



**The
Way
Of
Man**

versus

**God
Of
The
Way**

H. Allen Hanson

**“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. (Isaiah 55:8-9)**

The Way Of **God of Way The**
Of Man **Versus**

H. Allen Hanson

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The Way of Man versus the Way of God
by H. Allen Hanson

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Dedication

To my son Joel Hanson and his wife Annette
To my daughter Jessica and her husband Kevin Schouten
To my daughter Rebecca and her husband Darryl Thurman
To my son Dane Hanson and his wife Mirjam
To my grandchildren and great grandchildren
To my fellow believers at Zion Christian Assembly

CONTENTS

Preface

| | | |
|----------|--|-----------|
| 1 | The Way of Man | 1 |
| | The Creation of Man 1 | |
| | The Way of Man and the Way of God 1 | |
| | The Way of Christ 3 | |
| | The Many and the Few 4 | |
| 2 | The Trees of Eden | 7 |
| | Two Trees and the Temptation 7 | |
| | Choosing Death Instead of Life 8 | |
| | Sin and Death Passed on into the Entire World 9 | |
| | The Trees of Eden and the Trees of the World 10 | |
| | God's Promise of a Savior 10 | |
| | Salvation from Sin and Death 10 | |
| 3 | The Way of Cain | 13 |
| | Two Men and Two Offerings 13 | |
| | Cain Killed His Brother Abel 13 | |
| | The Way of Cain 14 | |
| | The Faith of Abel 14 | |
| | Two Men, Two Ways 15 | |
| 4 | The Wickedness of Man | 17 |
| | The Multiplication of Men and Their Wickedness 17 | |
| | The Ark of Salvation 18 | |
| | Christ as Our Ark of Salvation 19 | |
| 5 | A New Beginning and a New Wickedness | 21 |
| | The Rise of Nations 21 | |
| | The Tower of Babel 21 | |
| | The Wickedness of Idolatry 22 | |
| | Idolatry or Faith in God? 23 | |
| | The Calling of Abram 24 | |
| 6 | The Promise of a New Nation | 27 |
| | God Reveals the Destiny of Abrams's Descendants 28 | |
| | Abraham, the Father of Many Nations 28 | |
| | God's Conclusive Promise of a Son and His Confidence in Abraham 30 | |
| | The Wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah 30 | |
| | The Way of Lot 30 | |
| | The Birth of Isaac and the Beginning of the New Nation 31 | |
| | The Awful Test of Abraham's Faith 31 | |
| | The Way of Man or Faith in God? 32 | |

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 7 | The Birth of a New Nation | 33 |
| | The Births of Esau and Jacob 33 | |
| | God Renews the Promise to Isaac 33 | |
| | The Deception of Jacob 34 | |
| | Jacob Serves for a Wife 34 | |
| | The Consequence of Deception 34 | |
| | The Family of Jacob 35 | |
| | Six More Years of Service 35 | |
| | Was Rachel an Idolater? 35 | |
| | Esau and Jacob Meet Again 35 | |
| | Wrestling with God 36 | |
| | Jacob Continues His Journey 36 | |
| | The Death of Rachel 37 | |
| | The Children of Israel 37 | |
| | The Ways of Man in the Life of Jacob 37 | |
| | The Ways of God 37 | |
| 8 | The Evil Brothers | 39 |
| | The Brothers Sell Joseph to Traders 39 | |
| | Joseph Becomes a Slave in Egypt 40 | |
| | Joseph Becomes Governor of Egypt 41 | |
| | Joseph's Brothers Come to Egypt to Buy Food 41 | |
| | Joseph Reveals Himself and is Reconciled with His Brothers 43 | |
| | Following the Ways of God 43 | |
| 9 | The New Nation Living in Bondage | 45 |
| | Jacob Journeys to Egypt 45 | |
| | The Early Years in Egypt 45 | |
| | The Deaths of Jacob and Joseph 46 | |
| | The Years of Bondage 46 | |
| | The Birth of Moses 47 | |
| | Moses Flees to Midian 47 | |
| | The Ways of Man in Egypt | |
| 10 | Freedom and Rebellion | 51 |
| | God Calls Moses 51 | |
| | Moses Returns to Egypt 51t | |
| | Moses and Aaron Go before Pharaoh 52 | |
| | The Death of First Born and the Passover 52 | |
| | The Exodus 53 | |
| | The Red Sea Crossing 53 | |
| | The Journey to Sinai 53 | |
| | Israel at Mount Sinai 53 | |
| | The Ten Commandments 54 | |
| | The Children of Israel See God 55 | |
| | God's Plan for the Tabernacle of Worship 55 | |
| | The Golden Calf 56 | |
| | Moses asks to See God's Glory 57 | |
| | The Construction of the Tabernacle and Furnishings 57 | |
| | The Priestly Ministry Begins 58 | |
| | Nadab and Ahihu Present Profane Fire before Jehovah 58 | |
| | Various Laws and the Feast of Jehovah 58 | |
| | Preparations for Leaving Sinai 58 | |
| | The Departure from Sinai 58 | |
| | The Complaints of the Children of Israel 58 | |
| | The Contention of Miriam and Aaron 59 | |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| The Spies Sent to Canaan | 59 |
| The Rebellion against Entering Canaan | 59 |
| The Rebellion of Korah | 60 |
| God Rids Himself of the Complaints against Aaron | 61 |
| The Forty Years | 61 |
| The Glory of God and the Rebellion of His People | 62 |
| 11 A New Generation: New Complaints and New Sins | 63 |
| The Death of Miriam | 63 |
| Moses' Error at Kadesh | 63 |
| God Commands Moses to Journey around Edom | 63 |
| Journeying by Edom and Coming to Mount Hor | 64 |
| The Death of Aaron | 64 |
| The Defeat of the King of Arad | 64 |
| The Brass Serpent | 64 |
| Journeying along the East Border of Moab | 64 |
| The Defeat of King Sihon and King Og | 64 |
| Balak, the king of Moab, Seeks to Curse Israel | 65 |
| The Error of Balaam | 65 |
| The Children of Israel Commit Fornication and Idolatry | 65 |
| Vengeance on the Midianites | 65 |
| Tribes Settling East of the Jordan | 66 |
| Moses is Forbidden to Enter the Land | 66 |
| A Review of the Wilderness Years and the Laws of God | 66 |
| The Death of Moses | 68 |
| Joshua, the New Leader | 68 |
| The Fortieth Year | 69 |
| 12. The Promised Land: Victory and Defeat | 71 |
| Joshua, the New Leader | 71 |
| The Two Spies | 72 |
| The Crossing of Jordan into the Promised Land | 72 |
| The Captain of the Army of Jehovah | 72 |
| The Destruction of Jericho | 73 |
| The Sin of Achan and Defeat at Ai | 73 |
| The Deceit of the Gibeonites | 73 |
| The Conquest of Canaan | 73 |
| The Division of the Land as Inheritance to the Tribes of Israel | 74 |
| The Reubenites, Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh | |
| The Return to their Land | 75 |
| Joshua's Farewell Words to Israel | 76 |
| The Covenant at Shechem | 77 |
| The Death of Joshua | 77 |
| 13 Doing What is Right in Their Own Sight | 79 |
| The Times of the Judges | |
| A New Generation Arose that did not Know Jehovah | 79 |
| The Leadership of Judges | 80 |
| Abimelech the Son of Gideon Made King | 80 |
| The Vow of Jephthah | 80 |
| Samson and the Philistines | 81 |
| The Triumphant Death of Samson | 82 |
| The Idolatry of Micah and the Levite | 82 |
| A Levite, His Concubine, and the Wickedness of the Benjaminites | 83 |
| Eli and Samuel | |

| | | |
|------------|---|------------|
| 14 | “Give us a King” | 85 |
| | “Give Us a King” 85 | |
| | God’s Commands Concerning Kings 86 | |
| | The Beginning of the Kingdom of Israel 86 | |
| | The Reign of Saul 86 | |
| | The Reign of David 87 | |
| | The Sin of David 87 | |
| | Satan 88 | |
| | The Reign of Solomon 89 | |
| | The Unfaithfulness of Solomon 89 | |
| | The Divided Kingdom 90 | |
| | The Northern Kingdom: The Kingdom of Israel 90 | |
| | The Southern Kingdom: The Kingdom of Judah 91 | |
| | High Places During the Kingdom Years 91 | |
| | High Hills and Green Trees 91 | |
| | Prophets of God and False Prophets 92 | |
| | Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah | |
| | King Josiah 95 | |
| | The Beginning of the Captivity 95 | |
| | The Fall of Jerusalem and the Kingdom of Judah 96 | |
| | The Kingdom of Judah goes into Captivity 96 | |
| | The Promises of Jehovah God 96 | |
| | The Glorious Future Kingdom 97 | |
| 15. | The Babylonian Captivity | 99 |
| | Ezekiel 99 | |
| | Daniel and his Three Friends 100 | |
| | Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream 101 | |
| | The Image of Gold 101 | |
| | Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s Second Dream 101 | |
| | A Voice from Heaven 102 | |
| | Daniel’s Dream 102 | |
| | Daniel’s Vision 103 | |
| | The Handwriting on the Wall 104 | |
| | The Persian Conquest of Babylon 104 | |
| | Daniel’s Prayer 105 | |
| 16 | The Return to the Land | 107 |
| | Rebuilding the Temple 107 | |
| | Queen Esther and Mordecai 108i | |
| | Ezra Goes to Jerusalem 109 | |
| | Intermarriage with Foreign Wives 109 | |
| | Nehemiah: Sent as the New Governor of Judah 110 | |
| | Ezra Reads the Law 110 | |
| | Waiting for the Messiah 111 | |
| 17 | The Four Hundred Silent Years | 113 |
| | The Rise and Fall of Early Nations 113 | |
| | The Nation of Israel 114 | |
| | The Rise and Fall of World Kingdoms and Nations 114 | |
| | Persia 536-331 B.C. 114. | |
| | Greece 331-167 B.C. 115 | |
| | Jewish Independence 167-63 B.C. 116 | |
| | Rome 63 B.C. to the Time of Christ 116 | |
| | Looking for the Messiah 117 | |
| | The Way of Man and the Way of God 118 | |

| | | |
|-----------|---|------------|
| 18 | The Promised Savior: Crucified | 119 |
| | The Four Gospel Accounts of the Savior | 119 |
| | Preparations for the Coming of the Savior | 119 |
| | His Name shall be Called Jesus | 120 |
| | The Birth of Jesus | 120 |
| | Jesus Presented in the Temple | 121 |
| | The Wise Men from the East | 121 |
| | The First Effort to Kill the Savior | 121 |
| | The Boy Jesus | 122 |
| | The Ministry of John the Baptist | 122 |
| | The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus | 122 |
| | The Lamb of God | 123 |
| | Early Disciples of Jesus | 123 |
| | The Early Ministry of Jesus | 124 |
| | Nicodemus | 124 |
| | The Woman of Samaria | 125 |
| | The Greater Ministry of Jesus in Galilee | 125 |
| | The Rejection of Jesus in Nazareth | 126 |
| | Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee | 126 |
| | Jesus Tours Galilee with the Four Fishermen | 126 |
| | The Jews Seek to Kill Jesus | 127 |
| | The Sermon on the Mount | 127 |
| | The Two Ways | 128 |
| | The First Great Group of Parables | 128 |
| | The Calling of the Twelve Apostles | 128 |
| | Jesus Performed Many Miracles | 128 |
| | Jesus Stills the Storm and Raises the Daughter of Jairus | 129 |
| | Christ's Revelation of His Church | 129 |
| | Jesus' Teaching on Leadership and Ministry in the Church | 130 |
| | Jesus Predicts that He will be Killed and that He Will Rise Again | 130 |
| | The Transfiguration of Christ | 130 |
| | Jesus: The I Am | 131 |
| | Before Abraham was, I AM | 132 |
| | I am the Way | 133 |
| | Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead | 133 |
| | The Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem | 123 |
| | The Anointing at Bethany | 134 |
| | The Lord's Supper and Gethsemane | 134 |
| | The Arrest and Trials of Jesus | 134 |
| | "Let Him be Crucified!" | 135 |
| | The Promised Savior: Crucified! | 136 |
| | The Burial and Resurrection of Christ | 136 |
| | The Triumphant Savior! | 136 |
| | The Way of Salvation | 138 |
| | The Great Commission and Ascension of Jesus | 138 |
| | The Way of Man and the Way of God | 138 |
| 19 | The Birth and Growth of the Church | 141 |
| | Jesus is the Rock and Head of the Church | 141 |
| | The Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets | 141 |
| | The Gates of Hades | 142 |
| | Sin and Discipline in the Church | 142 |
| | The Day of Pentecost | 143 |
| | Practices of the New Church | 143 |
| | Miracles and Preaching by Peter | 144 |
| | Sin in the Church | 144 |

Opposition Increases as Believers are continually
 Added to the Church 145
 Complaints and the Chosen Seven 145
 The Martyrdom of Stephen 145
 The Preaching of Philip 146
 The Conversion of Saul 147
 Peter and the Conversion of Gentiles 147
 Peter in Conflict with the Church in Jerusalem 148
 Persecution: The Preaching of the Scattered Disciples 149
 The Church at Antioch 149
 Herod the King Harasses the Church 149
 The Rapid Growth of the Church 149

20 Go into all the World 151

“Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul” 151
 The First Missionary Trip 151
 The Gospel, Opposition, and Stoning 151
 Conflict in the Church over Circumcision
 and the Law 153
 The Second Missionary Trip 153
 New Churches, Persecution, and Prison 153
 The Third Missionary Trip 155
 Strengthening Churches. Conflict over a False Goddess 155
 The Uproar in Jerusalem and the Arrest of Paul 157
 Jerusalem Jews Plot to Kill Paul 158
 The Voyage to Rome 159
 The Island of Malta 159
 Rome 159
 The Way, the Way of Man, and the Way of God 160

21 The Church: The Pillar and Ground of the Truth 161

The Church: Physical and Spiritual 161
 The Church as the Pillar and Ground of the Truth 161
 Divisions: A Plea for Unity 162
 Immorality: A Plea for Purity 162
 Compromise: A Plea for Faithfulness 163
 Abuses at Communion: A Plea for Spiritual Discernment 164
 Disorder in Church Meetings: A Plea for Order 165
 False Teachers 166
 The Mercies of God: A Call to Ministry 167
 Spiritual Gifts 167
 Each Believer is Called to Fulfill His Ministry 169
 Leadership in Ministry 170
 The Distribution of Gifts 172
 A Demanding and Glorious Ministry 172
 A Glorious Church 173

22 Apostasy within the Church 175

The Signs of Apostasy in the Churches 175
 The Loveless Church 176
 The Persecuted Church 176
 The Compromising Church 176
 The Corrupt Church 177
 The Dead Church 177

| | | |
|-----------|--|------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Faithful Church 178 The Lukewarm Church 178 Early Warnings 179 A Scene in Heaven 180 Church History 180 | |
| 23 | The Church and Roman Empire | 181 |
| | A.D. 96 to A.D. 500 | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Cruelty of the Roman Empire 181 Evangelism 182 The Early Church, Growing Apostasy, and Persecutions 182 The Rise of Bishops 182 Persecution by Roman Emperors 184 Doctrinal Conflicts in the Church 184 Monasticism 185 The Religions of the World 185 Constantine 185 The New Testament Scriptures 186 The Bishop of Rome 186 The East and the West 186 The Fall of the Roman Empire 187 Augustine's Theology 187 The True City of God 188 Jesus is the Head of His Church, the Body of Christ 189 Church Meetings throughout the Roman Empire 189 The Roman Empire, the Way of Man and the Way of Christ 190 | |
| 24 | The Dark Ages | 191 |
| | 500 A.D. to 1100 A.D. | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invasions of the Roman Empire 191 The Rise of the Papacy 192 Mohammed and Islam 192 The Roman Catholic Church 192 The Teachings of the Scriptures 193 The Greek Orthodox Church 194 The Western, Eastern, and Oriental World 194 The First Real Pope 195 The Pope Becomes an Earthly King 195 The Holy Roman Empire 195 The Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals 195 The Cleavage Between the Eastern and Western Church 195 The Darkest Age of the Papacy 196 The Rule of Harlots and the Depth of Degradation 196 Hildebrand 196 Missionary Movements 196 Feudalism 197 The Crusades 197 The Darkness of the Church 197 Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots 198 | |
| 25 | The Renaissance and the Reformation | 199 |
| | 1100 A.D. to 1600 A.D. | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Movements Leading to the Renaissance The Crusades 199 Rising Papal Power and Wars with States 199 | |

- Religious Conflicts 199
- Increasing Wealth of Landowners 200
- The Growth of City State 200
- Greater Travel 200
- New Interest in Education and Learning 200
- The Shifting Political Power 200
- Decreasing Serfdom 200
- The Increased Growth of the Monarchy 200
- The Inquisition 200
- The Renaissance 201
- Renaissance Popes 201
- The Council of Constance 201
- Others Viewed by the Papacy as Heretics 202
- The Sale of Indulgences 202
- The Reformation 202
- Germany 203
 - Martin Luther, Lutherans, Anabaptist, War 203
- Switzerland 203
 - John Calvin 204
 - Calvin's Theology 204
- France 206
- The Netherlands 206
- Scandinavia 206
- Spain 206
- Bohemia 206
- England 206
- Scotland 207
- Ireland 207
- The Eastern Church 207
- The Americas 207
- The Counter Reformation 207
- Persecutions, Martyrs, and War 207
- The Reformation, the Church, and the Scriptures 207

26 The New World

209

1600 A.D. to 2000 A.D.

- Early American Colonies: Seeking Freedom 209
- Church Divisions and Denominationalism 209
 - Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans
 - Methodists, Presbyterian and Reform Churches, Quakers
- Denomination Leadership, Doctrines, and Practices 210
- A New Country 211
 - Conflicts with England 211
 - The Boston Massacre 211
 - The Tea Act 211
 - The Intolerable Acts 211
 - The First Continental Congress 211
 - The Beginning of the Revolutionary War 212
 - The Second Continental Congress 212
 - The Declaration of Independence 212
- The Revolutionary War 213
 - The United States of America 213
 - The Constitution of the United States of America 213
 - The Pledge of Allegiance 214
 - Patriotic Songs 214

| | | |
|-----------|--|------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The United States of America: A Christian Nation? 214 American Evangelism 215 Music 215 Revivals 215 World-Wide Missions 216 World-Wide Evangelism 216 Philosophy, Science, & Politics 216 Philosophy 216 Science 217 Politics 218 Conflicts in the Church 218 Modernism, Fundamentalism, Liberal Doctrine, Conservative and Orthodox Doctrine 218 Ecumenical Efforts 219 Scriptural Church Attempts and Movements 219 The Mega Church Movement 219 The Emerging Church 219 The New World and the Old World 219 The Church Throughout America Today 220 The Judgment of Nations 220 | |
| 27 | The World Today | 221 |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in the Natural World 221 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Flood, The Ice Age, Depleting Resources, Pollution, Weather Changes, Movements from within the Earth, Gravity, The Earth's Magnetic Field, The Expanding Universe, Burnout of Stars and Black Holes Changes in the World of Man 222 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growth in Knowledge, Men Learned to Make Things, The Early Inventions of Man, Man's Inventions Throughout Time, The Value of the Ingenuity of Man God's View of the Changes and Inventions of Man 224 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Tower of Babel, The Calling of Abraham, The Nation of Israel, The Law of God, Leadership, The Babylonian Captivity, The Coming of Christ, The Church, God's View if the Changes and Inventions of man The Wicked Ways of Man 225 The Sinfulness of Man Today 226 World-Wide Corruption 226 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Natural World, The Personal World, The Social World, The Economic World, The Political World, The Religious World, The History of Man, The World, Israel, and the Church The Judgment of God 228 | |
| 28 | The World of Tomorrow | 229 |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Rapture of the Church 229 The Saints in Glory 229 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Judgment Seat of Christ The Presentation of the Bride The Marriage Supper of the Lamb The Tribulation on Earth 230 The First Three and One Half Years of Tribulation 230 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The time of Jacob's trouble 231 The Last Three and One Half Years or the Great Tribulation 231 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dragon, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet 231 Tribulation Martyrs 232 | |

| | |
|--|------------|
| The Book of Seven Seals | 233 |
| The Seventh Seal | 233 |
| The Seven Bowl Judgments of God | 234 |
| The Judgment and Fall of Babylon the Great | 235 |
| The Coming of Christ in Glory | 236 |
| The War of Armageddon | 237 |
| The Winepress | 238 |
| The Valley of Hamon Gog | 238 |
| Hell and the Lake of Fire | 239 |
| Satan Bound for One Thousand Years | 239 |
| The Millennial Reign of Christ | 239 |
| Satan's Last Rebellion | 240 |
| The Great White Throne Judgment | 240 |
| 29 The New Heaven and The New Earth | 243 |
| The New Heavens and the New Earth | 243 |
| The New Jerusalem | 244 |
| The Glory of the New Jerusalem | 245 |
| The Throne of God and the Lamb | 245 |
| 30 The Way of Man or the Way of God? | 247 |
| The Sinful Way of Man | 247 |
| The Wickedness of Man | 247 |
| The Rebellious Way of God's People Israel | 248 |
| Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome | 249 |
| Israel Rejected and Crucified their Promised Savior! | 249 |
| Many Disciples of Christ Forsook Him | 249 |
| The Apostate Way of His Church | 249 |
| The Sinful, Rejecting Way of Man Continues Today | 249 |
| The Righteous Way of God | 251 |
| God Judges Wickedness | 251 |
| The Way of God in the Old Testament | 251 |
| The Way of God through His Son, Jesus Christ | 252 |
| Jesus is the Only Way to Salvation and Eternal Life | 252 |
| Jesus Came into the World as a Savior and Redeemer | 252 |
| The Judgment of Christ | 252 |
| The Crucifixion of Christ | 252 |
| The Suffering and Death of Christ | 253 |
| The Resurrection of Christ | 254 |
| A New Life for the Sinner | 254 |
| The Baptism of the Holy Spirit | 255 |
| Conversion to Christ | 255 |
| The New Life in Christ. A New Way of Worship | 256 |
| The Fulfillment of the Will of God | 256 |
| Faith Pleases God | 257 |
| The Way of Man or the Way of God? | 257 |
| God has Given Man a Choice: Life or Death | 258 |
| Scripture Index | 261 |
| About the Author | 273 |

*Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that **he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins** (James 5:19-20, emphasis added).*

Preface

The purpose of this study guide is to reveal the way of man versus the way of God as recorded in the Bible and in history. While the guide does not pretend to be an extensive history of man or a thorough Biblical or secular anthropology, it does emphasize many of man's directions which have significantly affected his behavior or ways. The guide provides as a reference for various studies in the congregation at Zion Christian Assembly.

Adam and Eve began their life in a garden. After they fell into sin, Adam became a tiller of the soil, or a farmer. One son, Cain, became a farmer and the other son, Abel, became a shepherd. As man began to multiply and spread throughout the land, life became more complicated. The directions and goals of man changed through various occupations and preoccupations in work, exploration, inventions, and as social life and politics developed. One of these great changes was the move to city life and its influences. City life was followed by the development of kingdoms, kings, and nations. Time and again God has called men out of cities and civilizations to a more simple life with Him.

The guide is a history of the various ways in which man in his arrogance has rebelled against God and His purpose in creating him. It is also a history of the promises of God and of those who turned from their ways to the way of God. It is an account of new beginnings as God continually reached out to man in love and salvation.

Throughout history man has rejected the goodness and grace of God and turned to unbelief, disobedience, wickedness, idolatry, and the willful denial of God. Throughout the various periods of history God promised over and over again the way of salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ. During those times only a few people responded to God in faith.

The guide is a call to all sinners to turn from their wickedness to Christ in repentance and faith for salvation. It is a call to the Jewish people that they might recognize Jesus Christ as their Messiah and turn to Him for salvation. Finally, it is a call to the church of Jesus Christ to turn from their apostate ways and seek to follow the Scriptures in their worship and service for God. It is a call for the revival, return, and obedience of God's people to God and to His holy Word and His ways. Revival begins with God's people. God described long ago how He would respond if His people would turn from their wicked ways.

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land (II Chronicles 7:14).

For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He ponders all his paths. His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin. He shall die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray (Proverbs 5:21-23)

The Way of Man

“The Way of Man versus The Way of God” is a history of man from the time of His creation to the present. It is also a history of God’s people, Israel, and the church. It is a Biblical account of the disbelief, waywardness, disobedience, and sinfulness of man in response to the love, goodness, and grace of God. In every work of God, from Eden to the present time, man has gone his own way, with the exception of a few men of faith who responded to God’s gracious provisions for an obedient life of faith before Him, through His Son, Jesus Christ. This book includes a record of the faith of individuals who walked with God, who were willing to come out and be separate from the ways of man in general and from the ways of God’s people who lived in disobedience and apostasy. The account begins in Eden, continues through various periods in the Old and New Testament, and ends in the world today. It reviews the history of nations, Israel, and the Church throughout time.

There are numerous references to the way of man through the Old Testament describing man’s determination to go his own way, away from God, into sin, apostasy, idolatry, and even atheism. Man in his selfishness, arrogance, unbelief, and wickedness has, under the influence of Satan, invented many objects, ways, and places to worship. Idols, altars, and various forms of worship were practiced in a variety of high places on high hills and under green trees. God provided a place and way to worship Him but “His people” even corrupted that. How does man continue in his own way of sin today and how has “His people” corrupted His church today?

The Creation of Man

God created man in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:20). When God created the world He saw everything that He had made and it was very good (Genesis 1:31). This included man. He was not only made in the image of God but he was made for the glory of God (I Corinthians 11:7). God said,

Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him (Isaiah 43:7).

Man was also created to be a witness for the reality and truth of God and of His promises to man (Deuteronomy 31:19, Isaiah 19:20, Acts 1:8). Finally, God created man to become, through Christ, His spiritual children (I Corinthians 15:45-49) and a bride for His Son (Revelation 21).

God created man for His glory but throughout the course of time man has walked contrary to Him. The result caused man to sin and the end was death. The Bible says that all men have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). God, by His grace, provided a way of salvation and a way to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

After God created man He placed him in an idyllic setting. God came to him and sought fellowship with him. He came and talked with man. God instructed man and provided a way for man to live in obedience and in relationship to Him. It was in this relationship and in this setting that man first began to go his own way instead of the way of God.

The Way of Man and the Way of God

There are over a thousand references in the Bible contrasting the way of man and the way of God. The first mention of the word “way” is found in relationship to the tree of life. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, we read,

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"— therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:22-24)

Man chose to eat of the forbidden tree rather than the tree of life and so he was banished from access to it until that time recorded in the book of Revelation (Revelation 22:2-14).

The Word of God describes the ways of God and the ways of man throughout the Old Testament, beginning in the books of history, then in the Psalms and Proverbs, the prophets and continues in the New Testament, especially in the book of Romans.

One reference in the Word of God describes the way of man as it began with Adam and Eve. They thought, at least Eve, after being tempted, that it seemed right for them to eat of the forbidden tree. The Bible says,

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25).

Man quickly found his way was the way to death. Nevertheless, he continued to go his own way. Man cannot look within himself in order to determine what is right or wrong. Nevertheless, he still looks to himself in the ways in which he goes.

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts (Proverbs 21:2).

*Truly, this only I have found: that **God made man upright**, but they have **sought out many schemes** (Ecclesiastes 7:29, emphasis added).*

*Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but **they have sought out many inventions** (Ecclesiastes 7:29 (KJV), emphasis added).*

***All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes**, But the LORD weighs the spirits (Proverbs 16:2, emphasis added).*

As man continued to ignore the ways of God he became more and more sinful. In the years that followed the fall of man in Eden, God saw how man corrupted his way.

So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth (Genesis 6:12).

After God created the nation of Israel and called them out of Egypt, and taught them ways to worship Him, they still chose their own ways of worship.

*He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog's neck; he who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine's blood; he who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol. Just as **they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations ...** (Isaiah 66:3, emphasis added).*

As Israel followed **the abominable ways of man** they reaped the results of their wickedness in a bitterness that reached into their hearts.

***Your ways and your doings** have procured these things for you. **This is your wickedness**, because it is bitter, because it reaches to your heart (Jeremiah 4:18, emphasis added).*

The New Testament records the tragedy and loss of Israel in not learning the ways of God and in not finding rest and salvation in Him.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart,

*And **they have not known My ways.**’ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ ”(Hebrews 3:7-11, emphasis added).*

Man, down through the ages, has not only sought his own way, but has deliberately rebelled against God and His ways. The New Testament sums up some of the ways in which man has ignored the truth. His ignorance is not a lack of evidence but is his willfulness in suppressing the truth of God.

*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. 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 thing (Romans 1:18-23).*

Consequently, God gave man up to his own willful ways.

*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. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. 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; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, **inventors of evil things**, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are **deserving of death**, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:24-32).*

The way of man is a way of sin, wickedness, rebellion against and disbelief in God and ends in death and ultimately in eternal death, hell, and the lake of fire if he does not turn to God in faith and be saved through the Lord Jesus Christ.

God, as He observes man, looks at the intentions of his heart. When man walks in the ways of God he begins to realize that his way is not in himself, he needs God to direct his steps. He understands the words of the prophet, who said,

*O LORD, I know **the way of man is not in himself**; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23, emphasis added).*

The prophet Isaiah, in urging man to seek God and return to Him for mercy and pardon, revealed the vast divergence in the thinking and ways of God and that of man.

*Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. **Let the wicked forsake his way**, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:6-7, emphasis added).*

When we seek God and call upon Him He will abundantly pardon, but we need to recognize that His thoughts and ways are far above ours.

*“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” (Isaiah 55:8-9, emphasis added).*

As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him (Psalm 18:30)

From the beginning God has invited man to turn to Him from their wicked ways. His desire is that man may live and not die. He has said,

... "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land (II Chronicles 7:14).

The Way of Christ

Jesus Christ is the only way to God. He came into the world to show us the way to the Father. Jesus said,

*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** (John 14:1-4, emphasis added).*

Thomas responded by saying,

*Lord, we do not know where You are going, and **how can we know the way?** (John 14:5, emphasis added).*

Jesus said to him,

***I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me** (John 14:6, emphasis added).*

God's promise of salvation and the way to Him through His Son was repeated over and over again in the Old Testament.

*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. **All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way;** And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:5-6, emphasis added).*

Jesus Christ died for our sins, but we have all gone astray in our own way. Through faith in Him we find the way to His Father and our God.

*Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by **a new and living way** which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:19-20, emphasis added).*

Through Jesus man can find a new and living way to God. **It is a way that is eternal in heaven and in perfect fellowship with God.**

The Many and the Few

It is sad to say, but many never seem to find, or desire to find, the true way to God. They do not seem to realize, or care, that their way is the way of death. They do not find the way to life and the way to God which is by faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9, II Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 11:6). Jesus described the two ways that are before man; one to death and one to life.

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14, emphasis added).

Throughout the various periods described in the Bible, from Eden to the accounts in Revelation, and in the centuries that follow, the pattern continues to the present day. Man still chooses his own way. It is a way that leads to eternal death, hell, and the lake of fire.

The book of Hebrews also records an amazingly small list of people who came to faith in God and salvation through Christ. Are you one who could be added to that list through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

*O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself;
It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.
O LORD, correct me, but with justice; Not in Your
anger, lest You bring me to nothing.
Jeremiah 10:22-24).*

The Trees of Eden

In the beginning, when God created the heavens, the earth, and all the things upon it, He saw that everything was very good. On the sixth day of creation God made man. He created him in His own image and likeness. God created them as male and female (Genesis 1:1-27). God created the woman by causing a deep sleep to fall upon the man (Adam), took out one of his ribs, made a woman, brought her to the man, and she became his wife. Adam named her Eve. They were both naked and not ashamed (Genesis 2:18-24).

God blessed them and said,

...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 (Genesis 1:28).

God planted a garden in Eden and placed the man whom He had created in the garden. God made trees grow in the garden that were pleasant to see and good for food. In the middle of the garden there were two special trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God put the man in the garden to tend and keep it (Genesis 2:1-15).

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 (Genesis 2:16-17).

Two Trees and the Temptation

God gave Adam and Eve two commandments, (1) be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth, and (2) not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lest they die. One tree was a tree of life and the other was a tree of death.

One day Satan came into the garden in the form of a serpent (Genesis 3:1, Revelation 12:9) to tempt Eve. He began by asking about the trees in the garden. He asked if God had said that they should not eat of every tree. Eve replied that God said they could eat the fruit of every tree except that of the tree in the midst of the garden or they would die. Satan persuaded her that she would not die but would be like God, knowing good and evil. Eve, seeing that the fruit was good for food, pleasant to look at, and that it would make one wise, took some and gave some also to Adam. Immediately, both of their eyes were opened, they realized they were naked and sewed fig leaves together for a covering. (Genesis 3:1-7).

Later in the day they heard the sound of God walking in the garden and they hid themselves from Him among the trees of the garden. God called to Adam and asked, "Where are you?" Adam answered that he had heard God's voice and was afraid because he was naked and hid himself. God asked Adam who had told him he was naked and if he had eaten of the tree that He had commanded him not to eat. Adam blamed the woman and the woman in turn blamed the serpent (Genesis 3:8-13). God cursed the serpent, saying,

... 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 (Genesis 3:15).

God not only cursed the serpent but indicated that his head would be bruised by the seed (descendant) of the woman. This was a promise of God which was fulfilled when the virgin

Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ, and when Christ defeated Satan at Calvary. This was the beginning of God's revelation of the Savior who would come to save man.

God had warned Adam that he would die if he ate of the tree. Instead of obeying the voice of God, Adam and Eve heeded the words of Satan. What were the terrible consequences? God said to the woman,

I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you (Genesis 3:16).

Then He said to Adam,

Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat of it": Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; For dust you are, and to dust you shall return (Genesis 3:17-19).

The consequences of their disobedience brought sorrow, pain, shame, a cursed ground, toil, and death. God clothed Adam and Eve and then He said,

Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever ... (Genesis 3:22).

The account continues:

... therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:23-24).

God expelled the man from the Garden of Eden to till the ground. Adam began as a gardener and God sent him to become a farmer in the country. This is significant when considering later the directions of Adam's descendants.

Choosing Death Instead of Life

That day Adam and Eve, in disobeying God, chose the tree of death instead of the tree of life. They were told that they could eat of every tree in the garden, except of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they had so chosen, they could have eaten of the tree of life and lived forever, but they chose death instead.

The consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience are even greater. Something other than death came into the world that day. Adam's name is rarely mentioned again in Genesis except in that he gave birth to sons and daughters, and lived nine hundred thirty years. Other Scriptures give greater insight as to what happened that day. Job, in his final defense, referred to Adam saying,

If I have covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom, because I feared the great multitude, and dreaded the contempt of families, so that I kept silence and did not go out of the door ... (Job 31:33-34).

Job spoke of Adam as covering his transgression. He likened Adam hiding in the trees from God to hiding iniquity in his bosom in fear and dread. What was it that Adam feared? Was it death? He lived until he was nine hundred and thirty, but when did he really die? God said that in the day that he ate he would surely die (Genesis 2:17). Adam truly died spiritually that day, for the Bible teaches that natural man is dead in trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1 and 5, 2:13).

Sin and Death Passed on into the Entire World

The New Testament explains in great detail the consequences for the rest of the world because of Adam and Eve's disobedience. The book of Romans states,

*Therefore, just as **through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned**— (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense. For if **by the one man's offense many died**, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if **by the one man's offense death reigned through the one**, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) Therefore, as **through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation**, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as **by one man's disobedience many were made sinners**, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:12-21, emphasis added).*

Through Adam sin, the cause of death, entered into the world. Consequently, sin, death, and judgment spread to all men. I Corinthians continues with a wonderful truth,

*But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. **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.** But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. **The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.** For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all (I Corinthians 15:20-28, emphasis added).*

As sin and death came through Adam, so forgiveness, resurrection and life, and eternal life, come through Jesus Christ.

After Adam and Eve ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, their eyes were opened to their nakedness, a nakedness that was greater than that of their bodies. There are numerous references to nakedness in the Bible, generally in relationship to sin. The book of Hebrews states that all of us are naked before God.

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And **there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account** (Hebrews 4:12-13, emphasis added).*

We are all spiritually naked and cannot hide from God. In the book of Revelation, in speaking to the church of the Laodiceans, God said,

*... I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"—and do not **know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked**— I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and*

opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Revelation 3:14-22, emphasis added).

Just as Adam could not hide his sin in the trees of Eden, man cannot hide from God.

The Trees of Eden and the Trees of the World

Trees are mentioned over two hundred times in the Bible, teaching and illustrating a variety of truths. The trees of Eden are referred to three times in Ezekiel 31:9-18. The essence of the two trees in the middle of the Garden of Eden was that of good and evil, life and death. Man chose knowledge over life. The truth revealed in the trees of Eden degenerated into false concepts and places of worship, both of God and false gods. Witchcraft is often practiced among trees. Today man is occupied with trees in their futile environmental attempts to save planet Earth, many of their theories based on false premises. Just as man used trees as false ways to worship, man continues to use false ways in hiding from God, or in denying or distorting the reality of God.

The creation account and the fall of man is the beginning of the history of man. It began when he disobeyed God and made a choice that led to death. The history of man as it is related in the Scriptures continues with the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Adam through Seth and their choices and actions before God.

The time from the creation of the world to the birth of Adam and Eve's third son Seth, covers a period of one hundred and thirty years (Genesis 5:3). After that Adam and Eve had more sons and daughters (Genesis 5:4). Adam lived to be nine hundred and thirty years (Genesis 5:5). Sadly, there is no indication of teaching about God or of spiritual influence from Adam and Eve on behalf of their children. The Bible does say, however, that after the birth of Seth's son Enosh, men began to call upon the name of the LORD.

God's Promise of a Savior

After Satan had tempted the woman, and Adam and Eve fell into sin and death, God told Satan that he and his seed would ultimately be destroyed by the seed of the woman. God said to the serpent or Satan,

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 (Genesis 3:15).

God's words to Satan referred to the time when His Son, Jesus Christ, would bruise the head of Satan, and defeat him at Calvary. Not only was Satan's defeat accomplished, but also that of sin and death.

Salvation from Sin, Death, and Hell

After sin and death entered into the world, God promised a way of salvation through the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15). The seed was Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Galatians 3:15). He died for our sins on a very different tree at Calvary.

*... Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who **Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness**—by whose stripes you were healed* (I Peter 2:21-24, emphasis added).

Jesus not only died for our sins but through faith in Him we are freed from sin, death, and Hell and have eternal life in Him.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:5-11).

Physical death is not the end of man. The judgment of God follows death. The result is one of two destinies, Heaven or Hell and the Lake of Fire.

*... it is **appointed for 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 (Hebrews 11:27-28, emphasis added).*

*The LORD is known by the judgment He executes; The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. ... **The wicked shall be turned into hell, And all the nations that forget God** (Psalm 9:16-17, emphasis added)).*

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. ... And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 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. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-14).

What is your choice, the way of man or the way of God? Do you choose life in Christ and the glory of Heaven, or eternal death in hell and the Lake of Fire?

*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and **Adam and his wife hid themselves** from the presence of the LORD God **among the trees of the garden**(Genesis 3:8,emphasis added).*

3

The Way of Cain

Adam and Eve did not have children until after they were expelled from Eden. Their first child was named Cain and their second child was named Abel (Genesis 4:1-2). Cain grew up and became a tiller of the ground, and Abel became a keeper of sheep. In the course of time they both brought an offering to God.

Two Men and Two Offerings

The Bible does not give any teaching about what led each of them to bring an offering to God. Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground and Abel brought of the firstborn of the flock and the fat. There is no mention of an altar or of a fire on the altar. The fact that it was an offering suggests that it was a sacrifice. The fat of Abel's offering suggests that the animal was killed. The purposes of offerings and sacrifices are more fully described and explained later in the Scriptures. God responded differently to the two men and to their offerings.

And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell (Genesis 4:4-5)

What was it that caused God to respect both Abel and his offering and not respect Cain or his offering? Considering other Scriptures regarding sacrifices and offerings, was it because of the different attitudes of the two men, or was it the kind of offering made, or both? Abel's sacrifice included the death of an animal in the shedding of its blood. Later, the Bible explains that blood is given upon the altar to make atonement for the soul (Leviticus 17:11). There were grain offerings later but not for the atonement of the soul.

Cain became very angry when God did not respect his offering and his face fell. God questioned Cain about his anger and said,

Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it (Genesis 4:6-7).

God gave Cain an opportunity to do well and have his sacrifice accepted. It is not clear as to what is meant by "*sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.*" It might have meant that a sin offering was available at the door. Could it mean that if Cain rejected God's proposal that sin lies at Cain's door and that he should rule over it? The action of Cain following his conversation with God reveals that he rejected God's offer of a way of acceptance.

Cain Killed His Brother Abel

Cain rejected God's offer and continued in his own way. Then he turned on his brother Abel while they were in the field and killed him. Later, when God asked him where his brother was, Cain lied and said, "I do not know" (Genesis 4:8-9). God said to Cain,

... What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth (Genesis 4:10-12).

Cain responded by saying his punishment was greater than he could bear, that he was driven from the face of the ground and that he would be a fugitive on the earth (Genesis 4:13-14). Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and lived in the land of Nod where he built a city (Genesis 4:16-17). He and his descendants became a separate family from the other descendants of Adam (Genesis 4:18-24). It is significant to note that Cain moved from country life to city life because of the effect it had on the ways of his descendants. Lamech, for example, had two wives, an apparent change in married life. Not only that, Lamech ended up as another murderer. As time passed some of Cain's descendants lived in the country in tents with livestock while others became occupied or preoccupied with other pursuits.

*...Adah bore Jabel. He was the father of those who dwell in **tents and have livestock**. His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play **the harp and flute**. And as for Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, an instructor of every **craftsman in bronze and iron** (Genesis 4:20-24, emphasis added).*

The way of Cain, through his descendants, became an emphasis on secular life in contrast to the way of God.

The Way of Cain

Cain brought an offering to God but neither he nor his offering were acceptable. When God provided a way of acceptance, Cain not only rejected it but killed his brother. Why did he do that? The New Testament explains the reason,

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous (1 John 3:11-12).

The way of Cain is linked with evil in the New Testament. Cain was evil and his works were evil. He hated his brother and his righteous works. In telling of evil people, the book of Jude likens them to Cain, saying,

*But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. Woe to them! For they have gone in **the way of Cain**, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah (Jude 10-11, emphasis added).*

The way of Cain is the way of evil, sin, disobedience, and hatred. It is a way still found among man today. God is calling us to a new way of life through faith in Jesus Christ. Which way do you choose?

The Faith of Abel

Abel chose the way of faith. He came before the LORD with the firstborn of his flock and the fat, and both he and his offering were respected by God (Genesis 4:4).

Jesus, in His words of woe to the scribes and Pharisees because of their hypocrisy, referred to the righteousness of Abel when He said to them,

*Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from **the blood of righteous Abel** to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. (Matthew 23:31-36, emphasis added).*

The faith of Abel is described as the reason why he offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.

*By **faith** Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks* (Hebrews 11:4, emphasis added).

Through faith Abel obtained a witness that he was righteous, a witness that although he is dead still has a message today. Finally, the blood of righteous Abel is referred to our coming to God through His Son Jesus Christ.

*But **you have come** to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to **Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel*** (Hebrews 12:22-24, emphasis added).

Two Men, Two Ways

Cain and Abel were two brothers who came before the LORD, both of them bringing offerings. God accepted Abel and his offering but not Cain or his offering. God had provided a way for Cain to have acceptance before Him but Cain refused. Such was the way of Cain. Abel not only had an acceptable offering but he offered it by faith. The significance of faith is stressed throughout the Bible.

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. **By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.** By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But **without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*** (Hebrews 11:1-6, emphasis added).

Abel followed God’s way, Cain followed his own way. We all are in need of acceptance before God. We must come to God by His way, by faith, as Abel did. We are invited to come to Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith ...” (Hebrews 12:2).

Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 1:11-13, emphasis added).

The Wickedness of Man

The genealogy of Adam, after the death of Abel and the departure of Cain, begins with the birth of another son called Seth. Adam was one hundred and thirty years old when he was born. His mother gave him his name saying,

For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed (Genesis 4:25).

Eve's reference to another seed seems to relate to the seed of the woman which God, in His words to the serpent, referred to after Adam and Eve had disobeyed Him and ate of the forbidden tree. Eve overheard God say,

... 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 (Genesis 3:15).

God's promise of a Savior through the seed of Eve was renewed in the birth of Seth. Seth had a son named Enosh. During his days "men began to call on the name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:26). This appeared to be a hopeful new beginning. It did not last long, however, and the descendants of Adam through Seth, like those of Cain, turned to wickedness.

The Biblical genealogy of Adam covers a historic period of over sixteen hundred years. This included ten generations from the day of creation to the time of Noah. During that period men lived to great age. Eventually they all died except one, Enoch, who did not die. The Bible says,

Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him (Genesis 5:21-24).

Enoch walked with God. He was taken by God before any of his six ancestors died, from Adam to Jared. All of them lived concurrently for centuries. There is no record in the Bible of any testimony or influence for God by these men during those years except that of Enoch. The New Testament details the faith and ministry of Enoch.

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God (Hebrews 11:5)

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, "to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14-15).

Enoch was taken away (translated) and did not see death. He not only pleased God but he prophesied and warned the ungodly of the judgment of God.

There is no indication that any man walked with God after Enoch until the time of Noah. In fact, men became increasingly wicked.

The Multiplication of Men and Their Wickedness

Chapter six of Genesis relates that men began to multiply on the face of the earth as they took wives and bore children (Genesis 6:1-4). As men began to multiply, however, they became more and more wicked.

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He

was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them' (Genesis 6:5-7).

The wickedness of men was great and all of the intentions and thoughts of their hearts were only evil. God was so grieved in His heart that He was sorry that He had made man and decided to destroy him. One man, however, found grace in the eyes of the LORD. He was called Noah (Rest) for his father, Lamech, said,

This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed (Genesis 5:29).

Noah was a just man and walked with God (Genesis 6:8-9). The earth, meanwhile, was corrupt before God and filled with violence, for all men had corrupted their way on the earth (Genesis 6:11-12). The New Testament describes the faith and preaching of Noah.

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith (Hebrews 11:7).

God ... did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness ... (II Peter 2:4-5).

Noah was a preacher of righteousness. He is referred to along with the judgments of God against the ungodly and of His deliverance of the godly.

*For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, **but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness**, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then **the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment**, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority (II Peter 2:4-10, emphasis added).*

The Ark of Salvation

God determined to destroy men from the face of the earth but He also planned a way of salvation. God said to Noah,

The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch (Genesis 6:13-14).

After telling Noah how to make the ark God explained to him what He was going to do.

... behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them (Genesis 6:17-21).

Noah did all that God commanded him (Genesis 6:22). After Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth had completed the ark, the LORD said to Noah,

Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation (Genesis 7:1).

God also instructed Noah relative to other life forms that were to be brought into the ark to keep them alive. God then explained how He was going to destroy all the living things on earth.

. For after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made (Genesis 7:4).

Noah obeyed all that God commanded him and entered the ark with his family.

And Noah did according to all that the LORD commanded him. Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters were on the earth. So Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood ... and the LORD shut him in (Genesis 7:5, 16).

It began to rain after Noah and his wife, his sons and their wives, and the animals were in the ark. It rained for forty days and nights, until all of the mountains were covered.

And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died. So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive. And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days (Genesis 7:21-24).

All those living on the earth were dead. Only those in the ark were still alive. The waters gradually receded after the rain stopped, and after about a year the earth was dry, and all who were in the ark were able to leave. The ark had provided salvation for Noah and his family.

Christ is Our Ark of Salvation

The New Testament speaks of the salvation of Noah and his family in relationship to salvation in Jesus Christ. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (I Timothy 1:14). Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31). He suffered and died that we might be saved.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him (I Peter 3:18-22, emphasis added).

Jesus, apparently during His death, went by the Spirit and preached to those who were disobedient to the warnings of God during the days of Noah. God still warns us today, desiring that we might be saved.

*For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. **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** (II Peter 3:5-9, emphasis added).*

In the ten generations from Adam to the flood, a period of over sixteen hundred years, only two men, Enoch and Noah, are identified as walking with God. They walked in faith. Enoch was translated and escaped death and Noah was saved from death through the ark. They not only walked with God but they witnessed for Him to a wicked world. Both of them warned of God's coming judgment of sin. What was the people's response? They continued in their sins. Only eight people were saved from the flood, Noah and his family. All of the others perished because of evil and ungodliness. They could have been saved.

Each of us needs to make a choice if we want to be saved. Jesus is our ark of salvation. We can be saved by faith in Him today (Acts 16:31, Ephesians 2:8-9).

A New Beginning and a New Wickedness

God destroyed the world through a flood because of the wickedness of man. He saved Noah and his family because Noah found grace and walked with God (Genesis 6:8-9). After the flood God provided a new beginning for man. It started out with Noah walking in the way of God by building an altar and offering burnt offerings to Him. This was the first mention of an altar and animal offerings since that of Abel over fifteen hundred years earlier. God smelled a soothing aroma and promised Noah that He would never again curse the ground or destroy all living things on the earth (Genesis 8:21). God blessed Noah and repeated the commandment given to Adam; to be fruitful and multiply, and repopulate the earth (Genesis 9:1).

After the flood Noah became a farmer. He planted a vineyard, drank the wine, became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. The new beginning turned into a tragic beginning. His son Ham saw the nakedness of his father and told his brothers. It ended up with Ham and his descendants being cursed. Ham became the father of the Canaanites who became enemies of Shem's descendants for centuries to come (Genesis 9:20-25).

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood waters were on the earth (Genesis 7:6). He lived another three hundred and fifty years after the flood, for a total of nine hundred and thirty years (Genesis 9:28-29). Noah's son Shem was a hundred years old at the time of the flood and lived over five hundred years afterward (Genesis 11:10-11). It is tragic to say that there is no indication in the Bible that the lives of Noah and Shem, who lived so long after the flood, had any spiritual effect on the ways of their descendants. There is no record that Noah's other sons, Ham and Japheth, had any spiritual influence.

The Rise of Nations

Through the sons of Noah, Japheth, Ham, and Shem, the earth was repopulated. Genesis 10 outlines the genealogy of each of the sons and the various locations of their descendants as they migrated. The descendants of Japheth migrated into the area north of the Mediterranean and became known as the coastline people of the Gentiles. The descendants of Ham migrated westward near the Mediterranean Sea and down into the area later to become known as Egypt. The descendants of Shem remained for a time in the area of the Euphrates River.

The descendants of the sons of Noah were ultimately divided into nations in the world. At first they built cities which then expanded into nations. The nations that developed became increasingly prominent throughout the centuries that followed. There is no indication in the Bible that any of these nations followed the ways of God.

The people stayed together in the beginning after the flood but as the population grew they journeyed and migrated to a plain near the Euphrates River called the land of Shinar. Genesis 11 gives an account of how God separated the people and scattered them over the face of the earth to form the nations.

The Tower of Babel

When the people at first began to migrate and came to the land of Shinar they decided to build a city and a tower so that they might make a name for themselves and not be scattered throughout the earth. This is reminiscent of the way of Cain, who built a city. **God said that He was not pleased with their plan.**

“Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth (Genesis 11:6-9).

God confused the language of the people and scattered them into various parts of the earth.

As people separated, some remained in the area of Babel. Nimrod, the grandson of Ham, a mighty man and a hunter, began a kingdom at Babel which included other cities in the land of Shinar, including Nineveh in Assyria (Genesis 10:8-12).

Babel is considered the beginning of Babylonia. It is in this area that the Sumerian civilization developed. Babylon became one of the sources of wickedness before God, influencing civilizations throughout the history of the world, down to the present time. It is the name given to the Mother of Harlots to be destroyed in the end times (Revelation 17 & 18).

During the three hundred years following the flood, the people and nations invented a new way to sin; idolatry. This is not surprising, for the Bible says,

... God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions (Ecclesiastes 7:29 KJV)

Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions (Psalm 106:39 KJV)

The sin of idolatry is not mentioned in the Bible in the many centuries before the flood, only wickedness and violence.

The Wickedness of Idolatry

Genesis 11 traces the genealogy of Shem, beginning with Arphaxad and continuing on to Terah, the father of Abram, a period of about three hundred years. The history of Terah is as follows:

Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and begot Terah. After he begot Terah, Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years, and begot sons and daughters. Now Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. This is the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans. Then Abram and Nahor took wives: the name of Abram’s wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor’s wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran (Genesis 11:24-32).

Terah lived in the city of Ur of the Chaldaea in the land of Shinar, near the Euphrates River. The area is also called Mesopotamia. Three sons were born to him there, Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Terah moved his family to the city of Haran, near the land of Canaan.

According to Acts 7:2, God appeared to Abram in Mesopotamia, before he lived to Haran. He told Abram to get out of his country, from his family, and from his father’s house, to a land that He would show him (Genesis 12:1).

Why did God tell Abram to leave his father’s house? Abram’s father was guilty of the sin of idolatry. While idolatry is not mentioned in the Genesis narrative of Terah, the book of Joshua reveals that he served other gods. In his last words to the tribes of Israel, Joshua reminded the people of the idolatry of their fathers.

Thus says the LORD God of Israel: “Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac” (Joshua 24:2-3, emphasis added).

God told Abram to get out of his country, from his family, and from his father’s house because they were living in idolatry. Not only was his father Terah an idolater but also his uncle Nahor and his cousin Bethuel. The Scriptures reveal that the practice of idolatry continued later on with their descendants (Genesis 31:32).

The sin of idolatry developed as men began to seek other gods. There is only one true God, the Creator of heaven and earth and all life and things upon the earth. He only is worthy of worship. All other objects of worship are idols or false gods. It is a sin to disobey God, it is even a greater sin to deny the true God and worship an idol or false god. This practice grew into the concept of many gods, and continues to this day. The book of Romans describes this abominable sin and ungodliness of man.

*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. 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. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. 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; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,¹ undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:18-32, emphasis added).*

Instead of recognizing the true God, men sought out their own gods, objects of this world and made images or idols of them out of wood and stone. God responded by giving them up to their own ways. How ignorant and wicked they were in suppressing the truth. As they believed the lie of Satan in the Garden of Eden they still trust in falsehood today.

Idolatry or Faith in God?

Over three hundred and sixty years had passed from the time of the flood to the days of Abram. His ancestors, Noah and his son Shem lived to a great age. Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood (Genesis 9:28) so he was still alive during the earlier years of Abram. Shem lived five hundred years after the flood (Genesis 11:11) so he was still alive during the days of Abram. Shem was still alive when Abram’s grandson Jacob was born.

The life times of Noah and Shem are significant because it raises a question as to their testimony during those centuries. Did Noah continue to be a preacher of righteousness? (II Peter 2:5). No mention is made of a testimony by Shem. These are important factors in considering the

way of men and nations falling into idolatry instead of following the way of God in faith. Once again, God initiated a new beginning for man through Abram.

The Calling of Abram

The purpose of God in calling Abram becomes clearer in the years that follow. It seems evident that all of the nations at this time had turned to idolatry. God planned to create a nation that He would teach to follow His ways.

It is unclear from the Scriptures as to the exact time and place of the calling of Abram. Acts 7:2-4 indicates that God appeared to him the first time in Mesopotamia telling him to leave his country and come to a land that He would show him. Abram, however, went with his father from the city of Ur to Haran to live (Genesis 11:31). The calling is clearer in Genesis where it states that God 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 (Genesis 12:1-3)

God called Abram out of the cities of Ur and Haran to a land where he and his descendants would again live in tents (Genesis 12:8). Evidently God wanted him to be separated from the ways of man influenced by city life.

God not only promised Abram a land but promised him something far greater. God said He would make him a great nation and bless him and all families on earth would be blessed in him. The full meaning of the blessing of Abram is revealed to him farther on in his life as God reveals how this will take place. The Scriptures ultimately reveal that all families or nations on earth will be blessed by the descendant or seed of Abram, Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16).

After the move to Haran, Abram departed from his father's house as God had told him. He was seventy-five years old at the time. He took his wife, his nephew Lot, and others and went to the land of Canaan, to a place called Shechem. There the LORD appeared to him a second time and said, **"To your descendants I will give this land."** There Abram built an altar to the LORD who had appeared to him (Genesis 12:4-8). This is the first mention of an altar since that of Noah after the flood (Genesis 8:20). It is reminiscent of the offering of Abel two thousand years earlier (Genesis 4:4). Abram was now living by faith in God. The New Testament relates

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 (Hebrews 11:8).

After God had appeared to him in Shechem, Abram moved near Bethel, pitched his tent and again built an altar to the LORD and called upon His name. A famine came into the land and Abram journeyed to Egypt. Down in Egypt Abram did a cowardly thing, he asked his wife Sarah, because of her beauty, to say she was his sister. He became very rich in Egypt but fell into disfavor with Pharaoh because of his deception and returned to Canaan (Genesis 12:10-20).

At that time there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot and they decided to separate. Lot journeyed down in the plains of Jordan and pitched his tent near the cities, all the way to Sodom (Genesis 13:12). Abram remained in Canaan and God said to him,

*Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for **all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants (seed) forever.** And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that **if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants (seed) also could be numbered.** Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you (Genesis 13:14-17, seed and emphasis added).*

God reaffirmed His promise of numerous descendants and the land of Canaan. Abram then moved his tent to Mamre (Hebron) and built an altar to the LORD.

Abram waited in faith for God to fulfill His promise of the land and to make him a great nation through which all of the nations would be blessed.

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 (Hebrews 11:8).

When God called Abram, his wife had not yet had any children. As time went on he must have wondered how God would make him a great nation.

The time from the end of the flood to the time of God's promise to Abraham covers a period of nearly three hundred years. During that period, with the rise of nations and the new wickedness of idolatry, Abraham is the only man recorded as following the way of God. In the centuries that followed God used the descendants of Abraham in His judgment of the nations for their wickedness.

...because of the wickedness of these nations ... the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deuteronomy 9:5).

*Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For **rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.** because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you ...*
(I Samuel 15:20-23, emphasis added).

The Promise of a New Nation

Abram and Lot had separated. Lot ultimately moved into the city of Sodom with his wife and daughters. During that time four kings made war with the kings of Sodom and four other cities. This is the first mention of kings and of war in the Bible. Nimrod began a kingdom in the land of Shinar but he is not mentioned as a king (Genesis 10:8-12). The four kings were from Shinar.

*And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel the king of Shinar, Arioch the king of El-lasar, Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and Tidal the king of nations that they made war with Bera the king of Sodom, and with Birsha the king of Gomorrah, Shinab the king of Admah, and Shemeber the king of Zeboim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar ... **Twelve years had they served Chedorlaomer; and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.** And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, and the Zuzim in Ham, and the Emim in Shaveh-Kirjathaim, and the Horites on their mount Seir, to El-Paran, which is by the wilderness. And they returned, and came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites that dwelt at Hazazon-Tamar (Genesis 14:1-7 DBY, emphasis added).*

The four kings were obviously occupied with conquest and exploitation. When the other nations finally rebelled, they made war against them. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, and three other kings joined in battle against them but were defeated. The conquering kings took goods and captives, including Lot, and departed (Genesis 14:8-12 DBY).

Nations magnify the way of man. Greed and covetousness, strife and conflict, and the desire for fame and power, motivate men to wage war against weaker nations. Nations have followed this pattern throughout time.

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war ... (James 4:1-2).

All nations, however, are not the same. The Bible says “Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah, the people that He hath chosen for His inheritance (Psalms 33:12 DBY).

While wars illustrate how men and nations insist on following their own way, that does not mean all wars are unjust. When Abram heard that the four kings had taken Lot, he set out with three hundred and eighteen men to rescue him. He defeated the kings, rescued Lot and recovered the spoils. As he was returning from the battle, the king of Salem came out and blessed him. His words show that God considered Abram’s actions to be just and right.

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. and he blessed him and said: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” ... (Genesis 14:18-20).

A little later, in talking to the king of Sodom about the spoils, Abram said,

I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours ... except ... the portion of the men who went with me ... (Genesis 14:22-23).

Abram raised his hand to the LORD, God Most High. Soon after God came to Abram in a vision and promised that He would be his shield and great reward. Abram, however, was concerned about his future and that he had no offspring for an heir. Sometime earlier, at Haran and at

Shechem, God had promised Abram that He would give him descendants and make him a great nation. The Bible describes their conversation.

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.' But Abram said, 'Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' Then Abram said, 'Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!' 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 (Genesis 15:1-7).

God responded immediately, promising Abram that one would come from his own body to be his heir, and that his descendants would be beyond number. Abram believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6).

Abram had turned from unbelief, sin, and idolatry to faith in God. The New Testament reaffirms his response to God by restating,

*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called **the friend of God** (James 2:23, emphasis added).*

Abram (Abraham) not only believed in God but was called the friend of God.

God Reveals the Destiny of Abram's Descendants

After promising Abram an heir, God promised again that He would give him the land of Canaan. Abram asked how he would know. God responded by asking Abram for an unusual kind of offering during which He revealed the future of Abram's descendants. .

*Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that **your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.** And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "**To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites**" (Genesis 15:12-21, emphasis added).*

God not only promised Abram descendants, but that they would be strangers in a foreign land and be afflicted for four hundred years. This prophecy was fulfilled hundreds of years later in Egypt.

Sarai, Abram's wife, was concerned that she had borne him no children and suggested to Abram that her maid, Hagar could bear children for her. Abram listened to her, and through Hagar bore a son, Ishmael. Abram was now eighty-six. Ishmael was not God's choice and proved to be not only a snare to Abram but an adversary to the descendants of his son though God unto this day.

Abraham, the Father of Many Nations

God appeared to Abram a third time when he was ninety-nine years old, reaffirming His promises made to him over a period of twenty-four years (Genesis 17:1-27). God identified Himself as Almighty God (El Shaddai) telling Abram to walk before Him and be blameless.

Abram fell on his face. God spoke of His covenant with Abram and of multiplying him exceedingly, saying also that he would be a father of many nations.

*As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a **father of many nations**. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a **father of many nations**. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God (Genesis 17:4-8, emphasis added).*

After telling Abram that he would be the father of many nations, **God changed his name from Abram to Abraham**, which means father of multitudes. God also changed the name of Sarai to Sarah, saying,

*As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And **I will bless her and also give you a son by her**; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her (Genesis 17:15:-16, emphasis added).*

Abraham, after hearing this, laughed and wondered if a child could be born of a man who was one hundred years old and of a wife bearing a child at ninety years old. He then asked that Ishmael live before God (Genesis 17:17:18). God responded by saying,

*No, **Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac**; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year (Genesis 17:19-21, emphasis added).*

God now clearly promised Abraham and Sarah a son, to be named Isaac. He would be the beginning of Abraham's descendants and of a new nation.

Abraham, in becoming the father of many nations, became both a physical and spiritual father. He became a father of other nations (1) through his son Ishmael, (2) through his grandson Esau, (3) and through his marriage to Katurah, who gave birth to Midian (Genesis 25:1-4). The New Testament reveals that Abraham is also a spiritual father, the father of all believers in Jesus Christ. The book of Romans says of Abraham,

*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the **father of all those who believe**, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but **who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham** had while still uncircumcised (Romans 4:11-12, emphasis added).*

*Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that **the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all** (Romans 4:16, emphasis added).*

The book of Galatians repeats this blessing,

*Therefore know that only **those who are of faith are sons of Abraham**. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, **In you all the nations shall be blessed**. So then **those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham** (Galatians 3:7-9, emphasis added).*

The promise of God to Abraham was fulfilled in his descendant or seed, Jesus Christ.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ

Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ (Galatians 3:13-16, emphasis added).

Abraham knew that the promise of God was greater than that of the land. He understood that the blessing that would come to all nations was in Jesus Christ, his seed. Jesus said of Abraham, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Abraham's faith was in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Many nations were formed after the flood. All of them, apparently, turned to idolatry. God found one man, Abram (Abraham), who would believe in Him, and planned a new nation through him. This nation was to be a special nation in which all of the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:2-30). Why did God specifically call Abraham to accomplish this? The answer is indicated in God's fourth appearance to Abraham.

God's Conclusive Promise of a Son and His Confidence in Abraham

God appeared with two men to Abraham the fourth time, declaring again that Sarah would have a son (Genesis 18:1-15). The following conversation took place:

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent." And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' "Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!" (Genesis 18:9-15).

As they were leaving, God and those with Him looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. Then God said,

Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him (Genesis 18:17-19).

God called Abraham because He knew that he would command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice that He might accomplish through him the birth of a new nation.

As God was leaving Abraham He revealed yet another great wickedness of man in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah The Way of Lot

God told Abraham that a great outcry had come to Him against Sodom and Gomorrah, that their sin was very grave and that He was going down to see if this was true (Genesis 18:20-21). The sin was that of homosexuality, described in the book of Romans 1:21-32). Abraham pleaded with God that He would not destroy the righteous with the wicked. God finally agreed that if ten righteous were found He would not destroy the cities.

Tragically, Lot and his family were living in Sodom. He even sat in the gate of the city (Genesis 19:1). In those days, decisions and judgments were made there by the leaders.

The two men with God were angels. When they came to the gate of Sodom, Lot met them and invited them to his home. The total wickedness of Sodom was obvious in the events that followed. The men of Sodom surrounded Lot's house and demanded that he bring the two visitors out that they might know them carnally. In his efforts to stop them from this wickedness, Lot sadly offered to bring his two daughters out to them. This did not stop their demands. The angels pulled Lot inside and struck the men with blindness. (Genesis 19:4-11).

The angels led Lot, his wife, and his two daughters out of the city. Then God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, raining brimstone and fire out of the heavens (Genesis 19:12-24).

The way of Lot and his destiny led to the death of his wife (Genesis 19:26) and the birth of children through incest (Genesis 19:30-38). Their names were Moab and Ammon, the fathers of the Moabites and Ammonites, ungodly nations who became enemies of the children of Israel. The New Testament vindicates Lot to some extent indicating that he was righteous. When God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, it is stated that He,

... delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) ... the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations ... (II Peter 2:7-9).

In spite of Lot's compromising ways, the Bible states that he was righteous and that his righteous soul was tormented by their lawless deeds in Sodom.

What about the other cities and nations at this time? Were they equally living in idolatry and sin? There is no indication in the Bible that any of these cities or nations followed God.

The Birth of Isaac and the Beginning of the New Nation

During His fourth appearance to Abraham God had declared again that Sarah would have a son (Genesis 18:1-10). Sarah laughed but a year later God visited her, and at the set time she conceived and bore a son.

And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age" (Genesis 21:1-7).

Abraham named him Isaac. He was one hundred years old at that time (Genesis 21:1-5). Isaac was the beginning of the new nation. Abraham had waited, by faith, for over twenty-five years for the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise.

When Isaac was weaned Abraham made a feast for him. Sarah saw Hagar's son Ishmael scoffing and said to Abraham,

Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac (Genesis 21:10).

Abraham sent Hagar and her son away after God promised that He would make a great nation of her son.

The Awful Test of Abraham's Faith

God tested the faith of Abraham one more time by an incredible command. He told Abraham to take his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and offer him as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:1-10). Abraham obeyed and was about to slay his son when God intervened.

*But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for **now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.**" Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-WILL-PROVIDE; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided (Genesis 22:11-14, emphasis added).*

Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Genesis 22:15-18).

The New Testament elaborates on Abraham's faith at this time.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Abraham believed that God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead after he offered him to Him. He evidently believed that Isaac had to continue to live so that the promise of the seed and of a new nation might be fulfilled.

The Way of Man or Faith in God?

Over three hundred and fifty years passed from the time of the flood to the time when Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. During that period the nations were formed and men turned to idolatry. Nations also began to battle one another. The first mention of war is recorded as kings came and battled against Sodom, Gomorrah and other cities in the area (Genesis 14:1-3). Finally, the way of man became exceedingly wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah, so wicked that God destroyed them (Genesis 19:24). The wickedness of these cities is described in the example of the coming judgment of God in the New Testament.

...He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 6-7).

Only one man, Abraham, is recorded as believing in God during that period of time. Nothing is ever said of Noah or Shem who lived hundreds of years after the flood, or of the other sons of Noah. Abraham's faith was tested by God time and again for twenty-five years until the promise of a son was fulfilled in Isaac. Then he was tested again by God in commanding him to offer his son as a burnt offering.

God did what Abraham did not have to do. He gave His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ as an offering for our sins (I Corinthians 15:3-4, Galatians 5:1-2, Hebrews 10:6-14).

Abraham believed in the promises of God and in the Christ to come. We need to be willing to turn from unbelief to faith in God and in Jesus Christ for salvation.

The Birth of a New Nation

The promise of God to Abraham that He would make of him a new nation began with the birth of Isaac when Abraham was one hundred years old. Sarah died when she was one hundred and thirty-seven years old (Genesis 23:1-2). Abraham at that time was one hundred and forty-seven. At that time Abraham sent his servant back to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor to seek a wife for his son, Isaac. The servant met Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor. Rebecca agreed to go with Abraham's servant and she became the wife of Isaac.

Isaac was forty years old when Rebecca became his wife. Rebecca was barren, however, and Isaac pleaded with God, but it was not until He was sixty that she conceived (Genesis 25:20-26). By this time Abraham was one hundred and sixty years old. Abraham died when he was one hundred and seventy-five, so he only saw Isaac and Isaac's sons, two generations, in fulfillment of God's promise of a new nation through him (Genesis 25:7). What a test of faith!

The Births of Esau and Jacob

Rebecca became pregnant with twins and they struggled together within her so she inquired of the LORD and He said to her,

Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger (Genesis 25:23)

The first child came out red and hairy and they named him Esau. As his brother was born he took hold of the heel of Esau so they called him Jacob (Supplanter or Deceitful). Jacob lived up to his name by deceiving both his brother and his father. God had said that two nations were in her womb. He also said of the brothers that the older would serve the younger.

Esau, as the first born, would inherit the blessing of his father. One day Jacob talked Esau into selling his birthright for some food. Esau ate and drank, and the Bible states, "Thus Esau despised his birthright" (Genesis 25:29-34). The New Testaments elaborates even more.

*Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or **profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.** For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears (Hebrews 11:14-17, emphasis added).*

God Renews the Promise to Isaac

There was a famine in the land where Isaac was living and he moved to the land of Gerar. God appeared to him there and told him not go down to Egypt but to live in the land which He would tell him (Genesis 26:1-2). Then God renewed the promise He had made to Abraham.

Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws (Genesis 26:3-5).

Later, God appeared to Isaac again at Beersheba and said,

...I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake (Genesis 26:24-25).

Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there.

The Deception of Jacob

Some time after buying Esau's birthright, Jacob, with the help of his mother, deceived his father by pretending to be Esau. Isaac had grown old and his eyes were dim. He told Esau to hunt for some game, prepare some savory food and that then he would bless him. Rebecca overheard the conversation, and planned with Jacob a way of deceiving his father into giving Esau's blessing to him. She covered Jacob's neck and hands with goat's hair, had him wear some of Esau's clothing and prepared savory food. The deception worked and Isaac gave Jacob the first born blessing belonging to Esau (Genesis 27:1-29).

Esau was so enraged when he found what Jacob had done and threatened to kill him (Genesis 27:30-42). Rebecca told Jacob to flee to her brother Laban in Haran for a few days (Genesis 27:41-44). She also urged Isaac to send Jacob because of Esau's marriages to Hittite women, who were a grief of mind to her and Isaac (Genesis 26:34-35).

Isaac called Jacob, blessed him and sent him to Padan Aram, telling him to take a wife from there (Genesis 28:1-2). Isaac then gave Jacob the blessing of Abraham.

May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham (Genesis 28:3-4).

Jacob left Beersheba to go to Haran, in Padan Aram. He stopped at a place at night, took a stone for a pillow and lay down to sleep. As he slept he had a dream of a ladder to heaven with angels of God upon it and the LORD standing above saying,

... I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you (Genesis 28:13-15).

God passed on to Jacob the promised blessing to Abraham. When Jacob awoke he realized that God was there. He called the place Bethel, which means house of God. Then he made a vow that if God would be with him, provide for him, and bring him back to his father's house in peace that the LORD would be his God (Genesis 28:16-21).

Jacob Serves for a Wife

Jacob arrived in Haran and met Rachel, the daughter of Laban, at a well. He was welcomed by Laban and began working for him. When Laban asked about wages he wanted Jacob offered to serve him seven years for his daughter Rachel, with whom he had fallen in love. After the seven years were completed Laban deceived him on the wedding night and gave Jacob his older daughter Leah instead. When morning came Jacob realized what Laban had done. Laban explained that Leah was firstborn and had firstborn rights. Laban then agreed to give Rachel to Jacob and have him serve another seven years.

The Consequence of Deception

Jacob's name means Supplanter or Deceitful. He took his brother by the heel at birth. He lived up to his name in deceiving both his brother, Esau, and his father Isaac. God, however, had

told Rebecca as Esau and Jacob were struggling during birth that the older would serve the younger. Why didn't they wait upon God?

Now Jacob had become the victim of the deception of his uncle Laban. Jacob paid dearly for his own deception relative to firstborn rights. The intended short time with Laban turned into a period of fourteen years of hard service. In the years that followed Laban continued to deceive Jacob (Genesis 31:6-7).

The Family of Jacob

Jacob's wife Leah bore him his first four children, **Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah** (Genesis 29:31-35). Rachel was barren, envied her sister, and gave her maid Bilhah to Jacob as a wife. She bore him two sons, **Dan** and **Naphtali**. Leah in turn gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob as a wife and she bore him **Gad** and **Asher**. Leah finally conceived again and bore Jacob two more sons, **Issachar** and **Zebulun**. God remembered Rachel, listened to her, and opened her womb and she bore **Joseph** (Genesis 30:1-24). Jacob now had eleven sons.

