

# HOW YOU CAN KNOW THE FUTURE

All of us would like to know the future, right? If you're a farmer, wouldn't you like to know beforehand what the weather will be for the harvest season? If you're thinking about getting a job with a certain company, wouldn't you like to know if that company will be successful down the road? You'd like to know, wouldn't you? If you're thinking about getting married, wouldn't you like to know if you and your partner will meet each other's needs and be able to make each other happy? All of us want to know what the future will bring. Unfortunately, it's not easy to know the future.

In times past, people did all kinds of strange things to know the future. For instance, some would try to predict the future by how sunlight reflected off of a person's fingernails. Others would



The image of Daniel chapter 2 gives a panoramic view of history.

## God Knows the Future

- “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.” (Isaiah 46: 9,10).
- “Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.” (Isaiah 42:9).
- “I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee.” (Isaiah 48:5)

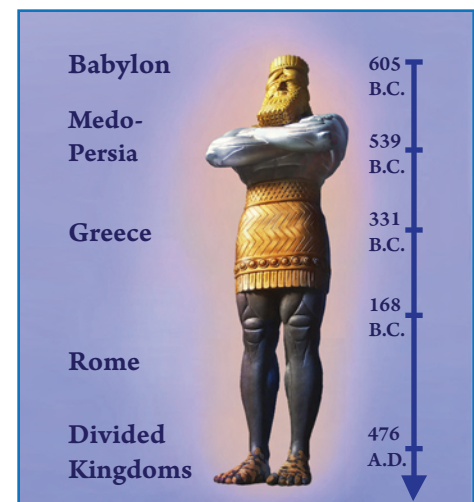
cut open the body of a sheep and look at the shape and design of its liver in an endeavor to know future events. Even today, some people believe that they can know the future by studying the stars and planets. Still others go to psychics, tarot card readers, palm readers, even witch doctors in order to find out what the future holds. These methods have never been successful. Does that mean that the future can't be known? No. On the contrary, the Bible talks about a God who knows the future; a God who knows the end from the beginning; a God who's wise enough and powerful enough to forecast the future with unerring accuracy. This is a God you can trust with your own life and future. In the box at the left is what the God of the Bible tells us about Himself!

## KEY POINTS

God knows the future because he designs it and leads it. In the story of the dream given to king Nebuchadnezzar we have evidence of the reliability of the Bible as well as God's oversight and leading in the affairs of men. The story begins 2600 years ago in Babylon, what is today the country of Iraq. It is recorded in the book of Daniel, chapter 2.

The King had a dream which he could not remember. His wise men and astrologers could not tell the King his dream nor its interpretation. In anger, Nebuchadnezzar ordered all of them to be killed. Among these men were Daniel and his three Hebrew friends. After petitioning God to help them, God revealed the dream to Daniel along with its interpretation. (Dan. 2:18) The dream was a panoramic view of history from the time of Nebuchadnezzar going forward to the end of the world. Its accuracy is stunning and speaks clearly of the validity and authenticity of the Bible. We can trust the Bible. It is God's Word of hope and promise to mankind.

In the dream, Daniel saw an image whose head was made of gold. Its chest was of silver and its thighs of bronze. Its legs were of iron and its feet partly of iron and clay. These metals represented a succession of kingdoms as shown in the illustration to the right.



As you look at the statue, notice that no new metal arises after the Roman Empire. No new earthly kingdom takes its place. The metal that began in the legs goes all the way down to the feet and toes and mixes with clay. So what does this mean? It means exactly what Daniel said it meant.

This fourth kingdom would be divided. This is an amazing prediction, describing exactly what happened. The Roman Empire wasn't swept away by another great kingdom, as were those that preceded it. Instead, in the 5th century A.D. barbarian tribes in Europe broke up the pagan Roman Empire into the various nations that eventually have become what is known as modern Europe.

However, just as iron and clay cannot mix together, so the remnants of the Roman Empire would never be united again into one strong Empire.

Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm and Hitler have tried to



The Roman Empire would never be united.



unify what is greater Europe – but to no avail. The Word of God is true!

### **The Second Coming of Christ**

What happened next must have been awesome to behold. The dream ended with a stone! A stone cut out without hands hits the image at the feet and crushes it until there is nothing left. Then this rock grows until it encompasses the whole world. (Dan. 2:44).

This represents the coming of Christ to set up His eternal Kingdom where sin and death will be no more.

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

Think about this: Babylon came and went, just as God predicted. Medo-Persia came and went, just as predicted. Greece came and went, just as predicted. Rome came and then broke apart into the various divided nations, just as predicted. The part of this prophecy not yet fulfilled is the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. Where, then, are we in earth's history? We are on the verge of the ushering in of the eternal Kingdom of God. Jesus is coming soon! We are living in the time of the divided Kingdoms.

The next major event we will see is the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

We have learned something tonight about God, about His power, His might and His care. And how have we seen it? It has been revealed to us through His Word, the Holy Bible. In Daniel 2, we have powerful evidence that God speaks to us through His Word. That's because we've been studying God's Word, not man's. And this is just the beginning. All through this series of studies we will come across evidence upon evidence to show us that God's Word is trustworthy. God's wants His Word to become the ultimate authority of our lives. Won't you choose to serve the soon-coming Savior Jesus Christ?

Won't you choose to daily trust His Word, the Bible?

# THE GOD OF CREATION

If you walk outdoors and look around, you'll likely see trees, hills, flowers, streams or lakes, maybe even some animals. And if you look up you'll see the sun, the sky, or clouds. And on a clear night, you'll see thousands of stars and perhaps the moon as well. Where did everything we see around us come from? How did it all get there? For that matter, how did we get here? Who made us?

Some people say that nobody made our world – no one created the plants and animals and people that live here. They teach that our whole universe just somehow came into being all by itself – and that life somehow just happened into existence by chance by some unexplained accident. They say that life began with just simple cells – probably in the sea – and that those cells grew into tiny living things made of many cells. Then those little living things changed over millions of years into more complex creatures that moved from the sea to dry land where they grew legs. As the theory goes, some of these creatures developed even more and later walked on four legs. They finally learned to stand up, became monkey-like, then apes, and finally they became human beings. The Bible has a completely different answer to these questions of origin. The Bible says that we are created by a loving Creator God.

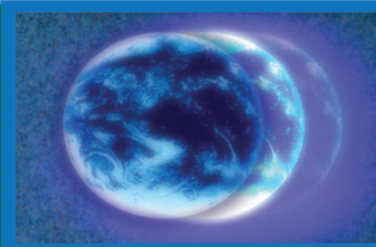
If you see a house, do you ever assume that somehow the house just made itself? Of course not! You realize that someone designed and built it. If you see a road, do you ever think that the road just made itself or that someone made it? Obviously someone made it, right? And roads and houses are far more simple than worlds or people! And when you look at people, animals, and stars, doesn't it just make sense to conclude that someone made them all? That someone designed and created them? So, as we begin to learn about the God who claims to be the Designer and Creator of everything, let's start with what the Bible says about His work in creating this earth and our universe in just one literal week.



The fingerprints of a Creator God are all around us.

## The Creation Week

- Day One: "God created the heavens and the earth.... Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.... So the evening and the morning were the first day." (Genesis 1:1-5) So we see that on the first day of the week God created this earth, He created light, and He began the cycle of days and nights.



- Day Two: "God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.... and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.'" (Genesis 1:6-8) On day two, God made the sky above us and separated the water on the earth from the water in the clouds and sky.



- Day Three: “God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear’; and it was so....Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind,...So the evening and the morning were the third day.’ (Genesis 1:9-13) The third day, then, God made the dry land to appear, created the seas, and covered the earth with plant life.



- Day Four: “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth’; and it was so....And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.” (Genesis 1:14-19) On day four, God caused the sun, moon, and stars to appear in the sky.



- Day Five: “Then God said, ‘Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens’....So the evening and morning were the fifth day.” (Genesis 1:20-23)



- Day Six: “God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creatures according to its kind: cattle and creeping things and beast of the earth, each according to its kind’...Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them....Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.” (Gen. 1:24-31)



- Day Seven: On the seventh day, God’s work of creation was done, so He rested. And He set aside the seventh day as a Sabbath of rest. The wonders of creation, the complexity of every member of this vast universe all point to a designer God. Take for example the human eye. It could not have evolved over long periods of time because it is absolutely useless unless it is a complete system. That is why David writes: “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works.” (Psalm 139:14)



### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

The fingerprints of a Creator God are all around us. “But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?” (Job 12:7-9) Yes, God did it all. This helps us see that it is our duty and privilege to worship God based on the fact that He is our Creator. “Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of His pasture.” (Psalm 100:3)

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

Does it surprise you that the mighty God who created and sustains such a colossal universe could be concerned about you? But love is something we can understand and the Bible tells us there is nothing in the world that can separate us from God’s love! Listen: “I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, not things present nor things to come nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38) God created you, that is why He loves you and desires to have an everlasting friendship with you. Won’t you make Him your Savior and Friend today?

# WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?

**W**hy is our world so full of pain, violence, and disease? Why have wars ravaged the world throughout history? Why do innocent people suffer? You and I are living in a war zone! The effects of this war that engulfs us look like this:

- A billion people go to bed hungry at night.
- One woman dies in childbirth every minute, 24 hours per day, 365 days a year.
- 100 million cases of AIDS are projected in the next five years unless something is done.
- At least 50 million were martyred for their faith during the Dark Ages. But 221 million are estimated to have been murdered worldwide during the last century alone.



How could all this pain happen if, as the Bible teaches, "God is love"?

This war has wounded all of us. No one escapes. The question is, what is going on here? How could all this pain happen if, as the Bible teaches, "God is love"? (1 John 4:8)

## KEY POINTS

To understand what's happening around us, let's go back to a story that unfolded in heaven, before this earth was even created. Revelation 12:7-9 tells the story: "And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." That's why Jesus said: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." (Luke 10:18)

So what do we see here: First, we see clearly that there is a place in the universe called Heaven. Secondly, there are two groups of characters in Heaven: the dragon, also known as Satan, and his angels. And there is Michael (which means in Hebrew, "One who is like God.") and his angels. Third, we see that there was a great war in Heaven, and Satan and his angels not only lost the war but were evicted. Finally, although this war began in Heaven, where does it wind up? On this earth!

That's the big picture. According to the Bible, you and I are in the midst of a battle that began in heaven. The Bible tells us then to, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

### Facts About the Great War

1. There is a place in the universe called Heaven
2. There are two groups in Heaven: the dragon, known as Satan with his angels, and Michael and his angels.
3. There was war between these two groups, and Satan and his angels were evicted from Heaven.
4. The war came to this earth and we are all in the middle of the battle.



Now, how was Satan able to get a foothold on this earth? The answer is found in the next few chapters of the Bible. Genesis states that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) It also says that God “saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31) God also created our first parents, Adam and Eve, and placed them in the midst of a beautiful garden, and gave them dominion over the earth.

Adam and Eve were told to avoid one tree in the garden. That tree was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They were told not to eat its fruit. If they did, the result would be death. (Genesis 2:16, 17) Why did God set up this test? It was a test of their loyalty to God. It was a test of how they would use their freedom of choice. Would they obey God or do their own thing? We all have freedom of choice, and we all face that same test. Are we going to do our own thing and become our own god? Or will we love God enough to obey Him? If we truly love God, then our conduct will prove it.



Adam and Eve were told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now back to our story. Look who appears in the garden: “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden.”’ (Genesis 3:1) So Satan, in the form of a snake, appeared to Eve, and tempted her to sin against God. (Genesis 3:2-3) God said, if you eat of the fruit you will die. And what did Satan say? No, no! “You won’t die!” (Genesis 3:4).

Basically, Satan told Eve she could become her own god. And this, my friends, is the essence of sin—rebellion against God - doing things our own way against God’s instructions. Faster than you can say, “Just a minute!” Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and acquired an immediate change of nature. They became rebels. Rebellion and selfishness suddenly became the norm for them—and for all of nature as well. Adam and Eve passed on their new rebellious natures to their children. And not too many years later, their first son murdered his younger brother. Such were the results of two people doing things their way instead of God’s. And that is how Satan got control of this planet. All this over eating a piece of fruit? No! All this over rebelling against God!

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

The good news is that though we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), God has not abandoned us to Satan. No, from the very beginning, from before Adam and Eve’s rebellion, God had a plan to rescue us from the devastation and consequences of sin. It’s called the gospel. The word gospel means good news. And let me tell you, the gospel is good news indeed.

What it tells us is that God has made provision to forgive us our sins and to give us power to live new lives in Him. The Bible tells us that “God is love.” And a loving God wasn’t going to leave this planet in the hands of His enemy. The Bible tells us that “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)

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

All around us we see the results of sin. But God promises us that one day all this will be gone, and we can have a share in His eternal kingdom. Right now we see the defilement brought by Satan. The good news is that this defilement is temporary. Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our rebellion, so that He can return the earth to its original beauty. Then it will become the eternal home of those who love Him. Won’t you accept the gift of eternal life that Christ freely offers to you today?

# WHAT HAPPENED AT THE CROSS?

Many years ago, a ship broke apart during a violent storm, and all the crew was lost except for one man. When the storm ended, he found himself floating in the water on a piece of debris. He despaired of ever being rescued. After a long time in the water, the man noticed an object on the horizon. He wasn't sure what it was, but he began swimming toward it. Finally he saw what it was: It was a cross. Just a cross silhouetted over the horizon as if it were planted right on the water. That cross proved to be his way mark! Never taking his eyes off the cross, he swam and swam until finally he saw the shoreline.

Yes, it was a cross sitting on a church at the high point of a small city. And in a real sense, it saved his life. Because, you see, that cross gave him direction and courage. It gave him hope. For

millions of others around the world, the cross of Christ has also led them to life—eternal life! But how and why does the cross have such power to save?

## The Gospel

- Jesus Christ, was part of the Godhead with the Father and Holy Spirit.
- Through Christ the world and everything in it was created.
- Christ was born of the virgin Mary and became one of us to live among us.
- Mankind has sinned against God and by rebelling against Him we are condemned to death.
- Christ was innocent of sin, but died as a substitute for us, so that whoever believes and turns from their rebellion may have eternal life.

## KEY POINTS

First of all, when we talk about the cross, we're not talking about just any cross. On the contrary, we're talking about one specific cross. And yet, it is who was hanging on that cross, Jesus of Nazareth, the Creator and God of the Universe, that makes this cross so incredible. On the cross hung one by the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

However, the Bible also refers to him as the eternal Word:

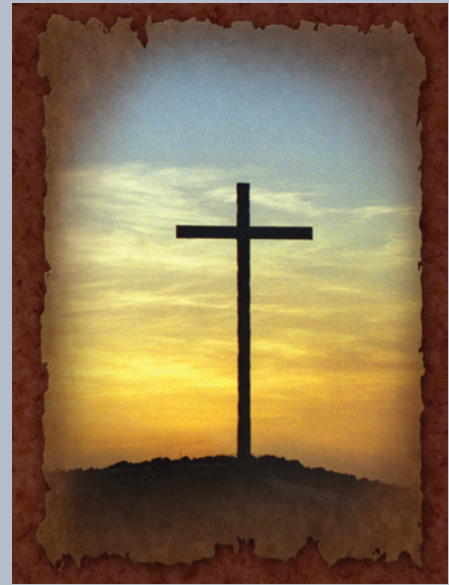
“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing

was made that was made.” (John 1:1)

Jesus was part of the eternal Godhead – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

The Word, Jesus Christ, was there at the creation of the world.

Hebrews 1:1-3 says: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”



For millions around the world, the cross of Christ has led to eternal life.



