebrew of the verse, "Hear." It is recited in Jewish synagogues regularly. I worship one God. There is only one God. The idea of the Trinity is "Three in One."

All of these verses are applicable to us today. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." When the Jewish scribes came to Jesus and asked Him "Which is the first commandment of all?" (Mark 12:28-29). Jesus answered by quoting Deut. 6:4-5. Is God at the top of my priority list? When I do anything, do I first consider if this is something that God wants me to do? Dr. Eugene Merrill in his commentary on Deuteronomy in *The New American Commentary* series said of the heart, "The heart is, in Old Testament anthropology the seat of the intellect, equivalent to the rational part of mankind." The "heart" refers to the thinking part of each person. When Moses wrote "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength," he was talking about the totality of each person. This is a high hurdle to which I can try to attain, but always seem to fall short.

What am I to do with God's words? They "shall be in your heart." "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." God's word should always be on the tip on my tongue. My children are grown and out of the house now. But I have contact with them and others throughout the day. These are opportunities to talk about what God is doing.



**Dickcissel, Whispering Oaks Ranch, Uvalde TX**  
 Named for its song that sounds like "dickcissel."

Deut. 29:29, 30:1-3. "The secret *things belong* to the LORD our God, but those *things which are revealed belong* to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, "and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, "that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you.

The first three verses of Deut. 30 are important for us today. We won't understand the early chapters of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) unless we understand what God is saying here. I also have included the last verse in chapter 29 since it is part of the context. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God." Even now God has not told us everything. But He has told us all that we need to know. Isa. 55:8-9, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says 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." God told Israel everything they needed to know so that they "may do all the words of this law."

Deut. 29 describes the blessings Israel will receive if they obey the law. But it also describes what will happen if they disobey. The end result of disobedience would be destruction of the nation by other nations and being carried away into captivity. So Deut. 30 says:

"And it shall come to pass, ..." In His foreknowledge God knew that Israel would go after foreign gods and that He would bring the Babylonians to take Israel into captivity. Later they would return to the land, but would remain under foreign domination. The foreign domination continued until the time Christ came. These verses as well as other passages in the Old Testament tell us what Israel must do in order to have their Kingdom re-established under the rulership of the Messiah.

"And you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today." There were two things that needed to be done for the restoration of the Kingdom. #1: They had to return to the LORD their God; and #2: They had to keep the Law.

When the Jews returned to the land from Babylon under Nehemiah and Ezra, they had learned their lesson about keeping the Law. They no longer went after foreign gods. Of course, they did not keep the Law perfectly. No one could. Even today, I fail often in obeying what God has commanded. So did the Jews. But they had the new temple and the animal sacrifices in the temple as an acknowledgment of their failures.

But somewhere along the way, prior to Jesus' birth, the Jews had forgotten the necessity of believing in God. When the Jewish rulers came to John the Baptist, John said, "do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'" (Matt. 3:8). The Jews thought they were saved because they descended from Abraham and kept the Law. Keeping the Law is works and thinking that salvation is theirs simply because they are from Abraham is not believing in God. So the message that John and Jesus taught early in Jesus' ministry was "Repent for the kingdom of God (heaven) is at hand." These passages do not tell the Jews of what they should repent or what the kingdom is. The Jews knew Deut. 30 very well. The Greek word mistranslated by Jerome as "repent" means to "change your mind." Not about sin because the Jews were keeping the law and had sacrifices for sin. But to change their mind by believing in God and not in their pedigree? The challenge for me today is to believe the Bible, and not to rely on the traditions of men.

Josh. 1:6-9. "Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. "Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Moses has died and the leadership of the people of Israel now falls to Joshua. In the opening verses of the book of Joshua, God gives His marching orders to Joshua. Josh. 1:5 ends with this promise from God: "I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you." Josh. 1:9 ends with: "Do not be afraid nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

God had promised this land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was to be the possession of their descendants forever. "For to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them." The word "inheritance" can also be understood in the sense of a "possession" as the *New American Standard Version* translates it. But they would have to fight to win it back from the current residents who had moved in when the people of Israel had abandoned the land to go down to Egypt.

Three times in these verses God tells Joshua to "Be strong and courageous." The Israelites at this time were believers in the LORD, at least for the most part. Both Joshua and the people had now to obey the Lord in faith and exercise their right to the land God had given to Abraham. The example for me is: Yes, I have eternal salvation, but now I must walk with the Lord, obeying Him. When I face difficulties, problems and challenges of all kinds, can I be strong and courageous in my faith?

"That you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you." Israel had the 613 commandments of what we call the Mosaic Law. We are not under that law today. But we have a completed Canon of Scripture to study, learn and obey. It contains everything I need to know for "life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

As God commanded about the law of Moses, so I should do with the entire Bible. It "shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it." Deut. 6:7, "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

Psa. 1:2, "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night."

Moses also wrote in Deut. 11:18, "You shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes." In Jesus' day the Jewish leaders were ostentatious in their observance of this verse, wearing large and showy phylacteries to impress the public (Matt. 23:5).

Memorizing Bible verses is not just a Vacation Bible School activity for children. Memorizing, reviewing, and meditating on Bible verses is an excellent way to gain a deeper understanding of what God wants me to do.

Don't confuse the word "meditation" with the mysticism of far east religious meditation which calls first for a person to clear or empty his mind and then see what pops into it. God wants me to fill my mind with His word, and then to think about it, what it means, and how I can use it in my life.

Josh. 2:1-6. Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there. And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country." So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country." Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they *were* from." And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them." (But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.)

This is a fun passage. Maybe you have read some spy stories as I have. This is the Bible's own spy story. God has promised Joshua that he would be successful in taking the land back. So why send out two secret agents? Just claim God's promise, go in and take the land. No, Joshua exercises wisdom which means that he wants to learn the best way to capture the city which is in a strategic location. The story narrative does not need much explanation. Sending out the spies was an act of faith.

Rahab is named in the "hall of faith" in Heb. 11:31 and in James 2:25. Josh. 1:9-11 gives her testimony. "I know the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, ... For the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." Rahab was a believer and saved at this time. We can be sure that many people throughout the world had also believed just as Rahab did. The story of God's delivering Israel from slavery in Israel had spread throughout the world. God had called Israel to be His witness.

Dr. Constable's *Notes* points out that in Hebrew there are words for two different types of prostitutes. There are "cultic prostitutes" who were the priests and priestesses in the idol temples. Then there were ordinary "street walkers" (my term). Rahab was the latter. However, the spies and Rahab met up, it was God's providence that brought them together. God knows what He is doing.

Years ago in a Sunday School class, our associate pastor was teaching this story. He took a contrary view to that of the usual commentaries from which I double check my understanding of the text. Dr. J. B. Hixson's interpretation resulted in a discussion in the class. Rahab lied about Joshua's spies. Dr. Hixson used the principle of "graded absolutism" to say that Rahab was not wrong to lie. Spies, by the very nature of their occupation, need to lie for the greater purpose they are serving.

Another example of graded absolutism is David eating the shewbread (Mark 2:25-26). Another was when Ezra had the men of Israel divorce their Canaanite wives (Ezra 10) around the time Malachi wrote that God "hates divorce" (Mal. 2:16). (In 1 Cor. 7:10-16 the Apostle Paul places strict limits on divorce for believers today. Much stricter than what was allowed under the Old Testament Law.)

Rahab knew all about God blessing Israel when He brought them out of Egypt. She was not about to put herself in a position of what we today would call anti-Semitism. Because of Rahab's faith in God, she risked her life to protect two of God's people.

John 13:34-35. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." I would like very much to have the faith and love that Rahab showed in the account we have of her in the Bible.

Judges 21:25. In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

The final verse in the book of Judges also occurred earlier in the book (Judg. 17:6). It summarizes the story of the book of Judges. Judges is preceded in the Bible by the book of Joshua and is a strong contrast to the story in Joshua. In Joshua Israel, for the most part, was faithful in following the Lord, obeying the law as given to them under Moses, and trusting God. The result was that just as God had promised, Israel prospered and conquered much of the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In the law that God gave to Moses, provision was made for a king. But during this time before Saul and David, Israel was a theocracy, meaning they were not under a human king, but under God's rulership. In Judges, not only did Israel not have a human king, it did not even honor God as their king. Everyone did what seemed good in their own eyes.

Much the same thing is happening in the world around us today. Everyone does what is right in their own eyes. This is never more apparent than in the matter of sex. If a man wants to think and act like a woman, let him do so. The same with a woman.

There is also the issue of racism. The truth is that there is only one human race. We are all descendants of Adam and we all descend from Noah. We are all equal before God. Racism is far more rampant today that it was sixty or seventy years ago when I was growing up. Doesn't the Bible say to "live at peace with all men." This is not happening with all the racial tensions today. "Everyone does what is right in their own eyes."

I want to focus on what God has told me in His word, the Bible. Not in what I read in the news or see on TV, or even what my friends or teachers may say. I want to do what is right in God's eyes.



**Bald Eagle, Private Ranch, Matagorda County, Texas**



Ruth 4:14-17. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! "And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. Also the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "There is a son born to Naomi." And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Yesterday, I looked at a spy story in the Bible and today it is a romance story. In both these stories we have believing non-Israelite ladies who are in the ancestral line of Jesus. These verses today are a straightforward narrative. But there are parts of the Book of Ruth that sound strange to us. We don't know enough of the details of the Law God gave to Moses.

Ruth 1:1 dates this story, "in the days when the judges ruled, ... there was a famine in the land." Judges covers a period from 1370 BC to about 1050 BC when Saul became Israel's king. The story would likely have taken place in the last half of the twelfth century BC (1150–1100BC). The days of the Judges was a time of spiritual and moral decay. This is summarized in the last verse of Judges (21:25). "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

During the time of the judges Israel would cycle back and forth from worshiping the idols of their unbelieving neighbors, oppression by their neighbors and famine, Israel's returning to the Lord, God raising up a judge to free them from the oppression, and then back into idolatry. The "famine in the land" was a warning sign of God's discipline on Israel. So what did Elimelech, Naomi and their two sons do? Instead of returning to the Lord in faith and obedience they compounded their disobedience by leaving the land God had given them and moved to Moab. 1 John tells me to confess my sins. I don't want to repeat the same sins over and over again or find new sins.

Elimelech and the two sons die leaving three widows and no progeny. Naomi decides to return home and encourages her two daughters-in-law to remain in Moab and find new husbands there. But Ruth, who is a believer in the Lord, insists on returning with Naomi. In Ruth 1:16, Ruth says to Naomi, "Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God." They returned at the time of the barley harvest (Ruth 1:22).

Now one of the provisions for the poor in the Law is given in Lev. 19:9-10. "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, ... you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger." So in Ruth 2:2 Ruth says to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor."

Joshua, had divided the land among the tribes of Israel and their families. The land was to remain within the families who received it. It could not be sold in perpetuity. If sold or mortgaged, it was to be returned to the original family in the Sabbatical year. If a man died without children, it was the duty of his closest relative to marry his widow and raise up children for the deceased family member. These children would then have the right to their family's property.

So Ruth and Boaz met. Boaz, being a "close relative" or "kinsman" of Elimelech, married Ruth. They had a son named Obed. Obed was the grandfather of David and an ancestor of Jesus. The genealogies in the Old Testament and New Testament establish Jesus' right to be the Messiah. The deaths of their husbands brought a great deal of sorrow and suffering to both Naomi and Ruth. They were faithful to the Lord. On returning to Bethlehem they obeyed Him. God turned their situation around and blessed both. May I follow their example of obedience.

Isa. 11:1-3. There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. 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. His delight is in the fear of the LORD, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears;

In the previous chapter Isaiah had prophesied the destruction of Assyria. Assyria was threatening to invade the northern kingdom of Israel and then Judah. Assyria would indeed invade the northern kingdom and the people would be taken into captivity. But Judah, the southern kingdom, would be spared from the Assyrians as Judah had been more faithful in worshiping God. The fall of the Northern Kingdom is described as the thickets of the forest being cut down.

The prophecy in Isa. 11 is about the future coming of the Messiah. So the Messiah will arise as a new branch sprouting from the roots of a stump. David was the son of Jesse, so the Messiah will be a descendant of David. The humanity of Jesus descended from David.

The Messiah will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. His rule will be a just rule. He will possess a knowledge and understanding of the facts that goes beyond what He can see and hear. As God, the Messiah will possess the divine attribute of omniscience.

Jesus came and the Jews rejected Him as their Messiah. That does not let God off the hook from keeping His promises to Israel. I do not fully understand all the details of God's prophecies for the future. But I do know that Jesus could return at any moment. I will be caught up to the clouds and will meet Jesus in the air and will be with Him forever. This will bring in the grand finale of human history and all the unfulfilled prophecies and promises by God will be fulfilled.



American Avocets, Sea Rim State Park, near Sabine, Texas

Dan. 7:13-15. "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed.

These prophetic verses from Daniel are important because they form the basis for the forty-three mentions of the "Son of Man" in the New Testament that refer to Jesus Christ. When Nebuchadnezzar captured Judah and Jerusalem, Daniel was a young man and was taken to Babylon. The Lord blessed Daniel because of his faithful obedience to the commands of God's law. Daniel was promoted to prominent leadership positions in both the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar, and also after Babylon fell to the Medes in Dan. 5:30 to a similar position in the Empire of Darius the Mede. Daniel is well-known for the visions he interpreted and for those he received that foretold the future history of Israel and the world. Daniel 7 is a chapter describing a vision of Daniel concerning Israel's future.

"Behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven!" In these verses, Daniel's vision sees the future return of Jesus Christ, called the Son of Man." This phrase when applied to Jesus Christ is looking at His humanity. With the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, He became true humanity. Phil. 2:5-8 describes Jesus, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross." Since Jesus possessed true humanity, He could die as our substitute and pay the penalty for our sins.

But after the virgin birth of Jesus His deity also continued. So He is also called the "Son of God." He was not the Son of God by reason of birth, but because He possessed all the attributes of God from all eternity. Jesus as the Son of Man did not lose any of His Deity. He continues to exist as one of the Three Persons of the Godhead, which we call the Trinity.

"Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him." Daniel's vision sees this as a future prophecy which still has not been fulfilled. While God is the Sovereign over all of Creation, Satan has usurped rulership of this world as described in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. As the *NET Bible* and the *New American Standard Version* correctly translate the tense of the verb in John 16:11, "The ruler of this world has been judged." Satan has been judged, but his sentence awaits execution in Rev. 20:10.

Daniel saw in his vision that "His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion." This follows "the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of Heaven!" From Rev. 20:1-6 this everlasting dominion begins with the 1,000 year Millennium, and then is rolled into "a new heaven and a new earth" of Rev. 21-22. At the beginning of the Millennium Satan is bound for 1,000 years in the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3). Upon his release in Rev. 20:7 he will attempt to lead one final rebellion against God. After his final defeat, he is cast into the "lake of fire and brimstone ... forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10).

Knowing the Old Testament source for the New Testament's reference to Jesus as the "Son of Man" helps me to understand the significance of the term. I praise God for the magnificence of His plan of salvation for me and all other believers in Jesus Christ, and for the prophecies for our future life with Him.

Obadiah 17-18. "But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, And there shall be holiness; The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. The house of Jacob shall be a fire, And the house of Joseph a flame; But the house of Esau *shall be* stubble; They shall kindle them and devour them, And no survivor shall *remain* of the house of Esau," For the LORD has spoken.

Obadiah is one of the twelve minor prophetic books at the end of the Old Testament. They are "minor" because their writings are shorter than the longer prophetic books like Isaiah or Jeremiah. But they still contain important messages to us and are a part of God's revelation to us. What makes Obadiah different is he addresses his message to Edom, not to the kingdom of Judah or the kingdom of Israel.

The Edomites were descendants of Esau and while Jacob and Esau reconciled their differences back in Genesis, later generations of the Edomites were enemies of Israel. The Herods of the New Testament were Edomites.

Obadiah had just written in verse 16 "For the day of the LORD upon all nations is near." Obadiah warns about a judgment that will come from God against all nations. This is a prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled, particularly when you consider the "all nations" reference. The prophetic event that best fits this description is the seven years of the Great Tribulation.

In today's passage Obadiah says, "But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance." Jerusalem is sometimes called Zion or Mount Zion in the Bible. The people of Israel will be delivered. The believing remnant of the Jews will be delivered through the Tribulation and enter into the Millennial Kingdom promised to them by God. "And there shall be holiness." Jerusalem will be set apart as God's dwelling place, i.e. where Jesus Christ will be the king. He will be the ruler of the entire world during the Millennium and also throughout eternity in "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). "Set apart" is the better way to understand the Bible word "holy" or "holiness."

The "house of Jacob," sounds to me to be a reference to all twelve tribes of Israel, including both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms after the division following the death of Solomon. But to make sure that we understand that Obadiah's prophecy includes the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, he adds, "And the house of Joseph a flame." God's promise of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel includes all the twelve tribes.

"But the house of Esau shall be stubble." Esau is not like a verdant field of grain, but just a stubble. But even so, read what Obadiah says next: They shall kindle them and devour them. Even what is left of Esau will be destroyed. Stubble is dry and quick to burn.

There is absolutely no future for Esau as Obadiah writes: "And no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau." Are there any descendants of Esau around today? There are millions of Jews living today and close to half of them live in the present day nation of Israel.

"For the LORD has spoken." God keeps His word. What He has promised, He will do. One of God's foundational promises in the Old Testament is what He promised Abraham in Gen. 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you."

The treaties and agreements between the nations of the world following World War 1 established the present nation of Israel as a matter of international law. I don't want to be a participant in the popular sentiment of the world in opposition to the Israeli nation. Too many churches and preachers say that God has replaced His promises to Israel and given them to the Church. They need to heed God's promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you."

Jonah 3:4-10. And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell *if* God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

The book of Jonah is unique among the minor prophets. It is not a book of prophetic utterances although in today's passage it does include a prophecy, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown!" But the book is written in the form of an historical narrative.

The book of Jonah also gives us evidence that the Bible is a different and very special kind of book. What other book would present its heroes in a negative light? This certainly is not how the ancient myths presented their heroes. God tells Jonah to do something and what does Jonah do? He tries to run as far away as he can so that maybe God cannot find him. God saves Jonah from disaster, and Jonah reluctantly obeys and goes to Nineveh. Jonah preaches the message in today's passage and the people turn to God. Then Jonah gets mad.

Noah preached for 120 years without a convert. Jonah preached one day and the whole city converted.

Nineveh was in Assyria. Jonah probably ministered in Nineveh one or two generations prior to when Assyria would conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel and take them away into captivity. Even at this time Assyria had a reputation as bad guys. We can see this in the king's order: "Let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands."

"So the people of Nineveh believed God, ..." I take this statement literally. I don't see this as simply a moral reformation of ceasing from their evil ways and the violence that is in their hands. I expect to see this generation of Ninevites in eternity.

One of the commands that God had given the nation of Israel was that they were to be a witness to the rest of the world about God. We don't see that they did a very good job of being a witness to the rest of the world. Instead, as we read the Old Testament, we see the people of Israel turning from God to worship the idols and false gods of their neighbors. Because of this idolatry God allowed the Northern Kingdom to go into captivity to Assyria and then the Southern Kingdom was carried away to captivity in Babylon.

Today, we have similar commands to tell our friends and neighbors and even the entire world about God. Matt. 28:19-20. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen."

There are many ways I can do this. I can give monetarily to the support of missionaries and pray for them. I can tell my friends and neighbors about Jesus Christ.

Micah 5:1-5. Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; He has laid siege against us; They will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The one to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting." Therefore He shall give them up, Until the time *that* she who is in labor has given birth; Then the remnant of His brethren Shall return to the children of Israel. And He shall stand and feed *His flock* In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great To the ends of the earth; And this *One* shall be peace. When the Assyrian comes into our land, And when he treads in our palaces, Then we will raise against him Seven shepherds and eight princely men.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, ... out of you shall come forth to Me The one to be Ruler in Israel." Here in verse 2 is a clear prophecy that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Even the Jews of Jesus' day did not have a problem understanding this prophecy. John 5:42 says, "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem." This was spoken by an unbelieving Jew who thought Jesus came from Nazareth.

"Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting." The Messiah is eternal. Only God is eternal.

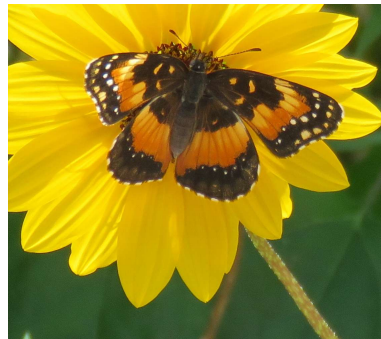
One of the purposes of prophecy is comfort and encouragement. Micah begins this chapter: "Now gather yourself in troops." Be prepared for war. "He has laid siege against us." During the reign of Hezekiah, the Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem. God delivered Jerusalem at that time by miraculously destroying overnight the entire Assyrian army of 185,000. Later the Babylonians would again surround Jerusalem and destroy it.

"Until the time that she who is in labor has given birth." I don't expect that this prophecy was as clearly understood by the Jews. With hindsight, we know what happened. But how can the Messiah who is said to be "from of old, From everlasting" be born? Jesus Christ while being fully God also was born of a woman and became fully human.

Then Micah does what often happens in Old Testament prophecies. He skips from the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem to the final establishment of the Messiah's kingdom ruling over Israel. "Then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel." Micah repeats the often stated requirement for the establishment of Israel's future kingdom. Moses set forth the same condition In Deut. 30:2. When the people of Israel are scattered to the far corners of the earth because of failure to trust God "and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, ...," then God would bring them back from captivity. This will happen at the end of the Tribulation and then Jesus returns.

"And He shall stand and feed His flock ..." In Zechariah's description of Jesus' second coming he wrote in Zech. 14:4, "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, ..."

God has told us how He plans to work everything out for His glory. Since He has told us, we can have comfort and encouragement. I can know that no matter how bad my situation may be and as I watch the world going wonky/wokey against God and Christianity, I can continue to trust God knowing who wins in the end.



**Bordered Patch, butterfly, Pleasanton, Texas**

Mic. 6:6-9. With what shall I come before the LORD, *And* bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, The fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul. He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

These three verses given to us by Micah show that there is a parallel between our relationship with God today and with what God wanted from the people of Israel in the Old Testament. In fact, even in the Old Testament salvation was by faith in God. Gen. 15:6 which is quoted in James 2:23 and Rom. 4:3. "And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Before I learned better, I used to think that people in Old Testament times were saved by keeping the Law, but today we are saved by faith. God gave the Law to Moses so that Israel would know how God wanted them to live. The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says of the Old Testament sacrificial system "that the sacrificial system were meant to be outward expressions of inner trust and dependence on God for His grace and mercy."

The "burnt offerings, With calves a year old" were a normal part of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. But then Micah mentions "thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil." He is exaggerating. Micah is using a figure of speech to make his point. God was not impressed with the quantity of the sacrifices, but with the quality. The lambs had to be perfect. "Calves a year old" would be near the point that they could be productive for the owner, providing milk or meat or new calves. Any "Old Bossy" who was ready for the glue factory would not qualify. But even lambs without spot and blemish and "calves a year old," while qualifying as proper sacrifices, were not the kind of quality that God was seeking.

"Give my firstborn ... "fruit of my body." Micah looks around at the neighboring people who worshiped idols and engaged in child sacrifices. That's not what God wants either. But all too often the people of Israel would listen to the false prophets and teachers and go off and do what their neighbors did. They would worship the Baals and idols and even sacrifice their own children to these false gods. My world is more civilized today. My neighbors don't sacrifice their babies as burnt offerings to false gods. Instead the world teaches ideas like gender, abortion, false race issues, once upon a time there was a big bang, climate change, and on and on. I prefer to find out what God says in His word.

"What does the LORD require of you ...?" God expected the people of Israel in the Old Testament "To do justly, to love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God." He also expects me to live my life "justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God."

God still requires me to make sacrifices to Him. Rom. 12:1-2 comes to mind, but there are other passages as well. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." I am not to conform my thinking to the world's ways. I am to renew my mind. I can only do that through learning and applying God's word to my thinking and to my life.



Long-billed Thrasher, Hebbbronville, Texas



Nahum 1:7. The LORD *is* good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.

Even though the city of Nineveh is not mentioned by name until the middle of the second chapter of Nahum, this book is a warning to Nineveh. Nineveh was the principal city of the Assyrian empire. Assyria had conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. The Assyrians were a ruthless and cruel people. They did not just kill their enemies, they tortured them to death.

Nahum wrote in the seventh century B.C. after the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He prophesies about the fall of Nineveh and the Assyrian empire which would occur perhaps a half century later and did happen in 612 B.C.

While it is good to know the historical background and setting of the books of the Bible, this verse is a simple promise that stands on its own. The verse is quick and easy to memorize. Remembering the verse is more difficult. In memorizing Bible verses I prefer to memorize them three or so verses at a time. It takes more time to memorize three verses than just one simple verse of three clauses like Nah. 1:7. But the extra time to memorize three verses helps me to remember the verses. I also can understand the context of the verses better. For example: Phil. 4:13 is a favorite memory verse. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." What does the "all things" mean? Does it mean that I can get an A in the coming final examination and I don't have to study to prepare for it? But when I also memorize it along with the previous couple of verses I know that Paul is referring to being full and being hungry, to abounding and suffering need. Now I can understand that trusting in Christ in my daily walk, I can handle whatever situation I have to face. And God will be glorified by my walk of faith in Him.

So Nahum wrote: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him." "Stronghold." God has built a fortress wall around the people of Judah who trust in Him. He also has a fortress wall around me when I am walking with Him in reliance on His word.

The walls around Nineveh did not keep the Babylonians from destroying Nineveh. The walls around the cities of the Northern Kingdom of Israel did not prevent the Assyrians from carrying the ten tribes of Israel into captivity. The walls of Jerusalem would have been only a delaying factor in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Assyrians except that God destroyed the Assyrian army of 185,000 overnight. King Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem had trusted in God. They did not resort to false gods and idols for their protection.

Each day when I wake up, I do not know what challenges and circumstances I will face that day. God knows. He has made provision for me to deal with them. Knowing God's word and trusting in Him through His word is the way I want to meet the challenges of each day.



**Swallow-tailed Kite, Ganado, Texas**



Habakkuk 2:2-4. Then the LORD answered me and said: "Write the vision And make *it* plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it. For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry. "Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.

Habakkuk ministered in the period of time when Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar was invading Assyria and Egypt. Assyria and Egypt had fallen or were on the verge of falling. Judah and Jerusalem were expecting Nebuchadnezzar to come after them next. And in 605 B.C. Judah fell to Babylon.

Habakkuk is known for asking God questions. He had just asked God in the final verses of Chapter one this question, Will Babylon "continue to slay nations without pity?" (Hab. 1:17). In Hab. 2:1 Habakkuk set himself "on the rampart" to wait for God's answer. He may have been standing on the wall of Jerusalem and seeing the Babylonian army approaching? Maybe the Babylonians were still down mopping up Egypt? But Habakkuk waits for God's answer. The answer will come in the remaining verses of Chapter 2. The immediate prospect for Judah appears in verse 5, Babylon "heaps up for himself all peoples." This does not sound like good news. Habakkuk does move on to tell of the ultimate destruction of Babylon which happens first in Dan. 5:30-31 and then finally in the future in Rev. 17-18.

That is the background for today's verses, a portion of which are quoted in three places in the New Testament. The Lord answers Habakkuk with a command, "Write the vision." God's answer is to be written on tablets of stone. A messenger is to carry those tablets throughout the land and proclaim the message to everyone. "That he may run who reads it." The urgency of this message requires that the messenger run from place to place. When he arrives at each place, he then reads the message.

"The vision is yet for an appointed time." God will indeed destroy Babylon. But it will be at the time God chooses. The people are not supposed to expect it to happen this time around.

"At the end it will speak, and it will not lie." The vision, this prophecy, God gives to Habakkuk, is true. It will happen.

"Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry." Heb. 10:35-37 quotes this promise. "Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise. 'For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.'" For those who do the will of God, obey His commands, there is the promise of a great reward. This promise is repeated in Rev. 22:12: "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work."

"The just shall live by faith." This statement is quoted three times in the New Testament. While I received the gift of eternal life when I believed in Jesus Christ, I understand the New Testament quotations to refer to the way I should live my life as a believer. Looking at the context of Habakkuk, the people of Israel were not being promised immediate deliverance from the Babylonians. They were to wait for a future deliverance. Think of the faith of Mordecai in the book of Esther, and of Daniel, both of them living in captivity in Babylon. May I walk in a faith like theirs, obeying God's commands, and looking for the future fulfillment of God's promises.



Ospey, Baytown Nature Center, Texas

Zeph. 2:1-3. Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, Before the decree is issued, Or the day passes like chaff, Before the LORD'S fierce God's anger comes upon you, Before the day of the LORD's anger comes upon you! Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden In the day of the LORD'S anger.

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, King of Judah (Zeph. 1:1). Josiah was a great-grandson of King Hezekiah. Hezekiah reigned during the time that Assyria had conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and had then invaded Judah, besieging Jerusalem. Hezekiah listened to the words of Isaiah and turned to the Lord for help. In one night the Lord destroyed an army of 185,000 Assyrians surrounding Jerusalem. Between Hezekiah and Josiah two of Judah's worst kings ruled, Manasseh and Amon. They led Judah back to the worship of idols with all that that kind of worship entailed. Today's verses are Zephaniah's words of warning to Judah to return to the Lord.

"Gather yourselves together." All the people of Judah need to join in turning away from idols and returning to trusting the Lord. "O undesirable nation." Zephaniah is describing God's chosen people, the children of Israel. Will they learn a lesson from the destruction and captivity of the Northern Kingdom when the Assyrians conquered the northern tribes of Israel?

"Before the decree is issued, Or the day passes like chaff." There is still time for Judah to return to the Lord and forsake idolatrous worship. "Before the LORD's fierce anger comes upon you, Before the day of the LORD's anger comes upon you!" "Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice." I take this to be a reference to a remnant still living in Judah that were faithful to God. Will they be able to lead the rest of the people who will gather together behind them and bring the nation back to the Lord?

"Seek righteousness, seek humility." Seeking righteousness is to keep the Law of Moses. Humility requires them to forget their pride in seeking to curry the favor of the false idolatrous gods.

"It may be that you will be hidden In the day of the LORD's anger." The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* points out that this appears to be a play on words from Zephaniah's name which means "hidden" or "concealed." Even when Babylon eventually conquered, there was a faithful remnant who survived.