Six More Years of Service

During the births of his children Jacob completed his service to Laban for his wives. He then negotiated with Laban to serve him for livestock. Over a period of six years Jacob became very wealthy (Genesis 30:25-43). Laban and his son envied Jacob and became hostile toward him (Genesis 31:1-2). Twenty years had passed since Jacob arrived in Haran. Then God said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you" (Genesis 31:3). Jacob called Rachel and Leah to him in the field and said to them,

... I see your father's countenance, that it is not favorable toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me. And you know that with all my might I have served your father. Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me (Genesis 31:5-7).

Then God came to Jacob again and said,

I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family (Genesis 31:13).

So Jacob arose, set his wives and sons on camels and fled from Haran with all of the livestock he had gained in the last years of service to Laban (Genesis 31:17-18). Laban was away at the time shearing sheep. As they left, Rachel stole the household gods of her father (Genesis 31:19).

Was Rachel an Idolater?

When Laban realized that Jacob was gone he pursued him. God, however, warned him in a dream to be careful what he said to Jacob. When Laban caught up with Jacob he accused him of stealing his gods. Jacob answered by saying, "With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live." Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. After searching through everything Laban did not find them, for Rachel had hidden them in a camel saddle. Later Jacob and Laban made a covenant with each other and parted. Did Jacob unwittingly pronounce a death penalty upon Rachel for idolatry when he uttered the statement above? (Genesis 31:22-32).

Esau and Jacob Meet Again

Esau came to meet Jacob on his return home. He had four hundred men with him. Jacob was greatly afraid and prayed to God that He might deliver him, reminding God of His **promise**.

Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, "I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude" (Genesis 32:11-12).

Wrestling with God

After making preparations to meet Esau, Jacob was left alone. That night he had an unusual encounter with God. While Jacob was alone a Man wrestled with him.

*Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And He said, **"Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."** Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: **"For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."** Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip (Genesis 32:24-31, emphasis added).*

Jacob wrestled with God and God changed his name from Jacob to Israel, which means "Prince with God." With the changing of his name, Jacob's children became known as the "Children of Israel." A greater change took place that day in the life of Jacob. He had promised God years before, after his dream at Bethel, that if God brought him back to his father's house that Jehovah would be his God (Genesis 28:16-21). Jacob became a man of faith in God.

Jacob Continues His Journey

The meeting between Jacob and Esau was peaceful and Jacob journeyed from Peniel to Succoth and then to Shechem, and there he pitched his tent and built an altar, calling it El Elohe Israel (God, the God of Israel) (Genesis 33:1-20).

Dinah, Jacob's daughter, went into the city of Shechem to visit the daughters of the land. Shechem, the son of Hamor, saw her and raped her. Then Shechem wanted her for his wife, and his father tried to negotiate an alliance with Jacob. Jacob's sons, however, were furious, and tricked the city into being **circumcised**. Simon and Levi went into the city and killed all of the men (Genesis 34:1-30). This act troubled Jacob greatly and later affected his blessing of his sons (Genesis 49:5-7).

God told Jacob to go to Bethel, where He had first appeared to him. Jacob told his household to put away their foreign gods, saying that he was going to Bethel and making an altar to God (Genesis 35:1-3).

And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother (Genesis 35:5-7).

God appeared to Jacob again and blessed him.

God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. "The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land." Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him (Genesis 35:10-13).

God reaffirmed the change in Jacob's name to Israel, reaffirmed the promise made to Abraham and Isaac that he would make of him a new nation, and that He would give him the land of

Canaan. Jacob then continued to journey to Hebron and to his father Isaac.

The Death of Rachel

On the way to Hebron, near Bethlehem, Rachel gave birth to another son and then died. She named him Ben-Oni but Jacob called him **Benjamin**. (Genesis 35:16-18). He became the twelfth son of Jacob. Did Rachel die because of Jacob's oath regarding Laban's stolen idols, which she had taken? (Genesis 31:32). Jacob buried Rachel and journeyed on to Hebron and came to his father Isaac (Genesis 35:37).

The Children of Israel

God changed the name of Jacob to Israel (Genesis 32:28). His children became known as the children of Israel. There are nearly six hundred references to them in the Bible. Each of Jacob's twelve sons became the head of a tribe as they married and the family grew. Through these twelve tribes God would build the nation of Israel.

God had promised Abram that He would make of him a new nation. One day, in a vision, God had told Abram that He would accomplish this through his descendants.

*... Know certainly that **your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.** And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete* (Genesis 15:13-16, emphasis added).

God foretold that the children of Israel would grow as a nation in a foreign land where they would be afflicted for four hundred years. How would He accomplish this through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants?

The Ways of Man in the Life of Jacob

Jacob's life was filled with deception; one of the ways of man, and a characterization of Satan (Genesis 3:13, Revelation 20:10). He deceived his father into giving him Esau's blessing. Laban deceived Jacob by giving him Leah for a wife instead of the promised Rachel. Laban also deceived Jacob in the matter of wages over the years. Rachel deceived her father by hiding the idols she had stolen from him. In contrast to all of these deceptions, God was faithful in guiding Jacob to His way and toward the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham and Isaac.

The Ways of God

The purpose of God in His promises to Abraham and Isaac was to make a nation that would be a blessing and testimony to other nations that they might turn from idolatry to Him, and learn His ways. God's ways became Jacob's ways after he wrestled with God on his return to his father Isaac and began a new life of faith in Him. God's ways begin with a life of faith and a life of obedience to His commands. His ways, relating to His holiness, are revealed more fully after the new nation is formed.

*... The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since **Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?** For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that **they keep the way of the LORD**, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him (Genesis 18:17-19, emphasis added).*

The Evil Brothers

The ways of Jacob's sons became apparent early in life. As described in the previous chapter Simon and Levi, after the rape of Dinah, tricked the men of Shechem and then killed all of them (Genesis 34:1-30).

Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, committed sin in his early life when he went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22). His father heard about it and it affected his blessing later in life (Genesis 49:3-4). Judah, another brother, after losing his first wife and two sons because of their wickedness before the Lord, unwittingly committed harlotry with his daughter-in-law Tamar (Genesis 38:13-18).

During the years that followed Jacob's return to Hebron, his father Isaac died. His sons were shepherds and traveled from place to place feeding the flock. Joseph, the son of Rachel, worked from time to time with his brothers. He brought a bad report of them to his father (Genesis 37:1-2). Jacob (Israel) dearly loved Joseph, because he was the first-born son of Rachel.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him (Genesis 37:3-4).

Joseph's brothers hated him when they say that their father loved him more than them. Joseph had a dream that made them hate him even more. He said to them,

Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf (Genesis 37:6-7).

His brothers responded by saying, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" Then they hated him even more. (Genesis 37:8). Joseph had another dream and told to his father and brothers.

Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me (Genesis 37:9).

Jacob rebuked Joseph, asking if his father, mother and brothers would bow down to him. His brothers' response was to envy him.

The sons of Israel have now grown up. The brothers are filled with hate and envy for their brother Joseph because of the love his father had for him and because of his dreams of the future. How can the evil ways of these brothers be changed in order for God to make a new nation through them?

The Brothers Sell Joseph to Traders

One day, when Joseph was seventeen, his father sent him out to check on the welfare of his brothers with the flock. When his brothers saw him coming in his coat of many colors they conspired to kill him. Reuben objected so they stripped Joseph of his coat and cast him into a pit. Some traders came by and Judah suggested they sell him as a slave instead of killing him. Joseph was sold and taken to Egypt. His brothers took his coat, dipped it in blood and brought it to their father, who concluded he had been devoured by a wild beast. Jacob mourned greatly for Joseph. (Genesis 37:13-35).

Both Reuben and Judah showed mercy when their brothers planned to kill Joseph, and both of them offered themselves as surety to their father for Benjamin later when he went down to Egypt with them. (Genesis 42:37 and 43:8-9). They are beginning to follow the ways of God.

Joseph Becomes a Slave in Egypt

Joseph was sold to the captain of the guard in Egypt. The LORD was with him and he found favor with his master and was made overseer of his house. Later, the captain's wife tried to lure him into laying with her. When Joseph refused she accused him to her husband and he was cast into prison. Again, the LORD was with him. Joseph found favor with the keeper of the prison and all the care of all the prisoners was committed to him. Every thing in the prison was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him, and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper. (Genesis 39:1-23).

One day two of the officers of the king of Egypt offended him and were cast into the prison where Joseph was. While there each of them had a dream which Joseph interpreted for them. One of them would be executed and the other would be restored. Joseph asked the restored man to appeal to Pharaoh the king for him but the officer forgot about him. (Genesis 40:1-22).

Two years later Pharaoh had two dreams but no one could interpret them. His butler, the man restored, whose dream Joseph had interpreted, remembered him and told Pharaoh about him. Joseph was brought out of prison to Pharaoh. (Genesis 41:1-14).

Pharaoh told Joseph about his dreams which no one was able to interpret and said,

I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it (Genesis 41:15).

Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying,

It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace (Genesis 41:16).

Pharaoh then told Joseph his dreams, which he had told to the magicians but none of them could explain them.

Behold, in my dream I stood on the bank of the river. Suddenly seven cows came up out of the river, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. Then behold, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such ugliness as I have never seen in all the land of Egypt. And the gaunt and ugly cows ate up the first seven, the fat cows. When they had eaten them up, no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were just as ugly as at the beginning. So I awoke. Also I saw in my dream, and suddenly seven heads came up on one stalk, full and good. Then behold, seven heads, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. And the thin heads devoured the seven good heads. So I told this to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me. (Genesis 41:17-24).

Joseph interpreted the dreams and said to Pharaoh,

*The dreams of Pharaoh are one; **God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do:** The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years; the dreams are one. And the seven thin and ugly cows which came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine. This is the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt; but after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will deplete the land. So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it will be very severe. And **the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.** (Genesis 41:25-32, emphasis added).*

Then Joseph advised Pharaoh,

*Now therefore, let **Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt.** Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine. (Genesis 41:33-36, emphasis added).*

Joseph's advice sounded good to Pharaoh and his servants and Pharaoh said to his servants,

Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God? (Genesis 41:38).

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph,

... Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you. (Genesis 41:39-40)

Pharaoh set Joseph over all the land of Egypt.

*And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" **So he set him over all the land of Egypt.** Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt. (Genesis 41:41-45, emphasis added).*

Joseph Becomes Governor of Egypt

Joseph was thirty years old when he became the governor of Egypt (Genesis 41:46). He was a slave for thirteen years but remained faithful to God. God was with him, prospered him, and his dreams were beginning to be fulfilled.

During the seven years of plenty the produce of the land was stored up in great abundance in the cities under the oversight of Joseph. He married Asenath, the daughter of a priest of On. She bore him two sons. He called the first born Manasseh saying,

For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house (Genesis 41:51).

The second son he called Ephraim,

For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction (Genesis 41:52).

When the seven years of plenty ended, the famine came as Joseph had said. The famine was in all the lands.

The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do." The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands (Genesis 41:54-57).

Joseph's Brothers Come to Egypt to Buy Food

When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt he sent his sons to buy some. They came before Joseph, but they did not recognize him and bowed before him. Joseph recognized them but did not reveal himself to them. Instead he treated them roughly, questioned them, and accused them of being spies.

...Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!" And they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. "We are all one man's sons; we are honest men; your servants are not spies" (Genesis 42:9-11).

The encounter continued,

But he said to them, "No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land." And they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and in fact, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no more." But Joseph said to them, "It is as I spoke to you, saying, 'You are spies!' In this manner you shall be tested: By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether there is any truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies!" So he put them all together in prison three days. (Genesis 42:12-17).

After the three days Joseph said to them,

"Do this and live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the famine of your houses. And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die" (Genesis 42:18-20).

The brothers agreed to do as Joseph commanded and said to one another,

... "We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us." And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us." (Genesis 42:21-24).

Joseph understood their conversation although he had been speaking through an interpreter. He turned away and wept. Then Joseph took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. Finally, after purchasing the grain the brothers returned to their father, Jacob.

On their second trip to Egypt they reminded their father that the governor had specified that they bring their younger brother. At first Jacob refused but Judah persuaded him saying that he would be surety for Benjamin. Then his father sent him along. (Genesis 43:1-14).

When they arrived Joseph invited them to his house and following that gave them a test. Before the brothers left with their grain Joseph had his silver cup put in Benjamin's sack. After they were out of the city he sent his steward to catch up with them and say to them, "Why have you repaid evil for good?" (Genesis 44:4). The brothers pleaded innocence. The steward said that with whom the cup was found that brother would be made a slave. After a search the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. The brothers tore their clothes and returned to the city and Joseph's house. (Genesis 43:17 to 44:13).

Judah pleaded with Joseph for Benjamin, confessing the iniquity of the brothers.

What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord's slaves, both we and he also with whom the cup was found (Genesis 44:14).

Joseph answered,

Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my slave. And as for you, go up in peace to your father (Genesis 44:15).

Judah came near to Joseph and said,

"O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's hearing, and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you are even like Pharaoh. "My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' "And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age,

who is young; his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.' "And we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' "But you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.'" (Genesis 44:18-23).

Judah continued,

*"So it was, when we went up to your servant my father, that we told him the words of my lord. "And our father said, 'Go back and buy us a little food.' "But we said, 'We cannot go down; if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we may not see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' "Then your servant **my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; 'and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn to pieces"; and I have not seen him since. 'But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.'** "Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, "it will happen, when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die. So your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave. "For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.' "**"Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers.** "For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?"* (Genesis 44:24-34, emphasis added).

Judah offered to remain as a slave so that Benjamin might return to his father.

Joseph Reveals Himself and is Reconciled with His Brothers

Judah's plea so moved Joseph that he wept and then revealed himself to his brothers saying, "I am Joseph." They were dismayed and then he and his brothers were reconciled. (Genesis 45:1-3). Then Joseph said to them,

I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. (Genesis 45:4-8).

Joseph forgave his brothers for the evil they had done to him. He told his brothers to go to his father and tell him he was alive and that God had made him lord over all Egypt.

Joseph told his brothers to ask his father to come down to him with his family and flocks and live in the land. Joseph said that he would provide for them because there still remained five years of famine (Genesis 45:3-11). When Pharaoh heard about Joseph's family he provided wagons for their travel and promised to give them the best of the land in Egypt.

Following the Ways of God

In contrast to his brothers, Joseph followed the ways of God. When tempted by Potiphar's wife he refused saying, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Later, when Joseph stood before Pharaoh and was asked to interpret his dreams, he acknowledged God and said, "*It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.*" (Genesis 41:16). God used Joseph to bring about a conviction of sin in the hearts of his brothers. Their evil ways began to be changed to the ways of God as they realized their sin in selling their brother into slavery and deceiving their father (Genesis 42:21). Later, both Judah and Reuben

offered themselves as surety when their younger brother Benjamin was taken to Egypt (Genesis 42:37 to 43:9). Judah even offered to become a slave instead of Benjamin (Genesis 44:32-33).

Joseph had love and compassion for his brothers and forgave them. Soon after, Jacob and his family went down to live in Egypt. God would make them, in Egypt, a great nation according to His promise.

The New Nation Living in Bondage

Joseph's brothers returned to their father and told him that Joseph was alive and that he was the governor over the land of Egypt. Jacob's heart stood still in disbelief but when he saw the wagons he believed.

Then Israel said, "It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die." (Genesis 45:28).

Jacob Journeys to Egypt

Jacob (Israel) took all of his descendants and journeyed to Egypt. On the way to Egypt he stopped in Beersheba and offered sacrifices to God, and God spoke to him in a vision and said,

I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes (Genesis 46:3).

God renewed the promise to Jacob, made to Abraham and Isaac, that He would make of them a new nation. God also promised to bring them back to the Promised Land.

Jacob arrived in Egypt with sixty-six descendants plus their wives. Adding Joseph and his two sons, who were born in Egypt, and Jacob, totaled seventy persons (Genesis 46:26-27).

The Early Years in Egypt

During the early years in Egypt the children of Israel lived in the land of Goshen. When they first came Joseph went to Pharaoh and told him about their arrival saying,

My father and my brothers, their flocks and their herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; and indeed they are in the land of Goshen (Genesis 47:1).

Joseph took five of his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh. After Pharaoh questioned them they said,

... We have come to dwell in the land, because your servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen (Genesis 47:3-4).

Then Pharaoh told Joseph,

Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen (Genesis 47:5-6).

Then Joseph brought his father to Pharaoh. While he was there Jacob blessed Pharaoh. When Pharaoh asked his age, Jacob said,

*The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; **few and evil have been the days of the years of my life**, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage (Genesis 47:9, emphasis added).*

Jacob was one hundred and thirty years old when he entered Egypt. He confessed that his days had been few and evil. His entry into Egypt was two hundred and fifteen years after God promised Abraham that He would make of him a new nation. Another four hundred and thirty

years would pass before the children of Israel would come out of Egypt as a new nation (Exodus 13:40).

After Jacob had blessed Pharaoh, Joseph provided for him and his brothers.

... Joseph situated his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. Then Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, according to the number in their families (Genesis 47:11-12).

While Joseph was still alive the children of Israel continued to live in Goshen, the best of the land. Joseph provided for them during the remaining years of famine.

The Deaths of Jacob and Joseph

Jacob lived to be one hundred and forty-seven. Before he died he blessed all of his sons, prophesying their future. He was returned to the land of Canaan for burial. After their father's death Joseph's brothers came to him and asked forgiveness for the evil they had done to him. Joseph forgave them, saying,

Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones (Genesis 50:19-21).

Joseph lived to be one hundred and ten. He saw his son Ephraim's children to the third generation and also the children of his son Manasseh. Before he died he said to his brothers,

I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob (Genesis 50:24).

Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying,

God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here (Genesis 50:25).

After he died Joseph was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt (Genesis 50:26). The children of Israel, numbering seventy, had entered Egypt when Joseph was thirty-nine. When he died the children of Israel had lived in Egypt for over sixty years. The book of Genesis covers the history from creation to the death of Joseph, a period of about two thousand three hundred years. The time period covers over one third of world history and the history of man.

The Years of Bondage

Egypt was a land of idolatry, filled with false gods and goddesses as seen in their history, ancient paintings, sculpture, architecture, and pyramids. Joseph married the daughter of the Priest of On, one of the gods of Egypt. During his lifetime, however, he was faithful to God and a testimony for Him. He followed the ways of God. God had commanded that he and the children of Israel be a testimony for Him throughout Egypt.

Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, At the full moon, on our solemn feast day. For this is a statute for Israel, A law of the God of Jacob. This He established in Joseph as a testimony, When He went throughout the land of Egypt, Where I heard a language I did not understand. (Psalm 81:3-5).

The book of Exodus refers to God's judgment against all the gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12). No doubt the children of Israel were influenced in many ways by the gods of Egypt.

As indicated previously, when they entered Egypt the children of Israel numbered seventy. The Bible records their names and refers to their families,

... the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt; each man and his household came with Jacob: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. All those who were descendants of Jacob were seventy persons (Joseph was in Egypt already) (Exodus 1:1-5).

The years passed and the children of Israel continued to live in Egypt after the death of Joseph, his brothers, and all that generation. They began to multiply exceedingly.

... the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them. (Exodus 1:6-7).

As the children of Israel multiplied, they became mighty, filled the land and became a concern to the Egyptians. A new king arose in Egypt who did not know of Joseph and he said to his people,

Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land (Exodus 1:9-10).

Taskmasters were set over the children of Israel to afflict them with burdens. In their bondage Pharaoh used them to build many cities, such as Pithom and Raamses. The more they were afflicted, however, the more they continued to grow and multiply. They became such a dread to the Egyptians that they increased their bondage (Exodus 1:11-12).

So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor (Exodus 1:13-14).

Finally, the king of Egypt called the midwives of the children of Israel, who were called Hebrews by the Egyptians, and commanded them to kill all of the baby boys at birth. **The midwives feared God.** They did not obey the king of Egypt and saved the male children. When questioned they explained to the king that the Hebrew women gave birth before the midwives came. God blessed the midwives because they feared God (Exodus 1:15-21). Then Pharaoh commanded the children of Israel saying, “Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive” (Exodus 1:22).

The Birth of Moses

During this time a son was born to a man and wife who were descendants of Levi. The woman hid the child for three months then she took an ark of bulrushes, placed the baby in it and laid the ark in the reeds by a river bank. The baby’s sister watched over it (Exodus 2:1-4).

Pharaoh’s daughter came down to the river and saw the ark. When it was opened she saw the child. The baby cried and she had compassion on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.” (Exodus 2:5-6).

The child’s sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter if she should call a nurse from the Hebrew women to take care of the baby for her. Pharaoh’s daughter said “Go” so the girl called the child’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give *you* your wages.” So the baby’s own mother took and nursed him. Then she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She called his name Moses, saying, “Because I drew him out of the water.” (Exodus 2:7-10).

Moses Flees to Midian

One day when Moses was forty years old he went to his Hebrew brothers and observed their burdens. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. He killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

The next day he saw two Hebrew men fighting and asked why one was striking the other. (Exodus 2:11-13). The man replied, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” (Exodus 2:14). The New Testament states,

... Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand (Acts 7:22-28).

Moses, realizing that his act was known, became fearful. Indeed, Pharaoh did hear about it and sought to kill him. Moses fled to the land of Midian and joined a man named Reuel (Jethro), the priest of Midian. He married one of his daughters and she bore him a son whom they named Gershom (Exodus 2:15-22). He served his father-in-law as a shepherd (Exodus 3:1). Did Moses still think that God would deliver the children of Israel by his hand?

The Ways of Man in Egypt

God brought the children of Israel down into Egypt in order that He might fulfill His promise to Abraham that He would make a great nation of him and that through Abraham all of the nations of the world would be blessed. God’s promise, however, was far-reaching because it referred to Abraham’s seed, that is, to the Christ who was to come nearly two thousand years later. The whole world was to be blessed through Him who became the way of salvation from sin and death.

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ (Galatians 3:16).

The years in Egypt, however, were used of God as a stage in His purposes. The children of Israel lived four hundred and thirty years in Egypt. Over six hundred years had passed since God promised Abraham that He would make of him a new nation. Time is not a problem to God for His way is perfect.

As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him. For who is God, except the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God? It is God who arms me with strength, And makes my way perfect (Psalm 18:30-32).

Did the children of Israel follow the ways of God as did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph over these centuries of time? The Egyptians, as was noted earlier, were idolaters, worshipping false gods and following the wicked ways of man. There is no indication in the Biblical account as to the extent to which their ways were influenced by the Egyptians and their gods until they were freed from bondage. Then it became very clear that their ways were greatly influenced by the times they returned to idol worship.

Why did God develop the nation of Israel in Egypt instead of Canaan? Again, His ways are perfect, who can understand them?

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? (Romans 11:33-34).

Meanwhile, the children of Israel continued to serve in bondage and began to cry out because of the bondage. Their cry came up to God and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 2:23-25). God had promised that He would make a great nation of

them. Why was their nation in bondage? One truth is certain, regardless of their ways; God called them “My people.” Before He brought them out of Egypt He said,

*I have surely seen the oppression of **My people** who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites (Exodus 3:7-8, emphasis added).*

Man’s ways may waver but God’s ways and promises are faithful. He remembered His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The children of Israel were still His people.

God said to Abram: *“Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions”* (Genesis 15:13-14).

Freedom and Rebellion

Moses was forty years old when he fled to Midian (Acts 7:23-29). Forty more years passed and Moses was now eighty years old (Exodus 7:7). One day he led his flock to the back of the desert and came to Horeb (Sinai), the mount of God. There he saw a wondrous sight: a bush was burning with fire but the bush was not consumed (Exodus 3:1-2). He turned aside to see the great sight and God called to him from the midst of the burning bush.

God Calls Moses

God told Moses not to come near and to take off his sandals for the place was holy. Then God said, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (Exodus 3:3-6). God said to Moses,

I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey ... Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt (Exodus 3:7-10).

When Moses questioned God regarding this he was told that God would be with him and that the people would be brought to this mountain (Exodus 3:11-12). Moses then asked what he should say if the people asked who sent him. God answered and said,

“I AM THAT I AM.” ... Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: “I AM hath sent me unto you ... Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you...” (Exodus 3:14-15 DBY).

Then God told Moses to gather the elders of Israel together and tell them that Jehovah, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had appeared to him. God said to tell them that He would bring them up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, to a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:16-17 DBY).

Moses argued with God, making many excuses as to why he would not be able to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. God empowered him with several miracles he could do with his rod and then Moses agreed to go (Exodus 4:1-17).

Moses Returns to Egypt

Moses took his wife, his two sons, and his rod in his hand, and returned to Egypt. Before leaving, God said to him,

When thou goest to return to Egypt, see that thou do all the wonders before Pharaoh that I have put in thy hand. And I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go. And thou shalt say to Pharaoh, Thus saith Jehovah: Israel is my son, my firstborn. And I say to thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me. And if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill thy son, thy firstborn (Exodus 4:21-23 DBY)

God sent Aaron, his brother, to meet Moses and they went together to Egypt and gathered together all of the elders of the children of Israel. When they heard all of the words God had spoken to Moses and saw the signs, the people believed. When they heard that God had seen their affliction they bowed their heads and worshiped (Exodus 4:24-31).

Moses and Aaron Go before Pharaoh

Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and told him that Jehovah, the God of Israel had said, “Let my people go that they may celebrate a feast to me in the wilderness.” Pharaoh replied,

... Who is Jehovah, to whose voice I am to hearken to let Israel go? I do not know Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go (Exodus 5:2 DBY).

They replied that the God of the Hebrews had met with them, asking them to go three days into the desert and sacrifice to Him. Pharaoh refused.

Moses returned to God and God reassured him that He would deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt according to His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying,

*... Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh; for by a strong hand shall he let them go, and by a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land ... **I am Jehovah. And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, ... And I established also my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan ... And I have heard also the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians have forced to serve, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore say unto the children of Israel, I am Jehovah, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their service, and I will redeem you And I will take you to me for a people, and will be your God; and ye shall know that I, Jehovah your God, am he who bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land concerning which I swore to give it unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; and I will give it you for a possession: I am Jehovah** (Exodus 6: 1-8 DBY, emphasis added).*

Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh many times and performed various miracles with the rod of Moses. Each time they warned Pharaoh of a plague if he refused to let the children of Israel go, reminding him of the words of God, “I am Jehovah” (Exodus 7:1-17). After each plague Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let the people go, even after he was warned of the tenth plague (Exodus 7:17 to 11:10).

The Death of the First Born and the Passover

God prepared the children of Israel prior to the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn. He told them to take a lamb and keep it for fourteen days.

*... ye shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; and the whole congregation of the assembly of Israel shall kill it between the two evenings. And they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two door-posts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs shall they eat it ... And **thus shall ye eat it: your loins shall be girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste; it is Jehovah's passover.** And I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am Jehovah. And the blood shall be for you as a sign on the houses in which ye are; and **when I see the blood, I will pass over you;** ... when I smite the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:6-14 DBY, emphasis added).*

The children of Israel kept the ordinance and at midnight that night God struck all of the firstborn of Egypt. Pharaoh rose in the night and there was a great cry in Egypt for there was not a house where there was not one dead (Exodus 12:28-30).

Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said,

Rise up, go away from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve Jehovah, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and go; and bless me also (Exodus 12:31-32 DBY).

The Egyptians urged one another to send the children of Israel out of the land in haste, saying that “We are all dead men!”

The obedience and faith of the children of Israel in putting the blood on their door posts and lintels resulted in their firstborn being passed over and saved alive.

The Exodus

The children of Israel left Egypt and journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. They had lived in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years (Exodus 12:37-40).

And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, on that same day it came to pass that all the hosts of Jehovah went out from the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:41 DBY).

God went before them in a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire to lead them day and night (Exodus 13:19-22).

The Red Sea Crossing

Soon after the children of Israel left, Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued them with his army of chariots. When his army drew near the Israelites were afraid and cried out to God and Moses. Moses told them to stand still and see the salvation of Jehovah and assured them that God would fight for them (Exodus 14:5-14).

As the Egyptians were pursuing them the children of Israel came to the Dead Sea. Moses stretched out his hand and God caused the water to go back by a strong wind and the children of Israel went through the seas on dry ground. The Egyptians followed and were drowned when the waters returned again. God saved Israel that day and they feared Jehovah and his servant Moses (Exodus 14:21-31 DBY). Moses and the children of Israel sang a song to Jehovah lauding Him as a Man of War, asking who is like God among the gods. Then Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron and all the women sang a song of triumph to Jehovah (Exodus 15:1-21 DBY). Their response was the result of following God's way.

The Journey to Sinai

The journey to Sinai was through a wilderness and the people complained, asking for water. They came to Marah where the water was bitter and God sweetened the water for them. As they continued to journey they came to Elim and the people complained because there was a lack of food, looking back to Egypt. God told Moses that He was testing them to see if they would walk in His law. God told Moses that He would rain bread from heaven and promised that that they would see the glory of Jehovah. Suddenly the glory of Jehovah appeared in a cloud (Exodus 16:1-10 DBY). In the morning they found a small substance on the ground which they called "manna."

When the people came to Rephidim they found no water and contended and complained to Moses. God told Moses to strike a rock and there was an abundance of water. Later at Rephidim the people of Amalek came and fought against Israel. Moses told Joshua to assemble some men and fight them while he prayed with Aaron and Hur on top of a hill. Joshua defeated the enemy (Exodus 17:8-13).

Israel at Mount Sinai

Three months after leaving Egypt the children of Israel arrived at the wilderness of Sinai and camped before the mountain (Exodus 19:1-2). God called to Moses from the mountain and said,

... Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will

indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me ... a holy nation " (Exodus 19:3-6, emphasis added).

God promised the children of Israel that if they would obey Him and follow His way that they would be a special people to Him and a holy nation. This is the essential truth – obedience to God and His particular plan leads to blessings. When men make up their own plans, they separate themselves from God and bring punishment upon themselves. The nation of Israel illustrated this point over and over.

Then God promised to come to the people in a thick black cloud so that they might hear when He spoke, and believe (Exodus 19:9). On the third day God came down to meet with the people.

*And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and the sound of the trumpet exceeding loud; and the whole people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the foot of the mountain. And **the whole of mount Sinai smoked, because Jehovah descended on it in fire; and its smoke ascended as the smoke of a furnace; and the whole mountain shook greatly. And the sound of the trumpet increased and became exceeding loud; Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice*** (Exodus 19:16-19 DBY, emphasis added).

Then God came down on Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain and said to him,

Go down, testify to the people that they break not through to Jehovah to gaze, and many of them perish. And the priests also, who come near to Jehovah, shall hallow themselves, lest Jehovah break forth on them. ... So Moses went down to the people, and told them (Exodus 19:21-25 DBY).

The Ten Commandments

Evidently Moses and Aaron were down with the people when God first uttered the Ten Commandments. God began by declaring that He was their God who had brought them out of bondage in Egypt. The commandments reveal Jehovah as the true God and His ways as the true way in contrast to the ways of man (Exodus 20:1-2 DBY). The first four commandments state what Israel's ways were to be in relationship to God. The last six commandments state what their ways were to be in relationship to man.

... Thou shalt have no other gods before me ... Thou shalt not make thyself any graven image ... Thou shalt not idly utter the name of Jehovah thy God ... Remember the sabbath day to hallow it ... Honour thy father and thy mother... Thou shalt not kill... Thou shalt not commit adultery... Thou shalt not commit adultery... Thou shalt not steal... Thou shalt not bear false witness... Thou shalt not desire (covet) they neighbor's ... (Exodus 20:3-17 DBY).

God explained each of the commandments as they were uttered. The people were terrified by the things they saw and heard.

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the flames, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw [it], they trembled, and stood afar off, and said to Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said to the people, Fear not; for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before you, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near to the obscurity where God was (Exodus 20:18-21 DBY).

The people were fearful of dying and asked that Moses speak to them from God. So they stood far off while Moses drew near to where God was. Jehovah said to Moses,

... Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: Ye have seen that I have spoken with you from the heavens. Ye shall not make beside me gods of silver, and ye shall not make to you gods of gold (Exodus 20:22-23 DBY).

The Ten Commandments were followed by many other laws of God regarding sacrifices and altars, slaves, violence, animal rules, property, moral laws, holiness, and ceremonial principles. God's laws reveal His ways of truth, holiness, faithfulness, goodness and justice. Three annual feasts were established to help His people remember Him (Exodus 20:24 to 23:19).

God promised to send an angel before the children of Israel to the place He had prepared for them and that He would cut off their enemies. God warned them not to bow down to their gods and learn their ways. They were to utterly destroy these nations. God promised to help drive them out. They were to serve Jehovah their God and make no covenants with the people, nor their gods because it would be a snare to them (Exodus 23:20-33 DBY).

The Children of Israel See God

Then God told Moses to come up to Him again with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders. Only Moses came near to God when God affirmed the covenant. Moses told the people the words of the covenant and then said, "All the words that Jehovah has said will we do!" (Exodus 24:1-3). Then Moses wrote all the words down, built an altar, offered burnt offerings, took the blood of the offerings and sprinkled the altar. Then he reread the book of the covenant to the people and they said, "All that Jehovah has said will we do, and obey!" (Exodus 24:4-7 DBY).

Once again Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders went up on the mountain of God. There they saw a glorious sight. They saw God!

... they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were work of transparent sapphire, and as it were the form of heaven for clearness. And on the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: they saw God, and ate and drank (Exodus 24:10-11 DBY).

Then God told Moses to come up the top of the mountain and He would give him tablets of stone which He had written.

And Moses rose up, and Joshua his attendant; and Moses went up to the mountain of God. And he said to the elders, Wait here for us, until we return to you; ... And Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. And the glory of Jehovah abode on mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the appearance of the glory of Jehovah was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain, before the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and ascended the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights (Exodus 24:13-18 DBY)

God, as a consuming fire, appeared before the eyes of the children of Israel. Moses remained on the mountain with God for forty days and nights. Seeing God should have removed all doubt as to who He was, the true God, and the need to believe in Him and obey him.

God's Plan for the Tabernacle of Worship

During that time on the mountain God gave Moses instructions on ways of worshipping Him and directions for the people in preparation for making a sanctuary for worship. God said to Moses,

And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it (Exodus 25:8-9).

God repeated several times that the tabernacle and all of its furnishings were to be constructed according the pattern He gave them (Exodus 25:40, 26:30, Acts 7:44). It was so important to make the tabernacle precisely according to His plan for in it God and His ways were revealed. Many years later the Psalmist said,

Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; Who is so great a God as our God? (Psalm 77:13).

The tabernacle provided a place for God to dwell among His people, revealed His holiness, and ways to worship Him. Later He came down in a pillar of cloud and fire and glorified it with His presence. A priesthood and offerings were designated as means of atonement for sins. Aaron and his sons were later designated for the priesthood and garments were to be made for them.

When God was finished talking with Moses, God gave him the testimony He had declared on two tables of stone, written by the finger of God (Exodus 25:1 to 31:18).

The Golden Calf

The influence of Egyptian ways upon the children of Israel after spending centuries there became increasingly apparent during the time at Sinai and the desert years that followed. The people, after waiting the forty days for Moses to return, said to Aaron,

Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him (Exodus 32:1, emphasis added).

Aaron told the people to take off their golden earrings and bring them to him. He took them and fashioned a molten golden calf. Then the people said, “*This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!*” (Exodus 32:2-4). Aaron made an altar for the calf and the people began worshipping it.

It is inconceivable that the children of Israel should so corrupt themselves and resort to idol worship after all of the miracles God had performed in Egypt, after being led out of Egypt by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, and after seeing the glory of God several times and after hearing and seeing the tremendous sounds from Mt. Sinai and seeing the mountain on fire. They truly returned to the ways of man.

God saw them from the mountain and said to Moses,

*... Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. **They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them.** They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!” ... I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation* (Exodus 32:7-10, emphasis added).

God wanted to destroy the people but Moses pleaded with God and God relented from the harm He was going to do to the people. Then Moses went down to the people with the two tablets of stone. When he saw the calf and the people dancing, Moses became angry and cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them, and destroyed the calf (Exodus 32:11-20). Moses asked Aaron how this all happened.

And Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?” So Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, ‘Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ “And I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out (Exodus 32:21-24).

Aaron lied to Moses in his explanation. Moses noted that the people were unrestrained and asked who was on Jehovah’s side, that they should come to him. The sons of Levi came to him. Moses told them to put on their swords and kill the people. About three thousand people were killed. The next day Moses told the people, “Ye have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to

Jehovah: perhaps I shall make atonement for your sin” (Exodus 32:25-30). Then he returned to God and said,

Alas, this people has sinned a great sin, and they have made themselves a god of gold! And now, if thou wilt forgive their sin...but if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book that thou hast written (Exodus 32:31-32 DBY).

Jehovah answered Moses, saying,

Whoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. And now go, lead the people whither I have told thee: behold, my Angel shall go before thee; but in the day of my visiting I will visit their sin upon them (Exodus 32:33-34 DBY).-

The narrative continues by stating that God plagued the people, because of the calf which Aaron had made (Exodus 32:35).

Moses asks to see God’s Glory

At this time God said to Moses that they should leave Sinai and go to the promised land, indicating that He would not go with them for they were stiff-necked people and that He might consume them on the way. Then Moses went up to God and began to plead with Him again.

And Moses said to Jehovah, Behold, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people; but thou dost not let me know whom thou wilt send with me; and thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in mine eyes. And now, if indeed I have found grace in thine eyes, make me now to know thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thine eyes; and consider that this nation is thy people! (Exodus 33: 12-13 DBY).

Moses continued to plead with God for His grace and that he might know His way, and asked to see God’s glory. God showed Moses His back instead (Exodus 33:20-23).

The next morning Moses went up again to Mount Sinai, taking in his hands two tablets of stone like the first. God came down in a cloud, passed before the face of Moses and proclaimed His name. Moses bowed and worshipped (Exodus 34:14 DBY).

Moses spent forty more days and nights on Sinai. During that time God rewrote the Ten Commandments and gave instruction as to various feasts of Jehovah that the people were to keep. When Moses came down from the mountain his face was shining. The people were afraid to come near him so he covered his face with a veil (Exodus 34:18-35). The shining face of Moses was one more revelation to the children of Israel of the reality and presence of the one true God who was leading them.

The Construction of the Tabernacle and Furnishings

God called gifted craftsmen to construct the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the vestments for the priests. The people contributed the necessary materials for the craftsmen. After all of the work was finished, Moses looked over the work and all of it had been done according to the pattern commanded by God (Exodus 35:1 to 39:43). When the tabernacle was completed and all of the work was finished, the glory of God filled the tabernacle. The glory of God appeared because everything was done in the way He had commanded.

And the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle. ...for the cloud abode on it, and the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel journeyed in all their journeys. And if the cloud were not taken up, then they did not journey until the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of Jehovah was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys (Exodus 40:34-38 DBY).

From that day on a cloud rested on the tabernacle, directing the children of Israel during their journeys.

God called Moses from the tabernacle and instructed him regarding the various offerings and sacrifices that were to be made to Him. He then consecrated Aaron as the high priest and his sons as priests and instructed them in the duties of their service.

The Priestly Ministry Begins

The ministry began with offerings to Jehovah. These included sin offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings, to make atonement for the sins of the people. When the people brought the offerings, the priests killed them and presented them as blood offerings to God. Then the glory of Jehovah appeared to them and fire consumed the offerings. When the people saw it they shouted and fell on their faces (Leviticus 9:1-24 DBY).

Nadab and Ahihu Present Profane Fire before Jehovah

As soon the offerings were completed that day, the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, took censers, put fire and incense on them, and presented them before Jehovah, which He had not commanded. This was an obvious act of disobedience and fire went out from Jehovah, devoured them and they died (Leviticus 10:1-5).

The other two sons of Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar, who survived were then instructed by Moses to complete the offerings that day as God had commanded (Leviticus 10:6-19).

Various Laws and Feasts of Jehovah

In addition to the Ten Commandments, various laws and feasts concerning daily life and practices were added to help the people realize the holiness of God and to learn His ways. The Tabernacle and the priesthood provided ways for the children of Israel to worship God, to obey Him, and follow His ways (Leviticus 1:1 through 27:34).

Preparations for Leaving Sinai

It had been about a year since the children of Israel had left Egypt. God told Moses that they were to keep the Passover before leaving Sinai. A cloud had been over the tabernacle by day and had the appearance of fire by night. God told them that when the cloud was taken away they were to move and when it stopped they were to camp (Numbers 9:1 to 10:10).

The Departure from Sinai

The children of Israel started out from Sinai in the second month of the second year to go to Canaan, the Promised Land. Each tribe marched according to their order with the tabernacle being carried in their midst. Within three days the people began to complain, longing for Egypt and forgetting all of the glorious ways of God revealed during the past year (Numbers 10:11-36). As they traveled from place to place the ways of man appeared again. Their complaining developed into open rebellion and Moses had to continually intercede with God on their behalf.

The Complaints of the Children of Israel

The complaints of the people angered God and He sent a fire among them. They cried out to Moses, and when he prayed the fire was quenched. The people still yielded to craving, asking who would give them meat to eat. They complained about the manna, remembering the food in

Egypt. Moses appealed to God and He caused a wind to bring quail in for the people. God was again angered and struck them with a great plague (Numbers 11:1-34).

During the first year, after leaving Sinai, the children of Israel camped in several places and then arrived at Hazeroth (Numbers 11:35).

The Contention of Miriam and Aaron

In Hazeroth Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because he had taken an Ethiopian woman as a wife. They questioned whether God had only spoken to Moses and not them also, and God heard them. He suddenly came down in the pillar of cloud, called the three of them to Him, and said,

Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I Jehovah will make myself known to him in a vision, I will speak to him in a dream. Not so my servant Moses: he is faithful in all my house. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him openly, and not in riddles; and the form of Jehovah doth he behold. Why then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant, against Moses? (Numbers 12:6-8 DBY).

As God left them in anger Miriam became leprous as snow. Aaron turned to Moses and said,

Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not this sin upon us, wherein we have been foolish, and have sinned! Let her not be as one stillborn, half of whose flesh is consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb (Numbers 12:11-12 DBY).

Moses prayed to God and He healed her. Then the people journeyed on and camped in the wilderness of Paran at Kadesh (Numbers 12:16, 13:26).

Spies are Sent to Canaan

God spoke to Moses in Paran (Kadesh) and told him to send out one man from each of the twelve tribes, to search out the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:1-3). Joshua and Caleb were among them. The twelve spies returned after forty days in the land and came back with their report. They said that the land flowed with milk and honey and was fruitful, but that the cities were walled, that the people were strong, and that the giants of Anak lived there. Caleb reassured the people, however, and said, "Let us go up boldly and possess it, for we are well able to do it." Ten of the other spies disagreed and said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we" and brought an evil report to the people (Numbers 13:4-33 DBY).

The Rebellion against Entering Canaan

The people responded to the evil report of the ten spies by weeping and murmuring against Moses and Aaron saying that it would have been better to have died in Egypt or the wilderness (Numbers 14:1-3). They said,

And why is Jehovah bringing us to this land that we may fall by the sword, that our wives and our little ones may become a prey? Is it not better for us to return to Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt (Numbers 14:3-4 DBY).

Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb tried to persuade the people not to rebel against Jehovah for He was with them and that the land was very good. The people responded by threatening to stone them (Numbers 14:6-9 DBY). The glory of God suddenly appeared in anger and He told Moses that He was going to destroy the people because of their unbelief after His many signs and make a new nation. Moses appealed to God and asked Him to forgive them and God pardoned the people (Numbers 14:10-20 DBY). God declared, however, that none of those who had rebelled would see the land except Joshua and Caleb. God added thirty-eight years in the wilderness.

*In this wilderness shall your carcasses fall ... and all ...who have murmured against me, shall in no wise come into the land ... save **Caleb** the son of Jephunneh, and **Joshua** the son of Nun. But your **little ones, of whom ye said they should be a prey**, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land that ye have despised ... And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which ye have searched out the land, **forty days**, each day for a year shall ye bear your iniquities **forty years**, and ye shall know mine estrangement (Numbers 14:29-34 DBY, emphasis added).*

God added that they would all die in the wilderness. The ten men who brought up the evil report of the land died of a plague before Jehovah (Numbers 14:35-37 DBY).

Then the children of Israel admitted their sin and said they would go up to the place where God had said. Moses warned them not to go, for God was no longer among them. They persisted, and the Canaanites came down and defeated them (Numbers 14:38-45).

The Rebellion of Korah

Shortly after being defeated by the Canaanites, Korah rose up with Dathan and Abiram and 250 men against Moses and Aaron and said to them,

It is enough; for all the assembly, all of them are holy, and Jehovah is among them; and why do ye lift up yourselves above the congregation of Jehovah? (Numbers 16:1-3 DBY)

Moses called them to come up before Jehovah to determine whom He had chosen to come near Him (Numbers 16:4-12). They refused to come up but said,

Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that thou must make thyself altogether a ruler over us? Moreover, thou hast not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up! (Numbers 16:13-14 DBY).

Moses told Korah and his company to come before Jehovah with censers of fire and stand before the tent of meeting. After they gathered the glory of Jehovah appeared and God was about to destroy all of them. Moses again appealed to God. God told Moses to tell the people to separate themselves from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16:15-27). Then Moses said,

... Hereby ye shall know that Jehovah has sent me to do all these deeds, for they are not out of my own heart: if these men die as all men die, and are visited with the visitation of all men, Jehovah has not sent me; but if Jehovah make a new thing, and the ground open its mouth, and swallow them up, and all that they have, and they go down alive into Sheol, then ye shall know that these men have despised Jehovah (Numbers 16:28-30 DBY).

When Moses finished speaking the ground opened up under Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their families and they were swallowed up and the earth covered them. Then fire came from God and destroyed the other two hundred and fifty rebels (Numbers 16:31-35). This rebellion was so significant that it is referred to along with the “way of Cain” in Jude 11.

The next day all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, “Ye have killed the people of Jehovah” (Numbers 16:41). God became angry and a plague began to fall on the people. Aaron ran in with a censer to make atonement. He stood between the dead and living and the plague stopped. Fourteen thousand died in the plague (Numbers 16:42-50 DBY). This is another example of the people choosing their own way instead of God’s clear directions. In reacting to God’s judgement of Korah and the others, the people blamed Moses and kept rejecting God’s clearly defined way for their own.

God Rids Himself of the Complaints against Aaron

God instructed Moses to tell the leaders of each tribe to get a rod, twelve rods in all, with the rod of Aaron among them. Then God said

Write each man's name on his rod. And you shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of each father's house. Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you (Numbers 17:2-5).

The next day Moses went into the tabernacle and the rod of Aaron had sprouted and blossomed. He brought the rods out and showed them to the people. Then God said to Moses,

Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die (Numbers 17:10).

The children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying,

Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD must die. Shall we all utterly die? (Numbers 17:12-13).

The people finally realized that the tabernacle was a holy place of God and that only Aaron and the priests whom God had appointed were allowed to minister in it.

The Forty Years

After the children of Israel rebelled in Kadesh, God declared that they would remain in the wilderness for a total of forty years, one for each of the forty days that the twelve men spied out the land. The remaining period was about thirty-eight years. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy focus largely upon the first two years. Those years began and ended in rebellion. This is amazing because of the many signs, wonders, and revelations God gave the children of Israel. They saw His miracles, they saw the pillar of cloud and of fire, they saw His glory, the fiery mountain, and they heard His voice. They were provided with His law written on tablets of stone and they prepared a tabernacle and two altars by which to worship Him. God had given them a priesthood and many wonderful statutes revealing His ways. In the beginning of those first two years God had said to the children of Israel,

*... Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, **nor in any nation**; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you (Exodus 34:10, emphasis added).*

Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deuteronomy 4:6-8).

How could they help but believe? How could they so rebel and turn back to idols? Time and again they revealed that they were following the ways of man.

Little is recorded of the thirty-eight years that followed. They evidently left Kadesh and continued to sojourn in the wilderness. The rebellion of the children of Israel led to death in the wilderness. They failed to enter the promised land. After that generation had died, the new generation returned to Kadesh (Numbers 20:1). Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb were the only

men who remained alive of the previous generation. The New Testament reviews the patience of God as the children of Israel tested Him during the forty years and refused to learn His ways.

*The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. Now **for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness** (Acts 13:17-18, emphasis added).*

*... the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, **do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years.** Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and **they have not known My ways.**' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" (Hebrews 3:7-11, emphasis added).*

The Glory of God and the Rebellion of His People

God brought the children of Israel out of the years of bondage in Egypt into wonderful liberty and freedom, preparing them for entrance as a nation into the promised land. During the first two years of freedom God revealed His power by daily signs and miracles in Egypt and in the wilderness. He revealed His glory in the wilderness by His appearances in the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire and on mount Sinai. God revealed His ways through the Ten Commandments and numerous statutes and had them build a tabernacle and established ways of worshipping Him through various sacrifices.

The children of Israel saw His miracles, they saw His glory, they saw the fiery mountain, they heard His voice, they saw and were taught His ways. How could they help but believe? Did their false gods reveal themselves in any way at all? How could they so rebel and turn back to idols? Their freedom ended in rebellion. Such is the way of man! Sadly, it was also the way of God's own people

Throughout those years the children of Israel continually complained, committed idolatry with a golden calf, and were rebellious, ultimately refusing to enter into the promised land. Hundreds of years later the Psalmist said,

*Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; They tried Me, though they saw My work. **For forty years I was grieved with that generation, And said, "It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways."** So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest." (Psalm 95:6-11, emphasis added).*

The first two years in the wilderness were no doubt the most detailed revelation of God and of His holy ways in the Old Testament. He had developed and called out the nation of Israel to worship and serve Him and to be a blessing to all other nations. They rebelled against God time after time in the years that followed, choosing their ways, the ways of man. Instead of gaining freedom they ended up in a deeper bondage.

Verses in the Psalms and Prophets sum up the revelation of the ways of God and His fury over the disobedience of His people.

***He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel** (Psalm 103:7).*

*Who gave Jacob for plunder, and **Israel** to the robbers? Was it not the LORD, He against whom we have sinned? For **they would not walk in His ways, nor were they obedient to His law.** Therefore He has poured on him the fury of His anger And the strength of battle; It has set him on fire all around, yet he did not know; and it burned him, yet he did not take it to heart (Isaiah 42:24-25).*

A New Generation: New Complaints and New Sins

During the thirty-eight more years that followed, after the children of Israel left Kadesh, they sojourned in various places in the wilderness until all of that generation had died. The only men who remained alive were Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb. Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron was also still living. By now each of them was over one hundred and twenty years in age or older. At that time the new generation returned to Kadesh (Numbers 20:1).

The Death of Miriam

Miriam died at Kadesh and was buried there (Numbers 20:1). There was a lack of water in Kadesh at this time and the new generation began to complain, as their fathers did, to Moses and Aaron saying,

... Would that we had died when our brethren died before Jehovah! And why have ye brought the congregation of Jehovah into this wilderness, that we should die there, we and our beasts? And why have ye made us to go up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates, neither is there any water to drink (Numbers 20:3-5 DBY).

Suddenly the glory of Jehovah appeared. God told Moses to take his staff and speak to the rock that was there and that it would bring forth water.

Moses' Error at Kadesh

Moses and Aaron gathered the people together before the rock. Instead of just speaking to the rock, however, Moses in anger disobeyed God, spoke to the congregation harshly, and struck the rock twice.

... Moses took the staff from before Jehovah, as he had commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said to them, Hear now, ye rebels: shall we bring forth to you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his staff smote the rock twice, and much water came out, and the assembly drank, and their beasts (Numbers 20:9-11 DBY).

Jehovah said to Moses and Aaron,

Because ye believed me not, to hallow me before the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land that I have given them (Numbers 20:12 DBY).

The Scripture refers to this occasion as the waters of Meribah (strife) when the children of Israel contended with Jehovah.

God Commands Moses to Journey around Edom

Kadesh is situated near Mount Seir in Edom and the children of Israel were moving around in this area for many days. Finally, Jehovah spoke to Moses and said,

Ye have gone round this mountain long enough: turn you northward. And command the people, saying, Ye are to pass through the border of your brethren the children of Esau, who dwell in Seir; and they will be afraid of you; and ye shall be very guarded: attack them not; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot-breadth; for I have given mount Seir as possession unto Esau (Deuteronomy 2 :1-5 DBY).

Journeying by Edom and Coming to Mount Hor The Death of Aaron

Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom requesting permission to pass through their land, but the king refused to let them. The children of Israel then bypassed them and came to mount Hor.

Jehovah spoke to Moses at mount Hor and told him to bring Aaron up to the mount to die there because of his part with Moses in rebelling at the waters of Meribah. He was also told to bring Aaron's son Eleazar.

... Moses did as Jehovah had commanded, and they went up mount Hor before the eyes of the whole assembly. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there upon the top of the mountain; and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain (Numbers 20:27-28 DBY).

When the whole assembly saw that Aaron was dead they mourned for him thirty days (Numbers 20:29 DBY).

The Defeat of the King of Arad

When the Canaanite king of Arad heard that Israel was passing by he fought against them and took some of them prisoners. The children of Israel vowed to Jehovah that if He would give the people into their hand that they would destroy them. Jehovah listened and Israel defeated and destroyed their cities. They called the place Hormah (Numbers 21:1-3 DBY).

The Brass Serpent

As they journeyed around from Hor, around Edom, the people became impatient and spoke against God and Moses asking why they had been brought out of Egypt to die. They added that their soul loathed the light bread (manna). God became very angry (Numbers 21:4-5 DBY).

Then Jehovah sent fiery serpents among the people, which bit the people; and much people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, in that we have spoken against Jehovah, and against thee: pray to Jehovah that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And Jehovah said to Moses, Make thee a fiery [serpent], and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, and looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole; and it came to pass, if a serpent had bitten any man, and he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived (Numbers 21:6-9 DBY).

Jesus referred to the brass serpent, likening it to Himself when He would be lifted on the cross so that people might believe on Him and have eternal life (John 3:14-16).

Journeying along the East Border of Moab

The children of Israel journeyed and camped in many places on the east border of Moab (Numbers 21:10-20). While in that area they sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, asking passage through their land.

The Defeat of King Sihon and King Og

Sihon refused to let the children of Israel pass through, gathered his people instead, and came to fight against them. The children of Israel defeated them and took possession of all of their land, from Heshbon to Arnon. They destroyed all of the cities and their high places (Numbers 23:21-32 DBY).

Then the children of Israel turned and went up by the way of Bashan, and Og, king of Bashan came out to battle with them. Jehovah said to Moses,

... Fear him not! for into thy hand have I given him, and all his people, and his land; and thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto Sihon the king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon (Numbers 21:34 DBY).

The children of Israel fought and killed King Og and all his people. They left him with no one remaining, and took possession of his land (Numbers 21:35 DBY).

Balak, the king of Moab, Seeks to Curse Israel The Error of Balaam

The children of Israel journeyed on and camped in the plains of Moab, across the Jordan River from Jericho. When Balak, the king, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites he was afraid and sent messengers to Balaam the prophet and promised that he would reward him if he would curse Israel. Balaam responded by saying he would have to ask God. God forbade him to go and curse the people but ultimately he disobeyed and went anyway, even though an angel was sent to stop him. Balaam was then told to speak only the things commanded by God (Numbers 22:1-35).

When Balaam arrived in Moab Balak met him and took Balaam to the high places of Baal where he could see the people of Israel (Numbers 22:36-41 DBY). During this time Balak took Balaam to four different high places in an effort to get Balaam to curse the children of Israel. At each place Balaam prepared sacrifices for God and then prophesied. He promised to tell Balak what God would tell him. God put words in his mouth and instead of cursing the people he blessed them, angering Balak (Numbers 23 & 24). It appears at first that Balaam was a true prophet of God but it becomes clear that he used sorcery (Numbers 23:23, 24:1). Balaam also gave counsel to the Moabites and Midianites to trespass against Jehovah, causing the children of Israel to sin (Numbers 25:1-18, 31:16, Joshua 13:22, 24:9-10, Nehemiah 13:1-2). The New Testament refers to him as loving the wages of unrighteousness (II Peter 2:15) and running greedily in error for profit (Jude 11). Finally, Jesus revealed to the church of Pergamos, what Balaam taught Balak.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality (Revelation 2:14).

The Children of Israel Commit Fornication and Idolatry

God prevented Balaam from cursing Israel and caused him to bless them instead. Israel had defeated two kings, Sihon and Og and two and a half tribes had asked to occupy their land. As they continued camping near Moab, the daughters of Moab and Midian enticed them to commit fornication with them and to worship their gods. They joined themselves to Baal-Peor and Jehovah became very angry and began to slay all of them with a plague (Numbers 25:1-5). One Israelite brazenly brought a Midianite woman openly into his tent. Phinehas, the son Eleazer, the son of Aaron took a javelin and killed both of them and the plague stopped. Twenty-four thousand were killed at that time (Numbers 25:6-9).

The children of Israel at this time broke two commandments, to have no other gods except Jehovah and not to commit adultery.

Vengeance on the Midianites

God told Moses to take vengeance on the Midianites. The Israelites made war against them, and

killed all five of their kings and burned their cities. They also killed Balaam (Numbers 31:1-8). They took the women captive, however, and Moses became angry saying,

... Have you kept all the women alive? Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD. Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately. But keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately (Numbers 31:15-18).

In their zeal the children of Israel were drawn into the enticement and the counsel of Balaam. They compromised and angered Moses.

Tribes Settling East of the Jordan

Two tribes, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh requested their inheritance be on the east side of Jordan, the land they had conquered from Sihon and Og. Moses told them that if the men of war agreed to cross Jordan and help in the conquest of Canaan that they could leave their families to settle there. At that time God gave the children of Israel instructions for the conquest of Canaan and guidelines relative to tribal boundaries and other laws and statutes (Numbers 31 to 36). God began to reveal His ways relative to the entry into Canaan.

Moses is Forbidden to Enter the Land

Moses had angered God at the waters of Meribah when he disobeyed God in striking the rock and speaking rashly to the people, and God told him that he would not bring the children of Israel into the land (Numbers 20:9-12). God told Moses that Joshua would go in instead (Deuteronomy 1:37-38). Later Moses pleaded with God but God refused his request. Even Moses had to obey God's way.

Lord Jehovah, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy powerful hand; for what God is in the heavens or in the earth that can do like to thy works, and like to thy might? Let me go over, I pray thee, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But Jehovah was wroth with me on your account, and did not hear me; and Jehovah said to me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter! Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes; for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall put them in possession of the land which thou shalt see (Deuteronomy 3:24-28 DBY).

A Review of the Wilderness Years and the Laws of God

The first thirty-three chapters in the book of Deuteronomy are a review of the first two years in the wilderness. God had told them at Sinai,

Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you (Exodus 34:10, emphasis added).

Moses reminded the Israelites of the greatness of their God and of their nation. They were given new instructions relative to warfare and worship. The new generation was also reminded to obey God and to walk in the ways of Jehovah when they entered into the promised land.

And ye shall keep and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding before the eyes of the peoples that shall hear all these statutes, and say, Verily this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that hath God near to them as Jehovah our God is in everything we call upon him for? And what great nation is there that hath righteous statutes and ordinances, as all

this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things that thine eyes have seen (and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but thou shalt make them known to thy sons and to thy sons' sons), the day that thou stoodest before Jehovah thy God in Horeb, when Jehovah said to me, Gather me the people together, that I may cause them to hear my words, that they may learn them, and fear me all the days that they live upon the earth, and teach them to their children. And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and obscurity. And Jehovah spoke to you from the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but ye saw no form; only [ye heard] a voice (Deuteronomy 4:6-12 DBY, emphasis added).

The Ten Commandments and other statutes were reviewed and their many times of rebellion. They were to beware of false gods. Finally, the people were told that they would be blessed if they obeyed Jehovah and were warned that they would be cursed if they did not (Deuteronomy 5 through 28). One of most severe curses was that if they did not obey Him the nation would go into captivity.

*Sons and daughters shalt thou beget, but thou shalt not have them to be with thee; for they shall go into captivity. All thy trees and the fruit of thy ground shall the locust possess. The sojourner that is in thy midst shall rise above thee higher and higher, and thou shalt sink down lower and lower. He shall lend to thee, but thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail. And **all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, until thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of Jehovah thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee.** And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever. Because thou servedst not Jehovah thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, thou shalt serve thine enemies whom Jehovah will send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of everything; and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. **Jehovah will bring a nation against thee from afar, from the end of the earth, like as the eagle flieth, a nation whose tongue thou understandest not; a nation of fierce countenance, which regardeth not the person of the old, nor is kind to the young; and he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy ground, until thou be destroyed; for he shall not leave thee corn, new wine, or oil, offspring of thy kine, or increase of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and strong walls wherein thou trustedst come down, throughout all thy land; and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates in all thy land, which Jehovah thy God hath given thee** (Deuteronomy 28:41-52 DBY, emphasis added).*

Jehovah God promised, however, that He would gather them again, if they turned back to Him in the nations where they were held captive.

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt take them to heart among all the nations whither Jehovah thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return to Jehovah thy God, and shalt hearken to his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy sons, with all thy heart and with all thy soul; that **then Jehovah thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will gather thee again from all the peoples whither Jehovah thy God hath scattered thee** (Deuteronomy 30:1-3 DBY, emphasis added).

God told Moses, just before he died, that the children of Israel would forsake Him and turn to the gods of the land they were entering.

... Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, "Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?" And I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they have done, in that they have turned to other gods (Deuteronomy 31:16-18).

Moses gave a final blessing on Israel before he died, **praising God.**

There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, Who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; He will thrust out the enemy from before you, and will say, "Destroy!" Then Israel shall dwell in safety, the fountain of Jacob alone, in a land of grain and new wine; His heavens shall also drop dew. Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places (Deuteronomy 33:26-29).

After giving his final blessing God told Moses to go up to Mount Abarim and bring Joshua with him. He instructed him regarding Joshua, who would lead the children of Israel in the land of Canaan. The account is as follows:

*And Jehovah said to Moses, **Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land that I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy peoples, as Aaron thy brother was gathered, because ye rebelled against my word in the wilderness of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, as to hallowing me in the matter of the water before their eyes. (That is the water of Meribah at Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.) And Moses spoke to Jehovah, saying, Let Jehovah, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the assembly, who may go out before them, and who may come in before them, and who may lead them out, and who may bring them in, that the assembly of Jehovah be not as sheep that have no shepherd. And Jehovah said to Moses, **Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and thou shalt lay thy hand upon him; and thou shalt set him before Eleazar the priest, and before the whole assembly; and give him commandment before their eyes. And thou shalt put of thine honour upon him, that the whole assembly of the children of Israel may obey him. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him, by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, he, and all the children of Israel with him, even the whole assembly. And Moses did as Jehovah had commanded him; and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before the whole assembly. And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him commandment, as Jehovah had said through Moses***** (Numbers 27:12-23 DBY, emphasis added).

The Death of Moses

After giving his final blessing Moses went up to Mount Nebo and Jehovah showed him the whole land. He told him that this was the land He swore unto Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and that He would give it to them and their descendants. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. Jehovah buried him there (Deuteronomy 34:1-7). His eulogy follows.

... there arose no prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom Jehovah had known face to face; according to all the signs and wonders that Jehovah had sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land; and according to all that mighty hand; and according to all the great terribleness that Moses had wrought in the sight of all Israel (Deuteronomy 34:10-12 DBY).

Jehovah executeth righteousness and justice for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel (Psalms 103:6-7 DBY, emphasis added)

Moses is referred to over eight hundred times in the Old Testament and eighty times in the New Testament. He was truly a man of God, walking in the ways of God.

Joshua, the New Leader

Moses died and Joshua and Caleb were the only living men remaining of the previous generation. Jehovah God told Moses before he died that Joshua would lead the children of Israel as they entered into and lived in the land of Canaan.

*... **Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him; and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as Jehovah had commanded Moses*** (Deuteronomy 34:9 DBY, emphasis added).

The Fortieth Year

The new generation continued in the ways of man contrary to the ways of God. It began with Moses' error at Kadesh and God not allowing him to enter the promised land. Even after God gave them a victory over the king of Arad the people began to speak against God and Moses and said they loathed the manna. God, in His anger sent deadly snakes among them and many died. God, however had Moses make a brass serpent and those who were bitten and looked at it were healed. After God gave them the victory over King Sihon and King Og they fell into the sins of idolatry and adultery at Moab. The period ends with the death of Moses and the prediction that the children of Israel would forsake God for idols after his death.

The way of God, however, and His purpose for the children of Israel, is not diminished as He instructs Joshua in regard to the conquest and possession of the Promised Land.

God spoke to Joshua and said, *"Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life ..."* (Joshua 1:1-5).

The Promised Land: Victory and Defeat

Seven nations occupied the Promised Land. In addition, there were numerous kings because each city had a king. The children of Israel had been instructed by God relative to the conquest and possession of the land when they came out of Egypt (Exodus 34:10-16) and again before crossing the Jordan. They were to totally destroy the nations and their forms of worship.

When Jehovah thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and shall cast out many nations from before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou, and when Jehovah thy God shall give them up before thee and thou shalt smite them, then shalt thou utterly destroy them: thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them. And thou shalt make no marriages with them: thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor take his daughter for thy son; for he will turn away thy son from following me, and they will serve other gods, and the anger of Jehovah will be kindled against you, and he will destroy thee quickly. But thus shall ye deal with them: ye shall break down their altars, and shatter their statues, and hew down their Asherahs, and burn their graven images with fire (Deuteronomy 7:1-5 DBY, emphasis added).

These were the only nations God designated for total destruction. Why was God's judgment more severe for them? Evidently their wickedness was more abominable than that of other nations (Deuteronomy 18:12, 20:18). Some have questioned God's action, presuming that many innocent people, especially children were unjustly condemned. God, however, foreknows the hearts of people, whether they will believe in Him or not. God also foreknew that if the nations were not totally destroyed they would lead His people into idolatry.

Joshua: The New Leader

Joshua had become the new leader of the children of Israel. He and Caleb were the only men of war who remained alive of the previous generation who perished in the wilderness. After the death of Moses God said to Joshua,

... Moses my servant is dead; and now, rise up, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, into the land which I give unto them, to the children of Israel. Every place whereon the sole of your foot shall tread have I given to you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon to the great river, the river Euphrates, the whole land of the Hittites, to the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your border. None shall be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee; I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee. Be strong and courageous, for thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land which I have sworn unto their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that thou mayest take heed to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded thee. Turn not from it to the right or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart from thy mouth; and thou shalt meditate upon it day and night, that thou mayest take heed to do according to all that is written therein; for then shalt thou have good success in thy ways, and then shalt thou prosper. Have I not commanded thee: Be strong and courageous? Be not afraid, neither be dismayed; for Jehovah thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:2-9 DBY, emphasis added).

Joshua commanded the people to prepare themselves, for in three days they would cross over Jordan into the land to possess it. The men of war of the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh were to leave their families behind until the conquest was completed. All of the Israelites agreed to obey Joshua (Joshua 1:10-18).

The Two Spies

Joshua sent two spies into the land and Jericho. After entering Jericho they stayed at a harlot's house named Rahab. The king of Jericho learned of them and laid out plans for their capture. Rahab hid them and helped them escape. Before they left she told the spies,

I know that Jehovah has given you the land, and that the dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard that Jehovah dried up the waters of the Red sea before you when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and to Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. We heard [of it], and our heart melted, and there remained no more spirit in any man because of you; for Jehovah your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. And now, I pray you, swear to me by Jehovah, since I have dealt kindly with you, that ye will also deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a certain sign, that ye will let my father live, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that belong to them, and deliver our souls from death (Joshua 2: 9-13 DBY, emphasis added).

The men promised to deal kindly with her family and she let them down by a scarlet cord through a window on the wall of Jericho. They told Rahab to bind the scarlet cord in the window. The spies safely returned to Joshua and reported that the inhabitants of the whole land were afraid because of them (Joshua 2:14-24).

The Crossing of Jordan into the Promised Land

God instructed Joshua relative to the crossing of the Jordan River. Joshua told the people to hallow themselves for God would do wonders in their midst. God had also said that He would begin to magnify Joshua in the sight of Israel that they might know that as He was with Moses so He would be with him (Joshua 3:1-7). Then Joshua said to the children of Israel,

... Come hither, and hear the words of Jehovah your God ... Hereby shall ye know that the living God is in your midst, and [that] he will without fail dispossess from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites (Joshua 3:9-10 DBY).

The priests were instructed to carry the ark of the covenant to the river's edge. When they stepped into the river the water ceased flowing and backed up into a heap upriver. The priests and the ark stayed in the midst of the river until all of the people had crossed over on dry land (Joshua 3:13-17). Because they followed God's commands the people easily crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land.

On that day Jehovah magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they had feared Moses, all the days of his life (Joshua 4:14 DBY).

The children of Israel came up out of the Jordan and camped at Gilgal, on the eastern side of Jericho (Joshua 4:19). When all of the kings of the land heard that Jehovah had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the children of Israel they were petrified with fear (Joshua 5:1).

The Captain of the Army of Jehovah

When Joshua went over near Jericho from Gilgal, he looked up and saw a man with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and asked, "Art thou for us, or for our enemies?" He answered, "No; for [as] captain of the army of Jehovah am I now come." Joshua fell on his face and worshipped. He was told to take off his shoes for the place was holy (Joshua 5:13-15 DBY). At this time Jericho was shut up and barred because of the children of Israel. Jehovah said to Joshua,

... See, I have given into thy hand Jericho, and the king thereof, [and] the valiant men. And ye shall go round the city, all the men of war, encompassing the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall carry before the ark seven blast-trumpets; and on the seventh day ye shall go round the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass when they make a long blast with the blast-horn, that all the people on hearing the sound of the trumpet shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall flat, and the people shall go up, each one straight before him (Joshua 6:1-5 DBY).

Joshua instructed the priests and the men of war according to God's word and they did as they were commanded the first six days (Joshua 6:6-14).

The Destruction of Jericho

On the seventh day the children of Israel marched around Jericho seven times, the trumpeters made a long blast, and Joshua said to the people, "Shout, for Jehovah has given you the city" (Joshua 6:15-16 DBY). The people shouted, the wall of the city fell flat, and they went straight up, took the city, destroying and burning it. God said that the city would be accursed and warned the people against taking anything lest they also be cursed. Rahab and her family were saved and became part of the people of Israel (Joshua 6:17-25).

The Scripture continues by stating that Jehovah was with Joshua; and his fame was in all the land (Joshua 6:27 DBY). The children of Israel had victory because they obeyed the way of God. One man, however, trespassed regarding the accursed things and brought disaster at Ai.

The Sin of Achan and Defeat at Ai

After destroying Jericho about three thousand Israelites went up to attack the city of Ai and were defeated. Thirty-six men were killed. When Joshua inquired of God he was told that there had been a transgression against His commandment. Upon examination it was discovered that a man named Achan had committed the transgression. Achan confessed saying that he had taken a Babylonian garment, some silver, and some gold and hid it in his tent. As a result he and his family were stoned. Then God turned from His anger and the children of Israel were then able to conquer and destroy both Ai and Bethel (Joshua 7 and 8). Disobedience of God's way by just one man had resulted in their first defeat. God's way was the only way to victory.

The Deceit of the Gibeonites

When all the kings in the area heard about the destruction of Jericho, Ai, and Bethel they began gathering together to fight Joshua and Israel. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Gibeon, a city in Canaan, worked craftily and deceived the Israelites. They sent ambassadors to Gilgal saying they were from a far country seeking peace. Joshua and the other leaders, tragically, failed to inquire of Jehovah and made a covenant with them and swore an oath to let them live (Joshua 9:1-15 DBY). They discovered later that Gibeon was a city in the land. Because of the oath they did not destroy a city that was included with those to be destroyed. The Gibeonites were made water carriers and wood hewers for the congregation instead (Joshua 9:16-27 DBY). By not inquiring of Jehovah the Israelites failed to follow the way of God and the Gibeonites proved to be a problem to them for hundreds and hundreds of years.

The Conquest of Canaan

Joshua led two major campaigns in the land of Canaan, the first in the South and the second in the North. The first campaign began when the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon heard about the Gibeonites and joined forces to destroy it. The men of Gibeon asked

the Israelites to come and save them (Joshua 10:1-6). Joshua and the men of war went up from Gilgal to defend Gibeon and to fight the kings.

Jehovah told him not to fear for not a man would stand before them. As the Israelites fought and chased the armies of the kings there was a great slaughter. Jehovah also cast great hailstones upon them. While their enemies were fleeing Joshua called upon Jehovah and said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!" (Joshua 10:7-12 DBY). The sun and the moon stood still for a whole day until the battle was over.

And the sun stood still, and the moon remained where it was, until the nation had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? And the sun remained standing in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a full day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that Jehovah hearkened to the voice of a man; for Jehovah fought for Israel (Joshua 10:13-14 DBY).

God fought for the children of Israel and they won a great victory that day. Then they returned to Gilgal. Later it was learned that the five kings had hidden themselves in the cave at Makkedah. Joshua had his men roll great stones in the mouth of the cave, and later put the kings to death (Joshua 10:15-28).

In the days that followed Joshua attacked the cities of Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Gezer, Eglon, Horam, Debir and other cities and destroyed all the inhabitants (Joshua 10:29-39).

... Joshua smote the whole country, the mountain, and the south, and the lowland, and the hill-slopes, and all their kings: he let none remain, but he utterly destroyed all that breathed, as Jehovah the God of Israel had commanded. And Joshua smote them from Kadesh-barnea even to Gazah, and all the country of Goshen, even to Gibeon; and all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time; for Jehovah the God of Israel fought for Israel. And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp, to Gilgal (Joshua 10:40-43 DBY).