Jesus, the Creator of the Universe was born to a virgin by the name of Mary. (Luke 1:35) What does this mean to us? It is telling us that this little planet meant so much to God that He sent his only begotten Son to come down here and become one of us. And live and die here as one of us. What a wonderful picture of God this presents. What a comforting thought to know that this is what the Creator God is like. He cares about us so much that He came down to live with us in the form of His Son! (Phil. 2:5-7)

The amazing thing isn't so much that he could do it, but why? And here's the most wonderful truth in all creation: "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) He died for you and me because of love!

You see, the Bible tells us that all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and that the wages of sin is death.

(Romans 3:23; 6:23) And because we have sinned and done wrong, we've all forfeited eternal life. We now all face eternal death because of our sin and rebellion. However, Jesus offers us a way out. He tells us we can make a choice for Him and have Him as our Savior and Lord. "Choose Me," He says, "and I will give you eternal life."

Of course, most people don't consciously choose to serve Satan. But they make a choice for him every time they choose their opinions over God's authority. God tells us in the Bible, "You shall have no other God's before me," (Exodus 20:3), and that includes ourselves. But when we place our will over God's stated commands, we separate ourselves from the only source of hope, happiness, and life. The foundation of all sin and rebellion is human beings making decisions to become their own gods - and dying as the result.

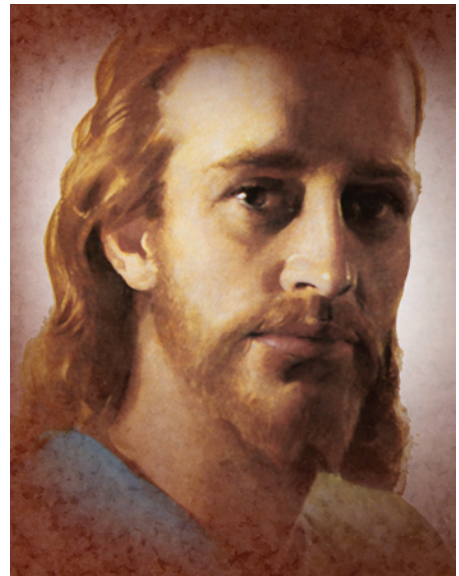
If we choose to accept His perfect life to cover our imperfect life; if we choose to accept His substitutionary death on the cross on our behalf, then through God's love and grace, in Christ we have passed from death into life! Why? Because the Bible tells us that "there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1). Put another way, the Bible says: "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 53:6) Oh, my friend, allow the wonder of this life-changing truth to sink into your mind. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

No matter what sins litter your past; no matter the guilt you and I carry due to the fact that we are sinners; despite all of that, when we come to Christ and accept Him as Savior and Lord, God promises to forgive our sins and remember them no more. (Hebrews 8:12; 1 John 1:9). The cross of Christ is the most powerful symbol in the universe because on the cross we see the most powerful demonstration of love the universe has ever witnessed!

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

Wouldn't you like to have the slate wiped clean from your past? Wouldn't you like to know the joy of being accepted by God? Just say Yes to Jesus right now. In your mind's eye, imagine Him standing before you saying, "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and him with me." (Revelation 3:21) Tell Him right now, "Come in Lord. Come in and take your rightful position on the throne of my life." When you open the door of your heart to Jesus, He will give you perfect rest. Jesus said "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)



He died for you and me because of love!



# SIGNS OF THE END OF TIME

In the 17th century a young man named Isaac Newton was sitting under an apple tree when an apple fell and hit him on the head. The result of that incident was that Isaac Newton discovered the law of gravity. However more complicated the true account probably is, there is no question that Isaac Newton and his discoveries concerning gravity was one of the great events in the history of human thought. It was a major step in what became known to the world as the scientific revolution. In every area of human life, people started to study nature itself, started to seek out the answers to the riddles of nature; laws that would help explain events that happen in the natural world.

And as more of these questions were being answered, a spirit of great optimism took hold in society. Because, you see, people believed that through the discoveries of science and technology, mankind would soon learn through his machines and inventions to overcome disease, natural calamities, even hatred and war. World War I, followed by World War II, with their combined 58 million dead, laid that optimism to rest. Many now call the age we live in the “Age of Fear.”

However, this is not a time to despair. Jesus predicted two thousand year ago that these things would happen before His second coming. Let us look at an astounding prophecy spoken by Jesus Himself regarding the signs that would herald His second coming. The prophecy is found in Matthew 24.

## KEY POINTS

Let's go back almost 2,000 years ago, to the ancient city of Jerusalem, where Jesus ended His ministry. Jesus is with His disciples and He points them to the magnificent buildings of the ancient Jewish temple, the pride and joy of the nation. And then He says something very strange to them: “And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.’” (Matthew 24:2).

This had to be astounding news to the disciples, for the temple was the center of worship and culture for the Israelite nation. And now Jesus was saying it would be destroyed? And sure enough, about 40 years later, just as Jesus said, the Temple was destroyed by the Romans. When the disciples heard that the temple would be destroyed they asked the questions, When? How? What will be the signs that this is about to take place?

Right after saying these things to His disciples, Jesus started to tell them about the signs of the end of the world, the signs that would precede his second coming. In other words, Jesus linked together the destruction of the temple with the signs of His second coming. He linked these two events, both filled with suffering and devastation, because He wanted them—and us—not to be discouraged.

What were the signs that Jesus said would precede His coming? Here they are: (see next page.)



Jesus, predicted two thousand year ago, many of the things that we see happening around us as sure signs that His second coming is near.



Jesus linked together the conditions surrounding the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 with the signs of His second coming.

- Matthew 24:11, 24: False Christ's and false prophets.

Some of these false Christ's would deceive many, and lead them astray.



- Matthew 24:6-7: Wars and rumors of wars.

It has been estimated that in the 20th century 160 million people have been killed directly as a result of war. Despite wars, Jesus said: "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." (Matthew 24:6)



- Matthew 24:7-8: There would be famines.

Famine in Bangladesh, 1970-1974  
 Famine in Ethiopia, 1984-85  
 Famine in Somalia, 1990-1991  
 Famine in North Korea, 1995-1998. Estimates are that 2 million people died in North Korea's famine.



- Matthew 24:7-8: There would be pestilences.

Pestilences or epidemics have increased in intensity, mainly due to the increased population around the world. The Spanish Influenza epidemic that killed an estimated 20-40 million people from 1918-1919 is considered to be the worst epidemic the world has ever seen. HIV AIDS is estimated to afflict 40 million people world-wide, 37 million adults and 2.5 million children under 15.



- Matthew 24:7-8: There would be earthquakes.

Devastating earthquakes are killing scores around the world. Here are just a few of the recent major quakes:  
 Algeria – October, 1980. Killed 2,590.  
 Mexico – September, 1985. Killed 9,500  
 Turkey – August, 1999. Killed 17,000  
 Indonesia and Pakistan in 2005 – Killed 250,000  
 Japan – major quake and tsunami, 2011.



- Matthew 24:14: The gospel of the Kingdom will be preached to all the world, then the end will come. This sign of the end is being fulfilled even as you read this paper and attend the Gospel meetings night after night.



### TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

Luke 21:28: "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near." What does this mean? It means that Jesus wants us to have hope and to trust Him. Jesus is telling us that none of these terrible things have taken Him by surprise, and we shouldn't be surprised either. We shouldn't lose faith in Him when tragedy strikes. Instead, we should seek help from above.

### BETWEEN YOU AND GOD

What about you, what about your own life? Are you struggling with things that just seem too big for you to handle? There's probably not a person in the world, no matter how rich, or powerful, or smart, who hasn't struggled with things too great for them to handle. Because no matter how rich, powerful, or smart someone may be, no one escapes the ultimate challenge we all face. And that is death! But Jesus beat death! And He wants you to know today that you can beat death too, through faith in Him as Savior and Lord of your life.

# RESCUE!

**A**t 7:30 on the morning of Sept. 23, 1994, Tom Hargrove, a business executive working in Cali, Colombia, found himself in a lot of trouble. He was driving down a familiar stretch of the Pan American Highway when he encountered a road block. No big deal, he thought. Police and military roadblock are common in Colombia.

But it was a big deal! This was no police roadblock. This was a rebel roadblock. He had survived three tours in Vietnam and now he feared he would die in Colombia. He was led away at gunpoint. Kidnapped. Eighteen days passed without a word from his kidnappers. Then came the first ransom demand. The kidnappers wanted \$6 million. By that time, Tom Hargrove was long gone, hidden away in the cold and forbidding Andes mountains. He was so isolated that for the next 11 months he would not see a wheel, a road, a window with glass. He would lose 50 pounds.

Over many months the \$6 million ransom was negotiated down to \$500,000 and paid. But no Tom. Finally, one day, in the words of his wife, "This very strange man walked into my bedroom. He smelled like ashes and had lost 50 pounds." But her Tom was safely back home again. How much would you pay to ransom a loved one? \$1,000? A million dollars? Everything you owned? Your life?

That was how much Jesus Christ paid to ransom you and me after we were kidnapped! His life! Here's Jesus Himself speaking about the very fact that He ransomed us: "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 10:45).

I tell you the Tom Hargrove story today because it illustrates a wonderful truth the Bible teaches: the Second Coming of Jesus and the rescue of those who've been kidnapped by Satan. The Bible has hundreds of texts that specifically refer to this event.

## The Second Coming of Christ

- "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." (John 14:1-3)
- "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:11-13).
- See also Hebrews 9:27-28.

## KEY POINTS

There are many Bible verses that speak of the great promise of the coming of Christ. In the box to the left are a few.

The Bible explains clearly the manner of His return. Speaking of Christ's ascension to heaven the Bible states: "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." (Acts 1:9) Notice what happened next? "And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10, 11)








Soon Jesus will return to rescue us from this sin-sick world.



Two things stand out here. First, “this same Jesus” WILL come back. It will be Jesus Himself Who comes back, not some emissary, spirit-guide, or angel. His return will be literal and personal. Notice, also, that He will return in the same manner as He went to heaven. We saw that He was lifted right off the ground and went up into the sky in the sight of many disciples. So, when He returns, Jesus will come down literally from the sky. In other words, He’s not going to just appear in the desert, or some secret place some day. He is going to come right out of the sky. Jesus said: "See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be ... Then will the Son of Man appear in heaven..., and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24: 26, 27, 30)

Revelation puts it this way: “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and EVERY eye will see Him.” (Revelation 1:7) Look at what this next text adds: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

Let’s review:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus Himself will come, literally, just the way that He left.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He is going to come from the sky.</li> <li>• His coming will be a world-wide event, something that everyone will see.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His coming is going to be LOUD. With a shout and a trumpet blast! (Read 1 Corinthians 15:52-53)</li> <li>• The dead will be resurrected.</li> </ul>	

“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.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17)

**TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

Dead or alive at Christ’s second coming, if you have trusted in Him, you will be given a new body that will never see sickness, pain or disease again. Instantly, through the supernatural power of the God who created the universe, you will be given a new body that will last forever.

Are you suffering now? Are you sick? Soon Jesus will return to rescue us from this sin-sick world. He will make all things right. His second coming is indeed our Blessed Hope!

**BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

When Jesus returns, there will be only two classes of people: Those who He takes to heaven and those who are left behind. My friend, God doesn’t force us to follow Him. He gives us a choice. Have you made a choice to follow Jesus?

# A BETTER WAY!

Imagine a great breakthrough in rocket science, and within a few years mankind lands on Mars. Before long, thousands of people are living on Mars. But soon bad things begin to happen. Things get so out of hand that the government back on earth sends space police to arrest the guilty. The police arrive but run into a problem. They are on Mars now, not earth, and Mars has no laws. If there is no law, then there's no violation.

That's why all governments have laws. If there are no laws, there would be no constraints on any of us. Who would want to live in such a place? Imagine how different our world would be if everyone obeyed the 10 Commandments.

## KEY POINTS

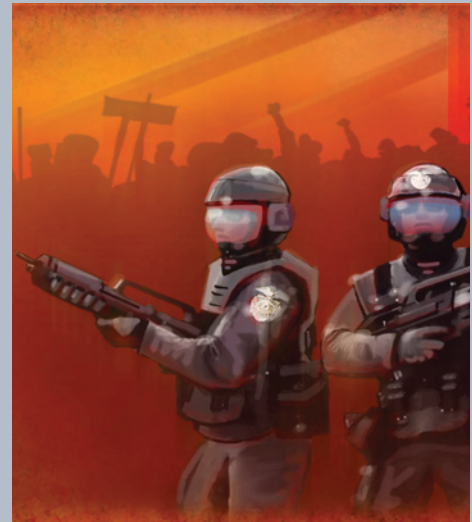
Yes, God has given us the Ten Commandments as a universal and timeless moral code. He told His people in Bible times to keep the commandments "which I command thee this day for your good." (Deuteronomy 10:13) This is a crucial point. He knows that obedience to His law is something that is for our benefit. We cannot trust to our own feelings for what is right and wrong. The Bible says "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) (Proverbs 28:26).

"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes." (Proverbs 21:2)

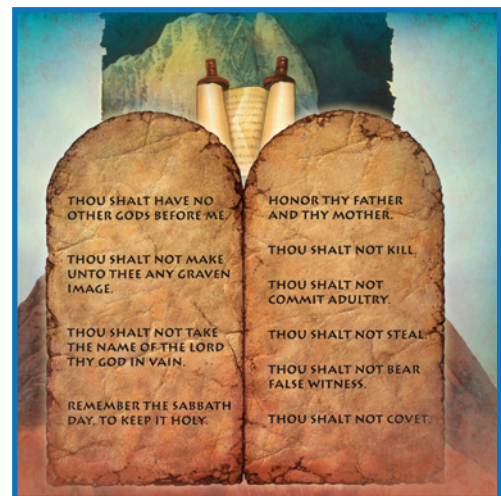
Years ago a debate on moral values took place between an atheist and a Christian. The atheist insisted that moral values came only from a person's feeling, nowhere else. The Christian said that moral values came from God. The Christian finally answered, "Sir, in some societies people love their neighbors, in others they eat them, all based on feelings and the promptings of their hearts. Which society would you prefer to live in?"



Cain knew murder was wrong.



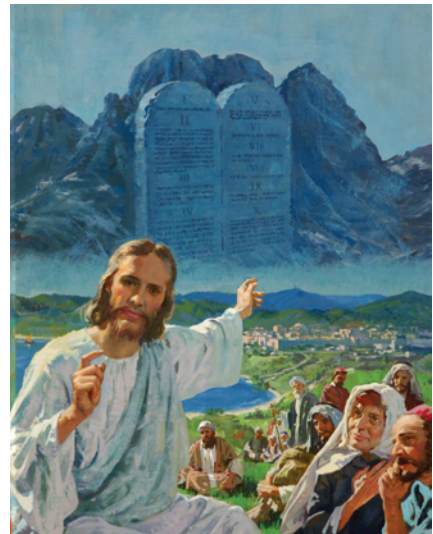
If there are no laws, there would be no constraints on any of us.



The Ten Commandments are a universal and timeless moral code.

Did you know that some say the Ten Commandments were given only to the Jewish people? What they want to establish is that it is no longer necessary for Christians today to adhere to God's law. Think about it, though. Were the Jews the only ones who were not supposed to kill, to steal, or not take God's name in vain? Remember the story of Cain and Abel and how Cain killed his brother? This was long before the giving of the law on Mount Sinai; before Abraham, the first Jew. And God punished Cain for murdering his brother. But how could God punish Cain if his act wasn't wrong? How about the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. He was tempted to commit adultery. Joseph said: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9)

But what about the New Testament? Didn't Jesus come to abolish the law? Actually, the New Testament teaches repeatedly that sin is breaking God's law. Here's one example: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4) Here is another New Testament text, also written after the death of Jesus. "Awake to righteousness, and sin not." (1 Corinthians 15:34) So we can see clearly that in the New Testament the law of God was still in effect. Jesus Himself said: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17)



Jesus said that not even the least commandment should be broken.