2 Kings 23:12-25 describes Josiah's leading the people of Judah back to God. Verse 25 says of Josiah, "Now before him (Josiah) there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him." The fall of Judah to the Babylonians was delayed until later when the people again turned away from God to worship idols.

We may read this and think, I don't worship idols. So what does this tell me about how I should live my life? Lev. 26 warns the people of Israel that if they failed to obey God, as they often did, that God would bring them through increasingly harsh stages of discipline until they finally would be carried off from the Promised Land into captivity.

God also warns me as a believer of potential divine discipline. Heb. 12:5-6, "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." The captivities of Israel and Judah were the ultimate stages of discipline God imposed on Israel, just as we as believers also can have our physical lives on earth terminated by the sin unto death (1 John 5:16-17). I need to pay attention to God's word, keep His commandments, confess my sins regularly, and walk faithfully with Him.

Zeph. 3:8-9. "Therefore wait for Me," says the LORD, "Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms, To pour on them My indignation, All My fierce anger; All the earth shall be devoured With the fire of My jealousy. "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him with one accord.

Zephaniah is looking forward to the distant future. When the prophets wrote about future events, they did so with their own words. The Holy Spirit inspired the prophets so that the very words the prophets used were what God wanted them to say. So we can be sure that what the prophets wrote will come true. Zephaniah wrote here in two verses the same thing John describes in eleven verses in Rev. 19:11-21.

"Therefore wait for Me." I also am waiting and need to do so with the confident expectation that Jesus could return at any moment. In 1 Thess. 4:16-17 Jesus will descend and we as believers are caught up together "in the clouds to meet Him in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." The unbelievers in the world who are left behind will soon find themselves in a time described as the Tribulation. There will be many worldwide disasters and spectacular events. At the end of seven years of this Tribulation all the armies of the earth will be assembled to attack Jerusalem. Zephaniah wrote, "My determination is to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms."

"To pour on them My indignation, All My fierce anger." Then the Lord Jesus Christ returns in what we call the "Second Coming" or the "Second Advent." He is joined by "the armies in heaven" (Rev. 19:14). We, the believers in Jesus Christ who were "caught up together" with Him at least seven years previously, return with Jesus and watch this pouring out of God's "fierce anger."

"That they all may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him with one accord." God's promises to Abraham to "make you a great nation" (Gen. 12:1-3) and the promise of a kingdom to David are fulfilled. The initial phase of this fulfilled promise of a nation and a kingdom is called the 1,000 year Millennium, and it is continued for all eternity into "a new heaven and a new earth" of Rev. 21 and 2 Pet. 3:13.

But what does this fanciful prophetic stuff mean to me? God has included all these prophecies in the Bible for me to read and to understand for the same reason that Zephaniah wrote them for the people of Judah. Judah was in the midst of a major crisis. The Babylonian army was on the move. The Babylonians were expected to invade Judah. The people did listen to Zephaniah and under King Josiah turned from their worship of false gods and returned to the Lord. Judah was protected this time from the Babylonians. Zephaniah's message was one of hope and encouragement.

Jesus told his disciples the night before He was crucified (John 14:1), "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." Then He promised them that even though He was leaving them, He would return. In 1 Thess. 4:16-17 Paul gave a similar application for us in verse 18, "Therefore comfort one another with these words."

Today I live in a world that is becoming more antagonistic and hostile to God and Jesus Christ. I can expect that antagonism and hostility to catch up with me. God's word tells me who is in control. I know how God will work everything out for His glory. I do not need to trust in the world's solutions to its own problems. God has told me what the ultimate end is and I can have comfort and encouragement in God's promises.

Hag. 2:6-9. "For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 'and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts."

Haggai prophesied in 520 B.C. after the initial return of the Jews from Babylon to their land. The returned exiles had started to re-build the temple in Jerusalem, but had stopped. They were distracted by wanting to finish their own houses. Also their idol worshiping neighbors did not want God's temple rebuilt. The returning exiles were listening to the thinking of the world as spoken by their neighbors. Rom. 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." If I am to know God's will, I need to learn it from God's word. Friends, neighbors, TV, politicians, and unbelieving teachers and professors are quick to tell me what the world thinks.

"I will shake." In Rev. 6:12 a great earthquake occurs as the sixth seal is opened. Jesus also mentioned earthquakes in Matt. 24. "The Desire of All Nations." Capitalizing these words in the *New King James Version* is the translator's interpretation which could be correct. This could be a reference to the return of Jesus at the end of the Tribulation during which the prophesied earthquakes occurred. Most modern translations interpret this "desire" as the nations bringing their material wealth to Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the temple during the Millennium. Maybe God left the phrasing ambiguous and both interpretations are correct. Was there a near fulfillment when King Artaxerxes of Babylon gave orders to his forest keeper to provide Nehemiah with timber for the rebuilding (Neh. 2:8)?

"I will shake heaven and earth." The author of the book of Hebrews had the Millennial Kingdom in view when he quoted this verse in Heb. 12:26, "But now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.'" The conclusion for us is given in Heb. 12:28, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." I am to serve God now in a manner acceptable to God. I am a believer in Jesus Christ. I will be in God's future kingdom. But my position in the kingdom is being determined by how I live now!

"The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former." This cannot refer to the second temple that was built after the return from the Babylonian captivity. This is definitely a description of the future Millennial temple which Ezekiel describes in detail in Ezek. 40-44. Ezra 3:12 records that the Jews who remember Solomon's temple wept when the foundation of the new temple was laid because it did not appear that it would have the grandeur of the former temple.

"And in this place I will give peace." This could be a reference either to the Millennial temple or to Jerusalem. During the reign of Jesus as the ruler of the world from Jerusalem during the Millennium, the inhabitants of Jerusalem will enjoy "health, well-being, and an abundant life" according to a note in the *Nelson Study Bible*. Haggai wrote encouraging the Jews to finish rebuilding the temple. They listened to Haggai. Both Ezra and Nehemiah led in the dedication of the restored temple. Haggai's encouragement and prophecies were meant for comfort to the people. So I also can be encouraged and comforted by knowing what God has promised for the future of all believers in Jesus Christ.

Zech. 2:10-12. "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," says the LORD. "Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. "And the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem.

This is a prophecy of the second coming (also called the second advent) of Jesus Christ. Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation. He is accompanied by an army of believers who were caught up to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air to be with Him forever. At Jesus' second advent He destroys the armies of the world led by the antichrist and his false prophet. The antichrist and the false prophet are cast into the Lake of Fire. Satan is locked up in the bottomless pit. The martyred believers of the Tribulation are resurrected. Those who have believed in Jesus Christ during the Tribulation and managed to survive, enter into the Millennial kingdom to re-populate the earth. (Matt. 24:13, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved.")

"Behold, I am coming." The return of Jesus Christ at His second advent.

"I will dwell in your midst." Jesus Christ will live on the earth again. But this time, He rules as king over all the earth. He will live in the midst of resurrected believers as well as those who enter into the Millennium, having endured "to the end" during the Tribulation. This passage is talking about Israel's promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

"Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day." Jesus Christ is not only the ruler of God's chosen people, Israel, but He also rules over all the nations of the earth. Many times Satan has tried in the past and is still trying today to establish a one world government to prove that he can do a better job of running the world than God can. Satan always fails at this. Whether it was Nimrod at the Tower of Babel in Gen. 11, the Assyrian Empire, or the Babylonians, or the Persians, or the Greeks, or the Romans, or the League of Nations, or even today's United Nations, or the wildest imaginations of some of our politicians, a one world government requires a perfectly righteous ruler (2 Sam. 23:3, "He who rules over men *must be just*"). That can only be Jesus Christ.

"The LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land." This is the promise of hope and encouragement for the Jewish exiles who have returned from the Babylonian captivity.

"The LORD ... will again choose Jerusalem." During the Millennium Jesus Christ will be king over the entire world, ruling from Jerusalem.

For me, I vote in every election I can. But I know that each time I vote, I am voting for sinful men and women. They will make mistakes in fulfilling the duties of their elected positions. My prayer is that they will follow the rules established by their predecessors in the United States Constitution. The Bible commands me to obey them (Rom. 13:1). "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." But if they ask me to disobey any of God's commands, I cannot do that. I must obey God.



**Red-headed Woodpecker, Pattison, Texas**

Zech. 12:9-11. "It shall be in that day *that* I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

I thought these verses would be an easy passage about which to write. Then I read the usual commentaries. I had memorized these verses because part of verse 10 was quoted in John 19:37 about Jesus' crucifixion. 550 years or so before Jesus was crucified and the Roman soldier pierced His side with a spear, Zechariah prophesied that He would be pierced.

Here is the way I understand what Zechariah is saying. "I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem." Zechariah was writing after a remnant of the people of Israel who had returned to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon. Previously, both Babylon and Assyria had attacked Jerusalem. But in the future (Rev. 19:11-21), the armies of the Antichrist and his false prophet will invade Israel to attack Jerusalem. That is when Jesus Christ returns with His army of believers and all the unbelieving armies of the world will be destroyed. The Antichrist and his false prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

"I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication." This sounds like what will happen during the Tribulation when many of the people of Israel will come to faith in Jesus Christ, some to die as martyrs at the hands of the Antichrist, but "he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13), i.e., delivered into the Millennium to repopulate the earth.

Paul prophesied much the same thing in Rom. 11:26 in a challenging verse to understand. "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.'"

The way *The Grace New Testament Commentary* handles this passage makes sense to me. Israel enters into a covenant or treaty with the Antichrist at the beginning of the Tribulation. Three and a half years later the Antichrist breaks the treaty. When this happens God has told the believers in Israel to flee to the mountains (Matt. 24:15-16). So the people of Israel are protected during the Tribulation fulfilling Jesus' promise, "he who endures to the end shall be saved." Not saved in the sense of eternal salvation because they had believed earlier in the Tribulation. They are saved in the sense that they will not be martyred during the Tribulation, but God will deliver them directly into the Millennial kingdom. There they will continue their human lives as born again believers still possessing their old fleshly natures as well as the born again new nature.

The world will be repopulated with new people, born in sin. These people born during the Millennium will have the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ. Many will. Unfortunately, some will not and will join up with Satan when he is released from the bottomless pit to lead the final rebellion against God.

For me, seeing how all these fragments of Scriptures fit together to present a great picture of what God has promised for our future is amazing. The words of Scripture were written over a period of 1500 years by over 40 different writers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The more I read and study the greater the marvel I see in what God has made known to us of His plan for this creation. To God be all the glory and praise for what He is doing.

Mal. 3:1-3. "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts. "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He *is* like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.

Malachi prophesied about 100 years after a remnant of the Jews had returned to Jerusalem and Judah from the Babylonian captivity. This was about the same time Ezra and Nehemiah ministered. The people living in Judah had lost their fervor for the Lord.

In the last verse of Mal. 2 (verse 17), Malachi accuses the people and records their questions: "You have wearied the LORD with your words; Yet you say, In what way have we wearied Him?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil Is good in the sight of the LORD, And He delights in them," Or, "Where is the God of justice?" Chapter three gives God's answer spoken through Malachi.

"Behold I send My messenger." In Matt. 11:7-10 Jesus quotes this verse and identifies this messenger as John the Baptist. As Malachi said, "he will prepare the way before Me." The Jews of Jesus' day had no problem understanding that the "Me" of this verse was a reference to their promised Messiah. But they were not willing to accept Jesus as that Messiah.

The message of John the Baptist is very familiar. It was the heart of the gospel message I heard in the Baptist church where I grew up and trusted in Jesus Christ as my Savior. John's message was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:1). The Jews understood it. They knew the Old Testament well. The Old Testament was clear as to what was required for the Messiah to establish His kingdom.

Deut. 30:2 says "and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, ..." The two conditions that had to be met were that the Jews have to be obedient to the Law God gave to them through Moses, and they had to return to the Lord in faith. The Jews of Jesus' day were keeping the Law better than they ever had before. But they were not trusting in God. "We have Abraham as our father" (Matt. 3:8). In their arrogance they were trusting in themselves as the descendants of Abraham and not in God.

When I was in high school, for the first time I heard a preacher redefine the word "repent" from what I had learned from the Baptist church. Repent means to "change your mind." Specifically, to change your mind about God and Jesus Christ. The Jews needed to return to God and trust in Him, and not in their lineage as sons of Abraham.

"And the LORD, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple." While Jesus visited the temple in Jerusalem many times, the coming of the Messiah about whom Malachi talks will be a time of judgment.

"Who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?" This is a prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled. Most of the Jews of Jesus' day, including their spiritual leaders, did not believe in Jesus as their Messiah. These words of judgment refer to the second coming of Jesus when He will judge His people. Those who have believed in Him will enter into the promised kingdom. The unbelievers will go into everlasting punishment.

The gospel today remains as it has always been. Paul gave it in his answer to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

Mal. 4:1-6. "For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do *this*," Says the LORD of hosts. "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, *With the* statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

"For behold, the day is coming." Malachi warns the people that the Day of the Lord is coming. This will be a time of judgment as the rest of this verse tells us. "Burning like an oven."

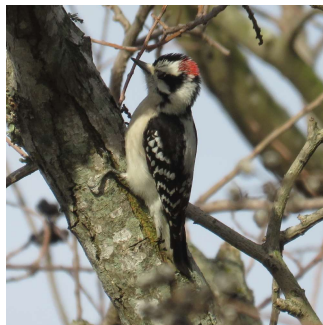
"And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble." I don't think many people put pride at the top of their list of the worst sins. But pride really describes our human nature. My human nature wants to do things my way. I do not want someone else telling me what to do. But God wants me to do things His way. The fire of judgment will burn the prideful wicked like stubble. But this is not an uncontrolled wildfire that after it has consumed all the stubble dies out. This is a controlled burn. We know from other passages of Scripture that it will burn forever.

The Sun of Righteousness will arise." The *New King James Version* capitalizes the subject here. But other translations do not. Is this a reference to the Messiah as suggested by the capitalizations? Some see this as the day of blessing following the judgment of verse 1. The Messiah will bring in this day of blessing like the rising sun. The healing in His (its) wings is the restoration of the earth in which the Messiah will reign during the Millennium and throughout eternity.

"Remember the Law of Moses." Chapter 1 of Malachi discussed how the Jews had been neglecting their observance of the temple worship.

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful Day of the Lord." The "messenger" of Mal. 3:1 was confirmed by Jesus in Matt. 7:7 to be John the Baptist. So is this reference to Elijah another reference to John the Baptist? John said he was not Elijah. Jesus said in Matt. 11:14 that John could have been Elijah, "if ..." The Day of the Lord has not come yet. So it looks like Elijah is yet to come. One of the two witnesses of Rev. 11:3-6 may be Elijah or a prophet like Elijah. What is the result of this future ministry of Elijah? "He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers." The testimonies of the two witnesses during the Tribulation will cause a revival among the Jews and others.

Malachi began this final chapter of the Old Testament with the command to obey the law God gave to Moses. The Old Testament gave two conditions to Israel for the restoration of the kingdom (Neh. 1:10). "but if your return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, ..." Israel must keep the law and then return to their faith in God. The ministry of Elijah through the "two witnesses" will bring the people of Israel back to faith in their Messiah. The wicked will be judged as part of the day of the Lord. Then the believers will enter into the promised kingdom.



**Downy Woodpecker, Houston, Texas**



John 1:1-4. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

"In the beginning ..." What beginning? This beginning is before Gen. 1:1 since verse 3 tells us that "All things were made through Him," i.e. through the Word. But since we are told that "the Word was with God, and the Word was God," this must be a beginning that is not a beginning. God is eternal. The Word is likewise eternal. The Word has always existed.

"The Word is with God." To be "with God, the Word must be distinct from God. Yet the next statement says "the Word was God." We understand that this is describing Jesus Christ as the Word, and that He is "with God." Dr. J. Vernon McGee in his *Thru the Bible* series comments on the Greek word order which says literally, "God was the Word." This places the word "God" in the emphatic position at the beginning of the Greek sentence. John wants us to know that Jesus is God, the same as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. All three are God. They are three separate and distinct persons, but are identical in attributes. Together they are one God.

The Jehovah's Witnesses cult make a big deal out of the absence of an article before the word

In Greek 101 you quickly learn that Greek does not have either a definite article "the" or an indefinite article "a." It has an article, the translation of which depends on its usage and context.

So that we may clearly understand that the Word is a reference to Jesus, we have John 1:14. "And the Word became 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." I like the way Dr. McGee rendered the statement here, "And the Word became flesh." He wrote, "the Word was born flesh." From eternity past Jesus has always been God, but in His birth He also became truly human.

"All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." I have heard Bible teachers say that all three persons of the Godhead were involved in creation. God the Father planned it (or better all the Godhead in a council of divine decrees planned it); God the Son executed the plan; and the Holy Spirit "hovered over the face of the waters" of Gen. 1:2.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of the world." Dr. Tom Constable's *Notes* are helpful. "Jesus was (and is) the source of life. Therefore He could impart life to the things that he created ... Life for humankind consists of light (here used as a figure of speech for knowledge and understanding)."

All this stuff is difficult for us to understand with the limitations of our finite minds. How can we have a Godhead of three persons, but only one God? Sorting out the Gen. 1 origins is tough with all the mis-information floating around. How can Jesus be both God and human?

The message to me is the importance of knowing God's word and finding good Bible teachers who don't twist Scripture to fit their preconceptions. I also have my own human failings and learn new things that change ideas I have previously held. I pray that God will show me what He wants me to know.

John 1:5-8. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light.

Verse 4 has identified Jesus as "life and the life is the light of the world." 1 John 1:5 says, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." Rev. 21:23 says of the New Jerusalem in eternity, "The city had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light." "And the light shines in the darkness." What is this darkness in which the life of Christ shines? The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says, "Satan the ruler and his subjects will resist the light, but they will be unable to frustrate its power." "The darkness did not comprehend it." The note in my Bible gives an alternate translation for "comprehend" as "overcome." Satan's power in this world and his rule will not be able to overcome the light Jesus Christ brings into the world.

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." We are introduced to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. John was sent "to bear witness of the Light." What was the purpose of John's witness? "That all through him might believe." The purpose of John the Baptist's ministry was to bring every person to faith in Jesus as Israel's Messiah.

John, the human author of this gospel bearing his name, stated the purpose for which he wrote this gospel in John 20:31, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." One hundred times in the gospel, John tells us to believe. No other book of the Bible has this same stated purpose. For the most part, the rest of the Bible is written to tell me how I, as a believer, should live my life.

In Gen. 1:2 after God had "created the heavens and the earth," we are told that "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep." In Gen. 1:3, "Then God said, 'Let there be light.'" It is as if God just turns on the light. God had not made the sun, moon or stars yet. But from the first day, there was light.

The contrast between light and darkness appears elsewhere in John's gospel. John 3:19-20 says, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."

John 8:12. "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.'"

John 12:46. "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness."

Each person living in this world has a choice to make. He can believe in Jesus Christ and receive eternal life. John's gospel gives no other requirement for receiving eternal life. When I believed in Jesus Christ in 1947, God gave me eternal life. My believing did not save me, but God saved me.



**Red-bellied Woodpecker, Houston, Texas**

John 1:9-12. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

The *New King James Version* follows the original *King James Bible* in its word order and punctuation. But who is it that comes into the world in this verse? Is it every man as it says here or is it the true Light, Jesus Christ? The other translations and the commentaries I checked all agree that John is writing about Jesus Christ coming into the world. This fits well with the context. The truth of the light is available to every one because Jesus has come into the world.

John 3:19 expresses a similar idea. "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." The bottom line is unbelievers do not believe because they don't want to believe.

"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." Rom. 1:18-20 says that men "suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." God has provided this wonderful world in which we live. For the most part, people in the world want nothing to do with God.

"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him." Paul wrote in Rom. 9:4-5 about Jesus' own people: "Who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen." So, after all God had done for Israel, they crucified Him.

These two verses are a summation of the end result of Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus suffered in many ways during His time on earth. One of these ways was rejection by the people who should have welcomed Him as the promised Messiah. But when I sin and fail to obey God, I am also rejecting Him. That is not the way I should glorify my God and Savior.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." This is the second time in his gospel that John mentions the only requirement for our eternal salvation. That is to believe or to place our trust in Jesus Christ. To me the *NET Bible* and *Young's Literal Translation* present this verse in a clearer fashion. The *NETB* says, "To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, ..." *YLT* reads, "But as many as did receive him, to them he gave authority to become sons of God – to those believing in his name."

Both these translations present the receiving of Jesus Christ as something that happened in the past. It was already done. Also these translations show that those who received Jesus were at the same time believing in Him. Receiving and believing are used synonymously. Both of these translations are correct grammatically. Receiving is believing. Believing is not the same as asking Jesus into your heart. Asking Jesus into your heart is sloppy verbiage. It does not present clearly that God saves us when we put our faith or trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and our eternal salvation.

John 1:13-14. who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became 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.

Verse 13 is the second part of the sentence that begins in verse 12. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those believing in His name." Of the people who received Jesus through believing in His name, John writes: "who were born." John 3 was not the first time John wrote about being born again. Believers are born again, "not of blood." Being born "of blood" refers to physical birth. Every person born into this world is born physically. Being born again is not a birth "of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man." Each person in this world can choose to obey God and believe in Jesus Christ. When a person believes, that person is born again by the will of God. God has promised and He keeps His promises. Believers are born again by a sovereign act of God. Our faith does not save us. God saves us.

Verse 14, takes us back to "the Word" (Jesus) about whom John began his gospel. "The Word became flesh." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says, "perhaps the word 'became' should be understood as 'took to Himself.'" John 1:1 identifies Jesus as God. As God Jesus always existed. Jesus' existence did not begin when He was born 2,000 years ago. But with His physical birth as a human being, He added true humanity to Himself. This is beyond my comprehension. I may think that I know what the words say, but how can Jesus be both God and man?

Phil. 2:5-8 says of Jesus: "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." Note that Paul wrote of Jesus that He "made Himself of no reputation." Other translations read, He "emptied Himself." Again, looking at the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* it was not that Jesus emptied Himself of His deity, but He set aside the personal self-interests of His humanity. Jesus became my slave. He died in my place.

As Jesus said in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." This is the fullest demonstration of what it means to love one another, which Jesus commanded us to do in John 13:34-35. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." I have not even begun to understand what it means to love others.

"We beheld His glory." John and the rest of the disciples witnessed firsthand the miracles, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. John was also one of the disciples that were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

"Full of grace and truth." Jesus taught and revealed the truth of God's word during His life on earth. His life was an embodiment of what grace means. Jesus divested Himself of all self-interests in His life. He asks nothing of us. There is nothing we can do to earn or deserve salvation. Jesus says, Believe in Me. Put your trust in Me. I will give you forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Eph. 2:8-9. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, ... It is the gift of God, not of works."



**Marsh Wren, Baytown Nature Center, Texas**

John 1:15-18. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*.

"John bore witness of Him." This is John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah. Mal. 3:1. "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming." John states that Jesus, who was born after John the Baptist was born, "was before me." This is another reference to Jesus' eternity. John said that Jesus is preferred before me, for He was before me." Jesus is and always has been God.

"And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace." The commentaries have a lot of fun trying to figure out what John meant by saying that we have received "grace for grace." I read at least four different interpretations. At least three of them seem to be variations on the same theme. God's grace is inexhaustible. God's grace provides everything that I will ever need. I don't deserve this salvation that God has given me. I can never outrun God's grace.

"For the law was given through Moses." God did not give Moses the law as a means of salvation. The law God gave to Israel through Moses was the way that God's chosen people should live. Just as Abraham believed God and it was "accounted to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6), so God's people were saved through their faith in God. God promised them, that if they kept the law, He would bless and prosper them. If they disobeyed, he would discipline them.

Now, Jesus, their Messiah, was here. He taught them truth. If the Jews had accepted Jesus as the Christ, their Messiah, He would have restored the kingdom. But as John 1:11 says, "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him." If they had believed the truth that Jesus taught, Jesus would still have suffered and died as Isa. 53 says. But the resurrection would also have happened and then the Jews would have received their kingdom, rather than having it postponed. At least that is the way I understand John the Baptist's message, "The kingdom is at hand."

"Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." In grace God provided Jesus as our Savior.

Verse 18 has another of those textual variants. The Bible I usually use says, "The only begotten Son, ..." A couple of older Bible manuscripts say, "The only begotten God." Some Bible versions translate it that way. Others massage the text to try to make sense out of the textual variant. My problem with the variant is that God was never born or begotten. Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, has always existed as God. No other Scripture says that God was begotten. The idea that gods are begotten is inherent in the myths of the ancient pagan gods. Jesus in His humanity was begotten. The majority of Bible manuscripts read, "The only begotten Son ..." I use a Bible that footnotes the textual variants. I prefer to examine each one to see which variant makes the most sense with the context and in light of the rest of the Bible.

"He has declared Him." By Jesus' life and what He taught, I can know a little more about God.



**House Finch, Pedernales Falls State Park, Texas**

John 1:29-34. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! "This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' "I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. "I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The word for "sin" in John's statement is in the singular. What is "the sin of the world" that Jesus takes away? Dr. Tom Constable's *Notes* indicates that the mention of "sin" here shows it is different from the reference to "sins" in 1 John 1:9. As used here "sin" in the singular is the sin that is passed down to all people who come from Adam. As it says in Rom. 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."

John 3:18 says, "He who believes is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Because of Adam's sin I was born condemned before I ever committed one sin. 1 John 1:9 tells me that the personal sins I commit after my salvation need to be confessed to restore my fellowship with God.

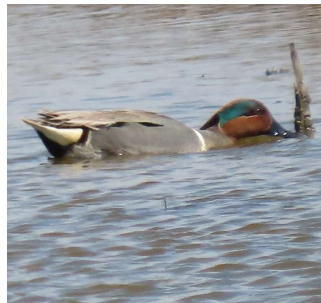
We were born condemned because of Adam's sin. Therefore God can give us Jesus' perfect righteousness when we believe in Him. This shows God's love, justice, and wisdom as He provides for the salvation of all people. We can receive salvation by trusting in Christ.

"After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me." Jesus was fully human, but He also was eternal. Jesus is God.

"I did not know Him." This is an interesting statement. John's and Jesus' mothers were relatives (Luke 1:36). But evidently they did not live that close to each other. God had sent John with a message announcing to the Jews the coming of the Messiah; and he was to baptize those who believed his message. John was to identify the Messiah because he would see the Holy Spirit descending on Christ when John baptized Him and the Holy Spirit would remain on Him.

"This is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." Matt. 3:11 is similar. It begins, "I indeed baptize you with water ...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." 1 Cor. 12:13 also talks about this Spirit baptism, but turns it around. "For by (same Greek preposition as translated in the gospels as "with") Spirit we were all baptized into one body ..." Rom. 6:3 speaks of being baptized into (different preposition) Christ Jesus. "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism unto death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

There are parallels with the gospels. Just as John baptized his converts in water, so Jesus Christ baptizes all believers in the Holy Spirit. Now we can walk in "newness of life" using the power of the Holy Spirit. Prov. 1:23 is interesting: "Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you." The Holy Spirit teaches us God's word. These verses speak of God's provision for our spiritual growth.



**Green-winged Teal, Matagorda, Texas**

John 3:3-6. Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

This is the well known "born again" passage in the Bible. Nicodemus is a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the ruling religious body of the Jews. John places this story of Nicodemus here following John's statement in John 2:23-24. "Now when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all *men*." Many people had believed in Jesus and were saved, but because they were new believers who had not grown in their faith, Jesus was not committing Himself as to rely on them. As we grow in our spiritual lives, we can expect to fail less in our walk with the Lord.

In John 12:42 John wrote, "Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue." Nicodemus was one of these rulers. John mentions Nicodemus three times and each time repeats that he came to Jesus by night. Nicodemus was a secret believer. The story in John 3 tells us of His conversation with Jesus which resulted in his salvation.

In John 3:3 Jesus makes the important statement, "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Many preachers like to point out the word translated "again" can mean either "again" or "from above." But Jesus' point is that a person needs to be born twice to see (verse 3) or to enter (verse 5) the kingdom of God. While Nicodemus understood that Jesus was speaking of two births, he did not know how this could happen.

Jesus explains in John 3:6 that we all have a physical birth which Jesus says is "flesh." But there is another required birth which is "spirit." The Holy Spirit is the agent of this second birth. When a person is born again or born from above, he receives a new spirit which is eternal and is able to have an eternal relationship with God.

Then as the conversation continues in John 3:16, Jesus says, "For God in this way loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

During this conversation, Jesus challenges Nicodemus in John 3:10, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" This would start Nicodemus thinking about everything he knew from the Old Testament about the promised Son of Man, God's Son, Israel's Messiah, and the kingdom of God.

How would Nicodemus have understood what Jesus meant by "the kingdom of God"? The Old Testament prophecies did not present the kingdom as heaven. Nicodemus understood that Jesus was talking about a restoration of the Kingdom of Israel on earth that would be ruled by the promised Messiah.

The message Jesus gave to Nicodemus is the message the world needs to hear today. To be a part in God's future kingdom and enjoy eternal life with God, each person needs to believe in Jesus Christ. We need to put our trust in Jesus Christ, not in any works that we can do.

Nicodemus as a Pharisee was faithful in obeying God's commandments, but that was not sufficient. Jesus died paying the penalty for our sins. When we believe in Him, we are born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. God saves us.



John 3:13-16. "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. "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.

"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven." Again, the gospel text confirms that Jesus existed in heaven prior to His human birth 2,000 years ago. Although there are some who suggest that John is writing editorially here, and that Jesus was not speaking, it is clear that Jesus was speaking in verse 11 when He told Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things." Many hold that Jesus is still speaking in today's verses. After all, in verse 11 Jesus commented on earthly things and heavenly things, so now He continues talking about heaven.

"That is, the Son of Man." Dan. 7:13-14 uses the title, "Son of Man" to describe Israel's future Messiah. "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed." The title, "Son of Man," confirms that Jesus was fully human, like all of us. But He also was God who came down from heaven.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, ..." Nicodemus would know this Old Testament story very well as he also would have known Daniel's prophecy of the Messiah. In Num. 21 the people of Israel complained about eating the same old "worthless bread" (manna) day after day. They were ready to go back to slavery in Egypt! God sent them a bunch of biting snakes, called "fiery serpents." Many died of snake bite. So the people came to Moses and confessed their sin of complaining about the manna God had given them. Moses prayed. Now we pray and we want God to snap His fingers and make things right. But God answers prayers in His way. In this case He told Moses to make a serpent and put it on a pole so everyone could see it if they looked. Those who believed God and looked up at this bronze serpent would be healed. This is a picture of what God wants every one to do today. Jesus was lifted up on the cross and died as a substitute for all of us. Everyone who believes in Jesus will be saved just like those Israelites believed God by looking at the serpent and were healed.

"Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Eternal salvation comes through our faith in Jesus Christ and His death for us.

Then the verse everyone has memorized at one time or another (or should have, (John 3:16). The *NET Bible* translates the verse slightly differently from most of our translations. "For this is the way God loved the world, ..." The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* has a similar translation. Jesus is telling us that "in this manner" God showed His love for us, "by giving His only begotten Son." God's love is infinite. Everything He does is in love. His love is never greater or less than it ever is. So to say that God "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" gives an incorrect impression. But it preaches well to say that God had so great a love for us, therefore we believe.



White Ibis, Houston, Texas



John 3:17-19. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." The purpose for which Jesus came into the world was to provide salvation to all people. Jesus coming into the world did not condemn unbelievers. Adam and all his descendants stood condemned from the moment Adam ate of the fruit in disobedience to God. Note what the next verse says: "He who does not believe is condemned already." This condemnation has passed from father to child ever since Adam had his first child.

1 Tim. 2:4 tells us that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." If it is God's will (and that is what Paul wrote to Timothy) that all men be saved, why aren't all saved? God created people in His own image. I take it that a part of the image of God is that each of us has the ability to choose to obey God or to disobey. While God is sovereign and has already determined the outcome of all events, creatures and things in His creation, He still can accomplish the fulfillment of His plan that He determined before He created anything. His omnipotence assures us that everything that God planned will happen. He can do this even though each person in the image of God can determine his own destiny.

So Jesus could say: "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already." God is omniscient and knows everything that is knowable. When He planned the creation of the universe He knew what He was doing. He knew who would believe in Him. So 1 Pet. 1:2 says that we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." It seems to me that God knew what each person who would believe would need in order to believe in Him. Since God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (a change of mind about Jesus Christ)" (2 Pet. 2:9), he gives each person every opportunity to believe.

What happens then? "That the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." As Paul wrote in Rom. 1:20-21, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, but became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened." God, in His justice, gives every person the fullest opportunity to believe in Him. The light of the Truth is available for all to see. God's eternity and omnipotent power can be clearly seen. But unbelievers have chosen to ignore the evidence of God's omnipotence and eternity in creating this world as well as the light that God has provided through Jesus Christ.

Understanding this stuff is not easy. It boils down to what we understand about God. All His eternal divine attributes or perfections exist together at one time. One does not take precedence over the others. If God's sovereignty were more important, then He picks some to be saved and leaves the rest in just condemnation. If love was tops, then all would be saved. God's salvation is free. He gives salvation to all who believe. Faith did not save me. God saved me when I believed.

John 3:31-36. "He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. "And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. "He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

John was speaking in verse 27. There is no indication in the text that he is not still talking here. These verses are about Jesus. "He who comes from above is above all. ... He who comes from heaven is above all." The text confirms that Jesus came from heaven. What Jesus says and does is more important than what any earthly teacher says. John would include himself among those who are "of the earth." In Col. 1:18 Paul wrote of Jesus "that in all things He may have the preeminence." I need to always remember that Jesus Christ should be of first importance in my life. I need to study His word and apply it. What can I do in my life to bring glory to God?

"And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies." Is this speaking of Jesus' omniscience as eternal God? Or is this what Jesus has seen and heard under the power of the Holy Spirit during His earthly life? When Jesus was twelve years old His parents took Him "to Jerusalem for the custom of the feast." Luke 2:42. When the days of the feast were over, His parents started back home, but later in the day realized that Jesus was not with the returning "tour group." Joseph and Mary returned to Jerusalem and it took three days of searching before they found Jesus! Verse 46 says they found Him, "in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions." Verse 47 says, "And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers."

Luke 2:52 summarizes Jesus' childhood: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." Jesus provides an example that I also should follow of learning all I can about what God has told us in His word. But Jesus was able to learn God's word because "God does not give the Spirit by measure." Jesus used the Spirit's ministry. God has given us His Spirit so we can also learn what God wants us to know.

"The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand." As Jesus said in John 10:29, "I and My Father are one." All three members of the Godhead share the same attributes, and perfections. They have different roles, but act as one. The Father sent the Son to this world for the purpose of providing salvation for all of us. When the Father did this, He had total confidence that Jesus would fulfill His purpose.

When I believed in Jesus Christ, God saved me. God could have taken me to heaven to be with Him instantaneously when I believed. But God has a purpose for me while I am here. Will I walk by faith? Will I learn more about God and what it means to trust Him in every situation I face? Will I be a witness to others about Jesus Christ? God has a purpose for each of us. He wants to give even greater blessings to those who walk faithfully.

"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life." This expresses John's purpose in writing this gospel. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. There is nothing else we have to do.

John never uses the word "repent" in this book. Why? Because the message that John the Baptist taught and Jesus and His disciples taught early in Jesus' ministry was no longer applicable. This was a message for the Jews taken directly from the Old Testament. God will fulfill His promise of a kingdom for Israel when the Jews keep the Law and return to God by believing in Him (Deut. 30:1-3).

John 4:22-24. "You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

These verses are a part of the story of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at a well in Samaria. As a result of this meeting she and other Samaritans believed in Jesus. Jesus' words here sound harsh: "You worship what you do not know." The Samaritans were ignorant of the truth God had given to the people of Israel.

Who were the Samaritans? The sources are incomplete and sometimes contradictory. We can't be certain on a lot of points. Their worship had many similarities to the ways the Jews worshiped. They did hold to the first five books of the Bible. Early copies of the Samaritan Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) are helpful from the standpoint of textual criticism since these texts predate the earliest manuscripts we have of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Here is a brief history of the Samaritans. After Solomon's death, the kingdom of Israel split into two separate kingdoms, called the Southern Kingdom or Judah and the Northern Kingdom or Israel. The Northern Kingdom had a history of idol worship. Briefly, God allowed the Assyrians to conquer the Northern Kingdom. The Assyrians typically would resettle conquered people in other parts of their empire and replace the re-located people with other conquered people. So the actual ethnicity of the Samaritans is uncertain. But their religion had similarities to that of the Jews, but added pagan idolatrous practices.

"Salvation is of the Jews." Even though the Samaritans had a similar hope to that of a messiah, true salvation through Jesus as the Messiah was strictly from the Jews. The other 34 books of the Old Testament have a lot of prophecies that Jesus fulfilled when He came.

"True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Although the Jews had rituals and formal worship in the Jewish temple, God wants people to worship with heart, soul and strength. As Deut. 6:5 says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."

Worship also includes the truth God has given us from His word. Being born again as Jesus taught in John 3:3 is a requirement for worship in spirit of a God who is spirit. Worshiping in truth requires using God's entire revelation to people, not just five books. Worshiping in spirit and truth requires both. It is not an either/or worship in spirit or truth.

"God is spirit." I have left the "s" in spirit uncapitalized because I don't see this as a reference specifically to the Holy Spirit, but to God Himself, which would include all three persons of the Godhead. God being spirit is in contrast to handmade idols of wood or stone or metal. It also contrasts to the gods of the ancient mythologies who were physical in form.

I believe that the entire Bible is God inspired and is all of His revelation about Himself. Too often, over time, men have added their own thoughts to what the Bible says. Dr. So-and-So says ... or Saint Whos-it says ... and we end up following the traditions of the fathers (1 Pet. 1:18) and not what God's word says. This is the error of the Samaritans who started with the first five books of the Bible, but followed their own idolatrous practices. I want to know what God has said in His word.



Common Yellowthroat, Houston, Texas

John 5:20-23. "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. "For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, "that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

John 5 begins with Jesus healing a man by the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. "Who had an infirmity thirty-eight years" (verse 5). In verse 8 Jesus said, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." This sounds like this man was a paralytic cripple. This is one of the signs that John reported Jesus did that prove He was the Messiah. Isa. 35:5-6 tells us of some of the Messiah's healing miracles which Jesus fulfilled. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing." The purpose of Jesus' healing miracles was to demonstrate His deity and that He was the Messiah. The healing and relief from suffering was a secondary result.

This man did not even know who Jesus was. When the Jewish leaders asked him who had healed him, he said that he did not know who healed him. Later he saw Jesus again and found out who He was. He went back and told the Jewish leaders. Now the Jews were upset with Jesus because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath and further had told the man to carry his bed. They considered both healing and carrying a bed to be working on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was to be a day of rest, not work. Today's verses are Jesus' response to the Jewish leaders. But first, by whose faith was the man healed? It was Jesus' faith that healed the man.

"The Father loves the Son, ... He will show Him greater works than these." Healing a man that had been crippled for 38 years without giving him a prescription for physical therapy was just a starter. The Father will "show Him greater works than these."

"The Father raises the dead ... so the Son gives life to whom He will." The gospels record multiple incidents where Jesus resuscitated someone who had already died. Lazarus in John 11:43-44 being one of them. But Jesus not only performed the miracle of resuscitation, but the day is coming when Jesus returns again and the dead will be resurrected, each believer receiving a new resurrection body (2 Cor. 5:1-4 and 1 Cor. 15:41-54) with which to enjoy their life forever.

"The Father ... has committed all judgment to the Son." I take it that "all" means all and that "all" would include the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats (Matt. 25:31), as well as the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:10-15. Matt. 25:31 says, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory."

"That all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father." All three persons of the Godhead are equal. One is not more important than the others. Isa. 42:8 says, "I am the LORD, that is My name: And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images." Phil. 2:11 speaks of the glory of God, "that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Anyone who denies the deity of Jesus is not worshiping God. The Jews had erred by adding more rules to Sabbath observance and many today take away from God's word denying the deity of Jesus. I need to be careful not to add to or take away from God's word.



Hooded Merganser, near Bardwell, Texas

John 5:24-27. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, "and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

"He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life." Jesus gives a clear statement of salvation. God gives eternal life to everyone who believes, trusts in Him. Back in the Baptist church in September, 1947, our pastor gave the gospel as the meat of a sandwich between two pieces of works, like two slices of bread. I believed God's promise that He would save me. The gospel the pastor presented at that time was the ABC gospel: "All have sinned" therefore repent; "Believe"; and "Confess", i.e. make a public confession of your faith. Both repenting of sin and making a public confession of my faith are the two slices of works and had nothing to do with God giving me eternal life. Repenting of my sin certainly didn't last very long. I probably interacted with me brother in a sinful way in the back seat of the car when my father drove the family home after church.

Repenting of sin is something that as a believer I must do constantly. Making a public confession of faith is also expected for every believer. But note what John 12:42-43 says about some of the Jewish rulers who did believe: "Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God." They believed, God saved them. But they were secret believers.

"Shall not come into judgment." John 3:18. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who has not believed is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Unbelievers will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15. Their names are not found written in the Book of Life, so they will be judged according to their works as written in another set of books.

As a believer in Jesus Christ, I will not be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment, but at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This latter judgment will be an evaluation of how I have lived my Christian life with the Judge's decision determining if I have qualified for any reward. Any rewards received would be above and beyond the gift of eternal life.

"The hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." Who are the dead? Are they spiritually dead unbelievers who have not been born again? They will hear the gospel, believe and receive eternal life. Or are they people like Lazarus who die physically and Jesus resuscitates them as a demonstration that Jesus even has power over life and death? I checked the usual commentaries and they waffle around in their discussions. The answers may be "Yes" and "Yes."

The next verse is here to help us understand what Jesus is saying. "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself." Human life differs from animal life. We are created in the "image of God," while animals are not. Our life in the "image of God" is given to us by God. Jesus is the member of the Godhead to whom God has delegated the authority to give life to people: physical life and eternal life. So Jesus could resuscitate Lazarus. He also gives eternal life to everyone who believes in Him. "Has given Him authority to execute judgment." Two divine prerogatives have been delegated to Jesus as a part of the Godhead: all judgment, and the giving of life.

John 5:28-30. "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. "I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is righteous, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me.

"The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth." Jesus is talking about a future resurrection of all people. If all we had was this verse, we would think that every person will be resurrected at one time. But what God has revealed of Himself and His plan for this world is progressive. He told Adam and Eve a little some six to eight thousand years ago. Then 3,500 years ago Moses wrote the first book of the Bible. He put in writing through the ministry of the Holy Spirit what had been passed down orally prior to that time. Then over the next 1,500 years, 40 or so authors through the ministry of the Holy Spirit added the remaining books of the Bible. Now we have God's complete revelation of what God wants us to know. Most of the time one verse does not tell us everything there is to know about a subject. We have to put the pieces together like a jigsaw puzzle. Jigsaw puzzles are fun, but they can be challenging.

Rev. 20 talks about two resurrections, calling one the "first resurrection." the second one is not identified as such. Rev. 20:12 simply states, "then I saw the dead, standing before God, ..." John 5:29 calls this second resurrection "the resurrection of condemnation." This is the resurrection of all unbelievers who will stand before Jesus Christ to be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment. Jesus calls the "first resurrection," "the resurrection of life." Rev. 20:4-6 says in part about the first resurrection: "Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God ... they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years ... this is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection."

The "first resurrection" occurs in multiple tranches. Paul wrote a long chapter on the resurrection. In 1 Cor. 15:22-23 of this resurrection chapter he said, "in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming." So Jesus' resurrection was the initial stage of the "first resurrection." The second phase is mentioned in 1 Thess. 4:16-17. "The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

Do those who are alive at the time of the Rapture of the Church miss out on being resurrected? I don't think so because Paul wrote in Phil. 3:11 "if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." Paul meant that whether he was living or dead when Jesus returns, either way he will be resurrected. He will receive a new body which we call a resurrection body. Finally, in Rev. 20:4-6 we have the resurrection of believers who die during the Tribulation.

"Those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." What is the evil that they have done? John says in his gospel that the only requirement to share in the "resurrection of life" is to believe in Jesus Christ. The evil that results in the "resurrection of condemnation" is not believing in Jesus Christ.

As every person is born condemned because of Adam's sin, so every person's sins were paid by Jesus' death on the cross. But if a person refuses to believe in Jesus Christ he has rejected God's offer of forgiveness. He will be judged by whatever works he has done. These "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

I enjoy fitting the jigsaw pieces of God's word together.

John 8:30-32. As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

I am simple minded. John has already written in John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." One hundred times in this gospel John has written about believing. He gives no other requirement for receiving forgiveness of sins and eternal life. So why do some people say that these people really were not saved when this verse says "many believed in Him"? Of course, there are many who understand verse 30 literally, and do not try to read between the lines.

The lexical definition of a disciple is a learner. In the Bible the Pharisees are said to be disciples of Moses. The Pharisees also had their own disciples. The Bible speaks of some who were disciples of John the Baptist. John 6:64 and 66 says, "But there are some of you who do not believe.' ... From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." These were only curious. They came to hear what Jesus said and decided it was not for them. They were not believers. The word disciple as used in the gospels and by Jesus is not a synonym for a believer. In verse 31, "Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.'" Again, if these Jews believed in Jesus, they were saved and had eternal life. But they were not necessarily His disciples. To be His disciples they had to abide in His word.

Jesus had a lot to say about abiding in Him when He gave final instructions to His eleven disciples in John 15. In John 15:4 Jesus commanded His disciples to "Abide in Me, and I in you." The disciples were already believers. But abiding as a disciple is not the same as being a believer. 1 John 2:6 says, "He who says He abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." If I have sin in my life, I am not abiding and I am not a disciple. A disciple is a learner. If I am not abiding and if I am not learning God's word, I also am not a disciple.

Jesus also tells me why I should be a disciple: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Sounds like a great motto. Let's post it on the front of every college library!

The unbelieving Jews answered Jesus in the next verse. "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage." The Jews thought they were saved just because Abraham was their father. They had forgotten what Gen. 15:6 said of Abraham: "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Salvation is a gift of God to those who believe, not to those with the correct pedigree.

Jesus points out in verse 34 from what God's truth frees me: "whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." So, first of all, I learned the gospel, believed and I was saved. I was freed from the penalty of sin. But I am still a sinner. The truth of God's word, teaches me that I can overcome sin in my life. By applying the truth of God's word, I am freed from the bondage of sin in my life.



Carolina Chickadee, near Bellville, Texas

John 8:43-45. "Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. "You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it. "But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.

Jesus is teaching in the temple in Jerusalem. The Pharisees and other people are there hearing Him teach. As John 8:30-31 say, "Many believed in Him." But some did not believe, claiming, "We are Abraham's descendants" (John 8:33). But people are not saved because they have the right pedigree.

Jesus asks a question, answers it, and then explains the answer. Question: "Why do you not understand My speech?" Answer: "Because you are not able to listen to My word." They weren't deaf. They had believed the devil's lies which they had been taught in the colleges of the day, i.e. the college of the rabbis. The apostle Paul was a graduate of this school having been taught by Gamaliel. He went around killing Christians until Jesus met him on the road to Damascus.

The explanation: "You are of your father the devil." "He was a murderer from the beginning." This contrasts with what Jesus had said in John 8:37, "You seek to kill me." The devil motivated Cain to kill Abel in Gen. 4. Also the devil "is a liar and the father of it." The devil spoke the first lie in human history when he told Eve in Gen. 3:4-5, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." These Jewish leaders had listened to the teaching of men in the college of rabbis and not to the word of God from the Old Testament. They had bought into the idea that God owed them the kingdom because they were descended from their father Abraham. They were "hard of listening."

"But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me." Jesus was speaking to the most highly educated people in Jerusalem. They knew the Old Testament Scriptures well. But what had happened over the several hundred years since the return from the Babylonian captivity is that the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Law had been embellished with a couple thousand additional rules. These additional rules were in place to be sure that no one would break the commands God had given to Moses. Jesus and His disciples were breaking these additional rules when the Pharisees accused them of breaking Moses' Law. The Jews had also replaced faith in God with the concept that since Abraham was their father God should give them the promised kingdom. But they were no longer trusting in God. They were trusting in their own works and pedigree.

Jesus, God Himself, came and taught them the truth. They did not understand. They had bought into the devil's lies they had been taught in the college of rabbis. I look back at all the things in my life I have had to unlearn when later I was taught correctly what God's word says. One time when visiting a university I heard a professor talk about the "big bang." I thought, "Wow! That sounds interesting." Thirty years later, I learned what the Bible teaches about the "big bang." It is better to be taught first from a Biblical worldview, than to have to unlearn the false ideas of another worldview.



**Great-crested Flycatcher, Rains County, Texas**



John 8:56-59. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad." Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

Jesus continues His dialogue with the Jewish leaders and others in the temple. "Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." What was it that Abraham saw? He may have received a special revelation from God that is not recorded in the Bible. But the Bible does tell us of some specific promises that God made to Abraham. In Gen. 12:2 God promised Abraham: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great." In Gen. 15:5 God said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them. ... So shall your descendants be." So God had promised Abraham that he would have an innumerable number of descendants who would make a great nation. He also would have known of the promise to Adam and Eve from Gen. 3:15 that Eve's seed would be victorious over the serpent (Satan) who had tempted them.

But the New Testament mentions something else that Abraham knew (Heb. 11:8-10 and following). Heb. 11:8 says, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance." Then verse 10: "For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." This sounds to me like God had given an early revelation to Abraham of the New Jerusalem of Rev. 21:2.

The Jews were not understanding what Jesus was saying. "You are not yet fifty years old." There is no way that you, Jesus, could have seen Abraham! As C. S. Lewis wrote: "He was either a liar, a lunatic or ..." They had already accused Jesus of being demon possessed (John 8:52).

Jesus answered "I AM." That did it! Exo. 3:14. "And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'" The unbelieving Jews knew exactly what Jesus was saying. How can some people today claim that Jesus never claimed to be God. So who do you say He is? "Liar, lunatic, or Lord?"

"They took up stones to throw at Him." Under the Old Testament Law anyone who blasphemed God was to be stoned to death. The Jews' reaction was to stone Jesus on the spot. "But Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple." The text does not tell us whether this was one of Jesus' supernatural miracles to disappear from right in front of their eyes while they looked around for suitable sized rocks with which to stone Him or was this just a demonstration of God's providential care of Jesus. Jesus' "hour had not yet come" (John 7:30).

God gave the Jews every possible opportunity to believe in Jesus. In this case Jesus told them who He was, and then vanished from their sight when they tried to kill Him. Jesus' vanishing act was another clear demonstration that Jesus was who He said He was. Today, I have God's word that tells me everything I need to know for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). God has providentially provided for me and protected me many times. Why do I fail Him as often as I do?



**Black-crested Titmouse, Lake of the Hills, Texas**

John 10:9-11. "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

Chapter 10 is Jesus' Good Shepherd Discourse. In John 9 Jesus had healed a man who was born blind. Jesus put clay on his eyes and told him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. He washed and immediately he could see. His friends brought him to the Pharisees. When the Pharisees found out that Jesus had healed this man of his blindness and did it on the Sabbath, they cast the man out. At the end of chapter 9 some of the Pharisees show antagonism to Jesus and Jesus rebukes them saying "your sin remains." Then Jesus talks about sheep, the sheepfold and related topics.

In today's verses Jesus identifies Himself as "the door" of the sheepfold. In the sheepfold the sheep would be protected from enemies outside. But the sheep can go outside to the pasture to feed. The shepherd would lead them out during the day. At night the shepherd brings his sheep back to the sheepfold. A doorkeeper mentioned in verse 3 may watch the sheep at night or as Jesus describes here the shepherd may lie down across the entrance of the sheepfold.

"If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved." This may just refer to the safety and protection that the sheep have in the sheepfold with the shepherd blocking the entrance. Some commentators see the "will be saved" as an analogy to the eternal salvation and forgiveness of sins that Jesus provides. When the sheep "go in an out and find pasture," this is an analogy to the watchcare Jesus provides to His sheep. I praise God that I am one of Jesus' sheep.

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." After the way the Pharisees treated the man who received his sight through Jesus in John 9 and the confrontation Jesus had with the Pharisees at the end of the previous chapter, the thief here may be analogous to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the spiritual leaders of the Jews. They should have been leading the people to Jesus. The former blind man had no problem acknowledging that only a person from God could restore sight to a person born blind.

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." "That they may have life" refers to the quantity of life, eternal life. Having life more abundantly is the quality of that eternal life. 2 Tim. 2:11-12 explains these two ideas: If we died with Him, We shall also live with Him (that is, eternal life). If we endure, We shall also reign with Him." Reigning with Jesus in the future kingdom and into eternity is a higher quality or a more abundant life in eternity.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." Jesus threw that fast ball right past them. His hearers had no clue what He was saying. Jesus knew His destiny. He knew what was coming. He knew why He was here. He was going to give His life for every sinner in this world. He died in my place.

How then should I live? I have believed in Jesus Christ. God has given me eternal life and forgiveness of sin. He provides everything I need to live a life pleasing to Him, obeying what He has said. I simply need to avail myself of good teaching of His word and walk in the Holy Spirit.



**Grasshopper Sparrow, near Three Rivers, Texas**

John 10:27-30. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand. "I and My Father are one."

"My sheep hear My voice." This chapter begins in verse 1 with Jesus talking about sheep, a shepherd and a sheepfold (or sheep pen). The sheep pen has multiple flocks and each flock has its own shepherd. The sheep of each flock know the voice of the flock's shepherd. They don't respond to the voice of another flock's shepherd. In verse 26 Jesus had told the Jews who were questioning Him, "you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep." Jesus was speaking of their present situation. He was not saying that they would never believe, only that they had not yet believed and joined His flock. They were still listening to the voices of other shepherds. I need to learn God's word, so that I am not misled by the many voices of the world's shepherds.

"They follow Me." How did I as a sheep follow Jesus? I believed in Him. This is the contrast in these verses. Context is always important in looking at the Bible. I pick a passage, but to fully understand what it is saying, I also need to know the verses before and after the chosen passage. In this case, verse 25 says, "I told you, and you do not believe." Verse 26, "you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep." How did I become one of Jesus' sheep? I believed in Him.

"And I give them eternal life." I believed and Jesus gave me eternal life. I did not save myself by believing. I believed and Jesus saved me. Believing in Jesus Christ is not a meritorious work.

"Neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." A Pentecostal friend in college who lived across the hall from me said, that you can decide to disbelieve and lose your salvation. Really? Jesus did not include me as one of the "anyone" in His statement? When Jesus gave me eternal life, it was eternal. Even in the Baptist church where I grew up which did not teach much of the Bible beyond how to be saved, I was taught eternal security: i.e. "Once saved, always saved."

"My Father, who has given them to Me." Among the three persons of the Godhead there is delegation of authority and responsibility. All three members of the Godhead are equal. "No one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." My eternal security is a reality not only because Jesus has given me eternal life and no one can change it; but God the Father also keeps my salvation secure.

"I and My father are one." Jesus did not say "is one." How can "one" be plural, as in "are one"? "Is one" would be saying that Jesus and the Father are the same Person. But they are not the same Person. They share the same attributes. "Neither shall anyone snatch them out of My (Jesus') hand"; "and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." Even though the three Persons of the Godhead have been delegated different areas of responsibility and authority, they always act as one.

In the context, Jesus' listeners reacted. They understood Jesus to have been making a claim that He was God. Verse 31 says, "The Jews took up stones to stone Him."



Checkered White, butterfly, Wheeler County, Texas

John 11:25-27. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

Lazarus has died. In John 11:1 Jesus hears that His friend, Lazarus, was sick. Jesus waits a couple of days. Then He decides to go to Bethany where Lazarus lived with his two sisters, Mary and Martha. Jesus tells His disciples that Lazarus had died. When they arrive in Bethany, they learn that Lazarus was buried four days earlier. Martha meets Jesus when He arrives and tells Him that if Jesus "had been here, my brother would not have died" (verse 21). Jesus tells her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha agrees that "he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (verse 24). This resurrection is mentioned in Dan. 12:2, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt."

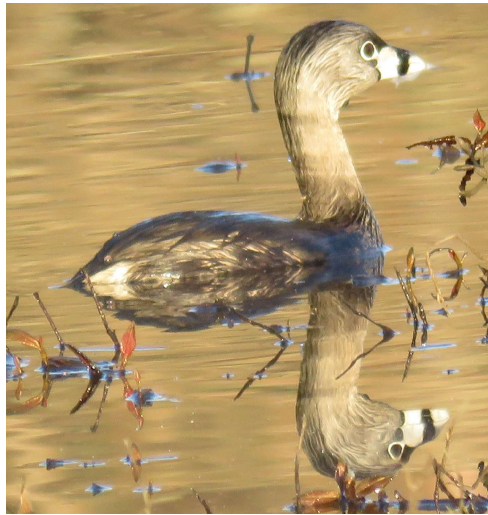
"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'" This repeats the idea of John 5:21, "For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will."

"He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." Anyone who believes in Jesus, if he dies, he will live again. Here Jesus is talking about physical life which was the life that was the focus of the prior discussion in verses 21-24.

"And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." When I believed in Jesus Christ, I received a different kind of life than the life Jesus talked about in verse 25. That life can die, but the life of verse 26 "shall never die." This life is eternal life or more correctly "everlasting life." Everlasting life has a beginning when I believed in Jesus Christ and was born again. It is everlasting from the moment of faith in Jesus Christ. What does "whoever" include? The answer is not all that profound. This would be any human being ever born into this world. It does not include angels, or Satan, fallen angels, or demons. It does not include animals. My pet guppy, or puppy, or my neighbor's parrot will not live again.

Martha has acknowledged an understanding of a future resurrection of physical life. Now Jesus asks her about this life of verse 26 that never dies. "Do you believe this?" One commentator referred to this question as an invitation. It certainly contrasts to many invitations that I have heard often from evangelists and in the Baptist church where I grew up. Those invitations, while including the need to believe, were often mixed with elements of works. "Believe and also do this."

Martha's gives a threefold answer acknowledging her faith in Jesus Christ. "I believe that you are the Christ." Martha believed Jesus was Israel's promised Messiah. "The Son of God." She believed that Jesus was God, full deity. "Who is to come into the world." Psa. 2:7 says of the promised Messiah, "The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'"



**Pied-billed Grebe and reflection, Near Nacogdoches, Texas**

John 12:37-41. But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with *their* eyes, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

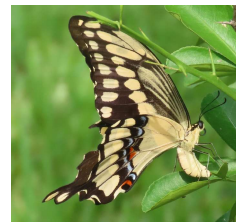
"Although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him." The purpose of Jesus' miracles was to demonstrate that He was Israel's promised Messiah. Previously, in this chapter we are told that many people did believe in Jesus when He resuscitated Lazarus. But others did not. The chief priests even "plotted to put Lazarus to death" (John 12:10)!

"Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" This is a quotation from Isa. 53:1. Isaiah had prophesied that Israel's Messiah would be rejected. In the following verses of Isa. 53, Isaiah foretold of Jesus' suffering and death. "The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

"Therefore they could not believe ... 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.'" (Isa. 6:9-10). What is going on? Paul tells us in 1 Tim. 2:4 that God "desires all men to be saved." To understand this I was taught to look at the example of Pharaoh and Moses back in Exodus. Moses asked Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go. Pharaoh said "No" ten times and God brought ten plagues on Egypt. Five times the text says, "Pharaoh hardened his heart" and would not let the people go. But with the sixth through the tenth plague it says, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." God gave Pharaoh every opportunity to allow the people of Israel to go. But after saying "No" five times Pharaoh had reached the point of no return. But God in His grace gave him five more opportunities. The text tells us that now it was God hardening Pharaoh's heart. God wanted to use the miraculous delivery of Israel from Egypt as a witness to the world about who God is. Later we learn that Rahab and Balaam and others had believed in God because of what happened to Egypt.

I believe God works the same way today. He does this not only with unbelievers, but also with believers. With unbelievers Rom. 1:19-20 tells us that God's "invisible attributes are clearly seen ... "even His eternal power and Godhead." Many reject God even at this foundational level, but God's revelation to them remains until their time runs out. Others may hear a fuller gospel message multiple times and continue to reject God, while some may believe. For those who believe, God gives us eternal life. "OK, God, I have eternal life, bring Me up to Your presence, so I can enjoy it now!" No, God has other plans for me. God wants me to learn more about Him and learn to trust Him more. As Paul wrote in Phil. 1:29. "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." God gives believers every opportunity to obey and serve Him while we live in this world. Those who do this well will receive an even more abundant life in eternity. But some will fail miserably in their Christian life. As 1 John 5:16 says, "There is a sin leading to death." This is the destiny of those who continually fail in their walk with God.

"These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. Isa. 6:1-4 tells us of Isaiah's vision of God's throne room: "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne". In verse 3, the seraphim sang, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory."