After finishing the southern campaign Joshua returned with his army to the camp at Gilgal. The campaign ended in victory as they obeyed the way of Jehovah and He fought for them. A few days later the northern campaign began.

When Jabin, the king of Hazor in the north, heard of the victories he sent messages to the other kings in the northern area and they gathered a huge army of horses and chariots and met at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel (Joshua 11:1-5). God told Joshua not to be afraid for He would give all of them up, slain before Israel. Joshua and the men of war came upon them suddenly and slew them and chased them until none were left. They hamstrung the horses and burned the chariots. Joshua and the men of war returned and took all of the cities, burned them, and killed all of the people. Joshua did not fail in anything that Jehovah had commanded Moses and passed on to him (Joshua 11:6-15). After the two main battle campaigns Joshua continued conquering the land for a long time.

... Joshua took all that land, the mountain and all the south, and all the land of Goshen, and the lowland, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and its lowland; from the smooth mountain, which rises toward Seir, as far as Baal-Gad in the valley of Lebanon, at the foot of mount Hermon; and he took all their kings, and smote them, and put them to death. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings (Joshua 11:16-18 DBY).

All of the kings made war against the children of Israel. None of the cities made peace with them except the Gibeonites. Joshua took the whole land, as Jehovah had said to Moses and the land rested from war (Joshua 11:23). Thirty-one kings had been conquered (Joshua 12).

The Division of the Land as Inheritance to the Tribes of Israel

Joshua had grown old and Jehovah God told him that there remained very much land to be

possessed. He told Joshua that He would dispossess the people in the land before the Israelites but that they were to partition it by lot for an inheritance at this time. The land was to be divided between the nine and a half tribes settling on the west side of the Jordan River. Two and a half tribes had previously inherited the land on the east side (Joshua 13:1-7 DBY). The tribe of Levi, however, was given no inheritance for Jehovah the God of Israel was their inheritance (Joshua 13:33 DBY). They were given cities to dwell in (Joshua 14:4).

Caleb came to Joshua and reminded him of what Jehovah had said to them at Kadesh-Barnea after they had spied out the land, and how they wholly followed Jehovah when the others rebelled against entering the land. Caleb said that he was promised that he would inherit the land where his feet had trodden (Joshua 14:1-9 DBY). Then Caleb said,

And now behold, Jehovah has kept me alive, as he said, these forty-five years, since Jehovah spoke this word to Moses, when Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still this day strong, as in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in. And now give me this mountain, of which Jehovah spoke in that day; for thou heardest in that day that Anakim are there, and great fortified cities. If so be Jehovah shall be with me, then I shall dispossess them, as Jehovah said (Joshua 14:10-12 DBY).

Caleb was now eighty-five, indicating that the children of Israel had now been in the land making war for five years. Joshua blessed Caleb and gave him the city of Hebron. At this time the land was resting from war (Joshua 14:13-15).

The first lot was given to the children of Judah, describing the borders of the land. Caleb's inheritance was in the land of Judah. On one of Judah's borders was the city of Jebus, or Jerusalem. The children of Judah could not dispossess the Jebusites and the Scriptures go on to say that they dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem to this day (Joshua 15:1-63).

The next lot came for the children of Joseph; Manasseh and Ephraim. They also did not dispossess all of the Canaanites and they too dwelt in their midst (Joshua 16:1-10). Later they complained to Joshua that they did not have enough land and had to live in the hill country because the Canaanites were in the valleys and had chariots of iron. Joshua told them that they could dispossess them even so (Joshua 17:1-17).

All of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh, and set up the Tent of Meeting there. The land at this time was subdued. Seven of the tribes had not yet had their inheritance distributed to them. Joshua again cast lots for them. This included the tribes of Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. After ending the dividing of the land, an inheritance was given to Joshua. Eleazar the priest, Joshua, and the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel finished distributing the land by lot in Shiloh before Jehovah, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (Joshua 18:1 through 19:51).

Cities of refuge were appointed as places for men to flee as they awaited judgment after killing a man (Joshua 20). Forty-eight cities were also given to the Levites within the possessions of the children of Israel (Joshua 21:1-42). The promises of Jehovah God were kept.

And Jehovah gave to Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they took possession of it, and dwelt in it. And Jehovah gave them rest round about, according to all that he had sworn unto their fathers; and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them: Jehovah gave all their enemies into their hand. There failed nothing of all the good things that Jehovah had spoken to the house of Israel: all came to pass (Joshua 21:43-45 DBY).

Two and a Half Tribes Return to their Land

Joshua called the men of war of the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh and commended them for keeping the commands of Moses and of himself. Joshua told them to return

to the land of their possession on the other side of the Jordan (Joshua 22:1-4). He challenged them to keep the commandments and the law.

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*Only, take great heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of Jehovah commanded you, to love **Jehovah your God**, and to **walk in all his ways**, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul* (Joshua 22:5 DBY, emphasis added).

Joshua blessed them and sent them away.

Joshua's Farewell Words to Israel

Approximately twenty years passed after God had given Israel rest from their enemies, and Joshua had become old. He called the leaders together and reminded them of what Jehovah had done to the other nations, how He had fought for them, and that land had been divided between the tribes, and the nations cut off (Joshua 23:1-4 DBY). Joshua added,

... And Jehovah your God, he will expel them from before you, and dispossess them from out of your sight; and ye shall take possession of their land, as Jehovah your God hath said unto you (Joshua 23:5 DBY, emphasis added).

The land had essentially been conquered but many of Israel's enemies remained in the various areas that they were now going in to possess and settle. The land had been given to them and they were now to take possession of it as Jehovah their God had said. There were still battles to be fought by the tribe as they entered into these lands. Joshua instructed them relative to future battles before them. Joshua was calling on the people to continue following God and His ways.

*And be ye very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left; that ye enter not among these nations, these that remain among you; and ye shall make no mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear [by them], neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them; but ye shall cleave unto Jehovah your God, as ye have done unto this day. For Jehovah hath dispossessed from before you great and strong nations; and as to you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. One man of you chaseth a thousand; for **Jehovah your God, he it is that fighteth for you**, as he hath said unto you.* (Joshua 23:6-10 DBY, emphasis added).

Joshua also warned them that Jehovah would not dispossess the nations if the Israelites did not follow His way and began to mix with the people of the various nations.

Take great heed therefore unto your souls, that ye love Jehovah your God. For if ye in any wise go back, and cleave unto the residue of these nations, these that remain among you, and make marriages with them, and come in unto them and they unto you: know for a certainty that Jehovah your God will no more dispossess these nations from before you, and they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which Jehovah your God hath given you. (Joshua 23:11-13 DBY, emphasis added).

Joshua informed the people that he was about to die and reminded them that not one thing failed of the words Jehovah God has spoken to them.

And behold, I am going this day the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your heart, and in all your soul, that not one thing hath failed of all the good words that Jehovah your God hath spoken concerning you: all are come to pass unto you--not one thing hath failed thereof. But it shall come to pass, that as

*every good word hath been fulfilled to you, that Jehovah your God spoke to you, so will Jehovah bring upon you every evil word, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which Jehovah your God hath given you; **when ye transgress the covenant of Jehovah your God which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods, and bow yourselves unto them, so that the anger of Jehovah shall be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you** (Joshua 23:14-16 DBY, emphasis added).*

Joshua warned the Israelites not to transgress the covenant of God and serve other gods and of the consequences if they did so.

The Covenant at Shechem

After addressing the leaders, Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel together again at Shechem and reminded them of how Jehovah had given them a land and cities, for which they did not labor, according to His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He told them to fear Jehovah and serve Him in sincerity and truth (Joshua 24:1-14 DBY). Then he said,

*And now fear Jehovah and serve him in perfectness and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the river, and in Egypt; and serve Jehovah. And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, **choose you this day whom ye will serve**; whether the gods whom your fathers that were on the other side of the river served, or the gods of the Amorite, in whose land ye dwell; but **as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah** (Joshua 24:14-15 DBY, emphasis added).*

The people answered and said,

... Far be it from us that we should forsake Jehovah, to serve other gods; for Jehovah our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did those great signs before our eyes, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed! And Jehovah drove out from before us all the peoples, and the Amorites the inhabitants of the land: so therefore we will serve Jehovah, for he is our God (Joshua 24:16-18 DBY).

Then Joshua said, “Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you Jehovah, to serve Him. And they said, “We are witnesses.” So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem (Joshua 24:22-25 DBY).

The Death of Joshua

Sometime after, Joshua, the servant of Jehovah died at a hundred and ten years old and was buried near Mount Ephraim. It is said of the children of Israel,

And Israel served Jehovah all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders whose days were prolonged after Joshua, and who had known all the works of Jehovah, which he had done for Israel (Joshua 24:31 DBY).

During the years of Joshua in the land of Canaan the children of Israel served Jehovah. This period appears to have lasted about twenty-five years. The children of Israel enjoyed victory after victory when they followed the ways of God as He fought for them. Defeat came at Ai when Achan sinned and transgressed the way of God. The Israelites failed to conquer Gibeon because they failed to inquire of God when they were deceived by them. These victories and failures were clear lessons to the Israelites of the difference between God’s plan and man’s ways. Only two men who came out of Egypt, Joshua and Caleb, inherited cities in the promised land because they had fully followed the way of God.

Before he died Joshua said, “put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel.” And the people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!” So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God” (Joshua 24:23-27).

Doing What is Right in Their Own Sight The Times of the Judges

The children of Israel had been allotted their inheritance and each tribe had begun to go and possess their inherited land. There were still many inhabitants remaining in the land who had not been destroyed so it was necessary for them to fight against them. Each of the tribes failed to completely destroy the enemy or conquer many of the cities. One of the cities they failed to conquer was Jerusalem which was occupied by the Jebusites. Caleb, however, succeeded in conquering Hebron (Judges 1:1-36).

One day the Angel of Jehovah came to a certain place and reminded the children of Israel that He had brought them out of Egypt to the land He had sworn to their fathers. He told them that He had said that they were to make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land and that their altars were to be thrown down (Judges 2:1-2). Then He said,

*... but ye have not hearkened unto my voice. Why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, **I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be [scourges] in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you** (Judges 2:2-3 DBY, emphasis added).*

When the Angel of Jehovah had spoken these words to the children of Israel all the people lifted up their voices and wept. Later, they called the name of the place Bochim (weeping); and they sacrificed there to Jehovah (Judges 2:4-5).

A New Generation Arose that did not Know Jehovah

After Joshua and the elders that lived after him died a new generation arose that did not know Jehovah nor of the works He had done for them (Judges 2:8-10).

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and served the Baals. And they forsook Jehovah the God of their fathers, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods of the gods of the peoples that were round about them, and bowed themselves to them, and provoked Jehovah to anger. And they forsook Jehovah, and served Baal and the Ashtoreths (Judges 2:11-13 DBY).

God became very angry against them and delivered them into the hands of their enemies as He had sworn He would do if they did not follow Him. As the Israelites became greatly distressed Jehovah raised up judges as deliverers to save them from their enemies. They did not, however listen to them (Judges 2:14-17 DBY).

*But they did not even hearken to their judges, for they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves to them; **they turned quickly out of the way that their fathers had walked in**, obeying the commandments of Jehovah; they did not so (Judges 2:17 DBY, emphasis added).*

Time after time Jehovah raised up judges but after each judge died the Israelites turned back and corrupted themselves more than their fathers. They followed other gods and ceased not from their **stubborn way** (Judges 2:18-19 DBY). Finally God said,

***I also will not henceforth dispossess from before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died; that through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of Jehovah to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not** (Judges 2:21-22 DBY, emphasis added).*

As the years passed the children of Israel lived among the Canaanites and took their daughters as wives. They did evil, forgot Jehovah their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs and God delivered them into the hand of the king of Mesopotamia. The people cried out to Him

and God raised up Caleb's nephew Othniel as a judge. He made war against the king and the land had rest for forty years (Judges 3:1-11).

The Leadership of the Judges

God raised up other judges when the Israelites cried to Him while under the oppression of different enemies. Judges led Israel from time to time for over four hundred years. During that period, twelve judges led the children of Israel, beginning with Othniel and ending with Samson. Eli and Samuel also served as judges until the time of the kings. After each judge died, according to the Scriptures, the people returned again would to do evil in the sight of Jehovah.

Some of the most prominent judges were Ehud (Judges 3), Deborah (Judges 4 & 5), and Gideon (Judges 6 through 8), who were used of God to gain great victories over various nations who oppressed Israel. Jehovah was with each judge and worked many miracles for them during their battles. After defeating the Midianites the men of Israel asked Gideon to be their ruler.

And the men of Israel said to Gideon, Rule over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also; for thou hast saved us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: Jehovah will rule over you (Judges 8:22-23 DBY).

Afterward Gideon made an unwise request. He asked the Israelites to give of their spoils of golden earrings, made an ephod of them, and set it up in his city, Ophrah. It became a snare to him and his house because all Israel "went a-whoring after it" (Judges 8:24-27 DBY). Gideon died and once again the Israelites turned back to the Baals and did not remember Jehovah their God and were delivered to their enemies on every side (Judges 8:32-34 DBY).

Abimelech the Son of Gideon is Made King

Gideon had seventy sons, one of whom was the son of a concubine from Shechem. His name was Abimelech. He asked the people of Shechem if it was better to have the seventy sons of his father to rule over them or one man. They followed Abimelech and he went and killed all of his brothers except Jotham. Then the citizens of Shechem made him king (Judges 9:1-6).

Jotham cursed Abimelech and after three years, he was killed during a battle with a city when a woman cast a stone from a tower on his head (Judges 9:7-57). The whole event was another example of the children of Israel going the way of man in disobedience instead of obeying God.

The Vow of Jephthah

The children of Israel again did evil and served the Baals and the gods of all of the people in the lands around them and forsook Jehovah. He was angered and sold them into the hands of Philistines and the Ammonites who oppressed the Israelites (Judges 10:6-8).

The people of Ammon passed over the Jordan to fight Israel and greatly oppressed them. Then the Israelites cried to Jehovah and said, "We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served the Baals" (Judges 10:10 DBY). God told them to go and cry to the gods they had chosen and let them save you in the time of your trouble (Judges 10:11-14). The children of Israel confessed their sins and turned again to Jehovah.

And the children of Israel said to Jehovah, We have sinned. Do thou unto us according to all that is good in thy sight; only deliver us, we pray thee, this day. And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served Jehovah; and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel (Judges 10:15-16 DBY).

Meanwhile the Ammonites were gathered in Gilead and the Israelites were gathered in Mizpeh seeking a **man to be their head and fight against** the Ammonites (Judges 10:17-18). They

found such a man in Jephthah who was a mighty man of valour (Judges 11:1 DBY). The Israelites went to him and said, “Come, and be our captain, that we may fight against the children of Ammon” (Judges 11:6 DBY). He agreed if they would make him their head. He became their head and captain, and Jephthah “uttered all his words before Jehovah in Mizpah” (Judges 11:7-11 DBY).

Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites asking why he came to fight against the children of Israel. The king of the Ammonites answered by saying that Israel had taken away his land when they came out of Egypt and that they should now restore it peaceably. Jephthah replied with a three hundred year history of the children of Israel and their conflicts with various nations, none of which were with the Ammonites. He said that Israel had not sinned against the Ammonites and that they were wrong to war against Israel, but the king would not hear his words (Judges 11:12-28 DBY). The Spirit of Jehovah came upon Jephthah and he passed over to fight with the children of Ammon. Then he vowed a vow to Jehovah and said,

... If thou wilt without fail give the children of Ammon into my hand, then shall that which cometh forth from the door of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, be Jehovah's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering (Judges 11:30-31 DBY)..

Jehovah God gave Jephthah and the Israelites victory over the Ammonites. When Jephthah returned home his daughter came out to meet him. When he saw her he rent his garments, telling her of his oath and saying he had opened his mouth to Jehovah and could not go back. It appears from the Scriptures that he did fulfill his vow. If so, what a tragedy (Judges 11:32-40 DBY). After Jephthah died God gave the Israelites three more judges (Judges 12).

Samson and the Philistines

Once again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of Jehovah and He gave them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years (Judges 13:1 DBY). One day an angel came to the wife of Manoah and said to her,

... Behold now, thou art barren and bearest not; but thou shalt conceive and bear a son. And now beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat nothing unclean. For lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son, and no razor shall come on his head; for the boy shall be a Nazarite of God from the womb; and he shall begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines (Judges 13:3-5 DBY).

After several encounters with the angel Manoah and his wife understood that the son to be born was to be a Nazarite and would be used of God to give the Israelites deliverance from the Philistines.

As God had promised the woman bore a son, and called his name Samson. And the child grew, and Jehovah blessed him. And the Spirit of Jehovah began to move him at Mahaneh-Dan, between Zoreah and Eshtaol (Judges 13:24-25 DBY).

As Samson moved among the Philistines he saw a woman and wanted her for his wife. When he told his parents they tried to persuade him to take a wife of the children of Israel, but he insisted otherwise. Samson was an extremely strong man as the Spirit of Jehovah moved upon him. One day, on his way to see the Philistine woman, he killed a lion with his bare hands. Later he posed a riddle to the Philistines relative to the incident at his wedding feast. They coaxed the answer from his new wife, angering Samson. The Spirit of God came upon him and he took revenge, killing thirty of them. Meanwhile his wife was given to another man (Judges 14:1-20 DBY). This began a war between Samson and the Philistines.

When Samson found out he caught three hundred jackals, tied torches to their tails and burned the Philistines' cornfields and gardens. Then the Philistines burned his wife and her father with fire. Samson avenged himself and killed Philistines with a great slaughter and went down to Etam. The Philistines threatened the Israelites and persuaded them to bind Samson with new cords and bring him to Lehi. When the Philistines saw Samson they began to shout against him (Judges 15:1-14 DBY). Jehovah, however, was with him.

... the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him, and the cords that were on his arms became as threads of flax that are burned with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand and took it, and slew with it a thousand men (Judges 15:14-15 DBY)

Samson won a miraculous victory that day by the Spirit of Jehovah and judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years (Judges 15:16-20 DBY).

The Triumphant Death of Samson

After a time Samson fell in love with a woman name Delilah. The Philistines offered her a great deal of money if she could find out the secret of Samson's strength. She enticed him over and over again but he gave her a variety of answers. Finally he grew tired of her pleading and told her that he was a Nazarite and that his strength was in his hair. He said that if it was shaved off that he would be as weak as any other man. She lulled him to sleep and called a man and had him shave Samson's head. He awoke after she called in the Philistines. His strength was gone for Jehovah had departed from him and was easily seized. They put out his eyes, bound him and had him grind in the prison at Gaza. While there his hair began to grow again (Judges 16:4-22 DBY).

One day the Philistines gathered together to sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice because they said that their god had given Samson their enemy into their hands. The people called for Samson to make sport of him. They had placed him between the two main pillars of their temple. Samson played before them as all of the people in the temple and over three thousand people watched from the roof. (Judges 16:23-27 DBY).

While he was being mocked Samson called upon Jehovah and said,

... Lord Jehovah, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may take one vengeance upon the Philistines for my two eyes (Judges 16:28 DBY).

Samson took hold of the two middle pillars on which the temple stood and said, "Let me die with the Philistines" and bowed himself with all his might. The temple fell on all the people slaying more in his death than Samson had slain during his life (Judges 16:29-31 DBY). In spite of some of his lusty ways of man Samson was used mightily when he followed the way of God.

The Idolatry of Micah and the Levite

A man of Mount Ephraim named Micah had a mother who had dedicated some silver to Jehovah to make a graven image. She gave the silver to Micah and he made the graven image instead. He had a house of gods and made an ephod and teraphim also. He consecrated one of his sons to be his priest. How can a man so compromise between Jehovah God and idolatry? Such is the way of man. In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:1-6 DBY).

One day a Levite from Bethlehem-Judah came to sojourn there and came to Micah's house. Micah invited him to dwell with him. He offered to hire the Levite to be a father and priest to him and the Levite was content to dwell with Micah and Micah consecrated the Levite. Then

Micah said, “Now I know that Jehovah will do me good, because I have a Levite for priest” (Judges 17:7-13 DBY).

Some Danites came to Micah’s house to lodge while on their way seeking a place to dwell in. They recognized the Levite and asked for counsel and he said, “Go in peace: before Jehovah is your way on which ye go” (Judges 18:1-6 DBY).

When the Danites passed through again with their families and men of war they took the graven image, teraphim and ephod away from Micah and invited the Levite to be their priest. When Micah tried to stop them they threatened him with death. The Danites conquered a city called Laish and renamed it Dan (Judges 18:6-29 DBY). There they set up the graven image.

And the children of Dan set up the graven image; and Jehonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses; he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. And they set up for themselves Micah's graven image, which he had made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh (Judges 18:30-31 DBY).

The children of Dan turned away from Jehovah to the way of man and idolatry, and remained that way until the Babylonian captivity. The tribe of Dan appears to have been ultimately rejected by God (Revelation 7).

A Levite, His Concubine, and the Wickedness of the Benjaminites

The Levites were not given any land in Canaan because God was their inheritance. They were, however, given cities to dwell with each of the tribes. Because they served in the tabernacle they traveled back and forth to Shiloh during their times of duty.

A certain Levite had a concubine who played the harlot against him and went away to her father’s house. The Levite went to bring her home. On the way back they lodged overnight in the city of Gibeah, which belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. An old man invited them to stay in his house overnight. While they were eating, some men of the city, sons of Belial, surrounded the house and demanded that the man (the Levite) be brought out so that they could know him (Judges 19:1-22). The master of the house tried to persuade them not to do this wickedness. He went out to them and said,

... No, my brethren, I pray you, do not wickedly; seeing that this man is come into my house, do not this villany. Behold, my daughter, who is a virgin, and his concubine; let me bring them out, and humble ye them, and do to them as is good in your sight; but to this man do not so vile a thing (Judges 19:23-24 DBY).

The Levite sent his concubine out and they abused her all night. In the morning she lay dead on the threshold of house of the old man (Judges 19:25-27).

When the children of Israel heard of the wickedness in Gibeah they assembled as one man unto Jehovah at Mizpah and demanded that the Benjaminites give up the sons of Belial in Gibeah that they might be put to death. They refused and a battle took place which ultimately destroyed all of the children of Benjamin with the exception of six hundred men who fled to the wilderness of Rimmon (Judges 20:1-48 DBY).

The tribe of Benjamin would have diminished had not the Israelites found a way to give the remaining six hundred men wives (Judges 21:1-23). Had they not, would there have been a king Saul or the Apostle Paul, who were their descendants?

The book of Judges ends with “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25 DBY). There is no mention of the tabernacle or of worship at the tabernacle in Shiloh during the hundreds of years of the judges, until the time of Eli and Samuel. Neither are the sacrifices and feasts of Jehovah mentioned. The children of

Israel, continually, did not follow in the ways of God but in the ways of man. Consequently, they did not conquer the Promised Land during the times of the judges.

Eli and Samuel

The last two judges in Israel were Eli and Samuel. Eli served as priest in the tabernacle at Shiloh. When Samuel was a boy his mother Hannah gave him to Jehovah and he served under Eli in the tabernacle. Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who served with him but they were very corrupt. God warned Eli regarding his sons and said that they would both die in one day. God said that He would raise up a faithful priest who would do according to what was in His heart and in His mind (I Samuel 1 & 2). God revealed Himself to the boy Samuel and used him to reveal the judgment that was about to fall on Eli and his sons. As Samuel grew Jehovah was with him.

*And Samuel grew, and Jehovah was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, knew that Samuel was established a prophet of Jehovah. And **Jehovah appeared again at Shiloh**; for Jehovah revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of Jehovah (1 Samuel 3:19-21 DBY, emphasis added).*

The judgment of God fell on Eli and his sons as He had promised. The Philistines made war against Israel. The Israelites had Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas bring the ark into the battle. The ark was captured and Eli's sons were killed. When Eli heard the news he also died. He had judged Israel forty years. Israel was defeated once again because of the corruption of Eli's sons and his failure to lead them in the ways of Jehovah.

During the times of the judges the children of Israel failed to conquer the nations in the land. They forsook God and worshipped Baals and other gods and intermarried with the people. Time and again they became oppressed by the nations around them and cried to God. God gave the Israelites judges as deliverers and rest for periods of time but then they soon returned to their own ways. Over and over again, over those four hundred years, the Israelites failed to listen to the judges and walk in the ways of Jehovah and so their enemies were never subdued. The Psalmist sums it up with these words:

*But my people hearkened not to my voice, and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' stubbornness: they walked after their own counsels. **Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, that Israel had walked in my ways!** I would soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries (Psalms 81:11-14 DBY, emphasis added).*

“Give Us a King”

Samuel began to judge Israel after the death of Eli. The Ark of the Covenant, which was taken by the Philistines, had been returned but was never again brought to the tabernacle at Shiloh. For many years it remained in the house of Abinadab (I Samuel 4 - 6). There is no mention of a new high priest, tabernacle worship, sacrifices, or feasts of Jehovah held during this period except the sacrifices of Samuel, which he made at various high places. It appears that high places were contrary to God’s command since sacrifices were to be made at the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 16 & 17). However, at some time, God forsook the tabernacle at Shiloh.

*But they tempted and provoked God, the Most High, and kept not his testimonies, And they drew back and dealt treacherously like their fathers: they turned like a deceitful bow. And they provoked him to anger with their **high places**, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. God heard, and was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: **And he forsook the tabernacle at Shiloh, the tent where he had dwelt among men** ... (Psalms 78:56-60 DBY, emphasis added).*

The Scriptures do not say when God forsook Shiloh, but it may have been after the ark was no longer in the tabernacle. Could it be that the glory had departed from Israel after the ark was captured, as the wife of Phinehas said? (I Samuel 4:21-22). What was the alternative for Samuel in seeking Jehovah? There is no indication that he ever returned to Shiloh. Were the high places where he sacrificed ordained of God? Sadly, the high places of Samuel seem to set the stage for high places of worship of other gods throughout Israel in the centuries ahead.

During this time the Philistines continued to be an enemy of Israel. Samuel spoke to the people and said,

If ye return to Jehovah with all your heart, put away the strange gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and apply your hearts unto Jehovah, and serve him only; and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines (I Samuel 7:3 DBY).

So, the children of Israel did put away their gods and served only Jehovah. They gathered at Mizpah where Samuel judged the people. When they heard that the Philistines were assembled to attack them the people asked Samuel to pray for them. He offered a burnt offering to Jehovah, prayed for the Israelites, and they were victorious over the Philistines. The hand of Jehovah was against the Philistines all of the days of Samuel (I Samuel 7:4-14 DBY).

And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house, and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar to Jehovah (I Samuel 7:15-17 DBY).

Samuel circled throughout the land and returned to Ramah during his priesthood and prophetic ministry as he judged Israel. It appears contrary to the Law again that Samuel built an altar to Jehovah while the original altar was still at the tabernacle, but God did not correct Samuel.

“Give Us a King”

When Samuel grew old he made his sons judges. The elders of Israel came to Samuel and told him that since he had become old, and that his sons did not walk in his ways, they wanted him to appoint for them a king to judge them like the other nations.

*... Behold, thou art become old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now appoint us a king to judge us, like all the nations. And the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, **Give us a king** to judge us. And Samuel prayed to Jehovah (I Samuel 8:5-6 DBY, emphasis added).*

This displeased Samuel and he prayed to Jehovah. Jehovah answered and said,

*... Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for **they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.** According to all the deeds that they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, in that they have forsaken me and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. And now hearken unto their voice; only, testify solemnly unto them, and declare unto them the manner of the king that shall reign over them (I Samuel 8:7-9 DBY, emphasis added).*

Jehovah said that they had rejected Him, not Samuel. Samuel spoke all of the words of Jehovah relative to the manner of kings, how they would take many things from their people, and of a day when they would cry out to Jehovah because of the chosen king (I Samuel 8:10-18 DBY). The people refused to listen to the words of Samuel and said,

... No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations; and our king shall judge us, and go out before us, and conduct our wars (I Samuel 8:19-20 DBY).

Samuel repeated their words to Jehovah and He said, “Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king” (I Samuel 8:21-22 DBY).

God’s Commands Concerning Kings

While the children were in the wilderness, before they had entered the promised land, God gave them commandments regarding kings if they should seek them to rule over Israel.

*When thou comest unto the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are about me; **thou shalt only set him king over thee whom Jehovah thy God will choose: from among thy brethren** shalt thou set a king over thee; thou mayest not set a foreigner over thee, who is not thy brother. Only **he shall not multiply horses** to himself, nor lead back the people to Egypt, to multiply horses; for Jehovah hath said unto you, Ye shall not return again any more that way. **Neither shall he multiply wives** to himself, that his heart turn not away; **neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.** And it shall be, **when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book** out of that which is before the priests, the Levites; and it shall be with him, and **he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear Jehovah his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them;** that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left; that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his sons, in the midst of Israel (Deuteronomy 17:14-20 DBY, emphasis added).*

Did the kings of Israel follow these commands? How quickly did they depart from God’s way for kings?

The Beginning of the Kingdom of Israel

Saul, David, and Solomon were the first three kings of Israel. Each of these kings ruled for about forty years. All three, during their lifetime, disobeyed God and sinned against Him.

The Reign of Saul

Before Saul became king, Samuel called the Israelites together to Jehovah at Mizpah and reminded them that they had rejected Jehovah God as their king, saying,

*... Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all the kingdoms that oppressed you; but ye have **this day***

rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your troubles, and have said unto him, Nay, but a king shalt thou set over us. Now therefore present yourselves before Jehovah by your tribes, and by your thousands (I Samuel 10:18-19 DBY, emphasis added).

Samuel called the tribes together and Jehovah revealed that He had chosen Saul to be king. The people were then told the rules of the kingdom. The rules were written in a book, and laid before Jehovah. Samuel sent the people away and Saul went home to Gibeah (I Samuel 10:25-26).

Saul began well by warring against the Ammonites and saving Jabesh Gilead. This victory helped him to be accepted by the people, so they went to confirm him as king before Jehovah at Gilgal (I Samuel 11). Samuel, however, exhorted them at that time.

But when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said to me, Nay, but a king shall reign over us; when Jehovah your God was your king. And now behold, the king whom ye have chosen, whom ye have asked for! and behold, Jehovah has set a king over you. If ye fear Jehovah, and serve him, and hearken to his voice, and rebel not against the commandment of Jehovah, then both ye and the king also that reigns over you shall continue following Jehovah your God (I Samuel 12:12-14 DBY, emphasis added).

Samuel reminded them of their wickedness in asking for a king and the people responded by confessing their sin, as he called upon Jehovah.

... I will call unto Jehovah, and he will send thunder and rain; and ye shall perceive and see that your wickedness is great which ye have done in the sight of Jehovah in asking for yourselves a king. And Samuel called to Jehovah; and Jehovah sent thunder and rain that day. And all the people greatly feared Jehovah and Samuel. And all the people said to Samuel, Pray to Jehovah thy God for thy servants, that we die not; for we have added to all our sins the wickedness to ask for ourselves a king (I Samuel 12:17-19, emphasis added).

Saul followed God for a time. He ultimately disobeyed God several times and God rejected him as a king. David was anointed by Samuel in his stead. When Saul learned of this he pursued David for many years and tried to kill him but God delivered David many times (I Samuel 13 through 31). One day, while fleeing from Saul, David went to the tabernacle of God, which at that time was pitched at Nob (I Samuel 21:1). When Saul learned that David had been there he assumed that Ahimelek, who was high priest at the time, had helped David. Saul killed him and eighty-five priests and all of the people in the city. Only the priest Abiathar escaped and fled to be with David (I Samuel 21:6-23). After a forty year reign (Acts 13:21), Saul was killed in battle (I Samuel 31:1-10). This was the result of his disobedience.

The Reign of David

David became king after the death of Saul. After God rejected Saul He found in **David a man after His own heart** (I Samuel 13:14). David was a man of war and conquered many nations around him in his battles for God. He inquired from Jehovah before his battles. He so enlarged the kingdom that it was greater than Egypt.

There is no record of David visiting high places during his reign. David's guidance from Jehovah came largely through Samuel the priest and Nathan the prophet. Tabernacle worship, the Passover, and other feasts of Jehovah are not mentioned during his reign. **The tabernacle had been moved from Shiloh to Nob, then to the high place at Gibeon** (I Samuel 21:1, I Chronicles 21:29). Was it moved to Gibeon for the convenience of the Gibeonites who had been assigned as wood cutters and water carriers for the tabernacle in the days of Joshua? (Joshua 9:27). The Ark of the Covenant was still in the house of Abinadab. After David conquered Jerusalem he had the Ark brought to the city and placed it in a tent which had been prepared for

it (II Samuel 6:1-22). He wanted to build a house for Jehovah but God told him that his son would build it instead (II Samuel 1 through 10).

The Sin of David

David, however, had many wives and concubines and still he lusted for others. One day, while his men were in battle, David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, who was one of his mighty men away in the battle. When David found that Bathsheba was pregnant he arranged with his commander to have Uriah killed in the battle. The prophet Nathan told David of his sin and David confessed and repented. God forgave him but said that the sword would never leave his house. As a result, one of David's sons raped his half-sister and her brother had the attacker killed. Later, two of his sons, Absalom and Adonijah, tried to usurp his throne and both were killed in the process (II Samuel 11 through 24, I Kings 1 and 2).

Although David sinned grievously he remained faithful to Jehovah and through him came the Christ (John 7:42, Acts 13:22).

... David did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Urijah the Hittite (I Kings 15:5 DBY).

David wrote many of the Psalms praising God. The life of David demonstrates that although one might go man's way and sin against God, if he confesses his sin he can be forgiven and find favor again with God.

Satan

One day Satan stood up against Israel and moved King David to take a census of Israel. God was displeased on account of this and He struck Israel (I Chronicles 21:1-7). David immediately confessed his sin.

David said to God, I have sinned greatly, in that I have done this thing; and now, I beseech thee, put away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly (I Chronicles 21:8).

David's sin caused the death of seventy thousand men of Israel (I Chronicles 21:14).

This is the first mention of Satan in the Old Testament. He is identified with the Serpent, who tempted Adam and Eve, and with the Devil (Revelation 12:9). He is described as our adversary (I Peter 5:8).

Satan as the adversary moved into the life of Job in an effort to cause him to curse God through a series of trials permitted by God. Job, however, remained faithful (Job 1 and 2). In the book of Zechariah, when Joshua the high priest was standing before the Angel of Jehovah, Satan stood to resist him (Zechariah 3:1 DBY). God spoke to Satan and said,

... Jehovah rebuke thee, O Satan! Yea, Jehovah that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee! Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? (Zechariah 3:2 DBY).

The adversarial and deceptive work of Satan is revealed throughout the New Testament. He is the enemy of God and man. His last effort will be to deceive the nations and gather them to battle against the people of God (Revelation 20:8).

They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:9-10).

Just as David was moved by him to sin, Satan will continue deceiving and tempting man and nations to walk in his own ways instead of the ways of God until that day when he will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

The Reign of Solomon

When Solomon, who David had anointed, became king he immediately brought to justice the enemies of his father David and the kingdom was firmly established in his hand (I Kings 2:12-46). David had conquered most of the small nations in Canaan, much of the land east of the Jordan, far beyond Damascus to the north and to the River of Egypt in the South. In land and power Solomon's kingdom rivaled Egypt and the rising nations in Mesopotamia.

At this time **the people sacrificed on the high places** because there was no house of Jehovah for there was no house built to the name of Jehovah (I Kings 3:2 DBY). Solomon also sacrificed on the high places.

*... Solomon loved Jehovah, walking in the statutes of David his father; **only, he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.** And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt-offerings did Solomon offer up upon that altar (I Kings 3:3-4 DBY, emphasis added).*

The "only" in the verse above indicates that Solomon was not completely following Jehovah's command given in the wilderness telling the Israelites to destroy the high places in Canaan (Numbers 33:52, Deuteronomy 33:29). Solomon went to Gibeon to sacrifice. The tabernacle was now there (I Chronicles 21:29). His father David had been afraid to go there (I Chronicles 21:29-30).

Jehovah appeared to Solomon in a dream at Gibeon and asked him what He should give him. Solomon asked for wisdom and this pleased Jehovah (I Kings 3:5-14 DBY). Solomon became the wisest man in the world and rulers of many nations came to hear him (I Kings 4:29-34).

Solomon was chosen of God to build a temple for Him. It was begun in the fourth year of his reign, four hundred and eighty years after the exodus. It was finished in seven years (I Kings 6). The Ark of the Covenant was brought into the temple and the glory of Jehovah filled the temple (I Kings 8:1-11 DBY). The glory of God had returned to Israel. Solomon prayed a long prayer of dedication and when he finished Jehovah God appeared to him a second time (I Kings 8:22 through 9:2 DBY).

Then Jehovah appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: I have heard thy prayer, and I have chosen for myself this place for a house of sacrifice. *If ... **my people, who are called by my name, humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from the heavens, and forgive their sin, and heal their land*** (II Chronicles 7:12-14 DBY, emphasis added).

The Unfaithfulness of Solomon

During these years Solomon and the kingdom of Israel lived in peace. Solomon built himself a house and engaged in many other projects. He became richer than all kings and gathered thousands of horsemen and chariots (I Kings 10:23-26). He loved many foreign women and had hundreds of wives and concubines (I Kings 11:1-3). Solomon violated God's command relative to kings. They were not to multiply horses, riches, or wives (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Solomon ultimately turned away after other gods.

*But king Solomon loved many foreign women, besides the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, Hittites; of the nations of which Jehovah had said to the children of Israel, **Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in to you; they would certainly turn away your heart after their gods: to these Solomon was attached in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses,***

*and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. And it came to pass **when Solomon was old, [that] his wives turned away his heart after other gods;** and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God, as the heart of David his father (I Kings 11:1-4 DBY, emphasis added).*

Jehovah became angry with Solomon for turning away from Him after He had appeared to him twice and said to him,

*... Forasmuch as this is done by thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes which I commanded thee, **I will certainly rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant: notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it, for David thy father's sake; I will rend it out of the hand of thy son; only, I will not rend away all the kingdom: I will give one tribe to thy son, for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen** (I Kings 11:11-13 DBY, emphasis added).*

God rent the kingdom, dividing it after Solomon's death. His son, Rehoboam, became king of Judah and Jeroboam became king of Israel. (I Kings 12:1-20).

The Divided Kingdom

The children of Israel appealed to King Rehoboam, asking him to ease the heavy burden of work that his father had placed upon them. He refused and ten tribes revolted. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained with Rehoboam. Jeroboam, an adversary of Solomon, led the northern tribes in their rebellion (I Kings 12:1-24). The two kingdoms became known as the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel.

The Northern Kingdom: The Kingdom of Israel

The people of the northern tribes made Jeroboam the first king of the kingdom of Israel (I Kings 12:20). Jeroboam built Shechem and lived there. He was concerned, however, that his people would continue to go to sacrifice in the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem, and would turn against him and return to Rehoboam (I Kings 12:25-27 DBY). Jeroboam took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He told the people that it was too much for them to go up to Jerusalem and to worship. He set one calf in Bethel and the other in Dan. This became sin to the people. Jeroboam made a house of high places and made priests who were not sons of Levi. He also made an altar at Bethel for sacrifice (I Kings 12:28-33 DBY).

The northern kingdom had a total of nineteen kings over a period of about 200 years. Every one of them was wicked. Repeatedly it is said of each of the kings,

***And he did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin where with he made Israel to sin** (I Kings 15:35 DBY, emphasis added).*

References made of kings walking in the sin of Jeroboam continue throughout I and II Kings. In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria attacked Gilead, Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria (II Kings 15:27-29). Finally, during the reign of Hoshea, Shalmaneser king of Assyria, besieged Samaria, took all the land of Israel, and carried all Israel away into captivity in Assyria because of their sins against God (II Kings 17:1-24). Samaria and the land was resettled by people of the east (II Kings 17:24).

The northern kingdom fell, but the kingdom of Judah remained for another one hundred and thirty years. The ten tribes learned the tragic result of following the ways of man instead of the way of God. God had warned them 800 years earlier, in the wilderness, that disobedience would result in captivity. Despite many rejected opportunities for repentance, God's just punishment was finally carried out (Deuteronomy 28:41).

The Southern Kingdom: The Kingdom of Judah

Rehoboam followed Jehovah for a short time but when the kingdom was established and he became strong, he forsook the law of Jehovah and the people did as well.

The people built high places again even after the temple was built and the Ark of the Covenant was back in the Holy Place. Consequently, God let them fall into hand of the Egyptians. They humbled themselves and God did not destroy them. Rehoboam, however, continued to do evil and did not apply his heart to seek Jehovah (II Chronicles 12:1-14 DBY).

The southern kingdom of Judah also had nineteen kings over a longer period of about 330 years. Only seven kings, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah did what was right in the sight of Jehovah, and walked in the ways of David. Only two kings, Hezekiah and Josiah destroyed the high places. Josiah was the only king to hold a Passover such as that in the days of the judges (II Kings 23:13-25).

In most of these king's reigns, however, the high places were not taken away. As the years passed the kingdom grew more and more wicked. God called the prophet Jeremiah to warn them but they imprisoned him and tried to kill him.

High Places During the Kingdom Years

The children of Israel failed to obey Jehovah God and did not destroy the high places in the land but began to worship at them during the kingdom years. At first the people sacrificed on the high places because no house had been built for Jehovah (I Kings 3:2 DBY). It appears that they worshipped Jehovah in those high places. King Solomon had sacrificed and burned incense on high places (I Kings 3:3). He had also gone to the high place at Gibeon and sacrificed (I Kings 3:4). After the temple was built and the Ark of the Covenant was placed within it there is no mention for a time of the children of Israel visiting high places.

Solomon, however, became unfaithful to God when he was old. He had many foreign wives and they turned his heart away to other gods.

And Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and followed not fully Jehovah, as David his father. Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, on the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the children of Ammon. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods (I Kings 11:5-8 DBY, emphasis added).

After the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom, the people followed their kings and in both kingdoms increasingly began worshipping other gods at high places. In the northern kingdom of Israel they worshipped the god Baal at Bethel and at Dan. The southern kingdom began worshipping other gods and built even more high places (I Kings 14).

High Hills and Green Trees

During the reign of Rehoboam, in the southern kingdom of Judah, the people began building high places on every high hill and under every green tree.

And Judah did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they committed more than all that their fathers had done. And they also built for themselves high places, and columns, and Asherahs on every high hill and under every green tree; and there were also sodomites in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations that Jehovah had dispossessed before the children of Israel (1 Kings 14:22-24 DBY, emphasis added).

When the Children of Israel were still in the wilderness God gave them statutes and ordinances to take heed and do upon entering the land He was giving them to possess. These were to be followed all the days that they lived upon the earth (Deuteronomy 12:1 DBY). Two of the commands He gave them were relative to other gods of the nations.

*... ye shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and ye shall destroy all their figured images, and **all their molten images shall ye destroy, and all their high places shall ye lay waste*** (Numbers 33:52 DBY, emphasis added).

Ye shall utterly destroy all the places wherein the nations which ye shall dispossess have served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree; and ye shall break down their altars, and shatter their statues, and burn their Asherahs with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and ye shall destroy the names of them out of that place (Deuteronomy 12:2-3, DBY, emphasis added).

God continued by saying,

*Ye shall not do so unto Jehovah your God; but **unto the place which Jehovah your God will choose** out of all your tribes to set his name there, his habitation shall ye seek, **and thither thou shalt come; and thither ye shall bring your burnt-offerings and your sacrifices,** and your tithes, and the heave-offering of your hand, and your vows, and your voluntary-offerings, and the firstlings of your kine and of your sheep; and ye shall eat there before Jehovah your God, and ye shall rejoice, ye and your households, in all the business of your hand, wherein Jehovah thy God hath blessed thee* (Deuteronomy 12:4-7, emphasis added).

God warned the Israelites concerning high places of worship in the new land. He commanded them to destroy all the high places of the inhabitants as they dispossessed them in the land. They were to worship only in the place and in the way God chose.

Not only did the Israelites disobey Jehovah in the place and way they were to worship but they also made altars, pillars, columns, and Asherahs or images, not only at high places, on high hills and green trees, but at the head of every street. They even corrupted the temple of Jehovah with their wicked idolatry (II Kings 21:4-7, 23:4).

Warnings against worship at high places and on high hills and under green trees are repeated over and over during the times of the kings. Prophets of God were sent to teach and urge them to repent and turn back to God instead of worshipping idols on high hills and green trees.

God also used prophets during the time of the kings to teach about the coming of His King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prophets of God and False Prophets

The major prophets during the kingdom years were Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. The minor prophets were Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Major prophets Ezekiel and Daniel and minor prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi ministered after both kingdoms had fallen.

Prophets of Jehovah helped the kings in their various battles with enemies. They not only taught the people to walk in the ways of Jehovah, but they also warned them that their kingdoms would fall and that they would go into captivity if they continued to follow their own ways of wickedness.

Elijah. Elijah challenged false prophets on Mount Carmel who were leading the people in the worship of Baal, a false god, during the reign of Ahab.

*Then Elijah drew near to all the people, and said, **How long do ye halt between two opinions? if Jehovah be God, follow him; and if Baal, follow him.*** And the people answered him not a word. And Elijah said to the people, ***I, only I, remain a prophet of Jehovah; and Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.***

Let them therefore give us two bullocks: and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and put it on the wood, and put no fire; and I will sacrifice the other bullock, and put it on the wood, and put no fire. And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Jehovah; and the god that answers by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, The word is good. (I Kings 18:21-24 DBY, emphasis added).

God answered Elijah with fire and as the people saw it they said that Jehovah was God. The false prophets were seized and killed.

And **the fire of Jehovah fell**, and consumed the burnt-offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And **all the people saw it, and they fell on their faces and said, Jehovah, he is God! Jehovah, he is God!** And Elijah said to them, Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape! And they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the torrent of Kishon, and slaughtered them there (I Kings 18:38-40 DBY, emphasis added).

There is no indication that people continued following Jehovah. Ahab did not change his ways and his wife Jezebel tried to have Elijah killed (I Kings 19:1-3).

Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet of the southern kingdom of Judah, warning them of their wickedness and of the coming judgment of God (Isaiah 1:4-31). He warned them that both priests and prophets had gone astray, erring in vision and stumbling in judgment (Isaiah 28:7 DBY). Isaiah also encouraged and said they would hear a word behind them, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:21 DBY). Nevertheless, they did not listen and Isaiah gave them warnings from God.

*... you are “inflaming yourselves with **idols under every green tree**, slaying the children ... (Isaiah 57:5 DBY, emphasis added).*

I have stretched out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, who walk in a way not good, after their own thoughts .. (Isaiah 65:2 DBY).

Behold, days come when all that is in thy house, and that which thy fathers have laid up until this day, **shall be carried to Babylon**: nothing shall be left, saith Jehovah. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, whom thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (Isaiah 39:6-7 DBY, emphasis added).

Isaiah also prophesied that the children of Israel who would be carried away into captivity in Assyria and Babylon would eventually be restored to the land.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that Jehovah shall beat out from the flood of the river unto the torrent of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, [ye] children of Israel. And it shall come to pass in that day, [that] the great trumpet shall be blown; and they shall come that were perishing in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and they shall worship Jehovah in the holy mountain at Jerusalem (Isaiah 27:12-13 DBY).

Go ye forth from Babylon, flee from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing; declare, cause this to be heard, utter it to the end of the earth; say ye, Jehovah hath redeemed his servant Jacob (Isaiah 48:20 DBY).

Isaiah’s prophecies, however, focused more on the future and the fulfillment of the promise of Jehovah to Abraham of the blessing to come through his seed, the Savior. He predicted numerous details concerning the Christ from His birth to His death. For example, the following are two references made of Christ as the coming King.

Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment (Isaiah 32:21 DBY)

Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is far off (Isaiah 33:17 DBY).

Jehovah's King shall reign in righteousness and judgment, following the way of God, unlike the evil kings of Israel and Judah. His kingdom will be eternal.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with judgment and with righteousness, from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:6-7 DBY).

Jeremiah. Jeremiah prophesied during the latter years of the kingdom of Judah and prophesied that the nation would fall and go into captivity in Babylon. He challenged them to repent but his messages were rejected and his life was threatened many times by the wicked kings of the time. Several of Jeremiah's warnings concerned false prophets who denied that the kingdom would ultimately fall.

*For of old thou hast broken thy yoke, [and] burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not serve. For **upon every high hill, and under every green tree, thou bowest down, playing the harlot** (Jeremiah 2:20 DBY, emphasis added).*

*And Jehovah said unto me in the days of Josiah the king, **Hast thou seen what backsliding Israel hath done? She hath gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath committed fornication** (Jeremiah 3:6 DBY, emphasis added).*

*Shall I not visit for these things? saith Jehovah; shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? An appalling and horrible thing is committed in the land: **the prophets prophesy falsehood, and the priests rule by their means; and my people love [to have it] so. But what will ye do in the end thereof?** (Jeremiah 5:29-31 DBY, emphasis added).*

***The sin of Judah** is written with a style of iron, with the point of a diamond, engraven upon the tablet of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars; whilst their children remember their **altars and their Asherahs, by the green trees, upon the high hills** (Jeremiah 17:1-2 DBY, emphasis added).*

Jeremiah warned of the consequences of believing false prophesies.

*And Jehovah said unto me, **The prophets prophesy falsehood in my name; I have not sent them, neither have I commanded them, nor spoken unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision, and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, and who say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land: By sword and by famine shall those prophets be consumed; and the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, because of the famine and the sword; and there shall be none to bury them, them, their wives, and their sons, and their daughters; and I will pour their wickedness upon them** (Jeremiah 14:14-16 DBY, emphasis added).*

Jeremiah also prophesied that the children of Judah would be carried away captive and later restored to the land after seventy years.

*And this whole land shall become a waste, an astonishment; and **these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years**. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, [that] I will visit on the king of Babylon and on that nation, saith Jehovah, their iniquity, and on the land of the Chaldeans, and I will make it perpetual desolations (Jeremiah 25:11-12 DBY).*

*For thus saith Jehovah: When **seventy years** shall be accomplished for Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in bringing you back to this place (Jeremiah 29:10 DBY).*

In addition, he prophesied of Christ, the coming King, who would reign in righteousness.

Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, when I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, who shall reign as king, and act wisely, and shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land (Jeremiah 23:5 DBY).

Instead of trusting in the prophets of Jehovah, the majority of the kings and people tragically trusted in false prophets, following the ways of man.

King Josiah

The last king of Judah who did right in the sight of Jehovah was Josiah, who walked in the ways of David. He was the grandson of Manasseh, a very wicked king, who had rebuilt the high places that had been torn down by King Hezekiah. Josiah defiled all of the high places in the land and restored the worship of Jehovah. He commanded that a Passover be kept, which had not been done since the days of the judges (II Kings 22:1 to 23:24). The Scripture says of Josiah,

And before him there had been no king like him that turned to Jehovah with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there his like (II Kings 23:25 DBY).

Nevertheless, Jehovah did not turn from His anger against the kingdom of Judah, because of the previous provocations of Manasseh, Josiah's grandfather (II Kings 23:26). Jehovah said,

... I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will reject this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there (II Kings 23:27 DBY).

The Beginning of the Captivity

The seventy years of captivity of the kingdom of Judah began during the reign of the son of King Josiah, **Jehoahaz**. The land of Judah became overrun with enemies. Pharaoh Necho bound King Jehoahaz, took him to Egypt, made his brother Jehoiakim king instead, and laid a tribute upon the land (II Kings 23:31-37). Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, also came against the land. God sent bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, against Judah to destroy it, according to His word spoken through his prophets (II Kings 24:1-2).

It appears that Daniel and his three friends were among those taken captive to Babylon during the second year of the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim (II Kings 23:36 to 24:7).

Jehoiachin and **Zedekiah** were the last two kings of Judah. Jerusalem was besieged by Babylon during the reign of Jehoiachin. Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin prisoner and made Zedekiah king of Judah in his stead. Nebuchadnezzar took more captives to Babylon during the first year of the eleven-year reign of Zedekiah that followed. Ezekiel, who was older than Daniel, seems to have been taken captive with them (II Kings 24:6-20).

... and he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, ten thousand captives ... and he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon ... and the mighty of the land, he led into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon; and all the men of valour, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all strong men apt for war, and the king of Babylon brought them captive to Babylon (II Kings 24:14-16 DBY).

Their kings had failed to follow the way of Jehovah God and the kingdom of Judah fell just as the kingdom of Israel had fallen.

*And Jehovah the God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending; because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-place. But **they mocked at the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the fury of Jehovah rose against his people, and there was no remedy.** And he brought up against them the king of the Chaldees, and slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and spared not young man nor maiden, old man nor him of hoary head: he gave them all into his hand. And **all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of Jehovah, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, he brought all to Babylon. And they burned the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all the palaces thereof with fire, and all the precious vessels thereof were given up to destruction.***

And them that had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they became servants to him and his sons, until the reign of the kingdom of Persia; to fulfil the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath, to fulfil seventy years (II Chronicles 36:15-21 DBY).

Jehovah God had sent many messengers describing His coming judgment on the kingdom of Judah and of their captivity and desolation which would last for seventy years, and these promises were fulfilled.

The Fall of Jerusalem and the Kingdom of Judah

Finally, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem, destroyed it and burned the temple, and the people went into captivity (II Kings 25:8-11). The kingdom of Judah ended. The days of the kings were over. The whole period of the kings lasted about 450 years. Most of the kings had not walked in the ways of Jehovah. The people had asked for a king to judge them and go before them in their wars (I Samuel 8:19-20 DBY) and the end was defeat and captivity.

*O Israel, you are destroyed, But your help is from Me. I will be your King; Where is any other, That he may save you in all your cities? And your judges to whom you said, "Give me a king and princes"? **I gave you a king in My anger, And took him away in My wrath*** (Hosea 13:9-11, emphasis added).

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without statue, and without ephod and teraphim (Hosea 3:4 DBY).

About fourteen hundred years had passed since God promised Abraham that He would make him a great nation and that in him all of the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). Was the nation of Israel now history? How would God fulfill His purpose?

The Kingdom of Judah goes into Captivity

God warned the children of Israel, before they entered the Promised Land, that they would go into captivity if they forsook Him and served other gods (Deuteronomy 28, 29 and 30). Time and again, for over eight hundred years, they turned to the gods of the land and Jehovah God continued to show mercy to them as they would come back to Him. During the times of the kings they built high places on every high hill and under every green tree to worship other gods (I Kings 14:23 DBY). They had high places in every street (Ezekiel 16:24-31) and over and over again even corrupted the temple of God. Jerusalem finally fell, the temple was destroyed and the kingdom of Judah also went into captivity (II Kings 25).

The Promises of Jehovah God

God did not forget His promises to Abraham and David, however, to bless all of the nations through their descendants. Back in the wilderness, before they entered the land, God said that He would bring them back again into the land out of captivity, if they would turn to Him.

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt take them to heart among all the nations whither Jehovah thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return to Jehovah thy God, and shalt hearken to his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy sons, with all thy heart and with all thy soul; that then Jehovah thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will gather thee again from all the peoples whither Jehovah thy God hath scattered thee. Though there were of you driven out unto the end of the heavens, from thence will Jehovah thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee; and Jehovah thy God will bring thee into the land that thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And Jehovah thy God will circumcise thy heart, and

the heart of thy seed, to love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live (Deuteronomy 30:1-6 DBY, emphasis added).

God also promised that He would return the nation of Israel to the land in the future. God utilized the kingdom years to introduce the coming kingdom of God. Isaiah's prophecies elaborate the promises of God concerning the coming of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

All of the prophets of Jehovah, during the kingdom years, revealed that the promises of God would be fulfilled. The children of Israel would be gathered again and return to the land, and numerous prophecies were made concerning the coming of Christ and the glorious future of Israel in the end times.

The Glorious Future Kingdom

The prophets Hosea and Zechariah sum up the mind of God concerning their demand for a king in contrast to the coming of His glorious King and the glorious kingdom to come.

*Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion; shout, daughter of Jerusalem! **Behold, thy King cometh to thee: he is just, and having salvation;** lowly and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass (Zechariah 9:9 DBY, emphasis added).*

The promised kingdom of God will be revealed when His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ returns in power and great glory.

*Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS** (Revelation 19:11-16).*

*O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from Me. **I will be your King;** where is any other, that he may save you in all your cities? And your judges to whom you said, "Give me a king and princes"? **I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath** (Hosea 13:9-11)*

The Babylonian Captivity

Babylon had risen from Babel over the centuries and had grown into a very large kingdom. It became the first world nation under King Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon had conquered Assyria, Egypt, and the kingdom of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar was a very cruel king and an idolater. In his conquests he brutally killed many people, even little children. The Psalmist laments,

Remember, O Jehovah ... the day of Jerusalem ... Daughter of Babylon, who art to be laid waste, happy he that rendereth unto thee that which thou hast meted out to us. Happy he that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock (Psalms 137 DBY).

King Nebuchadnezzar was also a man of great pride. He prided himself on the greatness of Babylon and credited himself for all of its buildings and splendor (Daniel 4:30). In writing about Babylon, God told Isaiah to take up a proverb against him.

... thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased, -- the exactress of gold ceased! Jehovah hath broken the staff of the wicked, the sceptre of the rulers. He that smote the peoples in wrath with a relentless stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted unsparingly (Isaiah 14:4-6 DBY).

The proverb continues in which the king of Babylon is referred to as Lucifer, possibly a personification of Satan (Isaiah 14:12-17).

The Babylonian captivity was the beginning of the domination of the children of Israel by other nations. Increasingly the children of Israel, also referred to as Jews, suffered persecution as the people of Jehovah God. God, however, did not forget His promise to Abraham that all of the nations of the world would be blessed through his descendants. God raised up prophets continually to teach His own people, and the nations, the ways of God. The captives Ezekiel and Daniel became prophets during this time.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel was taken captive eleven years before Jerusalem fell. He prophesied among the captives the same things that Jeremiah was prophesying in Jerusalem. He had warned them of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 4, 5, 6, 7, 20, and 22).

*And ye shall know that I am Jehovah, when their slain shall be among their **idols**, round about their altars, upon **every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree**, and under every thick terebinth, the places where they offered sweet savour to all their **idols** (Ezekiel 6:13 DBY, emphasis added).*

Ezekiel reminded the children of Judah of their disobedience and unfaithfulness to God, and of the reason for the captivity. His message was to justify the ways of God with His people.

During his lifetime Ezekiel had nine visions of Jehovah revealing His glory. The word of Jehovah came to Ezekiel over sixty times saying, "They shall know that I am God." How often did the Israelites need to be reminded that Jehovah is God?

Many of Ezekiel's prophecies revealed the glorious future of Israel and of the temple of God in Jerusalem in the end times. One vision is described in Ezekiel 39 where a valley full of dry bones come alive, picturing Israel in the last days, together again under one King (Ezekiel 37).

*... Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: **Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, whither they are gone, and will gather them from every side, and bring them into their own land: and I***

will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all. ... I will save them ... and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezekiel 37:21-23 DBY, emphasis added).

Daniel and His Three Friends

Daniel was taken as a youth to Babylon in one of the early waves of the captivity, twenty years before the fall of Jerusalem. One day King Nebuchadnezzar told the chief of his eunuchs to bring royal descendants of the children of Israel and teach them the learning of the Chaldeans. They were to be nourished by the king's food in preparation for presentation before the king. Daniel and three of his friends, Shadrach, Meshah, and Abednego were included in the selection (Daniel 1:1-7). Daniel, however, did not want them to be defiled by the king's food.

... Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not pollute himself with the king's delicate food, nor with the wine which he drank; and he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not have to pollute himself (Daniel 1:8 DBY).

God granted Daniel and his three friends favor with the chief and he tested them for ten days on a diet of vegetables. Afterwards they looked healthier than all the others who had been chosen. God also gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding of visions and dreams (Daniel 1:9-17). When those who had been selected were presented before Nebuchadnezzar, he found none like Daniel and his friends.

And the king spoke with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: and they stood before the king. And in all matters of judicious wisdom, as to which the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the scribes [and] magicians that were in all his realm (Daniel 1:19-20 DBY).

Daniel and his friends were accepted in the council of wise men because of their faithfulness to God. They were used of God to teach His way to the king and his people. Daniel served God throughout the captivity unto the first year of King Cyrus (Daniel 1:21).

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

One night King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. He called his wise men and asked them to tell him the dream and the interpretation. When they were not able, the king became angry and commanded them to be killed. This included Daniel and his friends (Daniel 2:1-13). Daniel asked for time, then he and his friends prayed. God revealed the dream and its secret to Daniel in a night vision (Daniel 2:16-19). Daniel blessed God and said of Him,

*... it is he that changeth times and seasons; **He deposeth kings, and setteth up kings;** He giveth wisdom to the wise, And knowledge to them that know understanding. **It is he that revealeth the deep and secret things** ...* (Daniel 2:21-22 DBY, emphasis added).

After blessing God, Daniel went before the king. He told the king that there was a God in heaven who revealed secrets and that God was making known to the king what would happen in the latter days. Daniel told the king his dream and interpreted it.

The king had seen a great image with a head of gold, a torso and arms of silver, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. Then he saw a stone strike the image and break it in pieces. The stone then became a great mountain and filled the earth. (Daniel 2:19-35). Daniel explained that the image represented four kingdoms. **The head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom.** Three others would follow and when they ended God would set up a kingdom that would never end (Daniel 2:36-45). When the king heard of this he fell before Daniel and said,

Of a truth it is that your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, because thou wast able to reveal this secret (Daniel 2:46-47 DBY).

The king promoted Daniel and made him ruler over the whole kingdom and chief of the governors and all the wise men of Babylon. Daniel requested that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, his friends, be included in the administration of the kingdom (Daniel 2:48-49).

Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the interpretation revealed that God was using Daniel to teach the king about the true God and that kings and nations are raised up by God to fulfill His way. The king's dream also revealed that he and his kingdom was the first of four new world nations.

The Image of Gold

Nebuchadnezzar soon forgot his admission that Daniel's God was the God of gods and had an image of gold made and set up in the plain of Dura. At its dedication the king commanded that everyone was to fall down and worship the image or be cast into a fiery furnace. Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to obey the king. When the king learned of this he spoke to them and commanded them,

*... fall down and worship the image that I have made, [well]: but **if ye worship not**, ye shall be cast that same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace: and **who is the God that shall deliver you out of my hands?** (Daniel 3:15 DBY, emphasis added).*

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the kings and said,

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image that thou hast set up (Daniel 3:16-19 DBY).

The king became furious, ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter and had them bound and cast into the furnace. Then the king saw an astonishing sight and said,

*... Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? ... Lo, **I see four men loose**, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the **appearance of the fourth is like a son of God** (Daniel 3:24-25 DBY).*

Nebuchadnezzar came near and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the Most High God, come forth" (Daniel 3:26 DBY). When they had come forth, the king said,

***Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego**, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants who trusted in him, and who changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God! **Therefore I make a decree, that in every people, nation, and language, he who shall speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and his house shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that is able to deliver after this sort** (Daniel 3:28-29 DBY, emphasis added)*

After this the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon (Daniel 3:30 DBY). Once again God revealed Himself as the only true God to Nebuchadnezzar, using Daniel's three friends to convey the message.

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream

Time went on and Nebuchadnezzar had a second dream of a tree that was cut down, leaving a stump. Then he was driven out of his kingdom as a beast. Daniel interpreted the dream for him.

*... this is the interpretation, O king, and it is the decree of the Most High, which cometh upon my lord the king: They shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field... **and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth over the kingdom of men, and giveth***

it to whomsoever he will. And whereas it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree; thy kingdom shall remain unto thee, after that thou shalt know that the heavens do rule. Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities ... (Daniel 4:24-27, emphasis added DBY).

Daniel advised the king to break off his sins that it might lengthen his prosperity. The king, however, continued to be prideful, boasting to himself of the great kingdom he had built. Suddenly he heard a voice from Heaven (Daniel 4:28-31).

A Voice from Heaven

The voice from Heaven spoke to the king telling him that his kingdom would depart from him and that he would be driven from men and dwell with the beasts until he would know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will.

*... King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken: The kingdom is departed from thee; and they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and **seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth over the kingdom of men**, and giveth it to whomsoever he will (Daniel 4:31-32 DBY, emphasis added).*

Immediately the word of God was fulfilled and Nebuchadnezzar was driven from men and lived like a beast (Daniel 4:33). At the end this experience his understanding returned and he said,

*... I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto the heavens, and mine understanding returned unto me, **and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation.** And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; **and he doeth according to his will in the army of the heavens, and among the inhabitants of the earth;** and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? ... **Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of the heavens**, all whose works are truth, and his paths judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase (Daniel 4: 34-37 DBY, emphasis added).*

Nebuchadnezzar finally and totally recognized Jehovah as God. God revealed to him that He rules over kingdoms of men. After a time he died and the rule of the kingdom passed on to his descendants, one of whom was Belshazzar. They did not share Nebuchadnezzar's recognition of Jehovah as God.

Daniel's Dream

Daniel had a dream and visions during the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, in which he saw four great beasts. The first was like a **lion, and had eagle's wings**, the second was like a **bear**, the third was like a **leopard with four wings**, and the fourth was a dreadful and terrible **beast with iron teeth and ten horns**. Then a **little horn** came up among them and the first three horns were uprooted. He had eyes like a man and a mouth speaking great things (Daniel 7:1-8, emphasis added). Then Daniel saw a glorious sight.

*I beheld till thrones were set, and **the Ancient of days** did sit: his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was flames of fire, [and] its wheels burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him; thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: **the judgment was set**, and the books were opened (Daniel 7:9-10 DBY, emphasis added).*

As he continued watching he heard the voice of the horn, then the beast was slain and the dominion of other beasts was taken away (Daniel 7:11-12 DBY). Then he saw,

*and behold, **there came with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man**, and he came up even to the **Ancient of days**, and they brought him near before him. And **there was given him 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 that which shall not be destroyed
(Daniel 7: 13-14, emphasis added).

In the center of his dream Daniel saw a vision of the Ancient of Days on a throne and the Son of Man coming with clouds to Him. He was given dominion, glory, and an everlasting kingdom. This was no doubt a vision of God the Father and of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The interpretation of the vision was made known to Daniel. The beasts represented four kings which will rise out of the earth and then fall (Daniel 7:16-18 DBY). The beasts were not identified but appear to be representative of the same four kingdoms in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in which only Babylon was named. Archeological discoveries have affirmed the winged lion as a symbol of Babylon.

Daniel asked about the fourth beast with the ten horns and the little horn. He saw the horn make war with the saints and prevail over them until the Ancient of Days came in judgment. After that the saints possessed or took over the kingdom (Daniel 7:19-22 DBY).

The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom which will devour the whole earth, tread it down, and break it in pieces. The ten horns shall be ten kings that will arise out of this kingdom. Another shall arise after them and shall subdue three kings (Daniel 7:23-24 DBY).

And he shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most high [places], and think to change seasons and the law; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and a half time (Daniel 7:25 DBY).

Then the court will be opened and the kings' dominion will be taken away and given to the saints of the Most High as an everlasting kingdom and all shall serve and obey Him (Daniel 7:26-27 DBY).

Daniel's Vision

Daniel saw another vision during the reign of King Belshazzar. He saw **a ram with two horns** followed by **a he-goat with a notable horn** come from the west and trample the ram. The goat became great and then the great horn was broken and **four horns** came up in its stead toward the four winds of heaven (Daniel 8:1-8 DBY). Out of them came a little horn.

And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which became exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the beauty of the earth. And it became great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and trampled upon them. And he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and from him the continual sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And a time of trial was appointed unto the continual sacrifice by reason of transgression. And it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised and prospered (Daniel 8:9-12 DBY).

Daniel heard one saint ask another saint the length of the vision of the continual sacrifice and of the transgression that makes desolate, and for the sanctuary and the host to be trodden down. He said 2,300 days, then the sanctuary shall be vindicated (Daniel 8:13-14 DBY).

As Daniel sought understanding of the vision, the angel Gabriel appeared and said, "Understand, son of man, the vision is for the time of the end." Then he touched Daniel and said, "...I will make thee know ...the set time the end shall be" (Daniel 8:15-19 DBY). He then gave Daniel the interpretation.

The ram that thou sawest having the two horns: they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Greece; and the great horn that was between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up in its stead, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with his power. And at the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors shall have come to the full, a king of bold countenance, and understanding riddles, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but

*not by his own power; and he shall destroy marvellously, and shall prosper, and shall practise, **and shall destroy the mighty ones, and the people of the saints.** And through his cunning shall he cause craft to prosper in his hand; and **he will magnify himself in his heart,** and by prosperity will corrupt many; and **he will stand up against the Prince of princes: but he shall be broken without hand.***(Daniel 8:20-25 DBY, emphasis added).

Gabriel revealed to Daniel that the ram with the two horns represented the kingdoms of **Media and Persia**. The he-goat represented the king of **Greece** and the four horns and the little horn represented kingdoms that would follow. Daniel was told that the vision was for many days to come. He was astonished at the vision and understood only parts of it (Daniel 8:26-27).

The Handwriting on the Wall

One day King Belshazzar held a great feast in which the people drank from the vessels taken from the temple of God and praised the gods of gold and silver. Suddenly a hand appeared writing on the wall. When no one could interpret the writing, the queen suggested they call Daniel (Daniel 5:1-12). Belshazzar asked him to interpret the writing, promising him a reward and that he would be made third ruler in the kingdom (Daniel 5:1-16). Daniel refused the gifts but agreed to read the writing and make known the interpretation.

*O thou king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father the kingdom, and greatness, and glory, and majesty; and for the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: ... But when his heart was lifted up ... he was deposed from the throne of his kingdom, and they took his glory from him; and he was driven from the sons of men, and his heart was made like the beasts ... **till he knew that the Most High God ruleth over the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will*** (Daniel 5:18-21 DBY, emphasis added).

Daniel reminded Belshazzar how Nebuchadnezzar had learned that God ruled over the kingdoms of men and then chastised Belshazzar for his sin against God.

*And thou, Belshazzar, his son, hast not humbled thy heart, although thou knewest all this; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of the heavens; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou and thy nobles, thy wives and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know; and **the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: then from before him was sent the part of the hand, and this writing hath been written*** (Daniel 5:22-24, emphasis added).

Daniel read the handwriting on the wall and interpreted it for the king. God was about to finish his kingdom and give it to the Persians.

*And this is the writing that is written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE, God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL, Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting; PERES, **Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians*** (Daniel 5:22-28 DBY, emphasis added).

King Belshazzar was slain that night by the Persians in their conquest of Babylon and the kingdom. He learned too late that God rules in kingdoms and nations of men and that He judges those who scorn His ways.

The Persian Conquest of Babylon

The Persian conquest established it as the second world kingdom. Darius the Mede ruled as king for a short time before Cyrus the Great became king (Daniel 5:30-31). Two later Persian kings were also named Darius. Darius set three presidents, including Daniel, over the land. The king considered appointing him over the whole realm because of his abilities (Daniel 6:1-3).

The other presidents resented Daniel and looked for a way to discredit him but could not find any. They concluded that they would have to find something against him relative to his God (Daniel 6:4-5). They approached King Darius and suggested a royal decree for him to make:

... that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, except of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked. (Daniel 6:7-8 DBY).

King Darius consented to their proposal. The decree was written and signed by the king. When Daniel heard about the decree he went to his house and, with his windows open, kneeled and prayed three times a day as usual. His adversaries were watching and when they found Daniel praying before God they accused him before the king (Daniel 6:9-10).

... That Daniel, who is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day (Daniel 6:13 DBY).

They reminded the king of the decree that if anyone was found praying to any god they would be cast into the den of lions. Darius was distressed and labored all day seeking a way to save Daniel. He could find none and was forced by the decree to have him cast into the den of lions. The king said to Daniel, “Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will save thee” (Daniel 6:12-16 DBY). King Darius went to his palace and passed the night fasting. Early the next morning he hurried to the den of lions and cried out to Daniel and said,

... Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, hath thy God whom thou servest continually been able to save thee from the lions? (Daniel 6:20 DBY).

Daniel answered the king and said,

... O king, live for ever! My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocence was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt (Daniel 6:21-22 DBY).

The king was exceedingly glad and commanded that they take Daniel up out of the den. He was unhurt, “because he believed in his God” (Daniel 6:23 DBY). The men who accused Daniel were thrown into the den and were killed instantly. Then King Darius made the following decree:

*Peace be multiplied unto you. **I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He saveth and delivereth, and he worketh signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth:** who hath saved Daniel from the power of the lions (Daniel 6:26-27 DBY, emphasis added).*

King Darius became convinced that the God of Daniel was the living God and made a decree that everyone in his kingdom should fear before Him. Not only was the king influenced by Daniel, but the whole nation became aware of the ways of God.

Daniel's Prayer

Daniel prospered under Darius and continued into the reign of Cyrus the Persian (Daniel 6:28). He lived throughout the seventy years of captivity, teaching the way of God to all of the kings of Babylon and Persia. During the reign of Darius, Daniel realized, after reading the prophecy of Jeremiah, that the captivity was coming to a close.