But someone may be asking, aren't we saved by grace and not by

#### God's Ten Commandment Law

- A universal and timeless moral code.
- Is for our benefit.
- For all mankind.
- Jesus "did and taught" it.
- Shows us what is right and wrong and reveals our need of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

works of the law? Of course. No one can be saved by keeping the law because the law was never meant to save anyone. Let me illustrate this point with a mirror. Let's say your hair is disheveled and your face isn't washed. Looking in a mirror isn't going to fix that, is it? Of course, it wasn't supposed to. It was merely to help you see your need of a good cleaning. The same is true with the law of God, the Ten Commandments. They show that we are all sinners in need of a spiritual cleaning, in need of a Savior. "For by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:21)

#### TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

Are you struggling with sin today? If so, I have good news for you. First, you can be forgiven! Second, Jesus wants to give you power

over sin. This doesn't mean you'll never sin again. It simply means that sin will no longer dominate your life. Listen to how the apostle Paul puts the matter: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." (Romans 6:14) When we're under grace, we have God's spiritual force field around us and He views us as perfectly righteous and holy.

Having been saved by grace we now desire nothing more than to honor our Savior by keeping His commandments. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." (1 John 5:2) Grievous? Look at all the suffering that has come to this world because people have disobeyed God's law. Sin is what is grievous, not obedience. The Bible adds, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (1 John 2:4)

#### BETWEEN YOU AND GOD

In the last days God's people are described this way: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:12) How can you and I get to this state of obedience? In two wonderful ways: First, by asking God to live out His life within us. And, secondly, by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior so that even when we fall short, He tells us, "I've still got you covered." Isn't that beautiful?

Wouldn't you like to have that experience? To be changed, to be healed, to start living in a way that is not only pleasing to God but will also make your life better? You can, starting right now, with Jesus in your life.

# GOD'S INDESTRUCTIBLE SIGN!

Symbols are powerful. In ancient Egypt, when Queen Hatshepsut died in 1470 B.C., her stepson Tuthmos III had her name chiseled off the temple wall. He wanted this symbol of his hated stepmother destroyed. A few years ago the Taliban regime in Afghanistan destroyed some giant Buddhist statues, symbols in their minds of paganism. They hoped by so doing to destroy the Buddhist religion which they symbolized.

Some people believe that the reason terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York City was because they wanted to destroy these symbols of American financial power. If you think about it, if something like the World Trade Center could be destroyed, what symbols are immune to destruction? Just about anything you can think of that stands as a symbol can be destroyed. Suppose, though, there was a symbol that was indestructible? Is there such a symbol?

*The first thing that God  
made holy wasn't a  
mountain, or a shrine.  
It was time!*

## KEY POINTS

The answer is yes! We find this symbol in the earliest pages of the Bible. We find it given before sin came to the earth. This was a symbol so indestructible that it exists even today. We find this symbol in the Creation story. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

The chapter then describes step by step the creation of this world. And when He was done, the Bible says: "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made." What day did God end his work? "And he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." (Genesis 2:2,3)

The word "sanctified" is another way of making something "holy." So, according to the Bible, the first thing that God made holy wasn't a mountain, or a shrine. It was time! God made the seventh day holy.

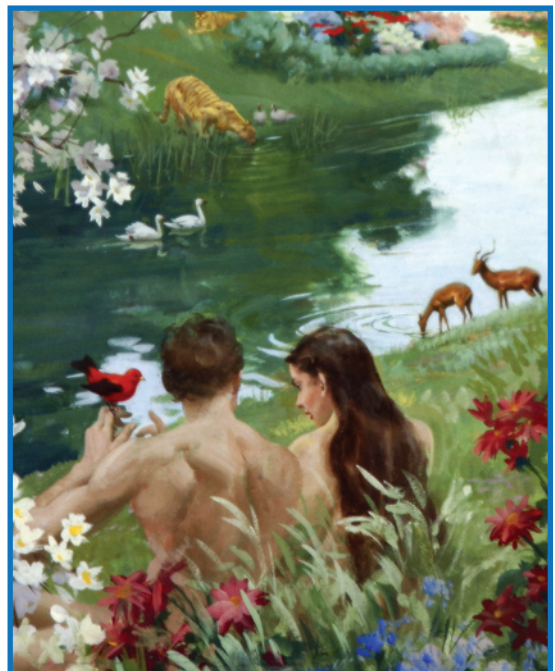
Why did He do this? Notice the answer: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it." (Exodus 20:8-11)

God made the Seventh-day special. It was the indestructible symbol of the fact He created the world. You can no more stop the coming of the seventh day than you can stop the sun from rising in the morning sky. When we work six days and rest on the seventh, we are honoring the God of creation.



God's symbol of creation is indestructible.

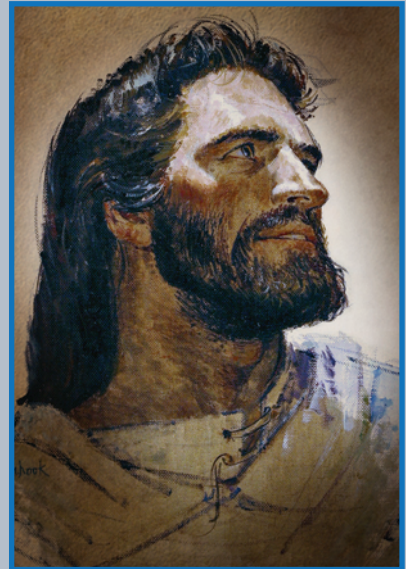
God sanctified the seventh day of Creation.



God tells us to rest on the seventh day. It's His gift of rest and relaxation. It is a refuge in time. The Sabbath allows us to unwind, to put away our routine activities and spend special time with God and with our families. It's His weekly invitation to come and spend special time with Him.

Some ask, wasn't the Sabbath just for the Jewish people? The Bible makes it clear that the Sabbath was for all mankind.

- The Sabbath was made holy before there was a Jewish nation (Gen. 2:1)
- The Sabbath was kept holy before the Commandments were given at Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 16:22-30)
- The Sabbath is written into the Ten Commandments, which are still standards of conduct for all God's faithful people. (Ex. 20:8-11)
- The Sabbath was a symbol of Creation for all His creation – not just the Jewish nation. Jesus made this point clearly when He said: "The Sabbath was made for man." (Mark 2:27)
- Jesus is our perfect example in life. It was His custom to keep holy the Sabbath day. (Luke 4:16)
- Jesus expected His followers, after His death, to keep the Sabbath holy. (Matthew 24:20)
- There are 84 references in the New Testament of the early church keeping the Sabbath. See Acts. 13:34 and Acts 13:42-44.
- John the Revelator refers to a vision he had on the Sabbath, the "Lord's day." (Rev. 1:10) Jesus tells us which is the Lord's day. "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28 and Luke 6:5).
- We will keep the Sabbath when we live with Jesus in heaven. (Isa. 66:22-23)



Jesus taught "The Sabbath was made for man."

What about the text that says: "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." (Acts 20:7) Doesn't this refer to a Sunday service? It appears this was a Saturday night meeting. For the Jewish writer Luke, Sabbath sundown would have marked the beginning of the first day of the week. Also, the fact that it was the first day of the week would have given the author of Acts a great opportunity to talk about any change. But he says nothing. (In our next presentation we will explore how the change from Sabbath to Sunday took place).

The weekly cycle has not changed since Creation. The Sabbath is still the seventh day of the week, what we call Saturday. How do we know Saturday is the Sabbath? It's pretty simple. It's the day before Easter! (Luke 23:54-56, 24:1-3).

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

Even if what we've learned from the Bible is right, and the 7th day Sabbath is the correct day, does it really matter? Does God really care whether we worship on that day or another? In the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve all the trees to eat from - except one. That was what they were commanded to do. Why would God care? Because God said He cared. He is God – our Creator. Our response of obedience is always based on our love for Jesus. "If you love, keep my commandments." John 14:15.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

We face the same decision that Adam and Eve faced in the garden. Will we worship and obey the God of the Universe or will we follow man-made traditions? God's people are described this way: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:12) Won't you choose, out of your love for Jesus, to keep His commandments? Won't you consider today, to start keeping holy God's true Sabbath day?



# HISTORY'S GREATEST COVER UP!

On May 7, 1915, the British ocean liner Lusitania was sunk by a German submarine, drowning more than 1,200 innocent men, women and children. It was one of the events that drew the United States into World War 1. For decades, history books all took the same position: The Germans had savagely sunk an innocent ship filled only with civilian passengers.

However, 50 years later, the world learned about an incredible cover up. Inside the hold of this luxury liner were 4,200 cases of small-arms ammunition. The “innocent passenger ship” had been carrying weapons of war and was in fact a legitimate target for the U boats in the Atlantic. People were astonished to know that they had been led to believe a lie for decades!

Do you ever wonder if some of the things you have believed all your life are flat-out wrong? It’s not always easy to accept new truth. And that’s what we want to talk about today: a traditional belief, a habit that has been long entrenched in Christianity that is, unfortunately wrong. We need to be careful about holding onto tradition over truth. Jesus Himself warned about this: “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (Matthew 15:9)

## KEY POINTS

In Daniel chapter 2, we saw how the prophet Daniel was given a view of world history. A great image represented four great world kingdoms which began in Daniel’s day and came right down to our time and beyond. You will remember they were, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome, then a splintering of nations culminating in the Second Coming of Jesus. In Daniel chapter 7 another vision is recorded that covers the same sequence of kingdoms, only this prophecy provides more detail for the same historical events.

“Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another.” (Daniel 7:2,3) Notice the elements in his dream:

Symbol	Interpretation
Four winds of heaven	War & strife (Jeremiah 49:36, 37)
A great sea	Peoples, nations (Revelation 17:15)
Four beasts coming up from the sea	Kings or kingdoms (Dan. 7:17)

Like the kingdoms in Daniel 2, which were represented by precious metals, here the kingdoms are represented by animals or beasts. These kingdoms are:

- Head of Gold and Lion: Babylon 605-539 B.C. - (Dan. 7:4)
- Chest of Silver and Bear: Medo-Persia 539-331 B.C. - (Dan. 7:5)
- Thighs of Bronze and Leopard: Greece 331-168 B.C. - (Dan. 7:6)
- Legs of Iron and Terrible Beast: Pagan Rome 168 B.C. - 476 A.D.

Here is where the similarities stop. Daniel is given greater details of this final beast – the one that not only is terrible, but also has 10 horns (like the image of Dan. 2 had ten toes) and out of which grew a “little horn” that “spoke great things” against the Most High (Dan. 7:8). So, what is this little horn power? Here are nine characteristics from the Bible:



A false belief has been long entrenched in Christianity



Daniel 7’s beasts represent four kingdoms

### Nine Characteristics of the Little Horn Power

1. It was part of the fourth beast – Rome.
2. It uproots three kings.
3. It has eyes like a man.
4. It speaks great things “against the most High.” (Dan. 7:25) It is a blasphemous power – speaking against God. It has a definite religious element.
5. Stronger than the other horn powers (Dan. 7:20)
6. It would be different from the other horn powers (Dan. 7:23)
7. Will persecute the saints (Dan. 7:25)
8. God’s people would be given into the hands of this power for a certain amount of time – “a time, times and the dividing of times.” (Dan. 7:25) We saw that using the day-for-a-year method of interpretation (Num. 14:34; Ez. 4:6), this time period is 1260 years.
9. This power would try to change times and laws (Dan. 7:25)



### Nine Characteristics of the Papal Power

1. It followed after pagan Rome.
2. The church destroyed three kingdoms. The Ostrogoths, the Vandals, and the Heruli.
3. It has a man at its head – the Pope.
4. It speaks great things against God. For example the church claims it can forgive sins! “There is no offense, no matter how serious, that the Church cannot forgive.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church. No 982.)
5. The Roman Catholic Church was stronger than the others. It still is a major force in the world.
6. It is different than the others as it is a religious power.
7. The Roman Catholic Church did persecute all those that disagreed with it. Millions died at the hands of this institution.
8. It persecuted and had undisputed power for a period of 1260 years, from 538 to 1798, when the Pope was taken captive by General Berthier.
9. It tried to change God’s law dealing with time.



So what power arises up after Pagan Rome? History is clear. It is Papal Rome. That’s why it is called the Roman Catholic Church. One of the most famous political philosophers of all times, Thomas Hobbes, wrote centuries ago: “If a man consider the origin of this great ecclesiastical dominion, he will easily perceive that the papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman empire, sitting crowned on the grave thereof.” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*.)

Papal Rome fits all the characteristics listed for the Little Horn as shown above, exactly.

Note in particular number 9 in the list above. The Roman Catholic Church claims to have changed the fourth commandment – the only commandment dealing with time. Here is what their own writings state: “The Church of God has thought it well to transfer the celebration and observance of the Sabbath to Sunday.” (*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 402).

Here is another Catholic source: “Q: Which is the Sabbath day? A: Saturday is the Sabbath day. Q: Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday? A: Because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.” (Cardinal Peter Gierman – *Convert’s Catechism*).

### TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (Mark 7:7) Keeping holy the seventh day Sabbath is a command of God; doing so on the first day is a commandment of men. Is it your desire to put God’s will first in your life? John wrote, “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” (1 John 2:4)

Do you know that right now, all over the world, millions and millions of Christians are keeping holy the seventh day Sabbath? They do it not to be saved or to earn merit with God, but because they love God and want to obey His commandments rather than the commandments of man. (John 14:15) They want to show their loyalty to God by obeying His commandments, including the one that goes against almost all the traditions of men.

### BETWEEN YOU AND GOD

The question each of us must answer is whether we choose to follow man-made traditions or God’s commandments. I would like to call your attention to the Bible text we saw earlier that describes God’s faithful people living near the end of time. “Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” (Revelation 14:12) My friend, don’t you want to be numbered among God’s people?

# WALKING WITH GOD

**F**red, a second year theology major, struggled. He wanted to be right with God. He determined that he would become a perfect Christian. He prayed, struggled, and seemed to have a real breakthrough. He was excited as he told one of his classmates, “I have made a list of all the things I need to overcome. I am going to take one of the items on my list every day and work and pray over it till I have mastered it.” He was very sincere. But the list was too long, the temptations too great, the struggle too hard. Fred left college in total discouragement. Later he gave up his faith completely.

Many Christians struggle over how to live in a way that pleases God. Fred had it wrong. He sought to win God’s love by what he would do for God. He

## Faith and Good Works

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”

-Ephesians: 2:10

failed to realize that we cannot win God’s love. Fred failed to see that the only way that he as a sinner could be saved is by accepting Jesus’ perfect life in place of his own imperfect life. (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:8-9)

## KEY POINTS

Doesn’t a true Christian seek to do everything possible to please God? Paul, shows how our faith makes good works possible, not as a means of salvation, but as a result of Jesus living in us. “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians: 2: 10).

The key to living the Christian life is to allow Him to live out His life in us.

Jesus set an example for us. Of His Father He said, “I always do what pleases him” (John 8:29). He indicated that doing what pleases God was better to Him than His daily food, “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4: 34).

Let’s consider some of the things God asks of us. As we look at them carefully we see that in them God has placed a blessing that brings joy. That in doing them we will enjoy a closer walk with Him and in the process will bring Him honor and glory.



A person is saved by accepting Jesus’ perfect life in place of his own imperfect life.