**Giant Swallowtail, butterfly, Houston, Texas**



John 12:42-43. Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

How many people have you heard say something like this? "He (or she) is such a good person, I know they are Christians." Here John tells us that there were some secret believers in Jesus among the spiritual leaders of the Jews. Outward appearances can be deceiving. In the one hundred references in John's gospel to believing, he never once mentions believing in the sense of it only being a non-saving belief, as in a "head belief" and not a "heart belief." The New Testament gives us the names of two of these rulers who were undoubtedly among these secret believers in Jesus Christ: Nicodemus (John 3:1-9) and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38).

There are some people who say that you have to not only believe in Jesus to be saved, but you also have to confess Him. This was what I was taught in the Baptist church where I grew up. You made a public profession of your faith in two ways: You came down the aisle when the pastor gave the invitation at the end of the service, and you then were publicly baptized. Both of these activities, i.e. walking the aisle, and being baptized, are works. These may be works in response to a person's believing in Jesus Christ. But they are not necessary for a person's salvation.

The primary Scripture that people use for confession being needed for salvation is Rom. 10:9-10: "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

I have heard various interpretations of this passage. The latest one I heard just this week in a recent message taught by Dr. Andy Woods, pastor of Sugar Land Bible Church. Dr. Woods is also the President of Chafer Theological Seminary and an author of several excellent books. The church is located less than twenty minutes from my house. My wife and I currently attend a church that is ten minutes away. We are blessed to have multiple choices of excellent Bible-teaching churches near us.

Dr. Woods approached Rom. 10:9-10 from the standpoint of its context. In Rom. 9-11 Paul is talking about the people of Israel and their lack of faith in Jesus Christ. He begins Rom. 10:1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved." Dr. Woods was teaching from Zech. 13:9 about a future time when everyone living of the children of Israel will be saved. "I will bring one-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; And each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"

He also mentioned Jesus' related prophecy in Matt. 23:39, "For I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" At the end of the Tribulation every surviving Israelite will have believed in Jesus Christ and they will then confess Him as their Savior. The confession actually follows their believing in Jesus Christ. They will be saved the same way I was saved. I believed in Jesus Christ and God saved me.

The one-third of the Israelites who survive the Tribulation will have believed and God will save them. As Paul said in Rom. 11:26, "And so all Israel will be saved." These will persevere to the end of the Tribulation.

"They loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God." For me, I need to take care that I live my life in a manner pleasing to God, and not for the purpose of receiving accolades from men.

John 13:31-35. So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. "If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. "Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Jesus has just finished the Last Supper with His disciples. He has washed their feet and identified Judas as His betrayer. Judas has just left: "So, when he had gone out." "Now the Son of Man is glorified." Jesus knows He is about to be crucified, so He tells His disciples that He is glorified. Makes sense? Right? Jesus is carrying out the Father's plan. God will glorify Jesus after this, just as Jesus glorifies God by fulfilling God's plan. "And God is glorified in Him." I glorify God when I obey God. When I disobey, I dishonor God.

Jesus gives His disciples a new commandment. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you." Didn't Lev. 19:18 say: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"? And in Matt. 5:43-44 Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy, But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.'" So we need to pay attention to this "new" commandment."

What is new here? We also should consider Rom. 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Think of what Jesus went through during the twenty-four hours after He gave this new commandment to His disciples, He did not even need to leave His comfortable digs in Heaven to come down to this miserable world. Preachers define love correctly as wanting the best for another person. That sounds nice, but I also want good things for myself. Am I willing to totally dedicate my life for the sake of others like Jesus did for me? What happened to Jesus' eleven disciples who heard this? Ten of them suffered death as martyrs and although John lived to an old age, he finished his life as an exile on a remote island.

My wife and I have recently heard messages on love that included this passage. In one of them I heard the pastor discuss 1 Cor. 13:4-7 in detail. "Love suffers long." (Patience, steadfastness, remaining tranquil and calm while waiting, to endure provocation without complaint. The opposite of putting self first.) Love "is kind." (A positive reaching out or being useful or helpful to someone else.) "Love does not envy." (Not jealous, not envious, without uncontrolled outbursts.) "Love does not parade itself." (Does not brag or speak of one's own accomplishments.) Love "is not puffed up." (Not conceited. Not like the Corinthians whom Paul warned in 1 Cor. 8:1, "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.) Love "does not behave rudely." (Does not disgrace or shame its object.) Love "is not provoked." (Not easily angered, upset, provoked, or irritable.) Love "thinks no evil." (Does not impute wrong doing to others, gives the benefit of the doubt.) Love "does not rejoice in iniquity." (Does not go along with evil or overlook evil.) Love "rejoices in Truth." (Has integrity and is consistent with righteousness.) Love "bears all things." (Hides the faults of others or covers them up. Does not embarrass others with their faults. Love does not excuse the faults, but does not discuss them publicly.)

He based these comments on a study of the Greek words used to describe this love. This is the love that the Holy Spirit will produce in my life if I am walking with Him. When I think of myself first, the fruit of the Spirit rots on the vine (Gal 5.22-23).

John 14:1-3. "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

Jesus has just finished telling His eleven remaining disciples that He would be leaving them. This was not what His disciples expected. They were thinking that Jesus would establish His future kingdom, overthrowing the rule of Rome. Now Jesus has told them, "Good bye." The disciples are upset.

So Jesus moves ahead with a new promise, but first He encourages them. "Let not your heart be troubled." Why? Because Jesus was going to His Father's house to prepare a place for the disciples and all of us who believe after them, so that we can be with Jesus forever. This is a promise that has not yet been fulfilled. Jesus gave us this promise so that our hearts would not be troubled.

As we go through our every day lives, we face many problems and difficulties. Some of them are relatively small. Other times we may face a major catastrophe. For Jesus' disciples, the capture, trial, crucifixion, and death of Jesus was worse than anything they could have imagined as possible. "Let not your heart be troubled."

Today, I see the world in which I grew up and in which I have lived for eighty years plus, being turned topsy-turvy. "Let not my heart be troubled." Jesus has promised that He will return. As I study God's word and seek to understand what He has promised us about the future, I can have hope in His faithful fulfillment of those promises. Let not my heart be troubled.



**Belted Kingfisher, Rockport, Texas**



John 14:1-7. "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me "In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. "And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."

Last December I wrote a devotional on the first three verses. I will add a couple of comments on these verses here. Jesus repeats the recurring theme in John's gospel. "Believe in Me." The only condition for eternal salvation is believing in Jesus Christ. Is Jesus telling His eleven disciples that they believe in God, so they also should believe in Him? Or is He saying that they believe in God and they also believe in Jesus. This could also be read as a command to believe both in God and believe in Jesus Christ. Commentators agree that the Greek text could be read in any of the three ways. I will suggest that Jesus is confirming that the disciples believed both in God and also in Jesus Christ as God. Prophecy is written as a source of comfort and encouragement for believers. After Jesus' announcement that He was leaving, the disciples needed this encouragement, as I often do also.

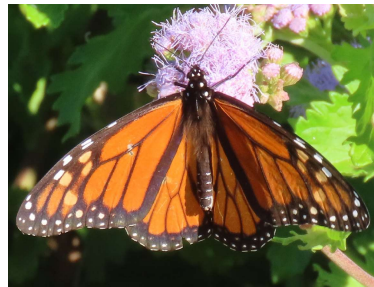
So Jesus revealed something entirely new to them. The Old Testament had taught that the Messiah would come and establish Israel's Kingdom. Now Jesus is going to die. He would leave the disciples. They would not be able to follow Him until later. John 13:36 says, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward." John 14:3 fills in details of how the disciples would be able to follow Jesus later. Jesus said, "I will come again and receive you to Myself."

"Where I go you know, and the way you know." But Thomas asked, "How can we know the way?" Thomas wasn't doubting as much as he was trying to figure out what Jesus was saying.

So Jesus gives us the verse that too many preachers leave out when they read verses 1-3 at funerals. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Trusting in Jesus Christ is the only way for anyone to have a dwelling place ("mansion" in the old English) with God when we are caught up together in the clouds to meet Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:16).

If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also." The way this verse is translated makes understanding it a head-scratcher. Dr. Tom Constable's *Notes* explains the verse well. He writes that Jesus used the word "If" suggesting "that the statement was true for the sake of the argument." The translation could read "Since you have known Me, you have known My Father also." "And from now on you know Him and have seen Him." In the future you will learn more about God and will know Him better. Jesus is anticipating the promise (prophecy) that He makes in John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

Today, God has blessed me with a completed canon of Scripture as well as the ministry of the Holy Spirit through gifted men with the God given spiritual gift of pastor-teacher to teach His word.



Monarch, butterfly, Brownsville, Texas

John 14:12-15. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. "And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. "If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*. "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

"The works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do." To what is Jesus referring when He speaks of these works? In speaking to the Jews who were ready to stone Jesus because He said, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30), Jesus called His miracles, "works." John 10:37-38. "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." I take it that the works here in John 14:12, are the miracles and signs that Jesus did. So how could the disciples do better signs than Jesus did? The answer is that they could not. But they could do a greater quantity of miracles. Paul said to the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 12:12, "Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds." So, one view of this verse is that it was directed to Jesus' eleven disciples.

Jesus was not saying that all Church Age believers will have the ability through the Holy Spirit to perform miracles of healing, turning water into wine and resuscitating dead people. These miracles were Jesus' and the apostles' credentials that they were speaking God's truth.

Some commentators suggest that the "greater works" refers to a greater number of people who will be saved by the witness of believers in the Church Age. On the Day of Pentecost Acts 2:41 says that over three thousand souls believed and were baptized as a result of Peter's sermon. This assumes something the Bible does not say: that Jesus did not have three thousand converts during His ministry. Of course, millions and perhaps billions have believed after Jesus was crucified, plus those who believed before Jesus came.

"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." Adding "in Jesus' name" at the end of our prayers is not a magic talisman to guarantee that God will give us our requests. 1 John 5:14-15 expresses this prayer principle this way: "If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." The purpose of prayer is to glorify God. God is not glorified if our prayers depart from His will. What is God's will? God has told us His will in His word, the Bible. For my prayers to be "according to God's will," I have to know the Bible and apply it correctly as I pray.

How often do I ask God to perform some miracle in my life? Someone is telling lies about me or is planning to hurt me in some way, should I pray that God would force him to change his mind? 2 Tim. 3:12, "All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." I live in a world controlled by Satan. God allows things to happen that I might apply God's word to each situation and learn to trust Him more. My prayers should apply God's word.

"If you love Me, keep My commandments." Jesus is not changing the subject. Praying in Jesus' name, and praying according to God's will, means that we are also keeping God's commandments. I can't glorify God if I am disobedient. When I am disobedient, I am not loving God. 3 John 2 gives an example for prayer: "I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health just as your soul prospers." A prospering soul is one that is growing spiritually. It is not wrong to pray that good things will happen to me or to pray for good health. It is not wrong for me to pray that others will prosper and be in good health. When health problems occur, rarely does God provide unexpected recoveries. More probable are correct diagnoses and skilled treatments. Can I glorify God in these situations?

John 14:16-18. "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

"And I will pray the Father, and He will send you another Helper." The commentaries say that we do not have a one word equivalent to the Greek word translated here as "Helper." In various English translations it is rendered: Comforter, Counselor, Advocate, and Helper. One who stands alongside to counsel, comfort, speak on my behalf as an advocate, or to be a helper. So in verse 18 Jesus tells His disciples, "I will not leave you orphans." A parent watches over and cares for a child, so, like a parent, the Holy Spirit will watch over and care for the disciples. Jesus has told His disciples that He was leaving them. So Jesus says in John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled." As Jesus continues to teach them, He tells them why they should not be upset. In John 14:2-3 Jesus will return to meet them in the Rapture so we can be with Him forever. Verse 12 says they will do more miracles and signs than Jesus did. In verses 13-15 prayer in Jesus' name, according to God's will, and when practicing love for Jesus by keeping His commandments, Jesus will provide their requests glorifying the Father.

Jesus again mentions the Holy Spirit later in this Upper Room Discourse. John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." In John 16:7, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you, but if I depart, I will send Him to you."

"The Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him." The only thing the Holy Spirit does for the unbelievers of the world is to convict them "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). But for me as a believer, He is much more. For the disciples Jesus says the Holy Spirit "dwells with you and will be in you." This sounds to me like the Holy Spirit was also with Jesus during all His life on earth. Thus Jesus could tell His disciples that the Holy Spirit "dwells with you."

But Jesus also gave them power, which may have been through the Holy Spirit in Matt. 10:1. "And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease." 1 Cor. 6:19, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you."

John the Baptist said of Jesus in John 1:33, "This is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." On the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, after Jesus' ascension, Jesus fulfilled this promise. I received the baptism and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as do all believers in Jesus Christ, the moment I believed.

When I am walking with the Lord, I am filled by means of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), so I can understand God's word (John 14:26), and have ability to not fulfill the lusts of my flesh and to obey God (Gal. 5:16).

"I will come to you." Does this refer to the Rapture, the few days when Jesus visits the disciples between His resurrection and ascension, or is he talking about the Spirit's coming at Pentecost? All of these are mentioned in various commentaries.

I was saved by faith when I believed. But now I must walk by faith. I need to walk by faith every day. God has given me amazing gifts so I can live for Him. I have no excuse for my failures.

John 14:19-20. "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. "At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."

"A little while longer and the world will see Me no more." Tomorrow, Jesus will be crucified and the unbelieving world will not see Jesus after that. "But you will see Me." Jesus alludes to His resurrection. After His resurrection Jesus' disciples will see Jesus again. They went from cringing cowards like Peter who denied Jesus three times during His trials to becoming witnesses who carried the gospel throughout the world. As 1 Cor. 15:4-6 says of Jesus, "and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present." Jesus' post-resurrection appearances were selective. It looks like He may only have appeared to those who had believed in Him ("brethren"). He did not reveal Himself to those who did not believe.

But there will be a time when all the world will see Jesus at His Second Coming. So 1 Cor 15 is speaking of the limited time of Jesus appearances between His resurrection and ascension. Matt. 24:29-30 says of Jesus' Second Advent, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

In the Rapture believers are caught up to the clouds "to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). Zech. 14:4 says of the Second Advent "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives." Zech. 14:6 adds, "It shall come to pass in that day That there will be no light." At the Rapture we, as believers, will meet Jesus in the air and return with Him to heaven. Jesus meets us by Himself. The unbelievers of the world have no clue what happened. Imagine the confusion if I happen to be at a real estate closing ready to sign a deed and the Rapture happens. I am there pen in hand and blip, I am gone! At the Second Coming the armies of the world are marching toward Jerusalem. The lights go out and they see Jesus coming with all the hosts of heaven. Jesus descends all the way to the Mount of Olives and destroys the armies of the world. That's just a couple of the differences.

"Because I live, you will live also." 1 Cor. 15 contains 58 verses addressed to believers in Jesus Christ affirming the reality of Jesus' resurrection and the promise that we also will be resurrected. Jesus' resurrection is the assurance that we also will be resurrected. As Paul said in Phil. 3:10-11, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." Paul is elaborating on Phil. 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Paul says that "one way or another" he will participate in the resurrection. Either he will die at Caesar's hands or Jesus will return and Paul will be caught up to the clouds "to meet the Lord in the air."

"At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." Jesus has previously said that He and the Father are one (John 10:30). At Pentecost believers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit who teaches us all things that God expects us to learn and apply. So Jesus is looking ahead to the reality that believers are not only indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but also by Jesus Christ.

I am amazed that Jesus has packed so much meaning into His last words to the disciples. I need to meditate more on them. May they be an encouragement to me as they were to the disciples.

John 14:21-24. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

In John 13:31 Judas left the Upper Room where Jesus and His disciples had celebrated the Lord's Supper and Jesus had washed the disciples' feet. After Judas left, Jesus began talking to the disciples about what was about to happen and giving instructions for their future lives after His ascension. He began his comments with a new commandment in John 13:34-35. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, ... By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." In today's verses Jesus returns to the importance of love.

He who has My commandments." First, I have to know what God has commanded me to do. I have to know what God's word says. "And keeps them." Then I have to obey what God has commanded. In John 14:12 Jesus had said, "If you love Me ..." Maybe I will and maybe I won't. The next phrase in verse 12 is translated differently in various English translations because of a textual variant. Did Jesus command His disciples to keep His commandments as a demonstration of their love for Him or did He state affirmatively that they would keep His commandments if they loved Him? He was speaking to the Eleven disciples, so they all were believers. Love and obeying God's word is not evidence that a person is a believer, but that that person is growing spiritually as a believer.

John 14:21 turns the conditional statement of verse 12 around. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me." Jesus is not saying that loving Jesus is a condition of salvation. If He were trying to say that, He would not have begun verse 12 with "If." The only condition for our eternal salvation is to believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

The second half of verse 21 and verses 23 and 24 gives us the result of our love for Jesus and obeying His commandments. To understand what Jesus is saying we have to know something about God's attributes. One of these attributes is love. 1 John 4:8 and 4:16 both say "God is love." God's love is infinite. God's love does not vary. God always loves me to the max, even when I am disobedient.

The same things can be said about all of God's divine attributes: His sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, justice, veracity ... What Jesus is talking about is love in the sense of my ongoing relationship with God. Some have called it fellowship. Jesus goes into more detail about our relationship with Him and the Father in John 15 and the book of 1 John says even more.

Dr. Tom Constable's *Notes* say, "The believer's obedience does not make God love him or her more than He would otherwise. ... the believer's obedience results in God expressing His love for that believer without restraint. When there is disobedience, God does not express His love as fully, because He chooses to withhold blessing and/or to discipline the believer (cf. Heb. 12:4-13)."

In answering the "other" Judas' question in verse 23 Jesus says to the loving believer who keeps Jesus' word that "My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."

In John 15:10 Jesus said, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." Sin disrupts my fellowship with God. I need to confess my sin to God and not plan how to repeat those sins!

John 14:25-27. "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

The disciples were confused. They had believed in Jesus as the Christ, their Messiah. He was to restore the Kingdom to Israel. Now He is telling them that He will die. Jesus has also told them about His future resurrection. Even though they had seen Lazarus and others resuscitated after dying, they still were having a hard time putting all this together. Jesus had previously mentioned in John 14:16 that the Helper, the Spirit of Truth, whom Jesus now identifies as the Holy Spirit, would come. The Holy Spirit will "teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." This was a promise to the Eleven disciples to whom Jesus was speaking. What Jesus had taught them, the Holy Spirit would remind them. They would then understand what Jesus had just said.

All believers have a related promise for us today. John warned his readers in 1 John 2:26-27 about false teachers. "These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him." The believers to whom John was writing had previously been taught correctly by John and the other apostles. They did not need some johnny-come-latelies to come along with some newer revelations.

As these believers are abiding in fellowship with no unconfessed sin in their lives, the Holy Spirit (called the "anointing" here) will continue to remind them of the truths they have been taught. For us today, we don't have apostles teaching us. But we have the Bible, with the teaching of the apostles. I pray that God will give me discernment to recognize those who are faithfully teaching God's word. Those who do not repeat the false ideas of men.

"Peace I leave with you. ... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Jesus returns to what He had said in John 14:1. "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." I can have an inner peace and an untroubled heart, just as Jesus commanded the disciples to have, when I walk in faith, believing (and obeying) God's word.

"My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you." God had promised the Jews a time of peace when the Messiah would come and restore the kingdom to Israel. The Messiah came and offered them the Kingdom. But the Jews, and particularly their leaders, refused to believe God. They were comfortable with their present situation and did not want to take the step of faith to believe God and risk more problems from the Romans.

They knew what Moses had said in Deut. 30:2. To bring in the Kingdom they needed to: "Return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today." The Messiah came with the message which is poorly rendered in English "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." They were not willing to change their mind and trust God. They were descendants of Abraham and thought God owed the Kingdom to them because they were good Jews.

Satan keeps telling the unbelievers of the world that men can have peace in the world. "Let's create a League of Nations." "OK, that didn't work, let's do a United Nations." What will the great thinkers of the world come up with next?

I thank God that I have His word. I know I have a future with God. John 16:33. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

John 15:1-4. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

This begins an important chapter in the gospel of John for believers. I first heard this taught in the way I still understand it almost 70 years ago. Unfortunately, not every one understands these verses the same way. What does the word "abide" mean? Does "abide" refer to every believer in Jesus Christ, or does Jesus use the word in the sense of a believer who is obedient to His commands?

Several commentaries mention that Israel is described several times in the Old Testament as a grape vine. Dr. J. Vernon McGee honed in on the word "true" in Jesus' comment "I am the true vine." Dr. McGee said that the Greek word is often used in the sense of "genuine." There is a counterfeit vine, but Jesus is the genuine article. Consider John's use of the same word in John 4:23, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

"Every branch in me ..." Jesus is speaking of branches that believe in Him. These branches either bear fruit or they don't. Years ago, I planted a pecan tree in our yard. It was only a few feet tall. It was not yet mature. It took years before it began to bear fruit. The same is true of new believers, they are not yet mature. They have to learn what God expects of them and then they need to put it into practice to bear fruit. This takes time.

There are two ways the word "takes away" can be translated. "Takes away" is the way our translations read, but I have a Bible that footnotes the second way, "lifts up." If I were into raising grapes, I would understand Jesus' statement in the sense of "lifts up." A low hanging branch of a grape vine is not going to get sun so that it can bear fruit. The vinedresser lifts it up, propping it up on a pole or a trellis. This is the way God works with believers. He provides us with the resources and the tests of faith we need to grow spiritually, so we can bear fruit.

"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." Back in John 13:10 when Jesus was washing the disciples' feet and Peter protested, Jesus said, "you are clean, but not all of you." Eleven of the disciples were believers and "already clean," and then there was Judas. This gives us another confirmation in the context that the branches refer to believers.

"Abide in Me, and I in you." This time "abide" is a command. Jesus is telling me as a believer that I need to abide in Him. Jesus had previously told some of the Jews in John 8:31, "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.'" He used the word "If" here in the sense of maybe you believers will or maybe you won't abide in Me. Learning and obeying God's word is necessary if I am going to bear fruit in my spiritual life. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."

How do I abide in Christ? Jesus explains more in the next few verses. John 15:10 says, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Jesus is talking about the potential of my fellowship relationship with Him.

Paul begs us in Eph. 4:1, Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." As a believer I make choices all day long. Those choices need to reflect what God has commanded in His word.

John 15:5-6. "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

Jesus is continuing His discussion of abiding and fruit bearing. Again, to understand these verses we have to remember to whom Jesus is speaking. He is talking to His Eleven disciples. The unbelieving twelfth disciple, Judas, left the Upper Room in John 13:31. He left to betray Jesus to the Jews.

Too many people think that being saved should not be easy. They want these verses to say that if you are saved that your life will reflect salvation by producing fruit. In the past I have tried planting a garden. Radishes were easy. Stick the seeds in the ground and even in Texas heat in a few weeks you have radishes. But it still took time for the plants to grow enough to produce a radish.

"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned." Verse 6 talks about fire and burning. Sure sounds like hell. So if Jesus is talking to believers then these believers must have lost their salvation. Right? Wrong! Remember, salvation is a gift from God.

God is not a "yo-yo" giver to give something and then to take it back. God is faithful as it says in 2 Tim. 2:13, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." Many other passages teach the eternal security of the believer. As I learned back in the Baptist church as a child, "Once saved, always saved."

Another interpretative approach and still using the "hell" motif of fire and burning is that these non-fruit bearers are people who claim to be Christian but do not have saving faith. They may only have a "head belief," but not a "heart belief." But the Bible never distinguishes between two kinds of faith. If a person had saving faith, he would bear fruit in his life. This understanding equates abiding with believing. Again in verse 2 Jesus speaks of "Every branch in Me" and in verse 3, He says "You are already clean." These statements show that Jesus was speaking to believers, His Eleven disciples.

I have usually thought that the fire and burning of these cast out branches should be linked to the burning at the Judgment Seat of Christ in 1 Cor. 3:11-15. This passage teaches that our works will be tested by fire and be burned. The "gold, silver, precious stones" survive. The "wood, hay, straw" are burned up. "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." Believers who grow in their spiritual lives by learning God's word and obeying demonstrate love by keeping the commandments. These are believers who produce fruit. Their on-going fellowship with God is what Jesus describes as abiding in Him.

Dr. Constable's *Notes* present another view which he says he prefers, but also says the loss of reward or another idea, the loss of opportunity, may be correct. I agree with Dr. Constable's preferred view that the withered, non-fruit bearing branches being cast out and burned may be a form of divine discipline or even premature death. If the non-fruit bearing results in premature death, this would be a case of the sin unto death.

Dr. Constable also pointed out a timing difference between the "lifts up" and "pruning" in verse 2 and the casting out and withering of the branches in verse 6. He takes the timing difference from the cultivation of grape vines. The lifting up and pruning of verse 2 would occur in the spring before the vines bear fruit. The casting out and burning occurs in the fall after the harvest.

What is the fruit that I should bear in my life? From the context, I see that I should love others, especially other believers. I need to obey God word. To obey, I need to study, learn and apply it.



John 15:7- 8. "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Prayer is a tough issue for believers. If you are like me, we all pray for a lot of things that just don't happen. Many times our Bible teachers will say, "Sometimes God answers 'Yes'; other times He says 'No.'" Maybe sometimes the answer is "Not yet." I find prayer confusing, particularly in light of the various promises related to prayer. Here are some of the Bible verses on prayer.

Today's verse: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."

John 14:13-14. "And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it."

1 John 5:14-15. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."

Matt. 21:22. "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

James 5:15. "The effective, fervent of a righteous man avails much." Then James gives the example of Elijah praying for no rain and then praying for rain.

Rom. 8:26. "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Here is what Dr. Thomas Constable's writes in his *Notes* about John 15:7. This "is a blanket promise to grant any request that an abiding disciple may make. An abiding disciple will ask for only those things that are in harmony with, or subject to, God's will—like Jesus did. The wishes of abiding disciples are the same as Jesus' wishes. To ask anything else would make the praying believer a non-abiding disciple."

To pray in Jesus' name is to pray what Jesus would pray. The prayer must conform to God's will. God has told us what His will is in His word. So to ask according to God's will means that I must know the word of God and pray accordingly. I must also be abiding in Christ. That means I am obeying Jesus' "new commandment" to His disciples in John 13:34, that we love one another as Christ loved us. I must be obeying all the commandments God has given in His word. Also consider Psa. 66:18. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The LORD will not hear."

These are high hurdles. Why pray? We are commanded to pray. First step: Confess all my known sins. When I face a hardship, do I pray that God would remove it, or do I pray for strength or wisdom to handle the hardship? How often do I ask God for a miracle to remove a hardship and the miracle never comes? Do my prayers reflect covetousness? Maybe I should ask God for wisdom in how to pray better.



American Kestrel, Surfside, Texas

John 15:9-12. "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Jesus uses Himself as the example that His disciples should follow. Jesus has loved His disciples as God the Father has loved Him. At the end of Jesus' last words to His disciples before His arrest, trials and death, He said to them in John 16:32, "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone." The Father never left Him.

This is the example that Jesus tells His disciples that they should follow. What happened? We know Peter denied Jesus three times. In this verse in John 16 (verse 32), Jesus foretells that all Eleven disciples will run and hide. Yes, the disciples had trusted in Jesus as their Messiah, but they failed this test. I wouldn't have done any better. But Jesus commanded his disciples, "abide in My love."

In the next verse He tells them how to abide in His love. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." Jesus again uses His obedience to the Father's commandments as the example the disciples should follow. Jesus obeyed to the end, and His relationship with the Father was not broken until He bore our sins. Then, my sins (and the sins of the whole world) were imputed to Jesus while He was dying. Matt. 27:46, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Jesus asked this as a rhetorical question for our sake. He knew what was happening. My sin broke the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ. Then Jesus spoke His final word, "It is finished." And bowing His head He gave up His spirit." John 19:30. His relationship with God was restored because He had completed His work in dying as a substitute for our sins. Sin and disobedience also breaks our fellowship, our relationship with God. We are no longer fulfilling God's will for our lives. Because Jesus has paid the penalty for my sins, I can restore my fellowship and abiding by confessing those sins.

"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full." when I abide in fellowship with Jesus, joy as a part of the fruit of the Spirit becomes a reality in my life. As one pastor put it, "Joy is a supernatural delight in God apart from human circumstances." It is produced by the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer who is abiding and obeying the commandments.

"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Jesus did not say this once. He repeated it several times. Jesus gave His all for each one of us. This is a high standard. I wrote a few days ago about the subject of love, looking at the descriptions of love in 1 Cor. 13:4-7. Consider Paul's encouragement to us based on Jesus' love in Phil. 2:1-4. "Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." If I would do these things, I would make a good start to fulfilling Jesus command to love others.



**Cloudless Sulphur, butterfly, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Texas**

John 16:7-11. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: "of sin, because they do not believe in Me; "of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; "of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

The disciples are filled with sorrow that Jesus has told them that He is leaving. In these verses Jesus explains a reason for His departure. "If I do not go away the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." Prior to Jesus sending the Holy Spirit to them, He would die for the sins of the disciples, as well as the sins of the whole world. This was followed by His resurrection and ascension. Jesus' death fulfills God's plan of bringing salvation to everyone who believes in Jesus and trusts in the salvation that Jesus provides.

"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." The Holy Spirit's conviction does not force a person to believe in Jesus Christ. Conviction is the recognition of evidence showing that something is true. A common use of the word "convict" today is in court trials. The plaintiff and the defendant present their evidence. Then the judge and jury look at the evidence and form a conclusion. If the evidence is not conclusive as to guilt, the defendant is not convicted. But when the evidence is convincing, then the court convicts the defendant.

The Holy Spirit does not work alone. But he works through me and other believers who are commanded to be witnesses to the world of God's offer of salvation. Matt. 28:19-20 is called the Great Commission. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." Acts 1:8 calls us "witnesses." "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." I need to speak more boldly of God's great salvation. I need to continue my prayer and financial support of missionaries and those who teach God's word.

"Of sin, because they do not believe in Me." When a person fails to believe in Christ, He has rejected God's offer of eternal life and the forgiveness of His sins. When his works are revealed from the books of works at the Great White Throne Judgment, they will be found inadequate.

"Of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see me no more." With Jesus' resurrection and ascension, God the Father recognizes Jesus' perfect righteousness in fulfilling God's plan.

"Of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." God is sovereign. God is in ultimate control of, not only this world in which we live, but also of everything else that is outside of this created world. The ruler of this world today is Satan. In Luke 4:5-6 Satan gave Jesus the opportunity to become ruler over all the kingdoms of the world and to bypass the cross. "Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me.'"