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign, I Daniel understood by the books that the number of

*the years, whereof the word of Jehovah came to **Jeremiah** the prophet, for the accomplishment of the desolations of Jerusalem, was **seventy years** (Daniel 9:1-2 DBY, emphasis added)*

When Daniel realized this he prayed, fasted, and made confession unto Jehovah for the sin and rebellion of Jerusalem and all Israel. As he prayed he confessed,

And all Israel have transgressed thy law, even turning aside so as not to listen unto thy voice. And the curse hath been poured out upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God: for we have sinned against him. And he hath performed his words, which he spoke against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil; so that there hath not been done under the whole heaven as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us; yet we besought not Jehovah our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. And Jehovah hath watched over the evil, and brought it upon us; for Jehovah our God is righteous in all his works which he hath done; and we have not hearkened unto his voice (Daniel 9:11-14 DBY).

Then Daniel prayed for the mercy and forgiveness of God.

... O Lord our God, who broughtest thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a strong hand, and hast made thee a name, as it is this day, --we have sinned, we have done wickedly ... for because of our sins, and because of the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all round about us. And now, our God, hearken to the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake ... for thy city and thy people are called by thy name (Daniel 9:15-19 DBY).

Daniel's prayer expressed the sin of the children of Judah. During their captivity they had forsaken idolatry and returned to Jehovah. God had promised to bring them back from their captivity if they did so.

*And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and **thou shalt take them to heart among all the nations whither Jehovah thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return to Jehovah thy God, and shalt hearken to his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy sons, with all thy heart and with all thy soul; that then Jehovah thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will gather thee again from all the peoples whither Jehovah thy God hath scattered thee** (Deuteronomy 30:1-3 DBY, emphasis added).*

As Daniel was praying, the angel Gabriel came and revealed something even greater than forgiveness and return from captivity. The angel revealed the time and coming of the Messiah and of His death, based upon the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:20-26).

Jehovah God used the Babylonian captivity to free His people from idolatry. The faithfulness of Ezekiel, Daniel and his friends in following the ways of God had great influence on the kings and nations in which they were held captive. Many came to recognize Jehovah as the only true God. At the end of the captivity only a remnant returned to the land. The rest were dispersed throughout other lands and many became a testimony for the way of God. Daniel was used by God to reveal a future time, the coming of the promised Messiah, the Christ, and of His death.

The Return to the Land

Babylon had fallen and Persia emerged as the new world kingdom. The seventy year prophetic time of the captivity of the children of Judah was coming to a close. Persia was more tolerant toward the children of Israel, no doubt due to the influence of Daniel.

In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, the king made a proclamation, fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah (II Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-2). The proclamation was in writing and made throughout his kingdom.

*Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth has **Jehovah the God of the heavens** given to me, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whosoever there is among you of all his people, his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Jehovah the God of Israel--he is God--which is at Jerusalem. And whosoever remains in any place where he sojourns, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the voluntary offering for the house of God which is at Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-4 DBY, emphasis added).*

Cyrus recognized Jehovah as God and said that he was commanded to build a house for Him in Jerusalem. The king freed the children of Israel, allowing them to return to the land.

God stirred up the leaders of Judah and Benjamin and they rose up with the priests and Levites to go back to Jerusalem to build the house of Jehovah. They were given silver and gold and the articles of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon (Ezra 1:5-11 DBY).

Only forty thousand captives, a remnant, returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel who became their governor, and Jeshua a priest (Ezra 2:1-70). When they arrived in the land they gathered together in Jerusalem and built the altar of the God of Israel (Ezra 3:1-3). They kept the feasts and daily offerings. Then they began to prepare to build the temple of God (Ezra 3:7).

And the children of Israel that were come back out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves to them from the filthiness of the nations of the land, to seek Jehovah the God of Israel, did eat; and they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy; for Jehovah had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king ... to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel (Ezra 6:21-22 DBY, emphasis added).

The children of Israel had been cured of idolatry during the captivity and were once again seeking to follow the ways of Jehovah God.

Rebuilding the Temple

Zerubbabel and Jeshua appointed Levites to oversee the work. When the foundation of the temple had been laid they all sang praises and thanksgiving to Jehovah. The sound of their joy and weeping was heard afar off (Ezra 3:8-13 DBY).

When their adversaries heard what the children of the captivity were doing they tried to discourage them. They hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose and wrote a letter to Artaxerxes, the new king of Persia, warning him that the Jews who had returned were rebuilding the rebellious city and had laid the foundation of the temple. The king answered commanding that the work be stopped. It ceased until the reign of another king named Darius (Ezra 4:1-24 DBY).

Haggai and Zechariah prophesied during this time and challenged the people to begin building the temple again (Ezra 5:1, Haggai 1:1-11). Zerubbabel and Jeshua started again and

adversaries also came again, asking who had commanded them to build. They also sent a letter of complaint to Darius, the new king. He made a search and found the decree of Cyrus. He responded to the adversaries, telling them to “let the work of this house of God alone.” When the Jews heard the news they continued building and the temple was finished (Ezra 5:3-17, 6:1-15).

Queen Esther and Mordecai

Historically, the time of Esther took place before that of Ezra and Nehemiah. The book of Esther is an account of captives who did not return to the land of Israel. They were the Jews who are referred to as “the dispersion.” God used the dispersion as a witness of His ways as the Jews spread throughout the nations.

Esther was a Jewish woman who became the queen of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), a king of Persia. She was brought up by her cousin Mordecai. The former queen had disobeyed the king, was removed, and a search was made for a new queen. Beautiful virgins were brought in, including Esther. She pleased the king and became his queen. Mordecai sat in the king’s gate and watched over her (Esther 1 and 2 DBY).

Mordecai was a faithful Jew. One day he overheard a plot to kill the king and reported it to Esther and she informed the king in Mordecai’s name and it was recorded in the book of the chronicles (Esther 2:21-23 DBY).

Meanwhile the king promoted a man named Haman and set him above all of the princes. Everyone bowed to him except Mordecai. This angered Haman and when he learned that he was a Jew he petitioned the king to kill all the Jews. A decree went out to accomplish this. Mordecai heard the decree and sent word to Esther to appeal to the king. Esther was afraid to do this for no one was allowed to come before the king unless they were invited. Mordecai counseled Esther.

*...if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there arise relief and deliverance to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall perish. And **who knows whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*** (Esther 4:14 DBY, emphasis added)).

Esther replied and said to Mordecai,

*Go, gather together all the Jews that are found in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise, **and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish*** Esther 4:16 DBY).

Esther went to the inner court; the king saw her and asked what she requested. She asked that the king and Haman come to a banquet. Meanwhile Haman had a gallows built to hang Mordecai upon and went to the king tell him of his plan (Esther 5:1-14). That night the king couldn’t sleep and was brought the chronicles to read. He read about what Mordecai had done and asked what honor had been given him. Just then Haman came into the court and the king asked him what should be done for someone the king wished to honor. Thinking it must be himself, Haman suggested he be dressed in royal robes, ride the king’s horse in the city, and be proclaimed as the one the king wished to honor. The king ordered Haman to do this for Mordecai (Esther 6:1-11 DBY).

The king and Haman came to the banquet and Esther invited them to come again the next day. Then she revealed to the king that Haman was about to destroy her and her people. The king became very angry and Haman begged for his life but was later hung on the gallows he had made for Mordecai (Esther 7:1-10 DBY). King Ahasuerus elevated Mordecai and then Esther appealed to the king for her life and for her people.

*... If it please the king and if I have found grace before him, and the thing seem right to the king, and I be pleasing in his sight, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews that are in all the king's provinces. For how shall I endure to see the evil that shall befall my people? and **how shall I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?*** (Esther 8:5-6 DBY, emphasis added).

Ahasuerus had Mordecai prepare a decree that the Jews could defend themselves. They were able, with the help of sympathetic Persians, to defeat their enemies and be delivered from death. Esther was used of God to save the Jews and Mordecai was honored in the chronicles of Persia.

*... the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For **Mordecai the Jew was second to king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the welfare of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed*** (Esther 10:2-3 DBY, emphasis added).

Mordecai became second to the king of Persia and sought the welfare of the children of Israel. Many of them had returned to the land. Queen Esther and Mordecai lived after the temple had been rebuilt but the city of Jerusalem was still in ruins. They were, no doubt, a great influence on King Ahasuerus and on Artaxerxes who followed him as king of Persia. King Artaxerxes reigned during the time of Ezra.

Ezra Goes to Jerusalem

Ezra, a priest and a skilled scribe, asked permission of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, to leave Babylon and go to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:1-6 DBY). His main purpose was to seek and teach the way of God.

... Ezra had directed his heart to seek the law of Jehovah and to do it, and to teach in Israel the statutes and the ordinances (Ezra 7:10 DBY).

The king granted his request and gave Ezra a letter to the children of Israel, authorizing him to appoint magistrates and judges who knew the laws of God and to teach them to the people. The king also sent a great deal of silver and gold with Ezra (Ezra 7:6-26 DBY).

Blessed be Jehovah the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of Jehovah which is at Jerusalem; and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened, as the hand of Jehovah my God was upon me; and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me (Ezra 7:27-28 DBY).

Nearly two thousand descendants of the captives joined Ezra on his return to Jerusalem, after he had gathered many Levites for service in the house of God. On the way Ezra stopped at the river at Ahava, proclaimed a fast and prayed for God's protection as they traveled (Ezra 8:1-23).

When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem he delivered the king's orders along with the silver and gold to the leaders of the people of Israel (Ezra 8:24-36 DBY).

Intermarriage with Foreign Wives

Once again the people of God followed the ways of man and sinned against Him. The leaders came to Ezra and reported that the people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites had not separated themselves and had made marriages with the people of the land. Many of the rulers had also been guilty of this trespass. When Ezra heard of this he tore his clothes, pulled out his hair, and sat down astonished (Ezra 9:1-3 DBY).

All who trembled at the words of God sat astonished with him until the evening sacrifice. Then Ezra fell on his knees before Jehovah and prayed. He expressed his shame and confessed

the sin and guilt of disobedience in marrying foreign wives. He reviewed the ways of their fathers and of the captivity as a result (Ezra 9:4-15). As he was praying he said,

And now for a little space there hath been favour from Jehovah our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage (Ezra 9: 8 DBY).

While Ezra was praying and confessing a very large congregation of men, women, and children gathered and wept. A man named Shekkaniah spoke to Ezra and said,

... We have acted unfaithfully toward our God, and have taken foreign wives of the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing. And now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandments of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise, for this matter is incumbent on thee, and we will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it (Ezra 10:2-4 DBY).

Ezra made the priests, Levites, and all Israel swear that they would do according to the word of Shekkaniah. A proclamation was made to all the people that they must gather at Jerusalem. Ezra told them that they had acted unfaithfully in taking foreign wives, to make confession to God, and to separate themselves from the foreign wives (Ezra 10:6-11 DBY).

The whole congregation answered and said with a loud voice, “Yes, it is for us to do according to thy words” (Ezra 10:12 DBY). Ezra, in following the statutes of God, led the people to repent and turn back from the way of man to the way of God.

Nehemiah: Sent as the New Governor of Judah

Nehemiah was the cupbearer for Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who had earlier allowed Ezra to go to Jerusalem. Some men had come from Judah and Nehemiah inquired of them concerning the Jews who had returned from captivity and of Jerusalem. He was told that the province was in great affliction and that the walls and gates of Jerusalem were in ruins. Nehemiah wept, fasted, prayed, and made confession to Jehovah for the sins of the children of Israel. He asked God to hear his prayer and to give him mercy before the king (Nehemiah 1:1-11 DBY).

When he went before the king, the king saw his distress and asked about it. Nehemiah told him about his concern and asked the king to send him to Judah. The king not only granted him his request but sent him with great authority. Upon arriving in Jerusalem Nehemiah toured the city walls by night and then spoke to the leaders (Nehemiah 2:1-16 DBY).

*... I said to them, Ye see the distress that we are in, that Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. **Come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem**, that we be no more a reproach. And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me; as also of the king's words which he had said unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build ... (Nehemiah 2:17-18 DBY, emphasis added).*

The people began to rebuild the walls and gates, but adversaries tried again to hinder the work. Threats were made and the men had to carry weapons with them as they worked. The work progressed, the walls were finished and the gates hung in fifty-two days (Nehemiah 3 through 6:15). Their enemies “perceived that this work was done by ... God” (Nehemiah 3:16).

Ezra Reads the Law

Ezra was in the land before Nehemiah came. After the children of Israel were settled in their cities and houses were built in Jerusalem they gathered together and asked Ezra to bring the book of the Law of Moses. Ezra brought the law before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding. He read from morning until midday and the people

were attentive. Ezra stood on a stage as he read, with seven other men. When he opened the book all of the people stood up (Nehemiah 8:1-5 DBY).

And Ezra blessed Jehovah, the great God; and all the people answered, Amen, Amen! with lifting up of their hands; and they bowed their heads, and worshipped Jehovah with their faces to the ground (Nehemiah 8:6 DBY).

The men beside him caused the people to understand the law of God. They read distinctly and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. As they explained the law they said to the people, “This day is holy to Jehovah your God: mourn not, nor weep” for all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. They reminded them that the joy of Jehovah was their strength. The people went away, greatly rejoicing for they understood the words that were declared to them (Nehemiah 8:7-12 DBY).

Then all of the people made booths to dwell in and day by day the book of the law was read and there was great gladness (Nehemiah 8:17-18 DBY). Then they fasted, separated themselves from foreigners, and confessed their sins. They listened to the law of God a fourth part of the day; and a fourth part they confessed, and worshipped Jehovah their God (Nehemiah 9:1-3 DBY). A wonderful contrast took place when the hearts of God’s people turned from the ways of man to the way of God.

Waiting for the Messiah

Ezekiel, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, Ezra and Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah, Esther and Mordecai all walked in the ways of God and were used of Him to teach His people, to bring them out of captivity back to the land, and to be a witness to the kings and people of Babylon and Persia.

The last prophet, **Malachi**, appears to have lived about one hundred years after Ezra and Nehemiah. During those years the children of Israel had become lethargic. Malachi questioned them about their carelessness in their sacrifices and worship and their responses were indifferent. Many were divorcing their wives and marrying heathen women. He closed his prophecy with a reference to the coming of Elijah (John the Baptist) and the second coming of Christ and of the final judgment to come.

*For behold, the day cometh, burning as a furnace; and all the proud and all that work wickedness shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith Jehovah of hosts, so that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. And **unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and leap like fatted calves. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I prepare, saith Jehovah of hosts. Remember the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, the statutes and ordinances. Behold, I send unto you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of Jehovah. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse** (Malachi 4:1-5 DBY, emphasis added).*

Throughout the prophetic books numerous prophecies are made concerning the coming of Christ. This is significant since He is the source of the blessing promised to Abraham. Their prophecies prepared the people for His coming. Having finally given up idolatry, they began to look for the Messiah (Daniel 9:25, John 1:41, 4:25).

The Babylonian captivity of the children of Judah foreshadows a future Babylonian captivity described in the New Testament when once again the people of God turn from His way to the way of man. A woman, described as a harlot, is much like Israel, who was described as a harlot by the prophets (Jeremiah 2 & 3, Ezekiel 16).

*The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: **MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.** I saw the woman, **drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.** And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement (Revelation 17:4-6)*

The account continues describing her fall and judgment of God.

*... **Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!** For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.” And I heard another voice from heaven saying, **“Come out of her, my people,** lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. ⁵**“For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities ... she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her** (Revelation 18:2-8).*

The tragic prophecy is that in the end times God’s people will cease to follow the way of God in Christ and turn again to the way of man, ending up in a captivity of spiritual harlotry. They are called to come out of her.

The Four Hundred Silent Years

The Four Hundred Silent Years, or the Inter-Testament period, was a time when there were no additional scriptures of God written. Information about those years is gained from the prophecies of Daniel, secular history, and the Apocryphal books of Maccabees. The Apocryphal books are included in some Bible translations but are not generally regarded as divinely inspired.

The centuries are marked out historically by the rise and fall of four world nations. They include the Persian period, the Greek period, the period of Jewish independence, and the Roman period. During each period that nation and the Jews had an influence on each other in the ways of man and the ways of God.

The Old Testament covers the history of man and his relationship to God from creation to the time of Christ. The first fifteen hundred years are measured by the life spans of men. The remaining twenty-five hundred years focus on the rise and fall of nations.

The way of man is magnified by the character of the nation in which he lives and by its leaders. Conversely, man determines the ways of nations by the way in which he lives. They reflect each other. More importantly, nations and their leaders are influenced by the people of God who follow the way of God.

The Rise and Fall of Early Nations

Nations were first formed after the flood. Originally, the earth had one language, but God confused the language at Babel and scattered the people over the face of the earth. The sons of Noah were divided into families of nations. The families of Japheth settled in the Gentile coastlands, the families of Ham, including Egypt and Canaan, moved to the southwest, and the families of Shem spread out from the area of Mesopotamia (Genesis 10 & 11).

Nations began as city kingdoms and eventually included large areas of land and many cities. Egypt was one of the first large nations. The Chaldeans began to grow as a kingdom in Mesopotamia. Babel ultimately became the nation of Babylon. Asshur and Nineveh became the nation of Assyria. The children of Heth became the Hittite nation. All of those kingdoms or nations followed the way of man and turned to idolatry (Genesis 10). One of the major activities of the kingdoms was warfare with each other.

God divided people into nations and He controls their times and boundaries. His purpose was that they would seek Him and find Him.

... He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being ... (Acts 17:26-28. emphasis added).

God revealed Himself in many ways to the nations but it is clear from the Scriptures that they hated Jehovah and had no desire to know Him or to follow His ways (Exodus 20:5 DBY, II Chronicles 19:2 DBY, and Romans 1:18-32). Nevertheless, it was God's will to bless the nations and He called Abraham out of Mesopotamia that He might make of him a great nation which would be a blessing to all of the other nations on earth. God provided a land for the nation of Israel in the center of the other nations.

Do ye thus requite Jehovah, Foolish and unwise people? Is not he thy father that hath bought thee? Hath he not made thee and established thee? Remember the days of old, Consider the years of generation to

*generation; Ask thy father, and he will shew thee; Thine elders, and they will tell thee when **the Most High assigned to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel.** For Jehovah's portion is his people; Jacob the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, And in the waste, howling wilderness; He compassed him about, he watched over him, He preserved him as the apple of his eye (Deuteronomy 32:6-10 DBY, emphasis added).*

God promised Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan. The nations were assigned their boundaries by God in relationship to his own people, the children of Israel. The nations have been in conflict with each other and particularly with the nation of Israel throughout time.

The Nation of Israel

The children of Israel, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, grew from seventy people into a large nation during their four hundred years of bondage in Egypt. The cruelty of the Egyptians and Pharaoh's refusal to free them, led to the destruction of his army by God in the Red Sea during the exodus of the Israelites.

The Promised Land was filled with Canaanite nations who were so wicked that God commanded Joshua to destroy them. Later the Israelites became unfaithful to God and were defeated many times. Under David and Solomon Israel became the largest kingdom in the world and dominated many other smaller kingdoms. Israel became unfaithful again and Syria and Assyria rose to power and made war against Israel. The nation of Assyria finally conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and took them captive. The nation of Babylon, in turn, conquered Assyria and also took the kingdom of Judah captive. After the children of Judah, or Jews, returned to the land they never regained the kingdom but became subject to the world kingdoms.

There is no record of any nation turning to God or following His ways in the Old Testament. Instead, from the time of the formation of the nation of Israel, other nations have tried to seek their destruction.

The children of Israel turned from God over and over again, but He never deterred from His purpose and patiently pursued His plan of salvation. God used faithful men to teach the way of God and of the eternal kingdom to come through His Son Jesus Christ, the King of Kings.

During the four hundred years a remnant of the children of Israel, or Jews, continued to live back in the Promised Land and the others were in the dispersion, scattered throughout the world.

The Rise and Fall of World Kingdoms and Nations

The prophecies of Daniel present the Biblical link between Old and New Testament times. They cover two world nations in which he lived, Babylon and Persia and one of the future nations, Greece. The fourth future nation, Rome, is only indentified as the one of iron. The Apocryphal books of I and II Maccabees identify the fourth nation as Rome and refer to it ten times. Secular history provides a more detailed history of Rome. How will these world nations be used of God to fulfill His purposes and how will they reveal the way of man in conflict with the way of God?

Babylon had fallen and Persia began to rule the world during the life time of Daniel. He continued to live until the time of Cyrus the Great of Persia. His prophecies, however, reveal future events in Persia, and predictions relative to Greece and Rome.

Persia 536-331 B.C.

Persia, according to secular history, lasted over 200 years as a world nation. It is pictured as the silver chest and arms in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, as the bear in Daniel's dream, and as the

ram in Daniel's later vision. During that period it had eleven kings all of whom helped the Jews except Kings Cambyses who stopped the work on the temple for a time. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to the land. Three other kings, including Xerxes (Ahaseurus) supported them in rebuilding the temple and city of Jerusalem. Daniel, Ezra, Esther, Mordecai, Nehemiah and other faithful Jews led many of the Persian kings, beginning with Cyrus, to believe in Jehovah God and follow His ways. Persia continued about 100 years into the Inter-Testament period. It was conquered by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.

The ram that thou sawest having the two horns: they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Greece; and the great horn that was between his eyes is the first king (Daniel 8:20-21 DBY, Emphasis added).

Greece 331-167 B.C.

Greece lasted over 160 years as a world nation. It is pictured as the lower body of brass in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, as the leopard with four wings in Daniel's dream, and the goat with one horn in his later vision. The horn is broken into four horns and then a little horn comes up.

Greece became a world nation in 331 B.C. but it had its roots in the ancient civilizations of Crete and Mycenae. Historians consider it to be the major foundation of western civilization. It developed the first republic form of government. Its golden age or classical period goes back to 530-336 B.C. in which its culture in arts, literature, and philosophy reached its height. It had many gods related to the stars and planets. Greece developed an effective alphabet and language that was used throughout the world for hundreds of years. The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek (The Septuagint) during the Inter-Testament period.

Greece functioned as city-states which were in disarray after the Peloponnesian wars. Phillip II came to the throne of Macedonia in 359 B.C. and transformed into a great military power and gained control of Greece and uniting them. In 336 B.C. Phillip was assassinated and the throne passed onto his son Alexander the Great. Under his leadership Greece became the largest empire at that time.

One of the goals of Alexander the Great, in his conquests, was to advance Greek culture world-wide. Greece became the third world nation under Alexander the Great. He was very favorable to the Jews, sparing Jerusalem and allowing them freedom of worship. He died at the age of 32 in 323 B.C. and his kingdom was divided between four of his generals. They are pictured as the four horns in Daniel's dream.

And the rough goat is the king of Greece; and the great horn that was between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up in its stead, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with his power. (Daniel 8:21-22 DBY, emphasis added).

Secular history identifies the four generals of Alexander who assumed power and kingships after he died. They were: **Ptolemy I**, king of Egypt, **Seleucus Nicator**, king of Syria, **Cassandra**, king of Macedonia, and **Lycimachus**, king of Thrace. Ptolemy and Seleucus are pictured as the first kings of the south and north in chapter 11 of Daniel. The kings who followed them warred against each other continually for 150 years seeking dominion.

Finally a king named **Antiochus Epiphanes** arose who ruled over much of the Middle East from 175 to 164 B.C. He was a descendant of Seleucus and of Antiochus I & II. He was very antagonistic against the Jews and tried to exterminate them and their worship of Jehovah God.

And at the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors shall have come to the full, a king of bold countenance, and understanding riddles, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; and he shall destroy marvellously, and shall prosper, and shall practise, and shall destroy the

mighty ones, and the people of the saints. And through his cunning shall he cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he will magnify himself in his heart, and by prosperity will corrupt many; and he will stand up against the Prince of princes: but he shall be broken without hand (Daniel 8:23-25 DBY, emphasis added).

And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which became exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the beauty of the earth. And it became great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and trampled upon them. And he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and from him the continual sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And a time of trial was appointed unto the continual sacrifice by reason of transgression. And it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised and prospered (Daniel 8:9-12 DBY).

Antiochus Epiphanes is also mentioned in the Apocryphal book of I Maccabees.

And there came out of them a wicked root Antiochus surnamed Epiphanes, son of Antiochus the king, who had been an hostage at Rome, and he reigned in the hundred and thirty and seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks (I Maccabees 1:10 APC, emphasis added).

Antiochus Epiphanes is no doubt the Little Horn of the vision because he polluted the altar at Jerusalem by offering a pig upon it. He may be a picture of the antichrist who will arise in the latter days (Mathew 24:15, Mark 13:14). He forbade temple worship, erected an altar to the Roman god, Jupiter, destroyed copies of Scripture, and sold many Jews into slavery. This led to the **Maccabean** revolt and a period of independence for the Jews.

Jewish Independence 167-63 B.C.

The Jews gained independence after the Maccabean revolt. Mattathias, a priest, became infuriated at the attempt of Antiochus Epiphanes to destroy the Jews and their worship. He had five heroic, warrior-like sons (Judas, Jonathan, Simon, John, and Eleazar). They were called “The Maccabees”, a title given them for their victorious campaigns for freedom. Judas, a military genius, won battle after battle against powerful enemies in his zeal for following the way of Jehovah God. He re-conquered Jerusalem, purified the temple, and rededicated it to God. He established the line of priest-rulers, the first ones being his brothers. They governed the Jews for about 100 years until they were conquered by the Romans under Pompey.

During the Inter-Testament period synagogues or meeting places increased as the dispersion of the Jews continued to spread throughout the world. Various Jewish groups arose such as the Sanhedrin, Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Herodians, and Essenes.

Rome 63 B.C. to Time of Christ

Rome lasted over 500 years as a world nation (63 B.C. to 476 A.D.). The city itself began to grow in Italy about 700 B.C. It developed as a republic with a senate and citizens had a voice in the government. Rome was, no doubt, the fourth kingdom of iron described in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and as the beast with iron teeth in Daniel’s dream. She is not included in his later visions. Rome is not identified by name in the Old Testament but is mentioned several times in the Apocryphal books of I & II Maccabees.

Rome continued to grow and expand for hundreds of years. Throughout the centuries Rome adopted much of the politics, culture, and gods of the Greeks. They were practical rulers, seeking peace throughout the world and building roads for travel and communication.

After the death of Julius Caesar in 64 B.C. Rome adopted an emperor. A year later Palestine was conquered by Rome under Pompey. The Romans were cruel but allowed a great deal of self-government in the nations they conquered. Israel was divided into tetrarchs with regional kings.

Herod the Great, an Edomite, became one of the kings. He was very cruel, but still had the temple rebuilt for the Jews. He also worked with the priests who also had rule over the people. The priesthood, however, became corrupt again, following the ways of man.

Looking for the Messiah

Throughout the centuries God had not forgotten His promise to Abraham that, through his seed, all of the nations would be blessed. All of the prophets from Isaiah through Malachi predicted the coming of the Savior hundreds of times.

Daniel was the first to reveal Him as the Messiah. Messiah is translated “Christ” in Greek. He is referred to in all of the dreams and visions in Daniel (the Stone, the Son of Man, the Prince of princes, and the Messiah). The time of His coming was also revealed in Daniel.

*Seventy weeks are apportioned out upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to close the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make expiation for iniquity, and to bring in the righteousness of the ages, and to seal the vision and prophet, and to anoint the holy of holies. Know therefore and understand: From the going forth of the word to restore and to build Jerusalem unto **Messiah, the Prince**, are seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks. The street and the moat shall be built again, even in troublous times. And **after the sixty-two weeks shall Messiah be cut off**, and shall have nothing; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with an overflow, and unto the end, war, --the **desolations** determined. And he shall confirm a covenant with the many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and because of the protection of abominations there shall be a desolator, even until that the consumption and what is determined shall be poured out upon the desolate (Daniel 9:24-27 DBY, emphasis added).*

Gabriel revealed to Daniel that seventy weeks were appointed for the children of Israel, from the word of Cyrus allowing the Jews to return to the time of the Messiah. An analysis of the years involved from the time of Cyrus and the command to restore and build Jerusalem to the time of the Messiah (Christ), reveals that each week represents a period of seven years. Seventy times seven equals 490 and the interpretation is that the seventy weeks equal 490 years. The years are somewhat less than those of secular history and there are uncertainties in interpreting all of the events involved in the coming of Christ.

During the reign of Cyrus, Daniel had a vision of a glorious man whose appearance was very similar to John’s vision of Jesus Christ (Daniel 10:4-6, Revelation 1:13-15). He told Daniel of a king in the future who would rise up against the people of Israel, against God’s covenant, the sanctuary, and Jerusalem. He would cause the daily sacrifice to be taken away and put in place the abomination of desolation (Daniel 11:5-31). The glorious man told Daniel that the people that know their God shall be strong and respond.

*And **they that are wise among the people shall instruct the many**; and they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days. And when they fall, they shall be helped with a little help; but many shall cleave to them with flatteries. And **some of the wise shall fall, to try them, and to purge and to make them white**, to the time of the end: for it shall yet be for the time appointed (Daniel 11:33-35 DBY, emphasis added).*

The people of God were evidently reading the Scriptures and increasingly preparing themselves for the coming of the Messiah. The New Testament reveals that many were looking for Him. This is evident in the New Testament in the various responses to John the Baptist and early encounters with Jesus.

The Way of Man and the Way of God

The Inter-Testament period reveals many of the ways of man and of the way of God. The nations reveal that they are following the ways of man in seeking their own objectives, sinning and in rebellion of God. Only a remnant of God's people, the Jews followed His ways. God used the period to teach the nations and His people, and to use them for His glory. The dispersion of the Jews with synagogues over the world, the Greek language, the Roman peace, and the translation of the Scriptures into Greek were all used of God to prepare the world for the coming of Christ and open the door for world evangelism.

One truth is evident, God rules over the ways of nations and the ways of man.

*Jehovah frustrateth the counsel of the nations; he maketh the thoughts of the peoples of none effect. The counsel of Jehovah standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation. **Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah**, the people that he hath chosen for his inheritance! (Psalms 33:10-12 DBY, emphasis added).*

*The wicked shall be turned into Sheol, all the nations that forget God. For the needy one shall not be forgotten alway; the hope of the meek shall not perish for ever. Arise, Jehovah; let not man prevail: **let the nations be judged in thy sight**. Put them in fear, Jehovah: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah (Psalms 9:17-20 DBY, emphasis added).*

Nations and man have no hope in their own ways. Our only hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only way of salvation before Jehovah God.

The Promised Savior: Crucified

Four thousand years passed after God's first promise of a Savior was made in Eden relative to the seed of the woman. During that time the promise was made more specifically to Abraham, and again to Moses and David. The promise of the coming Savior was increasingly emphasized by the prophets. During those centuries God did not forget His promise. The Bible reminds us to have faith in His promise, in His way, and of His salvation.

... do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 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 (II Peter 3:8-9).

Isaiah and Malachi prophesied of a messenger who would come and prepare the way for Him (Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1-3, 4:1-6). Malachi was the last prophet to foretell the coming of the promised Savior.

The Four Gospel Accounts of the Savior

The gospel or good news of Jesus Christ was described separately by four of His followers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They established a four-fold witness of His life. John began his account by going back to eternity in heaven, revealing who Jesus Christ was: the Word of God.

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 (John 1:1-4).

Jesus was with God, He was God, all things were created through Him, and in Him was life and light. John continued by describing how the world responded to Jesus when He came. Jesus shined as light in the darkness but the darkness did not recognize or comprehend Him.

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it ... 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 (John 1:5-11).

Even though Jesus created the world, the world did not know Him and His own people did not receive Him. Ultimately He was despised and rejected as the prophets foretold (Isaiah 53:3). To those who did receive Him, however, Jesus gave the right to become children of God, "even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). John went on to say,

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 (John 1:16-17).

Matthew and Luke both began their gospel accounts by listing the genealogy of Jesus as evidence that Jesus was the descendant or promised seed of David. He was the promised Savior and King. Mark and John omit details of the birth of Jesus. Mark emphasized the amazing miracles of Jesus, demonstrating that He was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Preparation for the Coming of the Savior

The gospels were all written after Jesus had lived, died, risen, and returned to heaven. They were historical accounts, intended to teach His followers who and what He was. But, how would

people of Jesus' own time know that He was the promised Messiah? How would they prepare for His coming? God raised up John the Baptist to preach repentance. Isaiah prophesied of him as the voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight" (Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 3:1-3). Malachi spoke of one who would be God's messenger and the Elijah to come.

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 (Malachi 3:1).

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet ... 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 (Malachi 4:5-6, Matthew 11:10-13, and Luke 1:13-17).

John the Baptist was sent to prepare hearts for the coming Savior, and to bear witness that Jesus was truly the promised Savior.

His Name shall be Called Jesus

Before Jesus was born, the angel Gabriel came to Mary, a virgin in Nazareth, betrothed to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. Gabriel told her she was blessed among women, that the Lord was with her, and said,

... Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:30-33, emphasis added).

Mary was told to call her Son by the name of Jesus (Jesus means Jehovah Savior or Jehovah saves). Mary asked how this could be since she did not know a man. Gabriel answered and said,

... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

Gabriel said that nothing was impossible for God. Mary then said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be according to your word" (Luke 1:37-38).

Joseph learned that Mary was with child and while he thought about putting her away an angel appeared to him in a dream and said,

... Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:20-21, emphasis added).

This was to be a fulfillment of God's word to Isaiah the prophet when He said,

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14, Luke 1:22-23, emphasis added).

Joseph and Mary were married and lived in Nazareth. When time drew near for the birth of Jesus, God used a decree from Rome to fulfill prophecy as to the place of His birth.

The Birth of Jesus

A decree went out from Caesar Augustus that everyone should return to their home city to be registered for a census. Joseph and Mary left Nazareth and went to Bethlehem, the city of David, because Joseph was a descendant of David. While they were there Mary gave birth to Jesus.

In the country shepherds were watching their sheep. Suddenly, an angel appeared, with the glory of God shining all around, and they were greatly afraid (Luke 2:1-10). The angel said,

*... Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. **For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.** And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger (Luke 2:10-12).*

A great multitude in the heavens began praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:13-14).

The shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph and the Baby. After seeing the Christ Child, the shepherds praised and glorified God. They spread the news all over, and all who heard marveled (Luke 2:15-20). They were the first witnesses of Christ’s birth.

Jesus Presented in the Temple

Eight days after His birth Jesus was circumcised. Later He was taken by His parents to the temple to be presented to God. While there, Simeon and Anna came in and spoke concerning Jesus. It had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would see the Lord’s Christ before he died. He took the Child Jesus up in his arms and blessed God, saying:

Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel (Luke 2:29-32).

Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary, His mother:

*Behold, **this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel**, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, **a sword will pierce through your own soul also**), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed (Luke 2:33-35).*

Anna, a prophetess, who served God in the temple, came in at that instant and gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38).

The Wise Men from the East

Wise men came to Jerusalem from the East, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem. They asked where He was who had been born King of the Jews. They had seen His star in the East and had come to worship Him. When Herod the king heard this, **he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.** He gathered the chief priests and scribes together and asked them where Christ was to be born. They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea” and quoted the prophet Micah (Matthew 2:1-5).

... 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 (Micah 5:1-2).

King Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled when they heard of the birth of the King of the Jews. They should have rejoiced, as the shepherds did, at the good news of the birth of the promised Savior and King.

The First Effort to Kill the Savior

Herod secretly called the wise men and asked them the time that the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem to search for the Child and bring back word to him so that he could come and worship Him too. The wise men found the Child with Mary and Joseph, fell down and worshipped before Him, and presented Him gifts. Being divinely warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country a different way. (Matthew 2:7-12).

After the wise men left, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream saying,

Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him (Matthew 2:13).

Joseph arose and took the Child and His mother and fled by night to Egypt and they were there until the death of Herod, fulfilling the words of the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called My Son”(Matthew 2:14-15, Hosea 11:1).

Herod was furious when he realized that he had been deceived by the wise men and had all of the male children, from two years old and under, killed in the area of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16). This fulfilled another prophesy of mothers weeping for their children (Jeremiah 31:15).

After Herod died an angel appeared in a dream to Joseph telling him to return to the land of Israel. Joseph, Mary and the Christ Child came back to Nazareth in Galilee (Matthew 2:19-23). In Nazareth Jesus grew “and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him” (Luke 2:40).

The Boy Jesus

Every year Joseph and Mary went to the Passover in Jerusalem. When Jesus was twelve years old He lingered behind when His parents returned home. They went back to search for Him and found Him in the temple sitting with the teachers, asking them questions. All who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. His mother asked Him why He had caused them great anxiety. He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”(Luke 2:41-49). His parents did not understand the statement. They evidently still did not realize that their Son was the Christ.

Jesus went back with them to Nazareth, and was subject to them. He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:51-52). Nothing more is said about Jesus until He began His ministry at about the age of thirty (Luke 3:23).

The Ministry of John the Baptist

John the Baptist was sent by God as a witness for Jesus Christ (John 1:6-8). He began his ministry, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins in preparation for the coming Savior and the ministry of Jesus (Luke 3:1-3). He began preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand!” He was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of the voice crying in the wilderness: “**Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.**” Many came to John at the Jordan River and were baptized, confessing their sins. (Matthew 3:1-6). The people were in expectation, reasoning in their hearts about John, wondering if he was the Christ (Luke 3:15). John answered them saying,

... I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire (Luke 3:16-17).

God used John the Baptist as a witness for Jesus before he knew that Jesus was the Christ and before Jesus began His ministry.

The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus

Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized and John tried to prevent Him saying, “I need to be baptized by You.” John thought Jesus should baptize him, because John knew Jesus and the kind of life that He lived. Jesus had a righteous testimony. Jesus said,

“Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” After John baptized Jesus, he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Jesus. Suddenly a voice came from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Jesus was then led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 3:13-17, 4:1).

Jesus fasted forty days and nights in the wilderness. In His hunger the tempter came and said, **“If you are the Son of God,** command that these stones be made bread” (Matthew 4:3). Jesus answered and said,

It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

The devil took Jesus up to the pinnacle of the temple and said, **“If You are the Son of God,** throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over You, and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone’” (Matthews 4:6, Psalm 91:11-12). Jesus said to him,

It is written again, “You shall not tempt the LORD your God” (Matthew 4:7).

Then the devil took Jesus up on a mountain and showed Him all of the kingdoms of the world and their glory and said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me” (Matthew 4:8-9). Jesus said,

Away with you, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Matthew 4:10).

As Satan tempted Him, Jesus always answered the devil with the written Word of God. The devil then left Jesus and angels came and ministered to Him (Matthew 4:11).

The Lamb of God

After being tempted Jesus came again to John the Baptist at Bethany near the Jordan River. As he saw Jesus coming toward him John bore witness of Jesus, saying,

*... **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* (John 1:29-31, emphasis added).

John continue to bear 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*** (John 1:32-34, emphasis added).

John did not actually know who the Coming One was until Jesus was baptized. It was revealed to John that the Holy Spirit would descend as a dove and remain on the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. John then knew that Jesus was the Son of God.

Early Disciples of Jesus

The next day John was standing with two of his disciples when Jesus came again. John looked at Jesus and said again, “Behold the Lamb of God.” The two disciples heard John and followed Jesus. They stayed with Jesus that day and one of them, Andrew, found his brother Simon and said, **“We have found the Messiah”** (which is translated, **the Christ**) and brought

him to Jesus. When Jesus saw him He said, “You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas,” meaning Peter or a stone (John 1:35-42). The following day Jesus found Philip, and Philip in turn found Nathaniel and said to him,

We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (John 1:45, emphasis added).

When Jesus saw Nathaniel He said, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” Nathanael asked how Jesus knew him. Jesus said that He had seen him under the fig tree. Then Nathaniel said, “**Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel**” (John 1:46-49). Jesus responded and said,

Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man (John 1:50-51).

These early disciples had responded to John’s call for repentance and believed his witness for Jesus. They followed Jesus, and after spending time with Him quickly realized and believed for themselves that He was the Messiah (Christ), the long awaited King of Israel.

The Early Ministry of Jesus

The ministry of Jesus was characterized by miracles and parables. He performed His first miracle or sign at a wedding in **Cana of Galilee** where He and His early disciples were invited. When they ran out of wine He changed water into wine, manifesting His glory, and His disciples believed on Him (John 2:1-11).

Later, in Jerusalem, Jesus went into the temple, drove out the sacrificial animals for sale, overturned the tables of the merchants, and said, “Take these things out! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!” When asked for a sign for His actions He said, “Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” During the feast many believed in Jesus when they saw the signs which He did. Jesus did not commit Himself to them at this time for He knew all men and did not need their testimony (John 2:13-24). He evidently did not rely on them as a witness.

Nicodemus

One night a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” Jesus replied, “... unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” He explained that a man must be born of the Spirit and Nicodemus asked how this could be. Jesus answered and said, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” (John 3:1-10).

... Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 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 (John 3:11-16, emphasis added).

Jesus revealed to Nicodemus that He had come down from heaven. He said that He would be lifted up like the serpent, referring to the cross. Then Jesus added that He had come into the world as the Savior.

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 everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God (John 3:17-21).

The Woman of Samaria

Jesus left Judea to go again to Galilee. On the way He came to a city in Samaria and stopped at Jacob's well. While resting there a **woman of Samaria** came out for water and Jesus asked her for a drink. She was surprised that a Jew would ask a Samaritan for drink and He said to her,

...If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water (John 4:10).

The woman asked how He could give her living water and Jesus answered,

Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:13-14).

The woman asked for the water and Jesus told her to call her husband and come back. She said that she had no husband and Jesus told her that she was right for she had had five husbands and that the one she was living with was not her husband. The woman concluded that Jesus was a prophet and said

Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship (John 4:20).

Jesus explained that true worshippers will worship God in spirit and in truth. The woman said, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am *He*." (John 4:21-26). It is very amazing that the Samaritan woman was looking for the Messiah!

The woman went back into the city and said, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" The Samaritans went out and invited Jesus to stay with them. Many believed in Him because of His word and said, "This is indeed **the Christ, the Savior of the world**" (John 4:28-42). Their confession reveals that Jesus was recognizable as the Christ.

The Greater Ministry of Jesus in Galilee

The greater part of Jesus' ministry was in Galilee. He only returned to Jerusalem on feast days. His life was characterized by the many miracles He performed showing compassion for the needy. The gospels record over thirty individual miracles and many healings of multitudes. Jesus also used parables and metaphors in His teaching. Over fifty are recorded in His ministry.

The people were very receptive when Jesus returned to Galilee from Jerusalem because they had seen the things He did in Jerusalem. His ministry in Galilee was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah.

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined (Isaiah 9:1, Matthew 4:15).

Jesus preached that the time was fulfilled, that the kingdom of God was at hand, and to repent and believe in the gospel (Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:14-15, Luke 4:14-15). The Galileans

were astonished at His teaching. Jesus came again to Cana where He met a nobleman whose son was sick unto death. Jesus promised to heal him. The nobleman believed and found his son healed after returning home (John 4:46-54).

The Rejection of Jesus in Nazareth

Jesus came to his home in Nazareth and entered the synagogue on the Sabbath. He stood and read from the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:16-18),

The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD (Isaiah 58:6, 61:1-2).

Jesus said, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Everyone marveled at His gracious words and said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” Jesus went on to say,

*You will surely say this proverb to Me, “Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.” ... **Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country.** But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:23-27, emphasis added).*

Jesus said that a prophet is not accepted in his own county. They knew Him as “Joseph’s son.” Familiarity no doubt blinded them. They also became so angry at His words that they rose up, thrust Him out of the city, and took Him to the brow of a hill to throw Him over the cliff. Jesus passed through the midst of them and went His way to Capernaum (Luke 4:28-31). **Jesus was rejected by His own home people and they tried to kill Him!** Such is man’s way.

Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee

Jesus passed by the Sea of Galilee and saw Peter and Andrew again. They were fishing with James and John and had caught nothing. Jesus told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat, and they caught such a great multitude of fish that the boat began to sink. Then Jesus called all four of them, saying that He would make them fishers of men (Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11).

Back in Capernaum Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and taught. They were astonished at His teaching. There was a man in the synagogue who was demon-possessed. He cried out to Jesus and said, **“I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”** Jesus rebuked him and said, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” The demon came out of him and the people were amazed and said, “What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” Immediately His fame spread throughout the entire region around Galilee (Mark 1:21-28, Luke 4:31-37). There is no indication, however, that they recognized Him as the Christ.

Upon leaving the synagogue they entered the home of Peter’s wife’s mother who was sick and Jesus healed her. That evening Jesus healed many who were sick with various diseases (Matthew 8:14-17, Mark 1:29-34, Luke 4:38-41).

Jesus Tours Galilee with the Four Fishermen

Jesus and the four disciples moved back and forth through Galilee, preaching the coming kingdom of God and healing multitudes of sick, including a leper. He returned to Capernaum and

healed a paralytic who was lowered to Him through the roof because of the crowd. When Jesus saw his faith He said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” The scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus of blasphemy saying, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Jesus answered and said,

... Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins ... I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house (Luke 5:22-24).

The man rose up and departed, glorifying God and all the people were amazed saying, “We have seen strange things today!” (Luke 5:26).

Jesus returned with the four disciples, and called Matthew when He came to Capernaum again. While feasting in Matthew’s house the scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with publicans and sinners. Jesus said to them, “I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:9-13).

The Jews Seek to Kill Jesus

Another feast day came and Jesus returned again to Jerusalem. While He was there He healed a lame man by the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath and the Jews began again to persecute Him. Jesus said to them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:1-17). This so infuriated them that they sought to kill Jesus.

Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God (John 5:18).

Jesus answered with a long description about His relationship with the Father and how the Scriptures reveal eternal life through Him. He concluded by saying,

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. ...For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me (John 5:39-46).

The Sermon on the Mount

Then Jesus returned to Galilee again. He entered a synagogue where there was a man with a withered arm. The scribes and Pharisees watched Him to see if He would heal the man on the Sabbath. Jesus asked if it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath and then healed the man. Immediately they took counsel, how they might destroy Him (Mark 3:1-6, Matthew 12:9-14, Luke 6:6-11). At this time Jesus healed great multitudes by the Sea of Galilee. Later, after a night of prayer, Jesus called all of the other disciples, making twelve. Great multitudes were now following Jesus again and He went up into a mountain and preached one of His longest sermons.

The Sermon on the Mount began with the beatitudes or blessings, and woes, for different people. Jesus said that his people were the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and said that their righteousness needed to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus cited various Old Testament writings and then added, “but I say unto you” directing the teaching to the inward thoughts of the heart. (Matthew 5:3-48, Luke 6:20-36). He taught them how to pray (Matthew 6:1-32), closing with,

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus continued by explaining how to ask, seek, and knock and the promise of God to hear and answer prayer.

The Two Ways

Jesus concluded His sermon by presenting two gates and two ways, one to life and one to destruction. Jesus invites the multitudes to enter the narrow gate.

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matthew 7:13-14).

Jesus warned, however, that few find the narrow gate and way to life. Later in His ministry, Jesus revealed Himself as the gate and the way to life. When Jesus ended His sermon the people were astonished at His teaching.

The First Great Group of Parables

Much of Jesus' teaching was in parables. He told seven parables about the kingdom of God including: The Sower, The Seed, The Tares, The Mustard Seed, The Hidden Treasure, The Pearl of Great Price, and The Net. He explained them only to those who asked their meaning. (Matthew 13:1-50). The verses have similar content to the messages to the seven churches of Asia in Chapters two and three of Revelation, revealing truth and falsehood, the way of God and the ways of man.

The Calling of the Twelve Apostles

One evening Jesus went up into a mountain to pray, and prayed all night to God. In the morning He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve, whom He named apostles (Luke 6:12-13). The twelve included:

Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor (Luke 6:14-15).

When he had called the twelve, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. (Matthew 10:1). Then He sent them out and commanded,

... Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food. Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city! Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:1-14)

Jesus Performed Many Miracles

Jesus performed many miracles as He taught. He healed a centurion's servant in Capernaum and raised a widow's son from the dead at Nain. Fear came upon the people and they said, "A great prophet has arisen ... and God has visited His people". (Luke 7:1-17). Later, Jesus healed a blind and dumb man who was possessed with a devil. These are only samplings of His many

miracles. The scribes, however, said that He cast out devils by Beelzebub. (Matthew 13:22-37). Amazingly, after His many miracles, the scribes and Pharisees demanded a sign.

Jesus Stills the Storm and Raises the Daughter of Jairus

Jesus' disciples evidently still had some doubts about Him. As they were crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus fell asleep. A great storm arose and water began to fill the boat. His disciples became alarmed and awoke Jesus. He arose, rebuked the wind and said, "Peace, be still". The wind ceased and the sea became calm. His disciples marveled, saying, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey Him?" (Matthew 8:18-27).

After Jesus had crossed over the sea, Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue came and fell at His feet. He said that his daughter was dying and asked Jesus to lay hands on her and make her live. While on the way Jesus healed another woman who had been ill for twelve years and simply touched His garment. When Jesus came to the little girl He took her by the hand and told her to arise (Mark 5:1-43, Matthew 9:18-26, Luke 8:40-56). Everyone was greatly amazed.

Soon after Jesus healed two blind men and a dumb demoniac. The Pharisees accused Him again saying, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons." The miracles of Jesus caused mixed reactions, astonishment, belief, and condemnation. They should have only caused belief that Christ was the Messiah, for no one had ever healed blindness!

Christ's Revelation of His Church

There are only two references to the church in the Gospels. While in the area of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" They answered that some said John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Then Jesus said, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." (Matthew 16:13-16). Jesus told him that flesh and blood had not revealed this to him but, "My Father in Heaven." Then Jesus said,

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:18-19).

It appears from this verse that the church will be built on Peter (which means rock or stone) and that he will be given the keys to the kingdom of heaven and great authority. Other Scriptures, however, teach that **Jesus is the foundation** and that **all of the apostles** are part of it. "...For no **other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ**" (I Corinthians 3:11) and "...having been **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone** (Ephesians 2:19-20 emphasis added).

Jesus said that the gates of Hades or Hell would not prevail against the church. The church will be victorious against all enemies.

The other mention of the church in Gospels is relative to sin and discipline in the church and the promise answered prayer and the presence of Jesus in the smallest of gatherings.

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything

that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them (Matthew 18:15-20).

Other New Testament Scriptures describe the church in a variety of ways, teaching about leadership, doctrine, and practices. These will be considered in the next chapter.

Jesus' Teaching on Leadership and Ministry in the Church

On day His disciples came to Jesus and asked Him who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus called a little child to him and said "...whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven ..." (Matthew 18:4).

On another occasion Jesus, in speaking of the scribes and Pharisees, said,

*They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' But you, **do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted** (Matthew 23:6-12, emphasis added).*

Later, Jesus called His apostles to Him and said,

*... You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And **whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many** {Matthew 20:25-28, emphasis added).*

Jesus taught by His words and by His life that leadership and ministry should be done in humility as a servant, not a Lord. Peter expressed this when he wrote regarding elders,

*The **elders** who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away** (I Peter 5:1-4, emphasis added12).*

Jesus Predicts that He will be Killed and that He Will Rise Again

At this time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day (Matthew 16:21) He foretold this three more times, speaking of His crucifixion, but His disciples did not understand (Matthew 16, 17, 20, 26; Mark 8, 9, 10, 14; Luke 9, 18, 22). The last times He also predicted His betrayal by one of His disciples.

The Transfiguration of Christ

One day Jesus took Peter, James, and John up into a high mountain to pray and then He was transfigured before them.

As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:29-31).

As they were watching, a cloud came and overshadowed them and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Luke 9:34-35). The disciples were eye witnesses

of Christ's glory. Both Peter and John wrote of this vision as evidence that Jesus was truly the Son of God. Passing on through Galilee, Jesus again foretold His death and resurrection.

... The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day (Mark 9:31).

The disciples evidently did not understand what was going to happen to Him and were afraid to ask Him (Mark 9:32).

Jesus: The I Am

The miracles of Jesus provided massive evidence that He was the Son of God. This was the purpose of His miracles. One day, He fed five thousand people with only five loaves and two fishes (Luke 9:10-17). Afterward He went up on a mountain to pray while His disciple returned to the other side of the sea. As they were crossing, Jesus came to them walking on water (John 6:16-21). The next day the people came by boat to Capernaum, asking Jesus how He had gotten there. Jesus said to them,

... you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him (John 6:26-27).

The people again asked for a sign, saying that God gave their fathers manna in the desert, bread from heaven. Jesus had just fed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. Wasn't that an even greater sign? Jesus answered by saying,

... Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (John 6:32-33).

When they asked for this bread, Jesus answered with the first of His seven **I AM** claims,

*... **I am the bread of life.** He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe (John 6:35-36).*

The Jews complained about His words saying, that Jesus was the son of Joseph, so how could He say that He came down from heaven? Jesus responded again saying,

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world (John 6:48-51).

When His disciples heard this, they wondered how Jesus could give them His flesh to eat (John 6:52). Jesus explained,

... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him ... he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever (John 6:53-58).

Many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" Many of them left and ceased to follow Him any more (John 6:60-66). Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" Peter answered and said,

... Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (John 6:68-69).

Jesus left Judea again for the Jews sought to arrest Him and kill Him (John 7:1). Wherever Jesus went, He angered the scribes and Pharisees. One day He said,

***I am the light of the world.** He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life (John 8:12).*

This resulted in a long exchange between them and Jesus. Jesus told them that they would die in their sins if they did not believe in Him. They asked, “Who are you?” Jesus told them that they would know when they have lifted up the Son of Man (John 8:13-28). Jesus told them that the truth would make them free. They answered that they were descendants of Abraham and were never in bondage. Jesus told them that if they were Abraham’s children they would not seek to kill Him. Jesus went on to say, “If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death” (John 8:51). The Jews said to Him,

... “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, “If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.” Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom do You make Yourself out to be? (John 8:52-53).

Jesus answered and said that if they knew His Father they would know who He was. Then He added, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad” (John 8:56). Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” (John 8:57). Jesus responded by saying, “**Before Abraham was, I AM**” (John 8:58). The Jews picked up stones to cast at Him but He hid himself from them.

Before Abraham was, I AM

When Jesus referred to Himself as **I AM** He identified Himself with God when He appeared to Moses in the Sinai desert. When Moses asked His name God said to him, “**I AM THAT I AM**” (Exodus 3:13-14 DBY, emphasis added). God also revealed that He was **Jehovah God**. The Hebrew word for Jehovah is closely related to I AM in that it means “the self-existing One.” The Jews evidently understood who Jesus claimed to be.

Jesus revealed Himself seven times as I AM in describing who He was. In time He proved His claim by a miracle. In addition to saying, “I am the bread of life” and “I am the light of the world,” quoted previously, Jesus said,

***I am the door.** If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved ... (John 10:9, emphasis added).*

***I am the good shepherd.** The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11, emphasis added).*

***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 (John 11:25-26, emphasis added).*

***I am the way, the truth, and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14, emphasis added).*

***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 (John 15:5 emphasis added).*

When Jesus said He was the bread of life, He had just miraculously fed five thousand people. He was teaching that through His death, his body provided spiritual food (John 6:1-71). Jesus demonstrated that He was the light of the world by opening the eyes of the blind (John 8:12, 9:41). Jesus was the good shepherd for He gave His life on Calvary (John 10:11-21). Jesus proved that He was the resurrection and the life by raising Lazarus and others from the dead (John 11:1-44). When Jesus was about to be arrested at Gethsemane He asked who they were seeking. They said “Jesus of Nazareth.” He answered, “I AM” and they fell backwards (John 18:1-6). These revelations are realized more completely when we come to Him for salvation through faith. The question is: What is the way of salvation?

I Am the Way

One day Jesus told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them in His Father's house and that He was coming again for them that they might be with Him. He added, "... where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" (John 14:1-5) Jesus answered him and said,

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6, emphasis added).

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus taught that there were two gates and two ways, one to life and one to death (Matthew 7:13-14). He warned that few find the way to life. Jesus is the way to life and no one comes to God except through faith in Christ.

Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were intimate friends of Jesus. He visited many times in their home at Bethany near Jerusalem. One day they sent Jesus a message saying that Lazarus was sick. Jesus said that "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11: 4). He stayed two more days where He was and then went to Judea, telling His disciples that Lazarus was dead. When Martha met Him she said that her brother would not have died if Jesus had been there. Jesus told her that Lazarus would live again and she said she knew that he would live again in the resurrection. 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? (John 11:25-26).

Martha said, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." (John 11:27). By this time Lazarus had been dead four days. Jesus told them to take away the stone and then prayed to His Father,

Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me (John 11:41-42).

Then Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go." (John 11:43-44). Lazarus came forth and when the people saw this many believed in Jesus.

When the chief priests and Pharisees learned what had happened they said

What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation (John 11:47-48).

Again they plotted to put Him to death (John 11:53). Later they plotted to put Lazarus to death also because many Jews believed in Jesus because of him.

The Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem

Jesus left Bethany and went to Jerusalem. As they came near the city Jesus told His disciples to go into the city and find a colt tied and bring it to Him. They found it as He said and He rode upon it into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-7). Multitudes spread their garments and branches before Him and cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matthew 21:8-9). They also said, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!" Jesus came in fulfillment of the prophecy, "... your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt" (John 12:15, Zechariah 9:9). Some of the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke His disciples and Jesus said, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones

would immediately cry out.” (Luke 19:37-40). It is doubtful that many in the crowd really recognized Jesus as the Christ.

The Anointing at Bethany

Jesus returned to Bethany and met one more time with Mary and Martha in Bethany. At that time Mary anointed Him lavishly with oil and wiped His feet with her hair. Judas, who later was to betray Jesus, considered it a waste (John 12:1-6). Jesus rebuked Judas, Satan entered him and he went to the Jewish leaders and bargained with them for thirty pieces of silver on how he might deliver Jesus to them (Luke 22:3-6).

The Lord’s Supper and Gethsemane

It was Passover time and Jesus met with His disciples and said “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer ...” (Luke 22:15-16). During the Passover meal Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper (I Corinthians 11:20-26), in remembrance of His death.

Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and said, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Then He took the cup and said, “This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.” Then Jesus said that the hand of His betrayer was with Him on the table and added, “... truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!” (Luke 22:17-22). The disciples began to dispute as to who would do such a thing and who was the greatest. At that time He foretold that Peter would deny Him three times. (Luke 22:31-34).

After this Jesus and His disciples went out to the Mount of Olives to a garden called Gethsemane. There Jesus prayed three times “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” Being in agony as He prayed, He sweat great drops of blood (Luke 22:39-45).

The Arrest and Trials of Jesus

Just as Jesus finished praying, Judas came with a multitude and kissed Him. Jesus said, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:47-48). Jesus was arrested and taken to the high priest’s house. Peter followed after and denied three times that he knew Jesus. Meanwhile, there were many who bore false witness against Jesus, which did not agree. One was that Jesus had said that He was able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (Mark 14:53-58). Actually, Jesus was referring to His body (John 2:21). Those present mocked and beat Jesus, spit on His face, and struck Him (Matthew 26:67-68, Luke 22:63-65). In the morning they took Him to the council (Sanhedrin), who asked Him if He was the Christ. Jesus answered and said,

... If I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I also ask you, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go. Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God (Luke 22:67-69).

Then they asked, “Are You then the Son of God?” and He said, “You rightly say that I am.” Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth.” They arose and took Him to Pilate, the Roman Governor (Luke 22:70-71). Meanwhile, when Judas learned that Jesus was condemned, he was remorseful, returned the pieces of silver and hung himself (Matthew 27:3-10), fulfilling another prophecy (Zechariah 11:12-13).

Coming before Pilate, the Jewish leaders brought false accusations against Jesus again saying, “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar,

saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.” Pilate asked Jesus, “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “It is as you say.” After listening to their accusations and questioning Him, Pilate said, “I find no fault in this Man” (Luke 23:1-4)

Jesus was then sent to Herod, who questioned Him extensively, but Jesus gave him no answers. Herod and his men treated Jesus with contempt, mocked Him and arrayed Him with a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. (Luke 23:1-11). Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people and said to them,

*You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, **I have found no fault in this Man** concerning those things of which you accuse Him ... **neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him*** (Luke 23:13-16, emphasis added).

At that time it was a custom for Rome to release a prisoner to the Jews. A murderer named Barabbas was being held. Pilate asked whom they wished to have released, Barabbas or Jesus, who is called Christ? They answered, “Barabbas!” (Matthew 27:17-21). Pilate asked, “What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let Him be crucified!” Then the governor said, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they cried out all the more, saying, “Let Him be crucified!” (Matthew 27:22-23). Pilate asked, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar!” (John 19:15). When Pilate saw the tumult rising he washed his hands and said, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.” They answered, “His blood be on us and on our children.” Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified (Matthew 27:24-26).

The soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him, twisted a crown of thorns for His head, and put a reed in His right hand. They bowed before Him and mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Then they spat on Him, mocked Him, and led Him away to be crucified (Matthew 27:24-31).

The trial of Jesus revealed the utter and total wicked ways of man and of God’s own people, the Jews, particularly the scribes, Pharisees, and other Jewish leaders. It was a trial born out of denial, unbelief, envy, and hatred in the face of the holy character and compassion of Jesus and of His miracles which were evidence of the work of God. They condemned Jesus through false witnesses and total untruths. Even Pilate, the Roman governor, realized this. Finally, having no evidence against Jesus, they demanded that He be crucified!

*As for such as turn aside to their **crooked ways**, The LORD shall lead them away With the workers of iniquity* (Psalm 125:5, emphasis added)

“Let Him Be Crucified!”

The promised Savior, the Messiah/Christ had come after four thousand years of waiting, and now His own people asked Rome to crucify Him. Crucifixion was the most cruel, torturous, slow death used by the Romans. The Jews did not hesitate to stone people. Why did they use Rome to crucify Him? They wanted Jesus to be cursed. The law said,

*If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for **he who is hanged is accursed of God*** (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

Wonderfully, by the grace of God, through the crucifixion **“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us** (Galatians 3:13).

The Promised Savior: Crucified!

Jesus was crucified immediately after His last trial. He was led to Golgotha or Calvary and nailed to the cross at nine in the morning. Soldiers shared his clothing and cast lots for His robe. Over His head was a sign saying, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” He was on the cross for six torturous hours. At noon darkness came over the land and lasted until Jesus died at three in the afternoon.

During those hours on the cross, Jesus uttered seven statements, some of which were: **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”** (Luke 23:34); to the thief, **“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”** (Luke 23:43); to His Father, **“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?”** that is, **“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”** (Matthew 27:46); to the watchers, **“I thirst”** (John 19:28); to His Father, **“It is finished!”** (John 19:30); and finally, **“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit”** (Luke 23:46). After saying this Jesus bowed His head and gave up His spirit (John 19:30). At that time the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom, the earth quaked, and many came out of the tombs. When the centurion saw all of this he said, “Truly, this Man was the Son of God!”

The Jews asked Pilate to have the legs broken of those on the crosses, that their bodies not remain overnight. When the soldiers came to Jesus they found that He was dead already so they pierced Him with a spear, fulfilling the prophecies that His legs would not be broken and they would look on Him whom they had pierced (Psalm 34:20, Zechariah 12:10).

The Burial and Resurrection of Christ

Joseph, a rich man of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus. He took the body, wrapped it in linen, and buried Jesus in his own tomb which was nearby, accompanied by Nicodemus. Some of the women, who had been at the crucifixion, watched where Jesus was buried, and then left to prepare spices and ointments for Him.

Meanwhile, the Jewish leaders went to Pilate and asked for a guard at the tomb because Jesus had said He would rise in three days. They were afraid His disciples would come and steal His body and deceive the people. The tomb was sealed and the guard placed.

Early in the morning, on the first day of the week there was suddenly another earthquake and an angel descended from heaven, rolled away the stone and sat upon it. The guards were so fearful that they became like dead men. Then they went into the city and told the Jewish leaders what had happened. They were paid to lie and say that Jesus’ disciples came and stole His body while they were sleeping (Matthew 28:2-15).

A little later the women came and found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. An angel appeared and told them that Jesus was not there, but that He had risen.

The Triumphant Savior!

The resurrection of Jesus and His triumph over death was not only the fulfillment of many Old Testament scriptures, but revealed amazingly how the way of God triumphs over the ways of man. God actually used man’s wickedness to accomplish the way of salvation for man according to His prophetic Word. The Words of Jesus in the Psalms detail what He endured on the cross.

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? ... But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, “He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!” ... I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the

*dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. **They pierced My hands and My feet;** ... I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. **They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots** ... All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the LORD ... **They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, That He has done this** (Psalm 22:1-31, emphasis added).*

Isaiah prophesied the Word of God vividly, revealing the extent of the suffering of Jesus. Man deliberately killed his only hope of eternal life, but God's purpose was fulfilled through them.

***Behold, My Servant** shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as many were astonished at you, So **His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men;** ... Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider (Isaiah 52:13-15, emphasis added).*

Isaiah continued prophesying the details of the rejection of Jesus, His sorrow, and the purpose of His suffering, to be offered as a sacrifice for man's sins and to provide justification for man before God.

*Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. **He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.** And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But **He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;** The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. **All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.** He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; **For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.** And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When **You make His soul an offering for sin,** He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. **By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.** Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And **He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors** (Isaiah 53:1-12, emphasis added).*

We are all sinners and need to be saved. We cannot save ourselves, we need a Savior. Our sins were laid on Jesus and we can be saved by simple faith in Him

In view of the Scriptures above, it is a tragedy that only a few of God's special people, the Jews, have discovered how Jesus fulfilled all of the promises of their Messiah. Prophecy indicates that someday they will turn to Him in faith when He comes again. In that day God says,

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. ... And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: ... every family by itself ... (Zechariah 1:10-12).

In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. ... And one will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your hands?' Then he will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends (Zechariah 2:1-4).

Jews and Gentiles alike will find the way of salvation.

The Way of Salvation

There are two ways in life before man, life or death (Matthew 7:13-14). There is only one way of salvation and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. He is the only Savior. Jesus said,

*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because **narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life**, and there are few who find it* (Matthew 7:13-14, emphasis added).

Jesus also said,

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6, emphasis added).

Shortly after Jesus ascended to heaven, Peter preached,

*Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by **the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth**, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. **Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*** (Acts 4:10-12, emphasis added).

Salvation is a gift of God. He sent Jesus into the world to be our Savior from our sins.

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 (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The Great Commission and Ascension of Jesus

After His resurrection, Jesus "...presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them ..." (Acts 1:3). He spent forty days in Jerusalem and Galilee with His disciples after His resurrection. One day in Galilee He said,

*... All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. **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*** (Matthew 28:18-20, emphasis added)).

After giving His disciples the great commission they returned to Jerusalem. As they were assembled there Jesus commanded them,

*... not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, which ... you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but **you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now ... 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*** (Acts 1:4-8, emphasis added).

When Jesus had said these things and while they watched, "He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). Suddenly two men stood by them in white and said,

Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven (Acts 1:10-11).

The way of Man and the Way of God

The way of man is no more fully demonstrated than in his wicked response to the promised Savior. Herod tried to kill Jesus after His birth, realizing that He was the Messiah. God's own people, the Jewish scribes and Pharisees plotted and schemed to kill Him throughout His life. They accused and condemned Jesus for simply healing on the Sabbath. They repeatedly

contradicted and twisted the words which He said. In their hypocrisy, the enemies of Jesus admitted that **He taught the “Way of God” in truth** even as they contradicted Him (Matthew 22:16. Mark 12:14. Luke 20:21). Even His own disciples fled in the final hours, while Judas betrayed Jesus and Peter denied knowing Him.

The arrest and trial of Jesus was full of false accusations and even when Pilate, the Roman governor found no fault in Him, the Jews insisted that He be crucified. Crucifixion was demanded, instead of stoning, for in that way Jesus would be cursed. In their rejection, rebellion, hatred and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, they fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. The prophet Isaiah foretold many truths about the Messiah and what man did to Him.

*Jehovah hath made bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Behold, my servant shall deal prudently; he shall be exalted and be lifted up, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee--**his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the children of men** --so shall he astonish many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at him: for what had not been told them shall they see, and what they had not heard shall they consider (Isaiah 52:10-15 DBY, emphasis added).*

*Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. **He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him** (Isaiah 53:1-3, emphasis added).*

*Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet **we esteemed Him stricken**, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But **He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth ... He was led as a lamb to the slaughter ... He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken ... He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors** (Isaiah 53:4-12), emphasis added).*

The prophet Isaiah described the wicked way in which man would treat the Messiah, yet God in his love, mercy and grace purposed to redeem man from his wicked ways through His son, who is the way, the truth and the life. The apostle John, in the New Testament, said of Jesus Christ,

*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And **the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it** ... 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** (John 1:4-11, emphasis added).*

John continues by describing the way of salvation.

*But as many as received Him, to them **He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name** (John 1:12, emphasis added).*

The way of man and the way of God are summed up by the apostle Paul.

*And you **He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world**, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. **But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in***

*trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **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.** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:1-10).*

Man's way is wicked, sinful, and rebellious, but God, from the beginning in Eden promised him a Savior. The way of God is through faith in Jesus Christ. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Man has a choice, to follow the broad way which leads to destruction or the narrow way, in Christ, to life, eternal life (Matthew 7:13-14). God's way was ultimately accomplished gloriously by using the greatest wickedness of man, crucifying the promised Savior. Praise His holy name!

The Birth and Growth of the Church

The first mention of the church was made by Jesus to His disciples in the region of Caesarea Philippi when He asked them whom men say that He is. They replied that men say, John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He then asked them who they say who He is. Peter answered and said “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:13-16). Jesus answered and said to him,

... Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:17-19, emphasis added).

Jesus’ answer, referring to Peter and this rock, has lead to the teaching that His church will be built on Peter, whose name means rock or stone. The assumption is that Peter will be given the keys to the kingdom and will have authority to bind on earth and it will be bound in heaven. This has lead to the claim that Peter is the earthly head of the church and was the first pope. Other scriptures reveal a different meaning.

Jesus Christ is the Rock and Head of the Church

Jesus taught about the need to build one’s house on the rock (Matthew 7:24-25, Luke 6:47-49). Christ is called the “stumbling stone and rock of offense” (Romans 9:30-33). He is referred to as the spiritual Rock and that Rock was Christ (I Corinthians 10:1-3). Isaiah 28:16 is quoted by Peter as he describes the church as a spiritual house.

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.” (I Peter 2:4-8, emphasis added).

Jesus Christ is clearly the head of his church, which is His body, according to Ephesians 1:22, 4:15, and 5:23, and Colossians 1:18, and 2:19.

The Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets

Additional Scriptures refer to the foundation of the church, which may help to understand the part that Peter has in the building of Christ’s church. The apostles and prophets, not just Peter, make up the foundation, upon which all believers are built, Christ being the chief cornerstone.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22, emphasis added).

The book of Revelation, in describing the church as the bride of Christ and the New Jerusalem, referred to the wall of the city.

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:14, emphasis added).

The apostle Paul warned fellow workers to take heed how each builds on the foundation of the church.

*For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are **God's building**. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the **foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** Now if anyone builds on this **foundation** with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that **you are the temple of God** and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are* (I Corinthians 3:9-17, emphasis added).

The Gates of Hades

Jesus indicated that His church would be a victorious church when He said that the gates of Hades would not prevail against it. Gates are for defense. He indicated that the church would be in warfare. Part of the warfare is within us, the flesh against the Spirit.

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. (II Corinthians 10:4-6).

We also war against the Satan and the hosts of wickedness.

*... be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to **quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.** And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints ...* (Ephesians 6:10-18, emphasis added).

Sin and Discipline in the Church

Jesus also indicated that He would give His disciples the keys to the kingdom of heaven. In doing so, He gave them authority relative to His church. He specifically mentioned binding and loosing (Matthew 16:19). Later, Jesus taught what this might mean.

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 18:15-18).

Jesus taught responsibility in regard to sin in His church. Brother must deal with brother seeking confession and repentance. If counsel is refused, other witnesses are brought in, and if their counsel is refused, the sinning man is to be brought before the church. If he refuses to

listen to the church, he is excommunicated. The action by the church is either loosed or bound in heaven. Jesus went on to describe the simplicity of the church or assembly and the support that it has for its various decisions from God in heaven.

Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them (Matthew 18:19-20, emphasis added).

Jesus told many parables describing various characteristics of the kingdom of heaven which seem to refer to the church in Matthew 13. They are very similar to His words to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. It is apparent that the way of man and sin is found, even in the church.

The Day of Pentecost

Before Jesus ascended into heaven He told His disciples to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, who would empower them in their witness for Him. Jesus spent 40 days on earth after His resurrection. His disciples waited ten more days, the fiftieth day, the day of Pentecost. About one hundred and twenty believers were gathered together waiting when suddenly the Holy Spirit burst upon them with a mighty rushing wind. Flames of fires lighted upon each of them as they were filled with the Holy Spirit and each began to speak in a different language the wonderful works of God. Jews from all over the world had come to Jerusalem for Passover and heard the mighty wind and the languages of the believers, and wondered what it meant (Acts 2:1-13).

Peter raised his voice and said that this was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel in which God said “I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh... and it will come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:28-32). He then spoke of Jesus of Nazareth, who having proven that He was from God by His miracles and wonders, was taken by lawless hands, crucified, and put to death. God, however, raised Him from the dead, and all the believers gathered were witnesses.

Peter continued, saying that Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God. Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus poured out what was now seen and heard (Acts 2:14-33). Then he added, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Peter’s words cut to the heart of the people and they asked, “What shall we do?” and Peter replied,

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 (Acts 2:38).

About three thousand souls received his word and were baptized and were added to the church.

Practices of the New Church

The early church began gathering together, engaged in the following practices, and continued to grow from day to day.

*And they continued steadfastly in the **apostles’ doctrine and fellowship**, in the **breaking of bread**, and in **prayers**. Then fear came upon every soul, and **many wonders and signs** were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had **all things in common**, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So **continuing daily with one accord in the temple**, and **breaking bread from house to house**, they ate their food with **gladness and simplicity of heart**, praising God and having favor with all the people* (Acts 2:42-47, emphasis added).