- **The Sabbath:** We are called to the joy of keeping holy the Sabbath day. We do this by not treating it like an ordinary day. (Ex. 20:8-11). On the Sabbath we are not to do our common work. We are to focus on spiritual matters and stay away from the secular. We are not to do as “we please,” but as He pleases! (Is. 58:13-14) It’s a time for worship. A time to spend with family and in nature. A time to do works of ministry, just like Jesus (Mark 1:21:31)



- **Stewardship:** The Bible teaches that everything belongs to God and we are merely the stewards of what belongs to Him. (Ps. 14:1). To help us remember this fact and to live a life of faith in His providence, God asks us to return tithe, 10% of our “increase.” (Malachi 3:10). The tithe belongs to God. We are merely returning it to Him for the use of the ministry of His church. Beyond that, He invites us to give offerings, cheerfully. (2 Cor. 9:7) Offerings are a response to our love for God.



- **Spiritual Life:** In order to be strong physically we must eat, breath and exercise! How does all this apply to our spiritual life? Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6: 35). To be strong spiritually we must feed on God’s word on a daily basis. We need to read and meditate on His Word, the Bible. Someone has said, “Prayer is the breath of the soul.” To maintain a strong relationship with God we need to talk to Him as to a friend. Also, exercise is doing God’s will, acting out our faith in obedience. The best spiritual exercise is sharing the joy you have in walking with God with those around you. Exercise is also becoming active in the church by using the gifts and talents God has given you through His Holy Spirit.



- **Physical Health:** God cares for our bodily health, because He created them! We know God cares about health because Jesus spent so much time healing people. God gives us guidelines to help us optimize our health. Why? Because our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 6:19-20). He counsels us to abstain from things that harm our bodies such as illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco. (Prov. 20:1) Research has shown how important diet is to our health. In Scriptures there are three diets:
  - The recommended diet – vegetarian one given to Adam and Eve. (Gen. 1:29)
  - The permitted diet – given to Noah after the flood, which included clean meats
  - The forbidden diet – the one that excluded eating unclean meats (Lev. 11) – most of which are scavenger animals and fish.



- **Our Dress:** Jesus is our example of humility. God knows the dangers of prideful adornment. Before entering the Promised Land, He ordered His people to take off their adornments. The Bible teaches us not to imitate the immodest styles and proud adornments of the world. “Do not let your adornment be merely outward as in the arranging of the hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of fine apparel, rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God...” (1 Peter 3:3-5). Peter even links our spiritual witness to the way we dress.



### TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

The question is, do we really love God? Do we really want to do what God asks us to do? If so, God has given us some basic principles about how to show our love for Him. All of these are expressions of loving God. To walk with God means that we love Him and are deeply committed to Him and seek to be like Him. It is impossible not to imitate those we love. And the wonderful thing is that we ourselves are blessed when we do them.

### BETWEEN YOU AND GOD

May the Lord open your heart and give you the desire to follow God in all the ways He wants to lead you. The Christian life is a journey of faith; a journey that we don’t take alone. Every step along the way we walk it with Jesus. “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy...Amen.” (Jude 24-25).

# HOW TO START OVER AGAIN!

**H**is name was Abbie Hoffman. He was born in 1937 in the United States. He became a political rebel during the 1960's and 70's. He led many protests against the American government and the American way of life. Later he was arrested on drug charges. Rather than face a trial he changed his name to Barry Freed and then had plastic surgery to change his appearance. A number of years later he turned himself in to police. Sadly, in 1989 Abbie Hoffman committed suicide.

What can we learn from this story? Hoffman tried to escape his past and change his life on his own, but it didn't work. His past caught up with him and his life ended in tragedy. Maybe you are also trying to put the past behind you. Maybe you are struggling with bad habits. Maybe you are dealing with regrets and hurts that you just can't seem to shake off.

Good news. First, you are not alone. All have sinned and done wrong. (Rom. 3:10-12; 1 Tim. 1:15) God's grace and forgiveness, regardless of your past, are available to you today. You can find forgiveness, healing and restoration at the cross of Christ. The Gospel is just this – we can have a fresh start! We can have a brand new life when we receive Christ as our Savior and Lord!

## KEY POINTS

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water.” (Matthew 3:13-16) Jesus, though sinless, was baptized to set us an example.



Jesus, though sinless, was baptized to set us an example.



You can find forgiveness, healing and restoration at the cross of Christ.



Those who accept Christ are baptized in His name.

To Jesus, baptism was very important. He told His followers to go and make disciples of all nations and to baptize them. (Matthew 28:18-20). Peter's sermon at Pentecost ended with this appeal: “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” (Acts. 2:38) Later it states that “those who gladly received his word were baptized...” (Acts. 2:41). Those who accept Christ as Lord are instructed and expected to be baptized in His name.

There is an interesting story of Philip who preached to a “eunuch” concerning the death of Jesus the Messiah. The man came under conviction. What happened next? “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.” (Acts 8:36-38) Baptism always follows our profession of faith in Jesus. In fact Jesus Himself said that “he who believes and is baptized will be saved.” (Mark 16:16)



**Biblical baptism is by total immersion in water.**

What does it mean to be baptized? The Bible is clear about this as well. “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3-4) The act of baptism is our public expression that we have decided to follow Jesus; that we are dead to our old self and now are alive to Christ; no longer slaves to sin but rather slaves of righteousness.

There is another question that we must answer and that is, what is the biblical method of baptism? The Bible states that there is only one baptism: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” (Eph. 4:5) The Greek word “baptizo” tells us that baptism means “to dip in or under.” A man tells a story about how he met a Greek man in a restaurant and asked him what the word “baptizo” meant in Greek. The man took a donut and immersed it in his cup of coffee. “There,” he said, “I just baptized my donut.” Biblical baptism is accomplished by immersion in water.

When John the Baptist baptized in the time of Christ, the Bible says that people came from all over “and were baptized by him in the Jordan river.” (John 3:6) He did not sprinkle them. He baptized them in the river. After Jesus was baptized the Bible says he came “up immediately from the water.” (Matt. 3:16) In fact, in John 3:23 the Bible says that John the Baptist was “baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.” You don’t need much water to get sprinkled. You need much water to completely immerse someone. Baptism was always by immersion.

Baptism is not only for those who have received Jesus as Savior for the first time, but it can also be appropriate for those who are accepting new truth about Jesus and His Word. (Acts. 19:5).

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

Baptism is a life and death decision. It’s a choice to die to our old self and live for Jesus. Are you ready to die to self and live for Jesus regardless of the cost? When the apostle Paul faced this decision, he didn’t hesitate. He had seen the light and that light was Christ Jesus. He was baptized and began a new life with Christ.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

If you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior but have not yet been baptized, what are you waiting for? Today is the day of your salvation! Don’t you want to express your desire to be wholly His by following your Lord in His example of being baptized? Is it your desire to follow your Lord in this sacred rite? If so, talk with a Pastor and set the date for your baptism today!

# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

There's a saying that goes, "It's not that life is so short, it's just that death is so long!" It makes a good point, doesn't it? No matter how long we live, it's clear that death will be longer. What happens at death? Where do the dead go? Can we communicate with the dead? We need answers we can trust. The devil has always lied to mankind about death. So, let's find our answers right from the Word of God.

## KEY POINTS

It all happened so fast. Frank barely had time to think. He'd been outside raking leaves, when he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his chest. He then collapsed. His wife, watching from the kitchen window, called for help. By the time the ambulance arrived, Frank's heart had stopped beating. As the paramedics tried frantically to revive him, much to everyone's relief, his heart started to beat again. Frank had a Near Death Experience. And though for those few minutes Frank's heart stopped working, his mind hadn't.

After he recovered, he told an incredible story of how after he collapsed, all the pain disappeared. He said he felt himself leave his body and shoot right into a gray, crackling mist. Frank floated outside his body and watched the medics trying to revive him. Then, off in the mist, he seemed to see his dead father who smiled at him and waved. Then a being full of warmth and light began talking to Frank and told him that it was not his time to die, that he needed to go back and become a better person. The next thing Frank knew he was staring up into the faces of the medics who had just revived him. For many, stories like this are considered proof of life after death. But what does the Bible teach?

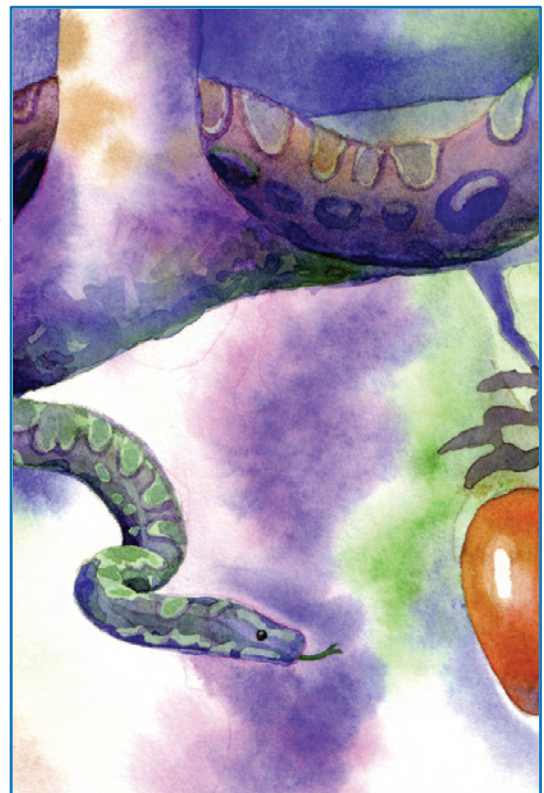
In the Garden of Eden God told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the forbidden fruit they would die. Satan, the serpent, said "No. You will not die." (Gen. 2:17; 3:2-4) The first lie that Satan told was about death. There are presently two views in Christianity about death. One view is that the dead go immediately either to heaven or hell. The other view is that the dead go to sleep until the second coming of Jesus when the dead will be called back to life – eternal life for the righteous. What does the Bible teach?

### Bible Teachings on Death

- "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:28,29)
- "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2)
- "For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?" (Psalm 6:5)
- "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." (Psalm 115:17)
- "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything." (Ecclesiastes 9:5).



What does the Bible teach about death and life after death?



The first lie that Satan told was about death.

Are the dead in heaven or sleeping in the grave? They are sleeping in the grave! They know nothing because they are asleep. Remember the story of Lazarus? When Jesus heard that Lazarus had died, what did He say? “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, ‘Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.’ Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.” (John 11:11-14) It is clear from the Bible, despite what you may have heard elsewhere, that the dead are asleep.

Notice this text about the creation of man: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Genesis 2:7) Notice two elements: the dust of the ground and God’s breath caused Adam to become a living soul.

Adam did not receive a living soul, he became one. The word “soul” is used in the Bible in numerous ways, usually to mean a living being, but it is never used in the sense of our being immortal. The Bible never teaches that man has an “immortal soul.” In fact, it says the opposite: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (Ezekiel 18;20). The same word used for “soul” in this verse is the word used for “soul” in Genesis 2:7.

Immortality is a gift of God (John 3:16). It is granted at the resurrection when Jesus returns. Paul says, “This mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-54)

What about the story of the thief on the cross? Didn’t Jesus say that he would join Him in heaven that very day? No. On Sunday, Jesus still had not returned to heaven. (John 20:17) The text simply states “assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43). Remember, punctuations were not present in the original text.

But what about the people who almost die and then come back to tell about some other realm of conscious existence? First, none of these people were really dead. All were unconscious for a short time then came back to awareness. Secondly, medical science has shown how people on drugs can have similar experiences. They are simply having hallucinations in which they see things that aren’t real.

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

Let’s summarize what we have learned: First, death came because of sin and death is a sleep in which one goes to the grave and remains unconscious until the coming of Christ. Secondly, Jesus died for our sins on the cross and rose from the dead to prove He had power over death. Thirdly, at His second coming He will raise the righteous dead and give them immortality. (Read 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58).



Death is a sleep in which one goes to the grave and remains unconscious until the coming of Christ.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

Christ died on the cross for our sins. By His resurrection He proved that He died for our sins and that His sacrifice for our sins had been accepted. So, is Jesus your Savior? If so, you have nothing to fear in death. Death is a temporary sleep. We rest in His arms, waiting for that great resurrection morning!



# WHERE WILL YOU SPEND THE MILLENNIUM?

In the 1930's, a group of scientists, looking at charts and studying trends, said that the safest place in the coming decades would be an island in the Pacific called Okinawa. This turned out to be the location of some of the fiercest fighting in World War II. Making predictions about the future can be difficult. Many people have made predictions about how our world will end. However, as followers of Jesus, there is good news. The Bible says, "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7) If we believe in the Bible, we don't have to worry about the future. God has revealed to us what the future holds. And if you love Jesus, you don't have a thing to worry about!

## KEY POINTS

Listen to Jesus' own words describing the manner of His return:

"Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out...' For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be . . . Then will the Son of Man appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matthew 24: 26, 27, 30)

Christ's coming will not be a secret. On the contrary, Jesus' return will be a dazzling event. John's description goes like this: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him." (Revelation 1:7)

Next we learn that every ear will hear Him: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God." (1 Thessalonians 4:16) This trumpet will be so loud it will wake the dead! This wonderful event of the dead in Christ coming back to life is called the first resurrection. "This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power . . ." (Revelation 20: 5, 6).

If the Bible talks about a first resurrection, can we assume there is also a second? What does the Bible say?

"Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." (Luke 17:28-30)

This text is describing the destruction of the wicked at the second coming of Christ. The second resurrection is the resurrection of the wicked at the end of the millennium.

What is this "millennium" period? The answer is found in Revelation 20:1-10. Take a minute and read this passage over. It details the closing events of this terrible battle between Christ and Satan.

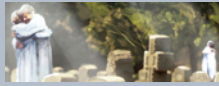
Let's outline, in chronological order, what transpires prior to, during and after this millennium:



Satan is forced to remain on a desolate earth with no one to tempt for 1000 years.



At the Second Coming, the dead in Christ are raised to immortal life, and those who hate Him are slain.



- At the second coming of Christ, the dead in Christ are resurrected. (1 Thess. 4:13-18)



- At the second coming of Christ, the wicked that are alive are destroyed by the brightness of His coming. (Luke 17:28-30; Rev. 6:15-17; 2 Thess. 1:8)



- Satan is left on this earth, bound to an empty planet, with no one to tempt, for one thousand years. (Rev. 20:3; Isa. 26:21; Jer. 4:23-24)4:13-18)



- The righteous sit on thrones and judgment is given them. (Rev. 20:4; Dan. 7:27; 1 Cor. 6:2,3; 1 Cor. 4:5) This judgment reviews the justice of God. Questions that might be considered are: Why are those we expected to see in heaven not there? Why are those we never expected to see in heaven, actually there? Is God just? (Rev. 16:7):13-18)



- At the end of the millennium, the second resurrection takes place – the resurrection of the wicked to everlasting damnation. (Rev. 20:5; John 5:29; Dan. 12:2)



- The New Jerusalem, along with the saints, comes down from heaven to earth, which will be the eternal home of the saved. (Rev. 21:2)



- Satan is unbound and he goes back to his old tricks – deceiving the nations. (Rev. 20:2-3; 20:7-8)



- The wicked, led by Satan, surround the New Jerusalem. In the midst of their attack, fire comes down from God out of heaven, and devours Satan, his angels, and all the wicked of all the ages. This is hell – the final destruction of the wicked. (Rev. 20:7-9; 20:14-15) This is the second death, from which there is no resurrection.

This leads to a crucial point. We've all heard about hell. The question is, what does the Bible really teach about it? Remember the familiar verse: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) Notice the contrast between "perish" and "everlasting life." Perish means to be destroyed, to no longer exist. That's not the same thing as being eternally tormented in hell somewhere.