Other translations translate the phrase "is judged" more accurately as "has been judged." Satan has already been judged, but is waiting the execution of that judgment. Rev. 20:10, tells us when his judgment is executed: "The devil, who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone." Satan's judgment is executed following the future events of Revelation, i.e. the Tribulation of Rev. 6-19 and the promised Millennial Kingdom of Rev. 20:1-6.

John 16:12-15. "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. "All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you.

These verses along with the preceding verses (John 16:8-11) give us the threefold ministry of the Holy Spirit when He came: (1) He convicts the world (verses 8-11); (2) He enlightened the disciples ("He will guide you into all truth' ... He will tell you things to come," verses 12-13); (3) He glorifies Jesus (verses 14-15, "He will glorify Me").

The second of these three ministries was directly to the Eleven disciples. The work of the Holy Spirit in guiding the disciples into all truth and bringing to their remembrance all things that Jesus said to them (John 14:26), enabled them and their close associates to write the books of the New Testament. We now have the complete revelation of God to the world from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible contains everything that I need to know for life and godliness. 2 Pet. 1:3: "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." For me I can never know enough of God's word. Through the word of God I can handle everything in a manner pleasing to God.

The Holy Spirit does not provide new revelation today. 1 Cor. 13:9-10 says, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." What I have been taught is "that which is perfect." This is God's word, the Bible. When the Canon of Scripture was completed in the first century, God had no more new revelation to give us. Our understanding of His word has improved over time through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as people have continued to study what was written. I should not listen to some modern day prophet who says, "Last night I had this vision from God ..." As Billy Graham often said, "The Bible says ..."

"He will tell you things to come." Prophecy is an important part of God's word. God has told us what the future holds for us. We don't know all the details. There are still some things that are a puzzlement. (A term which I picked up from one of my genealogy "cousins" about the brick walls in our ancestral genealogy charts.) But God has revealed the future as a comfort and encouragement to us. It is unfortunate that many of our church fathers' chose to allegorize Bible prophecies, rather than to interpret them as written in a normal literary fashion.

John 16:14-15 shows the interrelationship of the three members of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus, the Son. The Holy Spirit takes what Jesus has already taught and declares it to the disciples (and apostles including Paul). "All things that the Father has are Mine." What Jesus taught came from God the Father. We have one God who exists in three persons. They possess the same attributes. They work together, each having different functionalities, but moving toward one purpose and goal, the fulfillment of God's plan which was determined in eternity past, before the creation of the heavens and the earth in Gen. 1:1.

As Paul wrote to the Colossians in Col. 3:16, so I should do through the ministry of the Holy Spirit: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

John 16:31-33. Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

"Do you now believe? Is Jesus confirming the disciples' faith in Him for salvation or is He asking a rhetorical question regarding their understanding of what is about to happen? In John 16:28-29, Jesus had again said He was leaving, "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father." The disciples respond, "now You are speaking plainly." From the context, Jesus confirmed that the disciples did not understand what the next few hours would bring.

Jesus knew what Zechariah had prophesied in Zech. 13:7. "Strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered; Then I will turn My hand against the little ones." Matthew refers to the fulfillment of this prophecy in Matt. 26:56, "But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled." So Jesus continues in John 16:32, "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own."

How was Zech. 13:7 fulfilled? The Shepherd, Jesus, was arrested, tried, condemned to death, scourged, and crucified." The sheep, the disciples, ran and hid. They were scattered. Peter with a few other disciples, went back to fishing (John 20:2-3).

It seems to me that Zechariah's prophecy was literally fulfilled. So how should I interpret and understand the unfulfilled prophecies of the Bible? Should I interpret future prophecy allegorically like Augustine did and many continue to do today relying on the traditions of the fathers (1 Pet. 1:18), rather than understanding the words of the Bible as they are written? I will continue trying to understand Bible prophecy literally, in the plain sense of the words themselves and their context.

"And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." God the Father and God the Son had a continuous relationship throughout Jesus' earthly life. This fellowship was broken only while Jesus was bearing our sins on the cross. Matt. 27:46, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Jesus told the disciples what was coming, so that they would not be surprised, but "that in Me you may have peace." The next clause is better translated, "In the world you have tribulation." Not only was persecution, suffering, and tribulation coming, but it was also a present reality for the disciples. This is true for all believers today, who faithfully walk in obedience to God. The "will have" of the *New King James Version* is a corrupted rendering of the Greek text from which it was translated. How I apply God's word to the persecution, suffering and tribulation I face in the world is an ongoing challenge.

The *NET Bible* and *New American Standard Version* translate "be of good cheer" as "take courage." Both translations are good, but "take courage" perhaps better describes how I should face persecutions, sufferings and tribulations of life.

Why should I "take courage"? I have the example of Jesus' life. He said, "I have overcome the world." Jesus had not yet died for our sins, but He already had victory over everything the world had thrown at Him. If Jesus had overcome the world through the power of His deity, He would not have been qualified Him to die as a substitute for my sins. He overcame the world in His humanity. He made the conscious decisions every day to live in obedience to the Father. He did not call down legions of angels to save Him from the persecutions of the world or act from His deity. Just as Jesus' overcoming the world required His faithful obedience to God's will, so for me as a believer, overcoming the world is not guaranteed. I must overcome the false thinking of the world in my life.

John 20:30-31. And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

In these two verses. John states the purpose for which he wrote this gospel. The gospel of John could be called the first salvation tract written. "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing you may have life in His name." One hundred times in this gospel John speaks of believing. The requirement for receiving eternal life is to believe in Jesus, the Son of God. No other book of the Bible has a statement that it was written for the purpose of telling people how to be saved. In fact, most of the Bible was written for believers, telling us how we should live our lives as saved people.

John does not include a sinner's prayer or baptism, repenting from sins, confessing Christ, commitment or any other condition. My salvation does not require that I do any good works, either before or after my salvation. The word "repent" is not used even one time in John's gospel.

"Jesus is the Christ." The word "Christ" is the anglicized version of the Greek word referring to the Jewish Messiah promised to Israel in the Old Testament. The Messiah was first promised in Gen. 3:15. "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." The prophecies in the Old Testament say that the Messiah would restore the kingdom to Israel and would rule as king forever. Matthew's gospel tells us why the promise of the restoration of the kingdom and establishing the reign of the Messiah has not been fulfilled yet. God is faithful and keeps His word. He will restore the kingdom to Israel.

"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book." The four gospels record thirty-five miracles or signs that Jesus performed. We don't actually know how many since He undoubtedly did many more that are not recorded in the Bible. In Matt. 10:1 Jesus delegated the ability to perform miracles to His disciples. "And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease." The miracles Jesus and His disciples did, demonstrated who Jesus was. John's gospel records seven of Jesus' miracles and adds His resurrection as an eighth sign.

John 3:15 says, "Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." So what is the gospel message that I should be prepared to give to anyone who asks me? Rom. 3:21-23 tells us, "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We often use verse 23 which states the problem, i.e. we are sinners. But verse 22 gives the solution as believing, "through faith in Jesus Christ."

Rom. 5:8 tells us what Jesus did for us: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." I am a sinner. I was bound for judgment and eternal punishment. Jesus Christ died in my place. God's gift of salvation is offered to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, who place their trust/faith in Him.



**Palm Warbler, South Padre Island Nature Center, Texas**

Acts 1:6-8. Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The disciples ask a question that was foremost on their minds. This question did not come from a bunch of dullheads who had spent three plus years with Jesus and did not catch on to what Jesus was teaching. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He had clearly presented Himself as having come to restore the promised earthly kingdom to Israel.

In Acts 1:3, a part of the context of today's passage, Luke wrote of Jesus' "He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Then in Acts 1:5 Jesus told His apostles, "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Several times the Old Testament associates prophecies of the future restoration of the kingdom of Israel with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. So when Jesus tells the apostles that "not many days from now" "you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit," the apostles asked a natural question. "Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Ezek. 39:28-29 is one of these prophecies speaking of the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. This is an often neglected Old Testament book. "Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer. And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," says the LORD God."

Ezekiel wrote this prophecy after the Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. While they had returned to the land, they were still under the domination of the Persian Empire. God promises them there will be a future kingdom. This is a promise that is still to be fulfilled in the future. The promise will be fulfilled in the Millennium and will continue throughout all eternity "in a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

Jesus' answer in Acts 1:7 confirms that there will be a future restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. The time of this restoration, however, is unknown. Only God knows the time. "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."

In Acts 1:8 Jesus commissions the apostles to preach the gospel to the entire world. This commission is also stated in Matt. 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15. The latter verse says, "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'" The indwelling of the Holy Spirit of which Jesus says in the Acts' context, "you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit," provides the apostles with the power to fulfill this commission mandate.

1 Cor. 12:13 teaches that every believer in Jesus Christ in the Church Age is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. "For by one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink of one Spirit."

So each of us has the same power through the Holy Spirit. Jesus commanded us as Peter reiterated in Acts 10:42, "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead." God expects me to be His witness wherever I go. He has given me power through the Holy Spirit to be His witness.

Acts 2:22-24. "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—— Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it."

These verses are a part of the sermon Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. When I read these verses I learn a lot about what God has done. Peter refers to the "miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him (Jesus) in your midst." These miracles, wonders and signs were the attestation that Jesus came from God. Jesus performed miracles primarily for this purpose. The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would perform miracles as Jesus did. Peter's challenge: "as you yourselves also know." Jesus' ministry was not done in secret. Peter was reminding them about what they had previously seen or had heard about.

"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God." God was not caught off-guard by Jesus' rejection, crucifixion and death. "Foreknowledge" means just what it says, "to know beforehand." In eternity past, before God created the heavens and the earth in Gen. 1:1, the three members of the Godhead formed the plan for this world in which we live. The plan included creating Adam and Eve and each of us as their descendants in the image of God. As a part of that image, we each have the ability to make decisions. We have freewill, our own volition. In God's plan He knew what decisions each of us would make. He didn't learn what those decisions would be, because God is omniscient. When He made His plan, our decisions were part of that plan.

God had a purpose with that plan. The purpose was to demonstrate His glory. I make plans all the time. Many times they work out. But sometimes things happen that are not in my control, and my plans go awry. But when God makes a plan, He has the power (called omnipotence) to bring the plan to fruition even when the participants in that plan (you and me and everyone else) exercise their own volition.

"You have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death." The Jewish leaders probably celebrated well on Friday night after Jesus' death. They had gotten rid of Jesus (They thought!). Satan may also have celebrated, but I am sure he had concerns. Satan knew that Jesus had told His disciples that He would rise again. The disciples had not quite figured out that part of Jesus' teachings yet. The "You" part of this statement refers to Peter's Jewish audience. But the "lawless hands" of the Gentile Romans had a part in it. And we, too, because we were born in sin also are indirectly involved. Let's not follow the mistaken error of many over the centuries and blame the Jews for Jesus' death.

"Whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it." On the cross Jesus surrendered His human life. He had said that He had the power to do this, and that He had the power to take it up again. But It was God who raised Jesus from the dead because Jesus had fulfilled God's plan for Him. Adam also had been given a choice, but he failed to obey God. Because of Adam's sin, we are all born sinners. Because of Jesus' perfect righteousness, all who believe in Him will receive Jesus' perfect righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

Because I was born a sinner, I need salvation. Because Jesus Christ lives, I can know that I will live also. Jesus' resurrection is a key element of the gospel.



Acts 2:25-28. "For David says concerning Him: 'I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.'

This is still Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. The work of the Holy Spirit was evident in the recap in Acts after Peter finished in Acts 2:41. "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." Peter had just mentioned the resurrection of Jesus, and now quotes what David said about the future resurrection in Psa. 16:8-11. Peter demonstrates to His Jewish audience that David had spoken of resurrection.

"I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken." David is speaking in this verse of the closeness of his relationship with the Lord. David went through many challenges in his life. There was the irrational animosity of Saul; the rebellion of David's son, Absalom; the battles with the Philistines, and more. The Lord was with David bringing him through all these major calamities. Yes, David had his failures. He confessed his sins and even though God disciplined him, the Lord remained at David's right hand.

Similarly, Jesus had an unbroken fellowship relationship with God throughout His life. When I run into major problems and difficulties in my life, I don't want to be shook up, but to have this peace of which David speaks. God is in control. Do I really believe that? Sometimes I can see no human solution. I just have to persevere through the testing, letting God do His work. So David could say, "my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad."

"Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." In the next verse, Acts 2:29, Peter points toward David's grave and says, "He is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day." Then in Acts 2:31 Peter spoke plainly about what David's words in Psa. 16:9-10 meant: "He, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ." Jesus' body was not in the grave long enough to decay.

What did Peter mean when he quoted David as saying, "You will not leave my soul in Hades"? Here is where we need to go back to Psa. 16:10 and see what word David used. We think of "Hades" as Hell and this is the way the old *King James Bible* translated it. The NIV actually had a decent translation rather than just transliterating the Greek word. The NIV called it "the realm of the dead."

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum's *Messianic Bible Study Collection* says, "In the Old Testament period, Sheol was a place where both the righteous and the unrighteous expected to go after death." In simple terms, Sheol is the "grave." Dr. Fruchtenbaum also interprets the "depths of Sheol" in Psa. 86:13 to indicate that there are various levels in Sheol. This idea is supported by the account in Luke 16:22-23 of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom while the rich man was in torment in Hades. Looks like the rich man was in the "basement" and Lazarus in the "penthouse."

In Job 13:15, Job in his suffering (a righteous man, believer) says, "Oh, that you would hide me in the grave" ("Sheol" in the Hebrew).

Rev. 20:13-14 tells us the ultimate destiny of those who are in the depths of Hades/Sheol: "The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the Lake of Fire."

Of course, before this, we, as believers, were caught up to the clouds to meet the Lord in the air in the Rapture. So at the time of Rev. 20, only unbelievers are left in Hades/Sheol. I will be "full of joy" in Jesus' presence.

Acts 2:32-36. "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Peter is coming to the close of his message on the Day of Pentecost. He makes some important declarations that are interpreted in different ways today. "This Jesus God has raised up." The resurrection of Jesus was done by God. Jesus did not raise Himself from the dead. "Of which we are all witnesses." The "all" in this statement would be the twelve disciples which would include Matthias (Acts 1:26). There may have been others in the crowd who also had seen the resurrected Jesus.

"Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear." In Acts 2:7 the crowd of Jews from all over the known world heard ordinary Galileans speak in the native languages of the crowd. This was a miracle and sign that God was speaking through Peter and those who were with him. As Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 14:22, "Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers." The purpose of the spiritual gift of speaking in unknown foreign languages ("tongues") was to be a witness to unbelievers that they may believe.

"Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God." Peter tells where Jesus now was. Jesus is at the "right hand of God." Several New Testament passages confirm that Jesus is at the right hand of God. One is Heb. 12:2. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." While this is a place of power and glory, it is not the prophesied reign of Jesus over this world. In Acts 2:34 Peter quotes what David wrote in Psa. 110:1, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." Jesus will be at God's right hand until God makes His enemies Jesus' footstool.

Psa. 110:5-6, begins with Jesus at God's right hand, but then looks ahead to a time in the future. "The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill *the places* with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries." The execution of kings and the heads of many countries, filling the places with dead bodies, and judging the nations will occur at the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. After that is when Jesus will sit on His own throne as king over the world.

Now Psa. 110:3 adds an interesting statement, "Your people *shall be* volunteers in the day of Your power." At Jesus' Second Advent, He does not descend to the earth alone. 1 Thess. 3:13 speaks of the Second Coming of Jesus, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." We will have been caught up to the clouds to meet Jesus in the air. We went through the heavenly reward ceremony (the Judgment Seat of Christ), and then the marriage supper of the Lamb. Then the grand finale: We return with Him at His second advent to watch His victory over the unbelievers in the world. Rev. 19:14 adds more details: "And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses."

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." This statement of Peter confirms the deity of Jesus Christ. He also declares for the entire house of Israel that Jesus is their promised Messiah. Prophecy is an important part of Scripture written for our encouragement and comfort. I look forward to its fulfillment.

Acts 2:37-39. Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

The Holy Spirit was at work with Peter's audience. They knew the Old Testament very well. Peter's sermon fully demonstrated to them that Jesus was their Messiah as promised in the Old Testament. Peter was preaching under the power of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit gave the people understanding of what Peter was saying. Their response: "What shall we do?"

Peter's reply was clear to them. But the reply does not translate well into English. The first word I want to talk about is "Repent." Growing up in a Baptist church, I was taught what the "repent" means in English. It means to feel sorry for your sins and to turn from them. Feeling sorry for my sins and turning from them may not have lasted much longer than a minute and a half after I walked the aisle!

A half dozen years later I began attending Bible studies at a Bible church. Based on the Greek of the word we translate as "repent" the pastor redefined the word "repent." It meant a "change of mind." Specifically, it meant a change of mind about Jesus Christ. Peter was telling his listeners to believe in "Jesus as their promised Messiah." Over the past sixty plus years I have heard many Bible teachers define "repent" in the same way. The problem is, that is not the way we normally use "repent" in English.

One day, not too long ago, I decided to look up "repent" in one of those 6 inch thick unabridged dictionaries (*Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Unabridged*, Second edition, 1983). First definition: the same way we always use the word. The second definition was "to change one's mind." The definition also told how the word came into English. It came from the Latin word "paenitere." Then it came into Old French as "repentir," and finally into English as "repent." Seventeen hundred years ago, the Roman church had departed from the teaching of the apostles as written in the Bible, and had added works to salvation by faith. So when Jerome translated the Greek text into the Vulgate translation, he translated the Greek word meaning to "change one's mind" with the Latin word "paenitere," meaning "to do penance" for sin.

The Greek has a different word for feeling sorry for a person's actions (2 Cor. 7:8 translated the word as "regret"). In the first century the Jews did not have the seventeen hundred years of verbal baggage that we have from Jerome's bad translation. When they heard the message our Bibles translate "repent," they would have immediately thought of Deut. 30:2-3, "And you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, ... that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity."

Later, in Acts 10:43 Peter gives the gospel to Cornelius, "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." God saved me when I believed in Jesus Christ. There is no other way to be receive the gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life, than to place your trust in Jesus.

Some mornings I leave the house early and find myself in rush hour traffic. A couple blocks away a few times I have seen a man on the street corner holding up a sign saying "REPENT." I applaud what he is trying to do. But according to the Bible, you can repent as often as you want. (Believers should do this as often they sin.) But if that is all a person does, he is still going to Hell. I was born a sinner. I am still a sinner. My faith is in Jesus Christ who died for my sins. There is more in these verses that I will look at next time.

Acts 2:37-39 - part 2. Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

I have already touched on why I don't think this passage says that I had to repent of my sins to be saved. "Repent" is a command. I have explained why I think many Bible teachers say that "repent" means to change one's mind about something. What is it in this passage about which these people needed to change their minds? The last clause in Acts 2:36 says, "that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." The Jewish leaders had incited the Jewish mob to demand that Jesus be crucified because they did not believe He was God and their Messiah. I submit to you that that is what Peter was commanding his audience to do. They were to change their minds about Jesus being God and their Messiah. That is, they were to believe in Jesus Christ.

If they did this, then they would receive the remission of their sins (the forgiveness of their sins.) The preposition "for" which comes before "remission of sins" in the text can mean "on account of" or "on the basis of." So neither the repenting or the baptism is for the purpose of receiving the remission of sins, but are an acknowledgment that their sins have been forgiven. To properly understand what Peter is saying requires a fairly technical explanation based on Greek grammar.

"Be baptized" is also a command. But it is a form of the verb that we do not have in English. This makes it even more difficult to understand correctly. When Peter commanded them to "repent" which I understand is a command to believe in Jesus as "Lord and Christ," who was he commanding? In English a command is always in the second person, as in "you repent," or "you believe." Since the command is also plural, Peter was writing "you all repent," and "you all believe."

But in the Greek commands can also be written as third person commands. "Be baptized" in the Greek is an example of a third person command. It is also singular. So when Peter commanded the crowd to repent, i.e. believe, he was speaking to everyone. But when he stated the command to be baptized, he was addressing a more limited audience. The best way I can suggest to understand what Peter is saying about baptism is to say, "Let him (who repents, believing) be baptized." The NET Bible translates the verse "And Peter said to them, "Repent and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ ..." Everyone was commanded to believe. But only those who did believe and were saved were to be baptized.

Water baptism which is what I think Peter is commanding here is a public demonstration that a person has believed in Jesus Christ. When baptism is by immersion (the way it was always done in the New Testament), it also depicts Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

"And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." When a person believes in Jesus Christ, he receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, called the baptism of the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor. 12:13. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." This is what Jesus promised His disciples. "The Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:17).

I praise God that I have the Holy Spirit. Through Him and those who teach through the power of the Holy Spirit, I can know God's word and how He wants me to live. I need to be attentive to learn God's word and also to apply it.

Acts 5:1-5. But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of *it*, and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself?" "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.

This is an interesting passage with some important principles. It helps if we know the background for what is going on in these first days of the Church. In Acts 4:32-37 the new believers were closely involved with each other. Some sold their possessions including Barnabas and gave to others who were in need. These new believers had been taught prophecy. They knew that Jesus could return at any moment. When that happened all these material possessions would be left behind. Better to sell it now and share with those who needed help. Very likely, because of their new faith in Jesus, many were ostracized from their old unbelieving friends and were suffering financially because of this rejection.

"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?" Just like Jesus was tempted by Satan, so Ananias was also tempted by Satan. Jesus resisted Satan, but Ananias and Sapphira succumbed. Not only did they lie, but they were also motivated by greed and covetousness. They wanted to make a name for themselves in the church by their supposed generosity. They were guilty of a cluster of sins.

The underlying sin was the same as Satan's original sin when he rebelled against God. Isa. 14:12-14 says of Satan, called Lucifer in the passage. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground. You who weakened 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 also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'" This is the sin of pride and arrogance.

Peter added, "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?" Peter confirms that we have the right to own personal property. A principle that existed under the Old Testament Law. The selling of possessions and giving to others in the new church, does not support the ideas of socialism or communism. Peter's comments affirm this.

There are two important clauses in verses 3 and 4. In verse 3, "To lie to the Holy Spirit." In verse 4, "You have not lied to men but to God." This is the "go to" passage for proving that the Holy Spirit is God.

"Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last." God judged Ananias and Sapphira. Peter did not cause their deaths. They died the sin unto death (1 John 5:16-17). Even though their sins were forgiven and the new believers were not under the Mosaic Law, but under grace, God expects us to obey Him.

The lessons for me: Beware of greed and covetousness. Coveting is far more prevalent today than we think. One time I bought a car that replaced the car my wife, Betty, normally drove. A couple of days later, I went back and bought the fancier car on the showroom floor that I did not need! The car dealer's good marketing produced a covetous desire in me to buy a car I did not need. I needed to heed Heb. 13:5, "Let your conduct *be* without covetousness; *be* content with such things as you have."

Acts 10:43-45. "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

Acts 10 is the "Cornelius chapter." Acts 10:2 says that Cornelius was "a devout man who feared God with all his household." Cornelius was doing a lot of good works. He was seeking God, but as Peter reported in Acts 11:14 he needed to hear how he could be saved: The angel had said to Cornelius that Peter "will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved." In Acts 10:3 Cornelius receives a vision. In Acts 10:6 the angel of God says to Cornelius that when he sees Peter, Peter "will tell him what he must do." In Acts 10:9ff Peter also has a vision. God uses these two visions to bring Cornelius and Peter together. In Acts 10:34-42 Peter explains Jesus Christ to Cornelius. He tells of Jesus' ministry, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and that He will judge the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42).

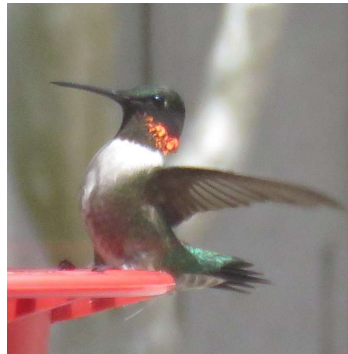
Acts 10:43, "To Him all the prophets witness that through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." Peter does not quote specific prophets. Presumably, Cornelius already was familiar with the Old Testament prophets and recognized from Peter's description that Jesus was Israel's promised Messiah. Peter gives the only requirement for receiving "remission of sins": "whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word." Cornelius and the members of his household, as Old Testament believers on hearing about Jesus, believed that Jesus was Israel's promised Messiah. Immediately, before Peter had even finished speaking, they were baptized by the Holy Spirit. They received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Acts 10:46 says that they spoke in tongues (foreign languages unknown to the speakers) and "magnified God."

"And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished." Peter learned through the vision he received and now the Jewish believers who came with Peter also learned that God's promise of salvation through Jesus was not a gift from God exclusively for the people of Israel. Salvation is for Jews and Gentiles alike. Every one who "believes on Him will receive remission of sins."

"The gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles also." The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a gift from God to anyone who believes in Jesus during the Church Age.

Acts 10:47, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?" Cornelius did not need to be baptized in water before he could be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He did not need to be baptized to receive remission of sins. Water baptism was a public announcement that Cornelius and his household were now believing in Jesus Christ. The heart of Peter's gospel message was that Jesus "is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36), He died, was resurrected, and that anyone who believes in Him receives remission of sins." Without believing in Jesus, there is judgment. This is the gospel message that God wants my unbelieving friends to hear from me.



**Ruby-Throated Hummingbird, Houston, Texas**

Acts 16:31-33. So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

If you are like me, I hear Acts 16:31 quoted often as presenting the only requirement for receiving eternal life and the forgiveness of sins. In the context Paul and Silas have come to Philippi. On the Sabbath (Jewish Sabbath, not Sunday) they went down to the river where the Jews of the city typically met for prayer. They met Lydia. She believed and was baptized.

Later they cast out a demon from a slave girl who was harassing them. This angered the girl's masters who had Paul and Silas jailed. Paul and Silas were beaten and as Acts 16:24 says, they were locked up in "the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks."

Acts 16:25, "At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening." I can imagine the jailer and his family were also listening and wondering when these "troublemakers" would shut up and go to sleep! I can't imagine sleeping with my feet locked down in stocks and sitting or lying on a hard floor. But would I be singing rather than expressing anger at those who had mistreated me?

In Acts 16:26, God turned the situation around. There was a great earthquake. The jail doors sprang open and the stocks and chains fell apart. The jailer woke up and saw the prison doors open. He thought his prisoners had escaped and because of this he would be executed. He drew his sword and was going to save the local hangman the trouble. Acts 16:28. "But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.'"

The jailer asks a question. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved." "Sirs," is an address of respect. It is the same word Paul and Silas used in their reply giving Jesus the title of "Lord." We might think the jailer was asking how he could be saved from the hangman. But if the prisoners are all there, he is safe from the hangman.

The text does not tell us, but from the hymns and prayers and Paul's and Silas' testimonies, he must have heard the gospel message. By addressing Paul and Silas as "Sirs," the jailer showed that he knew that these two men were not his typical prisoners.

They answered the jailer's question. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." The message gives no other requirement. "You and your household." When you, the jailer, believes, you will be saved. Also anyone else in your household will be saved when they believe.

"Then they taught the word of the Lord to him, and to all who were in his house." We don't know what else they taught. But we know the result. "He took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized."

I expect that some time between verses 31 and 32 the jailer and his family believed in Jesus Christ. In verse 32 Paul and Silas probably taught them more about Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, and explained the significance of water baptism. Water baptism pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and is a testimony to others that a person has believed. We don't know the ages of the people in the jailer's household. But babies aren't old enough to believe. You also can't dunk a baby under water in baptism by immersion. There is nothing in the Bible about baptizing babies.

When I witness to an unbeliever, is my message clear? Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. God saves everyone who believes.

Acts 17:10-12. Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

Paul and Silas had to leave Thessalonica by night because some of the Jews there had rejected Paul's teaching. The Jews stirred up a mob against Paul and Silas and made false accusations against them to the rulers of the city. However, some of the Jews there did believe (Acts 17:4-11).

On arriving at Berea, Paul and Silas followed Paul's standard practice. They went to the local Jewish synagogue and began to teach them about Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote in Rom. 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." The Jews in Berea were more open to Paul's teaching than those in Thessalonica.

The *NET Bible* translates the word "fair-minded" as "open-minded" while most translations say "noble" or "noble-minded." The actual Greek word is a compound word which in English would be "good genes." While "noble" or "nobleman" is the way the word is translated the other two times it appears in the New Testament, "open-minded" or "fair-minded" seems to convey the idea better for what the text here is saying (particularly "open-minded.")

The reaction of these Jews in Berea is what I should also do when I hear the teaching of God's word. "They searched the scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so." Now the only Scriptures they had at the time were the Old Testament books. Undoubtedly, Paul and Silas taught them daily. But they also "searched the Scriptures daily."

It is all too easy for us to get caught up in the daily routines of our lives and to put off the reading, and studying of God's word and also prayer. I was taught when I was growing up of the importance of a daily quiet time, though at times I was not that regular. Writing these daily devotionals keeps me on track, but occasionally I miss a day.

The Bereans found the Old Testament to corroborate what Paul and Silas taught. "Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men." How many Greeks believed? How many is "not a few"? This statement is a litotes, a figure of speech of which few people have ever heard. A litotes is defined as an "understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by negating its opposite." "Lunch at Whataburger yesterday *was not bad*," meaning it was good. Rom. 1:16, begins with a litotes "For I am not ashamed ..." As one commentator said, Paul was "proud of the gospel."

These examples are easy to understand. But at times a litotes appears in Scripture and we miss it, resulting in the misinterpretation of a passage. An example is Rev. 3:5, "He who overcomes ... I will not blot his name from the Book of Life." Does this mean that if a believer does not overcome that he can lose his salvation? No. Does it mean that every believer overcomes, and a person who does not overcome is not really a believer, so his name is blotted out? My understanding again is "No." Although there are many who disagree. God is immutable. He does not change. If God wrote your name in the Book of Life, it will never be blotted out. But as the rest of the verse says, a believer who does not overcome, will not "be clothed in white garments" and Jesus will not honor the non-overcoming believer by confessing his name before God the Father and His angels. A non-overcoming believer's name is not blotted out. Overcoming is works God expects believers to do in their lives.



Rom. 1:16-17. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

These are the "Martin Luther" verses of the Bible. The Roman Church was continually enriching itself by demanding the payment of indulgences from its followers in order to buy their way and their relatives out of Purgatory. Martin Luther pondered on these verses, finally coming to the realization that God is a God of justice. Through God's grace and mercy, we are saved as God justifies us, declaring us righteous. (I take this from Dr. Constable's *Notes*.) Martin Luther's understanding of God's justice, grace, and mercy is correct.