The believers were taught the doctrine of the apostles and the teachings of Jesus, which had not yet been written down. They met together for fellowship. They had communion or breaking of bread as Jesus had commanded in remembrance of His death at Calvary, and they had times of

prayer. They met in the temple and from house to house. People were being saved and added daily to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47).

Miracles and Preaching by Peter

On one occasion, Peter and John went to the temple and healed a lame man on the way. As he leaped with joy as he followed them the people in the area were amazed. Peter turned and preached to them saying,

*... Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? **The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all** (Acts 3:12-16, emphasis added).*

Then Peter added,

***Repent therefore and be converted**, that your sins may be blotted out ... To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities (Acts 3:19-26, emphasis added).*

As Peter was speaking, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees became greatly disturbed because he preached Jesus and the resurrection of the dead. They arrested Peter and John and put them in custody. Many, however, believed and the number of men came to about five thousand. It is not clear if this was in addition to the first three thousand (Acts 2:41, 4:4).

The next day both men were brought before the Jewish leaders and questioned by what power and name they had done this. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said,

*... Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that **by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.'** Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:8-12, emphasis added).*

After hearing them they were commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus. Peter and John said,

Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20).

Finally, after further threatening them, the Jewish leaders let them go. The wicked ways of man among unbelieving Jewish leaders is now redirected toward the church.

Peter and John reported to the church all that the chief priests and elders had said to them and the church with one accord prayed to God for boldness and the place was shaken where they were assembled. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. Being of one heart and soul, the church shared all things in common. Barnabas, a disciple, sold property and laid the money at the apostle's feet. The apostles, with great power, gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 24-33).

Sin in the Church

Sharing things in common led to sin in the church. Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a possession and kept back part of the proceeds, pretending to lay all of the money at the apostles'

feet. Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part for yourself? ... You have not lied to men but to God.” When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died and they buried him. Three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. When questioned, she agreed that the land had sold for so much. Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” Immediately she fell down and died and they carried her out and buried her. They followed the way of man rather than the way of God. Great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things (Acts 5:1-11).

Opposition Increases as Believers are Continually Added to the Church

The apostles did many signs and wonders among the people and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch. Believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. Sick people were healed on the streets as Peter passed by (Acts 5:12-16).

As the church grew, the high priest and the Sadducees were filled with indignation, arrested the apostles, and put them in prison, intending to bring them to judgment. An angel brought them out and said, “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:17-20). Early in the morning they entered the temple and taught. Meanwhile the Jewish council met, learned that the prisoners were gone and were teaching in the temple. They wondered what had happened. So they arrested them again and set them before the council again and reminded them that they had forbidden them to teach in Jesus’ name (Acts 5:21-28). Peter replied and said,

... We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him (Acts 5:29-32).

When the council heard this they were furious and plotted to kill them. Then they beat them and let them go. The apostles departed, rejoicing that they were worthy to suffer for Jesus and daily, and in every house, continued teaching Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:33-42).

Complaints and the Chosen Seven

As the number of disciples multiplied there arose a complaint that widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. The apostles asked the church to seek out seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, to take care of this problem. **Stephen**, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, **Philip**, and five others were chosen. The apostles prayed and laid hands on them. It appears that these may have been the first **deacons** (ministers or servants). The word of God continued to spread and the number of disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem. Stephen and Philip were also used in preaching the Word (Acts 6:1-7).

The Martyrdom of Stephen

Stephen was a man full of faith and power and did many signs among the people. A group called the Synagogue of the Freedmen began disputing with him but was unable to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke. They induced men to say they had heard blasphemous words from him, brought him before the council, and set up false witnesses against him concerning things Jesus had said (Acts 6:8-15).

When the high priest asked if these things were so, Stephen gave a long teaching on the history of Israel from Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, and others, to the carrying away to

Babylon. He reminded them how their fathers would not obey but rejected the ways of God (Acts 7:1-50). Then Stephen said to those before him,

You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).

They became very angry when they heard these things and gnashed at him with their teeth. Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (Acts 7:54-56).

Stephen's accusers cried out, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. Witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. As they stoned him Stephen called on God saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." Then he died (Acts 7:57-60).

Saul consented to the death of Stephen. At that time there arose a great persecution and Saul began to make havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Many of the disciples were scattered and went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:1-4). Saul was demonstrating the way of man in opposition to the church.

The Preaching of Philip

Philip, one of the seven, went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. Multitudes, seeing the miracles which he did, believed and were baptized. There was great joy in that city. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God they sent Peter and John to them. They came down and prayed for them and laid hands on them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. A sorcerer named Simon offered money in order that he might do the same but was reprimanded for his wickedness. He repented and was forgiven. After the apostles had testified and preached the Word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-25).

An angel of the Lord then spoke to Philip telling him to go south along the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. He arose and on the road met an Ethiopian eunuch, of great authority under Queen Candace, returning from worship in Jerusalem. He was sitting in his chariot, reading the book of Isaiah (Acts 8:26-28).

The Spirit told to Philip to go near the chariot. Philip ran to him and heard him reading and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He answered, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" Then he asked Philip to join him (Acts 8:29-31). The place where he read was this:

He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth (Isaiah 53:7-8).

The eunuch asked Philip if the prophet was speaking of himself or some other man, Philip, beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. As they went down the road they came to some water and the eunuch asked, "See, here is water. what hinders me from being baptized?" Phillip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." He commanded the chariot to stand still. They both went down into the water and Philip baptized him (Acts 8:34-38).

The Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. Philip was found at Azotas and passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea (Acts 8:39-40).

The Conversion of Saul

Saul, breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of **the Way**, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2).

As he came near Damascus a light from heaven suddenly shined around him and he fell to the ground, blinded. A voice said to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" He answered and said, "Who are You, Lord?" The Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Saul asked what he should do and the Lord said, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." Saul arose and was led blinded into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, food, or drink (Acts 9:3-9).

The Lord spoke in a vision to Ananias, a disciple at Damascus, and said to him,

Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight (Acts 9:11-12).

Ananias was fearful for he had heard of Saul's plans of persecution. The Lord reassured him that Saul was a "chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." Ananias went to the house, layed his hands on Saul and said that the Lord Jesus had sent him to receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately, Saul was able to see, arose and was baptized. Saul spent some time in Damascus with the disciples. Immediately, he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He was the Son of God. All who heard were amazed. Saul had come to persecute the disciples. Instead he confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 9:10-22).

After many days, the Jews plotted to kill him but their plot became known to Saul. They watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket (Acts 9:23-25).

When Saul returned to Jerusalem the disciples were afraid of him for they did not know that he had become one of them. Barnabas defended Paul, explaining what had happened in Damascus. Paul began to preach boldly in Jerusalem but an attempt was made to kill him. When the brethren found out they sent him to Tarsus. Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied (Acts 9:26-31).

Peter and the Conversion of Gentiles

Peter was preaching throughout the country and came to Lydda. While there he healed a paralyzed man named Aeneas and many at Lydda turned to the Lord. Lydda was near Joppa and a disciple there named Dorcas became sick and died. When the disciples heard that Peter was nearby they sent two men, urging him to come. As the widows were grieving Peter put all of the people out and prayed. Then he turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, arise" and immediately she opened her eyes and sat up. As this became known around Joppa, many believed on the Lord. Peter stayed many days at Joppa with Simon, a tanner (Acts 9:32-43).

Meanwhile in Caesarea, a Roman centurion named **Cornelius** who feared God, gave alms, and prayed to God, saw a vision of an angel of God. The angel said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come ... before God. Now send men to Joppa, and call for Simon Peter who is staying with Simon, a tanner, by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.” Cornelius called two servants and a soldier, explained everything and sent them to Joppa (Acts 10:1-8). As they were coming Peter fell into a trance and saw a vision of a sheet descending out of heaven filled with all kinds of unclean beasts. A voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” The voice spoke again, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” This was done three times. Just then the men from Caesarea arrived and told Peter their mission (Acts 10:9-23).

The next day Peter and six brethren accompanied them to Caesarea. There they found many gathered in the house of Cornelius. Peter said to him, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?” Cornelius told of his vision of the angel and said, “So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God” (Acts 10:24-33).

Then Peter opened his mouth and said,

... In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all— that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 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. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins (Acts 10:34-43).

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the Word. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were astonished because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also, for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter said, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:44-48).

Peter in Conflict with the Church in Jerusalem

When Peter returned to Jerusalem the Jewish believers contended with him because he had met with Gentiles. Peter related all of the events prior to his going and the men who had been sent to bring him to Caesarea (Acts 11:1-10). Then Peter said,

... the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.' And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God? (Acts 11:12-17).

When they heard these things they became silent and glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.” They were just beginning to understand the words of Jesus in 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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:19-20, emphasis added).

Persecution: The Preaching by the Scattered Disciples

Persecution of the church in Jerusalem increased after the martyrdom of Stephen. Many of the disciples were scattered and traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to the Jews only. When they came to Antioch they spoke to the Hellenists or Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. News of this came to the church in Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11:19-22).

The Church at Antioch

When Barnabas came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all in the Lord. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith and a great many people were added to the church. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul and bring him to Antioch. For a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. **The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch** (Acts 11:23-26). At that time prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch, one of them named Agabus. This is the first mention of **prophets** in the church. Agabus predicted a great famine and the disciples sent relief to the elders in Jerusalem for Judea. This is the first mention of **elders** in the church (Acts 11:27-30).

Herod the King Harasses the Church

While Peter was back in Jerusalem, Herod the king began to harass some in the church. He killed James, the brother of John, and arrested Peter and put him in prison. Four squads of soldiers guarded him. Meanwhile, constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

The night before Herod was about to bring Peter before the Jews, an angel stood by Peter, who was chained before two soldiers. Guards were before the doors. A light shone in the prison; and the angel struck Peter, awoke him and said, “Arise quickly!” and his chains fell off his hands. The angel said, “Gird yourself and tie on your sandals ... Put on your garment and follow me.” Peter thought he was seeing a vision as they passed the guards and as the iron gate into the city opened before them. As they went down the street the angel departed. Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people” (Acts 12:1-11).

A little later Peter came to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark where many were gathered together praying. They were astonished as Peter told how the Lord had brought him out of prison. Peter told them to tell the brethren and departed to another place (Acts 12:12-17).

Herod killed the guards after learning that Peter had disappeared. He went down to Caesarea and while he was there an angel of the Lord struck him and he died. Meanwhile, the Word of God grew and multiplied and the church began to grow more rapidly (Acts 12:18-25).

The Rapid Growth of the Church

Many factors opened the door for the rapid growth of the church. **God, who ordains the times and boundaries of nations, sent His son into the world during the time of the Roman Empire.** Conditions in the Roman Empire such the *Pax Romana* (world peace) (B.C. 27-A.D.

180), the universal use of the Greek language, the translation of the Old Testament Scriptures into Greek, the Roman roads and communication system, the relative opportunity for freedom of travel, and the existence of Jewish synagogues throughout the land, were conducive to the spread of the Gospel through evangelism and the growth of the church.

... when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4-5).

God had promised Abraham that all of the nations in the world would be blessed through his seed (Genesis 22:18).

Jesus Christ, the Church, and the Way of Man

The way of man was demonstrated increasingly with the coming of Christ and the birth and growth of the church. There were plots to kill Jesus from the beginning of His life. It is incredible to realize man's reactions to the wonderful person of Christ, the massive evidence of Who He was, and the reason why He came, to save man from his sins. Rejection, denial, betrayal, and the final condemnation to a cross of shame, torture, and death reveal the way of man before a God of love, grace, and forgiveness.

The early church met in great simplicity, meeting in the temple and from house to house. The apostles taught the new believers. They shared with one another and when some problems arose they chose seven men, perhaps the first deacons, ministers, or servants, to assist them.

The birth and growth of the church was resisted and led to wide-spread persecution and martyrdom of the disciples of Christ as they spread the gospel. God, however, did not change His purpose, the salvation of man for time and eternity. Jesus, and Jesus only, is the way of life and the way to God.

Go into all the World

After His resurrection and before He ascended into heaven Jesus commanded His apostles to go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). He said, “**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature** (Mark 16:15). Just before He ascended into heaven Jesus said, “...it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that **repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things (Acts 1:46-20). They were told, however, to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high (the Holy Spirit) (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8).

The apostles, sadly, did not leave Jerusalem, even after they had received the Holy Spirit. It took persecution to scatter them into other areas. **Saul of Tarsus**, a leader of the persecution, was wonderfully saved and became a powerful witness for Jesus Christ. Only Philip and Peter seem to have ventured outside of Jerusalem. As persecution increased the disciples were scattered but preached the gospel only to Jews until they came to Antioch. There they preached to Hellenists and a Gentile church was born. Barnabas, and later, Saul began teaching the disciples there.

“Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul”

The church in Antioch had a variety of prophets and teachers including Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. One day, as they ministered and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” After fasting and praying, the brethren laid hands on them and sent them away (Acts 13:1-3). The direction of the Holy Spirit, and the calling of Barnabas and Saul, was a new step in God’s way.

The First Missionary Trip The Gospel, Opposition, and Stoning

Having been sent out by the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Saul sailed to **Cyprus** and preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. John Mark was with them. They preached in **Salamis** and **Paphos**. While in Paphos, a false prophet and sorcerer named Elymas opposed them as they were preaching Christ to a proconsul named Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:4-9). **Saul, who is also called Paul**, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to him,

O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time (Acts 13:10).

The sorcerer was immediately blinded. The proconsul, when he saw what was done, was astonished at the teaching of the Lord and believed (Acts 13:11-12). The sorcerer was the first example of opposition to the gospel on the missionary trip. The way of man persisted, however, and opposition continued in all the regions where the way of salvation was preached.

Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark left Cyprus, and came to **Perga in Pamphylia**. John Mark left and returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas traveled on to **Antioch in Pisidia**, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath. The rulers invited them to speak (Acts 13:13-15).

Paul reviewed the history of Israel up to the time of King David and said, “**From this man’s seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior, Jesus**” (Acts 13:16-23). Then Paul preached the gospel of Christ to them.

Men and brethren ...to you the word of this salvation has been sent ... in Jerusalem ... their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by ... His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers ... God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus ...Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:26-39).

The Gentiles who were present begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Many more came on the next Sabbath. The Jews, seeing the multitudes, became envious, contradicted and blasphemed, opposing the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, we turn to the Gentiles as God commanded us, I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.” The Gentiles were glad and many believed. Jews, however, started a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from the region (Acts 13:42-50). Some chose God’s way and others the way of man. Many Jews believed and many Gentiles were overjoyed that the good news included them. Other Gentiles, including Greeks and Roman officials, rejected the gospel and oppressed and persecuted Paul and Barnabas.

Paul and Barnabas left Antioch, entered **Iconium**, and spoke in the synagogue. Many Jews and Greeks believed, but unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against Paul and Barnabas. They stayed for a long time speaking boldly for Christ. The city was divided, however, part with the Jews, and part with the apostles. **Paul and Barnabas are both referred to as apostles now.** A violent attempt was made against them by both the Gentiles and Jews to abuse and stone them (Acts 14:1-4).

The apostles fled to **Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia**, and preached the gospel there. Paul healed a lame man in Lystra and created a stir. The people thought that he and Barnabas were gods. The priest of Zeus prepared to make a sacrifice. When the apostles heard this, they tore their clothes, ran in among the multitude (Acts 14:5-14). They cried out, saying

*... Men, why are you doing these things? **We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God,** who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:15-17).*

The apostles barely restrained the multitudes from sacrificing to them. **Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came, persuaded the multitudes, and stoned Paul.** They dragged him out of the city, supposing he was dead. When the disciples gathered around him, however, he rose up and went into the city. The next day he and Barnabas departed for Derbe (Acts 14: 6-20).

After preaching the gospel in Derbe, the apostles returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They encouraged the disciples and **appointed or pointed out elders** in every church. They prayed for them and commended them to Christ. This is the first mention of “elders” being pointed out in the church. The gifting, qualifications, responsibilities, and recognition of elders are outlined later in the letters of Paul to the churches.

Finally, after preaching the Word in Perga, they sailed to Antioch where they had been commended for the work which they had completed. When they arrived and gathered the church

together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They stayed a long time at Antioch with the disciples (Acts 14:21-28).

Conflict in the Church over Circumcision and the Law

Some men came from Judea and taught the Gentiles that they needed to be circumcised or they couldn't be saved. This caused a great deal of dissension and dispute so Paul, Barnabas, and others were sent by the church to the apostles in Jerusalem about the problem. After they arrived and reported on their work and the conversion of Gentiles a sect of the Pharisees who believed arose and said that it was necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses (Acts 15:1-5). The way of man created conflict within the church.

The apostles and elders met to consider this matter and after much dispute. This is the third mention of "elders" in the church. There is no indication in the Scriptures as how they came into this role. As indicated previously, teaching on elders, and also deacons, came later in the letters of Paul to the churches. Peter reminded them that God had chosen him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles that they might hear and believe. God gave them the Holy Spirit, making no distinction, purifying their heart by faith. Then Peter asked why we should test God by putting a yoke on the Gentiles which the Jews were not able to bear. He added that we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they. Paul and Barnabas followed up describing the many miracles God had worked through them among the Gentiles (Acts 15:6-12).

After listening to everyone, James spoke and said that they should not trouble the Gentiles who were turning to God, but that they write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, things strangled, and from blood. The apostles, elders, and brethren agreed and a letter was written for the Gentiles who believed (Acts 15:13-22).

The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"—to whom we gave no such commandment—it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ²⁹that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell (Acts 15:23-29)

Barnabas and Paul, accompanied by Judas and Silas, returned to Antioch, gathered the church together, and delivered the letter. When it was read, they rejoiced and were encouraged. Judas and Silas, being prophets, stayed and exhorted the brethren with many words. Judas remained in Antioch and Silas stayed in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas also remained for a time, teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord with many others (Acts 15:30-35).

The Second Missionary Trip New Churches, Persecution, and Prison

One day Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them again but Paul did not because he had left them on the first trip. **Contention** became sharp and they parted. Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to **Cyprus**. Paul chose Silas and departed, commended by the brethren. The way of man persisted, even between Paul and Barnabas.

Paul and Silas went through **Syria and Cilicia**, strengthening the churches (Acts 15:36-41). They came to **Derbe and Lystra** where they found a disciple name Timothy who had a good report and asked him to join them. As they journeyed, they delivered to the churches the decrees determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily (Acts 16:1-5).

They went to **Phrygia and Galatia** but were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia. They came to **Mysia** and tried to go to Bethynia but the Spirit did not permit them so they went on to Troas. Paul had a vision there in which a man of Macedonia pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, they sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called them to preach the gospel there (Acts 16:6-10).

They sailed to Samothrace, went to Neapolis, and then to **Philippi** where they met a woman named Lydia at a woman's place of prayer. Paul spoke to them and the Lord opened Lydia's heart and she was baptized. She invited Paul, Silas, and Timothy to stay at her house (Acts 16:11-15).

A slave girl with a spirit of divination, bringing her masters profit by fortune-telling, began following them, crying out and saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." Paul finally said, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." When her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates, saying, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city" teaching customs which are not lawful for us as Romans." A multitude rose up together against them, and the magistrates tore off their clothes, beat them, and threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. The jailer put them into the inner prison and in the stocks (Acts 16:16-24). Roman idolaters, following the ways of man, were now persecuting them.

That night Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God as the prisoners listened. Suddenly there was an earthquake and the prison doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosened. The jailer, thinking that the prisoners had fled, was about to kill himself. Paul called to him and said they were all there. Upon hearing this, the jailer came in, fell on his knees and asked what he needed to do to be saved. Paul answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." The jailer and his family believed and were saved. The next day the magistrates released Paul and Silas and asked them to leave the city. After visiting the house of Lydia and seeing the brethren, they encouraged them and left the city (Acts 16:25-40).

Paul, Silas, and Timothy passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to **Thessalonica**. Paul read the Scriptures in the synagogue, explaining how Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." Many were persuaded, including many Greeks who were present. The Jews who were not persuaded, became envious, and gathered a mob against them. They went before the city ruler saying that the apostles had turned the world upside down and had come here too. They accused them of acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus. The rulers took some kind of a pledge from them and let them go (Acts 17:1-9).

Paul, Silas, and Timothy went immediately to **Berea**. They entered the synagogue and the Bereans received the word preached. Being fair-minded, they searched the Scriptures daily to verify the words of Paul, and many believed. **When the Jews from Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching in Berea they came and stirred up the crowds.** The brethren sent Paul away to **Athens**, while Silas and Timothy remained to come later (Acts 17:10-15).

While Paul waited at Athens, he saw that the city was filled with idols. He reasoned in the synagogue with the Jew and Gentile worshippers and preached in the market place. He met Greek philosophers, who took him to the Areopagus, and asked about his teaching, which seemed to be about foreign gods (Acts 17:16-21). Paul stood in their midst and said,

Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:22-31).

When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." Paul departed from among them and some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others (Acts 17:32-34).

Paul departed from Athens and went to **Corinth**. While there he met a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla and stayed with them. He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. Many opposed Paul and he said, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Many of the Corinthians believed on the Lord and were baptized (Acts 18:1-8).

The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and said, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." So he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God. Finally, Jews rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat and said, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." After listening to them, Gallio, the proconsul, rejected their charges and drove them from the judgment seat. Some time later Paul left Corinth and sailed for **Syria** with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:9-18). When they arrived in **Ephesus**, Paul left them there, but he went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay a while longer, he did not consent, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." Paul sailed from Ephesus, landed at **Caesarea** and greeted the church. Then he returned to **Antioch** (Acts 18:19-22).

The Third Missionary Trip **Strengthening Churches. Conflict over a False Goddess**

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul departed and went over the region of **Galatia** and **Phrygia**, strengthening all the disciples. Apparently, he went alone.

Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures came to Ephesus. He spoke in the synagogue teaching the things of the Lord, though he knew only the teaching of John the Baptist. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him they explained to him the way

of God more completely. From then on he vigorously refuted the Jews, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. He then moved on to **Achaia** and **Corinth** (Acts 18:24-28).

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul came to **Ephesus** and found some disciples and asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit since they believed. They said that they had never heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul asked them about their baptism and they answered, “John’s baptism.” Paul explained that they should believe on Christ Jesus and when they heard this they believed and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:1-7).

Paul went into the synagogue and preached for three months. Some, however, became hardened and spoke evil of **the Way**. Paul departed, withdrawing the disciples, and continued teaching in the school of Tyrannus for two years. Paul did many miracles and the Word spread throughout **Asia**. Some Jewish exorcists began to call the name of the Lord Jesus but a man with an evil spirit leaped upon, overpowered them and they fled. This became known in Ephesus and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Many, who believed, confessed their deeds, brought their magic books, and burned them. So the Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed (Acts 19:8-20). God used the evil ways of man to magnify His way through Jesus Christ.

During Paul’s missionary trips, other disciples joined him in the ministry in addition to Silas and Timothy. These included Erastus, Gaius and Aristarchus. Paul sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia while he stayed in Asia. About this time **there arose a great commotion about the Way**. Demetrius and other craftsmen who made shrines of **the goddess Diana** became concerned over the loss of profits as people were responding to the preaching of Paul. The craftsmen created uproar in the city and the people began shouting, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” Then the people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, and rushed into the theater. The assembly, however, was confused as many did not know why they were there. Finally the city clerk quieted the crowd and said that if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen had a case against anyone, the courts were open and there were proconsuls where the case should be settled lawfully. He added that they were in danger of being called into account for the day’s uproar, there being no reason for the disorderly gathering. Then he dismissed the assembly (Acts 19:21-41). Worship of the false goddess Diana created an uproar and opposition to the gospel.

After the uproar, Paul departed into **Macedonia**, encouraging the believers and then went to **Greece** and stayed three months. He returned to **Philippi** again and planned to go back to Troas. Many brethren were accompanying Paul at this time: **Sopater** of Berea, **Aristarchus** and **Secundus** of the Thessalonians, **Gaius** of Derbe, Timothy, and **Tychicus** and **Trophimus** of Asia. Some of them had gone ahead and waited for Paul at Troas (Acts 20:1-5).

When the disciples at **Troas** came together to break bread, Paul spoke to them until midnight. They were meeting in an upper room and a young man named Eutychus sank into sleep, fell out the window, and was taken up dead. Paul went down, fell on him, embraced him and said, “Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.” The young man was brought up and they were all comforted. After coming up, they broke bread, talked until daybreak, and Paul departed (Acts 20:7-12).

Paul left Troas and went on foot to Assos and then joined his companions and sailed to **Miletus**. From there he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. When they arrived he reminded them of his teaching in Asia, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” He told them that he was bound for Jerusalem not knowing what would happen to him except that the Holy Spirit testifies

in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await him (Acts 20:13-23). Paul counseled them,

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to **shepherd the church of God** which He purchased with His own blood. **For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears*** (Acts 20:28-31, emphasis added).

Paul warned the elders of future dangers in the churches. Like wolves, some will come in to destroy the flock. Others, even among the elders, will seek to draw away the disciples after themselves. The way of Christ in the churches will be threatened by the way of man.

Paul and his companions left after praying together and all sorrowed because they would not see him again, and then accompanied them to the ship (Acts 20:28-38).

They set sail and landed at **Tyre** where they met some disciples who warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Continuing on, they came to **Ptolemais**, greeted the brethren, and then went on to **Caesarea**. They stopped at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him. A few days later a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. He took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said that the Holy Spirit says, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." When they heard this everyone pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul told them that he was not only ready to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When he would not be persuaded, they said, "The will of the Lord be done" (Acts 21:1-14).

When they arrived in **Jerusalem** they met with brethren and reported on the work God had done among the Gentiles through them and everyone glorified God (Acts 21:17-20). Then the elders said,

... You see, brother, how many ... Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come (Acts 21:20-22).

They told Paul to take four men who had taken a vow and be purified with them, "that all may know that the things they have heard concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law" (Acts 21:23-24). Then they added,

But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality (Acts 21:25)

Paul took the men, was purified with them, and entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for them (Acts 21:26).

The Uproar in Jerusalem and the Arrest of Paul

Jews from Asia, seeing Paul in the temple, stirred up a crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place." They had seen Trophimus, an Ephesian, with him in the city, and supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. Jews in the city were so disturbed that they dragged Paul out of the temple and shut the doors (Acts 21:27-30).

They were about to kill Paul when news of the uproar reached the Roman commander and he took soldiers and ran down to them. He arrested Paul and commanded that he be bound with chains, asking who he was and what he had done. As the crowd was crying, “Away with him”, Paul asked the commander for permission to speak to the people (Acts 21:31-40)

When Paul spoke to the people in Hebrew, telling how he had persecuted **this way** and of his vision of Christ and conversion, the people listened until he told of being sent to the Gentiles. Then they cried out, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live.” Then the commander ordered that Paul be examined by scourging but Paul reminded him that he was also a Roman citizen. The commander released Paul from his bonds and commanded the chief priests and their council to appear before him (Acts 22:1-30). The council was so divided at the hearing that it was dismissed.

Jerusalem Jews Plot to Kill Paul

When Lysias, the Roman commander, learned of a plot to kill Paul, he sent him by night to Felix the governor in Caesarea. The Jewish leaders came down and brought charges against Paul to Felix (Acts 23 & 24). Paul, defending himself, said they could not prove their accusations. Then he said,

*But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some **Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, “Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day”*** (Acts 24:14-21, emphasis added).

When Felix heard this, having knowledge of **the Way**, he adjourned the proceedings and said, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.” Meanwhile, Felix with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. He kept Paul in prison to please the Jews and held him there two years until he was succeeded by Porcius Festus as governor (Acts 24:22-27).

Festus visited Jerusalem shortly after coming and the Jewish leaders informed him of Paul and asked to have him brought to Jerusalem, hoping to kill Paul along the road. Festus answered that he be kept in Caesarea and once again the Jews came accusing Paul. Festus asked Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem for a hearing. Paul replied and said he stood at Caesar’s judgment seat, where he ought to be judged, because to the Jews he had done no wrong. Then he said, “**I appeal to Caesar.**” Festus conferred with the council and said, “You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!” (Acts 25:1-12).

King Agrippa and his wife Bernice called on Festus and were invited to hear Paul’s defense. Paul gave a lengthy account of his life as a youth and as a Pharisee and a believer in resurrection. He related how he had persecuted the followers of Jesus until Jesus appeared to him in a vision and he was converted and became a witness for Christ to the Jews and Gentiles. King Agrippa said, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.” Then Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar” (Acts 25:13 to Acts 26:32).

The Voyage to Rome

Finally, Paul was sent to Rome, with a Roman centurion. Paul's companion, Aristarchus, went with them. While sailing, a storm came up and Paul advised them to stop at Crete because he perceived disaster to the ship and to their lives. They continued on, however, and the storm increased and worsened for many days, until all hope was given up (Acts 27:1-20).

Paul stood up and said that they should have listened to him, and not have sailed from Crete. Then he encouraged them saying that there would be no loss of life, but only of the ship. He said that an angel of the God told him, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you." He added that he believed God as he was told by the angel, and that they must run aground on a certain island (Acts 27:21-26).

On the fourteenth night they drew near land and dropped anchors to avoid running aground. Some sailors let down a skiff to escape to shore but Paul told them, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." In all there were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship (Acts 27:27-38).

In the morning as they neared the land the ship ran aground and was broken up by the violence of the waves. They all jumped overboard, some swimming and others on boards from the ship, to get to land. So it was that they all escaped safely to land (Acts 27:39-44).

The Island of Malta

When they had escaped to land, they found that the island was called **Malta**. The people were very kind and kindled a fire to warm them and make them welcome. Paul gathered a bundle of sticks for the fire and a viper came out and fastened on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live." When Paul shook off the viper and it seemed to do him no harm the people decided he must be a god (Acts 28:1-6).

The leading citizen of the island, Publius, received them and entertained them courteously for three days. The father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery and Paul went in to him, prayed, and healed him. After that, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. The people honored them in many ways; and when they departed, they provided such things as were necessary (Acts 28:7-10).

Rome

After three months they sailed for Rome, stopping at Syracuse and Rhegium. At Puteoli, they found brethren, and stayed with them seven days, and then went toward Rome. When the brethren heard about them, they came to meet them as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. When they came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard, but Paul was allowed to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him (Acts 28:11-16).

Paul called the leaders of the Jews together after three days and said to them,

Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain (Acts 28:17-20).

They told him that they had not received letters from Judea concerning him, nor had any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of him. They told Paul that they desired to hear from him concerning this sect because they knew that it was spoken against everywhere. They appointed a day and many came to him. He explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. Some were persuaded by the things he said and some disbelieved. Paul continued speaking when they did not agree among themselves (Acts 28:21-24).

The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, "Go to this people and say 'Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them'" (Acts 28:25-27).

Paul added, "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" When he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him (Acts 28:26-31).

The Way, the Way of Man, and the Way of God

Many times the ministry of Paul and the other brethren was referred to as the Way. Jesus said that He was the way and that no one could come to the Father except by Him. As the gospel was preached throughout the world, the Jews and also the Romans continued to oppress, persecute, and seek to hinder the good news of God's way of Salvation for man. Oppression and persecution and all the ways of Satan and man did not curtail the work of evangelism, for Jesus said, "... on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18).

The Church: The Pillar and Ground of the Truth

Jesus said, "...on this rock I will build My church ..." (Matthew 16:18). The word "church" is an Anglicized transliteration combining the Greek words *Kurios* (the Lord) and *Ekklesia* (called out). In working from the original Greek text, *Ekklesia* should have been correctly and simply translated as "the called out." It can also be translated assembly, congregation, gathering, company, or meeting. The church is both physical and spiritual. The Scriptures, however, do not describe the church as a physical building such as a tabernacle, temple, cathedral, basilica, chapel, or hall.

The Church: Physical and Spiritual

The church is described physically as the assembling of saints, disciples, brethren, and Christians. Spiritually, it is described as the body of Christ, the temple or house of God, and the bride of Christ. Early meetings were held in houses or homes, upper rooms, and in the temple area in Jerusalem.

The church is identified physically as a gathering of people in a house as well as in a city, such as the church in Jerusalem. It also refers spiritually to the church throughout the world and throughout time. Bible scholars have described the church as "visible" and "invisible." When Paul stated that the church was **the body of Christ**, he was referring to the church as a spiritual body. Every believer has been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. They are members of the body and **Christ is the head** (I Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:9-16, Colossians 1:17).

The church as the **body of Christ** is a **spiritual building**, and the **bride of Christ**. It is a spiritual building with believers as living stones and Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone (I Peter 2:4-8). It is the temple of God and God by His Spirit dwells in it (I Corinthians 3:16-17). As the bride of Christ it has a special relationship with Him (Revelation 21:2-9). The church is a living organism. It has often become a man-made organization.

The Church as the Pillar and Ground of the Truth

The apostle Paul, in writing to Timothy relative to doctrines and practices in the church, concluded his letter by describing the church as the embodiment of the truth.

*... I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in **the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*** (I Timothy 3:14-15, emphasis added).

He prefaced the description by referring to conduct or behavior in the church. The church as the pillar and ground of the truth refers to the foundation and structure of the church of the living God as built on the truth. Since Jesus is the truth, His church is expected to be teaching and living the truth. To what extent was the church manifesting the truth?

The books of I and II Corinthians give detailed instruction on doctrines, conduct, ministry, and other practices in the church. They were also written to correct errors in the congregation and to teach church truth relative to unity, purity, order, and doctrine. Paul, Silas, Timothy, Apollos and others spent a great deal of time teaching, after the church was planted in Corinth. Paul spent a year and a half there and returned again during his third missionary trip. A number of years later Paul learned of some serious problems of carnality in the church including

divisions, immorality, compromise, abuses at communion or the Lord's Table, disorder in ministry in church meetings, and false teachers. Many in the church were following the ways of man rather than the way of God. Paul wrote to the church to correct these errors.

Divisions: A Plea for Unity

In his letter to the church, Paul pleaded with them, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that there should be no divisions among them, but that they should be perfectly joined together in the same mind and judgment. He had heard that there were contentions among them in which they were saying, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Then he asked if Christ was divided, or if Paul was crucified for them, or in whose name they were baptized (I Corinthians 1:1-13).

Paul said to the brethren that he could not speak to them as spiritual but as to babes in Christ, for they were still carnal. Then he asked, "Where there is envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? One says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" (I Corinthians 3:1-4). Carnality is a reflection of man's lower nature rather than spiritual character. The Bible describes it as flesh rather than spirit.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that he and Apollos were simply ministers through whom they had believed. He said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." He said that they were fellow workers (I Corinthians 3:5-9). Paul continued by saying.

Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's (I Corinthians 3:21-23).

Paul concluded by saying that he had figuratively applied this to himself and Apollos, so that they might learn not to think beyond what is written, and that no one be puffed up against another. This was a major cause for division at Corinth (I Corinthians 4:6). In his plea for unity in the church, Paul was echoing the prayer of Jesus just before He was crucified.

*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that **they all may be one**, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; **that they also may be one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, **that they may be one just as We are one**: I in them, and You in Me; **that they may be made perfect in one**, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me (John 17:20-23, emphasis added).*

There were evidently other divisions in the church when they came together relative to head coverings and conduct in meetings (I Corinthians 11:1-18). Division within churches has led to divisions between churches and the denominationalism which has prevailed to the present time. Such is the way of man.

Immorality: A Plea for Purity

Paul also learned of sexual immorality in the church by a man with his father's wife. The brethren were concerned over this but failed to do anything about it. Paul told them that the man who had done this should be taken away from them. He needed to be judged and disciplined.

*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, **deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus**. Your glorying is not good. **Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened**. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. **Therefore let us keep the***

feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (I Corinthians 5:4-8, emphasis added).

Paul reminded them that he had written that they were not to keep company with a brother who was sexually immoral, covetous, an idolater, a reviler, a drunkard, or an extortioner. They were not even to eat with such a person. They were responsible for judging those in the church. God judges those who are outside. Therefore, Paul said, “put away from yourselves the evil person.” (I Corinthians 5:9-13).

Paul admonished the brethren, asking if they knew that the unrighteous would not inherit the kingdom of God. He reminded them that neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners would inherit the kingdom of God. He added that some of them were like this but had been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (I Corinthians 6:9-11).

Finally, Paul said that the body was not for sexual immorality but for the Lord. Since our bodies are members of Christ, we should not take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot. Anyone joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him and should **flee sexual immorality**. Most sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. **Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit**, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own. You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit (I Corinthians 6:12-20).

Compromise: A Plea for Faithfulness

The Corinthians were also compromising by entering into lawsuits over legal differences, in dealing with problems in marriage relationships, and in eating food offered to idols.

Lawsuits. The Christians were going to court against each other in Corinth, outside of the church. Paul asked if it was right to go to court against another before the unrighteous and not before the saints. Did they not know that saints will judge the world and angels? Are they not worthy to judge smaller matters in the church? Did they not have a wise man among them who was able to judge between the brethren? Paul continued by saying that it was already an utter failure for them to even go to law against one another. Why not accept wrong? If, however, they do wrong and cheat their brethren, are they truly among those who will inherit the kingdom of God? (I Corinthians 6:1-10). They were committing two wrongs; going the way of the world to settle wrongs, and not suffering wrong done to them.

Marriage Problems. The Corinthians had written to Paul about marriage concerns. He encouraged them to marry in order to avoid sexual immorality. He also encouraged them to stay single, if they had the self-control, in order to give themselves wholly to the Lord. He encouraged those who were married not to depart from each other and marry someone else but rather to be reconciled. If a husband or wife is an unbeliever they should remain married, if the unbeliever is willing, so that the believer might win the other to Christ. If one did depart, the other was not bound. He also said that the unbelieving husband was sanctified (set apart) by the wife, and the unbelieving wife was sanctified (set apart) by the husband; otherwise their children would be unclean, but now they were holy or set apart (I Corinthians 7:1-14). Evidently, if one parent was a believer, the children would be set apart before God. What this spiritual benefit might be is not made clear in the text. One thing is certain; God’s way of dealing with marriage problems is different than man’s ways.

Paul also addressed their concerns about virgins. He indicated that, because of the present distress, it might be wise not to marry. However, if they did marry, it was not sin. Finally, he said that a wife was bound by law as long as her husband lived, but if her husband died, she was at liberty to be married to another if she wished, only in the Lord (I Corinthians 7:25-39).

Food Offered to Idols. Evidently the believers were in places where the food they were about to eat had been offered to idols. Paul reminded them that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other god but one, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we live. If some people did not have that knowledge, and were conscious of the fact that the food had been offered to an idol, if they ate, their conscience, being weak, would be defiled if others ate (I Corinthians 8:1-7). Paul continued by saying,

... food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble (I Corinthians 8:8-13).

Paul indicated that there was a danger of idolatry in the church. He reviewed the account of Moses and Israel in the desert and how some became idolaters and that the things that happened to them were examples to the Corinthians that they not become idolaters (I Corinthians 10:1-7).

*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. **Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry** (I Corinthians 10:12-14, emphasis added).*

Abuses at Communion: A Plea for Spiritual Discernment

The practice of idolatry in the city of Corinth no doubt had an influence on some of the believers in the church. Eating food which had been offered to idols may have had a negative effect on how they viewed the sacrifice of Christ. Paul reminded them of the meaning of the cup and the bread in participating in communion by saying,

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread (I Corinthians 10: 16-17).

Paul called attention to both the Jews and the Gentiles. When the Jews ate the Old Testament sacrifices, they were partakers of the altar. The Gentiles, by contrast, sacrificed to demons and not to God. Do not have fellowship with demons (I Corinthians 10:18-21). Then he said to them,

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons (I Corinthians 10:21).

Paul added that when they ate food sold in the market or food served at a dinner, they should ask no question for conscience sake. If someone says, "This was offered to idols" they should not eat, not only for their own conscience but for the conscience of others. Paul concluded by saying, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (I Corinthians 10:25-31).

Paul had also heard that when the church came together it was not for better but for worse because there were divisions in the meetings also. Some did not even come to eat the Lord's Supper but went ahead of others, eating and drinking to satisfy their own needs. Some even

became drunk. Paul asked, “Do you despise the church of God ... Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.” (I Corinthians 11:17-22). Then he described the Lord’s Supper.

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes (I Corinthians 11:23-26, emphasis added).

Paul warned the believers about participating at the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come (I Corinthians 11:27-34).

In addition to abuses at communion or breaking of bread, there were evidently disorders during congregational meetings, causing confusion.

Disorder in Church Meetings: A Plea for Order

Paul wrote that the church needed to remember to keep the traditions that had been delivered to them, including teachings on authority or **headship and submission**. He explained that the head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God. This truth is demonstrated in the head covering. The man is not to have his head covered when he prays or prophesies because that would dishonor his head. He should not cover his head because he is the image and glory of God. The woman, however, is the glory of man and therefore should have her head covered when she prays or prophesies. She was created for the man and ought to have a symbol of authority on her. By this she is showing submission before the angels. There should be no contention over this in the church (I Corinthians 11:2-16). When Christian women refuse to follow God’s way in wearing a covering they demonstrate an unwillingness to be subject to the headship of the man, of Christ, and of God.

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and they all spoke in tongues or other languages (Acts 2:3-11). Other believers also spoke in tongues on receiving the Holy Spirit (Act 10:46, 19:6). Evidently others spoke in **tongues in the church** (I Corinthians 12, 13, and 14). It appears that this became a problem.

But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? ... So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me. Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel. Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful (I Corinthians 14:6-14).

Paul emphasized that prophecy was more edifying in church meetings than speaking in tongues unless there was interpretation. He concluded by writing,

What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, than ten thousand words in a tongue (I Corinthians 14:15-19, emphasis added).

Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you (I Corinthians 14:23-25).

Paul continued by teaching about order in church meetings, revealing how a meeting was to be conducted under the leading of the Holy Spirit rather than by the ways of man and man-made order and programming. Meetings were to be conducted utilizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

*How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, **each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation.** Let all things be done for edification. **If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.** But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. **Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.** But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. **For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.** And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. **For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints** (I Corinthians 14:26-33, emphasis added),*

Liberty and self-discipline need to be guided by the Holy Spirit in the exercise of gifts. There are times to speak and times to be silent. Women are to be silent in the churches. They are not to speak but to be submissive. If they have questions they may ask them privately because it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Paul concluded by saying,

*...did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. **Let all things be done decently and in order** (I Corinthians 14:36-40, emphasis added).*

False Teachers

In addition to the failure of the church to practice the truths of the church, there were also false teachers teaching false doctrines. Paul concluding his teaching on church truth by re-emphasizing the gospel of Christ, which he had preached to them, and by which they were saved.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen 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, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed (I Corinthians 15:3-11).

Paul particularly emphasized the resurrection of Christ, which he preached, as some false teachers among them were saying there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul countered their teaching by saying,

*Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found **false witnesses of God**, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (I Corinthians 15:12-19).*

In the heart of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he outlined ministry in the church. What is ministry, what are the areas of ministry in the church, and who are the gifted for ministry?

The Mercies of God: A Call to Ministry Spiritual Gifts

Ministry is service. A minister is a servant. Every believer is a servant of God. As a Christian, each believer has been gifted by the Holy Spirit and has been called for ministry or service. Some believers have several gifts. Spiritual gifts are listed in several New Testament books (Romans 12:1-18, I Corinthians 12, 13, & 14, Ephesians 4:1-16, I Peter 4-11). In describing the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of them, Paul uses the members or parts of the human body as an illustration of how they function in the church, which is the **body of Christ**. Like the human body, in which each member is necessary as a benefit to the other members, the exercise of each spiritual gift is needed for the health, growth, and activity in each church. Members of the body, in each case, are interdependent on other members.

There are a wide variety of gifts for believers and each gift differs in various ministries and activities, each one is for the profit of all (I Corinthians 12:4-7). Spiritual gifts are bestowed for both verbal and non-verbal ministries. Leadership and non-leadership roles also vary within the local congregation and the body of Christ throughout the world.

Ministry includes various service within the church and world evangelism. All believers are called and ordained, as well as gifted for ministry. The book of Romans beseeches believers, by the mercies of God, to present their bodies as living sacrifices, acceptable to God, which is their reasonable service.

*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. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. **Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality (Romans 12:1-13, emphasis added).***

Seven gifts are listed above with descriptions of how they are to be focused or utilized in the church. All gifts are to be characterized by love and accompanied by prayer. Spiritual gifts for ministry are listed again in I Corinthians.

*Now concerning **spiritual gifts**, brethren ... There are **diversities of gifts**, but the same Spirit. There are **differences of ministries**, but the same Lord. And there are **diversities of activities**, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the **word of wisdom** through the Spirit, to another **the word of knowledge** through the same Spirit, to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another **gifts of healings** by the same Spirit, to another **the working of miracles**, to another **prophecy**, to another **discerning of spirits**, to another **different kinds of tongues**, to another **the interpretation of tongues**. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. **For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ** (I Corinthians 12:1-12, emphasis added).*

Nine gifts are listed emphasizing the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God. Each gift may vary in ministries and in activities. After describing the church as the body of Christ, with Him as the head, and believers as parts of the body, the teaching continues, showing how each member, like the human body, is interdependent.

*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first **apostles**, second **prophets**, third **teachers**, after that **miracles**, then **gifts of healings**, **helps**, **administrations**, **varieties of tongues**. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all **interpret**? But **earnestly desire the best gifts**. And yet **I show you a more excellent way** (I Corinthians 12:27-31, emphasis added).*

Nine gifts are listed here also. The emphasis is that different believers have different gifts, providing a variety to meet the needs of the body of Christ. I Corinthians 13 emphasizes **the need for love** in order that the exercise of gifts may be effective in the church.

Once again spiritual gifts are described by Paul in the book of Ephesians, linking them with the church as the body of Christ. Believers are to walk worthy of their calling, in unity.

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, 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, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. **But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men"** (Ephesians 4:1-8, emphasis added).*

Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, ascended to heaven and gave gifts to all believers for the purpose of spiritual growth in the body of Christ, through the working of every believer.

*And He Himself gave some to be **apostles**, some **prophets**, some **evangelists**, and some **pastors (shepherds)** and **teachers**, for the **equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, **speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love** (Ephesians 4:11-16, emphasis added).*

The word “pastor” should be translated “shepherd”. It is another term for elder, not of the main leader of a congregation.

The apostle Peter wrote additional instructions on ministry gifts for believers. He describes these gifts and the “manifold” grace of God.

*As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. **If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.** If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, **that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ**, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen (I Peter 4:10-11, emphasis added).*

Obviously, all ministries are not verbal, nor are all ministries leadership. The meaning of the word “minister” seems to be ignored and therefore limited, particularly in the area of leadership. Christ Jesus’ teaching on leadership is in sharp contrast with the concepts and ways of man.

As a minister every Christian is also a priest as a part of God’s spiritual house. As priests, believers are both holy and royal as worshippers and witnesses (I Peter 2:5-9). Jesus Christ is our great High Priest (Hebrews 5:9, 6:20. 8:1, 9:11, 25, 10:19-22).

*Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, **you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:1-4, emphasis added).*

*But you are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation (I Peter 2:9-12, emphasis added).*

As holy priests all believers have direct access to enter the Holiest before God to worship Him though our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrew 10:19-25, emphasis added).

The apostle Paul encouraged the believers to earnestly desire the best gifts, but said he would show them a **more excellent way** (I Corinthians 12:28-31). Love is the more excellent way. Without love all of the gifts are ineffective and unprofitable.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails (I Corinthians 13:4-7).

Paul pointed out that all spiritual gifts would someday cease and then said, “... now abide faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love (I Corinthians 13:8-13).

Each Believer is Called to Fulfill His Ministry

Individual responsibility regarding the call to ministry is critical to growth in the body of Christ. Exhortations from the apostle Paul to Archippus, Timothy, and the believers at Corinth and Ephesus, illustrate the need for each believer to fulfill his ministry.

And say to Archippus, **“Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it”** (Colossians 4:17, emphasis added).

*Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. **Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you*** (I Timothy 4:15-16, emphasis added).

*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But **let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? **If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are*** (I Corinthians 3:5-17, emphasis added).

*... we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, **speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love*** (Ephesians 4:14-16, emphasis added).

God provided a variety of leadership gifts in the church to encourage all believers to exercise their spiritual gifts in the body of Christ and in witnessing to the world of lost souls. How well did leaders do this? Did they follow the ways of man or the way of Christ? What was happening in the church? Were all of the Christians exercising their gifts as participators or were most of them spectators? Were leadership gifts used to encourage widespread use of gifts or did their gifts become dominant, self-centered, and contrary to the teaching on leadership in ministry?

Leadership in Ministry

The first leaders in the church were the twelve **apostles**. Later, **elders** and **prophets** were added. The word “apostle” means sent out. There are three examples in the Bible of apostles: Jesus, who was sent by God (Hebrews 3:1-2), the twelve, who were called and sent out by Jesus (Matthew 10:1-5), and Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and others, sent out by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2-4, 14:14). Several terms are used to describe an elder: presbyter, overseer, shepherd (pastor), or bishop (Acts 20:1-28, I Peter 5:1-5, Titus 1:7-9, Philippians 1:1). Paul, in his letters to Timothy and Titus, described the qualifications of elders, and also deacons (ministers) who assisted the elders in the church. The ordination or appointment of elders has been confused in the church. God ordains, gifts, and calls all of His people for ministry or service. Leaders are simply recognized by their gift, qualifications, and service by apostles and other elders in the church. The qualifications of elders and deacons are outlined in the books of I Timothy 5 and Titus 1.

Paul cautioned the Ephesian elders at a meeting with them at Miletus regarding wolves that would come among them and draw away disciples after themselves.

*Therefore **take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears*** (Acts 20:28-31, emphasis added).

The apostles very quickly displayed the wrong concepts of men as they contemplated their role of leadership. One of them came to Jesus and asked Him who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus called a child and said,

... Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18: 3-4).

Jesus referred to the scribes and Pharisees who do their works to be seen of man and be called “Rabbi” and told His disciples not to be like them. They were not to seek titles.

But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:8-12).

One day Jesus asked His disciples what they were disputing about on the road. They did not answer for they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. He said to them, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.” (Mark 9:35). He added:

... The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves (Luke 22:25-30).

James and John came to Jesus on another occasion and asked that He would grant them to sit, “one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory” (Mark 10:35-37). Jesus said,

You do not know what you ask ... to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared (Mark 10:38).

Their mother was also involved in this request (Matthew 20:20-28). Later Jesus said,

... You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45).

The apostle Paul, in talking with the Ephesian elders warned them of leadership problems in the future.

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also **from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears** (Acts 20:28-31, emphasis added).*

The Lord Jesus Christ gave His apostles very clear teaching on the humility of leadership. As the Lord and Head of His church, He taught and demonstrated humility in ministry.

*... You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but **whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many** (Matthew 20:25-28, emphasis added).*

Peter, who was both an apostle and elder, also exhorted elders in the church.

*The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away** (I Peter 5:1-4, emphasis added).*

In conclusion, leadership in the ministry of the church needs to recognize the gifted ministry of all believers in the body of Christ and abide by the teaching and example of the Lord Jesus Christ. To what extent has this taken place throughout the church?

The Distribution of Gifts

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are distributed somewhat equally between leaders and other members of the church. Leadership gifts are identified as apostles, prophets, teachers, leaders, administrators, exhorters, shepherds, evangelists, and others with words of wisdom, and words of knowledge. Other members of the body of Christ have ministry gifts of giving, mercy, faith, healing, miracles, discerning spirits, tongues, interpretation, and helps. They are given for the spiritual growth of the body and each has its important role.

If the various gifts are hindered or ignored the whole body will suffer and become sickly, weak, and cease to grow spiritually. The body of Christ requires an active working ministry of every part (Ephesians 4:14-16).

A Demanding and Glorious Ministry

Paul, in his letters to Timothy and Titus, charged them relative to their ministry. Neither were young “pastors” as some Bible translators avow. They were missionaries working with the apostle Paul. He charged Timothy to preach the Word and warned of those who would not endure sound doctrine.

*I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: **Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry** (II Timothy 4:1-5, emphasis added).*

Paul advised Titus relative to insubordinate and deceiving talkers whose mouths must be stopped and the need to rebuke them sharply. He was also encouraged in his own ministry.

*For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. **Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work** (Titus 1:10-16, emphasis added).*

But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine ... showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you (Titus 2:1-8, emphasis added).

In addition to teaching in the church, the Holy Spirit gifted some as **evangelists** (Ephesians 4:11). Philip is referred to as an evangelist (Acts 2:8) and Timothy was encouraged to do the work of an evangelist, in fulfilling his ministry (II Timothy 4:5, emphasis added).

The book of II Corinthians contrasts the ministry of the Old Testament with the New Testament, revealing a much more glorious ministry for the church.

*But if **the ministry of death**, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will **the ministry of the Spirit** not be more glorious? For if **the ministry of condemnation** had glory, **the ministry of righteousness** exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For **if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious**. Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech— unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day **the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament**, because **the veil is taken away in Christ**. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But **we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord** (II Corinthians 3:7-17, emphasis added).*

The ministry in the body of Christ is very demanding and requires total commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ for fulfillment. Ultimately, when Jesus comes again, it will be revealed that not only did the gates of Hell not prevail against the church (Matthew 16:18) but that He will present her to Himself a glorious Church.

A Glorious Church

The church is not only the body of Christ but it is also **the bride of Christ** (John 3:28). She is coming one day, prepared as **a bride adorned for her husband**, and is called **the Lamb's wife** (Revelation 21:2 & 9). Jesus loves His church. The love relationship of Christ and His church is compared to that of a husband and wife.

*Husbands, love your wives, just as **Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish**. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. **For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones**. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church** (Ephesians 5:25-32, emphasis added).*

Regardless of the divisions, immorality, compromise, disorder, and false teaching prevalent in the church at Corinth, and possibly in other churches, the Lord Jesus will cleanse, purify and glorify His church as His loving bride. In the meantime we are called to follow the ways of God, in which Jesus is the way, and not the ways of man. Early in His ministry Jesus said to the woman of Samaria,

*Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. 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** (John 4:21-24, emphasis added).*

As the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth, she is to be faithful to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the truth and worship God in spirit and in truth.

I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star. And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:16-17).

Apostasy within the Churches

The apostle John was on the island of Patmos when God gave him a revelation of Jesus Christ which he was to give to the seven churches of Asia. They were words of judgment relative to the doctrines and practices of the churches, and prophecy concerning the future of the churches. John wrote the words instructing them to keep the things which were written (Revelation 1:1-4). He began by writing,

*... Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and **from Jesus Christ**, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty' (Revelation 1:4-8, emphasis added).*

John wrote that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard behind him a loud voice, like a trumpet, saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, and what you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia.' The book was to be sent to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Revelation 1:9-11).

John turned to see who was speaking to him and saw one like the Son of Man in the midst of seven golden lampstands. He was gloriously clothed,

... clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength (Revelation 1:13-16).

When John saw Him, he fell at His feet as dead. He was most glorious to behold and to hear. He laid His right hand on John and said,

... Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches (Revelation 1: 17-20).

The Son of Man is clearly the Lord Jesus Christ with a message to churches in Asia Minor.

The Signs of Apostasy in the Churches

The word "apostasy" is not found in the Bible. Apostasy is a theological term used to describe false doctrines and practices in the church. It may be defined as a moving away from a position of truth to a position of error. The message in each of the letters that John was to write included one of the descriptions of the Son of Man revealed to John. Each message usually contained commendation as well as the call to repentance. The first letter was to the angel of the church of Ephesus. The word angel is defined as "messenger" so it may refer to the one who receives or reads the letter.

The Loveless Church

The first letter was to the church of Ephesus. It began with a revelation of Jesus Christ holding the seven stars in His hand and walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. Jesus proceeded with a commendation, then that which He had against them, a command to repent, and a final warning. He then mentioned hatred for the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

*I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have **left your first love**. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; **repent** and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that **you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate** (Revelation 1:2-6, emphasis added).*

The Ephesians had fallen from their first love. They needed to repent and do their first works or their lampstand or church would be removed. The term “Nicolaitan” means ruler of the laity or people. Their deeds were early movements toward the development of the clergy/laity system, away from the plurality of leadership in elders and ministry by those gifted by the Holy Spirit. This is clearly a sign of apostasy, following the way of man instead of the way of God. It was clearly a moving away from what Jesus taught about leadership and ministry in the church

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28).

The Lord Jesus closed with a command and a promise.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).

The Persecuted Church

The second letter was to the church in Smyrna. The Lord Jesus revealed that He was the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life. Knowing their works He spoke of tribulation and poverty, asserting that they were rich. He mentioned blasphemy of false Jews and of Satan.

*I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and the blasphemy of those who say they are **Jews** and are not, but are a synagogue of **Satan**. Do not fear those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, **the devil** is about to throw some of you into **prison**, that you may be tested, and you will have **tribulation** ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (Revelation 2:9-10, emphasis added).*

Satan was leading many astray and causing suffering and tribulation in the church. Others would be persecuted and tested. Jesus promised them the crown of life for faithfulness unto death. Jesus closed with the same command and a different promise,

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death (Revelation 2:11).

The Compromising Church

The third letter was to the church in Pergamos. Jesus revealed that it was He who has the sharp two-edged sword. He said that He knew their works and that they lived where Satan's throne is. He began by commending them and then saying the things He had against them.

*I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, **where Satan dwells**. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the **doctrine of Balaam**, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit **sexual immorality**. Thus you also have those who hold the **doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate**. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth (Revelation 2:13-16, emphasis added).*

Some in the church were following the **doctrine of Balaam** who led the Israelites into **sexual immorality**, and others held the **doctrine of the Nicolaitans**, which Jesus hated. They had moved **from deeds** in Ephesus **to the doctrine** of rulers over the laity or people, moving yet farther away from the teaching of Jesus and the apostles on God's way of humble and servant leadership and ministry in the church (Matthew 20, Acts 1, and I Timothy 3).

The letter ended with another challenge to repent and a promise to overcomers.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it (Revelation 2:17).

Jesus clearly taught humility in leadership and ministry.

...do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:8-12).

The Corrupt Church

The fourth letter was to the church in Thyatira. Jesus identified Himself as the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like fine brass. He recognized their works, love, service, faith, and patience, but also the things He has against them (Revelation 2:18-20).

*... you allow that **woman Jezebel**, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her **sexual immorality**, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they **repent** of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as **many as do not have this doctrine**, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden (Revelation 2:20-24, emphasis added).*

Sexual immorality and eating food offered to idols was being taught by the woman Jezebel. Jesus warned them of great tribulation but the guilty refused to repent. Jesus referred to their deeds as the depths of Satan. He then encouraged the overcomers with another promise.

Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels—as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Revelation 2:25-29).

The Dead Church

The fifth letter was to the church in Sardis. Jesus began by saying that it is He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. He said, "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." Jesus instructed and warned them (Revelation 3:1).

*Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and **repent**. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you (Revelation 3:2-3, emphasis added).*

Jesus encouraged them with these words:

You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Revelation 3:4-6).

The Faithful Church

The sixth letter was to the church in Philadelphia. Jesus said that it is He who is holy and true. He has the key of David, He opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens. Jesus said that He set before them an open door (Revelation 3:7).

*I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for **you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name**. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because **you have kept My command to persevere**, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth (Revelation 3:8-10, emphasis added).*

Jesus had only commendation and praise for the faithful church in Philadelphia. He set before them an open door. He did not say what the open door meant, but promised them a crown and other promises.

Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. ¹He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write own out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Revelation 3:11-13).

The Lukewarm Church

The seventh and last letter was to the church of the Laodiceans. Jesus said that he is the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, and the Beginning of the creation of God. He said that He knew their works, that they were neither cold nor hot. Jesus said that He wished they were cold or hot (Revelation 3:14-15). He chastened and rebuked them.

*... I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore **be zealous and repent** (Revelation 3:15-19, emphasis added*

Because the church was lukewarm Jesus said He would vomit them out of His mouth. Their nakedness needed to be clothed. Jesus closed by indicating that He was outside the door, but that if anyone opened the door, He would come in.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Revelation 3:20-22, emphasis added).

The letters to the churches of Asia comprise the first part of the revelation of Jesus Christ to them, things which must shortly take place (Revelation 1:1). The chapters which follow reveal prophecies of things that will take place after this, focusing on the end times (Revelation 1:19).

John wrote the book of Revelation when he was old, in or about A.D. 95, indicating that the church had existed for only sixty years or so. It very quickly departed from the teachings of Jesus into the wicked ways of man: carnality, immorality, false teaching or heresy, and apostasy. Old Testament books on prophecy and all of the New Testament books warned of these things, with varying emphasis, for that time, and in the end times.

Early Warnings

The books of I Timothy, Hebrews, II Peter, II John, III John, and Jude gave warnings of apostasy in the early church. The apostle Paul wrote the following to Timothy about some departing from the faith, deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, saying,

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness (I Timothy 4:6-7).

In II Peter, the apostle Peter warned of false prophets and heresies among the people in the church and that many would follow them and be exploited.

*But there were also **false prophets** among the people, even as there will be **false teachers** among you, who will secretly bring in **destructive heresies**, even **denying the Lord** who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their **destructive ways**, because of whom the **way of truth** will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with **deceptive words** ... (II Peter 2:1-3, emphasis added).*

Peter continued by saying that these false prophets were carousing in their own deceptions while they **feast with you**. They had **forsaken the right way** and gone astray, following the **way of Balaam**, who loved the wages of unrighteousness (II Peter 2:13-15). Peter added,

*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For **it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness**, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire" (II Peter 2:20-22, emphasis added).*

The apostle John, in his second and third books warned of apostasy.

*For **many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist**. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. **Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God** (II John 7-8, emphasis added).*

*I wrote to the church, but **Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us**. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, **he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church**. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but **he who does evil has not seen God** (III John 9-11, emphasis added).*

Jude, who called himself a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, wrote to the churches, warning them of certain ungodly men who had crept in among them, who turned the grace of God into lewdness and denied the Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 1-4). Jude continued:

Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 11-13, emphasis added).

Jude concluded his letter by referring to Enoch, the seventh from Adam, who prophesied of these men, saying that the Lord was coming to execute judgment.

... to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him ... These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit (Jude 15-19, emphasis added).

Jude encouraged the churches with these words:

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life ... Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen (Jude 20-25).

A Scene in Heaven

The book of Revelation, in chapter three, concludes the New Testament history of the church as it existed in the time of the apostle John. After he saw all of these things, John saw a door standing open in heaven. A voice invited him to come up and be shown what must take place after this. John was immediately in the Spirit and saw a scene of God on a throne, being worshiped by four living creature and twenty-four elders (Revelation 4:1-11). God was holding in His hand a scroll, sealed with seven seals. No one was found worthy to open the scroll except a Lamb (the Lord Jesus Christ). When He took the book, every creature in heaven worshiped Him (Revelation 5:1-14). The opening of the seals revealed prophecies leading to the end times.

Church History

The story of the church, after the close of the New Testament account, relies on secular church history. It is a history of growing apostasy and persecution as the church, like the people of Israel, followed the ways of man instead of the way of God. It is a history of the church in the Roman Empire and the influence of one another.

The Church and the Roman Empire

A.D. 96 to A.D. 500

The church began during the time of the Roman Empire, which was the last of four “world” empires (Babylon, Persia, Greek, and Rome) in the history of the world. The church had a powerful spiritual influence upon the Roman Empire. The Empire, in turn, had a tragic and negative influence on the church. The warnings of Jesus to the churches in the book of Revelation relative to apostasy within and persecution quickly found increased fulfillment in the Roman Empire.

The story of the church, in the New Testament, began in the book of Acts and ended in the book of Revelation on or about A.D.90. From that time on it has been necessary to rely upon secular accounts of church history, which have been sketchy in areas throughout the centuries.

The Cruelty of the Roman Empire

Justice, tolerance, and the *Pax Romana* (world peace maintained by the Roman Legions) were principles of the Roman Empire. No nation was strong enough to wage total war against it. These principles bound it together and influenced the world for centuries. The ideals of *pietas* (the sense of duty), *gravitas* (the seriousness of purpose), and *dignitas* (the concept of personal worth), have appealed to people throughout time. These ideals, however, were overshadowed by the cruelty, greed, and wickedness of many of the emperors, citizens, and other people in the empire. The treatment of criminals, enemy prisoners, slaves and any other persons or movements that threatened the well-being of the Empire was extremely cruel and many times unjust. The immorality of many Romans quickly affected the church.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ revealed many aspects of many times unjust. The immorality of many Romans quickly affected the church. Of the cruelty of Rome. The trial and ultimate death of Christ, after the Roman governor Pilate found no fault in Him, was a total miscarriage of justice. The punishment by crucifixion was a vastly greater injustice. Hours and hours of torture were inflicted on the victims. Christ was innocent and the two criminals crucified with him were only thieves. Evidently, such punishment was common practice.

Amphitheaters, such as the Coliseum in Rome, were built for entertainment in major cities in the Empire. While they were used for races, drama, and musical productions, they also glorified the most inhuman treatment of men. Spectators watched as gladiators fought one another. Many of the gladiators were slaves. Men also fought with lions and other beasts for the spectators.

Christians were often the victims of entertainment for the audience. The Apostle Paul seems to have alluded to the practice of fighting the beasts (I Corinthians 15:32). According to tradition, Paul was eventually beheaded by Rome and the Apostle Peter was crucified.

A Jewish revolt and war broke out in A.D.66 because of Roman misrule. Emperor Titus (A.D.40?-81) conquered Jerusalem after a long siege in A.D.70 and destroyed the city and the temple. The absence of the temple brought an end to Jewish sacrificial worship. The conquest of Masada in A.D.73, after a long siege, ended in the self-annihilation of the Jewish defenders and a victory for Rome.

Thousands and thousands of Christians were martyred during the centuries that followed as the world was being evangelized through the spreading of the Gospel of Christ. As the church grew it began to be persecuted more and more by the Roman Empire.

Evangelism

Christian congregations were established in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Damascus, then throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, and Rome. The gospel began to spread as Christians left Jerusalem during the early persecutions. Philip ventured out to Samaria and Peter later joined him and then went on to Caesarea and won the first Gentiles to Christ. The apostle Paul, after his conversion, was sent out with Barnabas by the Holy Spirit and began to evangelize Asia Minor.

Paul and Barnabas separated in their ministry. Paul was joined by Silas and continued on throughout Asia Minor and into Greece. Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus. Ultimately, churches were established in cities throughout the Roman Empire.

As time went on, many joined Paul in the work of evangelism, preaching the gospel throughout the empire. Timothy was the first to join Paul and Silas. Others included: Titus, Apollos, Aquila and Priscilla, Gaius, Erastus, Aristarchus, Sopater, Secundus, Tychicus, and Trophimus, just to name a few. Over thirty persons are mentioned in the book of Acts and in the letters of Paul.

Very little is actually known about the various Christian congregations from A.D.96. until the early A.D.300s. Christian writers such as Polycarp and Ignatius, disciples of John, Papias, Justin Martyr, Iranaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Eusebius wrote various discourses on Christianity during the period. Churches continued to be established throughout the Roman Empire by men who had worked with or who followed after the apostle Paul.

The Early Church, Growing Apostasy, and Persecutions

Apostasy began in the early church according to the book of Revelation. Apostasy may be defined as (1) moving away (apo) from a position or (2) a defection. False doctrines, false teaching, and false practices are forms of apostasy in the church. Apostasy in the early church began with the creation of man-made leadership. False practices and doctrines followed.

In the beginning of the early church, congregations met together in homes. Many references are made of these home gatherings in the letters of the apostle Paul. Some larger meetings were held in upper rooms. There is no record of church buildings until after A.D. 200.

The apostles and church elders served as leaders. Each congregation had its own elders (Acts 14:2). Deacons (meaning servants) assisted in the work. Qualifications for these ministries are outlined in I Timothy and Titus. Elders are variously described as shepherds or pastors, bishops or overseers, and presbyters (Acts 20:17-38, Titus 1:5-9, I Peter 5:1-5). These were descriptions of the same person or service. Ministry of the Word of God in each congregation was provided by a plurality of men gifted by the Holy Spirit. Christ was taught as the head over the churches (I Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:9-16, Colossians 1:17).

The twelve apostles, with the exception of Peter and John, apparently stayed in Jerusalem. From time to time councils were held with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem over doctrinal differences and practices in various churches (Acts 15:2-6).

Apostasy began in the leadership of the church with the rise of bishops, leading to archbishops, patriarchs, and popes. Apostasy and influence of the Roman Empire caused the church to begin following the ways of man rather than the ways of God. The many **persecutions** by the Empire may have been a factor in causing the church to seek man-made leadership.

The Rise of Bishops

Very quickly, in the early church, there was a movement away from the simple Biblical form of leadership as the church began to establish a man-made organization. A distinction was made

between **elders and bishops**, and later between elders and pastors. The word “**pastor**” is found only once in the New Testament. It states that Christ gave,

*... some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some **pastors** and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ... (Ephesians 4:11-12, emphasis added).*

The word is a translation of the Greek word “poimen”, which is translated “shepherd” elsewhere in the New Testament. It is one of the descriptions of elders, who are also described as bishops, presbyters, and overseers. Paul warned the elders of Ephesus,

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which **the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God** which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. **Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves** (Acts 20:17, 28-30, emphasis added).*

Peter also instructed the elders

***The elders** who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd the flock** of God which is among you, **serving as overseers**, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away (1 Peter 5:1-4, emphasis added).*

Bishops and/or pastors (shepherds) were men gifted by the Holy Spirit and were appointed (pointed out) in new congregations by the apostles (Acts 14:23).

The New Testament, in no way, describes separate ministries for bishops and pastors, with the bishop over several congregations and the pastor the leader of a single congregation. The term pastor (which should be translated shepherd) is clearly not defined as “the leader” of a congregation as it is used today. The Biblical description of the work of a bishop and “pastor” was developed into a man-made hierarchy of authority over the church.

The title “Bishop” began to be used to designate authority over many congregations. Polycarp (A.D. 69-156), for example, became bishop of Smyrna. The letter to Smyrna, the second church of Asia referred to in Revelation, prophesied of a persecuted church (Revelation 2:8-11). The first and third churches, Ephesus and Pergamos, had the deeds and doctrine of Nicolaitans, which the Lord Jesus Christ hated (Revelations 2:6, 15). As pointed out in the previous chapter, Nicolaitan means ruler of the people, or laity. This practice was the beginning of the clergy/laity system in the church, an apostasy in contrast to the simple leadership of elders and the ministry of word by those gifted by the Holy Spirit.

Other men who assumed the position of bishop included Ignatius (A.D. 67-110), bishop Antioch, Papias (About A.D. 70-155), bishop of Hierapolis, Iranaeus (A.D. 130-200), bishop of Lyons, in Gaul, and Eusebius (A.D. 264-340), bishop of Caesarea. Many of these men are referred to as the “**church fathers**”, which Jesus forbade.

The disciples of Jesus asked Jesus who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus called a child to him and replied, “... whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:4). Later Jesus, in speaking of the scribes and Pharisees, said,

*But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’ **But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your***

Father, He who is in heaven, And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:5-12, emphasis added).

The literature is not clear when the church adopted “pastors” and “priests” and the clergy/laity system, departing from Scriptural teaching of the plurality of elders as shepherds (pastors) in congregations and the priesthood of every believer.

*... you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, **a holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... you are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light ...* (1 Peter 2:5-9, emphasis added).

While the church was apostatizing from Scripture both in leadership and in ministry though the gifts of the Holy Spirit, it appears that the church was still faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, serving Him and witnessing for Him. It should not be assumed that all believers or that all teaching and practice was apostate. The churches continued to grow and spread throughout the Roman Empire even under persecution.

Persecutions by Roman Emperors

Nero (A.D.37-68) was the first Roman emperor to focus on the persecution of Christians. In A.D. 64 a great fire swept through Rome. Evidently Nero was unable to have it stopped and blamed the Christians for starting the fire and had many put to death. The apostle Peter, according to tradition, was crucified upside down in A.D. 66, and the apostle Paul was imprisoned and later beheaded about A.D. 67, during the time of Nero. Christianity became an unlawful religion in the second century and persecutions increased.

Ten persecutions of the church by Roman emperors occurred over the next two hundred and fifty years. Jesus mentioned ten days of tribulation in His letter to Smyrna, the persecuted church, in Revelation 2:10. The ten days may have referred to these ten periods of persecution.

Persecutions were initiated by the following Roman emperors, in addition to Nero; Domitian (A.D. 95), Trajan (A.D. 98-117), Hadrian (A.D.117-138), Antonius Pius (A.D. 138-161), Marcus Aurelius (A.D.161-180), Septimius Severus (A.D.193-211), Maximin (A.D. 235-238), Decius (A.D. 249-251), Valerian (A.D. 253-260), and Diocletian (A.D. 284-305).

In the persecution ordered by Emperor Antonius Pius, Polycarp was arrested and brought before the governor. When he was offered his freedom if he would curse Christ, he replied, “Eighty and six year have I served Christ and He has done me nothing but good; how then could I curse Him, my Lord and Savior?” He was burned alive at the stake.

Throughout the period of the ten persecutions, Christians hid in various places including caves and the catacombs of Rome. Many were arrested, beheaded, or thrown to the wild beasts. The persecutions lasted until the time of Emperor Constantine. They were the fulfillment of the letters to the churches in the second chapter of Revelation of coming persecution.