Notice too that the Bible talks about "everlasting punishment," not "everlasting punishing." "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life." (Matthew 25:46) Psalms 37:20 puts it this way: "But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs; they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away." (See also Jude 7; Isa. 34:9-10; Jer. 17:27 and Mal. 4:1)

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

The fires of hell were not prepared for you. They were prepared for Satan and his angels. (Matt. 25:41). Jesus is preparing a place for you in heaven (John 14:1-3); a place where you can live with Him forever. The millennium will be a time when the redeemed review the justice of God and enjoy the fellowship of heaven. When the millennium is complete, this earth will be cleansed by the fires of hell. Then, a new earth will come forth to be the habitation of the redeemed for eternity.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

This is not a theory. This is something eternally personal to Jesus your Lord. He came to this earth and died a criminal's death on a cross so that you would be among those seated on thrones in heaven during the millennium. He wants to spend eternity with you. Why? Love. "For God so loved the world..." Won't you daily commit to be His disciple?

# THE LAMB OF GOD

The volcano rumbles and smoke pours into the sky. The priests slowly make their way up the long incline, chanting as they go. As they reach the edge, smoke billows and molten lava spews into the air. A few men come forward bringing a bound woman. Her eyes glisten with fear, but she is not resisting. The men bring her to where the priests stand offering prayers to the gods, asking for a good harvest and that the gods no longer be angry with them and accept this sacrifice as an appeasement for their sins.

When the prayer is over, the priests lift the young woman over their heads and throw her into the mouth of the burning volcano. What a terrible story! Yet all through history mankind

## Why Sacrificing Animals?

- It provided a graphic illustration that sin causes death.
- It gave hope to know that a substitute would die for sinners.

has felt the need to sacrifice. Even in ancient Israel, the Bible records that lambs and other animals were regularly sacrificed as part of their religious observance.

## KEY POINTS

Why did the practice of sacrificing animals become such a central part of the worship of the true God? The Bible provides two reasons. First, God wanted the Israelites to understand that “the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) When we rebel and sin against God, we forfeit our right to life. Each time an Israelite sinned he was to bring an animal, usually a lamb, to the sanctuary

where it would be killed. It was a graphic lesson that sin causes death. Second, God wanted them (and us) to know that we do not have to die for our sins. A substitute would die in our place.

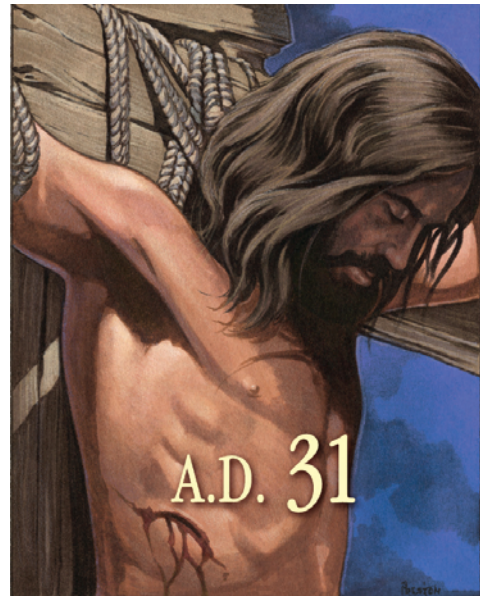
Now when Jesus started His ministry he came to the Jordan River to be baptized. When John the Baptist saw Jesus he said: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) John called Jesus the “Lamb of God” because Jesus would suffer and die in order to save us from the results of our sin, which is eternal death! The Bible says: “For He (God) made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Every one of those sacrificial animals was a symbol of Jesus. God was showing His people that one day the real Lamb of God would die in their stead. This was God’s plan from the very beginning. The Bible says: “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 13:8)

Not only does the Bible tells us that Jesus would die for our sins, but through prophecy, it also tells us when He would die!



Every sacrificial animal was a symbol of Jesus.



It all began with the prophet Daniel praying one day for Jerusalem, which had been ruined years before by the Babylonians. As Daniel was praying, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and gave him a prophecy centering on time: “Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city . . .” Gabriel told Daniel. (Daniel 9:24)

To put it simply, Daniel is told that in 70 weeks something is to happen to the Jews and to their city, Jerusalem. Now 70 weeks is just a little over a year, 490 days. But in Bible prophecy a day represents a year. (Num. 14:34; Ez. 4:6) So God said to Daniel that something significant was going to happen in 490 years. 490 years from when? The Bible tells us that too: “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks” or 69 weeks. (Daniel 9:25)



Jesus, the Messiah, came exactly on time to fulfill Bible prophecy.

So from the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem unto the “Messiah the Prince,” would be a period of 69 weeks. (69 weeks equals 483 days/years.) According to Ezra 7:13, the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem was given in the year 457 B.C. If you add 483 years to 457 B.C. it takes you to 27 A.D., the very year that Jesus was anointed (the meaning of Messiah is “anointed”) by the Holy Spirit at His baptism in the Jordan! Isn’t that amazing!

Now remember, that after the 69-week period, the Messiah would be “cut off, but not for Himself.” (Daniel 9:26) This means that Jesus would be killed sometime after 27 A.D. But more importantly, He wouldn’t just be “killed,” He would be sacrificed for you and me. The Bible puts it this way: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

But the prophecy tells us even more. So far we have covered 69 of the 70 weeks. There’s still one more week to go. The prophecy continues (remember this was written more than 500 years before the events!): “Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; *But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.*” (Daniel 9:27) After three and a half years Christ, the real Lamb would be sacrificed, cancelling the need to continue the cycle of animal sacrifices. And that’s what happened. In the spring of A.D. 31, “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” (1 Corinthians 5:7)

When the apostle Stephen was killed by stoning (34 A.D.), three and a half years after the death of Jesus on the cross, the Gospel began to spread throughout the world. (Acts 8:4) This ended the amazing prophecy about Jesus and the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the whole world!

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

In this amazing prophecy, God lets us know that we can trust Him and His Word. God sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for you and me on a time schedule - and Jesus was sacrificed precisely on schedule. God told us that a substitute would come and die for our sins, and He also told us when. Jesus fulfilled that prophecy perfectly. Now we, who are living hundreds of years after these prophecies, can look back into history and see that God is, indeed, true to His words. He is a wonderful God, and we have a wonderful Savior!

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

Regardless of who you are, regardless of what you have done, Jesus, the Lamb of God, has paid the penalty for your sins. God loves you! Jesus died for you. His sacrifice on the cross was for you. Jesus is offering you eternal life as a free gift! Why don’t you accept that gift right now?

# GOOD NEWS FROM THE COURTROOM

On the day he was to be hanged, he was served a meal of peas, bread, olives and tea. As midnight approached he was led to the gallows. He was pronounced dead at 11:58 pm., May 31, 1962. His body was cremated and his ashes strewn out at sea. The executioners? Jews. The criminal? Adolph Eichmann – the man who orchestrated Hitler’s systematic murder of millions of Jewish men, women and children. However, was there really justice in hanging someone who killed millions of people? No, not really. Only God can provide that kind of justice. The Bible says He will do just that: “For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:14; 2 Cor. 5:10)



The Bible indicates that some sort of judgment takes place before the Second Coming of Christ.

Justice will be done. The Bible says: “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with

### The Judgement Proves:

- God has been fair
- He has done everything He can to save each person.

Me, to give to every one according to his work.” (Revelation 22:12) This text implies that there will be some sort of judgment before the Second Coming of Jesus for He will bring His reward with Him.

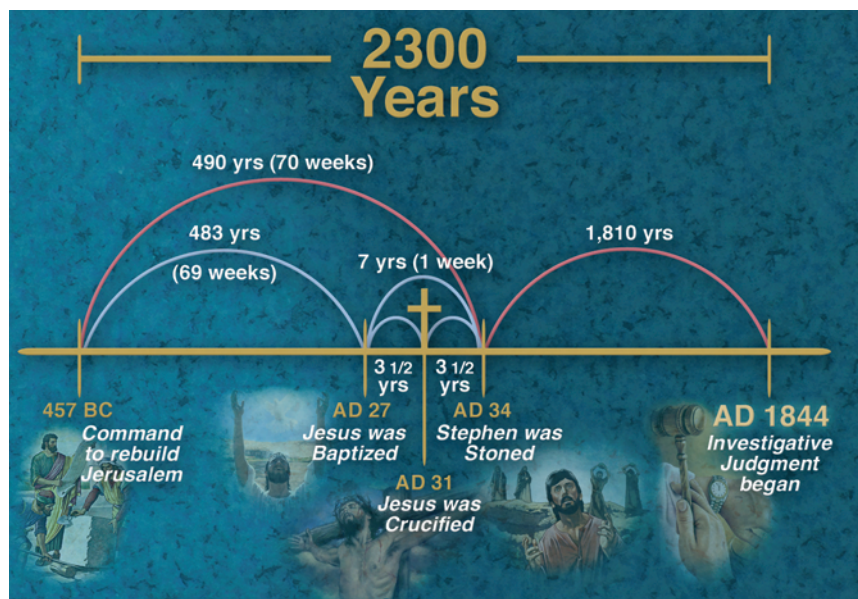
### KEY POINTS

Keep in mind, though, that the judgment is not just about man. It is also about God. In this conflict between good and evil, has God been fair? Has He done everything he can to save each person? Before the on-looking universe, God will prove that He was just and fair in all his dealing with sin and sinners! (1 Cor. 4:9; Eph. 3:10)

Unlike the courts of man, the decisions in God’s court are never wrong. The Bible says even those who reject the salvation God offers will admit in the end that God’s verdict was just. (Rom. 14:11) Let us read the Bible’s clearest description of this pre-advent judgment. “I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated.... His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire.... Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.” (Daniel 7: 9, 10) If you read on in the vision, it becomes clear that following this judgment, Jesus returns. Clearly, this is the judgment that takes place just before Jesus returns.

The court described here is clearly a judgment scene. In the Bible, books are often used during a judgment: “And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” (Revelation 20:12)

Let’s make sure one thing is perfectly clear: Not one of us facing the judgment is worthy of eternal life. So it’s pretty wonderful that in this court, many whose records come up before the Judge of the Universe find the word, “Pardoned!” after their name. They have asked Jesus to forgive their sins and become Lord of their lives.



So essential it is for man to understand how God deals with the sin problem, that He gives us an object lesson in an earthly sanctuary where sins were dealt with. The sanctuary had various compartments and functions:

- Courtyard – Lambs and other animals were brought here to be sacrificed for the sins of the bearer.
- Holy Place - After this, the blood from the animal was taken into the Holy Place, transferring the guilt from the person to the sanctuary by way of the sin-laden blood. This defiled the sanctuary with the sins of the people.
- Most Holy Place - Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest went into the Most Holy Place bringing the blood of another sacrifice with which to cleanse the sanctuary. This cleansing of the sanctuary was also known as the great day of judgment. (See Lev. 16) In the Jewish faith it was understood to be the day when every person's case was decided either for or against God.



When Jesus was sacrificed on the cross, all symbols met their fulfillment. The earthly sanctuary service was no longer needed. This was made clear when at the death of Jesus, the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, was torn in half. (Matt. 27:50-51). Now, salvation history moves from earth to heaven – to the heavenly sanctuary. “We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.” (Hebrews 8:1)

During this final Day of Judgment Jesus stands in the heavenly sanctuary not only as our defense attorney, but also our judge! The Bible tells us, “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” (Hebrews 9:24) That’s why the judgment is nothing to fear!

We have learned from Daniel 7 that there is a judgment that takes place before Jesus returns. Can we know when that judgment actually takes place? Yes! Daniel answers that question for us in Daniel 8 and 9. Daniel 8:14 is a key text: “And he said unto me, unto two thousand and three hundred days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.”

First, let’s remember that in prophetic language a day is equal to a year. (Num. 14:34; Ez. 4:6). The context of this prophecy indicates that the starting date is the same as what we saw with the 70 week prophecy that outlined the probationary time for the Jewish people and the coming of the Messiah. The starting date was 457 B.C. (Dan. 9:25). So, if you add 2300 years to 457 B.C. you will arrive at 1844 A.D. This is the date that God’s pre-advent judgment began.

Just as the High Priest, on the earthly day of judgment went into the Most Holy Place, Christ our great High Priest, went into the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary and began His work of judgment in 1844. When this judgment is completed Jesus will come again! Jesus is coming soon, and His reward will be with Him (Rev. 22:12)

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

The judgment-hour message is another way for God to tell us that Jesus is coming back soon. We need to be ready because “we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10 ). The judgment hour message, which began in 1844, is another example of a merciful God calling us to decide for Him, because the judgment is going on right now.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

We must remember that the judgment is good news! If you’ve accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you can rest assured that your name is written in God’s Book of Life. When the judgment is finished, then God will stand vindicated before His universe. On that day all will acknowledge that God is loving, merciful and just! Yes, this is the good news that the judgment provides!

# WHY SO MANY CHURCHES?

**H**ave you ever noticed all the variety in nature? There are thousands of different kinds of flowers, trees, birds and animals! And people too! With the exception of identical twins, it's rare to find any two people who look alike. But there's one area where variety might not be so good, and that involves the question of why are there so many different churches?

You might say, isn't that good? Not everyone likes the same kind of church. There's a common view that all religions just provide different paths to the same God. But how can this be true when the teachings of different religions are often totally opposite of each other?

The problem is not that there are so many roads. No, God tells us clearly which road to take. The problem is that the road God tells us to take is not the smoothest nor the most popular. That's why Jesus said: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life." (Matthew 7:13, 14)

## KEY POINTS

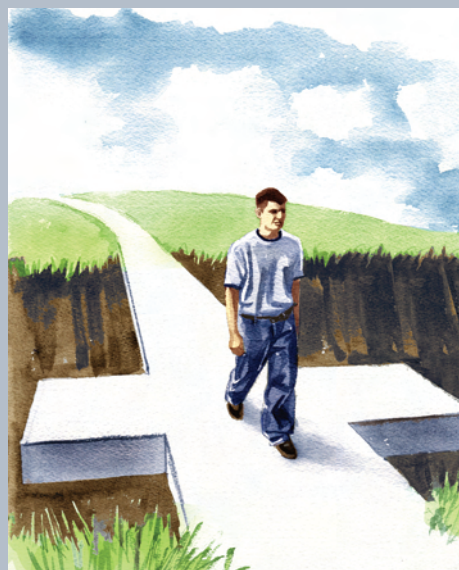
Jesus said the true way is narrow. He doesn't say the "ways" leading to life are narrow. Maybe He is referring to different religions other than Christianity? What about within Christianity itself? Sure, there are lots of different denominations, but don't they all teach the same thing about Jesus? Good question. Let's see how God answers that question: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8, 9)

For example, some churches say that in order to receive forgiveness for our sins, we need to confess our sins to a priest; others say we don't need a priest but can go directly to God. Both can't be right. Some churches baptize believers by sprinkling, others by complete immersion.

Some baptize babies, others have children wait until they are older and can decide for themselves. Yet the Bible says there is "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism." (Ephesians 4:5) As you can see, they can't all be right.

Some say that after the cross, the Sabbath was done away with. Others believe it's still God's will for His people to observe it. Both can't be right. Some people believe the dead are unconscious when they die (Eccl. 9:5), while others believe when you die you keep on living, either in comfort or in agony. Both can't be right. How do we know which one to choose? How can we find the church with God's truth for this time? God gives us a wonderful promise: "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go." (Psalm 32:8)

The God of heaven is not influenced by popular opinion. He simply tells us, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." (Matthew 24:14) What is that gospel message? First, we find in the New Testament a call to worship the Creator God. "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible... all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Colossians 1:16, 17)



Jesus said the true way is narrow.