But the context of Scripture is important. To whom was Paul writing? Rom. 1:7,8: "To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: ...your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." This sounds like Paul was writing to Romans who were already saved. Notice what Paul said in Rom. 1:11-12, "that I may impart some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." Then in Rom. 1:15, "*I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."

The word "gospel" simply means "good news." We use it often in the sense of the good news of how we can receive eternal life and the forgiveness of sins. But the *Grace New Testament Commentary* says that the gospel of which Paul is not ashamed and is the "power of God to salvation" is best understood as deliverance, focusing "on freeing the believer from sin's grip." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). That is good news, i.e. the gospel as we usually hear it. But if I, as a believer, am taught through God's word how I should live my life through faith, obeying God, glorifying Him, so that I may not be ashamed (1 John 1:28) at the Judgment Seat of Christ, isn't that also good news? This sounds like the minority view that the *Grace New Testament Commentary* is espousing. It fits with Paul's wish to establish and strengthen these Roman believers in the faith.

"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." We received the righteousness of Jesus Christ when we believed in Him (2 Cor. 5:21 and Rom. 4:3). But Rom. 8:4 tells us "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." I am a believer with eternal salvation, now God expects me to live like it.

To be frank, I have struggled trying to understand this minority interpretation which I have also heard taught in church. Certainly, interpreting the word "gospel" as the message that provides eternal life and the forgiveness of sins does fit well with the passage. The verses that follow also seem to work well with the majority understanding.

"The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." We enter the Christian life, become believers by faith, but now we must learn to live by faith. "The just shall live by faith" can be understood as "The one who is just (righteous with Jesus' righteousness imputed to him) by faith shall live." As I walk by faith in my life, obeying what God has taught me from His word, God's righteousness is revealed in my life.

Rom. 1:26-32 contains one of those "vice lists" found in the Bible. We can read through these lists quickly thinking that these do not apply to me. But think again. How many times have I committed some of these same sins? If Paul is writing to believers, he is also being realistic. I, as a believer, can commit any of these sins, but that is not what God wants me to do.

Rom. 1:18-21. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

"For the wrath of God is revealed ..." In Rom. 1:17 Paul wrote "the righteousness of God is revealed." These two are linked to each other. They are both occurring in the present time. I have been saved through faith. Now I should continue to exercise my faith in working out the righteousness of God in my life. If I fail to work out the righteousness of God, then the wrath of God is revealed. Looking ahead to Rom. 3:21, Paul uses the same "is revealed" language, "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed." I see the verses from Rom. 1:18 through Rom 3:20 as a digression. Paul is telling us why the wrath of God is revealed.

Three times in this chapter, Paul tells how the wrath of God was being revealed at the time he was writing. Rom. 1:24, "Therefore God gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts." Rom. 1:26, "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions." Rom. 1:28, "And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting." These "gave them up" or "over" statements are followed by a list of close to 25 sins. God took the restraints off as if he were saying, "Go to it, boys and girls. If that is the way you want to live, go ahead." In reality, these are all sins that can be committed by believers and unbelievers.

People mistakenly read the sexual sins as something only an unbeliever would commit. When committed by believers, the wrath of God may take the form of divine discipline. Looking at the 36 or so uses in the New Testament of the Greek word for "wrath," they all appear to refer to God's response to them in time, and not in eternity. The wrath may refer to the outpouring of God's wrath on the world during the Tribulation or it may refer to divine discipline of believers during their life on earth, or it may simply be God giving unbelieving sinners over to destroying their lives in sin. I don't see this "wrath of God" as referring to Hell.

"For what may be known of God is manifest in them, ... even His eternal power and Godhead." Most translations use "divine nature" instead of "Godhead." The Greek word is used only once in the New Testament, so it looks like it means whatever the translators want to call it. "Divine nature" looks like a good choice. The point is that the existence of God is readily apparent to everyone.

This world has not always existed. To avoid having to admit that God exists, unbelieving scientists have come up with a big bang idea. But this does not tell us from where the matter and energy that once upon a time produced the big bang came. It does not tell who or what pulled the trigger to set off the big bang. The world replaces God with ideas like mother nature or lucky stars or the force in Star Wars. I had a "chance meeting." Einstein's disproven "cosmological constant." Rom. 1:18 says they "suppress the truth." Since they are sinners, they do so "in unrighteousness." This world exists because it was created by our pre-existent, eternal, omnipotent and omniscient God.

As David wrote in Psa. 19:1-3. "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language *Where* their voice is not heard." God has revealed knowledge. He has said what He wants me to know in His word. It is up to me to learn it, and to "utter speech" about it to others.

Rom. 1:22-25. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

“Professing to be wise, they became fools.” This describes people who throughout history have rejected the evidence for the existence of God. Throughout all of time God has had His witnesses who believed in Him through what God has revealed about Himself. Today, we have the completed Canon of Scripture. When I was about twelve years old, I decided that I wanted to learn the Bible. I tried reading it, but didn't get very far. But a couple of years later, God pointed me to a Bible study where a pastor taught God's word in more depth than a 30 minute evangelistic message.

“Changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man.” When you read through the Old Testament, it doesn't take long before you find this happening. In Exodus the people of Israel got tired of waiting for Moses to come down off the mountain. They made for themselves a golden calf!

In the book of Judges, the people went through periods of idol worship. God would discipline them by war with their neighbors. Israel would then return to the Lord, but then start the cycle over again. How many of the kings of Israel and Judah did what was right in the sight of the Lord? Not many.

All the kings of Israel and most of the kings of Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord. By evil, the text means they followed the way of their godless neighbors, worshiping idols.

“Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts.” The false religions of the ancient world were alluring. These were fertility cults. If you want to be prosperous with good crops and harvests, then you need to please these false gods. Pleasing the false gods primarily involved sinful pleasures. The worship of Bacchus or Dionysius included drunken orgies. The worship of Baal or Astarte included sexual interaction with the priests or priestesses of the cults. Also there was the sacrifice of babies.

Today we are more civilized. The way of thinking of the world today is that there is no god or we can't really know anything about a god we cannot see. There is no absolute right and wrong. Each person can do whatever goes. We have the open practice of sexual activity of every sort. Crime and violence are allowed to proliferate.

“God also gave them up to uncleanness.” God takes the restraints off of people who refuse to believe in Him. God did this with Pharaoh in Egypt. Five times the text says that Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people of Israel go. Each time God would bring on Egypt another plague. Finally, Pharaoh reached the point of no return. God could have taken him out then. But God left Pharaoh around to continue to say “No.” So the text now reads that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. God had given Pharaoh up to his own ways at that point. This is what God does with unbelievers that follow their sinful ways. If a believer continues to live in this way, the Lord will continue to discipline the believer until He finally takes them out under the sin unto death.

Later in Romans, Paul commands us in Rom. 12:2. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” I need to transform my mind and understanding with God's word. I do not want to be deceived into conforming my thinking to the world's ideas. Through the Bible I can know God's will.

Rom. 3:9-12. What then? Are we better *than they*? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

This passage quotes Psa. 14:1-3. "The fool has said in his heart, "*There is no God.*" They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; *There is none who does good, No, not one.*"

"Are we better than they?" Paul is asking if the Jews (including Paul) were better than the Greeks or Gentiles. The answer, of course, is "No." We are all "under sin." We are sinners. These verses in Romans summarize what Paul has just written in Rom. 1:18-3:8.

Psa. 14:1 begins, "The fool has said in his heart." Rom. 1:21 says, "their foolish hearts were darkened." Rom. 1:20 says of God, "His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made even His eternal power and Godhead" (divine nature). Only a fool fails to recognize the Creator of this world.

A person who denies the clear evidence for the existence of God is this fool. He is quite content in the way he lives. This fool has willfully rejected God. How then can anyone be saved? Jesus gave us an answer in John 6:44-45. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise Him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me." Jesus also said in John 12:32, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." In John 6:45 Jesus promised that everyone would be taught by God. How does God teach us? Through those who teach His word and testify to Jesus Christ. That is a commandment I have from God. Matt. 28:19-20. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."

Jesus refers to His crucifixion in John 12:32 "that He would draw all peoples" to Himself. So we have a conundrum or as my distant genealogical cousin described it, a puzzlement. No one seeks God. But knowing the attributes of God, that He is just, sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, ..., when anyone looking at this world acknowledges that it was created by an eternal, omnipotent God, then God will see that that person is taught the truth of the word of God and have the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ. This is a disputed understanding, but it is the only one I see that gives credence to all the attributes of God. Those who deny the clear evidence for God's invisible attributes, "even His eternal power and divine nature," God gives them over to "futile thoughts" and their "foolish hearts."

In Rom. 3:19 Paul summarizes this entire section that began in Rom. 1:18 when he wrote (*English Standard Version* translation): "the whole world may be held accountable to God." Unbelievers are accountable in that God gives them over to their lives of sin and to believers in the form of divine discipline. Next Paul will discuss the solution from the standpoint of believers. He writes about how God saved us.

He also tells me how I should live my life. Rom. 8:4. "That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." I was saved through faith. I need to walk by faith, in obedience to, what God has written in His word. I see Abraham as an example of a believer walking by faith in Rom. 4:19, "And not being weak in faith, ..."

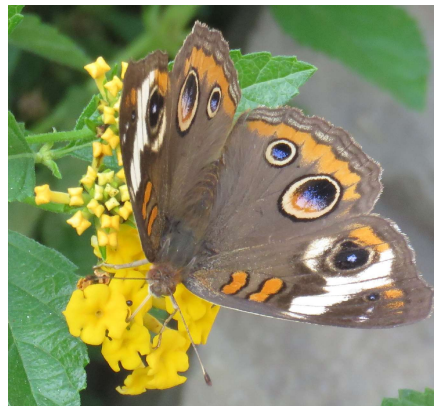
Rom. 3:20-23. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

God did not give the law to the people of Israel through Moses for the purpose that they might be saved by keeping the law. As Gen. 15:6 says about Abraham, "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ, and it always has been through believing what God has said and promised. The law was a demonstration that people cannot be saved by good works, and particularly not by keeping the law. No one was able to keep the law perfectly. Therefore the law provided for sacrifices which pictured the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us. So Paul sums up his argument, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight. For by the law *is* the knowledge of sin." As Paul says in Rom. 7:7, "I would not have known sin except through the law."

What is the better way that God has provided? We saw it in Gen. 15:6. Now God has revealed it even more clearly through Jesus Christ. "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." "The Law and the Prophets" is a figure of speech referring to the entirety of the Old Testament Scriptures. It is like saying "from the beginning to the end," or "from start to finish." How do we receive the "righteousness of God"? "Even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ." When I believed in Jesus Christ, God gave me Jesus' perfect righteousness. Just as Gen. 15:6 says that Abraham had believed at some time previously, and God credited to Abraham's account, God's perfect righteousness.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This easily memorized verse shows two reasons why we need a Savior. God's salvation package is the solution for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. First, because every person is a sinner, we need our sins forgiven. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins when He died on the cross. God offers the gift of the forgiveness of our sins when we believe. We can choose to accept this gift, or we can reject it. But even with my sins forgiven, my life still does not reflect the glory of God. All the good works I can do, are self-serving. They represent the best that I can do within myself in an attempt to show the world how good I am. God credited to my account the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This righteousness of Jesus Christ now completes the glory of God on my account

Now God wants me to live up to these great gifts He has given me. He has also given me His word and the Holy Spirit. Through His word and the power of the Holy Spirit, I can live my life in ways that I can never do on my own. When I learn God's word, obeying Him, it is God who is glorified. God is glorified because it is He who is working through me. As Rom. 8:4 says, "That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." I need to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.



**Common Buckeye, butterfly, Houston, Texas**

Rom. 3:24-26. being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

There is a lot of theology in these three verses as we can see from the multi-syllabic words. I just used one of my own (Long words with too many syllables). I will try to keep this simple. "Being justified." In the past I have heard the noun form of this verb, "justification" explained in this way: "just as if I had never sinned." This is an over-simplification. This limits justification to the forgiveness of sins. But that is only a part of the package that God gave me when I was saved. But as Rom. 3:22 says, God gives "the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe." Justification includes the imputation of Jesus' righteousness to every believer. God gives these gifts to us the moment anyone believes in Jesus Christ. There are no works required for salvation and no works are required of any person after salvation in order to receive eternal life. "Freely by His grace."

"The redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Jesus paid the price to redeem us from the slavery of sin. "Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood." The best explanation for "propitiation" is that it refers to "satisfaction." God is a holy and just God. Because of my sin and lack of perfect righteousness, I deserve eternal punishment and separation from God. "By His blood" refers to Jesus' death on the cross which paid the penalty for my sins. Jesus' death satisfies God's justice.

"To demonstrate His righteousness." Since God is holy and just, He cannot simply brush off my sins. They must be judged and the penalty must be paid or God is not a just and righteous God. That is where Jesus came in and died in my place. This statement looks at God's righteousness, whereas the "Righteousness of God" in Rom. 3:22 is Jesus' righteousness that is credited to every believer.

"Because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed." In the past God did not punish sinners immediately because He knew that Jesus Christ would be born into this world, live a perfect life, and die in the place of every person's sins. God is omniscient and knows everything that has happened or will happen or could have happened. In particular, He knows everything that will happen in the future before it even happens. This is called God's foreknowledge.

"That He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." God's holiness and justice were not compromised because He did not execute punishment on sin prior to Jesus' paying the penalty for those sins. God's forbearance continues even today. Look at what Peter wrote about God's longsuffering in 2 Pet. 3:9. "The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance," changing their mind about Jesus Christ and believing in Him.

Why did God do all this? "To demonstrate His righteousness." God's magnificent attributes are demonstrated through His perfect plan which is being worked out in this world. God is glorified as each day unfolds. Now that I have God's perfect righteousness, I have a responsibility as Paul wrote in Eph. 4:1-2, "I ... beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ..." and more.

Rom. 4:1-4. What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

Paul now turns to Abraham as an illustration of how believers receive justification. If Abraham had lived a completely righteous life, he would have something to brag about. But God would not be impressed with Abraham's boasts. God knows better. Paul quotes Gen. 15:6. "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." The same thing happened to Abraham when he believed in God and God's promised Messiah as happens to us when we believe in Jesus Christ. God's perfect righteousness is credited (deposited into our account or imputed) to us. We now have the passport for entry into heaven and eternity.

"Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt." When I was employed I received a paycheck. My employer owed me the money because of the work I had done. My salary was not a gift.

In Rom. 4:3 and Rom. 4:4 Paul present "faith" and "works" as totally separate and unrelated. Through our faith God gives us His perfect righteousness. When I believed, God was not indebted to me to give me His righteousness. God is not my employer who owes me anything because I believed in Him. But God did promise in His word that when I believed He would deposit His righteousness to my eternal account. It is a gift by God's grace.

Now that God has saved me, I now have new responsibilities. As 2 Cor. 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." God has given me His Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit I am able to learn and understand God's word. I must learn to obey God's word. God has created a new spirit within me, and I can, if I choose, using God's divine resources, live my life in a manner pleasing to Him.

In Rom. 12:1-2, Paul tells us how we as believers should live our lives. This is where works comes in. But Paul has to beg us to do this. There is no guarantee that I, as a believer, will obey. God did not create us to be robots. If He had, Adam and Eve would never have sinned and brought about this mess of a world in which we now live. Rom. 12:1-2. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."



Eastern Bluebird, Leakey, Texas

Rom. 4:5-8. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: "Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed *is the* man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

Paul now moves from Abraham to David as a witness of our "free grace" salvation. "Free grace" is a term that theologians use to describe the teaching that we are saved through faith alone in Christ alone without any works. Abraham lived during the "patriarchal period." This was before God gave the Law to Moses by which Israel was supposed to live. David lived under the Law.

"But to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." Who are the ungodly? Every one of us were born as ungodly. God deposited His perfect righteousness to me an ungodly sinner when I believed.

Warren Wiersbe wrote in the *Bible Exposition Commentary*: "God does keep a record of our works, so that He might reward us when Jesus comes; but He is not keeping a record of our sins." Wow! At the Judgment Seat of Christ, my life will be evaluated by what I have done right, not by my sins.

"Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works." Paul then quotes what David wrote in Psa. 32:1-2 which reads: "Blessed *is he whose* transgression *is* forgiven, *Whose* sin *is* covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity." In both Psa. 32 and Psa. 51 David confesses his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah.

Later, near the end of David's life he fails God again when his pride and arrogance got the best of him. In 2 Samuel 24 David orders a census of men of fighting age. David confessed this sin in 2 Sam. 24:10. After both these sinful incidents and David's confession, God still disciplined David.

The opening verses of Psa. 51 reflect an important principle the New Testament teaches. That is when we sin, we need to confess those sins to God to restore our fellowship relationship with God. In Psa. 51:1-3 David wrote: "Have mercy on me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me." This is not David repenting of sin for his salvation. This is the confession of a believing David seeking to restore his relationship with God. If you are familiar with 1 John 1:9, that verse also speaks of confession and cleansing.

The "free grace" gospel is in contrast to the typical gospel taught by churches that hold to Arminian theology or those that hold to Reformed or Calvinistic theology. Arminianism says that a person can believe and be saved. But after that he can sin in such way that he falls from grace and loses his salvation. A person can also decide to disbelieve and lose his salvation. This teaching makes works a requirement for salvation.

But Calvinism does a similar thing. Only in Reformed/Calvinist theology, if you don't have sufficient good works in your life after you believed, you really didn't believe and were never saved. In Reformed theology this is called "perseverance of the saints."

In either Arminianism or Calvinism how does a person know if he has enough good works so that he knows he is saved? What happens if old age dementia takes hold of a person and that causes a death bed denial of Jesus Christ? I praise God that when I believed, He gave me my salvation. I did nothing to earn or deserve it. I can do nothing to lose it. I don't need to do anything to keep it.



Rom. 4:19-22. And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."

"And not being weak in faith." I take this statement to be one of those figures of speech which we read and never think of as a figure of speech, called a "litotes." The word is pronounced with a long "i" as in Lie-tote-tes. It means to express a positive statement as a negative. The Bible uses the word "faith" or "believe" as absolute statements. You either believe something or you don't. You either have faith that the chair will not collapse when you sit on it or you don't trust that that chair with a broken leg will hold you up. So when we speak of a person as having a weak faith and another person as having a strong faith, we are really talking about how often a person's faith falters.

In James 1:5-6 James wrote, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, ... But let him ask in faith with no doubting." A person with doubts, lacks faith when he doubts. So a person who is weak in faith spends more time doubting (lacking faith) than a person who is strong in faith.

In Gen. 15:2 Abram was trying to figure out how God would keep His promise. "But Abram said, 'Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?'" God's answer is in Gen. 15:4, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." So with this promise of God to Abraham, Paul could say, "he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief." Abraham did not doubt that God would do the impossible and give him and Sarah a son.

"But was strengthened in faith." Doesn't this say that Abraham's faith became stronger? Yes, Abraham would continue to face challenges in his life. Each time I face challenges how do I handle them? Do I trust God's promises that He will bring me through the trials? Or do I stumble in my lack of faith and fail to trust God's promises? Following Abraham's story, in Gen. 18:2 "three men" appear to him. Two of them are angels and we know that the one who is called "Lord" in Gen. 18:17 is the preincarnate Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord reveals to Abraham that the angels are on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah to look into the their sins. Should the city be destroyed? Then Abraham intercedes for the two cities with a countdown starting with "Suppose there are fifty righteous" and counting down to "ten." Then Abraham stops the countdown. Was it a lack of faith that he did not go down to five which was the number of believers God allowed to leave Sodom and Gomorrah"?

Abraham failed again with a lack of faith when he did not tell Abimelech that Sarah was his wife in Gen. 20. He had forgotten the lesson of Gen. 12. But the supreme test came in Gen. 22 when God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham obeyed by faith. As Heb. 12:19 says, "Concluding that God was able to raise *him* up, even from the dead." Now where did Abraham get that idea? I think it was the only thing that made sense because God had told him that Isaac would be his heir. Then Paul quotes Gen. 15:6 that confirmed Abraham's earlier trust in God. "It was accounted to him for righteousness."

Just as Abraham faced many tests in his life, I also face ongoing tests and challenges. When they come up, do I obey God, applying God's word and promises by faith? When I do, I may be able to handle even greater challenges.

Rom. 5:1-2. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

"Therefore." Paul is now building on what he has previously written. If I don't understand Rom. 4, then I am not going to understand Rom. 5. Context is important in understanding what the Bible has to say. "Having been justified by faith." Paul began Rom 4:1-3 by saying that Abraham was not justified by works. He quoted Gen. 15:6, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." God deposited to Abraham's eternal account, God's perfect righteousness. This is what the Biblical idea of justification or justified means. As Paul wrote in Rom. 5:1 "having been justified." As a believer, I have already been justified. God did it when I believed.

Paul then gives us a result of our justification. "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." He is introducing a new theological term which he does not name until Rom. 5:10. "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son." The "peace with God" of Rom. 5:1 is being "reconciled to God" in Rom. 5:10. This peace means that we are no longer God's enemies. We will not face God's future judgment. As believers we will not appear before God at the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15. This peace is not the sense of tranquility that arises from the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, ..." Paul also talks about this inner sense of peace or tranquility in Phil. 4:7, "and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

God reconciles us, as believers, to Himself. God is not reconciled. I heard a pastor in a church my wife and I were visiting say that "God was reconciled." I don't know if it was just a slip of the tongue or if he didn't know any better. Reconciliation means that the person reconciled is changed. But God is immutable. He never changes. Heb. 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." Our position before God as believers is changed when we receive the gift of God's righteousness.

Therefore, we can "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." We have assurance of our future participation in Jesus' glorious kingdom. "Hope" is not wishing that something will happen. As the Bible uses the word, it is our confident assurance that what God has promised, God will do.

I have skipped an important statement in Rom. 5:2. "Through whom (Jesus Christ) also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand." This is our ongoing position in the Christian life. Grace is not just a one shot action on God's part. He saves us by grace, but He doesn't leave us on our own. Rather His grace is available to us throughout our lives as believers. We continue to access God's grace by faith. We believe His word and walk by faith utilizing the power of the Holy Spirit.

As Paul phrases it: I "have access by faith into this grace in which" I stand. I need to take advantage of the divine resources God has provided for living a life pleasing to Him. I need to learn and know God's word, letting it transform my mind, so I am not conformed to (and confounded by) the thinking of the world (Rom. 12:2). I need to keep short accounts with God, confessing my sins (1 John 1:9). I need "to walk worthy of the calling with which" I was called (Eph. 4:1).

Paul is now going to tell us things we need to know about how believers should live.



**Lincoln Sparrow, Warbler Woods Sanctuary, Texas**

Rom. 5:3-5 And not only *that*, but we also glory (rejoice) in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

I have inserted the word "rejoice" above in today's Bible passage. Back in creative writing class in grade school, your teacher may have taught you to vary your vocabulary to make your writing more interesting. That is a good principle. But when it comes to translating Scripture, it does not contribute to a reader's understanding of what God wants us to know from His word. This verse is a good example. In Rom. 5:2, Paul wrote that we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Now he adds, 'And not only that, but we also rejoice in tribulation.' Both times, he used the same Greek word for "rejoice." In both statements he also repeats the word "hope."

"Rejoice in tribulation." I don't hear that kind of stuff from a lot of the self-help books and websites in this world. We do all we can do to get rid of obstacles, pain, afflictions, distresses, pressures, you name it. Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 3:12, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." This is a statement of reality in the devil's world. God allows these things to happen to us that we may learn more about Him and appreciate Him even more. This is one of several verses we have that speak of the potential progression of a believer's spiritual growth. When we handle the tribulations and adversities of life by applying God's word to the situations, we experience perseverance or persistence as we learn to grow through God's promises and commands. We demonstrate proven character or the quality of our faith in God. This in turn brings hope, confident assurance that what God has promised, He will do. Looking back at Rom. 5:2, this hope is our confident assurance that we will rejoice when we are in God's presence and see His glory.

Compare these verses with James 1:2-4. "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." I grow spiritually when I patiently handle trials.

"Because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." God in His love is preparing us for even greater things in His promised kingdom and into eternity forever with Him. He has given us the Holy Spirit to bring us through the problems of life. The presence of the Holy Spirit also confirms God's love for us.

How often have I tried to resolve problems and difficulties in my life through my own efforts and have not let God work His wonders? Sometimes I have reacted in sinful ways. I recall a time I became upset with a former business associate. In reality, it was more the fault of a third person. I did keep my upset feelings to myself. Later, I got over it and continued my friendship with the business associate. We shared a couple of investments, one of which was extremely profitable.

"Now hope does not disappoint." Many translations render the word "disappoint" as "put to shame" or "to be ashamed." The Bible sometimes speaks of a believer having shame at the Judgment Seat of Christ. 1 John 2:28, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." To the extent that I have obeyed God, my hope will become a reality at this judgment.



**White-tailed Hawk, near Hebbroville, Texas**

Rom. 5:6-8. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

In the first two sentences (Rom. 5:6-7), how many times is the word "for" used? I count four times. In the Greek two different words are used, each correctly translated "for." Each of the two Greek words is used twice. The first word in each sentence "For" is the common Greek word used in an explanatory sense. We can think of it as "For this reason." The second use of "for" in each sentence is used in a substitutionary sense. "For" used in this way shows that the words are a substitution for something else. One thing replaces some other thing or is on behalf of something else.

"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." To be "without strength" means to be helpless, powerless. There is nothing we could do to save ourselves. Not only that, but we are called ungodly." We were neglecting God or worse even rebelling against Him. "In due time" this sounds like what Paul wrote in Gal. 4:4, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law." In Eternity Past, when God determined His plan for this world, He knew when the exact perfect time would come to send His Son to die as a substitute for all the ungodly people who will ever live in this world. "In due time" refers to God's perfect timing.

"For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die." The "righteous man" here is one who lives his life in a righteous manner. There might be exceptions where someone might die for a righteous or good person, but rarely. Of course, Jesus told His disciples in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." What is the example of Jesus' love that he showed the very next day after giving His disciples this new commandment? He died for us, as our substitute. We could say that the eleven disciples might meet the "righteous," "good man" description.

R o m . 5 : 8  
 repeats what Jesus did on the next day, the day after Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment. " B u t G o d demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died in my place when I was still a sinner, without God's imputed righteousness, and at a time when I was powerless and had no ability to save myself.



Green Parrots, McAllen, Texas

Rom. 5:9-10. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

"Much more then, ..." Rom. 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." The phrase "Much more then" introduces something even greater or better. Jesus died for my sins. I have "now been justified by His blood" when I believed. I will not appear at the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:10-15. The Lake of Fire is not in the picture for me. But Rom. 5:9 says that I "shall be saved from wrath through Him." Dr. J. Vernon McGee says that this is a promise of the Rapture that removes believers from the earth prior to the Tribulation. But I don't see the Tribulation in view in Paul's first use of the word "wrath" in Rom. 1:18: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" In the following verses Paul wrote repeatedly that when people turned to sin, God "gave them over" to even more sins. Believers with sin in their lives may receive divine discipline.

If we could understand what Paul wrote, Rom. 5:10 tells us how Christ saves us from this future wrath when it says, "we shall be saved by His life." Unfortunately, this whips by us faster than a Bob Feller, Dizzy Dean, or Vinegar Bend Mizell fast ball. I am showing my age, Mizell pitched for the Houston Buffaloes in the 1951 season before moving up to the major leagues with the St. Louis Cardinals. I understand that he was a believer in Jesus Christ. Many people correctly see "saved by His life" as a reference to Jesus' resurrection. But how does that save us from this future wrath? Paul does not give the details because his readers had already been taught the details. Here are some verses to fill in the picture. Each one gives us a piece of the puzzle of saving us from wrath.

- 1) John 16:7. "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." After Jesus' resurrection, He sent us the Holy Spirit.
- 2) Acts 2:33. Peter said of Jesus, "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear." In his published messages on *Romans*, Dr. Donald Barnhouse mentioned this verse.
- 3) Gal. 2:20. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." Christ indwells believers.
- 4) Col. 3:16. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."
- 5) Rom. 8:34. "Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."
- 6) John 14:19. "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also." I thank God for Dr. Barnhouses' insight into Rom. 5:10.

We have these divine resources which Christ has made available to us to save us from wrath when He ascended to God's right hand. We have the Holy Spirit, God's word, and both the Spirit and Christ making intercession for us. I have no excuse for not living my life in a manner pleasing to God. Heb. 12:6. "For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges ever son whom he receives." I don't need God's wrath. I want to live the life God intended for me to live.

Rom. 5:11-12. And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned——

“And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation,” Paul brings us back to where he began this chapter. Rom. 5:1-3. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also rejoice in tribulations, ...” Rom. 5:11 says, “we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Rom. 5:2-3 says, “we rejoice in hope of the glory of God”; and “we also glory in tribulations.” Through justification God imputes Jesus’ perfect righteousness to us. This removes the barrier of sin between us and God and establishes peace between believers and God. The fancier word for this peace is reconciliation. Believers have been reconciled to God. Our reconciliation is another reason to rejoice. In Rom. 5:2, we can “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” which we will see first hand at the Rapture. Then at the Judgment Seat of Christ as our works are evaluated, we will learn the degree to which we will participate with Christ in His glory.

Paul wrote about this potential of sharing in Christ’s glory in 2 Tim. 2:10-13. “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. *This is* a faithful saying: For if we died with *Him*, we shall also live with *Him*. If we endure, we shall also reign with *Him*. If we deny *Him*, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” We can rejoice in tribulations because as we endure these by applying God’s word to each situation, we are laying up for ourselves “treasures in heaven.” Matt. 6:19-20. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, ...”

Now we come to an important verse. Rom. 5:12. “just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned——” Theologians use a lot of ink arguing interpretative minutiae regarding this passage. I have heard them explained and read them. If I had to take a test on the issues, I would flunk. The arguments are summed up well by one preacher who appended two words after the words “because all sinned.” He added “in Adam.” Dr. Constable’s *Notes* quotes Dr. S. Lewis Johnson’s summary of three different imputations. Believers are justified when God’s imputes Jesus’ perfect righteousness to us.” That is Dr. Johnson’s third imputation. First is the “imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity, or to the whole human race.” He referred to 1 Cor. 15:21-22. “For since by man came death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” The second is the “imputation of the sin of the elect (He was writing from a position of limited atonement, whereas I hold to unlimited atonement and would say ‘the sin of all mankind’) to Jesus Christ, who bore that sin’s penalty in his death on the cross” (2 Cor. 5:21. “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”) Adam is the head of the human race. Every one of us is condemned because of Adam’s sin. But we also are all born with a sin nature and commit sin on our own. Because Adam’s sin condemns the entire human race, Jesus’ death on the cross as our substitute results in the imputation of Jesus’ righteousness on all who believe in Him. Since Jesus was born of a virgin, He did not receive a sin nature, and was born free of Adam’s original sin. That is a lot of theology in a couple of long paragraphs. I see in all this, the magnificence of God’s marvelous plan that He set in motion revealing His great glory.