Doctrinal Conflicts in the Church

The church had growing doctrinal conflicts and many heresies developed: Montanism, Gnosticism, Arianism, Nestorianism, causing it to often lose sight of its true mission. It was growing more and more like **the way of the world**. Montanism emphasized the ascetic, perfect life of total self-denial focusing only on the coming of Christ. Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) became a Montanist and became alienated from the church. Gnosticism was an effort to combine Greek philosophy with Biblical teaching. Origen (A.D.185-254) was a Greek philosopher who became

a Christian and his writings, sadly, were an effort to combine philosophy with Christian doctrines. Years after he died he was condemned as a heretic. The apostle Paul wrote:

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (I Corinthians 1:20-25).

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Colossian 2:8).

Arianism questioned the deity of Jesus Christ, making Him less than God. Disputes arose over the Virgin Mary. Was Mary, as the mother of Jesus, also the Mother of God? Nestorianism taught that Mary was the Mother of both God and Man. There were many disputes as teachers and writers advanced various doctrines of God and man.

Monasticism

The monastic way of living began in Egypt with Anthony (A.D. 250-350), who began a life of solitude. Many followed his example and the movement spread throughout the Roman Empire. In the East each one lived his own cave or hut. In Europe they lived in communities called Monasteries. They combined work with religious exercises. As they grew there rose up many orders of monks and nuns. The practice has continued to this day. Once again, to the extent that solitude was practiced, the way of man contradicted the way of God, for Jesus said, “Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature ...” (Mark 16:15).

The Religions of the World

Much of the apostasy, persecution, and conflict of the church was caused or influenced by the religions of the world. From the time after Noah and the flood, the nations have worshipped false gods and idols. Greece had many gods as did the Romans. In the Orient or Far East, they also worshipped many gods and their religions were spreading to the West. Many of these false gods and idols are still worshipped today. Much of the Greek philosophy, literature and culture prevalent at this time centered upon the false beliefs and practices of man.

A new religion, Islamic, founded by Mohammed, began to spread throughout the Middle East, Africa, Asia Minor, and Europe after A.D. 600. The followers are known as Moslems and Mohammedans. Their effect, after the fall of Rome, on remaining countries and the church will be considered in the next chapter.

Constantine

Constantine (A.D. 272-337) became emperor of Rome in A.D. 306. He had many rivals and defeated his strongest rival, Maxentius, at the battle of Milvian Bridge in 312. According to legend he saw a Christian cross before the battle. Written on the cross were the words, “By this sign thou shalt conquer.” The cross became Constantine’s battle symbol and Christians began to receive more favored treatment. It appears that he considered himself a Christian. In 313 he signed the **Edict of Milan**, recognizing Christianity as a lawful religion and persecution ceased.

The consequences of the emperor’s conversion were manifold. There was an increase in numbers of churches as great multitudes of people were becoming Christians or Christianized

and Church buildings were being built. At the same time the Church's organization began to match that of the empire and **the way of man**. The church also became subject to imperial control. It became a state-church and at the same time increased in power. Eusebius (A.D. 264-340), bishop of Caesarea, had great influence with Constantine.

The growing doctrinal conflicts in the church often caused it to lost sight of its true mission. It was growing more and more like the way of the world. Arianism continued to raise questions and disputes over the deity of Jesus Christ. The question of the Trinity threatened to divide the church and Constantine called a council of church leaders at Nicaea in 325. **The Nicene Creed** was developed as a result. It is similar in some places to the Apostle's Creed, which is recited, with some variations, in churches today.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, both visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Only begotten of the Father, that is to say, of the substance of the Father, God of God and Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, both things in heaven and things on earth; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down and was made flesh, was made man, suffered, and rose again on the third day, went up into the heavens, and is to come again to judge both the quick and the dead; and in the Holy Ghost. (Nicene Creed, A.D. 325).

Another problem in the church was the scarcity of the New Testament Scriptures in the language of the people, which during those years was Greek or Hebrew. The church was growing faster than the Scriptures could be copied.

The New Testament Scriptures

The original New Testament manuscripts have been lost. In the 2nd century A.D. the New Testament books began to be made up in "Codex" form, somewhat like modern books. They were written in every day Greek language (Koine) so the common people were able to read them. New Testament Scriptures were read in the churches and were widely quoted by the early church writers. The Bible, with its twenty-seven book New Testament canon, was not fully accepted by the early church apostles and elders until it was finally ratified by the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397).

Jerome (A.D.340-420) translated the Bible into the Latin language, called the Vulgate. The translation began to be used exclusively later in the liturgy of the church. It became a hindrance to the common people who were unable to understand or read Latin

The Bishop of Rome

Having moved away from the apostolic age, with simply elders and deacons leading each congregation, **the church began to organize a man-made hierarchy of leadership**. Elders became subject to a bishop who was over a city and the areas around it. The system began with Polycarp and others men who were mentioned earlier.

When Constantine became emperor various men had served as bishops from Polycarp (A.D. 69-156) to Eusebius (A.D. 264-340). Silvester I (A.D.314-335) became **Bishop of Rome** under Constantine, and the church became an institution of influence in Roman politics.

The East and the West

Emperor Diocletian divided the Roman Empire into the east and west parts in A.D. 293 with an emperor in each part. The Eastern part included Greece, Asia Minor, Northeastern Africa, Syria and eastward. It was later known as the Byzantine Empire. It spread down into Africa and

up into Russia. The Western part included Italy, Spain, France, Germany, England, and the Northwest tip of Africa.

When Constantine came to power he ruled as Emperor of the West from A.D. 306 to 334. In 324 he defeated Licinius, Emperor of the East, and became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. As the sole emperor, **Constantine considered himself head of the church**. He moved the capital from Rome to Asia Minor and built a city called Constantinople, on the site of ancient Byzantium. He died three years later and his empire was divided between his sons.

Various emperors from the West and East ruled in the centuries that followed. Emperor Theodosius (A.D. 378-395) made Christianity the State religion of the Roman Empire and Church membership became compulsory with forced conversions to Christianity. As the “state church”, it changed its mission and entered into what many have called its “**Great Apostasy**” and became a political organization.

When Theodosius died in A.D. 395, the East and the West split into two parts. Although the empire split, both the East and West church continued to be under the Church of Rome. There were, however, many conflicts between the Eastern part and the Western until the final schism of the two was complete in A.D. 1054.

The Fall of the Roman Empire

As the struggles between the rival emperors of the East and the West continued, the Western Empire grew weaker and weaker. After the two parts of the empire finally split apart in A.D. 395, invaders began to enter into the West.

The Goths and Huns invaded the land and in A.D. 455 the Vandals sacked and burned Rome. German chieftains began cutting out provinces for themselves and in A.D. 476 Roman Emperor Romulus Augustulus was deposed and the Western Roman Empire fell. The Eastern Empire continued to survive until A.D. 1453.

During this period the church, rather than seek the way of God, began to organize more and more. The five bishops of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria had come to be called the **five patriarchs or archbishops** of the church. They gradually came to acknowledge leadership of the emperor. This led to a struggle for leadership between Rome and the church. Had they forgotten that Christ was the head of the church?

There was continual conflict between the Eastern Church and the Western Church throughout the centuries. The final separation, cleavage, or schism did not come until A.D. 1054. The Eastern church has maintained that they follow the New Testament more faithfully than the Western church and rejected many of its teachings and practices. Today the two are best known as the Roman Catholic Church and Greek Orthodox Church.

Augustine's Theology

As the Western part of the Empire was collapsing prior to the fall of Rome, Jerome (A.D. 340-420), John Chrysostom (A.D. 345-407), and Augustine (A.D. 354-430) helped preserve some **truths** and bring about new direction in the church.

Jerome, as mentioned earlier, translated the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament into the Latin language, called the Vulgate. This helped the Bible scholars but was a hindrance to the majority of the people who depended on the widely used language of Greek.

John Chrysostom, the Patriarch of Constantinople, was a very gifted preacher and a reformer. He preached to great multitudes in the church at St. Sophia in Asia Minor.

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, North Africa, was a theologian. He was responsible for molding doctrines which became controversial as the church moved into the Middle Ages. Earlier in life, before he became a Christian, Augustine was a teacher of rhetoric in Milan. He was a student of philosophy, particularly Greek Neo-Platonism. Augustine maintained later that the study of philosophy helped understand the Scriptures. This concept was dangerous as pointed out in this chapter in quotes by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 1:20-25 and Colossians 2:8.

When two men, Pelagius and Celestius, came from Rome to Africa, teaching a doctrine of salvation as old as time in the religions of the world, that man can save himself by his own works, Augustine contradicted the doctrine. He maintained that God has chosen who will be saved and that man has no part in salvation. This caused divisions in the church, however, some maintaining a works salvation and others that humans can help God in salvation. This controversy continues today. Many concluded then, and still do today, that Augustine was not right either. What do the Scriptures teach? Jesus said,

*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. 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* (John 3:14-18, emphasis added).

When the Philippian Jailer asked the apostles what he must do to be saved they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ... (Acts 16:31). Believing comes from the sane Greek word as faith. The Scriptures state,

*But **without faith** it is impossible to please Him, for **he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*** (Hebrews 11:6, emphasis added).

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: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:11-12).

Salvation is of God and it is very clear from the Scriptures that God’s will is that all men be saved. He desires “all men to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:4, 4:10). God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9). God has sent the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin and of coming judgment because they do believe in Christ (John 16:7-10).

The gospel of Christ is the good news of salvation. Sadly, many reject and rebel rather than receive and believe the good news. Man’s responsibility is to respond to the persuasion and invitation of God by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Augustine has often been described as the “father of the Catholic Church.” He maintained that the true church is in possession of the creed (statement of belief), the apostolic sacraments, and the apostolic succession of bishops. He thought of the earth as being two cities, one living after the flesh and the other after the spirit. He envisioned the church as the “City of God.” and promoted a universal church under one man as the earthly head, the Pope.

The True City of God

The Scriptures teach of a heavenly city of God, made up of the church, in the kingdom of God, and of just men made perfect.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in

heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. See that you do not refuse Him who speaks (Hebrews 12:22-25, emphasis added).

The church was taught to focus on Jesus Christ and warned not to be carried away with strange doctrines.

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them ... Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For **here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.** Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:8-16, emphasis added).*

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ will come again and rule over the world from Jerusalem for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6). The Bible also describes the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven where God will dwell (Revelation 21:13).

Man has moved from simply rebelling against the way of God to presuming the rule of man within the church of God and to organize it according to his own pleasure, will and way.

Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church, the Body of Christ

Jesus said, "...on this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). The church is His church and He is the head of it, not man. He purchased it at great cost, with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The church is also the body of Christ and believers are the members of His body.

He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence (Colossians 1:17, emphasis added).

Christ, as the head of His church is to have the preeminence in all things, not man. The church as His body is a spiritual entity, described at length in I Corinthians 12:1-31).

*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... Now **you are the body of Christ**, and members individually (I Corinthians 12:12-27, emphasis added).*

Finally, Jesus said that the gates of Hades (Hell) would not prevail against His church. Apostasy within and persecutions and every effort of Satan has not destroyed it. His church continues to live today! Jesus said,

*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 ... (Matthew 28:19-20, emphasis added).*

Church Meetings throughout the Roman Empire

The literature is very scant on any descriptions of church meetings throughout the Roman Empire during the centuries that followed the early church. How did the various congregations conduct their meetings? Did they follow the teachings and practices laid out in the books of Acts and I Corinthians? Did they continue in the apostles' doctrine, breaking bread and having communion in remembrance of the death of Christ, teaching, times of fellowship, and prayer? What about the exercise of gifts in the body of Christ in the ministry of the church?

History reveals that the way of man prevailed in the development of leadership in the church, with the focus on unscriptural leadership of bishops and the clergy/laity system. On the positive side, the church did continue grow and evidently evangelized throughout the empire.

The Roman Empire, the Way of Man, and the Way of Christ

Rome, as a world empire, followed the way of man like all of the three world empires which preceded it. The way of Christ and His church became obscured as church leaders sought more and more power by becoming entrenched in the government of Rome. It appears that the church as Israel in Old Testament times quickly deviated from the teachings of Jesus Christ, as the Way and the Way of God. What will the following centuries reveal?

One thing seems certain, the fall of the Roman Empire and the last of its emperors did not diminish man's quest for power. **The Empire's influence had hindered more than helped the early church and the way of Christ and the way of God were obscured.** Popes took the opportunity to take over the Roman rule of the world. The rise of the Papacy in the Church grew out of the formation of the Bishopric, Archbishops, Patriarchs, and finally, Popes. It brought the true church into more apostasy and obscurity as time proceeded into the "Dark Ages."

The Dark Ages 500 A.D to 1100 A.D.

The Dark Ages are identified with the Middle Ages and the Medieval times. The fall of Rome, the last of the four great world empires (Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome), radically changed the world. The Roman Empire had been a source of peace in the world maintained by its legions. It was known as the “Pax Romana.” God used the empire in spreading the Gospel throughout the world. With the fall of Rome, smaller kingdoms such as Italy and Spain began to emerge and to be identified again. Germany was still made up of tribal peoples. As the Roman Empire weakened there were many invasions and resettlements of people in Western Europe. The church became one of the main sources of power and authority for centuries.

Historians describe the Dark Ages in a variety of ways. Many maintain that they pertain largely to the church and the countries which remained of the Roman Empire in Western Europe. They believe that restrictions on Bible reading by people in the church, decreased education and literacy due to language problems, limited reading material and travel, and lack of the availability of classical literature and the arts, led to ignorance among the common people. The rigid rule of the Clergy over congregations, conflicts over doctrinal differences, infiltration of false religions, and immorality were also major factors.

The growth of all of these conditions is in stark contrast to the teachings of Jesus Christ, who said, “... I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). Jesus said to his people,

***You are the light of the world.** A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven** (Matthew 5:14-16, emphasis added).*

***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. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God (John 3:19-21, emphasis added).*

What was happening in the church? It was no longer walking in light. It began with the leadership and the development of the clergy, ultimately controlled by the Papacy. Could the fall of Rome have moved the church to seek the way of Jesus Christ and the way of God as taught in the Scriptures? Were there any positive as well as negative effects of the invasions and resettlement of people?

Invasions of the Roman Empire

As the empire was weakening, it was bombarded by invasions of the Gauls, Goths, Vandals, Huns, and Lombards. The Angles, Saxons, and Jutes resettled in England. German tribes resettled in Northern Italy. Some invasions were in the nature of conquest, others of migrations.

On 455 A.D. the Vandals sacked and burned Rome. In 476 A.D. the German chief Odoacer, deposed the last Roman emperor, Romulus and declared himself king of Italy.

The Franks, from the Rhinelands, were bent on conquest. In 525 A.D. they made conquests in Northwestern Europe to the North Sea and eventually set up the kingdom of France.

While the invasions created hardships and distress they did lead to many converts to Christianity throughout Europe.

The Rise of the Papacy

The fall of Rome opened the door of opportunity for increased authority for the pope. The beginning history of the papacy is unclear. The Roman Catholic Church claims that it started with Peter as the first pope. This is contrary to the teaching of Peter himself for he writes,

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away (1 Peter 5:1-4, emphasis added).

As indicated in previous chapters, the terms elder, bishop, overseer, and shepherd were various designations of the same persons. Very early in the history of the church this was changed in which the title bishop was given to men as a position of authority over a city or area, ending up with five bishoprics over the total church. This grew into archbishops and patriarchs. All of these positions were contrary to the teaching of Jesus and throughout the New Testament and related to the Nicolaitans (rulers of the people or laity) described in the Book of Revelation, which Christ hated. Ultimately, the Bishop of Rome claimed a position of preeminence over the other bishops but was challenged by the Eastern Church. Suddenly, the Bishop of Rome was identified as a Pope, which means “Papa,” contrary to the teaching of Jesus who said, “Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven” (Matthew 23:9). The title “Patriarch,” given to the head of the Eastern Church, means arch or high father.

As the position of the Emperor diminished with the fall of Rome the succeeding popes seized the opportunity to rule over the remains of the empire in addition to the church. The result was that the Western Church became the political power of Europe and often times an adversary to the Eastern Church.

Leo I (A.D. 440-461) has been called the First Pope by some historians. He persuaded Attila the Hun and Genseric the Vandal to spare the city of Rome during their invasions after the fall. The popes, however, were obviously not able to stop the other invasions. Instead, the invasions and conquests left them free to push their claims of spiritual rule unhindered by emperors.

Mohammed and Islam

In 732 A.D a new religion was taking the place of Christianity in the East. Mohammed began to teach the doctrine of Islam or Muslimism about 610 A.D. It soon spread all over Arabia, recognizing him as a prophet. The new religion was spread with the sword. Palestine and Jerusalem were conquered by the Mohammedans in 636 A.D. The Moslems, also known as the Moors, took over much of northern Africa and then moved into Spain via Gibraltar. In 732 A.D. Charlemagne, king of the Franks, with the help of the Germans, stopped them from any more conquests in Europe. The Moslems, under the Turks, continued conquests in the east and in Asia Minor into the 1400s.

The Roman Catholic Church

It is not clear from the literature when the name “The Roman Catholic Church” was used to identify the church. The word “catholic” means universal, that is, world-wide, and throughout time, which is true of the true church. Augustine used the term in his book “City of God.” The designation “Roman”, however, is a contradiction of terms, since Rome is hardly universal.

Augustine described many of the practices and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. He maintained the true church is one which is in possession of the creed, the apostolic sacraments, and the apostolic succession of bishops.

The Catholic Church identifies **seven sacraments**: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Marriage. **Baptism** (sprinkling) is given to infants as well as adults and washes away original sin. **Confirmation** confers the Holy Spirit upon the person. **Holy Eucharist** substantially contains the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine when brought into existence by the consecration of the Holy Mass (Transubstantiation). **Penance** has four stages, sorrow for sin, confessions to a priest, and acceptance of the priest's requirements and forgiveness and restoration by the priest. **Extreme Unction** destroys the power of sin at death to the repentant soul who confesses to the priest. **Holy Orders** differentiate the clergy from the laity. **Marriage** is a bond that cannot be dissolved.

The most sacred function of the Catholic Church is the **Mass**. Rules for members are explicit relative to attendance. **Purgatory** is a place for purification of the soul after death. When the pope speaks "ex cathedra" his word is infallible. **The assumption and veneration of Mary as an intercessor** for sinners before God is also taught in the Catholic Church.

The Teaching of the Scriptures

The Scriptures teach that **the Holy Spirit** (Romans 8:26) **and the Lord Jesus Christ** (Hebrew 7: 22-25) **make intercession for those who come to God**. The Scriptures also teach that "... there is one God and **one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus**" (I Timothy 2:5). Over and over again the Scriptures contradict all of the doctrines and practices which are based upon the theology of man rather than the Scriptures. The New Testament teaches the truth of each doctrine.

Baptism is by immersion (the meaning of the word "baptize" in Greek) and is for believers only. It does not save. Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ. (Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:36-41, Acts 8:36-39, Acts 10:45-48, Acts 16:30-34, and Romans 6:2-5).

Confirmation means to strengthen new believers in the faith. The apostle Paul returned to churches which were formed during his first missionary trip and confirmed them in the faith (Acts 14:21-22).

The Holy Eucharist refers to **the Lord's Supper, Communion, and Breaking of Bread**. When Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, He said to do it in remembrance of Him. Another purpose was to proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

*... He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; **do this in remembrance of Me**." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:19-20, emphasis added).*

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes (I Corinthians 11:26, emphasis added).

In the early church the Breaking of Bread took place in large meetings, often in upper rooms, and from house to house. (Acts 2:46, Acts 20:7). The Breaking of Bread was a remembrance of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, of His body given and of His blood shed for sinners and the proclamation of His death until He comes again. There is no indication in the Scripture that the bread and the cup were changed into the body and blood of Christ.

Penance is the act of repenting for sin. The unbeliever is to repent of his sins and believe the gospel. The believer is to repent of his sins daily. Confession follows. If he has sinned against someone else he should confess it to that person and to God and seek forgiveness (James 5:15-

16). The believer has forgiveness by confessing his sins directly to God. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

Extreme Unction and **Holy Orders** are completely foreign to the Word of God. A person can certainly be saved on the death bed if he repents and receives Jesus Christ as his Savior. As to holy orders, every believer is a minister (servant), a holy priest, and a royal priest (I Peter 2:5-10). The way of man in the Roman Catholic Church usurped the ministry of the believer. There is a great deal of teaching about **Marriage** and divorce in the Scriptures. As to **Purgatory**, which means a place of purging or purifying, there is only one place of purification, and that was at Calvary where Christ died for our sins. Through faith in Him the believer is cleansed from his sin. **The assumption of Mary** is totally without Scriptural basis. No man is infallible. All men are sinners. The Roman Catholic Church also maintains that its dogma and traditional teachings are equal in authority to the Scriptures. This is self-condemning, for the Word of God states,

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18-19, emphasis added).

The Greek Orthodox Church

The Eastern Church became known as the Greek Orthodox Church over the course of time. It continued to maintain some unity with the Roman Catholic Church, although there were many disagreements, until a final schism took place in 1054 A.D.

Orthodox means straight or sound doctrine. The Orthodox church refused to follow the practices of the Roman Catholic Church and maintained that they were governed more by the Scriptures. Their orthodox claim, however, was not in agreement with Scripture in many areas. They practiced immersion in baptism but did baptize infants. They did have bishops and a patriarch but allowed more freedom among congregations. They practiced icon veneration, the reverence of pictures of Christ and saints, and mysticism, direct revelations to men from God.

The Orthodox church spread Christianity into the Balkans and Russia. When the Moslems conquered Byzantine Asia Minor, the church went underground or moved into Russia.

The Western, Eastern, and Oriental World

Although Christianity had spread throughout Europe, including Spain, Portugal, France, Germany Holland, England, Ireland, Scotland and Scandinavia, in the Western World, it was still dominated by the Roman Catholic Church. The worship of idols and false gods had for the most part ceased. Idolatry had been replaced by Christianity or Christianization. The church, however, was increasingly under the influence of Roman Empire wicked ways of living, which continued to contribute to its apostasy. The papal domination of the church contributed increasingly to the coming of the “Dark Ages.”

The Eastern World was made up largely of the Byzantine Empire, which lasted from 330 A.D. to 1453 A.D. when Constantinople fell to the Ottomans, who were Moslem Turks. When the early Moslems invaded the land in the 600s, their religion came in sharp conflict with the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Byzantine Empire continued to function and preserved the ancient Greek culture as well defending the church. The Greek gods, thankfully, were diminishing in the minds of the people. The Eastern or Byzantine church was responsible for early translations of the Scriptures.

The Orient includes China, Japan, India, Mongolia, and other countries in far east Asia, each of which has its own culture and gods. Buddha and Confucius, born in 563 B.C. and 551 B.C. were founders of religions in India and China. In 317 A.D. the Huns from central Asia conquered northern China. In 484 A.D. the Huns invaded India. They invaded the Roman Empire earlier before its fall in 476 A.D. but their religions did not play an important role in European history.

The First Real Pope

Gregory I (A.D. 590-604) is generally considered as the first real pope. During the time of political upheaval after the fall of Rome, he established himself in control over the churches in Italy, Spain, Gaul, and England. He labored much for the purification of the church. He exerted great influence over the Eastern church. The popes who followed Gregory from A.D. 604 to 741 did not follow his influence. Nevertheless, his reforms strengthened the power of the papacy.

The Pope Becomes an Earthly King

The power of the papacy continued to grow. Pope Zacharias (A.D. 741-752) used his power to establish Pepin, a mayor, as the king of the Franks. The Franks were a Germanic people who occupied western Germany and northern France. Pepin was the father of Charlemagne (A.D. 742-814), who was king of the Franks from A.D. 768 to 814. Through his military ability and his conquest of many neighboring hostilities against the Roman Empire, Charlemagne became the ruler of the Lombard kingdom in Italy. Then he was crowned Emperor of the Romans by Pope Leo III in A.D. 800. Papal power now had authority in establishing kings and emperors. This was the beginning of the Papal States and temporal power, dominion, and control of popes over all governmental affairs of the state. Charlemagne, as Emperor of the Romans, in turn gave increasing power to the popes.

The Holy Roman Empire

Charlemagne and Pope Leo III essentially made an effort to reestablish the Western Roman Empire with German kings on the throne with the title of "Caesar" conferred by the popes. Known as the Holy Roman Empire, it continued in power for a thousand years. After the death of Charlemagne the empire was somewhat divided into what was to become Germany, France and Italy. Struggles for supremacy between the rulers of these areas and the popes continued throughout the centuries that followed.

The Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals

Nicolas I (A.D. 858-867) was the first pope to wear a crown. In order to promote his claim of universal authority he used a book entitled "PSEUDO-ISIDORIAN DECRETALS" which appeared about A.D. 857. The book contained documents of letters of bishops of the 2nd and 3rd centuries exalting the power of the pope. Centuries later they proved to be deliberate forgeries. The purpose was to establish papal power by anti-dating it five centuries.

The Cleavage Between the Eastern and Western Church

Pope Nicolas I began to interfere in the leadership of the Eastern Church. He excommunicated Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who in turn excommunicated Nicolas. The great division of the Eastern and Western Church followed in A.D. 869. This led to the final separation or Great Schism in A.D. 1054.

The Darkest Age of the Papacy

The darkest years of the papacy (A.D. 870-1050) began with Adrian II (A.D. 867-872) and continued under John VIII (872-882), and Marinus (882-884). The period from Nicolas I and Gregory VII (A.D. 1073) is referred to as the "**Midnight of the Dark Ages.**" It involved bribery, corruption, immorality, and even bloodshed. It is considered by many historians as the blackest period in the history of the church.

The Rule of Harlots and the Depth of Degradation

Pope Sergius II (A.D. 904-911) reportedly had a mistress, Marozia, who with her mother Theodora, and her sister, filled the Papal Palace with paramours and bastard sons, and turned it into a den of robbers, sometimes called in history "**The Rule of Harlots**" (A.D. 904-963). John X (A.D. 914-928) was made pope by Theodora for the satisfaction of her own passions. The illegitimate son of Marozia became Pope John XI (A.D. 931-936). Another of her sons appointed four succeeding popes. Pope John XII (A.D. 955-963), a grandson of Marozia, was guilty of many immoralities and crimes. He was killed in an act of adultery by the woman's husband.

The depths of papal degradation followed from A.D. 963 to 1048. The Bishop of Orleans, looking back, called John X and two other popes, "monsters of guilt, reeking in blood and filth, Antichrist sitting in the Temple of God." Pope Boniface VII (A.D. 973) murdered the previous pope and maintained himself by lavish expenditures of stolen money.

Benedict VIII (A.D. 1012-1024) bought the position of pope by bribery, called "Simony". John XIX (A.D. 1024-1033) also bought the papacy. Benedict IX (A.D. 1033-1045) was made pope as a boy of twelve, through the bribery of powerful families in Rome. He has been called the "Worst of the Popes." He was involved in robberies, murders, and adulteries, and the people finally drove him out of Rome. Gregory VI (A.D. 1033-1046) also bought the papacy. Loud protests against the papacy and cries for reform were finally answered through a man named Hildebrand who was about to become a new pope.

Hildebrand

Hildebrand became Pope Gregory VII (A.D. 1073-1085). He was determined to deal with the sins of immorality and simony of the clergy. Hildebrand actually appointed himself as a pope. He had high respect for the office, however, and introduced many reforms. His reforms were very dictatorial and came in conflict with both secular and church rulers. He challenged the power of emperors to name and invest clergy positions. His years as a pope are often referred to as the "Golden age of Papal Power."

Missionary Movements

During the Dark Ages there were no doubt many missionary efforts by various Christians but church history indicates that most of the missionary movements originated with the papacy.

The Anglo-Saxons, a Germanic people, were converted from heathenism to Christianity. They had moved to Britain before A.D. 400 and found some elements of Christianity there. St. Patrick, born in England, labored as a missionary to Ireland for thirty years (A.D. 431-461). Irish monks became missionaries to England, Scotland, and the continent of Europe.

Two men, Willibrord and Boniface were papal missionaries who worked in France and Germany during A.D. 700. Many of these people professed Christianity but held the doctrine of Arian, which taught that Jesus was not God. The false doctrine of Arias (A.D. 318) was preached by Ulfia (c310-388) to the German tribes and the Visigoths. The doctrine was spread to many

other areas. Willibrord, an Englishman, and Boniface were sent to convert these people from this doctrine. Willibrord had some success in the Frankish kingdom and then turned his attention to Denmark and became the pioneer of missions there.

Feudalism

Feudalism began in the Frankish Empire in Western Europe after the death of Charlemagne in A.D. 814. The Carolingian rulers who rose up after him were unable to maintain a strong central government. Consequently, tribal battles and wars between smaller kingdoms threatened the lives of the people in various lands and the landowners.

The word *feudal* refers to landed estates held by a person who, in return for military and land services, allowed people to live in relative safety. Feudalism was a decentralized system whereby the nobles were able keep the ownership and control of their lands.

As the system grew the nobles grew in wealth and became lords, living in fortified castles, with the people living around the castle, farming or serving as knights. Feudalism spread throughout Western Europe and into England. The great wealth of the church the empire was shared with the nobles. Gradually, the nobles became wealthier, more powerful, and some became kings. There were constant struggles between the church over wealth and power.

Feudalism continued throughout Europe until the 1400s. It declined and weakened as kings started to centralize control, as commerce began to grow, and as the crusades continued to occupy the minds of the people.

The Crusades

The crusades were military campaigns to defeat the Moslems who had conquered the Holy Land and Jerusalem and win back its freedom. The first crusade began just before A.D. 1100, ordered by Pope Urban (A.D. 1088-1099). The crusades which followed continued into A.D. 1291. The first crusade was successful freeing Jerusalem from the Moslems in A.D. 1099.

Although many of the crusades were failures, they were instrumental in saving Europe from the Ottomans or Moslem Turks and in opening the way for the revival of learning during the Renaissance.

The Darkness of the Church

The Dark Ages reveal the continual determination of man and of God's own people to follow his own ways rather than the ways of God and of Jesus Christ. There is an amazing and tragic parallel between the people of God in Israel and the church in which the wicked ways of man were followed instead of the ways of God. Sadly, the way of man is generated over and over again in the leadership, both in Israel and in the church.

The Dark Ages were not only generated by the church but were characteristic of it and to a great extent were limited to the church. Darkness led to even greater darkness.

The Letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation were the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to His servant John. In them He revealed the apostasy that was to come. Various descriptions of future apostasy was described in Chapter 22 of this book, including the doctrine and practices of the Nicolaitans, which Jesus hated, and which referred to the clergy laity system.

John's prophesy in the Book of Revelation described a woman sitting upon scarlet beast, called "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots, and of the abominations of the earth." Who or what was the Lord Jesus was foretelling of the future? Can there be any doubt that He was describing the apostate church? Many of the early reformers seemed to believe that the Roman Catholic Church is the Mother of Harlots. If she is the Mother, who are the harlots?

Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlot

Babylon, in the Old Testament, began as a city kingdom which after centuries of time ruled over the whole world. Israel, because of her unfaithfulness to God, was taken captive by her for seventy years. Babylon worshipped idols and no doubt influenced many of the Israelites to continue idols, even through Daniel, Ezekiel, and other prophets urged them to return to Jehovah God. At the end of the captivity only a remnant of Israel returned to the land and Jerusalem. God judged Babylon for its cruelty to Israel and it fell to the Mede Persians. Apparently, the Babylonian captivity is a prophetic illustration of the church under Rome during the Dark Ages.

John described Babylon as a mystery. He saw her as a great harlot with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication. The woman was sitting on a scarlet beast, having seven heads and ten horns, full of names of blasphemy and drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (Revelation 17:3-6).

An angel revealed the mystery to John. He said that the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits and the ten horns are ten kings, and the waters, where the harlot sits are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. He said **that the woman is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth** (Revelation 17:7-18, emphasis added).

John heard a voice from heaven saying, “**Come out of her, my people**, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong *is* the Lord God who judges her, for her trading included **the souls of men** (Revelation 18:4-13, emphasis added).

As John looked on, a mighty angel took up a great stone and hurled it into the sea saying,

*Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for **by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth** (Revelation 18:21-24, emphasis added).*

Babylon, without doubt, represents the harlot church of Rome. The city sits on seven hills. Under the Roman Empire, the church of Rome ruled over the kings of the earth, and the popes themselves became world rulers over men. The judgment of God will bring about her fall.

Who are the daughters of the Mother of Harlots? Might they be protestant churches who adopted many of her false teachings and practices during and after the Reformation? When will the dawn come and light up the world? Jesus said,

*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. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God (John 3:19-21, emphasis added).*

The Renaissance and the Reformation followed the Dark Ages. As in the captives of Israel came out of Babylonian, will only a remnant of the church come out, and will many of the remnant be unfaithful as many of the Jews in that day? Can this be called the church?

The Renaissance and Reformation 1100 A.D. to 1600 A.D.

An awakening was taking place in Western Europe in the 1100s prior to the beginning of the Renaissance in the late 1200s. There were many movements which led to the Renaissance and the Reformation which followed. These included the Crusades, rising papal power and wars with states, religious conflicts, increasing wealth of landowners, the growth of city states, greater travel, new interest in education and learning, the shifting of political power of nations, decreasing serfdom, the increased growth of monarchy, and the Inquisition.

The Crusades. The Crusades, ordered by the papacy, began in the late 1000s and lasted until 1291. They were referred to as "Holy Wars" and were waged against the invasions of the Moslems. Many of them, over and over again, were efforts to free the Holy Land and Jerusalem. Over time there were successes and failures. The Crusades increased the power of the papacy, hastened economic progress, strengthened Italian trading cities, and opened the doors to new learning. Knights from all over Western Europe as far as England, banded together in holy orders, to engage in the Crusades.

Rising Papal Power and Wars with States. Papal power continued to increase with Hildebrand (Pope Gregory VII 1073-1085), and those who followed him, into the 17th century. The Investiture Controversy in 1076 over who had the authority to establish rulers in power arose when Hildebrand maintained that only the pope had this power. Henry IV (1056-1106) of Germany challenged him. After Hildebrand died in 1085 there was continued war with German princes and nobles who set up rival popes for forty years. Clashes also arose with Italy, particularly with city states that were developing. Innocent III (1198-1216) became the most powerful of all popes. He claimed to be the "Vicar of Christ" and decreed the doctrines of Transubstantiation and Papal Infallibility, when he spoke "ex cathedra", that is, by virtue of his office or throne. He also instituted the inquisition which was for the persecution and punishment of deemed heretics of the church.

Religious Conflicts. There were continued conflicts between the Roman church and the Eastern church in Constantinople. The Greek church charged that Rome had departed from the true way relative to the forbidding of clergy marriage, the Eucharist, and the Holy Spirit. Patriarch Michael forbade the use of Roman ceremonies in Constantinople. In 1054 Pope Hildebrand laid a decree of excommunication upon Michael. The schism between the Eastern and Western Churches was complete when the patriarch in turn excommunicated the pope.

Meanwhile, within the Roman church, men were beginning to awaken to new intellectual activities, particularly through schools, in order to study the church's doctrines. After 1050 new discussions resulted in doctrinal disputes. Berengar, head of a school at Tours, and Lanfranc, of Bec, disputed over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Anselm (1033-1109), a student of Lanfranc, began explaining the doctrines which the church had been teaching. Peter **Abelard** (1079-1142), Peter Lombard (1090-1160), and **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1091-1153) continued the teaching of theology.

The Roman Catholic Church's doctrine became very authoritative. **Francis of Assisi** (1182-1226) and other monks became teachers in the development of universities. Scholastic Theology developed with men like **Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274). They began to organize all thought into systems combining Scripture with Greek philosophy, particularly that of Aristotle. Doctrinal

differences arose, one of them concerning the Lord's Supper. The Catholic teaching of transubstantiation in which the bread and the wine turn into the body and blood of Christ, and many other doctrines and practices were not accepted by many in the church.

Increasing Wealth of Landowners. Ownership of land grew and wealth increased through marketing and trade. Landowners became more free and less dependent on the state.

The Growth of City States. Cities grew and became more independent of the church and state, particularly in Northern Italy. Cities such as Venice, Genoa, Milan and others formed the Lombard league, became virtually self-governing. They flourished as trade grew, particularly in spices, which is amazing as it only concerns food seasoning, preservatives, and perfumes.

Greater Travel. The shift to a more balanced distribution of wealth and trade provided more opportunities for travel in other countries and among other classes, some of which had been motivated by the Crusades. Travel opened the doors to other cultures.

New Interest in Education and Learning. Through travel and trade people were exposed to many areas of secular learning. The Moslems actually were instrumental in reviving Greek teaching in philosophy, literature, and the arts. Interest in science grew during the period.

Shifting Political Power. The shifting political power between the church and various political entities such as Germany, England, France, and Italy created conflicts. Power was seized by various countries at different times.

Decreasing Serfdom. The feudal system began to break into fragments as the need for the protection of land and military lessened, and people moved into different social settings.

The Increased Growth of the Monarchy. The monarchy were persons who acquired titles, special privileges and political power. Many became wealthy lords over vast estates. Their position was hereditary, passing from generation to generation. The nobility, as their power, wealth, and education increased, gained increased political power in the state, and they were able to centralize their power, levy taxes, and raise armies.

The Inquisition. In the late 1100s the Roman Catholic Church became aware of heresy. Heresy was defined as any teaching which was contrary to Roman Catholic Church dogma.

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The Inquisition was perfected under Pope Gregory IX who followed Innocent III. It became a Church Court order for the detection and punishment of heretics. It was the duty of everyone to report anyone suspected who would then be liable to torture. The proceedings were kept secret. The Inquisition began against **the Albigenses** or Carthari in France, Italy, and Spain, who preached against many of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, making extensive use of the Scriptures. By 1167 they included large populations in these countries. Another group, **the Waldenses**, grew out of the preaching of Peter Waldo in the last 1100s. They also rejected many of the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church and taught the Bible as the sole rule of belief and Christian living.

A war of extermination was ordered, and people in town after town were tortured and slain as martyrs for hundreds of years. The inquisition continued through the Renaissance and the Reformation.

The Renaissance

Renaissance is a French word which means "rebirth." It was used by writers to denote a rebirth of learning which they believed had died after the fall of Rome. The Renaissance might also be considered as a time of "enlightenment" after the Dark Ages. It began in the late 1200s and lasted through the Reformation in the 1500s. It has been described as turning from a religious emphasis to a secular point of view, particularly in the areas of literature, the arts, and politics. Scholars have defined this as "**humanism**." In literature and the arts and architectures there was a return to the study of the classical period in Greece and this phase has been described as "**classicism**." There was a new beginning in all of these areas. New universities were started all over Western Europe. Actually, the Renaissance was just a new and increased focus on the ways of man, which was, and still is, characteristic of the man and church.

The quest for knowledge was vastly changed with **the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg** (1395?-1468?) sometime around 1440. The Chinese had invented a printing method but the language and process was slow and cumbersome. It is doubtful that the Europeans knew about it. Gutenberg began printing many books and also printed a Bible. Printing enabled multitudes of people, who could read, to gain knowledge in vast areas.

The end of feudalism and the growth of cities opened up new opportunities, in addition to education. **Exploration** and trade began with voyages to the Orient and beyond as interest grew in Geography. The Vikings had earlier begun exploration and unknowingly discovered the American continent. Men concentrated more on search for new ways to sail to India and China. It was not until the late 1400s that John Cabot, Christopher Columbus, and Vasco Da Gama discovered new routes and the New World.

Renaissance Popes. Papal power began to decline during the Renaissance. Boniface VIII (1294-1303) issued a papal bull, "Unam Sanctam," which said that it was "necessary for Salvation that every creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff." The pope was so corrupt that Dante, after visiting Rome, called the Vatican a "Sewer of Corruption" and assigned Boniface, with other popes, to the lowest parts of Hell. Boniface was humbled before Philip the Fair, King of France. Philip became the leading Monarch of Europe and brought the Papacy into complete submission to the state. The Papal Palace was removed from Rome to Avignon in France and for seventy years was under the control of the French Court, known as the "**Babylonian Captivity**" of the Papacy. In reality, it might be said, that the church, if it can truthfully be called the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, has been in "Babylonian Captivity" since apostolic days.

During the captivity years the greed for wealth of the succeeding Avignon popes knew no bounds. The popes still had the power to lay burdensome taxes. Church offices were sold for money and immorality increased in the papal household. **Dante** (c.1265-1321) attacked the popes for destroying the Empire. **Petrarch** (1304-1374), an Italian poet and scholar, described the Avignon as "a sink of iniquity, a temple of lies and a hell on earth."

The Council of Constance. Until 1409 there were two claimants to the papal throne, one at Rome and the other at Avignon. The German emperor Sigismund ordered the popes to call a new council in Constance in 1414. The result was the election of Martin V (1418-1431) as the sole pope. The council had another concern, **heresy**. The papacy considered any teaching contrary to the dogma the Roman Catholic Church as heresy.

Earlier, **John Wycliffe** (1320?-1384) of England, was viewed as a heretic. He denied many doctrines of the papal church and insisted in his writings that the Scriptures were the only source of truth. He and his associates translated the Bible from Latin into English. He was

unsuccessfully tried for heresy but his writings were condemned, and the Lollards, his followers, were persecuted. **John Hus** (?1369-1414) adopted **Wycliffe's** views and was teaching them in Prague. He was summoned to Constance where he expected that he be allowed to plead his cause but was tried and burned at the stake. The Wycliffe and Hus movements were efforts to reform the church. In 1431 a new reforming council met at Basel, without papal sanction. It lasted until 1449 but ended with a struggle with the popes over authority. Ultimately, all of the reforming councils failed.

Others Viewed by the Papacy as Heretics. Meanwhile, other movements and men considered heretics continued. In Florence, Italy vast crowds were thronging to hear **Savaonaorla** (1452-1498) who preached against sin and papal vice. After attempts to bribe him, he was burned at the stake. **Anabaptists** appeared throughout Europe who were devoted to the Scripture way of salvation and rejected infant baptism. **Erasmus** (1466-1536) became one of the greatest scholars before and during the Reformation, seeking to free men from false teaching and to return to the Scriptures.

One of the teachings of the papal church was purgatory. It provided a way for a person to receive the forgiveness of sins after death, which were not covered by baptism, penance, or extreme unction. Atonement was made by suffering, which could be lessened by the offering of prayers and masses made for them. Sins were not totally remitted, however, by purgatory and the papal church provided an additional way by securing an indulgence. In order to secure one a person might do some good work, go on pilgrimage to a sacred shrine, contribute money to a sacred cause, or countless other works. In essence a person could work or pay for the forgiveness of sins. What a terrible contradiction such teaching is from the Scriptures!

*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.** 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** (1 John 1:7-9, emphasis added).*

*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, **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** (Titus 3:4-7, emphasis added).*

The Sale of Indulgences. Papal indulgences began to be granted with Pope Pascal I (811-24) and in the course of time became very profitable. They were used for general revenue to induce people to engage in works for the church and later in the Crusades. In its greed for wealth the papacy provided opportunities for the purchase of indulgences which would provide partial or even plenary relief for sinners and from the fear of hell. The sale of indulgences appears to have intensified during the 1400s. The Inquisition and the sale of indulgences set the final stage for the Reformation.

The Reformation

The Reformation Movement was ignited in Germany in 1517 when John Tetzel, a Dominican friar, traveled through Germany selling papal certificates offering pardon for all sins to anyone, without the requirement of repentance, confession, penance or absolution by a priest. He said to the people, "as soon as your coin clinks in the chest the souls of your friends will rise out of purgatory into heaven." This horrified a Catholic priest named Martin Luther.

Reformation began as a rejection or modification of many of the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. As the reformation grew it developed into separate movements and spread throughout Europe, and many churches became known as Protestant.

Protestant churches were established in Germany, Switzerland, France, Scandinavia, England, Scotland, and Ireland. Many became state churches. Spain remained Roman Catholic.

Some churches, however, ventured to form entirely new churches which would be based on the teaching of the Scriptures.

Germany. In many ways Germany was ideally suited politically as a country for the Reformation to begin. German princes were in continual conflict with the papacy over state rule and were suffering under the cruelty of the Inquisition.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) arose as the leader of the Reformation in Germany. He was educated at various schools and entered the University of Erfurt to study law. Shortly after he had secured his degrees he decided to enter a monastery and became an Augustinian monk. He studied theology and later became a professor in the University of Wittenberg.

During his earlier years Luther went through a period of depression, believing himself beyond the possibility of salvation. John Staupitz, another monk, pointed him to the book of Romans. As he read Romans Luther discovered, and became converted, when he learned the truth of justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

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 (Romans 5:1-2).

As Luther continued to study the Scriptures and grow in his faith, he arrived at many convictions which differed greatly from the doctrines he had been taught by the papal church. In 1517 he published ninety-five theses concerning indulgences, after hearing of their sale by Tetzel. In 1520 the Pope issued a Bull excommunicating Luther, ordering him to recant or receive the penalty for heresy. When Luther received the Bull he burned it publically. He declared that the pope was antichrist and Rome a "nest of the devil." The following year he was summoned to appear before the Diet of Worms. Again Luther was ordered to retract. He refused and said, "Here I stand; I can do nothing else; so help me God." He was condemned. One or more German Princes helped Luther and prevented the edict from being carried out and he was hid for a year with a friend. When Luther returned to Wittenberg, he translated the Bible into German. Luther's motto, "The Word alone, Grace alone, and Faith alone" was contradicted in Lutheran Church teaching and practices as indicated in the next paragraph.

Lutheranism and the Lutheran Church. The German church became Protestant and many congregations began to call themselves Lutheran. Lutherans continued to baptize (sprinkle) infants as a "means" of salvation and continued the clergy and laity system with pastors and bishops. Neither are taught in the Scriptures.

Anabaptists. Another group arose during the Reformation in Germany who were called anabaptizers because they believed in baptizing believers only and re-baptized all who joined them.

War against Germany. Pope Paul III urged Emperor Charles V to wage war against Germany and offered indulgences to those who helped. The war lasted from 1546-1555, ending with the Peace of Augsburg, by which Lutherans won legal recognition of their religion.

Switzerland. The reform was started in Switzerland by **Ulrich Zwingli** (1484-1531), a parish priest in Zurich. He became convinced that the Bible was the means by which the church

could be purified. Through his preaching Zurich accepted his teaching against Indulgences, Mass, Celibacy, and Images using the Bible as the sole authority.

John Calvin (1509-64), was born in France as Jean Chauvin. His father, Gerald, was the secretary and legal advisor to the bishop and Jean was put on the Roman Catholic payroll for thirteen years, from the age of twelve until one year after his "conversion to Luther's Protestantism" about 1533. His father brought him up, expecting him to enter the priesthood. When his father fell into disfavor with the bishop in 1528 he was excommunicated on grounds of heresy and ordered his son to study law in Orleans where he earned a Bachelor of Laws in 1531. Later, at the University of Paris, Jean registered as Johannes Calvinus and later took the name of John Calvin. He studied both law and the classics and also earned a doctorate in law. During this period some of Luther's sermons reached Calvin and he became involved in some secret discussions with humanistic intellectuals who were urging reform of the church along the teachings of Luther. In 1534 Calvin became vocal in support of Luther's ideas and was forced to flee Paris after a crackdown by authorities. At that time, at the age of 25, he had begun to write his "Institutes of the Christian Religion", which became a textbook on systematic theology. In all of his voluminous writings, where is there a clear testimony of his faith in Christ for salvation?

Calvin moved to Strassburg, Basel, and then to Geneva. There he worked with William Farel in establishing the organization of the Genevan church. He wrote the first Genevan Catechism and Confession of Faith. He also drafted a church-law for the city and in the attempt to enforce on the city was rejected and the reformers were ordered to leave the city. In 1541 the city council requested his return. From that time on he ruled the city and the church.

Calvin's Theology. Calvin's theology was not original but based on the Roman Catholic theology of Augustine (354-430) and his City of God. His basic premises are as follows: **The absolute sovereignty of God** in creation. Salvation of God is based upon five premises which may be outlined under the acronym TULIP: (T) **The total depravity of man**, (U) **Unconditional election**, (L) **Limited atonement**, (I) **Irresistible grace**, and (P) **the Perseverance of saints**. On the surface some of these concepts appear Scriptural.

The absolute sovereignty of God teaches that God's purpose and will in His creation is always done. Was it God's will for man to eat the forbidden fruit in Eden? Were angels and Satan always acting according to God's will? Calvin taught that God, in His sovereignty, predestined some people to heaven and others to hell. The Scriptures, however, teach that who God foreknew He "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." Romans 8:29.

The total depravity of man premise maintains that man is unable to respond to the gospel. Why do the Scriptures teach about repentance and resistance, belief and unbelief, receiving and rejecting, obedience and rebellion, accepting and refusing, yielding and resisting, willing and unwilling, and other responses? Doesn't this concept take away the responsibility of man and make God responsible for everything, including sin? **Unconditional election** means that man is totally depraved and that God chooses or elects, regardless of any conditions or requirements on the part of man. Does this teaching deny the element of faith as the requirement for salvation? **Limited atonement** maintains that God has chosen only certain people to be saved. Isn't this a contradiction of God's will that not any should perish but that all should come to a knowledge of the truth? **Irresistible grace** essentially teaches that man does not have a free will in election and that grace cannot be accepted or rejected. Finally, **the perseverance of saints** appears to teach that one must be steadfast to the end in good works in order to be saved. This seems to teach that there can be no assurance of salvation, and borders on a "works" salvation. Is that what the Scriptures teach?

Finally, every believer is called to persevere in the faith. Some have interpreted this as eternal security, eternal life, and eternal salvation. The word "persevere" may be confused by some with "preserve". They differ, the latter having to do with striving or works.

The study of Biblical theology necessitates a thorough study of the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation to be accurate and true. Scriptures must be consistent in each book and with the whole Bible to avoid being narrow and not jumping to conclusions. It requires the understanding of a person who has been born again and has grown in spiritual discernment and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Are any of these qualifications revealed or evident in the life and theological conclusions and system of Calvin? Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation contradict Calvin's humanistic, man-made doctrine of salvation.

The following New Testament Scriptures reveal the will and foreknowledge of God relative to salvation and the free will of man in how he has been enabled to respond to the Gospel.

Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish (Matthew 18:14, emphasis added).

But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves ... (Luke 7:30, emphasis added).
He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me (Luke 10:16, emphasis added).

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! (Luke 13:34, emphasis added).

... the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10, emphasis added).

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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16-17, emphasis added).

... Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him (John 6:64, emphasis added).

If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority (John 7:17, emphasis added).

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief (I Timothy 1:15, emphasis added).

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:3-4 emphasis added).

... we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe (I Timothy 4:10 emphasis added).

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 (2 Peter 3:9, emphasis added).

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17, emphasis added).

It is obvious that Calvinism is based on humanism and the logic and reasoning of man, borrowed from the study of the classics and Augustine rather than the Scriptures. Calvinists also taught infant baptism (sprinkling) as a way of salvation for "covenant" parents. They also continued the clergy/laity system with pastors. Calvinism split the Protestant movement into two major divisions, Lutheranism and Calvinism, as its teachings were adopted in other countries.

France. By 1520 the teaching of Luther and Calvin had spread throughout France and by 1560 there were about 400,000 Protestants. They were called "Huguenots." Pope Pius urged their extermination and the king issued a decree for their massacre. On the night of August 24, 1572 St. Bartholomew's Massacre took place in which 70,00 were killed, including most of their leaders. The Huguenots united and wars against them continued until they were granted freedom by the Toleration Edict of Nantes in 1598. The edict was ultimately revoked in 1685 and 500,000 Huguenots fled to other countries. Most of the people of France remained Roman Catholic.

The Netherlands. Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anabaptists were numerous in the Netherlands, which included Belgium and Holland. By 1531 the Bible had been translated into Dutch, Flemish, and French. Charles V established the Inquisition and ordered all Lutheran writings to be burned and prohibited meetings in which the Bible would be read. His son Philip II utilized the Inquisition, sentencing all of the protestant groups to death. Over 100,000 were massacred with great brutality. In 1609 Belgium and Holland gained independence. Holland became largely Calvinistic and Belgium remained Catholic. Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) was an early leader of the Arminians who revolted against the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, asserting that it made God responsible for sin and denied man freedom of will.

Scandinavia. Lutheranism spread into Scandinavia and was made the State Religion in Denmark (1536), Sweden (1539), and Norway (1540).

Spain. Isabella (1451-1504), queen of Castile, married Ferdinand of Aragon in 1469 and the two kingdoms later united to form the kingdom of Spain. They were both Roman Catholics and started the Inquisition in 1480 which ultimately hindered the Reformation in Spain. Isabella's support for Columbus and the discovery of the Americas in 1492 opened the door to the spread of Catholicism in South America and parts of North America. Charles V (1500-1588) became king of Spain in 1516 and was succeeded by Philip II. Under their leadership Catholicism became the state church of Spain. Spain became the most powerful nation on earth and ruled the seas with its naval armada. Thousands of Protestants were martyred during this period.

Bohemia. After the martyrdom of John Hus in 1415 and the civil wars that followed, the Reformation movement continued to grow until about 80 percent of the population were Protestants in 1600.

England. There were many protests against Papal control of England. Henry VIII (1491-47), a Roman Catholic, and many of his predecessors, believed that the English Church should be independent. When Henry became king in 1509 he married Catherine of Aragon. They had five children but only one, Mary, lived. Henry wanted a son and sought a divorce from Catherine so he could marry Anne Boleyn. A request was made to the Pope for the divorce and it was refused. Henry had the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer declare the marriage null and void, and married Anne in 1533, who was then crowned queen. Henry persuaded the parliament to pass two acts in 1534 made the break final between England and the Roman Catholic Church. The first declared that the Pope had no authority in England and the second, the Act of Supremacy, made the Church of England separate from Rome with the king as its supreme head. Henry was excommunicated and England placed under interdict. Struggles divided the church in England for many years. Lutheran and Calvinistic doctrines were being accepted by many church leaders. Gradually the Church was creating documents based upon Protestant doctrines.

After King Henry, Edward VI ruled for six years and then Mary, Henry's daughter became queen in 1553. In Protestant history she is known as "Bloody Mary." She was a devout Catholic, determined to return England back to the Roman Church. She had many Protestant leaders put to death. She married Philip II of Spain and her goal appeared promising but she died in 1558 and

was succeeded by Elizabeth as queen from 1558 to 1603. Queen Elizabeth supported a mild form of Protestantism, **Anglicanism**. The church was somewhat Catholic in practice with priests, but Protestant in doctrine including both Lutheran and Calvinistic teaching. It was subject to the crown and **Episcopal** in government with archbishops and bishops. The Anglican Church is the "Mother Church" of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America. Out of the English Church many other groups grew such as the **Puritans** and many **Independents**. The Puritans' goal was to substitute a **Presbyterian** form of church leadership with elders in place of the Episcopal form, break the power of the crown over the church, simplify worship, and accept the Calvinistic confessions. **Methodists**, under the leadership of John and Charles Wesley came later in the 1700's.

Scotland. John Knox (1515-72), a Scotch priest, began to accept Reformation ideas. On the accession of "Bloody Mary", he went to Geneva and became entrenched in Calvin's teaching. When he returned he persuaded the Scottish parliament to adopt a Protestant confession in 1560.

Ireland. The Reformation had little impact in Southern Ireland and it remained Catholic. Northern Ireland became Protestant.

The Eastern Church. The Eastern Orthodox Churches were not affected by the Reformation and remained Orthodox as they spread into Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Russia.

The Americas. Roman Catholic Spain sent missionaries along with Columbus and other explorers. Settlers and native peoples in South America and the Southern part of North America became or remained Roman Catholic until after the 1600s when the English began settling in North America.

The Counter Reformation

The Council of Trent (1545-63), ordered by the Pope, began as an effort of the Roman Catholic Church to reform itself. It had three purposes: the definition of Catholic Doctrine, reformation of life in the church, and the extirpation of heresy. The decrees of the Council were the answer of the Church to Protestantism. It then mounted a massive counter offensive against the Reformation under the direction of the **Jesuits**. The Jesuits, or the Society of Jesus, were founded by Ignatius Loyola (1493-1556), a former soldier. The Jesuits were an organization of priests. They were teachers, preachers, confessors, missionaries, and directors of works of mercy. Many were missionaries in the Americas. The Jesuits became foes to Protestantism everywhere, making use of the Inquisition. Protestants were imprisoned, tortured, and massacred throughout the lands of the Reformation.

Persecutions, Martyrs, and War

Persecutions and martyrdom took place by the Protestants as well as the Roman Catholics. The number of Protestants martyred by the Catholics drastically out-numbered those martyred by Protestants. Lutherans martyred many Anabaptists. Michael Servetus, a scientist and Protestant leader, came to seek asylum in Geneva. Calvin ordered him tried as a heretic and he was burned at the stake for his views. Calvinists also martyred at least one Armenian. Queen Mary (Bloody Mary) martyred many Protestants. Queen Elizabeth, in turn, through the Church of England, martyred many Catholics. A hundred years of religious war followed the Reformation from 1546 to 1648, started by Roman Catholic kings, urged by popes and the Jesuits.

The Reformation, the Church, and the Scriptures

The Reformation resulted in a massive and wonderful return to God. Tragically, the turn was not far enough. The Bible had been translated into English, German, and many other languages

but how many were reading and searching the Scriptures, not only in regard to the way of salvation but also the study of doctrines relative to the truths as taught by Jesus and New Testament writers concerning the Church? Was I Corinthians studied as a base for establishing congregations? The Israelites, in the Old Testament, were encouraged by God to return to Him from their wicked ways.

*... if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and **turn from their wicked ways**, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land (II Chronicles 7:14, emphasis added).*

While many reformers, such as Luther, were converted and gained salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the church needed more. It needed **regeneration** rather than reformation. Congregations needed to be totally renewed by the Holy Spirit as taught in the Scriptures.

*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 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 (Titus 3:4-7, emphasis added).*

Reformation Churches broke into many divisions over leadership, doctrines, and practices as they followed the ways and teachings of men rather than the Scriptures. They also carried with them many of the errors of Roman Catholicism.

How could these divisions have been avoided, so that the Church would "endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" as expressed in Ephesians 4:3? Simply by following the way of God in the Scriptures rather than the way of man.

*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And **what communion has light with darkness?** And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or **what part has a believer with an unbeliever?** And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." Therefore, **"Come out from among them and be separate,"** says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters," Says the LORD Almighty " (II Corinthians 6:14-18, emphasis added).*

The Scriptures do not teach that believers and congregations are to separate from each other but that they are to separate from all that is contrary to the Scriptures. It is clear from a study of the Reformation that divisions were caused by leaders of the Reformation. Churches were named after the reformers, such as "Lutheran" and "Calvin." The apostle Paul warned of this in his meeting with the elders of Ephesus.

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also **from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.** Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears (Acts 20:28-31, emphasis added).*

Paul also wrote to the Corinthians:

*Now **I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.** For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that **each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (I Corinthians 1:10-13, emphasis added).*

The New World 1600 A.D to 2000 A.D.

The discovery of the Americas and the new world inspired Spain and the Roman Catholic Church as a new land of conquest and the Protestants as a land of freedom and new hope as they were still suffering persecution in Europe. Spain moved into South America and the lower part of North America with explorers and Jesuit missionaries. English and French explorers with Roman Catholics and Protestants missionaries moved into the middle and upper part of North America.

Early American Colonies: Seeking Freedom

The American colonies were settled in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, more as a financial investment. The **Dutch Reformed** settled in New York in 1615, and **Puritans** settled in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620, hoping that the new world would be a place where they would be free to worship God according to their conscience and their understanding of the Bible.

In 1634 **English Catholics** could only obtain a charter in Baltimore, Maryland by allowing freedom to all religions. The **Baptists** in Rhode Island advocated toleration of all religions in 1639. **Quakers** settled in Pennsylvania in 1681 in search of religious liberty. Most of these colonists pioneered the goal of absolute Separation of Church and State. Jesus described another kind of liberty that is found in Him.

*The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to **proclaim liberty to the captives** and recovery of sight to the blind, to **set at liberty those who are oppressed**; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD (Luke 4:18-19, emphasis added).*

Church Divisions and Denominationalism

As the American colonies continued to grow in the 1700s, Protestant churches also grew and began to multiply, divide, and sub-divide, forming new denominations, which ultimately included almost every letter in the alphabet. Many of these denominations had begun to form earlier in Europe. Some took the name of a leader, others took the name which emphasized the kind of leadership, doctrine, or practice. It appears that most of the divisions were created by Church leaders. Some of the major Protestant denominations which arose in the colonies included Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, and Quakers.

Baptists. The Baptist Church grew out of the Anabaptist movement in Europe. They were opposed to the practice of infant baptism by sprinkling and taught that baptism should be by immersion and that it was for believers only. They stressed being saved by faith in Jesus Christ and being born again by the Holy Spirit. John Smith founded a Baptist Church in Holland in 1609. Roger Williams (1604-1684) organized a congregation in Providence, Rhode Island in 1639. They are congregational in government. Baptist Churches are generally evangelical, emphasizing the preaching of the gospel to the unsaved. They have subdivided into many divisions over the years.

Congregationalists. The Congregational Church began in England in the late 1500s. The Puritans and Pilgrims brought Congregationalism to America in 1620. Each church is governed by its members and sets its forms of worship and statement of doctrines. Jonathan Edwards

(1703-1758) was a congregational clergyman who upheld some Calvinistic doctrines but believed in freedom of the will.

Episcopalians. The Episcopal Church developed from the Anglican Church in England. It was the first church established in the American colonies in 1607. It is independent from the Church of England. It is governed by bishops or an episcopate. It has two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. They accept the Apostle's Creed as a statement of faith.

Lutherans. Henry Muhlenberg (1711-1787) came from Germany and helped found the Lutheran Church in Pennsylvania in 1742. Lutherans in America accepted, as their creed, the Augsburg Confession, drawn up in Germany in 1530. Lutherans have sub-divided into many synods. Each synod is governed by bishops. Lutherans practice infant baptism and believe that the body and blood of Christ is present in the communion along with elements of bread and wine. It is called consubstantiation.

Methodists. The Methodist Church grew out of the preaching and teaching of John Wesley (1703-1791), a clergyman in the Church of England. He and his brother Charles had Bible study and prayer meetings at Oxford University. They were given the name "Methodist" by their method of Bible study and prayer. Charles Wesley wrote over 6,000 hymns. In 1738 Charles was "born again" after reading the book of Galatians in the New Testament. As long as he lived, John remained faithful to the Anglican Church although he gradually began to disagree with many of its doctrines and practices. He came to believe that God's grace and salvation were free to all men. John worked with George Whitefield, preaching on the street and in open fields.

Between 1735 and 1738 Wesley visited on a mission to the colony of Georgia in America. About 1766 Robert Strawbridge organized a Methodist society in Maryland and in 1784 a Methodist Church was founded in Baltimore. Its government was Episcopal with bishops. The Methodist Church has also sub-divided into many factions.

Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. The Presbyterian and the Reformed Churches are grouped together because they are Calvinistic in doctrine and practice. The word "Presbyterian" comes from the Greek word meaning "elder." Councils of elders or consistories rule each congregation. They practice infant baptism and believe that the children of Christian parents are under the covenant and therefore saved. They also have come to believe in the replacement doctrine, that the church has replaced Israel.

Francis Makemie came to America in 1683 and organized five churches. He and six other clergymen met in Philadelphia 1706 and formed the first presbytery. Gradually other churches joined them.

Quakers. The Quakers, or The Society of Friends, was founded in England by George Fox (1624-91) and others around 1648. They rejected formal worship believing that worship should be spontaneous. Any member might speak or pray when they felt led by the Holy Spirit. They had no rites such as baptism or the Lord's Supper. They had no paid clergy. They called their places of worship "Meeting Houses." In many ways they followed the simple teachings of the New Testament.

William Penn (1644-1718), an English Quaker, persuaded King Charles II to allow them to set up a colony in America, which later became known as Pennsylvania. A charter was granted in 1681 and in 1682 Penn arrived and opened the land to the Quakers who were being persecuted throughout Europe. They came by the thousands.

Denominational Leadership, Doctrines, and Practices

All of the denominations, with the exception of the Quakers, continued the clergy and laity system. Some had bishops overseeing synods and all had pastors in each congregation. Church

denominations in America followed the Protestant churches in Europe, carrying on many of the errors of the Roman Catholic during the Reformation rather than returning to the Scriptures. Once again, God's people and the church follow the ways of man instead of the ways of God as Israel has done through the centuries. Jesus said,

*Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, **teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.** For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men ... " —All too well **you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition** (Mark 7:6-9, emphasis added).*

The teachings of Jesus and Paul relative to Church truth and practice and the warnings of Jesus in the letters to the churches in the book of Revelation were again ignored. Scripture references relating to these teachings were presented earlier in Chapters 19 through 22.

As the churches grew in America a new nation was developing in the colonies.

A New Country

Thirteen colonies had been established in America by 1733. Ten were located in what is now known as New England and three were in the South. They included: Virginia, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Maryland, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Most of the colonies had a governor, legislature, and provincial courts. Each colony required all of its citizens to enroll and train in the militia. All of the colonies were subject to the king of England.

Conflicts with England. England made many of the colonists angry as they began increasing their taxes in the 1700s. Wars with Spain and France depleted England's financial condition causing them to look to their colonies for income. They initiated a series of acts which caused grievances in the colonies. These included: a decision to keep a standing army in North America in 1763, the Navigation Acts in 1764 controlling and taxing colonial shipping, the Quartering and Stamp Acts in 1765, and the Townshend Acts of 1767. The Quartering Act required Americans to provide housing, food, and all other expenses of the English army. All of these acts were initiated without the involvement or consent of the colonies.

The colonies made many appeals to the king of England but they were either ignored or meetings were set up at inconvenient times and places.

The Boston Massacre. Serious unrest among the colonists in Boston led the English to send troops to garrison the city. A clash occurred between the townspeople and the troops on the night of March 5, 1770. A crowd threatened the troops and the troops fired into them, killing three men and injuring eight others, two of which died later.

The Tea Act. In 1773, the English parliament passed the Tea Act which would allow the English East India Company to sell tea cheaper than the Dutch. The colonial leaders saw this as just another way of "taxation without representation" and organized the "Boston Tea Party." A band of colonists, disguised as Indians raided the English ships and tossed boxes of tea overboard, rather than pay tax on it.

The Intolerable Acts. England decided that something drastic had to be done to maintain its authority. It passed a new act in 1774 closing Boston Harbor and increased English authority in Boston and Massachusetts because they refused to pay for tea. When the governor arrived with troops the colonists rioted. He informed England that Massachusetts had revolted and asked for orders.

The First Continental Congress. The First Congress met in Philadelphia in September 1774 to defend American rights. It denounced many laws passed by the English parliament since

1763. The Parliament responded by **the Restraining Act**, declaring Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut to be in rebellion and ordered the arrest of the colonial leaders in 1775. General Gage sent troops from Boston to destroy the patriots' main supply in Concord, Massachusetts. The patriots were warned of this and on the same night, April 18, 1775, Paul Revere rode across the country-side warning his fellow patriots of the danger.

The Beginning of the Revolutionary War. General Gage and the English troops arrived in Lexington in the morning of April 19, 1775. Captain John Parker and Colonial minutemen faced them on the village green. Parker ordered his men not to fire unless fired upon but said, "if they mean to have war, let it begin here." No one knows who fired the first shot but 8 colonists were killed and 10 wounded and it was "the shot heard round the world." One English soldier was wounded. The English continued on and destroyed the military supplies of the colonists at Concord.

On June 1775, English troops succeeded in driving colonial patriots from Bunker Hill where they had hoped to besiege the city of Boston.

The Second Continental Congress. On May 10, 1775, the Second Congress met again in Philadelphia, shortly after the battle in Lexington, Massachusetts. The English had not changed in their treatment of the colonists. **The delegates prayed to God for guidance during their deliberations.** On March 16, 1776, John Hancock, presiding over the Congress, recommended that the day "*be observed by the said Colonies as a day of HUMILIATION, FASTING, and PRAYER; that we may with united hearts confess and bewail our manifold sins and transgressions, and by a sincere, repentance and amendment of life, appease his righteous displeasure and through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, obtain his pardon and forgiveness; humbly imploring his assistance to frustrate the cruel purposes of our unnatural enemies ...*"

The Congress encouraged the colonies to form into states. As they foresaw a coming war they realized that they needed a unified army. They chose George Washington to command it, and he took control on July 3rd. A few days later they made a final but futile appeal to the king of England in an effort to set matters right without war. Finally, on July 2, 1776, the Congress authorized the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence was written by Thomas Jefferson. It was signed on July 4, 1776 by 56 members of the congress who were representatives from all of the colonies. The document began by stating, "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which **the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God** entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, **that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.**--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness."

The document went on to state the purpose for the separation from England detailing the numerous abuses made upon the American colonists by the King of England over a period of many years, ignoring all appeals for redress made by them.

The document closed with the following words: "We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, **appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world** for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, **with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence**, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

The response from the King of England was a full scale war against the American Colonies which lasted for eight years until 1783.

The Revolutionary War. The battles in 1776 ended in defeat for the colonists until the surprise attack of George Washington on Trenton in December. The British had hired Hessian troops from Germany to assist them. In 1777, Lafayette and French soldiers came to America to join the Colonists in battle.

The major campaigns of the war began in the Northern and Middle Colonies in 1777 with victories and defeats on both sides. The campaigns in the South and West, from 1778 until 1781, ended with the defeat and surrender of Cornwallis and the British Army at Yorktown on October 19th. In 1782 the British evacuated Georgia and South Carolina. The peace treaty was signed in Paris in 1783 with the American Colonies as the victors.

The United States of America

The American government, during the Revolution, had been set up under the Articles of Confederation, adopted by the Congress in 1777. The government, however, was not adequate for the new nation. In the summer of 1787, a group of 55 men from 12 states met in Independence Hall in Philadelphia to frame a new government and a constitution.

The Constitution of the United States of America. The Constitution began with a Preamble stating "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

The Constitution contains seven articles describing the structure of the government: a Congress with a House of Representatives and a Senate as the Legislative Branch, a President and Vice President as the Executive Branch, and a Supreme Court as the Judicial Branch, with a balance of powers. Certain specific powers were designated for Federal Government and all remaining powers were invested in the States. The Constitution was ratified unanimously by representatives of twelve States in "the Year of our Lord" on September 17, 1787. The first ten Amendments (the Bill of Rights) were ratified on December 15, 1791. Seventeen more have been added since, totaling twenty-seven Amendments.

The First Amendment is sometimes referred to as "**the Establishment Clause**" in that it guarantees freedom of religion, speech, the press, and the right to assemble, stating, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise

thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

The Amendment is directed to Congress only and does not direct what a State may do. It cannot be interpreted as a prohibition of any reference to God or of Jesus Christ in Government meetings or documents. In fact, Bible Scriptures are engraved in stone on Federal buildings throughout the Capitol. Significantly, chaplains serve in the Senate, House of Representatives and in the Military.

The Pledge of Allegiance. The original pledge was written by Francis Bellamy in 1892. The Second National Flag Conference established the official words for the pledge in 1924. Congress added the words "under God" in 1954. The pledge states, "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, **one nation under God**, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Patriotic Songs. Many of our patriotic songs express recognition of God, "My Country, 'Tis of Thee", written by Samuel Smith, ends with the words, "**Our father's God** to Thee, Author of liberty, To Thee we sing: Long may our land be bright With freedom's holy light, Protect us by Thy might, **Great God, our King!**" There are many other songs, such as "God Bless Our Native Land" by Charles Brooks, "God of Our Fathers" by David Roberts, "God Bless America" by Irving Berlin, which acknowledge God and the need of Him in our nation.

The United States of America: A Christian Nation?

Nations developed after the flood and they all turned to idolatry within a few hundred years. God called Abraham that He might, from his descendants, make a nation that would follow Him. God promised Abraham that He would not only make a great nation of him and that in his seed all of the nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3 and 22:18). It took centuries before the nation of Israel, Abraham's descendants, became a nation which followed God. They followed God at times under the leadership of Moses and Joshua and God blessed them in many ways as He later said in the Psalms.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD (Jehovah), the people He has chosen as His own inheritance (Psalm 33:12, emphasis added, and Jehovah inserted).

Throughout the centuries leading up to, and including, the time of Jesus Christ, and in the centuries following, to the present day, could Israel be described as one nation under God?

The United States of America was the first nation in history, as it was being established, to recognize the creator God and the need of Him for guidance and blessing. While there were deists among the founding fathers, many were truly Christians and sought God's Word and prayed to Him for guidance. One of them, Patrick Henry said, "**It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded not by religionists but by Christians, not on religions but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**"

Tragically, the nation as a whole, as Israel and the Church, has deviated between the ways of God and the ways of Man. While many leaders continue to ask God to bless America, many deny Him and want His name and the name of Christ outlawed in the nation's deliberations. Separation of Church and State, to them, means Separation of State and God.

May God grant that the United States of America will continue to be that "Beacon of Hope," to all people in the future as it has been in the past. As a nation it has been used greatly of God as its churches have reached out in evangelism to a lost world.

American Evangelicalism

As Protestant Churches grew in America, the larger denominations such as the Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Reform Churches were characterized as "Evangelical" because they stressed the preaching of the Gospel of Christ and of the need of salvation through Him. This emphasis caused them to grow even more. The result was revivals and led on to world-wide missions and world-wide evangelism.

Music

Music was an integral part of the worship of God by the Children of Israel. Moses composed songs and David composed many of the songs in the book of Psalms. After Jesus instituted the Lord's supper, He and His disciples sang a hymn before going to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30). The letter to the Colossians emphasizes the importance of music.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 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 (Colossians 3:15-16, emphasis added).