"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world."

Second, the New Testament clearly indicates that the Ten Commandments are to be obeyed. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.” (James 2:11, 12) And again, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” (1 John 5:3)

Third, included in our obedience to the Ten Commandments is the Sabbath commandment that points to God as Creator. Look at what Jesus said: “For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” (Matthew 12:8)

So we see that God’s message for the world is salvation by accepting Jesus as our Savior. Then, from a grateful response of love to our Lord, we are called to obey His Commandments. So how can we recognize God’s last church? By the message it presents.

First, it must emphasize the gospel, the good news of salvation by faith in Jesus’ Sacrifice. Second, it must call men and women to worship only one God, the Creator. (Revelation 14:7) Third, both in the Old and New Testaments, God’s people are to keep His Ten Commandments.

And, fourth, at the heart of the Ten Commandments is the Sabbath commandment, the one commandment that points to God as our Creator.

Talking specifically about God’s people in the last days, the Bible describes them this way: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” (Revelation 14:12) So, which church would God have us be a part of in these last days? First, I would look for a church that was preaching the everlasting gospel and one that called people to worship the Creator God both as Savior and Lord. Worshipping Jesus as our Lord means we submit our will to Him and obey Him because we love Him. Directly linked to that, I would look for a church that was depicted in Revelation 14:12 as those “who keep the commandments of God” and have faith in Jesus. And when you find that church, may I suggest that you will have found God’s remnant people for this hour in earth’s history. And with all the conviction at my command, may I suggest that you have found that church at the meetings you have been attending.

Welcome home, my friend!

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

The Lord is clear about those that will make up His final people. They have two overarching characteristics: They love Jesus and keep His commandments. They keep all of His commandments, including the Sabbath commandment. We are called to join together in Christian fellowship and be part of the Body of Christ, His church. Make a decision to follow Jesus wherever He leads you.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

Don’t expect that the church that loves Jesus and preaches the everlasting Gospel to the world and keeps all of His commandments will be the most popular one in your neighborhood. The issue for us is not to follow the crowd. Rather, it is to follow Jesus and His Word, the Bible. Won’t you choose to be a part of Christ’s last day, commandment keeping people?



God’s church loves Jesus and keeps His commandments.



# THE COMING OF THE COMFORTER

Julio grew up in the slums of a large city. By the time he was 13, he'd been arrested four times. By 16, he was immersed in a gang. At 19 he was shot and almost died. Within six months, Julio was back on the street living his life of immorality and crime.

Then one evening while walking down the street he passed a church. He saw a sign out front advertising some gospel meetings. He heard a voice urging him to go in. He obeyed and became a changed man.

The speaker talked about Jesus and how He died for their sins. No matter how sinful their lives had been, the speaker said, because of the sacrifice of Jesus they could be forgiven. They just had to choose Jesus. And Julio did and now was a Christian.

Today he's married and has become a minister. How do we account for this? God's Holy Spirit came into his life and made him a different person.



We can't see the Holy Spirit, but we can see the results of His work in the lives of people.

## KEY POINTS

Just before He returned to heaven Jesus said: "My children, I will be with you only a little longer.... Where I am going, you cannot come." (John 13:33) Though He would leave them He promised that one day He would come back. And then He said, "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:20).

How do we reconcile those two statements? The answer is found in one of the greatest promises of the Bible. It's the promise that, although Jesus has gone back to heaven, He hasn't left us alone. "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever." (John 14:16; see also John 14:26; 15:26) The Holy Spirit provides a different kind of power. Though we don't see the Holy Spirit, we can see the results of His work in the lives of those in whom He is working, like Julio.

The New Testament teaches that the Holy Spirit is God, just as Jesus and the Father are God. We're talking here not about three gods, but three manifestations of one God. One of the most famous lines in the Old Testament comes from the book of Deuteronomy about this very subject. Listen! "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." (Deut. 6:4) The word translated "one" comes from the Hebrew word that's often used for something composed of parts. For example, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) One flesh, made up of two parts, a man and a woman. The word for "one" is the same word for "one" in Deuteronomy 6:4. (See also Gen. 1:5 and Matt. 28:19)

The Holy Spirit accomplishes many things in our lives. The Holy Spirit enables us to understand truth. Jesus said: "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13)



The Holy Spirit is also the voice of conscience in people. The Spirit also is given to us to help us have the power to obey God's commandments. But, being drawn and convicted by the Holy Spirit is one thing. It's totally another matter to follow those convictions. For instance, we've been convicted by the Holy Spirit that Jesus died for our sins. But we still have to make the choice to follow Jesus. Have you sensed God speaking to your heart in these meetings? Don't resist that conviction.

Have you ever had calluses on your hands? How did you get them? As you worked on a project, at first your hands were sore. But after a while they began to toughen, until one day you could feel nothing when you worked. It's the same with the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The more we resist, the more we harden ourselves to the wooing of the Spirit and as such we are heading toward committing the "unpardonable sin," the sin God cannot forgive.



The Holy Spirit is the voice of conscience in people.

"Wait, you say, doesn't the Bible tell us that God can forgive all sins – even adultery and murder? So what are we talking about when we refer to the unpardonable sin?" The Bible tells us in the words of Jesus: "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men." (Matthew 12:31, 32) Then what is the sin against the Holy Spirit? So what sins can't God forgive? Only those we don't confess. So, the sin against the Holy Spirit is the sin of continuously not responding to His promptings until we can no longer feel them.

You may have had a Christian friend ask, "Are you filled with the Holy Spirit?" Or they may say, "Have you received the baptism of the Holy Spirit?" Often what they mean by their question is, "Do you have the gift of speaking in tongues?" Let's see what the Bible says about the gift of tongues.

In the book of Acts, after the Holy Spirit fell, look at what happened: "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language...." (Acts 2: 4-8, 11)

What do we see here? We see that the early Christians were given the gift of speaking in known languages. People from all around the world each heard the disciples speaking in their own language. Why was this gift given? To communicate the gospel.

Who did Jesus say would receive the Holy Spirit? Jesus said: "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever." (John 14: 15, 16; Acts 5:32)

Another way we can know if we have the Spirit is to have the fruits of the Spirit spoken of in Galatians 5:22-23.

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

The Holy Spirit is a real person, one of the three-in-one Godhead. Upon the ascension of Jesus to heaven, He has been sent to comfort us, to convict us of sin and to lead us to the foot of the cross. He also gives us power to have victory over sin and have the promised gifts of the Spirit that reflect the character of Jesus.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

The promised Spirit will lead you into all truth. He will comfort and guide you. He will gift you for good works and the strengthening of His church. He will convict you of sin and give you power over sin. Won't you open your heart now to Jesus and His promised Spirit?

# WELCOME TO THE FAMILY: PILGRIMS IN PROGRESS

**W**e all have had the experience of having someone we looked up to disappoint us. People we have respected and even loved have let us down. Except for Jesus, no one is perfect. The apostle Paul was unquestionably the greatest of the apostles. But even he admitted to having shortcomings: “This is a faithful saying,” Paul wrote, “and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” (1 Tim. 1:15) The Bible makes it clear that we are all sinners. We’ve all fallen short of the glory of God.

## KEY POINTS

Over the past weeks we have learned some fascinating truths from the Bible. We have learned that Jesus, God Himself, bore our sins and died for us on the cross, and that through faith in

### 1 John 5:3

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”

His sacrifice we can have forgiveness for our sins and receive eternal life. (Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8-10)

We also studied the truth about the Ten Commandments. We saw that we are not saved by keeping the law, but that we keep the law because Jesus has already saved us. (1 John 2:3) And because we are saved by Jesus, we love and obey Him. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” (1 John 5:3) We saw, too, that at the heart of those commandments is the Sabbath. We looked at how Jesus kept the Sabbath and healed people. We saw that it was never changed and that

God expects His people to observe the Sabbath today.

Many of you have studied, you’ve prayed, and you’ve made a decision to be baptized. You have decided to follow Jesus, Who says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) I commend you for that decision. And many of you are ready to join the Seventh-day Adventist church and become part of the family of God. We warmly welcome you to our church family. You are becoming a part of God’s last-day remnant that gains three thousand new members every day! You are joining a special church full of wonderful and committed Christians. You are joining not just a church, but a prophetic movement with a wonderful message for the world.

God has always had a people who would proclaim truths about Him. And yet when we look at those messengers, we see that few if any of them always lived up to the truths they proclaimed one hundred percent of the time.

Look at some of these messengers from Bible history. Take Noah, a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 5:2). He did a great work, but when it was done the Bible tells us he lay naked in front of his family. Not good conduct for a “church leader.” And how about David – a leader of God’s chosen people, who murdered a man so he could marry his wife. The same failings can be seen in the New Testament church. Church leaders showed favoritism towards Jewish widows at the expense of Gentile widows. (Acts 6:1). Even Paul had problems getting along with his co-workers Barnabas and John Mark. (Acts. 15:36-39).



The family of God is a special place with special people.



Even the great men and woman of the Bible had character faults.

Now, what is the point of all this? It is to tell you that God is perfect, but God's people are not. That is why throughout these meetings we have been pointing you to Jesus and His Word, the Bible. The truths you have learned have come from the Bible, not from a person. The Word of God will endure forever. (1 Pet. 1:24-25) And because we have learned these truths, many are getting ready to be baptized and to join the Seventh-day Adventist church. And again I say, God bless you. Welcome to the family of God.

We welcome you as you become part of a world-wide family of more than 16 million people in 200 plus countries around the world. We are a church that speaks 717 languages. This church is growing by more than 3,000 members a day, or 21,000 members a week! This is now your church!

You are joining a church that believes in healing. Your new church operates more than 500 hospitals and clinics. It operates the largest protestant educational system in the world. It has radio and TV stations that broadcast the Gospel around the world. And all these ministries have one goal, and that is to tell the world about Jesus and His soon coming! And now, you too can have a part in spreading this message around the world.

And yet, you will soon discover for yourself that the church, and the people in it, are not perfect. Only God is. One day the pastor might do something that disappoints you. Maybe a church member or church leader will disappoint you. But remember to look at the pastor's hands. You won't find scars from the cross there, will you? No, the pastor didn't die for your sins. Look at the church member's or church leaders' hands. He or she didn't die for your sins, right? No, there's only one person who bore those marks for you, and that's Jesus. Jesus alone should be the main reason you join the church. It's because you love Jesus and want to follow Him and keep His commandments that you are joining the church. In the end, remember, you are not saved because your name is on the church books. You are saved because of Jesus. Look to Him. Look for truth in God's Word.



You too can have a part in spreading this message.

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

As a member of the church, we must always keep our eyes on Jesus – for He alone is perfect. He alone will not disappoint us. Jesus told a parable in which he taught us that the church would not be perfect – but that one day, He would separate the wheat from the weeds. That separation is His work. (Matt. 13:24-30) Until then, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus who alone is the author and finisher of your faith! (Heb. 12:1-2).



Jesus will separate the wheat from the weeds.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

Perhaps you have not yet made the decision to unite with God's family, His church. That invitation still stands. Christ is calling you to be a part of His last-day church, those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus. (Rev. 14:12) Please make plans today to be baptized and join those who are proclaiming and waiting for the soon coming of Jesus!

# THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS

**L**ouie was six years old. He was a happy, active little guy with long blond curls and a smile that wouldn't quit. Everyone loved little Louie. Then one day his mother noticed something was wrong. Louie had stopped gaining weight. He was sleepy and sick a lot. She took him to the doctor, who told her, "Your child has Leukemia." Within six months Louie was dead. So was that it for little Louie?

## KEY POINTS

Do you remember that disastrous tsunami in southern Asia that took more than 200,000 lives? I still think of the children and others who were swept away by the waves. Is there any hope for those killed in this terrible disaster?

Death is all around us. Sooner or later we all face it. It seems that death is the final answer. It seems that death is the strongest force in the world as it seems to always defeat life. Is death really the king? No! I'm here to tell you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that death is not the end. On the contrary, the final answer is life; eternal life through Jesus Christ. Just look at these promises found in your Bible:



Everything will be restored the way God intended it to be.

## God's final answer to the problem of death:

- "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)
- "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life." (1 John 5:13; see also 1 John 2:25; 5:13; John 6:40; Titus 1:2).

Before you were born, it was God's plan for you to live with Him forever, as if you'd never sinned. What a promise! The Bible tells us that Jesus "must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets." (Acts 3:21,22) Restoration is in many ways the key to understanding the whole essence of the Christian faith. It's all about restoration, about God making things the way they once were. Perfectly wonderful!

Sickness, suffering, pain, and death are not natural. These are unnatural intruders into God's original plan for life on earth. God is simply going to restore what was lost through sin. That's what salvation is all about. God is in the process right now of seeking to restore us morally and spiritually and get us ready for our new home. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you..." Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people. God is working in us now, giving us promises of change, of restoration, of a new life. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

This restoration begins in us the moment we accept Jesus. It will climax at the very end of time when we live with Jesus in a new heaven and new earth. Everything will be restored from its damaged condition.



When Jesus comes a second time the dead in Christ, who are sleeping in the grave, will be resurrected to immortality. (1 Thess. 4:16; Isa. 26:19). “Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (1 Corinthians 15:52,53)

At the Second Coming, the dead in Christ rise first, and together with the living righteous, are taken with Jesus to heaven. (John 14:1-3) On the other hand, the wicked that are alive when Jesus comes back will have no place to hide, as the earth becomes a vast wasteland scorched by fire. (Luke 17:28-30; 2 Thess. 1:8).

You recall that after the coming of Jesus the saints spend one thousand years in heaven, while on earth, the devil is left with no one to tempt. He is bound to this earth to contemplate the circumstances of his evil deeds. (Rev. 20:4; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3) At the end of the millennium, the New Jerusalem comes down to earth and when the resurrected wicked seek to take the city by force, the fires of hell come down from heaven and completely destroy them, including Satan and his angels. (Rev. 20:7-9)

This is the final judgment where deeds are punished once and for all. The Bible tells us that “this is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:14, 15) How tragic. None of these people needed to be there. Any one of them could have been inside with the redeemed who have accepted Jesus.

John goes on to tell us, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.” (Revelation 21:1) The old world is gone and the same God who spoke our world into existence recreates it afresh, more beautiful than before. And this, my friends, will be our eternal home with Jesus. On that day, God will wipe away all our tears, and from then on, there will be no more death, nor sorrow or crying! What a day of rejoicing that will be! (Rev. 21:3, 4; Isa. 65:17)



God will recreate the world even more beautiful than before.

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

Though we are presently surrounded by sorrow, pain and death, God’s final plan is to restore all things to perfection in the earth made new. In essence, the tragic parenthesis we now experience – a world full of rebellion against God – will be closed forever and we will return to Eden restored. We will again have a perfect home and face to face communion with our Maker and God. Life eternal is God’s plan for you and me!

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

Our world has been kidnapped by Satan, and we all face pain, suffering, and death. But Jesus is our escape. He is our lifeboat home where we were always meant to be. I’m ready to get on that lifeboat. How about you? To miss an eternal friendship with Jesus, your Savior is to miss absolutely everything. Please accept Him today as your Redeemer and Friend!

# CULT: BEWARE!

To their neighbors, the folks in the big house in San Diego, California, were a little different: Strange haircuts, funny clothes. But they seemed harmless enough. Then one day, police cars, ambulances, and TV crews appeared at the house. And one by one, dead bodies were brought out.

What happened? Murder? A terrible accident? No, it was a mass suicide. Thirty-nine people, from teenagers to the elderly, killed themselves. What happened? These people were members of a cult called Heaven's Gate. They believed that a comet in the sky would take them to a better world. What a terrible tragedy.