Tit. 3:5-7. not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Here are a couple of verses that all of us should memorize. I memorized verses five and six about seventy years ago from one of The Navigators topical memory packs.

There is nothing that anyone of us can do to earn or deserve our eternal salvation. We can't save ourselves by being baptized, by participating in holy communion, by repenting of sins, by giving money, by living a good life, or by anything else. We can't even save ourselves by believing in Jesus Christ. But God has promised us that if we do believe in Jesus Christ, then He will save us.

"He saved us." My salvation came from God. He did the work. Jesus died on the cross in my place. Yes, I believed, but that did not save me. God saved me.

"Regeneration." I was born again . At the moment of my faith in Jesus Christ, God gave me a new human spirit which enables me to have an eternal relationship with God. I take the statement of Jesus to Nicodemus, "You must be born again" to be literal and not just a figure of speech. Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be "born of the flesh" (physical birth) and "of the spirit" (the birth of a new spirit).

"Washing." Don't get confused. God is the one doing the washing in this verse. This is not a reference to water baptism which is a human work and had nothing to do with my eternal salvation.

"Justified by grace." At the moment I believed in Jesus Christ, God deposited to my account the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. Just because Jesus paid the penalty for my sins when He died in my place on the cross, that does not qualify me for eternal life. The forgiveness of my sins still left me with nothing on deposit in my account with God. But when God saved me, he deposited Jesus' perfect righteousness to my account.

"Should become heirs." Did I read that correctly? Does that say that I am not yet an heir, but that I should become an heir? Paul explains this a little more in the next couple of verses. But for now, how I live my life as a believer in Jesus Christ may qualify me to become an heir of more rewards



Gulf Fritillary, butterfly, Houston, Texas

Heb. 4:14-16. Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The writer of Hebrews has just completed the second warning passage in the book and makes his application for us. All five of the warning passages, warn about a future judgment I will face. In this judgment my life will be evaluated as to how I lived as a believer. The judgment is not to determine my eternal salvation, since as a believer I am assured that I will live with God for all eternity. But I have the potential for even better things in eternity than eternal life.

Jesus is my High Priest who serves as a mediator, a go-between, between me and God. Under the Old Testament law the priest made sacrifices for the sins of the people. Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for my sins.

"Let us hold fast our confession." Let me walk by faith, obeying God's word, making decisions day by day, moment by moment based on what I have learned from God's word.

Jesus Christ is not only God, but He lived a life as a human being and met with every kind of temptation and issues that I will ever face in my life. He did so without even once failing to obey God's word.

How can I come boldly to the throne of grace? This is the privilege of prayer that God has given me. In recent days and months, I have seen the power of prayer in the lives of my two pastors and friends. My pastor, Bruce Bumgarder, just before Thanksgiving, had emergency heart bypass surgery. He came through fine and is continuing his ministry. He was supported by prayer throughout the ordeal by his

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throughout the world. Then most recently pastor Robby, after prayer and careful consideration of the issues, followed through with his agreement to teach at a Bible college in Ukraine. His return home was delayed as he tested positive for COVID. Then the Russians invaded and all air flights were cancelled. His presence in the Ukraine enabled God to bring our missionaries, the Myers, out with him with the support of a lot of prayer.



Blue Grosbeak - near Newton, Texas



Heb. 13:19-21. But I especially urge *you* to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner. Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

In the previous verse the author of Hebrews had asked for prayer. He was looking forward to the time that he would see these Hebrew Christians again. Was he in prison or simply ministering in another place? The text does not tell us.

The author finishes this message with some final words of encouragement. "Now may the God of peace ..." I recall the words of encouragement Jesus gave to His disciples the evening before He was crucified, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I leave with you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:26-27).

The world thinks of peace from an external viewpoint: the absence of war, no problems with neighbors or co-workers, no fights, disagreements, disputes, .... But I can have peace despite all that is going on around me because of my faith in God. God is in control. He is working things out to bring in His ultimate victory. I can have peace because I know who will have the final victory.

"Brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead." Do we remember Jesus' resurrection only once a year? When I look at the number of references in the New Testament to the resurrection, I expect that this is at the heart of the gospel presentations of the early Christians. Think about it. Jesus was crucified. He was dead for three days. God raised Him from the dead. Over 500 people were eye-witnesses of the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor. 15:6). Because He lives, I have the promise that I will live also.

"The everlasting covenant." If I were a first century Jew, these words would remind me of what I had been taught all my life. The words "everlasting covenant" come straight out of the Old Testament, and particularly the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Jeremiah called it the new covenant in contrast to the old covenant God had made with Israel at Mt. Sinai during the Exodus. The new covenant, called here the everlasting covenant, is a promise that God will fulfill in the future.

The author prays for his readers that God would "make you complete in every good work ...," "working in you what is well pleasing in His sight." I need to live my life in the power of the Holy Spirit in obedience to all that God has given me through His word for life and godliness.

"To do His will." I grew up in a Baptist church, and God's will was bandied about in a form of mysticism. If I had a big decision to make, I would pray to find out what was God's will. I learned that when I prayed that God would do something, to add "if it is Your will." What color tie should I wear to church on Sunday? Whom should I marry?

God has told us in His word, what is His will. What I should pray for is wisdom in how I apply what I have learned from the Bible to those every day decisions as well as to the big ones like whom I should marry. The Bible tells me that I should not marry an unbeliever. It is God's will that I not marry an unbeliever. So should I date an unbeliever? The Bible has nothing to say about dating since dating is a part of 21<sup>st</sup> century culture, not that of 2,000 years ago. Dating an unbeliever may be unwise.



**White-tipped Dove, Estero Llano Grande State Park, Texas**

1 Pet. 1:17-21. And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

"If you call," and we do, is the implied meaning of this "if" clause in the Greek. I called on the Father when I placed my faith, my trust, in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation. I also call upon Him in prayer.

"Judges without partiality ..." Other passages tell us that God the Father has delegated all judgment to the Son, Jesus Christ. By calling God here, "Father," Peter is referencing my relationship with God. When I was a child, my father would discipline me if I disobeyed. So, I, as a born-again child of God can expect discipline from God during this life if I fail to conduct my life according to His commands. Some commentators take this as a reference to the Judgment Seat of Christ. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, my disobedience is not judged because Jesus' death has already paid the penalty for my sins. At the Judgment Seat of Christ the works of my life are evaluated as to how well I have done in my walk in this life.

"Redeemed." The death of Jesus Christ bought me from the slave market of sin.

"Aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers." God gave Moses the Law that the people of Israel were to follow. This Law contains 613 commandments. After the Jews returned from Babylon they decided to build a wall around these 613 commandments. The wall consisted of another 2,000 to 3,000 rules so that if the Jews kept these additional rules then they could not break any of the 613 commandments God gave to them through Moses. It was the violation of some of these additional rules that caused the Pharisees to accuse Jesus and His disciples of violating the Law. These additional rules were the "aimless conduct received by tradition" that Peter has in mind.

"He indeed was foreknown." I have corrected the erroneous translation of the word "foreknown." The *New King James Version* translators followed the tradition that they had been taught that the Greek words for "foreordained" and "foreknown" are synonymous. That is an interpretation, not a translation. In Eternity Past when the three members of the Godhead determined to create this world, they knew that Jesus Christ would have to become fully human and die for my sins. That was a part of God's plan for this world from the very beginning. "Foreknown" means to know beforehand.

"Raised Him from the dead." Peter again reminds us of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' resurrection is the evidence that what God has revealed about Himself in the Bible is absolutely true.



Chipping Sparrow, Falfurrias, Texas

2 Pet. 2:15-19. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

The story of Balaam in the Old Testament book of Numbers is not one I was taught in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School when I was growing up. The story is a good example of these false teachers about which Peter is warning. Balaam was a prophet of God. The king of Moab hired Balaam to curse Israel, but God did not allow Balaam to curse Israel. Instead Balaam spoke the words God gave to Balaam and Balaam blessed Israel. There was even a prophecy of the Messiah in Balaam's blessing of Israel. But Balaam could not resist the offer of a great reward from the king of Moab. Balaam told the king of Moab what the king could do to get God to turn against Israel, sexual immorality. Balaam's advice to the king of Moab was to invite Israel to participate in the sexual immorality of the worship of Baal. As Num. 25:3 says, "the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel." Balaam's advice to the king of Moab almost worked, but Israel returned to the Lord and God delivered them.

This ancient "health and wealth" gospel included the false promise of prosperous crops achieved through sexual immorality in the worship of false gods. Today we have preachers proclaiming a different form of a "health and wealth" gospel. "If you want good health and to be prosperous then listen to me and do ..." Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 3:12, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." As a believer in Jesus Christ, I have made myself an enemy of the world. I need to walk carefully with the Lord, taking it one step at a time.

"Wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest." False teachers are as useless and empty as a dry well. We can start with our eternal salvation. John 3:16, "For in this way God loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." My salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. Why then do preachers add works to salvation? Some teach that you also have to be baptized. Some say you have to repent of your sins. Some say you have to make Christ lord of your life. Some make works a post-requisite for salvation, i.e. you believe, but if you commit too many sins, you didn't have the right kind of faith. The variations are innumerable. The truth of the word of God is, I believed and then God saved me. It wasn't that God gave me faith so I could believe. When He created me He gave me the ability to choose to believe in Him or not to. But that believing does not save me. God promised that if I believed, then He would save me.

"By whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage." When I am led astray by false teachers, I become their slave. One false idea will lead to another and then to a third until I go completely AWOL in my faith.



Fiery Skipper, butterfly, Houston, Texas

2 Pet. 3:11-13 . Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Peter has just described God's destruction of this world and the universe by fire. "Therefore," he now introduces his conclusion with a rhetorical question and the answer. "What manner of person ought you to be? The answer: "in holy conduct and godliness." This is not the first time Peter has mentioned "godliness" in this letter. In the introduction to this letter in 2 Pet. 1:3, he wrote, "as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us ..." God's word has everything I need to know to live a life of "holy conduct and godliness."

I need to make learning God's word a priority in my life. Peter also mentioned "godliness" a couple verses later when he mentions the basic requirements for effective spiritual growth: "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love."

"Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God ..." This statement always sounded strange to me. What can I do to speed up the fulfillment of prophecy? Then I read a couple of commentaries that pointed me to another way to understand the verb here. "Eagerly awaiting" may be a better way to understand what Peter is saying. I need to be "looking for and eagerly awaiting the coming of the day of God." With this mindset, I may be better able to avoid the sinful paths I sometimes find myself chasing.

What is it that I should be eagerly awaiting. "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." These "new heavens and new earth" are mentioned twice in Isaiah (Isa. 65:17 and 66:22) and then in Rev. 21:1. Since there will be unbelievers in the Millennium as well as the final rebellion orchestrated by Satan involving the beast and the false prophet and their followers in Rev. 19, the place "in which righteousness dwells" seems to me to fit better by understanding the "new heavens and new earth" as our final destiny in eternity.

So what is the future schedule of prophetic events that God has laid out for us in His word that we need to be eagerly awaiting? First, the rapture of the Church (John 14:2-3 and 1 Thess. 4:16-17); The judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10); the Tribulation (Daniel's seventieth week of Dan. 9:24-27); our return with Jesus at His second coming (Zech. 14:3-5 and Rev. 19:11-21); the Millennium (Rev. 20:1-6); the final great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15); and then eternity in the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21-22). There are many other passages that speak of these events, but these are the ones that we commonly see used.



**Red-shouldered Hawk, Houston, Texas**



2 Pet. 3:14-16 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures.

“Looking forward to these things, ...” Peter refers to things about which he has just written: the coming of Jesus Christ for His church and the prophetic promises that will follow. He is writing as if he expects Jesus’ return to meet us in the air will occur during the lifetime of his readers, as well as his own lifetime. I also need to be looking forward to and eagerly awaiting Jesus’ return.

“Be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.” Since Jesus could return at any moment, how should I live? Peace is a part of the fruit of the Spirit according to Gal. 5:22-23. The fruit of the Spirit is the work of the Holy Spirit within each believer who is walking with God. The world thinks of peace as the absence of war or hostility and difficulties arising from external situations. But that is not the peace that the Bible says I can have through the Holy Spirit in my life. How can I have this peace from the Holy Spirit? Peter tells us, “without spot and blameless.” When my actions, my thinking and my speech conform with what the Bible tells me they should be, then I can expect that Holy Spirit given peace as well as the full package of the Gal. 5 “fruit of the Spirit.”

“That the longsuffering of the Lord is salvation.” Peter is still answering the scoffers of verse 3 who deny the coming of Jesus again because He is taking so long to return. God’s patient longsuffering is allowing time for unbelievers to come to faith in Jesus Christ, as he says in verse 9, “that all should come to a change of mind” (about Jesus Christ).

Peter then mentions Paul. Paul has also taught these same things and some of them are “hard to understand.” Hey, Peter, some of the things you have written in both of your letters are tough to understand also.

Finally, Peter finishes up these three verses with a warning. This “hard to understand” stuff about which Paul has written (and also Peter has written): “untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” For most of my 86 years I have heard the word of God twisted and distorted in innumerable ways. I pray that as I read and study God’s word that I will understand it correctly. Only when I understand it correctly will I be able to apply it correctly in a manner pleasing to God.



Northern Mockingbird, Houston, Texas

2 Pet. 3:17-18. You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Peter concludes this letter with a warning, a command for believers to grow, and a doxology.

"Since you know this beforehand." Peter uses the Greek word for "foreknowledge." These five words in this English translation are only one word in the Greek. We could say "having foreknowledge of these things." From where did this foreknowledge come? Peter had just taught it to his readers in this letter, just as he or others may have taught them previously. Knowing something does me no good unless I act upon that knowledge. As far as I know, the word for "foreknowledge" in its noun and verb forms is used seven times in the Bible. Five of those times the word is used in reference to God.

When God planned and created this world (universe) in eternity past, He knew what He was doing. He knew every detail of what would happen from Gen. 1:1 to the end of Rev. 22. He knew that Adam and Eve would choose to disobey, and He knew who would choose to believe. As it says in 1 Pet. 1:1-2, we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." God's foreknowledge working together with His omnipotence (and all His other divine attributes) is able to achieve the intended purpose of His glorification while giving every created person the free choice of choosing to believe or not to believe. This does not mean that God created and then He learned who would believe and who would not believe. That kind of thinking discounts God's attributes of omniscience and omnipotence. God knew what He was doing when He created the world. Before He even created this world, He knew every freewill decision that men whom He would create in His own image would choose and in God's omnipotence He determined how He would work everything out to His glory in accordance with His plan.

That's enough of that deep theology! Peter has told us in advance what will happen, what is the warning? "Beware lest you fall from your own steadfastness." Peter's original readers had not yet experienced the false teachers of 2 Pet. 2:1 whom he warned them would be coming in the future, nor the scoffers whom we have around us today who deny Jesus' promised return. But Peter's original readers need to be ready to stand fast in what the Scriptures say. The warning to me is that I need to know the Scriptures so that I can discern "both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). I don't want to be "led away with the error of the wicked" false teachers and scoffers.

Peter's final command: "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." As I grow spiritually I experience more of God's grace in my life. I was saved by grace, (I believed and then God saved me. My faith did not save me. If my faith saved me, then that faith would be works which would include not only the content of what I had learned, but also the act of believing what I had learned.) So I believed, and just as God promised, He saved me. This is grace.

Now I am a believer, saved by grace. But as I walk with the Lord I find there is a lot more to God's grace. I fail Him and sin often. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). That is grace over and above the grace of my eternal salvation. There is a lot more of that grace I can learn as I grow spiritually. That growth has to start with my "knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Several times in his letters Peter tells me that I need to know God's word.

Peter's benediction (doxology) tells us about God's ultimate purpose for creating this world. "To Him be glory both now and forever."

1 John 1:1-4. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that our joy may be full.

These four verses are John's introduction to this message. Was John writing to believers or unbelievers? 1 John 5:13 answers this question: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." So John is not writing a gospel tract. Explaining the gospel of Jesus Christ dying for our sins and salvation through believing in Jesus Christ was the purpose of the Gospel of John. But 1 John is written to tell us things we need to know as believers, so we can live our lives in a manner pleasing to God.

"That which we have heard from the beginning, ..." This appears to be a reference to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. John, as one of the twelve disciples, was an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry.

"Concerning the word of life." Is "word of life" a reference to Jesus Christ as the "Word" as in John 1:1, or is it a reference to the "message about life"? John 1:1 and John 1:14 do not identify Jesus as the "Word of life," but simply as the Word. So it appears to me that following the way the *NET Bible* and the *English Standard Version Bible* translated this as the "word of life" is the better understanding.

But in verse 3, "The life was manifested" "that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us." God is eternal, so what does John mean when he wrote "that eternal life which was with the Father"? Jesus Christ was with the Father as the second person of the Godhead from all of eternity. So here "life" appears to be a reference to Jesus Christ as eternal God taking on full humanity so He could die for us. So the "message about life" in this sense is a message about Jesus Christ.

John was touching on a subject he will refer to later in more detail. He was looking at ideas being taught by false teachers about whom and what Jesus Christ was.

"That you may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." John wants his readers, who are believers, to grow in their relationship with God and with John and other believers.

If John was concerned about false teachers 2,000 years ago, what would he think today? When I buy into the erroneous ideas of false teachers, my fellowship with God and Jesus Christ, as well as, that with other believers, is put in jeopardy. That is what John is telling us in the first three verses of this book.

"That our joy may be full." John also wrote in 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." Joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit and is shared in the fellowship between Bible teachers and their congregations when the truth of God's word is taught.



**American White Pelicans, Lake Livingston, Texas**

1 John 1:5-7. This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

John began this book in verse 1 with the statement, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard ..." He now repeats this opening concept: "This is the message we have heard from Him ..." As one of the Twelve disciples who were with Jesus during much of His three and one-half years of earthly ministry, John heard and saw many things which are not included in the gospels. This mention of light and darkness does not appear to be a direct quote. The word "light" and "darkness" are figures of speech and can generate different interpretations. I will offer a suggestion which has support from some commentaries. But in the back of my mind, I think I have heard other ideas of which I did not think well enough to remember in detail.

I take it that the "light" is God and what He has revealed of Himself to us, as well as, how He wants us to live. The "darkness" would be what we should not be doing or thinking or saying, i.e. sin. There is no darkness in God. He has no sin or evil. But that is how I was born, a sinner. As we used to say when I was growing up, "Me, myself, and I. That is all that is important." We may not have said the second sentence, but we thought the first statement was funny. But it also expresses the way our human selves operate when we are without God.

I can't walk in my sinful ways, disobeying what God's word says, and think I am having fellowship with God. In the words of Amos 3:3, "Can two walk together unless they are agreed."

The alternative to walking in darkness is to "walk in the light." If I know God's word, I should know how he wants me to live, think and speak. Without God's word, I will be pursuing the whims of "me, myself, and I." As Paul wrote in Rom. 7:18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells."

When I turn my eyes off of myself and begin to obey God's word in my life, then I will be walking in fellowship with God. At the same time, "we have fellowship with one another," i.e other believers and potentially with our unbelieving friends.

"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sins." I received the complete forgiveness of my sins when I believed in Jesus Christ. But I do continue to sin. What now? I have stepped out of the light. I need to be cleansed and leave the darkness to get back into the light. I believed in Jesus Christ once and God saved me, giving me forgiveness of sins and depositing to my account Jesus' perfect righteousness. All this happened immediately when I believed in Jesus Christ. But this cleansing "from all unrighteousness" is an ongoing process throughout my life each time I turn from my sin and again begin to walk with the Lord in obedience to His word.



Painted Bunting, near Presidio, Texas



1 John 1:8-10. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

These three verses each begin (as well as the two prior verses, 6 and 7) "If we ..." Who is this "we" about whom John is writing? John includes himself in these statements. 1 John is written to believers. This is not a gospel message telling unbelievers how to be saved. Verse 7 says, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all unrighteousness." Walking in the light is living my life in obedience to God's word. The word that God has revealed to us in the Bible. That is the positive side of what John is writing.

I have believed in Jesus Christ. God has given me the forgiveness of my sins for which Christ died. I have eternal life. But I am still here, in this body, and in this world. Now I have to live my life by faith. Obeying God's word is an act of faith. Verse 6 says, "If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." By obeying the truth of God's word, I can have a by-faith relationship with God while still walking around here in this world.

"If we say we have no sin ..." As long as God gives me life in this world, I will be a sinner. Reaching spiritual maturity is not the point of living a life without sin. Actually, spiritual maturity is an on-going, never ending process. Spiritual growth is an opportunity that God offers us in this world. Spiritual growth provides us a potential for future blessing. Also being a believer, having been born again by God and receiving as a gift from God eternal salvation, does not mean that there are certain sins I cannot commit.

If we confess our sins, ..." In verses 6, 8, and 10, John wrote, "If we say ..." The word "confess" has the same idea of saying or speaking. When I sin, I need to admit, to name, those sins to God agreeing with Him that they are sins. This is not a ritual. If I admit my anger over some affront a neighbor committed against me, while I am thinking of how I can get even, that confession is not going to restore my fellowship with God (or my neighbor). Confession means to agree with God that what I did is sin and then to move on not repeating that sin ... until the next time.

The idea of "cleansing from all unrighteousness" is those unknown sins I have committed. I confess my known sins, and even the unknown sins do not keep my fellowship with God in darkness.

"If we say we have not sinned, ..." This is the polar opposite of the confession of known sins in verse 9. For example: I was late for an appointment and drove 75

miles per hour down the freeway with a speed limit of 60. I know God's word tells me to be "subject to governing authorities" (Rom. 13:1) and speeding is a sin. But I was late. I think this is not a sin. Speeding may sound like a trivial sin. But the idea of denying that any sin is a sin is to call God "a liar." When I do that, I am continuing to walk in darkness. I am not practicing the truth.



Funereal Duskywing, butterfly, Houston, Texas

1 John 2:1-2. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

"These things I write to you, so that you may not sin." In the first chapter John had written that sin is a reality for every person living in the world. This includes even believers in Jesus Christ. He gave the solution that when we sin, we need to confess those sins to God, and God forgives those sins. Our fellowship with God is restored. Now John wants us to know that just because God has provided a solution for our on-going failures of continuing to sin, this does not mean that sin is acceptable.

Jesus is at God's right hand. He is there because He paid the penalty for our sins. He is our Advocate and makes intercession for us (Rom. 8:34). "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." That's a fancy five syllable word that we don't use in ordinary, every day, conversation. I like to think of it as Jesus' death on the cross SATISFIES the justice of God and paid the penalty for all my sins.

"And not for ours only but also for the whole world." For whom did Jesus die? Did He die for everyone in the whole world without exception, or just for everyone in the whole world without distinction? If He died for everyone without distinction, as some say, then He died only for those whom God chose for Him to die without distinction as to whether they were Jew or Gentile or even without distinction as to the color of their skin. I take these words that John wrote at their face value. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, for everyone without exception.

Then why isn't everyone saved? It takes more than just the forgiveness of sins for a person to be saved. Those who focus on sin as the reason each one of us needs to be saved, inevitably add works to God's message of salvation. There are at least two other requirements beyond the forgiveness of sins that must be fulfilled for a person to be saved and these two other requirements are gifts from God.

For a person to be saved, he must have the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. Having my sins forgiven, brings my standing before God from negative infinity up to zero. Whatever good works I have in my life still are not sufficient for being in the presence of God. God has promised that when I believed in Jesus Christ, He deposited to my account the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. Now my works in God's eyes are the positive infinite righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Back in Genesis God told Adam that if he ate of the forbidden fruit, he would die immediately. He ate, and he died, although he continued to live physically for another 900 years. After that, each person born into this world has been born spiritually dead. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:7, "You must be born again." None of us had anything to do with our physical birth. None of us can make ourselves born again. When I believed in Jesus Christ, God gave me new birth and I now have eternal life.

For a person to be saved, he needs more than just the forgiveness of sins. He needs to be perfectly righteous and he needs eternal life. My faith in Jesus Christ did not save me. I believed, and then as God had promised, God saved me.



**Bewick's Wren, Pedernales Falls State Park, Texas**

1 John 2:3-6. Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

John is remembering what Jesus taught in the Upper Room Discourse in John 15. He is also continuing his explanation of having fellowship with God with which John began this book. In John 15:10 Jesus said, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." Keeping God's commandments is a test of our relationship or fellowship with Him. It is not a test of our eternal salvation. Remember what John wrote in 1 John 1:7, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

"Whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in Him." Obedience to God's word and His commandments is the road to spiritual maturity. To obey God's commandments, I have to first of all know what they are. That means I have to learn God's word. I have to understand it correctly. Then I can apply it in my life which John calls here, "keeps His word."

The words John is using "fellowship," "know Him," "abides in Him," and "walk," all refer to our relationship with God. John is talking about how I, as a believer in Jesus Christ, should live my life. I can claim that "I know God" and "I am abiding in Christ," but if I don't know God's word and obey what God has told me to do in it, I am a liar and the truth is not in me.

I expect that John was writing to believers who probably were making these false claims of knowing and abiding. Later in this book John will address issues arising from false teachers in the church. 1 John 4:1, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."



**Burrowing Owls, Prairie Dog town, Marathon, Brewster Co, Texas**

1 John 2:15-17. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

“Do not love the world or the things in the world.” I like the way Dr. Constable discusses the world in his *Notes*. By the way, his notes covering the entire Bible are available for download for free in several places on the internet. Just search for “Thomas Constable’s notes.” He taught at Dallas Seminary for 45 years. He wrote “The world represents the system of values, priorities, and beliefs that unbelievers hold that exclude God.”

Growing up I attended a racially segregated all white public school. Later the Federal government imposed integration on schools. Has the world made progress toward meeting the Bible truth that we are all of one race whatever the color of our skin? I think not. Racism has continued to increase in recent years and now frequently erupts in violence that never existed when I was growing up.

Other issues today where the world’s values, priorities and beliefs may run contrary to God’s word are: right to life vs right to choose, gender issues, what we used to call sexual immorality today is considered acceptable, divorce, denying the scientific evidence for Noah’s flood, once upon a time there was a big bang or did God create this world 6,000 to 8,000 years ago, evolution or “God created man in His own image,” and many others. I try to limit these devotionals to a reasonable size, so I won’t elaborate on these issues here.

“If anyone loves the world ...” John was saying that some of his readers did love the world. The same is true of many believers today. “The love of the Father is not in Him.” To the extent that I love the world and its false ideas, I am lacking in love for God.

Then John describes three primary areas of worldly sins. “The lust of the flesh.” Our desires to do something apart from the will of God. What is God’s will for me? These are the commandments that God has given me in His word. God’s word is His revelation to me of what His will for me is.

“The lust of the eyes.” I want a car like Jack’s. Or the obvious thought that comes to our minds when we read this, Jack’s wife sure looks attractive or how far will Jacqueline go with me? The tenth commandment summarizes these thoughts as covetousness. Today people go into far too much debt that they cannot repay. They want bigger cars, larger houses, fancier phones or whatever because of the covetous desires of their eyes.

“The pride of life.” We want other people to think well of us. We do things to please other people rather than obey what God has told us to do. We stretch the truth about the things we have done so we can impress others. We tell people that we will do such and such because that is what sounds good, but we find we can’t do it.

“The world is passing away.” God said it. He promised Noah that He would not again destroy the world by a flood. But He will destroy the world by fire. If God doesn’t intervene (and He will), a scientific law called the Second Law of Thermodynamics, says that the world will one day destroy itself. But the thinking of world today is all worried about climate change (previously called global warming) destroying the world. But looking at history, climate has always been cyclical, running through self-correcting cycles of warming and cooling.

“He who does the will of God abides forever.” John takes us back to what Jesus said in John 15. When we keep God’s commandments, we will abide with Him, that is, we will have an ongoing fellowship relationship with God, not only in this life, but even more abundantly in eternity (John 10:10).

1 John 2:18-19. Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

"It is the last hour." The writers of the books of the New Testament expected Jesus Christ to return at any moment. If they had been told that two thousand years in the future, like today, we would still be looking for Jesus' return for the church to the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, they would have said that was NUTS." So whether they wrote, "It is the last hour," or made a reference to the "last day," the meaning is the same. Jesus Christ could return at any hour or day.

"You have heard that the Antichrist is coming." Who is this Antichrist? He is the "beast" of Rev. 19:19. He is the "prince who is to come" of Dan. 9:26. He is the "man of sin" of 2 Thess. 2:3. He appears several times by various names or titles in the Bible. He will be the dictator over the world during the Tribulation. Many in this world today are thinking that the way to end war in this world is to have all the nations of the world united under one government. Satan tried it before with the Tower of Babel in Gen. 11. We know how God brought an end to that escapade of Satan's. Many times people try to predict who Antichrist may be. During World War 2 some people thought that Hitler might be the future Antichrist. But the 2 Thess. 2 passage tells us that Antichrist will not be revealed until the church has been removed by the Rapture.

But the warning that John gives to his readers is "even now many antichrists have come." Even in the early years of the Church while the apostles were still alive and ministering, false teachers were preaching their erroneous ideas about who Christ was. John defines their specific false teaching in 1 John 2:22, "He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son." In 1 John 4:3, they do "not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." These attacks seem to have been focused on denying that Jesus was true humanity or denying that He was truly God. But Jesus was both fully human and fully God at the same time and He still is!. Today, the false teachers and their false ideas have multiplied into innumerable "isms" and theological viewpoints.

"They went out from us, but they were not of us." Who is the "They" and who is the "us" in this statement? The "They" is not difficult. "They" are the many antichrists." I used to think the "us" referred to the various churches of believers, including both John and his readers. But if the many antichrists had left these churches, why did John have to warn the churches about the many antichrists? By saying "us," John is taking us all the way back to the beginning of this message. "That which we have heard from the beginning." The "us" in 1 John 2:19 are the same people whom John called "we" in 1 John 1:1. The "us" and "we" are John and the other apostles who were eye witnesses who had heard and seen Jesus' earthly ministry.

Were these many antichrists saved believers in Jesus Christ? John doesn't say. At one time they had ministered with John and the other apostles, but now had left to go teach others their false ideas about God and Jesus Christ. The warning for me in this passage is that I need to know what the apostles and their close associates, like Mark and Luke and Jude, have written in the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament. I need to be able to discern the good from the evil, the true from the false.