During and after the reformation many hymns and spiritual songs were composed. Thousands were composed in America and became a part of Protestant worship and were used extensively in revivals and evangelistic meetings.

Revivals

The word "revive" is found several places in the Old Testament. Many times it was used in a prayer, asking revival from God. It means to live again and in the Biblical context to live again more in the Spirit of God. It also means to awake out of sleep. In the New Testament it was used of Christ saying, "He died, and rose, and revived" or lived again in Romans 14:9.

Revivals have also referred to "awakenings" among God's people. I Corinthians 14:34 states, "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin..." In teaching Christians to walk in the light Ephesians 5:14 concludes, "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

There have been many wide-spread revivals or awakenings among Christians since the Reformation. Some have been the result of preaching and others of simply prayer. The Welsh revival in Wales began when some women began to pray for their men who had become worldly and spent hours drinking and getting drunk in the pubs after work. It led to a great revival among the Methodists in Wales in the 1700s.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1778), was influenced by The Great Awakening which came to churches in America between 1740 and 1745. During the revival, in 1741, Edwards preached his famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." He referred not only to unbelievers but also to professing Christians who were living in sin. Many repented and turned back to God.

George Whitefield (1714-1770) helped spread the revival throughout the colonies by his emphasis on evangelism and Gospel preaching. Charles Finney began a different type of revivalism in 1824 in little frontier towns in the West. He preached out of doors, in bars, and in school houses.

Through the many years that followed there have been many different approaches and causes for revival. Many congregations held revival meetings every year with an evangelistic and Gospel emphasis for those who might not be saved.

World-Wide Missions

World-wide missions was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ when He commanded His apostles in His "Great Commission" to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Jesus reiterated the command just before He ascended into Heaven but told them that they were to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit.

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 (Acts 1:8-9).

After the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, the apostles did not, however, go into all the world but continued in Jerusalem. The apostle Paul's missionary work throughout the Roman Empire were the first efforts of World-Wide missions.

Protestant missionary work in England was intensified following the revival movements. In 1793, William Carey, a Baptist missionary began work in India, Robert Morrison began work in China in 1807. Adoniram Judson began work in Burma, and David Livingston in Africa.

Early missionary work was carried on by Roger Williams (1603?-1683) and David Brainard (1718-1747). American church denominations began to organize home and foreign missions in the late 1800s. Today thousands of missionaries representing different churches in America are all over the world. In addition there are many inter-church organizations such as New Tribes Missions, Christian Missions in Many Lands, Team, and Operation Mobilization in various missionary efforts throughout the world.

World-Wide Evangelism

The world-wide missionary movement led to world-wide evangelistic crusades, with an emphasis on preaching the Gospel of Christ and salvation to lost sinners. It began with huge tent meetings where multitudes could gather.

Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) was an early evangelist who conducted huge evangelistic campaigns in United States and the British Isles beginning in the 1860s. Millions of people attended the meetings and countless numbers were led to Christ and salvation.

Another evangelist, Bill Sunday (1862-1935), preached to over one hundred million people during his ministry and it has been estimated that over a million were converted during his campaigns.

A young evangelist named Billy Graham (1918-) began preaching the Gospel in the 1940s after working with Youth For Christ. Billy Graham Evangelistic Crusades have been held all over the world and continue today. His son, Franklin, is now working with his father. Untold millions have been converted to Christ through these crusade years. The crusades are supported by many different church denominations who assist with counseling and follow-up. Many, many other evangelists are conducting evangelistic campaigns world-wide. Never, in the history of Christianity has there been a greater effort obeying the great commission of Jesus Christ.

Philosophy, Science, & Politics

During the Renaissance and continuing through the Reformation a new interest in philosophy and science developed in Europe which greatly affected politics and Church doctrines. The humanism of Greek philosophy developed into a new focus on man. New discoveries in science developed into an emphasis in nature.

Philosophy. The word "philosophy" means love of wisdom. From the time of the ancient Greeks, men such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others were on a search for reality and truth through the reason, logic, and the experience of man and is referred to as humanism. Studies in

Greek philosophy were incorporated in the theological conclusions of Augustine, Aquinas and others. During and following the Renaissance and Reformation, the philosophy of Descartes, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Dewey, Sartre, and others led to materialism, naturalism, and rationalism.

Greek philosophers believed in gods. Some later philosophers believed in God, including some who professed Christianity. Many others were atheists. Philosophy, focusing on the wisdom and ways of man, has been in conflict or contradiction of truth and ways of God in His Word. The Apostle Paul encountered philosophers when he preached the Gospel of Christ in Athens. Their response to his message was more of curiosity than a search for truth.

*Then certain Epicurean and Stoic **philosophers** encountered him. And some said, "What does this babblar want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection (Acts 17:18, emphasis added).*

The Apostle Paul warned believers to beware of the deceit, traditions, and wisdom of men through the teaching and study of philosophy.

***Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ** (Colossians 2:8, emphasis added).*

The book of I Corinthians describes the folly in trusting the wisdom of man, for God will destroy the wisdom of the wise.

*... Has not **God made foolish the wisdom of this world?** For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men ... But of Him you are in **Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God**—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption ... (I Corinthians 1:19-31, emphasis added).*

Tragically, many denominational seminaries and congregations have ignored these warnings and have adopted philosophic concepts. In doing so they have consequently compromised Biblical doctrinal truth in teaching and practice.

Science. The word "science" means "to know." God gave man a conscience that he might know good and evil. The philosophy of naturalism led men to search for knowledge and truth beyond himself. He began to investigate nature, including the universe, its structure and mechanisms. Observation, measurement, experimentation and mathematics are parts of scientific methodology. Mathematics and measurement developed in the early history of the world and the Greeks proposed many theories regarding the physical world.

A rebirth of science took place in the 1500s through men like Leonardo da Vinci and Copernicus. Galileo, Kepler, and Newton discovered many laws in nature and applied them in their experiments during the 1600s.

Charles Darwin, a naturalist, advanced his theory of evolution in 1858. After spending five years on the coasts and islands of South America including the Galapagos, he published "The Origen of Species" and "The Descent of Man." He theorized that life gradually evolved from earlier forms of life and that man descended from the same group of animals as apes and chimpanzees. Strangely, he used the word descend rather than ascend. His theories on species and time totally contradict the teaching of the first chapter of Genesis.

Darwin's theories and the studies of distances from the stars in the universe by other scientists, using "light years" calculations led to the conclusion that Earth and the universe were millions and millions of years old. This also is a total contradiction of the history of time as

presented in God's Word. The rules of science, that findings must be observable, measurable, and repeatable are self limiting. Scientists often ignore the scientific laws of thermodynamics. Establishing conclusions that go beyond these principles remains theory and science fiction.

The apostle Paul warned regarding science in his letter to Timothy indicating that it can cause men to stray from faith in God.

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith (1 Timothy 6:20-21, KJV).

Politics. Early politics developed through leaders in government. After the flood men and nations organized their governments under kings. When God called Abraham He planned a new nation in which God would rule over man. After the time of the Judges, this new nation, Israel, demanded a king and be like other nations. Down through the centuries, nations have been ruled by kings until the time of the Greeks, who conceived the idea of a "republic" ruled by the people.

The United States of America was established as a republic with recognition of God as their king. America has been far from "A Nation Under God" in the last century many times under the influence of atheistic concepts in philosophy, science, and government. The influence of socialism, and particularly communism, which outlawed religion and Christianity in the Soviet Union, affected many political leaders and citizens in the United States to the extent that efforts have been made to deny even the mention of God and Jesus in government proceedings.

Conflicts in the Church

Conflicts in doctrine and practice have continued in the church from the time Christ began building it. This is due to the fact that the Scriptures have been ignored and replaced by the way of man. Philosophical views, scientific theories, and political directions have had a great influence in the theological views of man.

The church is hopelessly divided contrary to Christ's teaching and the Apostle Paul's teaching on unity and oneness. The Reformation did not bring about unity nor sound doctrine. The increase in denominationalism has only compounded errors and divisions in doctrine and practice.

During the 1800s and early 1900s the world, after accepting modern science, turned again to humanism, and modernism in theology. Ultimately, a theological conflict developed between Modernism and Fundamentalism.

Modernism. Philosophic and scientific theories opposed to the creation account in the Bible relative to the origin of the world and of life led to "higher criticism." Many theologians questioned time references and then other teachings in the Scriptures. The deity and virgin birth of Christ are questioned and the way of salvation.

Fundamentalism. In response to "Modernism" the "Fundamentalists" or Bible believing theologians, preachers, and teachers countered the false teaching by emphasizing foundational truths concerning Christ and the way of salvation taught in the Scriptures.

In the years that followed during the 1900s the conflict continued using the political references of "Liberal" and "Conservative" teaching in the church.

Liberal Doctrine. Liberalism continues "Modernistic" doctrines and practices, emphasizing social concerns and tolerance and ignore clear Biblical teaching against abortion, homosexuality, and marriage in the name of "freedom." The Bible, in Galatians 5:1 and 13, teaches liberty and freedom in Christ but warns that this liberty is not to be used as an opportunity for the flesh.

Conservative and Orthodox Doctrine. Conservative and orthodox theologians and churches seek to remain faithful to the truths and practices taught in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation with an emphasis on the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Ecumenical Efforts

There have been various efforts in the last century to unify the church but they have not been directed to eliminate denominationalism and doctrinal differences. Attempts to unite within denominations or evangelical churches who have doctrinal differences, and organizations such as the World Council of Churches have ended up compromising truth. Some cooperative efforts have created degrees of fellowship and helped in evangelistic campaigns.

Scriptural Church Attempts and Movements

Many congregations of Christians have made attempts to follow the New Testament doctrines, teachings, and practice as revealed in the books Acts and I Corinthians. These include the Quakers, Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, Church of God, Assemblies of God, and Brethren Assemblies. Most of them, however, still cling to the clergy/laity system with a pastor and ministry of the Word, not according to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but by man-made systems. In some churches where the gifts are exercised they are limited to the gifts of tongues or healing. In efforts that have been toward non-denominationalism, such as the "Brethren Movement," various differences among them have resulted in new divisions.

The Mega Church Movement

In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on congregational size or numbers of people attending. Only in the days following Pentecost did the Bible indicate the number of people being added to the church, but this was not in regard to the various assemblies or congregations in a city or area. Church growth is not emphasized in the Bible but rather the need to evangelize and establish churches. Small home churches are listed throughout the New Testament. Mega churches tend to have thousands in attendance. The leadership often use secular techniques such as marketing and target audiences in drawing people. In many cases services are geared to amusement and entertainment with a minimum of teaching. The result is that churches are in competition with each other and some even resort to proselytism in drawing members from other churches. What is the purpose of huge congregations? Do they not hinder the exercise of Spiritual gifts of all the believers and cause services to become spectator events?

The Emerging Church

The "emerging church" movement has been identified with "Mars Hill" churches in Seattle and Grandville, Michigan. The very name links this movement with the place where the apostle Paul preached to the Greek philosophers in Athens. Mars Hill churches are now spreading to other places. They teach that the Bible has errors and that the philosophy of man is necessary in the journey to arrive at truth. Teachers deny that there is a hell and in universal salvation for all. This had led to a great immorality among many of its members.

The New World and the Old World

Much of the new world of America is increasingly becoming the same old world as a nation and God's people are increasingly adopting the ways of man in the church, as predicted in the New Testament.

But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit (Jude 17-19).

God, however, praise His name, continues to work through the Holy Spirit in thousands of Evangelical churches in America, reaching out to the whole world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the message of salvation.

The Church Throughout America Today

The church in America continues to grow, particularly among Evangelical denominations such as Baptists, Free Churches, Assemblies of God and independent Bible Churches. Churches still carry on missionary work and cooperate in massive evangelistic crusades all over the world leading thousands and thousands to salvation in Jesus Christ. Most of them, however, still cling to the clergy/laity system and man-made directions of worship.

There are, in addition, thousands of small congregations or assemblies that meet simply as brethren in the name of the Lord Jesus and seek to follow the New Testament pattern of worship taught in I Corinthians. They focus on remembering the death of Christ in weekly communion, Bible teaching, individual spiritual growth, the development of gifts of the Holy Spirit for ministry, and evangelism. These congregations send out and support thousands of missionaries and Bible teachers all over the world.

Thousands of Christians in churches in America are praying for revivals throughout the nation, that more souls might be saved, especially those in political leadership, and that America might wholeheartedly turn back to God.

The Judgment of Nations

God will someday judge all nations that have existed throughout time, from Babylon to the present. God called Abraham that through his seed, Jesus Christ, all of the nations might be blessed (Genesis 18:8, Acts 3:24-26). Nations will be judged by their response to the gospel of Christ and the message of salvation. They will also be judged in how they have regarded God's people Israel. God said,

I will also gather all nations, And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; And I will enter into judgment with them there On account of My people, My heritage Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up My land (Joel 3:2).

America, as a nation, has been a friend of Israel, has been used greatly by God in fulfilling the "Great Commission" to **"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"** (Mark 16:15). May it continue to do so, and continue to pray, "God Bless America."

The World Today

The Word of God, the Bible, identifies and describes the world in a variety of ways, such as: the world of nature, including planet earth and the universe, the world of man, and the world throughout time. An understanding of the world today is dependent on its history, which is recorded in the Bible. It is, in fact, a sum total and climax of its history. How does the world today compare with the world in the beginning of time? What has changed? How does it compare with the various influences of nature and the ways of man down through the centuries?

God created the world, beginning with Earth, plant life, animal life, and finally man upon it. Everything that God created was good. Man was created in the image and likeness of God. He created him, male and female. God blessed them and told them to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and have dominion over it (Genesis 1:28). Man was not only created in the image of God, he is also the glory of God (I Corinthians 11:7).

God created man out of the dust of the ground, breathed life into him, and man became a living soul. God created the woman out of the rib of Adam. They were named Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:7-25).

God created man with a free will. Man did not choose the time of his birth, his race, his gender, nor many other individual features, but he was given choices. God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it (Genesis 2:15). 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 (Genesis 2:16-17, emphasis added).

God gave them freedom to choose the fruit of any tree for food but commanded them not to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. Man could choose to obey God or disobey.

God has an arch enemy, Satan, who came into the garden one day in the form of a serpent and tempted Adam and Eve to eat of the forbidden tree. They yielded to the temptation, chose to eat of the tree, and disobey God. Their disobedience caused sin and death to enter into the world, spread to all men, and cause all men to sin and die.

Over six thousand years of history have passed since God created the world. What has transpired during those years and what has changed? How has the natural world and the world of man changed, and what is the prophetic future of the world?

Changes in the Natural World

The world of nature and its processes are constantly changing, although some things seem to remain the same. Some of these changes are created by God and some by man. Man has many theories about these changes and theorizes changes he believes are in the future. God created the movements in the universe and the movement of the earth. He created time by days and marked out seasons and years. All things and forces, age decay, diminish, or burn out. All living things come into being, grow, and die. Plant life is dependent upon the seasons. It reseeds, lives, grows, and dies. Many things have been destroyed as they have come under the judgment of God.

The Flood. God caused Earth to be totally flooded by rain and from fountains of the deep because of the wickedness of man. Only Noah and his family survived in an ark. The water gradually subsided but evidently still covered large areas for centuries as indicated by rock formations, canyons, and water beds left behind where there is land area today.

The Ice Age. There are many theories about an ice age. One thing is certain, the ice age could not have lasted more than a few thousand years, relative to the history of the earth, and the ice gradually receded, apparently toward the poles, where it remained. It would appear that the ice age was perhaps the result of the flood and followed it for a long period. This would have had an enormous effect on climate and life on Earth.

Depleting Resources. God created the earth with many resources which were necessary and useful to man, particularly for food, clothing and shelter. In addition to plant life, various ores and liquids are embedded in the ground. Many of these resources, such as coal, oil, and minerals are depleting because of extensive use by man.

Pollution. Many forms of pollution are increasing which have been caused by man, such as water pollution, air pollution, and ground pollution through waste disposal.

Weather Changes. Drastic weather events cause catastrophes such as wind storms, tidal waves, rain storms, flooding, snow storms, freezing, hail, electrical storms, heat waves, forest fires, erosion, and draughts at different times and in different areas of the earth. Global warming is a theory and concern of man today but scientists disagree as to its reality or danger.

Movements from within the Earth. The surface of the earth is greatly affected by earth quakes and volcanoes coming from below its surface. Hot molten or liquid materials, deep within the earth expand, exerting pressure on solid materials above it, in various places and times, causing movements and eruptions which break through the outer shell of the earth.

Gravity. Gravity is a force that holds the world together and objects within and upon it. It affects weather and objects in movements on earth, and movements in the universe.

The Earth's Magnetic Field. The magnetic field of earth moves between the north and south poles. Magnetism, electricity, lightening, are all related and are a necessary component for life upon the earth. Scientists theorize that the magnetic field on earth is diminishing and will be depleted in about 10,000 years. Using their calculations, how strong would the magnetic field have been 10,000 years ago using some of their theories on the age of the earth. Would that condition have sustained any form of life?

The Expanding Universe. If the Universe is expanding from a contracted stage, what kind of time frame is theorized? How has that have affected life during that time?

Burnout of Stars and Black Holes. Are Arcturus, our sun, and other stars, burning out through time? If so, at what rate? How large would Arcturus and the sun have been 100,000 years ago if the universe is millions of years old? How would that have affected life on earth?

Changes in the World of Man

Man tends to think that he has advanced toward a higher and better stage of development today. The ingenuity and progressive abilities of man gives some credence to this. Looking back into the Biblical history of man, God gave man life and all of the basic knowledge to meet his needs for living, food, clothing, and shelter. The sacrifice of Abel indicates that he had fire and the tools necessary for preparing an offering to God.

Growth in Knowledge. It is clear from the Scriptures that God taught man many things through the centuries. The Word of God was written and literacy was widespread, even among children. The history of man, the laws and ways of God were recorded by Moses over two thousand years before Christ. Through writing and education man increasingly gained knowledge in secular history, literature, the arts, philosophy, mathematics, science, as well as physical skills.

Man Learned to Make Things. Man quickly learned to make garments by weaving instead of wearing skins. He made tents and built houses, and cities. He created musical instruments, and

developed craftsmanship in mining and smelting iron and bronze. He domesticated animals and made tools for farming and other work. He tended sheep for food and clothing.

The Early Inventiveness of Man. After the flood man became more and more inventive. He learned to make brick and used it with asphalt for mortar and began to build a city and tower like a skyscraper. The work was halted by God, when He separated the people into different language groups and spread the people over the world. Men, like Nimrod, began to organize into kingdoms and become kings. Many nations began to rise, such as Babylon in Macedonia and Egypt. The wheel and wagon were invented. The lever, pulley, and derrick were also invented, and later the catapult.

Some inventions were beneficial while others were used to assert power, leading to conflict, wars, and conquest between nations. As nations began to war with one another, weapons of warfare were developed, such as spears, and bows and arrows, and chariots for horses.

Man's Inventions Throughout Time. As man gained more and more knowledge of the world, and made new discoveries, he continued to invent and develop technology in many areas such as: communication, housing, health and sanitation, transportation and travel, machines, power sources, and technology. Various areas of discovery and invention aided each other in developing benefits.

Communication. Speaking was aided by inventions such as megaphones, telephones, radios, cell phones and loud speakers. Writing developed through pen and ink on paper, printing presses, typewriters, newspapers, computers, word processors, and email.

Housing. New skills and use of different materials aided in creating homes, public and commercial facilities and many other buildings.

Health and Sanitation. Increased knowledge and technology in medicine and food monitoring has improved health and skills in diagnosis and surgery have saved many lives.

Transportation and Travel. Moving began by creating routes, roads and bridges. Travel began with walking, then to riding horses and camels, chariots, wagons, boats, ships, buggies, stage coaches, automobiles, buses, trains, ships, and airplanes. Transportation and travel was improved by the invention of machines, and assisted by maps, radio, radar, and GPS (Global Positioning Systems).

Machines. Early machines, such as the pulley and derrick were used in building. Modern derricks are still used today. Machines such as the steam engine, gasoline engine, turbine, and electric motors vary from huge engines in factories to tractors in industry and agriculture to cars, trucks, trains, airplanes, and space craft.

Power Sources. Man moved from fire and burning wood to water wheels, windmills, sailing ships, steam, hydraulics, gasoline, turbine power, electrical power, and nuclear power.

Technology. In the last two hundred years, starting with what is referred to as "The Industrial Revolution", there seems to have been an explosion of knowledge and technology. During this period, in addition to the steam engine and gasoline engine, there have been an amazing number of discoveries and inventions. Most of these are related to the discovering and harnessing of electrical power. Inventions include: the telegraph, telephone, radio, television, and computer, mentioned previously.

Appliances. Homes and other facilities utilize many appliances which have been developed for cooking, heating, lighting, preserving, air conditioning, and cleaning, which are powered by electricity and sometimes natural gas.

The Value of the Ingenuity of Man. How beneficial have the changes and inventions of man been, in his progress throughout time and today, in relationship to the purpose of God in creating him?

God's View of the Changes and Inventions of Man

The progressiveness, ingenuity, inventiveness, and accomplishments of man is amazing. God truly created man with wonderful abilities. The progressive ways of man in the world, in gaining knowledge and creating many inventions, have been in many ways beneficial. The way of man, however, has resulted in thoughts, actions, and consequences which have been totally contrary to the ways and purposes of God. Many times God intervened in the life of man in order to redirect him.

The Tower of Babel. After the flood men began a massive project of building a city that would reach into heaven. God came down and saw the city and said,

"Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth (Genesis 11:6-9).

The Calling of Abraham. Abraham was living in the city of Ur when God called him. After promising him that he would be the father of many nations, God commanded Abraham to leave the city of his father. From then on Abraham and his descendants lived in tents.

The Nation of Israel. God, through Moses, led the children of Israel out of the cities in the nation of Egypt to live in tents in the Sinai desert for forty years.

The Law of God. God revealed Himself to Moses and Israel on Mount Sinai and gave them the law and the Commandments. God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle, furniture including altars, sacrifices, and a priesthood that His people might worship Him according to a way that was acceptable to Him.

Leadership. God gave the Israelites priests, elders and judges to lead them. Later, when they asked for a king, He gave them kings, although it was against His will.

The Babylonian Captivity. When the nation of Israel turned to idolatry, time and time again God warned them, and finally Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and the people were taken into captivity for seventy years.

The Coming of Christ. The greatest intervention of all time was when Jesus Christ came into the world, who had been promised as man's Savior from the time of the fall in the garden of Eden. Christ came to save man from sin and prepare him for the eternal Heavenly Kingdom.

The Church. Jesus Christ is building His Church, and as He said, "the gates of Hell will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

God's View of the Changes and Inventions of Man. Man, by knowledge, has often chosen to disobey God, beginning in the Garden of Eden, and throughout history, both before and after the flood. His wickedness before the flood turned to idolatry immediately afterwards. Even after God called Abraham, out of whom came the nation of Israel, during the time in the wilderness and the giving of the law, most of God's own people rebelled against Him. The pattern continued during the times of the judges and kings to the coming of Jesus Christ, whom they rejected and crucified. The church age has been a history of man seeking to combine his philosophy and science concepts with the Bible, compromising the truths of God, resulting in rebellion, agnosticism, and atheism.

Many of man's inventions were totally evil. One of his first inventions, after the flood, was idol worship, a product of his imagination. The Scriptures record man seeking many inventions, the defilement that resulted, and of God's anger and judgment of them. The writer of Ecclesiastes refers to the inventions of man in contrast to the uprightness in which God created him.

*Lo, this only have I found, that **God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions** (Ecclesiastes 7:29, KJV).*

The book of Psalms reveals the defilement and unfaithfulness of people in their works of invention, the anger of God and the plague He sent upon them, and finally the vengeance of judgment of God against them.

Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions (Psalm 106:39, KJV).

Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them (Psalm 106:29, KJV).

... thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions (Psalm 99:8, KJV).

The inventions of man do not please God. Only Faith pleases God.

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

The ways of man, throughout time, have demonstrated that he is basically wicked. Since sin and death entered into the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, when they partook of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17 through 3:19), man has continued to grow more and more wicked.

The Wicked Ways of Man

Throughout time there have been many kinds of people in the world; different races, cultures, occupations, goals, moral levels, economic levels, political views, religious views, and many other differences. People are viewed as individuals, families, societies, leaders, and as nations. They are viewed in regard to personality characteristics and morals. The character or way of man determines his values, directions, goals, and they influence how he lives in the world today. To what extent has he been good or evil? To what extent has he fulfilled the purpose of God in creating man?

Throughout the Old Testament the way of man was in disobedience and rebellion against God, not only of idolaters but among the nation of Israel, His own people. The ultimate unbelief and rebellion was in the rejection of Christ as his Savior and the crucifixion of Him. The book of Romans describes the utter wickedness of man, and the anger of God against the unrighteousness of man.

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. 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 (Romans 1:18-23, emphasis added).

Clearly, from what God's word says above, there are no such people as atheists, just men in denial, not desirous of accepting the truth. Such men change the glory of God for idols.

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. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due (Romans 1:24-27, emphasis added).

When men turned from God, He gave them up to a debased mind and vile immorality, including homosexuality and many other forms of wickedness.

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; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving,¹ unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:28-32, emphasis added).

Man does not only know that there is a God, but he also knows of the righteous judgment of God and that he deserves death. He also approves of others who practice sin. How is it that man knows all of these things? He was created with a conscience, that is "with knowledge." In addition, he has been given the law of God (Romans 2:1-16). The wicked ways of man today are even worse than in past history.

The Sinfulness of Man Today

The way of man has not changed. He is still a rebellious sinner. Man continues to break the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). He is even more wicked and sinful than the description of him in Romans 1:24-32 quoted above. He has continued to increase in sin and rebellion against the ways of God. Many are still idolaters, denying the truth of God. Not only do they murder, commit fornication and adultery, steal, lie, and covet, but they have adopted, and in many places legalized the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abortion, killing innocent babies, and euthanasia, putting to death old people, pornography, and harlotry are running rampant in the world today. Sexual abuse of children is widespread in homes and even among clergymen in the church.

The entertainment of man has grown from dancing girls, gladiators, and bull fights to x-rated movies in theaters and television pornography. Magazines, music, and clothing express the emphasis on sex today.

The increasing sinfulness of man, in a wide variety of directions, has spread throughout the world, leading to massive growth in world-wide corruption.

World-Wide Corruption

Sin is like cancer, it continues to spread and intensify more and more, and corrupt every area of the life of man. It begins with the corruption of nature and then personally, socially, economically politically, and religiously. All of the corruption in the world is the result of the immorality of man.

The Natural World. The corruption of nature began with the fall of man into sin. Decay and death occur in all plant life. Man has added to the corruption through misuse, waste, and pollution.

The Personal World. The personal lives of people have become increasingly immoral, worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. Practices such as premarital sex, living together without marriage, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, gay marriage, divorce, and abortion are common today. The spiritual lives of many professing Christians are marred by immorality. Many of these practices are legalized or seeking legalization. The quality of family life has greatly diminished.

The Social World. Society either reflects or sets the standards by its widespread acceptance of personal sinful behaviors. The emphasis of socialism throughout the world has greatly affected societal values.

The Economic World. Man's strong focus on economic needs has caused increased greed and selfishness. More and more emphasis is placed on the accumulation of material things and has led many to embrace socialistic teaching and practices which has led many to depend on government entitlement programs.

The Political World. There is a great deal of corruption in governments throughout the world. Many elections are the result of voter fraud. Laws are enacted which legalize immorality. Politics of various nations around the world differ greatly causing international conflicts and threats of wars. World economics leads to jealousies among nations. The spread of socialism and communism has led to cold wars and weapons development. Men have moved from bows and arrows to guns, atomic bombs, and other forms of nuclear warfare. Many politicians are deceived in thinking that a one-world government will bring peace and are moving toward this.

The Religious World. In spite of his sin and wide-spread wickedness, man is still basically religious. Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox churches which are grouped under Christianity make up about only one third of the world's population. Jews, Moslems, Confucians, Hindus, Buddhists, Animists, and Atheists make up the rest. Socialism and Communism have become a new religion to many.

Two-thirds of the population of the world continues to serve various false gods. If only one-third makes up "Christianity," and includes all of the churches above, what percentage of these are truly "Christian?" There is a common saying today that the church in Europe is dead and its cathedrals are its tombstones.

How spiritual is the true church, the body of Christ? In New Testament times it was described as carnal (I Corinthians 3:1). This history of the church under the Roman Empire and during the "Dark Ages" reveals a church with disobedient and wicked leaders. The church, many times, has reflected the ways of man in the world. The whole world today continues to grow in sin and world-wide corruption. While many Christians may be spiritual and obedient, others follow the ways of man in deliberate rebellion against God and still others cling to false doctrines and hope in good works.

Instead of turning to the way of God in repentance, man continually turns to his own ways, through various religions. Every man today is still a sinner. There are no doubt varying degrees of sin but unless a person repents and turns in faith to Jesus Christ for salvation he will face the judgment and condemnation of God. Christians will have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ someday where they will receive rewards or loss, based on their works.

The History of Man. The history of man is recorded accurately and in much detail in the Old Testament. There is no prehistoric account of man except in the imaginations of evolutionists. When God created man, He created him good and He created him with a free will. Man chose to disobey God and ate fruit from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil and by doing so, sin and corruption came into the world. The rejection of God's law and rebellion against Him have continued to this day.

The World, Israel, and the Church. In many ways the church has disobeyed God and ignored the Scriptures as Israel did in Old Testament days. Israel not only rebelled against God many times but ultimately rejected Jesus Christ of Nazareth as their Messiah and crucified Him. They are still waiting for Him, after two thousand years, without a priest, sacrifice, or temple. Today there are many tombstones east of Jerusalem in which the dead are awaiting His coming on the Mount of Olives. Plans and preparations for a new temple are presently being made. Why haven't they carefully examined the Torah to see if Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures? The church, from its beginning, and through the centuries, has also been disobedient to God and ignored the Scriptures, particularly in worship, leadership, and ministry (I and II Corinthians, II Peter 2, Revelation, in the letters to churches, and other New Testament books).

The Judgment of God

The book of Romans begins with the gospel of Christ, as the power of God for salvation, for everyone who believes, and that **the righteousness of God** is revealed through faith, and that the just will live by faith. **The wrath of God** is also revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth (Romans 1:16-18). The wicked ways of man in Romans 1:21-31 was described earlier in this chapter. The chapter ends by stating,

*who, knowing the **righteous judgment of God**, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them* (Romans 1:32, emphasis added).

The world, Israel, and the Church are subject to the judgment of God. Some judgments have already taken place and others are future. Judgments of God were numerous in the Old Testament. Adam and Eve were banished from Eden for their disobedience. The wicked world that developed during the following two thousand years was destroyed by a world-wide flood. Egypt was judged severely for enslaving the Israelites. Israel was sentenced to forty years in the wilderness for rebelling against God in refusing to begin the conquest of Canaan. Israel was also sent into Captivity and the temple at Jerusalem destroyed as they persisted in idol worship. The church will someday appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

*For we must all appear before the **judgment seat of Christ**, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad* (II Corinthians 5:9-11, emphasis added).

Peter warned of false prophets and teachers who will bring destructive heresies into the church, which many will follow. They are like "natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own **corruption**" ... while they promise liberty, "they themselves are **slaves of corruption**" (II Peter 2:1-22).

What is the ultimate judgment and destiny of sinful and wicked man? The Bible says, "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). It goes on to say "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Those in the world today who follow wickedness and the way of man will end up in death and hell.

The wicked shall be turned into hell, And all the nations that forget God (Psalm 9:17).

What about the world of tomorrow? What is final destiny of the world and what will be happening in the "end times" relative to life and death? What will be the future judgments of God? By the love and grace of God, there is still be a choice between eternal life in Christ or eternal death in hell and the lake of fire.

The World of Tomorrow

The world of tomorrow will come and it may be very soon. The next event will be the Lord Jesus coming in the clouds for His church. One day, late in His ministry, Jesus said,

*"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**" (John 14:1-6, emphasis added).*

What is the sequence in the coming of Christ? Christ will come first in the clouds and rapture His church and later He will come down on the Mount of Olives with His saints as the King of kings and Lord of Lords.

The Rapture of the Church

The rapture or "catching away" of believers in the church could take place at any time, even today. Jesus will descend from heaven with a shout, raise the dead in Christ, and catch them into the clouds to be with Him.

*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For **the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord** (I Thessalonians 4:13-17, emphasis added).*

What will follow the rapture of the church? Somewhat simultaneous events will take place in Heaven and Earth. Saints in the church will enter glory. Unbelievers left behind will enter a period of tribulation. Will those left behind continue to follow the ways of man or turn to God?

The Saints in Glory

After the rapture, the saints in the church will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. They will then be presented as a glorious church, followed by the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The Judgment Seat of Christ. All believers, after they have been caught up into Heaven must appear before the judgment seat of Christ relative to the things done in the body.

*But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For **we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ** (Romans 14:10, emphasis added).*

*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and **the fire will test each one's work**, of what sort it is. **If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire** (I Corinthians 3:11-15, emphasis added).*

*For **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad** (II Corinthians 5:10, emphasis added).*

The judgment seat of Christ is a time when each believer will give an account of himself to Christ relative to his faithful service or lack of it. Believers will receive rewards or suffer loss but will be saved.

The Presentation of the Bride. The Lord Jesus Christ, in bringing many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10), will present the church to Himself as glorious. He has cleansed her,

that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27, emphasis added).

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The church is the bride of Christ. There are many illustrations of this relationship in the Old Testament and some in the New Testament. The apostle Paul, in writing about the law and our new relationship to Christ said,

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God (Romans 7:4, emphasis added).

John, in the book of Revelation, related the coming marriage supper of the Lamb. After the judgment of Babylon he heard voices of multitudes and loud thunders saying,

Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:6-8, emphasis added).

Then a voice said to John, "Write: 'Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" (Revelation 19:9). Sometime after the marriage supper, the Lord Jesus will return to earth with His saints. **When Jesus was revealing the end times to his apostles He said that He would come again immediately after the tribulation** (Matthew 24:29-30).

The Tribulation on Earth

On one occasion, the Lord Jesus was telling His disciples about the coming destruction of the temple. They asked Him when this would be and what was the sign of His coming? Jesus gave them an overview of "end times" occurrences on Earth, after the rapture of the church.

He said that there will be **wars** and rumors of wars, **famines, pestilences, and earthquakes**, which will be the beginning of sorrows. There will be **tribulation and hate by all nations for Christ's sake. False prophets will arise and many will betray one another. Lawlessness will abound and love will grow cold. The gospel will be preached in all the world.** Meanwhile, **the 'abomination of desolation,'** prophesied by Daniel, **will be in the holy place.** This appears to relate to the antichrist. This will be followed by a **great tribulation**. **False christs and false prophets will show great signs and wonders to deceive many.** Obviously, many will still follow the wicked ways of man. Jesus warned that none should believe them, and said, **"For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."** (Matthew 24:4-30, emphasis added).

The book of Daniel indicates that the tribulation period will last for seven years. It is divided into two periods of three and one half years each (Daniel 11 and 12). The second period of time is referred to as **the great tribulation**. It comes with the rising of the Antichrist.

The First Three and One Half Years of Tribulation

The tribulation years will include many world disasters, described in the seven seals of Revelation, chapters 6 through 18. They begin with early efforts of world rule, war, famine,

massive deaths, and martyrdom. It appears that most of the tribulation years focus upon Israel and the Middle East.

The Time of Jacob's Trouble. Several Old Testament books prophesied the tribulation in relation to Israel. It is called "the time of Jacob's trouble" and that Israel will be saved out of it (Jeremiah 30:7). Sometime during the beginning of the tribulation Israel will rebuild the temple (Ezekiel, chapters 40 through 43). The prosperity of Israel, back in the land since 1948, and growing hatred of nations surrounding her, will lead to increased Middle East conflict. Many nations will be drawn into the conflict, and political actions against Israel will increase. Many believers will be martyred for the word of God and their testimony (Revelation 6:1-9). Meanwhile, God will seal one hundred and forty-four thousand from the tribes of Israel to witness for Him on earth. As the **wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, which Jesus predicted**, spread throughout the world, there will be **increased conflict** with Israel.

Ezekiel prophesied of Israel in the latter days, after she had returned to the land. They returned in 1948. Since that time there have been many conflicts between Israel and the nations around them, questioning their right to the land. Meanwhile, Israel has greatly prospered as a nation. The desert has indeed, as prophesied, blossomed as a rose (Isaiah 35:1). Anti-Semitism has continued to grow. Ezekiel also prophesied that in the last days Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal will come against Israel with great armies of horses, and be joined by Persia, Ethiopia, Libya, and many others. Gog is described as coming like a storm out of the far north. They will come to take plunder and booty from Israel who has acquired many resources in the land. Multitudes of Israelites will be killed (Ezekiel 38:1-12).

Many Bible scholars have identified Gog as Russia. Some nations have questioned Gog, asking if she has come to plunder Israel? (Ezekiel 38 and 39). The unrest and conflict between nations in the world, because of wars, famines, economics, politics, and religious prejudice against the Jews by Moslems and other religious groups, will cause many to increasingly believe that a one-world government would be the solution. Obviously, Satan utilized the ways of man, and prompted their minds in these directions and opened the door to the antichrist.

The Last Three and One Half Years or the Great Tribulation

The Great Tribulation will come in the middle of the years, with the rise of the antichrist, the man of sin, under the direction and power of Satan, who is identified as the dragon (Revelation 12:9). The antichrist will be enthroned in the temple at Jerusalem and reign as God (the abomination of desolation). All who do not worship him and receive his name and number will be killed. (Revelation 6 & 7).

Jesus warned that the great tribulation would be greater than any tribulation since the beginning of the world and, that unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved, but for the elect's sake the time will be shortened (Matthew 24:16-22). **All who do not yield to the antichrist**, particularly the Israelites, and refuse to receive the mark of the beast **will be killed**.

The Dragon, the Antichrist, and False Prophet. The apostles Paul and John prophesied of the coming of the antichrist after the falling away. The text does not explain who the falling away might be. It seems to refer to many sinning against God. After the rapture of the church, it is not clear from the Scriptures if **the Holy Spirit will return to heaven**. There is a reference to One who is restraining the revelation of the antichrist until his time. This may be the Holy Spirit.

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts

*himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God ... And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. **The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.** And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thessalonians 2:1-12, emphasis added).*

*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 (I John 2:18, emphasis added).*

*For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an **antichrist**. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we^[e] may receive a full reward (II John 7-8, emphasis added).*

John describes Satan as the dragon, the antichrist as the beast out of the sea, and the false prophet as another beast in Revelation 13:1-18. Following the wicked ways of man, many people will worship Satan and the antichrist, in rebellion against God.

*...I saw a **beast** rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name ... **The dragon** gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. ... **one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. ... So they worshiped the dragon** who gave authority to the beast; and **they worshiped the beast**, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Revelation 13:1-4, emphasis added).*

*Then he opened his mouth in **blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world** (Revelation 13:6-8, emphasis added).*

John saw **another beast, the false prophet**, coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast and caused all on the earth to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. He deceives everyone by signs he is granted to do and commands that **an image be made of the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast**, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes everyone to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell without the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. "Let the wise calculate **the number of the beast**, for it is the number of a man: **His number is 666.**" (Revelation 13:11-18, emphasis added).

The beast, or antichrist, is a man who will become the ruler of the world under Satan. It appears that Satan will work in the hearts of world rulers to give him power over all nations

Tribulation Martyrs. During this period a great multitude will not yield to the **antichrist** and turn to Christ for salvation. After they are killed they will be taken to heaven.

*After these things I looked, and behold, **a great multitude** which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and **before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God***

who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God ... Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9-17, emphasis added).

The Book of Seven Seals. The apostle John, in his vision of God, saw a book in His hand with seven seals, which only the Lamb of God (The Lord Jesus Christ) was worthy to open (Revelation 4 and 6). The opening of each of the seals revealed future occurrences. The first six seals revealed: (1) a conqueror and conquest, (2) war, (3) famine, (4) wide spread death, (5) martyrdom of those testifying for the Word of God, and (6) cosmic disturbances.

I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:12-17, emphasis added).

The sixth seal also revealed the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand Israelites mentioned earlier. It also revealed a great multitude before the throne of God who came out of the great tribulation, and "washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-14).

The Seventh Seal. Sometime around the middle of the tribulation years, after the antichrist begins to rule, God has begun to send judgments on earth. (Revelation 8 and 9).

These judgments of God occur with the opening of the seventh seal and the sounding of seven trumpets by angels. After the first trumpet (1) a third of the trees and all the grass on earth will be burned. At the sounding of the trumpets that follow: (2) the sea will turn to blood and a third of the sea creatures and ships will be destroyed, (3) a star called Wormwood will fall and destroy a third of the rivers, (4) a third of the sun and moon will be struck and a third of the day and night will be darkened, (5) the bottomless pit will be opened and smoke as from a great furnace, containing locusts and scorpions, will darken the earth and torment those without the seal of God, and (6) angels at the Euphrates river will be released to kill one third of mankind with an army of two hundred million horsemen on horses of fiery red, breathing fire, smoke and brimstone. After all of these plagues or judgments of God, man did not repent.

But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts (Revelation 9:20-21, emphasis added).

The revelations after the sounding of the sixth trumpet continue in Revelation 10 through 15. Chapter 10 reveals that the mystery of God will be finished. Chapter 11 records the giving of a measuring rod to the apostle John to measure the temple and mentions that the temple court will be given to the Gentiles, who will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months or three and a half years.

During that time God will give power to His two witnesses and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days or the same three and a half years. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before God, prophesied in Zechariah 4:2-3.

And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth (Revelation 11:5-10).

After three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God will enter them, and they will stand and cause great fear to those who see them. A voice calls the witnesses and they ascend to heaven. An earthquake follows and a tenth of the city falls, killing seven thousand people. The rest, in fear, give glory to God (Revelation 11:11-13).

When the seventh trumpet is sounded there are loud voices in heaven, saying,

*"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because **You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.**" Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail (Revelation 11:15-19, emphasis added).*

The revelation of the seventh trumpet continues in Revelation 12 through 14 with a sign in heaven of a woman with a garland of twelve stars, with child. A fiery red dragon seeks to devour the child, who is to rule all nations. It is a sign of the opposition of Satan against Israel, who flees to the wilderness for 1,260 days or about three and a half years. War breaks out in heaven between Satan and his angels and the angels of heaven. Satan, the accuser of the saints, and his angels are defeated and cast out of heaven. On earth Satan persecutes the saints but they overcome him by the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 12:1-17).

Then a beast rises out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, wearing a blasphemous name. The dragon gives the beast a throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast has been mortally wounded and healed, no doubt a counterfeit of Christ (Revelation 13:1-3). The dragon, beast, and false prophet were described above under the tribulation.

The Lamb, with the one hundred and forty-four thousand, who were redeemed, sing a new song, and an angel is seen flying in the midst of heaven, having the gospel to preach to those on the earth, saying,

Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water (Revelation 14:7).

Another angel pronounces the fall of Babylon, a third angel warns against the worship of the beast, who will be tormented with fire and brimstone, and then there is reference to reaping the earth's harvest.

The Seven Bowl Judgments of God. Revelation 15 and 16 describe seven more judgments of God during the tribulation. They are seven plagues: (1) loathsome sores on those with the mark of the beast, (2) the seas become blood and all sea creatures die, (3) rivers and springs become blood, (4) men are scorched and blaspheme God and do not repent, (5) the throne of the beast becomes darkness, men gnaw with their tongues in pain and blaspheme God, (6) the

Euphrates river is dried up for the coming of the kings of the east. These kings will join those for the coming battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:15).

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"

*And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great **Babylon was remembered before God**, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great (Revelation 16:18-21, emphasis added).*

The judgments of God, however, did not cause men to repent but only to blaspheme. Chapter 17 to 19 describes the judgment and fall of Babylon the great.

The Judgment and Fall of Babylon the Great. In Revelation 17:1-18 an angel describes to John the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication. The woman is seated on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemy having seven heads and ten horns. The woman holds a golden cup full of abominations of filthiness and fornication. On her forehead a name is written: "Mystery, Babylon, the Mother of Harlots and the abominations of the Earth." The woman is drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

The angel explains the mystery of the woman and the beast. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. The beast itself is also a king and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go into perdition. Ultimately, all of the kings will give their power and authority to the beast and make war with the Lamb (Jesus Christ). The Lamb will overcome them for "He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those *who are* with Him *are* called, chosen, and faithful."

The angel explains to John that the waters, where the harlot sits, "are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues." The kings hate the harlot but God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, giving their kingdoms to the beast until the words of God are fulfilled. The woman is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.

Babylon is mentioned six times in the book of Revelation (14:8, 16:19, 17:5, 18:2, 10, 21). Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots is identified with Babylon and the Babylonian Captivity of Israel in the Old Testament was presented in Chapter 24, *The Dark Ages*. The Church, under the Roman Empire became known as the Roman Catholic Church. Under the rule of emperors and popes in **Rome, the city on seven hills**, the church became captive to all of the wicked ways of Rome, not unlike Israel in captivity. The church, as Israel of old, became guilty of unfaithfulness leading to harlotry.

As the fall of Babylon was revealed to John he saw an angel coming down from heaven crying with a loud voice,

Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury (Revelation 18:1-3, emphasis added).

Then John heard a voice from heaven saying,

"Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. In

*the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.' Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And **she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her** (Revelation 18:4-8, emphasis added).*

The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived in luxury with the harlot will mourn when they see her burning. Merchants shall also mourn for her for no one buys their merchandise any longer. Her merchandise includes:

*... gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, **and bodies and souls of men.** (Revelation 18:12-13, emphasis added).*

The similarity between the Babylonian Captivity of Israel for its spiritual harlotry and that of the unfaithfulness and wickedness of the church under Rome is very clear. Babylon, as the mother of harlots, fostered false doctrines and practices, many of which have been adopted by various protestant churches following the reformation. The coming judgment of Babylon is a warning to churches who are unfaithful to God that they will face God in that day. The apostasy of the church, like Israel, will finally be judged by God.

*Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her! Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence **the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore** . The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore ... The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and **the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore ... for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth**" (Revelation 18:20-24, emphasis added).*

Great exultation is heard in Heaven over the judgment of Babylon, the mother of harlots..

*After these things John heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because **He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.**" Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" (Revelation 19:1-3, emphasis added).*

The tribulation years come to the end after the judgment of the great harlot Babylon. Jesus revealed that He would come again in power and great glory "immediately after the tribulation."

*... after the tribulation the sun and moon would not give their light and the stars would fall from heaven. Then **the Son of Man will appear coming in power and great glory.** All of the tribes (Israel?) will mourn when they see Him. **He will send His angels and gather His elect from one end of heaven to the other** (Matthew 24:28-31, emphasis added).*

Jesus told them to learn **the parable of the fig tree** (a symbol of Israel). When its branch begins to bud, summer is near. The **end time prophecies are near**. Jesus said that **no one knows the hour** of His coming except His Father. He said "**watch and be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect**" (Matthew 24:29-44, emphasis added).

The Coming of Christ in Glory

Jesus Christ came the first time, born of the virgin Mary, as the Savior. The return of Christ or His second coming consists of two events. He is coming in the clouds to rapture or catch up believers or his church and then He will come down on the Mount of Olives in great glory. There are innumerable references in the Old Testament relative to these events. The coming of

Christ in glory is also called "the Day of the Lord" when He comes with His saints as the King of kings and Lord of lords, to judge and make war. The apostle Paul describes that Day.

*... it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled **rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed** (II Thessalonians 1:6-10, emphasis added).*

Zechariah 14:1-4 indicates that Christ will come on the Mount of Olives, where He ascended, to do battle. John saw Him as the King of Kings, coming to judge and make war.

*Now I saw heaven opened, and **behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven ... followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS** (Revelation 19:11-16, emphasis added).*

When Jesus comes in power and great glory, He will judge those who have not obeyed the gospel of Christ and have persecuted the people of God. The Day of Christ's coming will not take place before a falling away comes and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition. This is no doubt the antichrist,

***Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God** ... then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming (II Thessalonians 2:4-8, emphasis added).*

The coming of Christ in glory, with His saints and angels as the armies of heaven, will be the beginning of the war of Armageddon, the bloodiest and most terrible of all the wars of the world since the beginning of time.

The War of Armageddon

When the Lord Jesus Christ comes in great glory and power as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, He will come when He is least expected, like a thief. When He comes, the armies of the world are gathered together in Armageddon against Him and His army. In the sixth bowl judgment, an angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. (Revelation 16:12-16). John saw,

***... I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. "Behold, I am coming as a thief." Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame. And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon** (Revelation 16:13-15, emphasis added).*

The angel explained a mystery to John,

*The beast that you saw ... is going to perdition. "The ten horns which you saw are **ten kings** who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as **kings with the beast**. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb,*

and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful” (Revelation 17:8-14, emphasis added).

The spirits of demons coming out of the dragon or Satan, began going out to the kings of the whole world to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. They gathered them to a place called Armageddon.

The Winepress. The Old Testament prophesies some of the details of the battle of Armageddon. The battle will take place in the Esdraelon plain, from Megiddo to the Kidron valley, a distance of about sixty miles. The watershed empties into the Kidron valley which lies between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. Megiddo lies in a strategic mountain pass between the plains of Sharon and Esdraelon. The name Megiddo enters into the composition of Armageddon. The Kidron valley is identified with the valley of Jehoshaphat. The Esdraelon Plain watersheds into the Kidron Valley, which is described as the winepress. So much blood will be shed during the battle that it will reach to the horses' bridle.

*And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.” So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And **the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs** (Revelation 14:18-20).*

The prophecy of Joel refers to the Kidron valley as the Valley of Jehoshaphat when God enters into judgment with the nations.

*... **I will also gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up My land ... for the LORD has spoken. Proclaim this among the nations: “Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, **Let all the men of war draw near, Let them come up ...” Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together** all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD. “Let the nations be wakened, and **come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations ... Come, go down; For the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great.” Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision judgment** (Joel 3:2-14, emphasis added).***

On the Day of the Lord, God will judge all of the nations who have gathered against God and against Israel. He will cast the beast (antichrist) and the false prophet into the lake of fire. John described the battle.

*And I saw **the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh** (Revelation 19:19-21, emphasis added).*

Ezekiel's prophecy of Gog and his armies from the far north coming against Israel was mentioned earlier under the time of Jacob's trouble (Ezekiel 38 and 39). A long description is given by him of God's judgment of Gog's armies and the armies of other nations. They will be buried in Israel.

The Valley of Hamon Gog. Ezekiel prophesied that God would bring Gog and his army to judgment, saying,

*And **I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus I will***

magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD (Ezekiel 38:22-23, emphasis added).

It will take seven months to bury Gog's armies and the armies of the world in the valley of Hamon Gog (the burial of Gog). The Lord God said,

It will come to pass in that day that I will give Gog a burial place there in Israel ... there they will bury Gog and all his multitude. Therefore they will call it the Valley of Hamon Gog. For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land all the people of the land will be burying ... they will set apart men regularly employed, with the help of a search party, to pass through the land and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search. The search party will pass through the land; and when anyone sees a man's bone, he shall set up a marker by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon Gog ... Thus they shall cleanse the land (Ezekiel 39:11-16, emphasis added).

It will take even longer to destroy all of the weapons of warfare. Those who dwell in the cities of Israel will set on fire and burn the weapons for seven years (Ezekiel 39:9).

God said He will set His glory among the nations, that the Gentiles will know that Israel was scattered because of their unfaithfulness, and that He has now gathered them back into their land, for He has poured out His Spirit on the house of Israel (Ezekiel 39:21-29).

Hell and the Lake of Fire

The Scriptures use a variety of words or terms in describing what happens to the body, soul, and spirit after physical death such as: the grave, Sheol, Hades, Gehenna, hell, paradise, and heaven, depending on a person's relationship to God. Heaven or Hell and the Lake of Fire are the final destinations of souls. Hell is a familiar word but the Lake of Fire is foreign to most people.

The first mention of the Lake of Fire in the Scriptures is in the book of Revelation, where it is referred to four times. After the battle of Armageddon the beast (antichrist) and the false prophet were cast alive into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20). A thousand years later, the dragon, or the devil, was also cast into the lake of fire, with them to be tormented day and night forever and forever (Revelation 20:10).

Satan Bound for One Thousand Years

The world of tomorrow will include the longest period of time in history. John saw an angel coming down from heaven, with the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, bound him for a thousand years and he cast him into the pit. He shut Satan up and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no longer, until the end of the thousand years were finished. Then he will be released for a little while (Revelation 20:1-3). During the thousand years Satan will no longer be a temptation to man.

The Millennial Reign of Christ

John saw thrones, and judgment was committed to those who sat upon them. He saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. They will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ (Revelation 20:4-6).

The Lord Jesus Christ will reign in Jerusalem as king and priest over the world and there will be a thousand years of peace for He will rule them with a rod of iron.

Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. The LORD has said to Me, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron. You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel." Now therefore, be wise, O kings. Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him (Psalm 2:1-12, emphasis added).

Life will be vastly different as the Prince of Peace, the Lord Jesus, rules over the earth in Jerusalem for a thousand years.

*No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but **the sinner** being one hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. "It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain," Says the LORD. (Isaiah 65:20-25).*

Even the animals shall live in peace.

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb. The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion will be together and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze together. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Year by year nations shall come to worship the Lord Jesus Christ as the King.

*And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from **year to year to worship the King**, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that **whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain.** If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16-18).*

Satan's Last Rebellion

After the thousand years have ended Satan will be released. He will go out to deceive the nations throughout the earth and gather them together to battle. They will surround the saints and the beloved city of Jerusalem. Fire will come down out of heaven from God and devour them. The devil, who deceived them, will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:10).

The Great White Throne Judgment

God is not only the Creator and Savior, He is also a judge. As written earlier, all believers will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, many judgments of God will take place during the tribulation period, and Babylon, the harlot church, will be judged. God's wrath against

unrighteousness and sin includes additional judgments: the judgment of the Nations, the judgment of the antichrist and the false prophet, and the judgment of Satan.

The judgment of the Great White Throne is the last and final judgment of God. John saw the throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them (Revelation 20:11). John said,

... I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 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. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:12-15).

The greatest judgment of all was the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary for the sins of mankind. Man can escape the Great White Throne Judgment if he repents, turns to God through faith in Christ for salvation. God in His love and mercy promised a way of salvation. Man has ignored and rejected salvation but God has been long suffering, patient and amazingly forgiving. Christ died to put away our sins and save us from judgment.

*... now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as **it is appointed for 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** (Hebrews 9:26-28, emphasis added).*

A new heaven and a new earth awaits all who have believed in Jesus Christ for salvation and have turned from the ways of man to the way of God.

*Come now, you who say, “Today or **tomorrow** we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make profit”; whereas **you do not know what will happen tomorrow**. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin (James 4:13-17, emphasis added).*

The New Heavens and The New Earth

The ultimate destiny of man is Heaven or Hell. Those who have accepted Jesus Christ by faith as their Savior will go to Heaven. Those who reject Him will end up in Hell. Jesus referred to the Kingdom of Heaven many times in His teaching. Heaven is the place of God's throne. Heaven is also described as other places, including paradise and the third heaven (II Corinthians 12:2, Luke 23:45, and Revelation 2:7). Heaven is distinguished from the "heavens" in Scripture.

The "heavens" which God created include the Sun, Moon, and stars (Genesis 1:6-19). God actually created the earth before He created the heavens. The present earth and the heavens will be destroyed and God will create new heavens and a new earth for His people to dwell in.

The New Heavens and The New Earth

The Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, in describing the judgment of God relative to Israel, his rebellious people, prophesied that God will create new heavens and a new earth. God said that Israel walked in a way that was not good. Nevertheless, in His mercy, God promised that He would not destroy them but bring forth descendants from Jacob and bless them, saying,

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying (Isaiah 65:17-19).

Jerusalem, mentioned in the prophesy, is no doubt indicative of the "New Jerusalem" which is described in Revelation 3, 21, and 22.

The later words of the prophecy (Isaiah 65:20-25), seem to refer to the thousand year reign of peace under Christ, because it also speaks of sinners and death.

Isaiah prophesies again relative to the new heavens and new earth in the following chapter.

"For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me," says the LORD, "so shall your descendants and your name remain. and it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD (Isaiah 66:22-23).

In speaking about the descendants of Jacob, they no doubt include all of Israel who have lived in faith before God.

The apostle Peter wrote about the coming of scoffers in the last days, who will say of Jesus Christ, "Where is the promise of His coming?" They point out that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (II Peter 3:3-4). Peter responds by saying,

*For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. **But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men** (II Peter 3:5-7, emphasis added).*

The judgment of the ungodly ways of man will be followed by the judgment and destruction of the present heavens and earth. Peter continued by saying,

*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; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 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 (II Peter 3:10-13, emphasis added).

Believers are promised a new earth, where righteousness dwells. Peter closes by encouraging believers to be steadfast before God and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Very little is said about the new heavens and the new earth. The new heavens will have no need of a sun or moon for the glory of God and the Lamb will illuminate and lighten it. There will be no night (Revelation 21:23-24). **Nations of saved people on the new earth** shall live in that light. **Kings on earth** will bring the glory and honor of the nations into the new Jerusalem.

There is no indication in the Scriptures as to who will live on the new earth. The church, as the bride of Christ, will obviously live in the New Jerusalem. It is not clear whether Old Testament saints like Abraham, Isaac, and all of Israel are in the church. The sealing of the 144,000 in the tribes of Israel, recorded in Revelation 7, appears to have taken place after the rapture of the church. It may be that these saints will inherit the earth and live upon it.

The New Jerusalem

The first mention of the New Jerusalem in the Scriptures is in the book of Revelation when Jesus revealed it to the apostle John in His message to the churches.

*Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. **He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* (Revelation 3:11-13, emphasis added).

Jesus indicated that it is the city of God, and that it will come out of heaven from God. The message is specifically to the churches. Later, John saw a vision of the new heaven and the new earth, and the New Jerusalem.

*Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. **Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.** And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "**Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.**" Then He who sat on the throne said, "**Behold, I make all things new**" (Revelation 21:1-5, emphasis added).*

God will dwell with His people in the New Jerusalem. It will be a place without death, sorrow, or pain. As the vision continued an angel revealed to John the words of God.

*"Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. **He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death**" (Revelation 21:5-8).*

The New Jerusalem, like the church, is described as the people of God and as a spiritual place. The church, similarly, is described as the temple of God and as the body of Christ. The New Jerusalem is described as a bride and as a city. As the vision continued an angel revealed to John the words of God.

*“Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the **Holy Jerusalem**, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with **twelve gates**, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are **the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel**: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of **the city had twelve foundations**, and on them were the **names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb** (Revelation 21:9-14, emphasis added).*

As the angel talked with John, he began to measure the city, its gate, and walls. The city measured twelve thousand furlongs (between fourteen and fifteen hundred miles). It seemed to be formed as a cube or triangle, being equal in length, breadth, and height. (Revelation 21:15-21). If it were to stand on the new earth it would project out an enormous distance. Instead, the city will probably be in space above the new heavens over the new earth. The city is described as a construction of many precious stones, with streets of gold. The city will shine in great glory.

The Glory of the New Jerusalem

The New Jerusalem will have no sun or moon for light, for the glory of God and the light of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ will give it light. There will be no night there. There will be no temple in the city for Almighty God and the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, are its temple.

*But I saw no temple in it, for **the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple**. 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. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life** (Revelation 21:22-27, emphasis added).*

The nations of those saved will walk in light as the glory of God illuminates the city and the Lamb is its light. The kings of the earth and the nations will bring honor and glory into it. No man of wicked ways shall be in the city to defile it. Only those in the Lamb's Book of life shall be there.

The angel then revealed to John a river of life, trees of life, the throne of God, and the throne of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus.

The Throne of God and the Lamb

The throne of God has a river of life which proceeds from it, with trees of life on each side. God's servants shall serve Him and they shall see His face and reign with Him forever.

*And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but **the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever** (Revelation 22:1-5, emphasis added).*

The angel concluded by saying to John, “These words *are* faithful and true” (Revelation 22:6). The Scriptures continue by saying,

And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. “Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Revelation 22:6-7).

The new creation begins for each believer as he becomes a new creation in Christ and becomes a child of God.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (II Corinthians 5:17).

The Lord Jesus Christ, as the captain of their salvation, is bringing many sons to glory, where they will be in the presence of God and see His face in glory (Hebrews 2:10). Satan will forever be in the lake of fire. There will be no more demons. The wicked ways and unbelief of man will no longer be, as saints walk in the way of Christ and in the way of God. Truly, eternity will be a place where righteousness and holiness dwells.

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 (I John 3:2, emphasis added).

God created man for His glory. When people sinned against God and went the way of man, God, in His love, mercy and grace, provided a way of salvation, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The way of man is death. The way of God and of His Christ is life. Man, ultimately, chooses life or death.

The Way of Man or the Way of God?

Throughout the Bible, the Word of God reveals the way of man in conflict with the way of God. In the beginning of time, when God created the earth, and man upon it, everything He created was good, including man. God created Adam and gave him a wife, Eve, and placed them in the garden of Eden, a paradise upon the earth. God created man with a free will, giving him choices. God placed two trees in Eden, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God instructed the man and the woman that they could freely eat of any tree in the garden, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned them that in the day that they ate of that tree, they would die (Genesis 1 and 2).

God has an arch enemy, Satan. He came into the garden one day, in the form of a serpent, and tempted Adam and Eve to eat of the tree. Satan lied and said that they would not die but be like God, knowing good and evil. They yielded to Satan's temptation and ate of the tree, disobeying God and brought sin and death into the world (Genesis 1:3-13). God, however, immediately promised a way of salvation through the seed of the woman.

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" (Genesis 3:14-16, emphasis added).

The seed of the woman is revealed in the Scripture as Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). The Lord Jesus conquered Satan and provided salvation through His death at Calvary. Satan, meanwhile, continued to tempt man. He challenged God relative to His servant Job (Job 1 and 2). He also moved David to sin in taking a census (I Chronicles 21:1). He opposed Joshua, the high priest, and God rebuked him (Zechariah 3:1-2). These are the only four references to Satan in the Old Testament. He is mentioned over eighty times in the New Testament, as Satan or the Devil. He continued to tempt man to sin against God and man continued living a life of sin.

The Sinful Way of Man

The **disobedience** of Adam and Eve led to **murder** when their son killed his brother Abel. His act is called **the way of Cain** (Jude 11). As the population grew man became more wicked.

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Genesis 6:5, emphasis added).

The Wickedness of Man. Man became increasingly **wicked, violent, and corrupt**, and after fifteen hundred years God destroyed them with a flood. During that period only three men are recorded in the Scriptures as righteous and pleasing to God, Abel, Enoch, and Noah (Genesis 4:4, 5:24, and 6:9, Hebrews 11:1-7). The flood destroyed everyone except Noah and his family, who were saved through an Ark which God instructed him to build.

After the flood new nations arose and man turned to idolatry. God called Abram, the son of Terah, an idolater (Joshua 24:2), and promised to make of him a new nation and that all of the other nations of the world would be blessed by his seed. The seed is Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). Abram believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6). He began to follow God, build altars, and sacrifice to Him. God changed Abram's name to Abraham (Father of many nations). The account of the lives of Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson

Jacob, and how God worked with them, to bring forth the nation of Israel is described in Genesis 18 through 40. God changed Jacob's name to Israel and his descendants became known as the children of Israel or Israelites and they became the nation or people of God.

The Rebellious Way of God's People Israel. Jacob and seventy of his descendants, the Israelites, went down into Egypt during the famine (Genesis 46 to 50). Over a period of over four hundred years they multiplied greatly and the Egyptians put them in severe bondage. They cried unto God, and through Moses were set free. Moses led them to Mount Sinai where he gave them the Law and the Ten Commandments. God had them build a tabernacle, gave them a priesthood, and ways to worship Him through various sacrifices. Meanwhile, they **complained and rebelled**, built a golden calf to worship, and wanted to return to Egypt (Exodus 1 to 40).

After leaving Sinai, twelve spies were sent into Canaan and all brought an evil report except Caleb and Joshua. **The Israelites rebelled against God and rejected His command to go** into the land. God extended their time to forty years in the desert and all of that generation died in the wilderness except Joshua and Caleb who were faithful to God. (Numbers 13 to 14). After Korah rebelled, Moses disobeyed God at Kadesh and was not allowed into Canaan (Numbers 20).

Joshua led the second generation of Israelites into Canaan and was victorious over thirty-one kings. Before he died Joshua said,

*"Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! **And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve**, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But **as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.**" (Joshua 24:14-15, emphasis added).*

After Joshua died the Israelites turned to **idolatry**, failed in their conquest of Canaan, and were conquered instead by other nations. God gave them judges such as Gideon, Samson, and Samuel to lead and deliver them when they cried to Him for help (Judges and I Samuel).

Finally, after four hundred and fifty years, **the Israelites asked Samuel to make them a king** to rule over them and fight their battles (I Samuel 8:4-30). This was very displeasing to Samuel, and to God, but God gave them a king. A man named Saul became the first king. After Saul became king, Samuel said to the Israelites,

*Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the LORD, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that **your wickedness is great**, which you have done in the sight of the LORD in **asking a king for yourselves** (I Samuel 12:16-18, emphasis added).*

Saul became disobedient to God and David was anointed king in his place. Saul tried to kill David many times before he himself was killed in battle. When **David became king, he was a faithful ruler until he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed in battle**, and when he allowed Satan to move him and took a census of Israel.

Later, David's own sons rose up against him. Solomon, David's son became the next king. He prayed to God for wisdom but married many foreign women who turned his heart to **idols**. During the reign of his son, Rehoboam, the northern tribes rebelled and Jeroboam became their king, in what became known as the kingdom of Israel. Jeroboam set up **idols** in Babel and Dan and led the people into idolatry. All of the eighteen kings who followed him led the people in following his wicked ways. The southern tribes became known as the kingdom of Judah. Only a few of the southern kings followed the Lord.

The kingdom period lasted about four hundred years. During that time, **the people worshipped Baal and other false gods "on every high hill and under every green tree."** God's own people turned to all kinds of wickedness, worse than the nations around them. They

even slew their children as offerings to Baal. God sent many prophets to them over the years, warning them that he would take away their kingdoms and send them into captivity. They did not heed the prophets and the kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria. Later, the kingdom of Judah was conquered by Babylon. Jerusalem and the temple were burned and the people went into captivity for seventy years. (I & II Samuel and I & II Kings).

Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Babylon was the first of four world kingdoms, all of whom worshipped various **idols and false gods**. Nebuchadnezzar tried to force the Israelites to worship his gods. Haman, under King Ahasuerus of Persia, attempted to kill all the Israelites, or Jews as they became known, because they followed God. Later, Cyrus, the king of Persia allowed the Israelites to return to their land and rebuild the temple of God and the city of Jerusalem. **Of the remnant of Jews who returned, many were unfaithful to God and married pagan women** (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel). Under Alexander the Great, Greece arose as a world nation. They had **many gods** named after the planets and stars. The next world power, Rome, followed Greece in their ways. Rome was ruling over the land of Israel when Jesus came into the world.

Israel Rejected and Crucified their Promised Savior! God's promise of a Savior was repeated over and over again, with many details, throughout the Old Testament, especially in the book of Isaiah and in the book of Daniel. The coming of Jesus as the Messiah or Christ fulfilled over three hundred Old Testament prophecies as described in Chapter 18. During His ministry thousands followed Him because of His teaching, preaching repentance, and His miracles. Nevertheless, many attempts were made to kill Him, beginning with King Herod at the time of Jesus' birth. The scribes and Pharisees particularly hated Him because He charged them with **hypocrisy** in their doctrines and practices. Finally, after three years of His ministry, His enemies falsely charged Him with blasphemy and rebellion against Rome. Although Pilate, the Roman governor found no fault in Jesus, he yielded to His accusers and had Jesus crucified.

Many Disciples of Christ Forsook Him. During the closing years of His ministry many of Christ's followers **forsook** Him (John 6:60-66). **Satan tempted Judas to betray Him and Peter to deny Him** (John 13:27. Luke 22:31). When Jesus was arrested all of His disciples forsook Him (Mark 14:50-52). Through the centuries Christians have continued **forsaking Christ**.

The Apostate Way of His Church. The books of I Corinthians and Revelation reveal that the church, influenced by Satan, quickly began to ignore the Word of God and the teaching of Jesus, leading to the Roman church, great apostasy of the "dark ages", and denominationalism today. Ecumenical efforts have failed to unite the church Biblically. Leadership and ministry continues to ignore the teaching of Jesus and the book of I Corinthians. When people are asked if they are saved, they respond by saying, "I hope so." Others say that they are trying to keep the Ten Commandments. The Law, however, does not save from sin but only reveals sin (Romans 7:7). If one were able to keep the whole law but stumble in one, "he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Still others say that they hope that their good works will outweigh their bad and that they will be saved. The Word of God makes it very clear that good works are not sufficient to save our souls. How can man know the way of God, however, if he does not read His word? Many people continue to deceive themselves.

There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death (Proverbs 14:12).

The Sinful, Rejecting Way of Man Continues Today. It is evident that man has continued in sin and wickedness unto the present time although God has warned throughout the Scriptures that he needs to repent of his sins and turn to God. The wicked ways of man are described in detail in the book of Romans. It states that God has revealed Himself to man so **that all men not**

only know God but have deliberately chosen to disobey Him knowing also of the coming judgment of God. This has revealed God's wrath. God has revealed Himself in creation, through His law, and in man's conscience.

*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.** Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man ... (Romans 1:18-23, emphasis added).*

The way of man in the world today trusts in philosophy and science. How can the way of God be known if we do not read His Word? Many who do read it, yield to Satan, and do not believe it. Many claim to be atheists. The Scriptures say,

***The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."** They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; there is none who does good (Psalm 53:1, emphasis added).*

There is no greater fool than one who fools or deceives himself. There is actually no such person as an atheist. To claim to be one is to live in denial, believing Satan's lie. The result of man's denial of God and refusal to follow His way has caused God to give them up to wickedness. The book of Romans reveals the wickedness of man and God's response.

***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. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. **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; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them** (Romans 1:24-32, emphasis added).*

Man not only knows there is a God but he knows that he will have to face the righteous judgment of God for his sin. The book of Romans continues by revealing that both Jews and Gentiles (other nations) have a **conscience** relative to God, with or without His Law. No one is without sin. (Romans 2 and 3). **If a man breaks one of the Ten Commandments, he is guilty of all** (James 2:10).

It is very evident that there is great wickedness throughout the nations all over the world. **Many still serve idols and false gods.** God's own people, Israel and the church, have committed wickedness constantly, **resisting and rebelling** against the truth of God. Over and over again the Israelites stirred up the wrath of God and in anger He punished them in various ways. **Israel today, as a nation, still rejects Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ.**

The reason man yields to Satan and sins is because he is flesh, not spirit. God said of man, **"My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh ...** (Genesis 6:3, emphasis added).

The New Testament describes the way of man as the works of the flesh.

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like ... those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

Jesus told Nicodemus, "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." He added that he had to be born of the Spirit to see the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again" (John 3:6-7, emphasis added).

If a man has not been born of the Spirit, he is still only in the flesh. While man may live physically, he is dead in trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1) and needs to be made alive spiritually. Man must repent of his sins and turn to God for redemption, mercy, and salvation from hell and the Lake of Fire. If a man is not redeemed, he will also die a second death, spiritually, under the judgment of God.

The Righteous Way of God

God is righteous in all His ways. His judgments are based on truth (Romans 2:2). God is holy. He cannot tolerate sin and judges the wickedness in unsaved sinners, in His own people, Israel or Jews, and His church.

God Judges Wickedness. All sin will come under the judgment of God, but will be judged in different ways. Physical death is one judgment for sin. The final judgment of the unrepentant, unbelieving sinner leads to eternal death, hell, and the Lake of Fire.

The wicked shall be turned into hell, And all the nations that forget God (Psalm 9:17).

*Then Death and Hades were cast into the **lake of fire**. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the **lake of fire*** (Revelation 20:14-15, emphasis added).

God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

"As I live," says the Lord GOD, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11, emphasis added).

All believers in Jesus Christ will face the judgment seat of Christ and will receive rewards or loss of rewards (Romans 14:10, II Corinthians 5:9-10).

In summary, man has chosen to be disobedient, murderous, wicked in his imaginations, violent, corrupters, complainers, rebellious, adulterous, betrayers, unbelieving, unfaithful, idolatrous, and rejecters of God and of Jesus Christ. Only a few have followed God in faith. In order for man to be redeemed and saved from sin and eternal death he must repent of his sins and turn to Jesus Christ in faith (Acts 20:21, Hebrews 6:1). To be saved from hell and the Lake of Fire, he must be redeemed and saved from sin and the curse of law. He must repent of his sins and turn to God for mercy and salvation through Jesus Christ.

The Way of God in the Old Testament. God is righteous and just but He is also loving, merciful, and forgiving. He has numberless attributes. God provided a way to be redeemed and saved from death and hell as soon as man first sinned in Eden by promising a Savior (Genesis 3:15). Sin can only be atoned for through sacrifices to God. In the Old Testament, innocent lambs and other sacrifices were offered on altars of fire before God. The life of an animal was given to redeem and preserve the life of the sinner. Later, God provided priests and a temple to guide in worship and sacrifice. This form of worship and these sacrifices, however, were only temporary and symbolic of the perfect sacrifice and worship before God, made possible through

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9 & 10). The way of God is wonderful and perfect through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, because the sinner can be redeemed and saved from death and enter a totally new spiritual life through faith in Him. Jesus is the Messiah or Christ promised throughout the Old Testament.