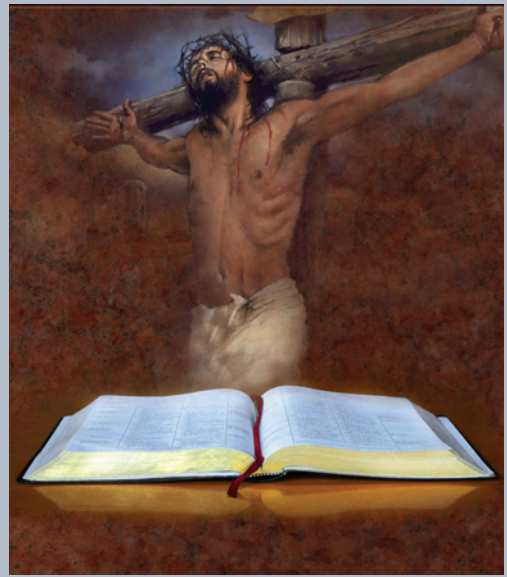
## KEY POINTS

There are thousands of cults in the world today, all of which are capable of luring people into their web. With this in mind, we want to spend some time looking at some characteristics of a cult. **The first**, we need to remember is that any cult, no matter what it calls itself, will have some source other than the Bible as its ultimate authority. The group may quote the Bible and say they believe in the Bible, but if it is a cult, there will be something else they use that has higher authority for them than the Bible. It could be the words of their leader, or some other book or special revelation. But if it has higher authority to its followers than the Word of God, we can be sure the group is a cult.

When Jesus faced the devil and his temptations he always went to the Bible. The Bible was Christ's final authority. "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God..." (Matt. 4:1-10; Luke 24:44-45)

That doesn't mean that the Bible must be the only source of truth. Remember what Jesus said of John the Baptist? "This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." (Luke 7:27, 28) Yet, John did not write a word of the Bible. But Jesus called him a prophet. Among the gifts of the Spirit is listed the gift of prophecy. (See also Eph. 4:11; Acts 21:8-9) Yet, everything must be tested by the Bible. If the words of a prophet don't agree with the Bible, watch out!

**The second** characteristic of a cult is that its followers do not believe that salvation is by faith in Christ alone. Notice what the Bible says about that: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) This is the great truth of the Bible! But Satan does not want you to know this. That's why he has so many counterfeit religions and cults that will teach you everything but salvation by faith in the righteousness of Jesus alone. They will tell you that you have to do this or that to be saved. But the Bible says that we are saved by faith in the death of Jesus for us and nothing else.



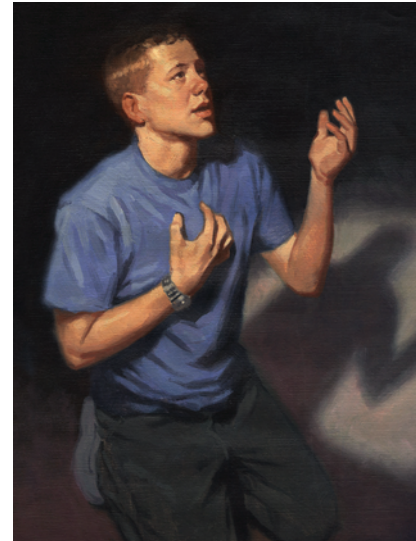
The Bible says that we are saved by faith in the death of Jesus for us and nothing else.



The Bible is the ultimate authority.

**A third sign** of a cult is a group that stresses that human beings aren't really all that bad. Such a group will teach that there is a good within us and we just have to focus on that. Often these groups teach there is divinity naturally within us. Some even say that we are gods. The Bible, of course, teaches just the opposite. "But the Scripture has concluded all are under sin." (Galatians 3:22)

The Bible teaches that we are all sinners, that we've all done wrong and have corrupt hearts. That is a basic Bible teaching, and it's so important. Because if we don't think we are bad, we won't seek Jesus for forgiveness. Years ago, a woman wrote about what she believed to be a "divine" person who appeared to her. This being told her we should love one another and be kind to one another. It all sounded quite wonderful. In fact, the statements sounded like Jesus. The woman really thought that the being was Jesus.



Each of us shall give an account of himself to God.

But this "divine" being never mentioned a word about the woman being a sinner, or needing forgiveness; nothing about salvation, or the cross and the death of Jesus in her behalf; nothing about a final judgment--things that Jesus and the New Testament writers all stressed. He taught her much good but totally omitted the one thing that Satan didn't want this person to know: eternal life through Jesus! No wonder the apostle Paul warned us: "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." (2 Corinthians 11:14)

**Finally**, a cult will teach that salvation is found only in its group alone and that you need to do exactly what its leaders tell you to do. Cults often turn people against their own families. And so a person ends up surrendering to the group when he or she should be surrendering only to God. Should we surrender ourselves to others? No. What does the Bible teach? "So then each of us shall give an account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12)

In the end, our ultimate allegiance must be to God alone and nowhere else. Any group that demands our total allegiance should be avoided. It is likely a cult.

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

In most countries, there is a special department in the government whose job it is to stop counterfeiters. How do you think they train for this? Do they spend all day looking at counterfeit bills? No, they spend more time looking at the original money. They want to know the true so well they can spot a counterfeit immediately. And that's what we have been doing in this series of meetings these past few weeks. We've been searching God's Word for truth. For by knowing truth, we can spot the counterfeit when it appears. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:15).

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

Make sure Jesus has your heart and you can walk through each day with the peace of being right with God. You can have the assurance that He will see you through the difficult days ahead. Make sure that the Word of God is the lamp that will guide your feet and light your path. As you trust in Jesus and His Word you will safely navigate through life's challenges and temptations and live with the hope of eternity in the earth made new!



# ARMAGEDDON: EARTH'S LAST BATTLE

First in 1990 and then again in 2003, the United States and its allies invaded Iraq. In both cases, as the armies marched towards Baghdad, many Christians were convinced that these wars were part of end-time Bible prophecy. Articles and websites predicted that these conflicts would lead directly to the final battle of Armageddon.

For decades books and articles have pointed to the Middle East as the focus of end-time prophecy. Question: Why are so many Christians focusing on the Middle East, on Israel and Iraq? Is this where we should be focusing our attention or are we in danger of being drawn into a final deception by Satan?

## KEY POINTS

Let's start to answer this by first focusing on the children of Israel. The Jewish nation started with the special calling Abram received. "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great." (Genesis 12:1-2; 17:7) That "great nation," the "seed" of Abraham, was the nation of Israel.

Israel consisted of the descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people whom He miraculously rescued from Egypt and brought to the Promised Land. This Promised Land was to be the center of God's salvation activity in the world, and Israel was to be His special people. God told them, "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:6)

God also told Israel, "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself." (Deuteronomy 7:6) And again, "For thou art a holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself." (Deut. 14:2)

What made them a holy nation? The God whom they served! God placed them in the intersection of all the great nations to be a witness. "Have not I told thee from that time...? Ye are even my witnesses." (Isaiah 44:8) He actually wanted His temple to become a house of prayer for all people. (Isa. 56:6-7)

So, the Middle East was important at that time because God had chosen faithful Israel to tell the world about Him.

Now to New Testament times. Peter is writing to the New Testament church, which consisted of both Jews and non-Jews. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9) A chosen people, priesthood, holy nation, peculiar people? This is language taken from God's description of ancient Israel. Only now, Peter is talking to the New Testament church, which was made up of Jews and Gentiles. What is going on here?



The church is God's present day Israel scattered around the world.



The Christian church was to replace the nation of Israel. All Christians, Jew and Gentile, now comprise spiritual Israel. Israel of the Old Testament failed in its assignment to witness for God. And God gave that assignment to Christians everywhere after Jesus was here. The Bible says: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:26-29) The promises that were given to ancient Israel are now available to all of us, whether we're Jew or Gentile. If Christ has your life, you are now part of "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people."



True religion is found in a life that reflects the love and character of God Himself.

Jesus even told the Jewish leaders, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." (Matthew 21:43). True religion is found in a life that reflects the love and character of God Himself. So the promises that went to ancient Israel now belong to the Christian church around the world! So where is "spiritual Israel" located today? It's located all over the world. God's salvation activity today now centers around His church wherever it is. (Matthew 28:20) The gospel was to go world-wide.

So, what about Babylon? Isn't it in the Middle East? Yes it is, but its relevance is also spiritual and symbolic. Let's look at some of these references to Babylon:

- "And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." (Revelation 17:5)
- "And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." (Revelation 14:8)

Bible scholars understand that these images and symbols are not to be understood literally. "Babylon is fallen" does not refer to the ancient city that fell 2500 years ago. It is talking about something spiritual and world-wide. Notice, Babylon makes all the nations drink "of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." This is something world-wide, not localized in the Middle East.

What does this Babylon symbolize? A look at an incident in historical Babylon of old will help us see the big picture. In the Old Testament, Babylon was this vast political and religious empire that persecuted God's people. One example of that persecution involved the enforced worship of a false god in Daniel 3 and involved three faithful Hebrew men, an image and a fiery furnace. The faithful refused to embrace false worship.

I would suggest that at the time of the end, spiritual Babylon will attempt to force the worship of its image. In our next meeting we will discuss how spiritual Babylon will attempt to do this. For now, I hope it is clear that when the New Testament talks about Babylon, it's not talking about Iraq or the Middle East. It is talking about a religious and political system that promotes doctrines that are in direct conflict with God's Word.

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

The church is God's present day Israel, scattered around the world. Babylon represents those entangled with man-made doctrines and traditions. God's call to His people is: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins." (Revelation 18:2, 4) God has His faithful people in Babylon, those who have accepted non-Biblical doctrines and practices. He calls them out of confusion into His wonderful truth.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

At the end of time there are only two groups of people: Those content to follow the traditions of men and remain in confusion and Babylon, and those who have the faith of Jesus and keep His commandments. (Revelation 14:12)

God is calling you to "come out" of Babylon. If you haven't decided to step out by faith to unite with God's last-day commandment-keeping church that focuses on the faith of Jesus, I invite you to make that decision now. Today is the day of salvation! Jesus is coming soon!

# THE MARK OF THE BEAST VERSUS THE SEAL OF GOD

Suppose one day you find a small sack of grain on a shelf in your house. You wonder if it would be good to eat. But then you see a label on the sack that says, “Danger! Contains rat poison. Do not eat!” You’d be thankful for that label, wouldn’t you?

Warning signs serve a purpose. They alert us to danger! They are there for our good. The Bible has a warning sign for us. In fact, this warning may be the most fearful and consequential one in the entire Bible.

“And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, if any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb . . . and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.” (Revelation 14:9-11) We certainly don’t want to receive this “mark of the beast!”



The final issue centers on true and false worship.

## KEY POINTS

When the Bible uses the term “beast,” it is not a negative term. We’ve studied how God uses lions and bears and dragons to depict kingdoms and spiritual forces. That is how the term “beast” is used here in Revelation 13 and 14. Let’s read about it: “And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy... and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.” (Revelation 13:1-2)

Notice five characteristics of this beast power:

1. It was a power that would arise out of the sea. We have learned that in prophecy water often represents peoples. (Rev. 17:15) In other words, it wasn’t to grow up in a newly-settled part of the globe such as the United States.

2. The dragon gives this beast its power and authority. What does that mean? Revelation tells us that the dragon is a symbol of Satan who works through other powers to do his work. Revelation 12:3-5 speaks of the early church and how Satan used pagan Rome to persecute Jesus and his disciples.

So this beast power received its authority from pagan Rome. So what does that mean?

Listen to this statement from Professor Labianca, a well-known historian from the University of Rome.

“To the succession of the Caesar’s [that is, pagan Rome] came the succession of the pontiffs of Rome. When Constantine left Rome, he gave his seat to the pontiff.” Here’s another: “The popes filled the place of the vacant emperor at Rome, inheriting their power...” Stanley’s History, (p.40)

Are we then saying that this beast power is papal Rome? We don’t need to because the Bible and all of history are saying it. As you reflect on this, please remember that we’re dealing with a system here. We love our Catholic brothers and sisters and pray that many of them will be saved in God’s eternal kingdom. Our concern here is with the papacy.

3. This beast power has “on its heads the name of blasphemy.” It is a blaspheming power. We have seen this in our previous lectures. The papacy says that the church can forgive sins. That it can change the commandments. This is blasphemy.

4. The Bible says that one of the beast’s heads was “wounded,” but that its wound would be healed when the beast would resume great power and authority. The power of the papacy was wounded when the pope was taken captive in 1798. Today that power has returned in a mighty way.

5. It would continue for forty two months. Using the year-to-date principle we have used before, this would equal 1260 years. (Num. 14:34; Ez. 4:6) How many religious systems have lasted this long? There is only one – the Papacy. History validates this prophecy. The Papacy rose to power in 538 A.D. Add 1260 years and you arrive at 1798, the year that the Pope was taken captive by the French General Berthier, ending the political power of the papacy. During this time period this power would persecute the saints – which it did with a vengeance.

But the prophecy said this power would have a “mark” of authority. So, what is that mark? This is actually not a difficult question to answer. Let’s let Rome speak for herself: When asked about the Roman Church’s authority to institute certain festivals, look at the response from a Catholic source: “Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her—she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday, the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday the seventh day, a change for which there is no Scriptural authority.” (A Doctrinal Catechism, pg. 174)

So what is the “mark” of this rebellious power? Listen: The Catholic Record, September 1, 1923—answering this question—said, “Sunday is our mark of authority. The church is above the Bible. And this transference of the Sabbath observance is proof of that fact.”

In contrast, now, can you see how the Sabbath, which points directly to God as Creator, becomes God’s seal or mark and Sunday worship the mark of the beast power? The keeping of God’s Seventh-day Sabbath is a sign, a mark, that a person acknowledges and worships God as Creator. It’s an outward sign that we have decided to obey God rather than man.

The mark of beast will be placed on those who bow to Sunday worship when it is finally enforced. And the seal of God, during this time, will be symbolized by Sabbath observance by those who love God and keep His commandments. Please understand, no one has the mark of the beast now. Many faithful people go to church on Sunday with little awareness they are ignoring God’s fourth commandment. But the time is coming when all these issues are going to come to the forefront. All the world is going to have to make a choice one of these days.



The Sabbath, God’s memorial of Creation, tells us why we should worship Him.

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

The issue with the mark of the beast will center around worship and the Sabbath, the one commandment that points directly to God as our Creator, and tells us why we should worship Him. Will we obey God rather than the traditions of man? In the end, God will have a people that love Him and keep His commandments. (Rev. 14:12)

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

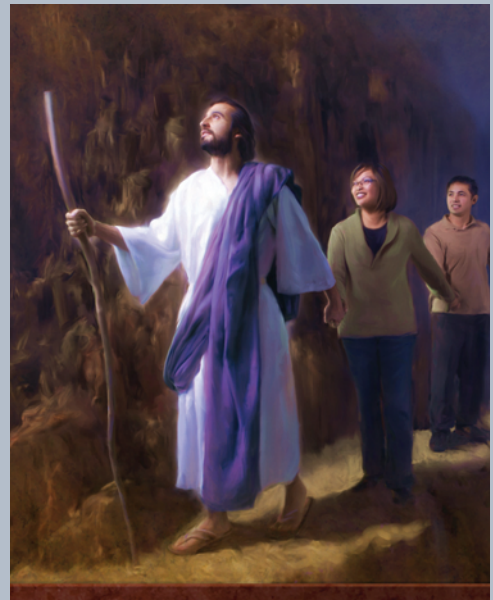
At the heart of this study lies this question – do you love Jesus enough to fully surrender to Him your opinions and will and wholeheartedly keep His commandments? (John 14:15) We must choose to love and obey Him today and every day, no matter what!