1 John 2:26-29. These things I have written to you concerning those who *try* to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

"These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you." John is still talking about the false teaching antichrists he mentioned earlier in verse 18. John is concerned that the believers to whom he was writing might be deceived by these false teachers.

"The anointing which you have received from Him." In John 16:7 Jesus promised His disciples that after His ascension He would send the Holy Spirit. Then in verse 13 Jesus said that the Spirit would guide them into all truth. The believers to whom John was writing appear to have been well taught by John or others. They were not newby believers. The teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit is a two way street. The Holy Spirit works through gifted teachers of God's word and He also works in the minds of those believers who hear the gifted teachers.

"And now, little children, abide in Him." This is a command. We abide in Christ when we keep His commandments. "That when He appears." When Jesus returns, we will then have our lives evaluated as to how well we utilized the divinely given resources for living the Christian life. How well have I learned God's word and applied it in my life? How good a listener have I been to what the Holy Spirit has tried to teach me? Will I stand with confidence before the Judgment Seat of Christ, or will I feel shame because of all my missed opportunities. It is not my sins that Jesus will evaluate at this judgment because they have already been forgiven. God has given me eternal life. There is no way I can lose it.

"Everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him." Before you decide what you think this verse is saying go back and read 1 John 1:7 and 1:9. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." "If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). So even though I have been born again, I still sin. But now that I have been born again, I can choose to practice righteousness. John uses this same grammatical structure a couple more times in this book and each time it should be understood in the same way. So even born again believers can sin. The believer who practices righteousness in his life is the one who will be able to stand with confidence at the Judgment Seat of Christ. I think this verse should be understood from the flow of thought John is presenting and not just taken as a stand-alone statement.

I am going to suggest a different idea as food for thought. In 2 Cor. 5:17 Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, ..." What is this new creation? We still have our old sinful selves, i.e., "the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). But we also have this new creation from God. As Paul wrote in Rom. 7 and Gal. 5, these two (the new creation warring against my old sinful self) war against each other. Could it be that when we "Abide in Him," obeying God's commands from His word, that it is that new creation that is practicing righteousness? When I apply this approach to what John writes in this book, then some of the thornier passages begin to make sense.



1 John 3:1-3. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

"Behold what manner of love ..." The *New American Standard Version* reads "How great a love."

"That we should be called children of God!" The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* comments on the next phrase found in most modern translations: "The words 'and that we are,' are rightly omitted by most manuscripts, are probably a scribal addition."

In Dr. Thomas Constable's *Notes*, he points out that the choice of the word for "children" refers to young children rather than to an older child in a position of privilege. The younger child needs development. He needs to grow up. I am paraphrasing what Dr. Constable wrote and he also referenced an earlier theologian, Westcott, with this comment. His comment reminds me of what Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."

"The world does not know us, ..." The trite expression that might describe what John is saying here is: "The world marches to a different drummer." The world of unbelievers has no clue. They don't know where they came from, why they are here or where they are going. The thinking of the world comes up with all kinds of ideas to answer these questions. The Bible answers all of these basic questions for me.

"We know that when He is revealed, ..." This is a reference to the return of Jesus Christ. Specifically, to his descending to the air where we will be caught up to meet Him in the clouds so that we can spend eternity with Him (1 Thess. 4:16-17). When that happens we will receive a new body, called by some a "resurrection body." 2 Cor. 5:1-2 calls this being "clothed with our habitation which is from heaven." My "old man," my sinful drives will be gone. I will be like Him (Jesus).

"Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." When the Bible speaks about "hope," it is not talking about some nebulous wish of something that may happen. This hope is a confident assurance that what God has promised will absolutely come true. May I have the confidence that, yes, Jesus Christ could return today. May I look forward to His glorious appearing and keep myself pure from the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).



Scarlet Tanager, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Texas

1 John 3:6-9. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

This is not an easy passage to understand. My understanding of it is derived from what the word "abides" means, what being "born of God" means, and why John had to write this stuff at all, i.e., "Let no one deceive you." He was setting forth the truth of God's word as opposed to the ideas being taught by false teachers.

"Whoever abides in Him." Abiding in Christ comes from Jesus' teaching to His disciples in John 15. In 1 John 1:3, John used the term "fellowship": "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." In 1 John 2:6, John wrote: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." Abiding in Christ is not a way of describing a believer in Jesus Christ. While only believers can abide in Christ, not every believer can be said to abide in Christ. Only those believers who know God's word and obey it by keeping His commandments are abiding in Christ. The moment a believer fails to obey a commandment, i.e. sins, he is no longer abiding in Christ.

"Let no one deceive you." I am not sure what the false teachers here were saying. John is correcting the false teachers when he wrote, "He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous." This is a truth that false teachers were not teaching.

"Because he has been born of God." In John 3:3 Jesus taught Nicodemus that "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Was Jesus just using a figure of speech when He said, "born of God"? Or, is there a literal reality to being born again? Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 5:17, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." I take the idea of being born again, or as Paul wrote, "a new creation," to be a work of God in every one who believes in Jesus Christ. God creates a new nature in us. Believers have a new spirit born in them. But my old sinful nature still exists.

Paul wrote in Rom. 7 about a battle between two natures within himself. Verses 19-20, "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." My conclusion is that it is this new nature that God has created in me that cannot sin. This new nature practices righteousness.

When I am walking in obedience to God's will as revealed in His word, I am abiding in Christ." But when I choose to sin, I am letting my old man (Paul uses the term) control my life. That breaks my fellowship with "the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." John gave the solution in 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

I also see a parallel between these two natures that dwell in me with the life that Jesus lived in this world. He was fully God. Phil. 2:6-7 says of Jesus, "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, ... coming in the likeness of men." Jesus was both fully God and fully human in His life in this world. In His humanity, He had the ability to turn away from God in disobedience and to sin. Satan tried to get Him to do so when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. At no point in His life did Jesus disobey God. I have two natures in me. I need to learn to "just say No," to my old nature.



1 John 3:14-16. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

John began this book by stating, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, ..." John was giving a personal testimony of what he and the other apostles had seen and heard. In today's verses John continues this personal testimony. Here he writes, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren." Jesus told His disciples in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John (and the other apostles he is including in the word "we") is testifying how his life changed as he now has come to love the brethren.

"Whoever hates his brother is a murderer." John repeats what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5:21-22, "I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."

Three times in these verses John uses the word "abide" or "abiding." He is talking about our on-going fellowship relationship with God the Father and with Jesus Christ. As John wrote in 1 John 1:3, "That which we have seen and heard, we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."

As John writes in verse 15, "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." When John says "eternal life" in this verse he is referring to Jesus Christ by way of one of His divine attributes, i.e. "eternal life." Jesus said of Himself in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." John spoke of Jesus Christ in 1 John 1:2, "the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—" He did this again in 1 John 5:20, "and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." So the reference here to "eternal life abiding in him" is to my fellowship with Jesus Christ who abides in me when I obey Him.

"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us." Jesus died for all sins, even murder. The moment I believed in Jesus Christ, God applied Jesus' death to me and my sins were forgiven. Jesus dying on my behalf is the extreme example of love for others. How far am I willing to go to show love for others? "We also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

See the Bird and  
Find its shadow



Verdin and its shadow, near Floresville, Texas

1 John 3:17. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" John may have had Deut. 15:7 in mind when he wrote this, "you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother."

How do I apply these ideas from a practical standpoint. There is a "first day" principle of financial management which is borrowed from what Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 16:1-2. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, ... On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, ..." The financial management principle says that we give to the church and to others in need out of every paycheck, off the top — not the few pennies that may be left at the end of the pay period after we have spent too much on ourselves.

When I am cheated, abused, maligned, lied about, or in any way mistreated, how do I react? Do I have concern or love for my tormentor? Am I really seeking what is best for my tormentor? Or do I seek to extricate myself from my difficulties even though to do so may hurt the other person. Am I more concerned for myself than I am for the person who is hurting me. "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us?"



**Barn Swallow, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge**

1 John 3:22-24. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

The previous verse, verse 21 states, "we have confidence toward God." Then John continues in today's verses, "And whatever we ask we receive from Him." John is talking about prayer. He links confidence and prayer again in 1 John 5:14-15. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."

So John gives us conditions for receiving our prayer requests from God. 1). We "keep His commandments." Of course, to keep them, we have to, first of all, know them. Then we obey them. In the next sentence, John summarizes these commandments. 2). We must "believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ." We must have eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. 3). We must love one another. As Paul wrote in Gal. 5:14, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" 4). We "do those things that are pleasing in His sight." Doing things that are pleasing in God's sight and keeping His commandments are saying the same thing with different words. We must be walking in fellowship with God with no unconfessed sin in our lives. 5). Then from 1 John 5:14-15, we must pray "according to His will."

So how do I know what God's will is, so that I can get my prayers answered the way I want them to be answered? God's will takes two different forms. There is God's sovereign will. That is what He decreed in eternity past. What He has decreed will happen and my prayer will not change it. Outside of Bible prophecy, there is also no way for me to know what God decreed in eternity past until it actually happens.

But when John writes about praying "according to His will," John is writing about the revealed will of God. God has given us His revealed will in the Bible. I still have a lot to learn about what it means to pray according to God's will. In God's omniscience, God knew what my prayer would be, and He may have granted that request in eternity past. But many of my prayers are for my comfort, good circumstances, success, healing and that kind of personal stuff. Maybe I should be praying for the strength to endure the pain I am suffering and that God's name would be glorified as I progress through the situation.

"Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. This is a promise conditioned on obeying God. John is not talking about the indwelling of any of the three members of the Godhead. That indwelling occurs at the moment I believed in Jesus Christ and is ongoing. I had nothing to do with it. Abiding in Him is my ongoing fellowship with God as I obey him.

"And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." When I am walking in fellowship with God, the ministry of God the Holy Spirit is a reality in my life. Sin in my life grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:20) and quenches His ministry to me (1 Thess. 5:19). John wrote about one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit in 1 John 2:27 where he referred to the Spirit as "the anointing": "the same anointing teaches you concerning all things." I need the Holy Spirit to teach me what the revealed will of God is.

1 John 4:1-3. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

"Do not believe every spirit." What does John mean by spirit? The word "spirit" may sound strange when we first read it. But John calls the spirits "many false prophets." In 1 John 2:27 John referred to the Holy Spirit as "the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, ..." The Holy Spirit teaches us God's word through our pastors who have the spiritual gift of pastor and teacher (Eph. 4:12).

We are to "test the spirits." Are they teaching the same things that John, one of Jesus' disciples and an apostle, has taught us? Today, we have the Bible containing the inspired word of God that God expects us to learn and to follow. John calls these false prophets (teachers) spirits because what they are teaching comes not from God, but from Satan and from his fellow demonic spirits.

"By this we know the Spirit of God." John now refutes what the false spirits were teaching by reminding his readers what they had been previously taught. The *Grace New Testament Commentary* rendered the true message as confessing "Jesus as Christ having come in the flesh." i.e. Jesus, the Messiah, came as true humanity. He was truly human like you and I. Of course, He was also God at the same time.

"And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and is now already in the world." John is repeating what he wrote in 1 John 2:18, "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come."

We are still in that last hour, looking for the return of Jesus Christ. In this book John addresses a few false ideas taught by these false teachers and prophets whom he calls "many antichrists." Today, there is not a single part of Scripture that does not have multiple interpretations. John's command to us is to "test the spirits, whether they are of God." I can pray for understanding. That the Holy Spirit would enlighten me to the truth of God's word. How does a verse of Scripture fit with its context? Do other passages seem to say something different? Why? I often find new things in God's word that I did not know before. As Paul commanded Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of God."



Prairie Warbler, Sabine National Forest, Texas

1 John 4:4-6. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

The pronouns in these verses tell us who the players are. "You." These are the believers to whom John is writing. "Them" are the false prophets or false teachers of verse 1. "We are of God." This is a reference to John and the apostles who have given us the New Testament, as in 1 John 1:1-3. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – ... that which we have seen and heard we declare to you." It may also include John's readers.

"Have overcome them." My understanding of John's use of the word "overcome" differs from that of many excellent Bible teachers from whom I have learned a lot. I take my understanding from John's first use of the word in John 16:33 where Jesus says to His disciples, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Both Satan and the world threw everything they could at Christ to get Him to fail in achieving the purpose for which God sent Jesus Christ into this world. Jesus succeeded in living a perfect, sinless life. As part of that He overcame the world.

The world being all the false ideas the Jewish leaders had about their promised Messiah and the Roman rulers had in their worship of idols. As well as any other false ideas floating around throughout the world. Jesus chose to follow through and obey God's plan and to die as the substitute for my sin. Jesus could have accepted Satan's offer of all the kingdoms of the world (Luke 4:5-8). He could have turned the stones into bread. He could have called down the angels from heaven to destroy all those who tormented, tortured, and crucified Him. In short, overcoming the world was one of the works of perfection that Jesus performed in his life in this world.

In 1 John 4:1 John called upon his readers to "test the spirits," the false prophets, against what John and the other apostles had already taught them. In today's passage John confirms that his readers were "of God," meaning that they were born again believers, but they were also abiding in God as they overcame the world.

"He who is in you" probably refers to the ministry of the Holy Spirit by whom they are able to "know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." John has previously mentioned this ministry of the Holy Spirit in 1 John 2:27, "the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him." Again in 1 John 3:24, "And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."

Overcoming the world is not an absolute reality for a believer in Jesus Christ. If it were, why would John command us in 1 John 2:15, "Do not love the world or the things of the world"?

"We are of God." Yes, I have believed in Jesus Christ. "He who knows God hears us." John is not restating what he has just said. Knowing God is more than simply being "of God." John is picking up on what he wrote in 1 John 2:2. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." For the ministry of God the Holy Spirit to be effective in my life to enable me to "know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error," I must obey God's commandments. I must be abiding in Him. I must have no unconfessed sin in my life.

1 John 4:7-11. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this 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 also ought to love one another.

John briefly moves away from the subject of the false prophets and many antichrists to the subject of love. Biblical love is the desire for the well-being of another person. Love wants the very best for others. Jesus gave us the command to love one another. He also told His disciples that everyone would be able to identify those who are Jesus' disciples because of their love for one another (John 13:34-35). Gal. 5:22 tells us that love is a part of the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of believers who are walking in the Spirit. In these verses John tells us that "love is of God." Love, in the Biblical sense, comes from the source of God.

John adds, "everyone who loves is born of God." This is the second of three times in this book that John uses the exact same sentence structure to describe born again believers in Jesus Christ. In 1 John 2:29 John wrote, "everyone who practices righteousness has been born of God. In 1 John 5:1 John wrote, "whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. John wrote the exact same words each time except for the first part of these sentences that tell us what a believer does: 1) "loves;" 2) "practices righteousness;" and 3) "believes that Jesus is the Christ." These three statements tell me how I, as a born again believer, should live. First, I should love others. Second, I should practice righteousness in my life. Third, even though God saved me the moment I believed in Jesus Christ, I should not be deceived by false teachers. I should continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah God promised to Israel. These three sentences do not say that every believer will at all times love others, or practice righteousness, or will never deny Jesus. I am a sinner. I often fail to obey God in multiple ways.

"And knows God." The believer who loves others is the believer who knows God by keeping God's commandments (1 John 2:3), like the commandment to love one another. This is the believer who practices the truth by walking in the light, having fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-7). This is the believer who abides, by walking as Jesus Christ walked (1 John 2:6).

John then reminds us of the greatest example of God's love for us. God sent the second person of the Godhead to become a man and to die in my place that I might live eternally with God. Jesus, eternal, infinite God, was begotten, born as a finite man. He lived and then He died. Jesus' death satisfied (He was "the propitiation for our sins.") God's justice, paying the penalty for our sins.

With Jesus' sacrifice, how then should I live? I also ought to love others. But I can't do it in my flesh, my sinful nature. So God created a new nature in me. I was born again, a new creation, 2 Cor. 5:17. It is with this new creation that I am able to love others, practice righteousness, and continue to believe that Jesus is the Christ, Israel's promised Messiah.



Couch's Kingbird, Beeville, Texas



1 John 4:12-16. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

John keeps repeating with different words the same ideas and concepts. Abiding in God and Christ is the way that I should walk in my life as a believer in Jesus Christ. Abiding means that I should be keeping the commandments that Jesus and His apostles have taught me in God's word to obey. When I sin, by failing to obey God, I confess those sins (1 John 1:9). Many times the Bible commands us to love one another.

In His final night with His disciples Jesus promised that after He had returned to God the Father in heaven that He would send the Holy Spirit to them (John 14:16-17). When we are abiding in fellowship with God, God the Holy Spirit helps us to understand God's word that we have been taught.

This is the way we grow spiritually as believers in Jesus Christ. "God abides in us and His love has been perfected in us." We learn God's word through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We apply God's word to the situations we face in our daily lives, i.e. we obey God including having love for one another.

"And we have seen and testify ..." The pronoun "we" probably includes John's readers. Earlier in this book John has used "we" and it might also have included his readers as well as the other apostles who were with John. But the earlier references include the pronoun "you" in the immediate context. The "you" in the context refers to his readers. Here the pronoun "you" does not appear in the immediate context so John was probably including his readers when he used the word "we."

"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God." Remember that John had commanded his readers in 1 John 4:1, to "test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." I take it that this is one of the tests. The term "Son of God" (as opposed to "only begotten Son") is a reference to the Deity of Jesus Christ. In the language of the day, the term "son of" was used to describe a person as being exactly like the character that he is the son of. So when Jesus called Himself the "Son of Man", he was saying that He was fully human. But here John is calling Jesus fully God. It sounds to me like some of the false teachers were denying the divinity of Jesus Christ. Today we do not have living apostles who can point out false teachers to us. But we do have the written word of God, the Bible. I need to know the Bible well enough that I can discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6).



**Yellow-breasted Chat, Sabine County, Texas**

1 John 5:1-5. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. 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 burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

In these verses John may be giving a couple more tests for determining those who teach by the Spirit of God (1 John 4:1-2). Do they teach "Jesus is the Christ," Israel's Messiah? Do they teach "that Jesus is the Son of God?" In 1 John 4:2, John wrote that "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God." The false teachers in John's day appear to have had a garbled understanding of whom Jesus was.

"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Both the *NET Bible* and the *English Standard Version* read "Everyone one who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." When I believed in Jesus Christ, God saved me. I believed at a moment in time, but God's work of saving me has eternal results. Now I am walking by faith. I continue to believe that Jesus is the Christ. But even if I should decide that that is incorrect, I have not lost my salvation because it is God who saved me. I did not save myself by believing in Jesus Christ.

John repeats the basic commands that every believer should follow. "That we love the children of God. That we should "keep His commandments."

Similarly, in the fourth verse the *English Standard Version* reads, "Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world." The *NET Bible* begins the verse, "Because everyone who has been ..." Most of our translations fail to pick up that introductory conjunction, "because." John is further explaining verse 3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, ... because everyone who is born of God overcomes the world." The structure of verse 4 is the same as verse 1. How we understand verse 1 is how we should understand verse 4. I believed in Jesus Christ and God saved me, i.e. I was born again. Now I am to live my life believing in Jesus Christ. Now I am to "love the children of God." I am to keep His commandments." I am to "overcome the world."

Paul wrote in Rom. 12:2 how I, as a believer, should live in relation to the world. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." I need to renew my mind. I do this by learning and applying God's word in my life.

Jesus is our example as an overcomer. John 16:33. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Jesus overcame the thinking of the world in His life. He did not succumb to the legalism of the Pharisees or to the liberalism of the Sadducees. He did not accept the offers and temptations of Satan in the wilderness. Jesus' overcoming the world was a part of the perfect life He lived on earth. Jesus was not saved by overcoming the world. He was never lost and so did not need salvation. As Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 5:21, "He knew no sin."

I, as a believer in Jesus Christ, am to overcome the world in my life. I am not to think the way the world thinks. I am to learn the word of God, so that I can think the way God wants me to think. Then I can demonstrate through my life "what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

One final thought. While I, as a believer in Jesus Christ, can overcome the world. There have been times when I have bought into the false ideas of the world. Through knowing God's word and applying it by faith is the way I can overcome the world. "And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith."



1 John 5:11-13. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to believe* in the name of the Son of God.

How do I know that I am saved? How do I know that my sins have been forgiven and that I have eternal life? I know that I am saved because I believe what God has promised. God promised that when anyone believes in Jesus Christ, then God will save them.

"These things I have written to you ..." In contrast to John's gospel, this letter of John has five purpose statements. John 20:31 is the one purpose statement that John wrote in his gospel giving the purpose for his writing the entire book. John 20:31 says, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." John wrote his gospel for the purpose of telling us how we can be saved, i.e. by believing in Jesus Christ.

In 1 John 5:13 when John wrote "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life," he is telling his readers that they can be assured that they do have eternal life. How? Because they believe in Jesus Christ. John's reference here to "These things" in 1 John 5:13 refers only to what he has written in the immediate context.

Some commentators say that the purpose statement in 1 John 1:3 is the purpose for which John wrote this letter. "That you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." Throughout 1 John, John writes about abiding in God and Christ, keeping His commandments, and loving one another. He is telling us how we should live our lives as believers. In this way, we can enjoy our fellowship with God and Jesus Christ and with other believers.

"That you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." Most modern translations do not include this final statement in this verse. This is what is called a textual variant. This statement is found in the majority of Bible texts, but is found in at least two of the oldest four extant manuscripts of the New Testament. Probably, a couple of the scribes copying even older manuscripts thought the statement was redundant and did not copy it.

Notice, also, that "*continue to*" is in italics in the New King James Version. There are no manuscripts of the New Testament that contain the words "*continue to*." The translators have added these words because of their theological presuppositions. They are correct that the tense of the verb "believe in" often has the sense of an ongoing action. But why add the words "*continue to*" only here and not every time the same tense of the verb is used?

In Kenneth Wuest's *Expanded Translation of the New Testament*, he translated the verb "to ask" in 1 John 5:14, as "keep on asking" whereas the *New King James Version* translates it simply "ask." Dr. Wuest did his translation to try to convey more accurately the sense of the Greek verbs.

By adding the words "to continue" the *New King James Version* translators were saying that it is not enough to simply believe in Jesus Christ, but that you have to continue to believe or you did not really believe in the first place and you were never saved. By this understanding the *New King James Version* translators were making saving faith a work.

I thank God that I am not saved by my works, but that when I believed in Jesus Christ, God saved me. It was not my faith that saved me. I know I am saved because I believe what God has promised, and not by the works in my life.

1 John 5:14-15. Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

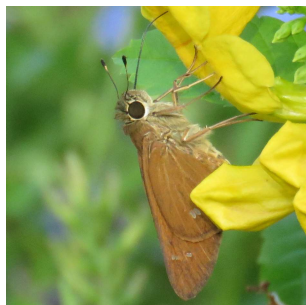
This is one of the great prayer promises in the Bible. This is also not the first time John mentions prayer in this letter. Looking at 1 John 3:21-22, we find both confidence and prayer linked together. We have the same two words, "confidence" and "prayer" in today's verses. 1 John 3:21-22 says: "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

In 1 John 3:22, we receive what we ask in prayer "because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." In 1 John 5:14-15 we "have the petitions that we have asked Him" when we ask "according to His will."

I also need to point out that the *New King James Version* translators have thrown a curve ball at us in these two passages. In chapter 3 it says "we have confidence toward God." The comparable phrase in chapter 5 reads "the confidence that we have in Him." Translating prepositions from one language to another can be tricky. Prepositions can have a broad range of meanings and the uses do not always parallel each other from one language to another. Both phrases use the same preposition in the original text, but the *New King James Version* translates one as "toward" and the other as "in." I have my Bible study software set to show seven different Bible translations in parallel columns. The preposition is translated "in," "toward," "before," and "in the presence of." Five of the translations translate the word differently in the two verses. Only two translate it with the same word in both places. What John is saying is that we can have confidence that God will hear our prayers when we pray while we are abiding in Him: "Toward Him," or "before Him," or "in His presence,." As John wrote in 1 John 1:3, when we are walking in fellowship with the Father and His son Jesus Christ.

Today's verses add that we need to pray "according to His will." That is, according to the revealed will of God that we have in the Bible. This contrasts to the warning that James gives about why God does not fulfill our prayer requests, James 4:3, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." If I am going to pray according to God's will, it might be helpful to know what God's will is. God has told me what His will is in His word, the Bible.

Before James gave the warning about why God does not answer prayer, he also gave a prayer that I should pray more often than I do. James 1:5. In the verses previous to this, James is writing about the testing of faith through various trials. When I face trials, I should do so with joy. What is missing from this discussion of various trials by James? I don't see where James tells me to ask God to get me out of this mess I am in! Instead he says in verse 5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." The wisdom for which I am to pray is the practical application of how I can apply what I have learned from God's word, to the various trials I face. Of course, if I had been sleeping in at home when my pastor taught what I needed to know or perhaps had nodded off in the middle of his message, I may not have learned what it is for which I need wisdom about how to apply what I do not know.



**Brazilian Skipper, butterfly, Houston, Texas**

1 John 5:16-18. If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death. We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

"If anyone sees his brother ..." "His brother" is a reference to any other believer in Jesus Christ. These verses about the "sin *which does not lead* to death" are not that hard to understand if you don't try to make John say something he is not saying. We have at least two examples in the New Testament of believers who committed the sin unto death. In Acts 5:1-5 we have the story of Ananias and Sapphira and in 1 Cor. 11:27-32 we have the Corinthian church turning the Lord's Supper into their former manner of worship of the false Greek gods.

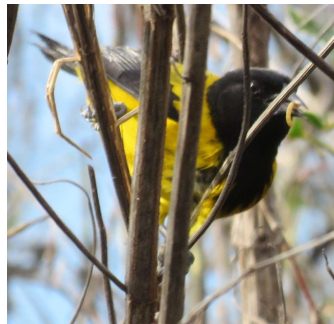
So what is the sin unto death? John does not specify any particular sin, nor does any other place in the New Testament. As John wrote in verse 16, "There is sin *leading* to death." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says of this statement, "There is no need for the word 'a' before sin. John was not thinking of only one kind of sin." Any sin could be "sin *leading* to death."

"I do not say that he should pray about that." John is not forbidding us to pray about a brother who has committed a sin that leads to death, because it is not for us to determine that a believer has committed such a sin. Following the prior two verses on prayer, John gives this example of a prayer that I should pray for any brother I see engaged in sin. But I should pray such a prayer privately, unless the sin is apparent to everyone else with whom I am praying. I need to heed the warnings of Scripture about speaking evil of others, e.g. James 4:11, et al.

The best explanation of what the sin "which leads to death" is, seems to be an on-going, unconfessed sin that continues unabated. The believer continues in the sin until he reaches the point of no return and the Lord says, "That's enough. Come home! I will see you at the Judgment Seat of Christ with an Aggie bonfire burning up your rewards." (1 Cor. 3:11-16, Heb. 10:26-27.)

As far as verse 18 goes, I will quote the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*. This commentary uses the *New International Version* of the Bible so some of this refers to words in that paraphrase of the Bible. "As in (1 John) 3:6, 9 the words 'continue to' are not justified by the original. John was affirming that 'anyone born of God' is a person whose true, inward nature is inherently sinless. ... the word 'himself' should be read in place of 'him.' John thus affirmed that 'the one who has been born of God keeps himself' (there is no word for 'safe' in the original). This restates the truth of (1 John) 3:9 in a slightly different form. A believer's new man (or 'new self'); is fundamentally impervious to sin and hence 'the evil one,' Satan, 'does not touch him.'"

When I believed in Jesus Christ, God saved me. I was born again. Being born again is not a figure of speech. But I received an actual new creation from God (2 Cor. 5:17), a new man. There is now a battle going on inside of me that Paul describes in Rom. 7:14-25. This new man that God created when I was born again does battle with my flesh, my old man. I now have God's divine resources in the form of His word and the Holy Spirit that when I use them I can live my life in a manner pleasing to God.



**Audubon's Oriole, Alice, Texas**

1 John 5:19-21. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway* of the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

"We know that we are of God." John is contrasting his teaching and that of the other apostles he includes with the word "we" with the false prophets of 1 John 4:1. John commands us to "test the spirits, whether they are of God." In 1 John 4:2 John continued, "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God." John calls these false teachers "antichrists."

These false teaching antichrists are of the world. "Therefore they speak as of the world" (1 John 4:5). Today's passage says "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one." Today, we have the completed teachings of the apostles in our Bibles. We also have the Holy Spirit to help us understand the truth of God's word. The world around us has ideas inspired by Satan.

We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding." In John 16:7 Jesus promised that when He ascended into heaven He would send the Holy Spirit to us. The false teachers about whom John wrote had come up with some wrong ideas about Jesus Christ. 1 John 4:2-3, Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh. 1 John 4:14, Jesus is not the Son of God. They are antichrists because they were teaching false ideas about Jesus Christ.

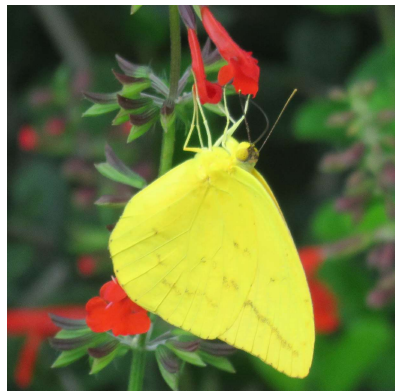
Jesus Christ "is the true God and eternal life." Here is a clear statement that Jesus Christ is God. John introduced the subject of eternal life when he began this letter. 1 John 1:2, "the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—"

"Little children." John addresses his readers as children. He considered that they were already believers in Jesus Christ.

Then, kind of out of the blue, we have John's final command and he makes it to these people he has just called "little children," i.e. believers. "Keep yourselves from idols." All of John's readers had undoubtedly been idol worshipers before they believed in Jesus Christ. The lure of the old systems and the harassment of their unbelieving friends, were strong pulls to return to their former ways. Throughout this letter John has repeatedly told his readers to keep God's commandments, to abide in Him, to test the false teachings of the antichrists, and to not love the world and its ideas.

The world in which I live today thinks that God does not exist. The world says that God did not create this world 6,000 to 8,000 years ago, but once upon a time, 13.8 billion years ago there was a big bang and this universe appeared. How many times have I heard people speak about "mother nature." There are churches that focus on the love of God or the sovereignty of God and consider His other attributes as of less importance. Other people question why God allows bad things to happen to good people. All of these are forms of idolatry that exist today.

For me, I want to know God's word, so that I am not misled by the false ideas and thinking of the world.



**Large Orange Sulphur, butterfly, Beeville, Texas**

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