The Way of God through the Lord Jesus Christ

The gospel of John introduces Jesus Christ as God and as life. He became flesh and came into the world in grace and truth (John 1:1-17). In the book of John, the Lord Jesus Christ revealed Himself seven times as the I AM, a title of God in Exodus 3:14. One day He told His disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them with Him. Thomas said that they did not know where He was going so how could they 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" (John 14:6, emphasis added).

Jesus is the Only Way to Salvation and Eternal Life. Jesus demonstrated by His life the ways of God: truth, love, mercy, compassion, holiness, obedience, justice, humility, peace, forgiveness, power, provision, patience, and more. He is **the bread of life** (John 6:33-51), the **light of life** (John 8:12, and **the resurrection and the life** (John 11:25, emphasis added). **He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly** (John 10:10). Jesus came into the world to save sinners (I Timothy 1:15). He is the only way of salvation.

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Jesus Came into the World as a Savior and Redeemer. Jesus came into the world as the Son of God from Heaven. He took on the form of a man, born by the virgin Mary, through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-35). His name was called Jesus because He would save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). **Jesus came into the world to save sinners** (I Timothy 1:15) **and redeem them from sin and the curse of the Law** (Galatians 3:13). God sent Him in love.

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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16-17, emphasis added).

The redemption of man from sin is costly. Jesus Christ paid the penalty. He redeemed man by taking his place under the judgment of God.

*None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him - For **the redemption of their souls is costly**, and it shall cease forever - that he should continue to live eternally, and not see the Pit (Psalm 49:7-9, emphasis added).*

*... **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** (I Peter 1:18-19, emphasis added).*

The Judgment of Christ. Jewish leaders hated Jesus and made many efforts to kill Him. Finally, when Jesus' disciple Judas betrayed Him, they arrested and brought Him to trial before the Jewish leaders, where He was falsely accused of many things worthy of death. He was also taken before Governor Pilate and King Herod. Neither found anything in Him worthy of death. During his trial, He was slapped, beaten, and stripped of His clothing by soldiers, shamed, and mocked. After Pilate was finally persuaded to have Jesus crucified, He was scourged or whipped.

The Crucifixion of Christ. The trial and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, instigated by the Jewish leaders, was God's judgment and penalty for the sins of man. The Jews wanted Him to be

crucified and thus cursed. God, however, used them to fulfill His own plan for Jesus to die in man's place. He took away our sins and our curse by being made sin and by being cursed for us.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (II Corinthians 5:21, emphasis added).

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:13-14, emphasis added).

... Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people ... (Titus 2:13-14, emphasis added).

... Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father ... (Galatians 1:3-5, emphasis added).

The Suffering and Death of Christ. During the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, though He was innocent, He suffered more than any man. He suffered for man's sin. He was nailed in shame to a cross where He suffered in agony for six hours before dying (Matthew 26 & 27, Mark 14 & 15, Luke 22 & 23, John 18 & 19). As **the Lamb of God**, even during His suffering and agony, Jesus showed love and compassion for others by the words that He said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), His concern for His mother, "woman, behold your son" (John 19:26-27), and the thief beside Him, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The Old Testament prophesied of His sacrificial suffering and death. His face and body were beaten more than any man.

Behold, My Servant ... His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men ... (Isaiah 52:13-14, emphasis added).

As the Lamb of God, Jesus became the supreme sacrifice for all of the sins of all mankind. While His own people, in rejection and hate, crucified Him, God the Father was judging Him for their sins. His soul as well as His body was an offering to God.

He is despised and rejected by men ... smitten by God ... He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities ... by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all ... He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth ... He was cut off from the land of the living ... For the transgressions of My people He was stricken ... He had done no violence ... Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him ... He has put Him to grief ... His soul an offering for sin ... My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities ... He poured out His soul unto death ... He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:3-12, emphasis added).

The words of Jesus on the cross were directed to His Father. Psalm 22 prophesies His thoughts as He said them. Suddenly He was all alone and cried out,

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent. But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; They trusted in You, and were not ashamed. But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" (Psalm 22:1-8, emphasis added).

Jesus continued by describing His enemies that surrounded Him, gaping at Him, as His body sagged out of joint on the cross as God brought Him to the dust of death. His heart melted because of what His enemies had done.

They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots (Psalm 22:16-18) .

The prophecy closes describing the worship which God will receive from all nations because of the sacrifice made by His Son, as the Lamb of God, and how they will remember what Jesus has done for generations to come.

All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD's, and He rules over the nations ... All those who go down to the dust Shall bow before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive. A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation, They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this (Psalm 22:27-31, emphasis added).

The last words of the Lord Jesus, on the cross, were directed to His Father, in triumph, "**It is finished!**" (John 19:30, emphasis added), and in submission to Him in death, "**Father, Into Your hands I commit My spirit**" (Luke 23:46).

When Jesus yielded up His spirit and died, the veil of the temple was torn in two, there was an earthquake, and graves were opened. When the Roman centurion and guards saw what was happening they feared greatly saying, "**Truly this was the Son of God!**" (Matthew 27:50-54, emphasis added).

Jesus suffered and died for us. He bore our sins so that we might live.

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us ... Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth ... who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed (I Peter 2:21-24 emphasis added).

The Resurrection of Christ. Jesus, in foretelling that He would be crucified, promised that on the third day He would rise again (Matthew 20:19, Mark 8:31 & 34, Luke 18:33). After Lazarus died, Jesus told his sister Martha that he would rise again. Martha responded by saying, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (John 11:23-24). 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 (John 11:25, emphasis added).

After Jesus arose from the dead He appeared to over five hundred disciples over a period of forty days. He commanded His apostles to go and make disciples of all nations, saying,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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 (Matthew 28:18-20, emphasis added).

After commanding them to wait for the Holy Spirit and power, Jesus led them out to the Mount of Olives and ascended to heaven before their eyes.

A New Life for the Sinner. The death and resurrection of Christ provides a new life for sinners. The book of Romans makes it very clear that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:9-23). Death has been the fate of all men from the time of Adam. Nevertheless, eternal life is offered to those who believe in Jesus Christ. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus ... " (Romans 6:23). This is only possible through rebirth. One night a Pharisee came to Jesus and Jesus told him that unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Jesus explained that men are born of flesh but need to be born of the Spirit (John 3:1-8). Jesus continued by saying,

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 (John 3:14-16, emphasis added).

He also said,

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 everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed (John 3:17-20, emphasis added).

When Jesus said that the Son of Man must be lifted up, He also said, "I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself (John 12:32). He had explained earlier, saying "unless a grain of **wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain**" (John 12:24). Jesus not only died for our sins but He rose again so that we could die and rise again in Him. Jesus said, "**Because I live**, you will **live** also" (John 14:19). Earlier He had said, "**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live** (John 11:25). Water baptism represents the believer's death and new life in Christ (Romans 6:1-10).

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus ascended into Heaven, the Holy Spirit came down, in a rushing mighty wind and tongues of fire, upon one hundred believers who were gathered in Jerusalem and they began to speak of the wonderful works of God in many languages (Acts 2:1-11). John the Baptist had said,

I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16, emphasis added).

Jews, who had come to Jerusalem from many countries, were astonished by what they heard, wondering what was happening. Peter preached about the promise of the Holy Spirit and about Jesus, His crucifixion, how God raised Him, and that He was both Lord and Christ. When the people heard this they were cut to the heart and asked "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:14-37). Peter said,

... 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 (Acts 2:38-49, emphasis added).

Four thousand souls were converted to Christ, believers were baptized, and the church was born (Acts 2:14-47).

Conversion to Christ. Just as it was necessary for Jesus to be lifted up, crucified, and to die it is also necessary for every sinner to be converted or born again in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said,

Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3, emphasis added).

After the day of Pentecost, as Peter and John went to the temple, Peter healed a man, lame from birth, in the name of Jesus, amazing onlookers and Peter again preached the Christ to them and gave them the same message of their need for conversion.

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,

whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3:19-21, emphasis added).

The New Life in Christ. When a sinner becomes saved by faith in Jesus Christ He is born again of the Spirit of God and becomes a child of God. Jesus Christ lives in him through the Holy Spirit. The Bible says,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (II Corinthians 5:17, emphasis added).

... you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you ... (Romans 8:9, emphasis added).

The new life in Christ includes many blessings. Christians have eternal life (John 3:16). They become members of the body of Christ and of His church. They have a new love relationship with God and fellow believers (I John 1:3). They are gifted for ministry in His church as royal and holy priests (I Corinthians 12 and I Peter 2:5-9). The fruit of the Spirit becomes manifest in their lives (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) as they live in the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25). They are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). They become witnesses for Christ to a lost world (Matthew 24:14). They have an inheritance in Heaven (I Peter 1:3-4). One day the Lord Jesus will take them as many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10). Meanwhile, Christians are to walk in the Spirit, not fulfilling the desires of the flesh (Romans 8:1-4, Galatians 5:16).

A New Way of Worship. The Old Testament way of worship consisted of a man-made tabernacle or temple, a human priesthood, and animal sacrifices. Once a year, on the day of atonement, the high priest, with the blood of an animal, entered the holiest before God. The New Testament way of worship in Christ is on a more spiritual level.

Christ came as High Priest ... with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:11-14, emphasis added).

The sacrifice of Christ was far greater because He entered into heaven itself, before the presence of God, with His own blood, to obtain an eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 9:22-28). Through the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, we are invited to come boldly into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:19-25, emphasis added).

The Fulfillment of the Will of God. The Lord Jesus came to do the will of God, yielding His body as a sacrifice for our sins and to sanctify or make holy those who come to Him in faith (Hebrews 10:5-10). God's will is for all men to be saved.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and

men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (I Timothy 2:3-6, emphasis added).

God is longsuffering, "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (II 2 Peter 3:9, emphasis added). God is **"the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe"** (I Timothy 4:10, emphasis added).

Israel still rejects the will of God for them (Luke 7:30). Jesus said, "he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me"(Luke 10:16). Paul's prayer to God for Israel "is that they may be saved, for whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Romans 10:1-14, emphasis added).

Faith Pleases God

The book of Hebrews lists some of the few men who pleased God during the Old Testament years. The list includes men of faith such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses, and how they acted in relation to God. The chapter begins with a definition of faith.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible (Hebrew 11:1-3, emphasis added).

The Scripture continues by stating,

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6, emphasis added).

Faith and belief are variations of the same Greek word in the Scriptures. The New Testament explains the necessity of faith for salvation.

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 (Ephesians 2:8-9, emphasis added).

The New Testament teaches that each person must believe or have faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved from death and hell. The way of God is revealed completely through His Son.

The Way of Man or the Way of God?

God created man in His own image and likeness, for His glory (Genesis 1:26, I Corinthians 11:7). The way of God is in righteousness (Genesis 18:10) and holiness (Exodus 15:11). Man, however, beginning with Adam, has walked in his own way. Man's ways seem right to him but lead to sin and death (Proverbs 14:2). God has made it very clear in His Word that man's thoughts and ways are not His thoughts and ways.

"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" (Isaiah 55:8-9, emphasis added).

Depending on man's response to the way of salvation offered by God through Jesus Christ, the ultimate destiny of man is either Heaven or Hell and the Lake of Fire. It is either eternal life or the second death (Revelation 20:6,14, and Revelation 21:8). The Great White Throne Judgment is the final judgment of God. The books are opened, judging the works of man, along with the "Book of Life." Anyone not found written in that book, will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death (Revelation 20:11-15). Those found written in the "Book of Life" will live forever with the Lord Jesus Christ in the glory of Heaven (Hebrews 2:10). There will be no more temptations by Satan, no more sin, sorrow, sickness, or death in Heaven (Revelation 21:4).

Throughout the Scriptures God has progressively revealed the way of salvation from sin and death through faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Some have accepted or received Christ as their Savior through faith. Others have rejected Him in unbelief.

God continues to invite sinners to come to Christ through the gospel and through the Holy Spirit. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the world to convict men of their sin.

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 . (John 16:8-11, emphasis added).

Christians are called to preach the gospel and witness for Christ to a lost world, in the hope that some might be persuaded to believe in Christ, appealing to their conscience and fear of God's judgment.

*Knowing, therefore, the **terror of the Lord**, we **persuade men**; but we are well known to **God**, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. (II Corinthians 5:1, emphasis added).*

Many, however, are unwilling to come to Christ (Matthew 22:2-3, Matthew 23:37, John 5:40). They **resist the truth** and the Holy Spirit (II Timothy 3:8 & 4:15, Acts 7:51). As the children of Israel were not willing to obey God in the wilderness (Leviticus 26:21), many of the unsaved, as well as the children of God, and the church, are not willing to follow His way today. Jesus said,

*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. **But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life** (John 5:39-40, emphasis added).*

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! **How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!** (Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34).*

God's own people, the children of Israel, after two thousand years without a temple, priesthood, or sacrifice, still reject the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Many in the church, which is hopelessly divided, have followed the doctrines of man and have rejected the teaching of Jesus and I Corinthians on the truths of salvation, leadership, ministry, and worship. There is a critical need to return to the Word of God, in repentance, faith, and obedience.

Joshua challenged the children of Israel in Canaan to choose whom to serve, the way of man and idolatry, or God. We need to make that choice today.

*Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, **choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve** But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods ..." (Joshua 24:14-16, emphasis added).*

God has Given Man a Choice: Life or Death

Thousands of years ago, on the Sinai desert, God warned the Israelites that they would perish and not possess the promised land if they did not make the right choice.

*I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, **that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them** (Deuteronomy 30:19-20, emphasis added).*

Man still has that choice today, life or death, Heaven or Hell and the Lake of Fire. The way of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is still available to all. Anyone can be saved today. The word of God says,

*In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you. **Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*** (II Corinthians 6:2, emphasis added).

The way of salvation is still a gift of grace, by faith and not works (Ephesians 2:8-9). As the apostle Paul told the jailer in Philippi, " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ... (Acts 16:31). Righteousness and justification comes by believing or faith.

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 (Romans 5:1-2, emphasis added).

Salvation brings new life. The Word of God describes the wondrous transformation that takes place when sinners are born again by faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit.

*And you **He made alive,** who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others* (Ephesians 2:1-3, emphasis added).

God's message to Israel is one of peace and hope.

*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the **LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.** Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart* (Jeremiah 29:11-13, emphasis added).

*If **My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land*** (II Chronicles 7:14, emphasis added).

God's message to all sinners is one of mercy and pardon.

*Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the **LORD, And He will have mercy on him; and to our God, For He will abundantly pardon*** (Isaiah 55:7, emphasis added).

The Word of God ends with a free invitation to come for whoever is willing.

*And the Spirit and the bride say, "**Come!**" And let him who hears say, "**Come!**" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely* (Revelation 22:17, emphasis added).

The destiny of Man is determined by his response to God's invitation: to reject it and spend eternity in Hell and the Lake of Fire with Satan and demons or to accept it and spend eternity in the glory of Heaven, enjoying the love of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Redemption is free, yet paid at great cost, because of the great love of God and Christ for man.

*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).

*... **God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*** (Romans 5:8, emphasis added).

*... **Jesus Christ, who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood ...*** (Revelation 1:4-6, emphasis added)

... Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father ... (Galatians 1:3-5, emphasis added).

Jesus, during His ministry, described two ways before man, the broad way and the narrow way. The broad gate leads to destruction and the narrow gate is the way life.

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matthew 7:13-14, emphasis added).

Why would any person be so foolish as to choose the way to destruction instead of the way that leads to life? This was the choice made by Adam and Eve in Eden and the choice people have made throughout the centuries.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23-24, emphasis added).

Scripture Index

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|------------------|---------|------------------|--------|
| Genesis 1:1-27 | 7 | Genesis 6:8-9 | 18, 21 | Genesis 17:15-16 | 29 |
| Genesis 1 & 2 | 247 | Genesis 6:9 | 247 | Genesis 17:17-18 | 29 |
| Genesis 1:3-13 | 247 | Genesis 6:11-12 | 18 | Genesis 17:19-21 | 29 |
| Genesis 1:6-19 | 243 | Genesis 6:12 | 2 | Genesis 18:1-15 | 30 |
| Genesis 1:20 | 1 | Genesis 6:13-14 | 18 | Genesis 18:1-10 | 31 |
| Genesis 1:26 | 257 | Genesis 6:17-21 | 18 | Genesis 18 to 40 | 248 |
| Genesis 1:28 | 7, 221 | Genesis 6:22 | 18 | Genesis 18:8 | 220 |
| Genesis 1:31 | 1 | Genesis 7:1 | 19 | Genesis 18:9-15 | 30 |
| Genesis 2:1-15 | 7 | Genesis 7:4 | 19 | Genesis 18:10 | 257 |
| Genesis 2:7-25 | 221 | Genesis 7:5 | 19 | Genesis 18:17-19 | 30, 38 |
| Genesis 2:15 | 221 | Genesis 7:6 | 21 | Genesis 18:20-21 | 30 |
| Genesis 2:16-17 | 7, 221 | Genesis 7:16 | 19 | Genesis 19:1 | 30 |
| Genesis 2:17 | 8 | Genesis 7:21-24 | 19 | Genesis 19:12-24 | 31 |
| Genesis 2:17-3:19 | 225 | Genesis 8:20 | 24 | Genesis 19:4-11 | 31 |
| Genesis 2:18-24 | 7 | Genesis 8:21 | 21 | Genesis 19:24 | 32 |
| Genesis 3:1 | 7 | Genesis 9:1 | 21 | Genesis 19:26 | 31 |
| Genesis 3:1-7 | 7 | Genesis 9:20-25 | 21 | Genesis 19:30-38 | 31 |
| Genesis 3:8-13 | 7 | Genesis 9:28-29 | 21 | Genesis 21:1-7 | 31 |
| Genesis 3:8 | 12 | Genesis 9:28 | 23 | Genesis 21:1-5 | 31 |
| Genesis 3:13 | 37 | Genesis 10 | 21, 113 | Genesis 21:10 | 31 |
| Genesis 3:14-16 | 247 | Genesis 10 & 11 | 113 | Genesis 22:1-10 | 31 |
| Genesis 3:15 | 7, 10, 17, 251 | Genesis 10:8-12 | 22, 27 | Genesis 22:11-14 | 32 |
| Genesis 3:16 | 8 | Genesis 11 | 21 | Genesis 22:15-18 | 32 |
| Genesis 3:17-19 | 8 | Genesis 11 | 22 | Genesis 22:18 | 150 |
| Genesis 3:22-24 | 2 | Genesis 11:6-9 | 22, 224 | Genesis 23:1-2 | 33 |
| Genesis 3:22 | 8 | Genesis 11:10-11 | 21 | Genesis 25:1-4 | 29 |
| Genesis 3:23-24 | 8 | Genesis 11:11 | 23 | Genesis 25:7 | 33 |
| Genesis 4:1-2 | 13 | Genesis 11:24-32 | 22 | Genesis 25:20-26 | 33 |
| Genesis 4:4-5 | 13 | Genesis 11:31 | 24 | Genesis 25:23 | 33 |
| Genesis 4:4 | 14, 24, 247 | Genesis 12:1 | 22 | Genesis 25:29-34 | 33 |
| Genesis 4:6-7 | 13 | Genesis 12:1-3 | 24, 96 | Genesis 26:1-2 | 33 |
| Genesis 4:8-9 | 13 | Genesis 12:2-30 | 30 | Genesis 26:3-5 | 33 |
| Genesis 4:10-12 | 13 | Genesis 12:4-8 | 24 | Genesis 26:24-25 | 34 |
| Genesis 4:13-14 | 14 | Genesis 12:8 | 24 | Genesis 26:34-35 | 34 |
| Genesis 4:16-17 | 14 | Genesis 12:10-20 | 24 | Genesis 27:1-29 | 34 |
| Genesis 4:18-24 | 14 | Genesis 13:12 | 24 | Genesis 27:30-42 | 34 |
| Genesis 4:20-24 | 14 | Genesis 13:14-17 | 24 | Genesis 27:41-44 | 34 |
| Genesis 4:25 | 17 | Genesis 14:1-7 | 27 | Genesis 28:1-2 | 34 |
| Genesis 4:26 | 17 | Genesis 14:1-3 | 32 | Genesis 28:3-4 | 34 |
| Genesis 5:3 | 10 | Genesis 14:8-12 | 27 | Genesis 28:13-15 | 34 |
| Genesis 5:4 | 10 | Genesis 14:18-20 | 27 | Genesis 28:16-21 | 34, 36 |
| Genesis 5:5 | 10 | Genesis 14:22-23 | 27 | Genesis 29:31-35 | 35 |
| Genesis 5:21-24 | 17 | Genesis 15:1-7 | 28 | Genesis 30:1-24 | 35 |
| Genesis 5:24 | 247 | Genesis 15:6 | 28, 247 | Genesis 30:25-43 | 35 |
| Genesis 5:29 | 18 | Genesis 15:12-21 | 28 | Genesis 31:1-2 | 35 |
| Genesis 6:1-4 | 17 | Genesis 15:13-16 | 37 | Genesis 31:3 | 35 |
| Genesis 6:3 | 250 | Genesis 15:13-14 | 50 | Genesis 31:5-7 | 35 |
| Genesis 6:5-7 | 18 | Genesis 17:1-27 | 28 | Genesis 31:6-7 | 35 |
| Genesis 6:5 | 247 | Genesis 17:4-8 | 29 | Genesis 31:13 | 35 |

Genesis 31:17-18 35
 Genesis 31:19 35
 Genesis 31:22-32 35
 Genesis 31:32 23, 37
 Genesis 32:11-12 36
 Genesis 32:24-31 36
 Genesis 32:28 37
 Genesis 33:1-20 36
 Genesis 34:1-30 36, 39
 Genesis 35:1-3 36
 Genesis 35:5-7 36
 Genesis 35:10-13 36
 Genesis 35:16-18 37
 Genesis 35:22 39
 Genesis 35:37 37
 Genesis 37:1-2 39
 Genesis 37:3-4 39
 Genesis 37:6-7 39
 Genesis 37:8 39
 Genesis 37:9 39
 Genesis 37:13-35 39
 Genesis 38:13-18 39
 Genesis 39:1-23 40
 Genesis 39:9 43
 Genesis 40:1-22 40
 Genesis 41:1-14 40
 Genesis 41:15 40
 Genesis 41:16 40, 43
 Genesis 41:18-24 40
 Genesis 41:25-32 40
 Genesis 41:33-36 41
 Genesis 41:38 41
 Genesis 41:39-40 41
 Genesis 41:41-45 41
 Genesis 41:46 41
 Genesis 41:51 41
 Genesis 41:52 41
 Genesis 41:54-57 41
 Genesis 42:9-11 42
 Genesis 42:12-17 42
 Genesis 42:18-20 42
 Genesis 42:21-24 42
 Genesis 42:21 43
 Genesis 42:37 40
 Genesis 42:37 to 43:9 44
 Genesis 43:1-14 42
 Genesis 43:8-9 40
 Genesis 43:17 to 44:13 42
 Genesis 44:4 42
 Genesis 44:14 42
 Genesis 44:15 42

Genesis 44:18-23 43
 Genesis 44:24-34 43
 Genesis 44:32-33 44
 Genesis 45:1-3 43
 Genesis 45:3-11 43
 Genesis 45:4-8 43
 Genesis 45:28 45
 Genesis 46 to 50 248
 Genesis 46:3 45
 Genesis 46:26-27 45
 Genesis 47:1 45
 Genesis 47:3-4 45
 Genesis 47:5-6 45
 Genesis 47:11-12 46
 Genesis 49:3-4 39
 Genesis 49:5-7 36
 Genesis 47:9 45
 Genesis 50:19-21 46
 Genesis 50:24 46
 Genesis 50:25 46
 Genesis 50:26 46
 Exodus 1:1-5 47
 Exodus 1 to 40 248
 Exodus 1:6-7 47
 Exodus 1:9-10 47
 Exodus 1:11-12 47
 Exodus 1:13-14 47
 Exodus 1:15-21 47
 Exodus 1:22 47
 Exodus 2:1-4 47
 Exodus 2:5-6 47
 Exodus 2:7-10 47
 Exodus 2:11-13 48
 Exodus 2:14 48
 Exodus 2:15-22 48
 Exodus 2:23-25 48
 Exodus 3:1 48
 Exodus 3:1-2 51
 Exodus 3:3-6 51
 Exodus 3:7-8 49
 Exodus 3:7-10 51
 Exodus 3:11-12 51
 Exodus 3:13-14 132
 Exodus 3:14-15 51
 Exodus 3:14 252
 Exodus 3:16-17 51
 Exodus 4:1-17 51
 Exodus 4:21-23 51
 Exodus 4:24-31 51
 Exodus 5:2 52
 Exodus 6:1-8 52

Exodus 7:1-17 52
 Exodus 7:7 51
 Exodus 7:17 to 11:10 52
 Exodus 12:6-14 52
 Exodus 12:12 46
 Exodus 12:28-30 52
 Exodus 12:31-32 52
 Exodus 12:37-40 53
 Exodus 12:41 53
 Exodus 13:19-22 53
 Exodus 13:40 46
 Exodus 14:5-14 53
 Exodus 14:21-31 53
 Exodus 15:1-21 53
 Exodus 15:11 257
 Exodus 16:1-10 53
 Exodus 17:8-13 53
 Exodus 19:1-2 53
 Exodus 19:3-6 54
 Exodus 19:9 54
 Exodus 19:16-19 54
 Exodus 19:21-25 54
 Exodus 20:1-2 54
 Exodus 20:1-17 226
 Exodus 20: 3-17 54
 Exodus 20:5 113
 Exodus 20:18-21 54
 Exodus 20:22-23 54
 Exodus 20:24 to 23:19 55
 Exodus 23:20-33 55
 Exodus 24:1-3 55
 Exodus 24:4-7 55
 Exodus 24:10-11 55
 Exodus 24:13-18 55
 Exodus 25:1 to 31:18 56
 Exodus 25:8-9 55
 Exodus 25:40 55
 Exodus 26:30 55
 Exodus 32:1 56
 Exodus 32:2-4 56
 Exodus 32:7-10 56
 Exodus 32:11-20 56
 Exodus 32:21-24 56
 Exodus 32:25-30 57
 Exodus 32:31-32 57
 Exodus 32:33-34 57
 Exodus 32:35 57
 Exodus 33:12-13 57
 Exodus 33:20-23 57
 Exodus 34:10 61, 66
 Exodus 34:10-16 71

Exodus 34:14 57
 Exodus 34:18-35 57
 Exodus 35:1 to 39:43 57
 Exodus 40:34-38 57

 Leviticus 1:1 to 27:34 58
 Leviticus 9:1-24 58
 Leviticus 10:1-5 58
 Leviticus 10:6-19 58
 Leviticus 17:11 13
 Leviticus 26:21 258

 Numbers 9:1 to 10:10 58
 Numbers 10:11-36 58
 Numbers 11:1-34 59
 Numbers 11:35 59
 Numbers 12:6-8 59
 Numbers 12:11-12 59
 Numbers 12:16 59
 Numbers 13:1-3 59
 Numbers 13 to 14 248
 Numbers 13:4-33 59
 Numbers 13:26 59
 Numbers 14:1-3 59
 Numbers 14:3-4 59
 Numbers 14:6-9 59
 Numbers 14:10-20 59
 Numbers 14:29-34 60
 Numbers 14:35-37 60
 Numbers 14:38-45 60
 Numbers 16:1-3 60
 Numbers 16:4-12 60
 Numbers 16:13-14 60
 Numbers 16:15-27 60
 Numbers 16:28-30 60
 Numbers 16:31-35 60
 Numbers 16:41 60
 Numbers 16:42-50 60
 Numbers 17:2-5 61
 Numbers 17:10 61
 Numbers 17:12-13 61
 Numbers 20:1 61, 63
 Numbers 20:1 63
 Numbers 20 248
 Numbers 20:3-5 63
 Numbers 20:9-11 63
 Numbers 20:9-12 66
 Numbers 20:12 63
 Numbers 20:27-28 64
 Numbers 20:29 64
 Numbers 21:1-3 64
 Numbers 21:4-5 64

Numbers 21:6-9 64
 Numbers 21:10-20 64
 Numbers 21:34 65
 Numbers 21:35 65
 Numbers 22:1-35 65
 Numbers 22:36-41 65
 Numbers 23 & 24 65
 Numbers 23:21-32 64
 Numbers 23:23 65
 Numbers 24:1 65
 Numbers 25:1-18 65
 Numbers 25:1-5 65
 Numbers 25:6-9 65
 Numbers 27:12-23 68
 Numbers 31:1-8 66
 Numbers 31 to 36 66
 Numbers 31:15-18 66
 Numbers 31:16 65
 Numbers 33:52 89
 Numbers 33:52 92

 Deuteronomy 1:37-38 66
 Deuteronomy 2:1-5 63
 Deuteronomy 3:24-28 66
 Deuteronomy 4:6-8 61
 Deuteronomy 4:6-12 67
 Deuteronomy 5 to 28 67
 Deuteronomy 7:1-5 71
 Deuteronomy 9:5 25
 Deuteronomy 12:1 92
 Deuteronomy 12:2-3 92
 Deuteronomy 12:4-7 92
 Deuteronomy 16 & 17 85
 Deuteronomy 17:14-20 86, 89
 Deuteronomy 18:12 71
 Deuteronomy 20:18 71
 Deuteronomy 21:22-23 135
 Deuteronomy 28 to 30 96
 Deuteronomy 28:41-52 67
 Deuteronomy 28:41 90
 Deuteronomy 30:1-3 67
 Deuteronomy 30:1-6 97
 Deuteronomy 30:1-3 106
 Deuteronomy 30:19-20 258
 Deuteronomy 31:16-18 67
 Deuteronomy 31:19 1
 Deuteronomy 32:6-10 114
 Deuteronomy 33:26-29 68
 Deuteronomy 33:29 89
 Deuteronomy 34:1-7 68
 Deuteronomy 34:9 68
 Deuteronomy 34:10-12 68

Joshua 1:1-5 70
 Joshua 1:2-9 71
 Joshua 1:10-18 71
 Joshua 2:9-13 72
 Joshua 2:14-24 72
 Joshua 3:1-7 72
 Joshua 3:9-10 72
 Joshua 3:13-17 72
 Joshua 4:14 72
 Joshua 4:19 72
 Joshua 5:1 72
 Joshua 5:13-15 72
 Joshua 6:1-5 73
 Joshua 6:6-14 73
 Joshua 6:15-16 73
 Joshua 6:17-25 73
 Joshua 6:27 73
 Joshua 7 & 8 73
 Joshua 9:1-15 73
 Joshua 9:16-27 73
 Joshua 9:27 87
 Joshua 10:1-6 74
 Joshua 10:7-12 74
 Joshua 10:13-14 74
 Joshua 10:15-28 74
 Joshua 10:29-39 74
 Joshua 10:40-43 74
 Joshua 11:1-5 74
 Joshua 11:6-15 74
 Joshua 11:16-18 74
 Joshua 11:23 74
 Joshua 12 74
 Joshua 13:1-7 75
 Joshua 13:22 65
 Joshua 13:33 75
 Joshua 14:1-9 75
 Joshua 14:4 75
 Joshua 14:10-12 75
 Joshua 14:13-15 75
 Joshua 15:1-63 75
 Joshua 16:1-10 75
 Joshua 17:1-17 75
 Joshua 18:1 to 19:51 75
 Joshua 20 75
 Joshua 21:1-42 75
 Joshua 21:43-45 75
 Joshua 22:1-4 76
 Joshua 22:5 76
 Joshua 23:1-4 76
 Joshua 23:5 76
 Joshua 23:6-10 76

| | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Joshua 23:11-13 76 | Judges 16:4-22 82 | I Kings 3:4 91 |
| Joshua 23:14-16 77 | Judges 15:16-20 82 | I Kings 3:5-14 89 |
| Joshua 24:1-14 77 | Judges 16:23-27 82 | I Kings 4:29-34 89 |
| Joshua 24:2-3 23 | Judges 16:28 82 | I Kings 6 89 |
| Joshua 24:2 247 | Judges 16:29-31 82 | I Kings 8:1-11 89 |
| Joshua 24:9-10 65 | Judges 17:1-6 82 | I Kings 8:22 to 9:2 89 |
| Joshua 24:14-15 77, 248, 258 | Judges 17:7-13 83 | I Kings 10:23-26 89 |
| Joshua 24:14-16 258 | Judges 18:1-6 83 | I Kings 11:1-3 89 |
| Joshua 24:16-18 77 | Judges 18:6-29 83 | I Kings 11:1-4 90 |
| Joshua 24:22-25 77 | Judges 18:30-31 83 | I Kings 11:5-8 91 |
| Joshua 24:23-27 78 | Judges 19:1-22 83 | I Kings 11:11-13 90 |
| Joshua 24:31 77 | Judges 19:23-24 83 | I Kings 12:1-20 90 |
| Judges 1:1-36 79 | Judges 19:25-27 83 | I Kings 12:1-24 90 |
| Judges & I Samuel 248 | Judges 20:1-48 83 | I Kings 12:20 90 |
| Judges 2:1-2 79 | Judges 21:1-23 83 | I Kings 12:25-27 90 |
| Judges 2:2-3 79 | Judges 21:25 83 | I Kings 12:28-33 90 |
| Judges 2:4-5 79 | I Samuel 1 & 2 84 | I Kings 14 91 |
| Judges 2:8-10 79 | I&II Samuel I&II Kings 249 | I Kings 14:22-24 91 |
| Judges 2:11-13 79 | I Samuel 3:19-21 84 | I Kings 14:23 96 |
| Judges 2:14-17 79 | I Samuel 4 to 6 85 | I Kings 15:5 88 |
| Judges 2:17 79 | I Samuel 4:21-22 85 | I Kings 15:35 90 |
| Judges 2:18-19 79 | I Samuel 7:3 85 | I Kings 18:21-24 93 |
| Judges 2:21-22 79 | I Samuel 7:4-14 85 | I Kings 18:38-40 93 |
| Judges 3:1-11 80 | I Samuel 7:15-17 85 | I Kings 19:1-3 93 |
| Judges 3 80 | I Samuel 8:4-30 248 | II Kings 15:27-29 90 |
| Judges 4 & 5 80 | I Samuel 8:5-6 86 | II Kings 17:1-24 90 |
| Judges 6 to 8 80 | I Samuel 8:7-9 86 | II Kings 17:24 90 |
| Judges 8:22-23 80 | I Samuel 8:10-18 86 | II Kings 21:4-7 92 |
| Judges 8:24-27 80 | I Samuel 8:19-20 86, 96 | II Kings 22:1 to 23:24 95 |
| Judges 8:32-34 80 | I Samuel 8:21-22 86 | II Kings 23:4 92 |
| Judges 9:1-6 80 | I Samuel 10:18-19 87 | II Kings 23:13-25 91 |
| Judges 9:7-57 80 | I Samuel 10:25-26 87 | II Kings 23:25 95 |
| Judges 10:6-8 80 | I Samuel 11 87 | II Kings 23:26 95 |
| Judges 10:10 80 | I Samuel 12:12-14 87 | II Kings 23:27 95 |
| Judges 10:11-14 80 | I Samuel 12:16-18 248 | II Kings 23:31-37 95 |
| Judges 10:15-16 80 | I Samuel 12:17-19 87 | II Kings 23:36 to 24:7 95 |
| Judges 10:17-18 80 | I Samuel 13 to 31 87 | II Kings 24:1-2 95 |
| Judges 11:1 81 | I Samuel 13:14 87 | II Kings 24:6-20 95 |
| Judges 11:6 81 | I Samuel 15:20-23 26 | II Kings 24:14-16 95 |
| Judges 11:7-11 81 | I Samuel 21:1 87 | II Kings 25 96 |
| Judges 11:12-28 81 | I Samuel 21:6-23 87 | II Kings 25:8-11 96 |
| Judges 11:30-31 81 | I Samuel 31:1-10 87 | |
| Judges 11:32-40 81 | II Samuel 1 to 10 88 | I Chronicles 21:1-7 88 |
| Judges 12 81 | II Samuel 6:1-22 88 | I Chronicles 21:1 247 |
| Judges 13:1 81 | II Samuel 11 to 24 88 | I Chronicles 21:8 88 |
| Judges 13:3-5 81 | I Kings 1 & 2 88 | I Chronicles 21:14 88 |
| Judges 13:24-25 81 | I Kings 2:12-46 89 | I Chronicles 21:29 87, 89 |
| Judges 14:1-20 81 | I Kings 3:2 89, 91 | I Chronicles 21:29-30 89 |
| Judges 15:1-14 82 | I Kings 3:3-4 89 | II Chronicles 7:12-14 89 |
| Judges 15:14-15 82 | I Kings 3:3 91 | II Chronicles 7:14 xix, 4 |
| Judges 15:16-20 82 | | II Chronicles 7:14 208, 239 |

II Chronicles 12:1-14 91
 II Chronicles 19:2 113
 II Kings 25:8-11 96
 II Chronicles 36:15-21 96
 II Chronicles 36:22-23 107

Ezra 1:1-2 107
 Ezra 1:2-4 107
 Ezra 1:5-11 107
 Ezra 2:1-70 107
 Ezra 3:1-3 107
 Ezra 3:7 107
 Ezra 3:8-13 107
 Ezra 4:1-24 107
 Ezra 5:1 107
 Ezra 5:3-17 108
 Ezra 6:1-15 108
 Ezra 6:21-22 107
 Ezra 7:1-6 109
 Ezra 7:6-26 109
 Ezra 7:10 109
 Ezra 7:27-28 109
 Ezra 8:1-23 109
 Ezra 8:24-36 109
 Ezra 9:1-3 109
 Ezra 9:4-15 110
 Ezra 9:8 110
 Ezra 10:2-4 110
 Ezra 10:6-11 110
 Ezra 10:10-12 110

Nehemiah 1:1-11 110
 Nehemiah 2:1-16 110
 Nehemiah 2:17-18 110
 Nehemiah 3 to 6:15 110
 Nehemiah 3:16 110
 Nehemiah 8:1-5 111
 Nehemiah 8:6 111
 Nehemiah 8:7-12 111
 Nehemiah 8:17-18 111
 Nehemiah 9:1-3 111
 Nehemiah 13:1-2 65

Esther 1 & 2 108
 Esther 2:21-23 108
 Esther 4:14 108
 Esther 4:16 108
 Esther 5:1-14 108
 Esther 6:1-11 108
 Esther 7:1-10 108
 Esther 8:5-6 109
 Esther 10:2-3 109

Job 1 & 2 88, 247
 Job 31:33-34 8
 Psalm 2:1-12 240
 Psalm 9:16-17 11
 Psalm 9:17 228, 251
 Psalm 9:17-20 118
 Psalm 18:30 4
 Psalm 18:30-32 48
 Psalm 22:1-31 137
 Psalm 22 253
 Psalm 22:1-8 253
 Psalm 22:16-18 254
 Psalm 22:27:31 254
 Psalm 33:10-12 118
 Psalm 33:12 27, 214
 Psalm 34:20 136
 Psalm 49:7-9 252
 Psalm 53:1 250
 Psalm 77:13 56
 Psalm 78:56-60 85
 Psalm 81:3-5 46
 Psalm 81:11-14 84
 Psalm 91:11-12 123
 Psalm 95:6-11 62
 Psalm 99:8 225
 Psalm 103:6-7 68
 Psalm 103:7 62
 Psalm 106:29 22, 225
 Psalm 125:5 135
 Psalm 137 99
 Psalm 139:23-24 260

Proverbs 5:21-23 xx
 Proverbs 14:2 257
 Proverbs 14:12 2, 249
 Proverbs 16:2 2
 Proverbs 16:25 2
 Proverbs 21:2 2

Ecclesiastes 7:29 2
 Ecclesiastes 7:29 22, 225

Isaiah 1:4-31 93
 Isaiah 7:14 120
 Isaiah 9:1 125
 Isaiah 9:6-7 94
 Isaiah 11:6-9 240
 Isaiah 14:4-6 99
 Isaiah 14:12-17 99
 Isaiah 19:20 1
 Isaiah 27:12-13 93
 Isaiah 28:7 93

Isaiah 28:16 141
 Isaiah 30:21 93
 Isaiah 33:17 93
 Isaiah 32:21 93
 Isaiah 35:1 231
 Isaiah 39:6-7 93
 Isaiah 40:3 119, 120
 Isaiah 42:23-25 62
 Isaiah 43:7 1
 Isaiah 48:20 93
 Isaiah 52:10-15 139
 Isaiah 52:13-15 137
 Isaiah 52:13-14 253
 Isaiah 53:1-12 137
 Isaiah 53:1-3 139
 Isaiah 53:3 119
 Isaiah 53:3-12 253
 Isaiah 53:4-12 139
 Isaiah 53:5-6 4
 Isaiah 53:7-8 146
 Isaiah 55:6-7 3
 Isaiah 55:7 259
 Isaiah 55:8-9 Cover
 Isaiah 55:8-9 3, 257
 Isaiah 57:5 93
 Isaiah 58:6 126
 Isaiah 61:1-2 126
 Isaiah 65:2 93
 Isaiah 65:17-19 243
 Isaiah 65:20-25 240, 243
 Isaiah 66:3 2
 Isaiah 66:22-23 243

Jeremiah 2 & 3 111
 Jeremiah 2:20 94
 Jeremiah 3:6 94
 Jeremiah 4:18 2
 Jeremiah 5:29-31 94
 Jeremiah 10:22-24 6
 Jeremiah 10:23 3
 Jeremiah 14:14-16 94
 Jeremiah 17:1-2 94
 Jeremiah 23:5 94
 Jeremiah 25:11-12 94
 Jeremiah 29:10 94
 Jeremiah 29:11-13 259
 Jeremiah 30:7 231
 Jeremiah 31:15 122

Ezekiel 4 to 7, 20, 22, 99
 Ezekiel 6:13 99
 Ezekiel 16 111

Ezekiel 16:24-31 96
 Ezekiel 31:9-18 10
 Ezekiel 33:11 4, 251
 Ezekiel 37 99
 Ezekiel 37:21-23 100
 Ezekiel 38:1-12 231
 Ezekiel 38 and 39 231, 238
 Ezekiel 38:22-23 239
 Ezekiel 39 99
 Ezekiel 39:9 239
 Ezekiel 39:11-16 239
 Ezekiel 39:21-29 239
 Ezekiel 40 through 43 231

 Daniel 1:1-7 100
 Daniel 1:8 100
 Daniel 1:9-17 100
 Daniel 1:19-20 100
 Daniel 1:21 100
 Daniel 2:1-13 100
 Daniel 2:16-19 100
 Daniel 2:19-35 100
 Daniel 2:21-22 100
 Daniel 2:36-45 100
 Daniel 2:46-47 101
 Daniel 2:48-49 101
 Daniel 3:15 101
 Daniel 3:16-19 101
 Daniel 3:24-25 101
 Daniel 3:26 101
 Daniel 3:28-29 101
 Daniel 3:30 101
 Daniel 4:24-27 102
 Daniel 4:28-31 102
 Daniel 4:30 99
 Daniel 4:31-32 102
 Daniel 4:33 102
 Daniel 4:34-37 102
 Daniel 5:1-12 104
 Daniel 5:1-16 104
 Daniel 5:18-21 104
 Daniel 5:22-24 104
 Daniel 5:22-28 104
 Daniel 5:30-31 104
 Daniel 6:1-3 104
 Daniel 6:4-5 105
 Daniel 6:7-8 105
 Daniel 6:9-10 105
 Daniel 6:12-16 105
 Daniel 6:13 105
 Daniel 6:20 105
 Daniel 6:21-22 105

Daniel 6:23 105
 Daniel 6:26-27 105
 Daniel 6:28 105
 Daniel 7:1-8 102
 Daniel 7:9-10 102
 Daniel 7:11-12 102
 Daniel 7:13-14 103
 Daniel 7:16-18 103
 Daniel 7:19-22 103
 Daniel 7:23-24 103
 Daniel 7:25 103
 Daniel 7:26-27 103
 Daniel 8:1-8 103
 Daniel 8:9-12 103, 116
 Daniel 8:13-14 103
 Daniel 8:15-19 103
 Daniel 8:20-25 104
 Daniel 8:20-21 115
 Daniel 8:21-22 115
 Daniel 8:23-25 116
 Daniel 8:26-27 104
 Daniel 9:1-2 106
 Daniel 9:11-14 106
 Daniel 9:15-19 106
 Daniel 9:20-26 106
 Daniel 9:24-27 117
 Daniel 9:25 111
 Daniel 10:4-6 117
 Daniel 11 115
 Daniel 11 and 12 230
 Daniel 11:5-31 117
 Daniel 11:33-35 117

 Hosea 3:4 96
 Hosea 11:1 122
 Hosea 13:9-11 96, 98

 Joel 2:28-32 143
 Joel 3:2 220
 Joel 3:2-14 238

 Micah 5:1-2 121

 Haggai 1:1-11 107

 Zechariah 1:10-12 137
 Zechariah 2:1-4 137
 Zechariah 3:1 88
 Zechariah 3:1-2 247
 Zechariah 3:2 88
 Zechariah 4:2-3 233
 Zechariah 9:9 97, 133
 Zechariah 11:12-13 134
 Zechariah 12:10 136

Zechariah 14:1-4 237
 Zechariah 14:16-18 240

 Malachi 3:1-3 119
 Malachi 3:1 120
 Malachi 4:1-5 111
 Malachi 4:1-6 119
 Malachi 4:5-6 120

 Matthew 1:21 252
 Matthew 2:1-5 121
 Matthew 2:7-12 121
 Matthew 2:13 122
 Matthew 2:14-15 122
 Matthew 2:16 122
 Matthew 2:19-23 122
 Matthew 3:1-3 120
 Matthew 3:1-6 122
 Matthew 3:13-17 123
 Matthew 4:1 123
 Matthew 4:3 123
 Matthew 4:4 123
 Matthew 4:6 123
 Matthew 4:7 123
 Matthew 4:8-9 123
 Matthew 4:10 123
 Matthew 4:11 123
 Matthew 4:15 125
 Matthew 4:17 125
 Matthew 4:18-22 26
 Matthew 5:3-48 127
 Matthew 5:14-16 191
 Matthew 6:1-32 127
 Matthew 6:12-13 128
 Matthew 6:33 127
 Matthew 7:13-14 5, 128, 138, 140, 260
 Matthew 7:24-25 141
 Matthew 8:14-17 126
 Matthew 8:18-27 129
 Matthew 9:9-13 127
 Matthew 9:18-26 129
 Matthew 10:1 128
 Matthew 10:1-14 128
 Matthew 10:1-5 170
 Matthew 11:10-13 120
 Matthew 12:9-14 127
 Matthew 13:1-50 128
 Matthew 13 143
 Matthew 13:22-37 129
 Matthew 16,17,20,26 130
 Matthew 16:13-16 129, 141
 Matthew 16:17-19 141

Matthew 16:18-19 129
 Matthew 16:18 160, 161, 173, 189, 224
 Matthew 16:19 142
 Matthew 16:21 130
 Matthew 18:3-4 171
 Matthew 18:3 255
 Matthew 18:4 130, 183
 Matthew 18:14 205
 Matthew 18:15-20 130
 Matthew 18:15-18 142
 Matthew 18:19-20 143
 Matthew 20 177
 Matthew 20:19 254
 Matthew 20:20-28 130, 171, 176
 Matthew 21:8-9 133
 Matthew 22:2-3 258
 Matthew 22:16 139
 Matthew 23:5-12 184
 Matthew 23:6-12 130
 Matthew 23:8-12 171, 177
 Matthew 23:9 192
 Matthew 23:31-36 14
 Matthew 23:37 258
 Matthew 24:4-30 230
 Matthew 24:14 256
 Matthew 24:15 116
 Matthew 24:16-22 231
 Matthew 24:28-31 236
 Matthew 24:29-30 230
 Matthew 24:29-44 236
 Matthew 26 & 27 253
 Matthew 26:67-68 134
 Matthew 27:3-10 134
 Matthew 27:17-21 135
 Matthew 27:22-23 135
 Matthew 27:24-26 135
 Matthew 27:24-31 135
 Matthew 27:46 136
 Matthew 27:50-54 254
 Matthew 28:2-15 136
 Matthew 28:18-20 138, 149, 254
 Matthew 28:19 151
 Matthew 28:19-20 189, 193

 Mark 1:14-15 125
 Mark 1:16-20 126
 Mark 1:21-28 126
 Mark 1:29-34 126
 Mark 3:1-6 127
 Mark 5:1-43 129
 Mark 7:6-9 211
 Mark 8,9,10,14 130

Mark 8:31 & 34 254
 Mark 9:31 131
 Mark 9:32 131
 Mark 9:35 171
 Mark 10:35-37 171
 Mark 10:38 171
 Mark 10:42-45 171
 Mark 11:1-7 133
 Mark 12:14 139
 Mark 13:14 116
 Mark 14 & 15 253
 Mark 14:50-52 249
 Mark 14:53-58 134
 Mark 16:15 151, 185
 Mark 16:15-16 193
 Mark 16:15 220

 Luke 1:13-17 120
 Luke 1:20-21 120
 Luke 1:22-23 120
 Luke 1:26-35 252
 Luke 1:30-33 120
 Luke 1:35 120
 Luke 1:37-38 120
 Luke 2:1-10 121
 Luke 2:10-12 121
 Luke 2:13-14 121
 Luke 2:15-20 121
 Luke 2:29-32 121
 Luke 2:33-35 121
 Luke 2:36-38 121
 Luke 2:40 122
 Luke 2:41-49 122
 Luke 2:51-52 122
 Luke 3:1-3 122
 Luke 3:15 122
 Luke 3:16-17 122
 Luke 3:16 255
 Luke 3:23 122
 Luke 4:14-15 125
 Luke 4:16-18 126
 Luke 4:18-19 209
 Luke 4:23-27 126
 Luke 4:28-31 126
 Luke 4:31-37 126
 Luke 4:38-41 126
 Luke 5:1-11 126
 Luke 5:22-24 127
 Luke 5:26 127
 Luke 6:6-11 127
 Luke 6:14-15 128
 Luke 6:20-36 127

Luke 6:47-49 141
 Luke 7:1-17 128
 Luke 7:30 205, 257
 Luke 24:49 151
 Luke 8:40-56 129
 Luke 9,18, 22 130
 Luke 9:10-17 131
 Luke 9:29-31 130
 Luke 9:34-35 130
 Luke 10:16 205, 257
 Luke 13:34 205
 Luke 13:34 258
 Luke 14:6 140
 Luke 18:33 254
 Luke 19:10 205
 Luke 19:26-27 253
 Luke 19:37-40 134
 Luke 20:21 139
 Luke 22 & 23 253
 Luke 22:3-6 134
 Luke 22:15-16 134
 Luke 22:17-22 134
 Luke 22:19-20 193
 Luke 22:25-30 171
 Luke 22:31-34 134
 Luke 22:31 249
 Luke 22:39-45 134
 Luke 22:47-48 134
 Luke 22:63-65 134
 Luke 22:67-69 134
 Luke 22:70-71 134
 Luke 23:1-4 135
 Luke 23:1-11 135
 Luke 23:13-16 135
 Luke 23:34 136, 253
 Luke 23:43 136
 Luke 23:43 253
 Luke 23:45 243
 Luke 23:46 136, 254

 John 1:1-4 119
 John 1:1-17 252
 John 1:4-11 139
 John 1:5-11 119
 John 1:6-8 122
 John 1:11-12 188
 John 1:12 119, 139
 John 1:16-17 119
 John 1:29-31 123
 John 1:32-34 123
 John 1:35-42 124
 John 1:41 111

John 1:45 124
 John 1:46-49 124
 John 1:50-51 124
 John 2:1-11 124
 John 2:13-24 124
 John 2:21 134
 John 3:1-10 124
 John 3:1-8 254
 John 3:6-7 251
 John 3:11-16 124
 John 3:14-16 64, 255
 John 3:14-18 188
 John 3:16-17 205, 252
 John 3:16 256, 259
 John 3:17-21 125
 John 3:17-20 255
 John 3:19-21 191, 198
 John 3:28 173
 John 4:10 125
 John 4:21-26 125
 John 4:21-24 173
 John 4:23 1
 John 4:25 111
 John 4:28-42 125
 John 4:46-54 126
 John 5:1-17 127
 John 5:18 127
 John 5:39-46 127
 John 5:39-40 258
 John 5:40 258
 John 6:1-71 132
 John 6:16-21 131
 John 6:26-27 131
 John 6:32-33 131
 John 6:33-51 252
 John 6:35-36 131
 John 6:48-51 131
 John 6:52 131
 John 6:53-58 131
 John 6:60-66 131, 249
 John 6:64 205
 John 6:68-69 131
 John 7:1 132
 John 7:13-14 133
 John 7:17 205
 John 7:42 88
 John 8:12 132
 John 8:12 191, 252
 John 8:13-28 132
 John 8:51 132
 John 8:52-53 132

John 8:56 30, 132
 John 8:57 132
 John 8:58 132
 John 9:41 132
 John 10:9 132
 John 10:10 252
 John 10:11 132
 John 10:11-21 132
 John 11:1-44 132
 John 11:4 133
 John 11:23-24 254
 John 11:25-26 132, 133
 John 11:25 252, 254, 255
 John 11:27 133
 John 11:41-42 133
 John 11:43-44 133
 John 11:47-48 133
 John 11:53 133
 John 12:1-6 134
 John 12:15 133
 John 12:24 255
 John 12:32 255
 John 13:27 249
 John 14:1-4 4
 John 14 132
 John 14:1-5 133
 John 14:1-6 229
 John 14:5 4
 John 14:6 4, 252
 John 14:13-14 125
 John 14:19 255
 John 15:5 132
 John 16:7-10 188
 John 16:8-11 258
 John 17:20-23 162
 John 18:1-6 132
 John 18 & 19 253
 John 19:15 135
 John 19:28 136
 John 19:30 136
 John 19:30 254
 Acts 1 177
 Acts 1:3 138
 Acts 1:4-8 138
 Acts 1:8 1, 151
 Acts 1:8-9 216
 Acts 1:9 138
 Acts 1:10-11 138
 Acts 1:46-20 151
 Acts 2:1-13 143
 Acts 2:1-11 255

Acts 2:3-11 165
 Acts 2:8 173
 Acts 2:14-33 143
 Acts 2:14-37 255
 Acts 2:36 143
 Acts 2:36-41 193
 Acts 2:38 143
 Acts 2:38-49 255
 Acts 2:41 144
 Acts 2:42-47 143
 Acts 2:46 193
 Acts 2:47 144
 Acts 3:12-16 144
 Acts 3:19-26 144
 Acts 3:19-21 256
 Acts 3:24-26 220
 Acts 4:4 144
 Acts 4:8-12 144
 Acts 4:10-12 138
 Acts 4:12 25 252
 Acts 4:19-20 144
 Acts 4:24-33 144
 Acts 5:1-11 145
 Acts 5:12-16 145
 Acts 5:17-20 145
 Acts 5:21-28 145
 Acts 5:29-32 145
 Acts 5:33-42 145
 Acts 6:1-7 145
 Acts 6:8-15 145
 Acts 7:1-50 146
 Acts 7:2 22
 Acts 7:2-4 24
 Acts 7:22-28 48
 Acts 7:23-29 51
 Acts 7:44 55
 Acts 7:51-53 146
 Acts 7:51 258
 Acts 7:54-56 146
 Acts 7:57-60 146
 Acts 8:1-4 146
 Acts 8:5-25 146
 Acts 8:26-28 146
 Acts 8:29-31 146
 Acts 8:34-38 146
 Acts 8:36-39 193
 Acts 8:39-40 147
 Acts 9:1-2 147
 Acts 9:3-9 147
 Acts 9:10-22 147
 Acts 9:11-12 147

Acts 9:23-25 147
 Acts 9:26-31 147
 Acts 9:32-43 147
 Acts 10:1-8 148
 Acts 10:9-23 148
 Acts 10:24-33 148
 Acts 10:34-43 148
 Acts 10:44-48 148
 Acts 10:45-48 193
 Acts 10:46 165
 Acts 11:1-10 148
 Acts 11:12-17 148
 Acts 11:19-22 149
 Acts 11:23-26 149
 Acts 11:27-30 149
 Acts 12:1-11 149
 Acts 12:12-17 149
 Acts 12:18-25 149
 Acts 13:1-3 151
 Acts 13:2-4 170
 Acts 13:4-9 151
 Acts 13:10 151
 Acts 13:11-12 151
 Acts 13:13-15 151
 Acts 13:16-23 151
 Acts 13:17-18 62
 Acts 13:21 87
 Acts 13:22 88
 Acts 13:26-39 152
 Acts 13:42-50 152
 Acts 14:1-4 152
 Acts 14:2 182
 Acts 14:5-14 152
 Acts 14:6-20 152
 Acts 14:14 170
 Acts 14:15-17 152
 Acts 14:21-28 153
 Acts 14:21-22 193
 Acts 14:23 183
 Acts 15:1-5 153
 Acts 15:2-6 182
 Acts 15:6-12 153
 Acts 15:13-22 153
 Acts 15:23-29 153
 Acts 15:30-35 153
 Acts 15:36-41 154
 Acts 16:1-5 154
 Acts 16:6-10 154
 Acts 16:11-15 154
 Acts 16:16-24 154
 Acts 16:25-40 154

Acts 16:30-34 193
 Acts 16:31 19, 20, 188, 259
 Acts 17:1-9 154
 Acts 17:10-15 154
 Acts 17:16-21 155
 Acts 17:18 217
 Acts 17:22-31 155
 Acts 17:26-28 113
 Acts 17:32-34 155
 Acts 18:1-8 155
 Acts 18:9-18 155
 Acts 18:19-22 155
 Acts 18:24-28 156
 Acts 19:1-7 156
 Acts 19:6 165
 Acts 19:8-20 156
 Acts 20:1-5 156
 Acts 20:1-28 170
 Acts 20:7-12 156, 193
 Acts 20:13-23 157
 Acts 20:17-38 182
 Acts 20:17, 28-30 183
 Acts 19:21-41 156
 Acts 20:21 251
 Acts 20:28-31 157
 Acts 20:28-38 157
 Acts 20:28-31 170, 171
 Acts 20:28 189
 Acts 20:28-31 208
 Acts 21:1-14 157
 Acts 21:17-20 157
 Acts 21:20-22 157
 Acts 21:23-24 157
 Acts 21:25 157
 Acts 21:26 157
 Acts 21:27-30 157
 Acts 21:31-40 158
 Acts 22:1-30 158
 Acts 23 & 24 158
 Acts 24:14-21 158
 Acts 24:22-27 158
 Acts 25:1-12 158
 Acts 25:13 to 26:32 158
 Acts 27:1-20 159
 Acts 27:21-26 159
 Acts 27:27-38 159
 Acts 27:39-44 159
 Acts 28:1-6 159
 Acts 28:7-10 159
 Acts 28:11-16 159
 Acts 28:17-20 159

Acts 28:21-24 160
 Acts 28:25-27 160
 Acts 28:26-31 160
 Romans 1:16-18 228
 Romans 1:16 258
 Romans 1:18-23 3
 Romans 1:18-32 23, 113
 Romans 1:18-23 225, 250
 Romans 1:21-32 30
 Romans 1:21-31 228
 Romans 1:24-32 3
 Romans 1:24-27 226
 Romans 1:24-32 226, 250
 Romans 1:28-32 226
 Romans 1:32 228
 Romans 2:1-16 226
 Romans 2 & 3 250
 Romans 2:2 251
 Romans 3:9-23 254
 Romans 3:23 1, 228
 Romans 4:11-12 29
 Romans 4:16 29
 Romans 5:1-2 203, 259
 Romans 5:8 259
 Romans 5:12-21 9
 Romans 6:1-10 255
 Romans 6:2-5 193
 Romans 6:5-11 11
 Romans 6:23 228, 254
 Romans 7:4 230
 Romans 7:7 249
 Romans 8:1-4 256
 Romans 8:9 256
 Romans 8:26 193
 Romans 8:29 204
 Romans 9:30-33 141
 Romans 10:1-14 257
 Romans 11:33-34 48
 Romans 12:1-8 167
 Romans 12:1-13 167
 Romans 14:9 215
 Romans 14:10 229, 251
 I & II Corinthians 161
 I Corinthians 1:1-13 162
 I & II Corinthians 228
 I Corinthians & Revelation 249
 I Corinthians 1:10-13 208
 I Corinthians 1:19-31 217
 I Corinthians 1:20-25 185, 188
 I Corinthians 3:1-4 162

I Corinthians 3:1 227
 I Corinthians 3:5-9 162
 I Corinthians 3:5-17 170
 I Corinthians 3:9-17 142
 I Corinthians 3:11 129
 I Corinthians 3:11-15 229
 I Corinthians 3:16-17 161
 I Corinthians 3:21-23 162
 I Corinthians 4:6 162
 I Corinthians 5:4-8 163
 I Corinthians 5:9-13 163
 I Corinthians 6:1-10 163
 I Corinthians 6:9-11 163
 I Corinthians 6:12-20 163
 I Corinthians 7:1-14 163
 I Corinthians 7:25-39 164
 I Corinthians 8:1-7 164
 I Corinthians 8:8-13 164
 I Corinthians 10:1-3 141
 I Corinthians 10:1-7 164
 I Corinthians 10:12-14 164
 I Corinthians 10:16-17 164
 I Corinthians 10:18-21 164
 I Corinthians 10:21 164
 I Corinthians 10:25-31 164
 I Corinthians 11:1-18 162
 I Corinthians 11:2-16 165
 I Corinthians 11:7 1
 I Corinthians 11:7 221, 257
 I Corinthians 11:17-22 165
 I Corinthians 11:20-26 134
 I Corinthians 11:23-26 165
 I Corinthians 11:26 193
 I Corinthians 11:27-34 165
 I Corinthians 12, 13, & 14 165, 167
 I Corinthians 12:1-12 168
 I Corinthians 12:1-31 189
 I Corinthians 12 256
 I Corinthians 12:4-7 167
 I Corinthians 12:12-27 161, 182, 189
 I Corinthians 12:27-31 168
 I Corinthians 12:28-31 169
 I Corinthians 13 168
 I Corinthians 13:4-7 169
 I Corinthians 13:8-13 169
 I Corinthians 14:6-14 165
 I Corinthians 14:15-19 166
 I Corinthians 14:23-25 166
 I Corinthians 14:26-33 166
 I Corinthians 14:34 215
 I Corinthians 14:36-40 166

I Corinthians 15:3-4 32
 I Corinthians 15:3-11 166
 I Corinthians 15:12-19 167
 I Corinthians 15:20-28 9
 I Corinthians 15:32 181
 I Corinthians 15:45-49 1
 II Corinthians 3:7-17 173
 II Corinthians 5:1 258
 II Corinthians 5:9-11 228
 II Corinthians 5:9-10 251
 II Corinthians 5:10 229
 II Corinthians 5:17 246, 256
 II Corinthians 5:21 253
 II Corinthians 6:2 259
 II Corinthians 6:14-18 208
 II Corinthians 10:4-6 142
 II Corinthians 12:2 243
 Galatians 1:3-5 253
 Galatians 1:3-5 260
 Galatians 3:16 247
 Galatians 3:7-9 29
 Galatians 3:13-16 30
 Galatians 3:13 135, 252
 Galatians 3:13-14 253
 Galatians 3:15 10
 Galatians 3:16 24, 48, 247
 Galatians 4:4-5 150
 Galatians 5:1-2 32
 Galatians 5:16 256
 Galatians 5:19-21 251
 Galatians 5:22-25 256
 Ephesians 1:3 256
 Ephesians 1:22 141
 Ephesians 1:22-23 161, 182
 Ephesians 2:1 & 5 8
 Ephesians 2:1-10 140
 Ephesians 2:1 251
 Ephesians 2:1-3 259
 Ephesians 2:8-9 4, 20, 138, 257, 259
 Ephesians 2:13 8
 Ephesians 2:19-20 129
 Ephesians 2:19-22 141
 Ephesians 4:1-16 167
 Ephesians 4:1-8 168
 Ephesians 4:9-16 161, m182
 Ephesians 4:11-16 168
 Ephesians 4:11 173
 Ephesians 4:11-12 183
 Ephesians 4:14-16 170, 172
 Ephesians 4:15 141

Ephesians 5:14 215
 Ephesians 5:23 141
 Ephesians 5:25-32 173
 Ephesians 5:27 230
 Ephesians 6:10-18 142
 Philippians 1:1 170
 Colossians 1:17 161
 Colossians 1:17 182, 189
 Colossians 1:18 141
 Colossians 2:8 185, 188, 217,
 Colossians 2:19 141
 Colossians 3:15-16 215
 Colossians 4:17 170
 I Thessalonians 4:13-17 229
 II Thessalonians 1:6-10 237
 II Thessalonians 2:1-12 232
 II Thessalonians 2:4-8 237
 I Timothy 182
 I Timothy 1:14 19
 I Timothy 1:15 205, 252
 I Timothy 2:3-4 205
 I Timothy 2:3-6 257
 I Timothy 2:4 188
 I Timothy 2:5 193
 I Timothy 3 177
 I Timothy 3:14-15 161
 I Timothy 4:6-7 179
 I Timothy 4:10 188, 205, 257
 I Timothy 4:15-16 170
 I Timothy 6:20-21 218
 II Timothy 3:8 258
 II Timothy 3:15 4
 II Timothy 4:1-5 172
 II Timothy 4:5 173
 II Timothy 4:15 258
 Titus 182
 Titus 1:5-9 182
 Titus 1:7-9 170
 Titus 1:10-16 172
 Titus 2:1-8 172
 Titus 2:13-14 253
 Titus 3:4-7 202, 208
 Hebrews 2:10 230
 Hebrews 2:10 246, 256, 257
 Hebrews 3:1-2 170
 Hebrews 3:7-11 3, 62
 Hebrews 4:12-13 9
 Hebrews 5:9 169

Hebrews 6:1 251
 Hebrews 6:20 169
 Hebrews 7:22-25 193
 Hebrews 8:1 169
 Hebrews 9 & 10 252
 Hebrews 9:11 169
 Hebrews 9:11-14 256
 Hebrews 9:22-28 256
 Hebrews 9:25 169
 Hebrew 9:26-28 241
 Hebrews 10:5-10 256
 Hebrews 10:6-14 32
 Hebrews 10:19-20 4
 Hebrews 10:19-22 169
 Hebrew 10:19-25 169, 256
 Hebrews 11:1-6 15
 Hebrews 11:1-7 247
 Hebrews 11:1-3 257
 Hebrews 11:4 15
 Hebrews 11:5 17
 Hebrews 11:6 4, 188, 225, 257
 Hebrews 11:7 18
 Hebrews 11:8 24, 25
 Hebrews 11:14-17 33
 Hebrews 11:17-19 32
 Hebrews 11:27-28 11
 Hebrews 12:2 15
 Hebrews 12:22-24 15
 Hebrews 12:22-25 189
 Hebrews 13:8-16 189

 James 2:10 249
 James 2:10 250
 James 2:23 28
 James 4:1-2 27
 James 4:13-17 242
 James 5:15-16 193
 James 5:19-20 xviii

 I Peter 1:3-4 256
 I Peter 1:18-19 252
 I Peter 2:1-4 169
 I Peter 2:4-8 141, 161
 I Peter 2:5-9 169
 I Peter 2:5-9 184, 256
 I Peter 2:5-10 194
 I Peter 2:9-12 169
 I Peter 2:21-24 10, 254
 I Peter 3:18-22 19
 I Peter 4:10-11 169
 I Peter 4:11 167
 I Peter 5:1-4 130, 172, 183, 192

I Peter 5:1-5 170, 182
 I Peter 5:8 88

 II Peter 2:1-3 179
 II Peter 2:2 228
 II Peter 2:1-22 228
 II Peter 2:4-5 18
 II Peter 2:4-10 18
 II Peter 2:5 23
 II Peter 2:7-9 31
 II Peter 2:13-15 179
 II Peter 2:15 65
 II Peter 2:20-22 179
 II Peter 3:3-4 243
 II Peter 3:5-9 19
 II Peter 3:5-7 243
 II Peter 3:8-9 119
 II Peter 3:9 188, 205, 257
 II Peter 3:10-13 244

 I John 1:3 256
 I John 1:7-8 202
 I John 1:9 194
 I John 2:18 232
 I John 3:2 246
 I John 3:11-12 14

 II John 7-8 179, 232

 III John 9-11 179

 Jude 1-4 179
 Jude 6-7 32
 Jude 10-11 14
 Jude 11 60, 65, 247
 Jude 1:11-13 16, 180
 Jude 14-15 17
 Jude 15-19 180
 Jude 17-19 220
 Jude 20-25 180

 Revelation 1:1-4 175
 Revelation 1:1 179
 Revelation 1 228
 Revelation 1:2-6 176
 Revelation 1:4-8 175
 Revelation 1:4-6 259
 Revelation 1:9-11 175
 Revelation 1:13-15 117
 Revelation 1:13-16 175
 Revelation 1:17-20 175
 Revelation 1:19 179
 Revelation 2 & 3 128, 143
 Revelation 2:6, 15 183
 Revelation 2:7 176, 243

Revelation 2:8-11 183
 Revelation 2:9-10 176
 Revelation 2:10 184
 Revelation 2:11 176
 Revelation 2:13-16 177
 Revelation 2:14 65
 Revelation 2:17 177
 Revelation 2:18-20 177
 Revelation 2:20-24 177
 Revelation 2:25-29 177
 Revelation 3:1 177
 Revelation 3, 21 and 22 243
 Revelation 3:2-3 178
 Revelation 3:4-6 178
 Revelation 3:7 178
 Revelation 3:8-10 178
 Revelation 3:11-13 178, 244
 Revelation 3:14-22 10
 Revelation 3:14-15 178
 Revelation 3:15-19 178
 Revelation 3:20-22 178
 Revelation 4:1-11 180
 Revelation 4 and 6 233
 Revelation 5:1-14 180
 Revelation 6 through 18 230
 Revelation 6:1-9 231
 Revelation 6 and 7 231
 Revelation 6:12-17 233
 Revelation 7 83, 244
 Revelation 7:9-17 233
 Revelation 7:9-14 233
 Revelation 8 and 9 233
 Revelation 9:20-21 233
 Revelation 10 to 15 233
 Revelation 11:5-10 234
 Revelation 11:11-13 234
 Revelation 11:15-19 234
 Revelation 12 through 14 234
 Revelation 12:1-17 234
 Revelation 12:9 7, 88
 Revelation 12:9 231
 Revelation 13:1-18 232
 Revelation 13:1-4 232
 Revelation 13:1-3 234
 Revelation 13:6-8 232
 Revelation 13:11-18 232
 Revelation 14:7 234
 Revelation 14:8 235
 Revelation 14:18-20 238
 Revelation 15 and 16 235
 Revelation 16:12-16 237

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Revelation 16:13-15 237 | Revelation 21:14 142 |
| Revelation 16:15 235 | Revelation 21:15-21 245 |
| Revelation 16:18-21 235 | Revelation 21:22-27 245 |
| Revelation 16:19 235 | Revelation 21:23-24 244 |
| Revelation 17 22 | Revelation 22:1-5 245 |
| Revelation 17 through 19 235 | Revelation 22:2-14 2 |
| Revelation 17:1-18 235 | Revelation 22:6 245 |
| Revelation 17:3-6 198 | Revelation 22:6-7 245 |
| Revelation 17:4-6 112 | Revelation 22:16-17 174 |
| Revelation 17:5 235 | Revelation 22:17 205, 259 |
| Revelation 17:7-18 198 | Revelation 22:18-19 194 |
| Revelation 17:8-14 238 | |
| Revelation 18 22 | I Maccabees 1:10 116 |
| Revelation 18:1-3 235 | I & 11 Maccabees 114 |
| Revelation 18:2-8 112 | I & II Maccabees 116 |
| Revelation 18:2 235 | |
| Revelation 18:4-13 198 | |
| Revelation 18:4-8 236 | |
| Revelation 18:10 235 | |
| Revelation 18:12-13 236 | |
| Revelation 18:20-24 236 | |
| Revelation 18:21-24 198 | |
| Revelation 18:21 235 | |
| Revelation 19-22 211 | |
| Revelation 19:1-3 236 | |
| Revelation 19:6-8 230 | |
| Revelation 19:9 230 | |
| Revelation 19:11-16 97, 237 | |
| Revelation 19:19-21 238 | |
| Revelation 19:20 239 | |
| Revelation 20:1-3 239 | |
| Revelation 20:4-6 189, 239 | |
| Revelation 20:6,14 257 | |
| Revelation 20:8 88 | |
| Revelation 20:9-10 88 | |
| Revelation 20:10 37, 239, 240 | |
| Revelation 20:11-14 11 | |
| Revelation 20:11 241 | |
| Revelation 20:11-15 257 | |
| Revelation 20:12-15 241 | |
| Revelation 20:14-15 251 | |
| Revelation 21 1 | |
| Revelation 21:1-5 244 | |
| Revelation 21:2-9 161 | |
| Revelation 21:2 173 | |
| Revelation 21:4 257 | |
| Revelation 21:5-8 244 | |
| Revelation 21:8 257 | |
| Revelation 21:9 173 | |
| Revelation 21:9-14 245 | |
| Revelation 21:13 189 | |

About the Author

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Allen and his wife Esther, who is with the Lord, are parents of five children, twenty-two grandchildren, and twenty-one great grandchildren, and more on the way. All of Allen and Esther's children are believers. Their oldest son, Joel, is an elder and Bible teacher in an assembly in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. Their youngest son, Dane, lives in Germany and is a missionary in the Balkan countries.