# WHEN THE LAMB SPEAKS AS A DRAGON

**O**ur study tonight is about a beast power that, once gentle as a lamb, starts acting like a dragon. This beast plays a major role in last-day events.

In our last study we saw that in the last days there was going to be a conflict around the mark of the beast, and this conflict had to do with the issue of worship. Talking about this beast power, the papacy, Revelation then says, “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8).

This issue of worship is going to center around the commandments of God, particularly the fourth commandment, and the 7th day Sabbath, which points to God as our Creator. You will remember that this beast power has thought to change that day to Sunday, as a mark of its own power and authority.



God's people have chosen to follow Him regardless of what man might try to do to them.

## KEY POINTS

The question is how could the papacy force the whole world to follow its religious precepts? The papacy has power and influence, but not that much. The papacy doesn't have any kind of military might, so how can it force the mark of the beast upon the world? It can't; at least not alone.

After describing the history of the papacy, Revelation 13 then tells about another beast power that arises: “And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (Revelation 13:11,12).

Whoever this power is, it certainly has a major role in last day events, especially regarding worship and the mark of the beast. When we understand who this power is, we can better understand the answer to the question about how the mark of the beast could be enforced by the papacy.

Who, then, is this lamb-like power? There are seven characteristics of this beast found in the text above that will help us identify this power.

1. It arises after papal Rome, the first beast: As we learned in our previous lesson, the deadly wound inflicted on the first beast took place in 1798, at the end of the 42 months, or 1260 year prophecy. This means that this new beast would arrive on the scene sometime around the 18th century. (Rev. 13:5)
2. Power comes up out of the earth: We have learned that seas in prophetic language depict peoples, multitudes. (Rev. 17:15) In contrast, a beast coming up out the earth would mean that it arises in a part of the world with very little population.
3. Horns without crowns: Horns represent power. This beast, unlike the other beast, does not have crowns on its horns (Rev. 13:1 and 13:11). It is a different kind of power. We could say, at the least, that it doesn't have a king. It is different kind of government.
4. Depicted as a lamb: The first beast was depicted as a lion, bear, leopard and terrible beast. This second beast is depicted as a lamb. One would gather that this beast would be known for its gentleness and kindness. But, who in the Bible is depicted as a lamb? Jesus is called the “Lamb of God.” (John 1:29). We could say this is a positive power, possibly a Christian power.

5. Changeable: This power starts out like a lamb, but then turns into a dragon-like beast – one whose characteristics now emulate that of the dragon, Satan. (Rev. 12:9)

6. World-wide power: The lamb-like beast will exercise the power of the first beast – the papacy. In its heyday the papacy was the most powerful force in the known world. Kings bowed down and trembled before it. Whoever this lamb-like beast is, it has world-wide power, enough to cause the whole world to worship the first beast. The Bible says that this new beast power “cause the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (Rev 13:12).

Here’s the answer to the question we asked earlier: How could the papacy force the world to obey it, at least in the area of worship and the mark of the beast? It’s the second beast power that forces the world to do it. Who is this power? It should be obvious at this point that this lamb-like beast is the United States of America. It alone fulfills each of the above characteristics.

7. Makes the World Worship the Beast: How could this be? The United States, whatever its faults, has always been known for religious liberty. However, in times of national crisis, our liberties can disappear. It has happened before - during the Civil War and the First and Second World Wars. After 9/11, the United States, fearful and angry, passed the Patriot Act, giving the government powers that under normal circumstances it would never allow. In times of crisis, things change. Imagine if there were to be another terrorist attack, a nuclear one. Everything could change, and the nation known as the bastion of religious freedom could easily start to “speak like a dragon.”



**The lamb like beast makes the whole world worship the first beast.**

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

At the end of time, amid all this turmoil and persecution in a world gone crazy, God will have a faithful people who are described as having “...the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev 14:12). It’s not just that they keep the commandments of God, it’s not just that they heed the call to worship the Creator, as opposed to worshiping the beast, but they also have the “faith of Jesus.” These are people who love God, who know that their salvation is secure in Jesus. These are people who have freely chosen to follow the Lord, to obey His commands, people who are going to show their loyalty and faithfulness to the Lord, regardless of what man can do to them.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

The psalmist writes: “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do unto me?” (Ps 118:6). That’s faith, the faith of Jesus. Yes, momentous things are to come. Great changes are to take place in our world. A crisis of world-wide proportions will soon break out on all of us. We need today, and every day, to take our stand with the Lord; to claim His promises of forgiveness, of acceptance, of salvation, of victory. Claim them, and proclaim them. And then we will be ready for the lamb that speaks as a dragon, for whatever it says, it’s not enough to turn you and me away from the One who has already spoken, saying to us, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Mat 28:20).

# DREAMS AND VISIONS: PROPHECY IN THE LAST DAYS

When King David committed murder in order to take another man's wife, it was the prophet Nathan that God used to bring the king to his senses and to repentance. The interesting thing is that you will not find a book in the Bible written by the prophet Nathan. Christians believe that no more books are to be added to the Bible; that any new revelation from God must be tested by the Scriptures.

But yet there were prophets that spoke for God that did not have writings in the Bible. Was Nathan the only one? No. Consider Elijah, Elisha, Deborah, Abraham, and in the New Testament prophets like John the Baptist, and the prophetess Ana. (Luke 2:26)

## KEY POINTS

Notice with me this statement from Jesus: "For there shall arise false Christ's, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." (Matthew 24:24) Jesus is warning about false prophets. Why would He warn us about false prophets if there weren't true ones? If the prophetic gift had somehow died long ago, why didn't Jesus just say, "Beware of any prophets, or anyone who claims the prophetic gift, for it will not be manifested in those days"? What is the Bible saying here? God has given to His church the gift of spiritual ministries that include apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. (Eph. 4:11-12) These gifts are given to equip Christ's followers for the work of ministry. So, non-canonical prophets are indeed a biblical teaching. In fact, the Bible says that, because the church will need special guidance in the end-time, we will see the gift of prophecy manifested in the last days.

In Revelation 12-13 we see that Satan is making war against the last generation of God's faithful people, the remnant of her seed. And how are they depicted? "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." (Rev. 12:17) So, God's faithful, end-time people are described as having these two identifying characteristics: First, they are commandment keepers, and second, they "have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

What is the "testimony of Jesus Christ"? In Revelation 19:10 it says: "I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The text is saying that God's Remnant, His final group of people, will have the "spirit of prophecy," the prophetic gift manifest among them.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in these texts about an end-time people who keep the commandments of God, who have the faith of Jesus, and who have the testimony of Jesus, which is "the spirit of prophecy." We believe that this gift has been manifested in the life and writings of Ellen G. White. Please note, that in all these meetings we have never once gone to the writings of Ellen White as a point of authority for any teaching. We have gone consistently to the Bible. Everything needs to be tested by the Bible. It is our ultimate authority!



God's people keep the commandments of God and have the "spirit of prophecy" among them.



The testimony, or words, of Jesus have always been communicated to man through the prophetic gift. All prophets must pass the test of scripture on both their life and message.

Did John the Baptist, Nathan or Ana have the authority to contradict the Bible? Of course not! These prophets just had a different role than the Bible writers, that's all. All had to be subservient to the Bible.

Thus, as we talk about Ellen White, I stress, her writings are not our final authority. The Bible is that authority.

Who is Ellen White and what does the Adventist church claim about her? Briefly, she was born in 1827, into a Methodist home. At the age of 17 God gave her the prophetic gift and began to send messages through her for the church. This began a ministry which lasted until her death in 1915, at the age of 87. Thus she wrote, preached, and ministered to the church for more than 70 years. Though she didn't start the Adventist church, though she was never the head of the Adventist church, and though she originated none of our doctrines, her role and influence in the church cannot be denied. She wrote dozens of books and hundreds of magazine articles. Among the books are such classics as *Desire of Ages*, *Steps to Christ*, and *The Ministry of Healing*. She was an influential figure of her time, particularly in the temperance movement. She is what she called the "lesser light" pointing to the "greater light," and that is the Bible.

She herself saw her role as a spokesperson for God, and a guide and counselor for the developing work of a church that would soon encircle the globe. She was human; she made mistakes, she grew in her understanding, and certainly she didn't claim all knowledge. She made it clear that: "When God's Word is studied, comprehended, and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world;... The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony..... Man is

fallible, but God's Word is infallible." (The Review and Herald, Dec. 15, 1885) At the same time, it's clear from reading her books that this was a woman who loved Jesus, and who was given a special gift.

Again, remember, you don't need to believe in Ellen White to know last day events, to know Jesus, to know about salvation, to know about the mark of the beast, the change of the Sabbath, and the Second Coming. Everything we've studied has come from the Bible. Around the world millions and millions of people, both in the SDA church and out, have been greatly blessed by the wonderful writings of this woman. You can be blessed too. Let her writings speak for themselves. We have nothing to demand. We can only share with you what has been our experience, and what has been a continued source of blessing to millions of us.



**The Bible is the ultimate authority for all faith and practice.**



**Millions of people around the world have been blessed by the writings of this remarkable woman.**

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

God will have a people who keep the commandments of God, and who have the "spirit of prophecy" among them. Do you believe God's Word? God knew that His end-time people, surrounded by the final deceptions of an angry dragon, would need special guidance and encouragement through the Spirit of Prophecy. The life and writings of Ellen White are just such counsel and encouragement for God's Remnant church for these end times.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

God's Word is a lamp to our feet. We must daily spend time with the Lord through Bible study and prayer. May we also invite you to pick up one of Ellen White's books and find the blessing of this "lesser" light, that always will enhance and lead you back to the "greater" light, the Bible. Maybe start with her book, *Steps to Christ*.



# THE ANOINTED ONE

Throughout history, we've seen the rise and fall of great men and women who've had a major impact on the world, either for good or evil. Some were great military leaders like Julius Caesar, Ghengis Kahn or Dwight Eisenhower. Others were powerful political leaders such as Franklin Roosevelt, Mao Tse-Tung, Stalin, and Hitler. Each impacted the world, some quite negatively.

## KEY POINTS

Perhaps you've noticed that one name is missing from our list. And this name has had more impact on the history of the world than all of the others put together. Jesus Christ. But there is an amazing difference between Him and the others that were



Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled over 300 prophecies from the Old Testament scriptures regarding the Messiah.

### Jesus Christ, the Messiah

- “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” (John 11:25)

“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

- “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53)

mentioned. And that is: Jesus

never led an army, never fought in a battle. Even Mohammed led an army. But Jesus never did.

He also never held a political office, never governed, and never led a powerful nation or empire. He didn't have a lot of money. On the contrary, he was extremely poor in this world's goods. (Matthew 8:20) Whatever the source of His power and influence, it had nothing to do with money.

While it is believed that Mohammed wrote the Koran, Jesus never wrote a book. Jesus' influence didn't come from anything He wrote because as far as we know, He never wrote anything. And then on top of it all, He never had a great following. Most leaders and people flat-out rejected Him.

And then there was His death. He died the death of a common criminal, crucified between two thieves.

Yet, Jesus turned the world upside down. The influence of Jesus has been without peer or precedent.

Listen to a few of the things He said about Himself: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” (John 11:25) “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

What do you do with someone who makes such claims? I like how one writer, C.S. Lewis, expressed it: “A man who was merely a man and who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who says he's a poached egg—or else He would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse.” (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 56) How then do we explain this Jesus? There's only one logical answer: Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God. He is the Messiah promised in the Holy Scriptures. He is the Ultimate Sacrifice God provided for the sins of the world.

Let's look at some of the Old Testament prophecies that point to Jesus as the Messiah. It's been estimated that more than 300 prophecies point directly to the life and ministry of Jesus. We obviously can't look at them all, but we can look at a few: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1, 7) Does any of this sound familiar? If you're already a Bible student, you know that when Jesus was on the cross, He cried out at one point: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) These were the very same words that King David wrote 1,000 years before in Psalm 22 in describing this scene.

Again in the Psalms it says: "they pierced my hands and my feet." (Ps. 22:16) Why did David write that? David was never crucified. What is amazing about this statement is that crucifixion wasn't even practiced in that part of the world at the time of David. Bible scholars recognize that this is talking about the death of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, a thousand years later. (See also Ps. 22:18)

For centuries, the Jews saw Zechariah 9:9 as a prophecy concerning the Messiah. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." (Zechariah 9:9) This was written more than 500 years before Christ arrived in our world. Here is the fulfillment of this prophecy: "Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. . . . And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon." (Matthew 21:2-7) Isn't it wonderful that we can trust the Bible!

It was also long believed by the Jews that the Messiah would come from the city of Bethlehem. This written by Micah was the reason why: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2) And, of course, Jesus was born in Bethlehem!

Look at this incredible prophecy written 800 years before Jesus found in Isaiah 53. "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs [or sickness] and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53)

Jesus was rejected and despised. He was bruised and crucified for our sins. Through his pain and death we receive eternal healing – eternal life! Jesus was the promised Messiah. He is the long awaited Savior of the world!

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

No other person in the stream of history has made such an enormous impact on the life of the inhabitants of this planet. Why? Because He was none other than the Son of God! The promised Messiah and Savior of the world. This fact, though, will mean nothing, unless He becomes your Savior and friend!

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

The apostle Paul wrote about God's great plan of salvation in this way: "God made Him Who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

(2 Corinthians 5:21) Would you like to have the righteousness of God? Place your life within the life of Jesus and God's Holy Spirit will make your decision a reality. Jesus is knocking at your hearts door. Won't you listen to His voice and open the door? (Rev. 3:20)



Jesus was despised and rejected by men.

# FAMILY MATTERS

**A**cross our nation families are under attack by the devil. Families are falling apart. Husbands are leaving their wives and wives are leaving their husbands. Children are left hurting and without a sense of security and love. At least half of all marriages in many western countries end in divorce! Sadly, many of those that don't experience divorce do not thrive and experience rewarding relationships.

God has something better for us. I believe that the Bible gives us principles that can make a big difference in our marriages and families.

## KEY POINTS

First, marriage was part of God's plan. It was part of paradise. "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. . . . Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:18, 21-24) In fact, the first miracle that Jesus performed was at a wedding! God intended marriage to be a blessing to humanity.

The Bible is also clear in defining marriage. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. Additionally, it is interesting that half of the Ten Commandments deal with family relationships. For example, the second commandment regarding graven images states: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." (Ex. 20:4-6) And the fourth commandment: "But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter." (Exodus 20:10) The Sabbath was for the whole family to rest.

"Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." (Exodus 20:12) Obviously that commandment is family related. How about "Thou shalt not commit adultery." (Exodus 20:14) Ties directly to family and marriage, doesn't it? Check out the Tenth Commandment as well. (Ex. 20:17) Family is important to God. By obeying His commandments we protect the family circle!

Marriage is sacred by God's standards. A man and a woman becoming "one flesh" brings in the idea of something not found anywhere else. We don't become "one flesh" with our parents or our siblings or friends. No—we become "one flesh" only with our husband or wife. This oneness isn't just sexual. This intimacy is intended to be a fortress. And when that fortress is breached, the marriage will be compromised and the entire family will be devastated.

Paul wrote about the depth a husband's love should reach when he said: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." (Eph. 5:2) Christ's death is the ultimate example of unselfish love.



A Christian home is a wonderful testimony to the power of the gospel.



Remember, husbands and wives are “one flesh” and no one hates his own flesh. That means there’s no place in a marriage for any kind of physical violence or abuse. Only a sick person mutilates their own flesh. Instead, he is to love her as Christ loves the church. Paul also tells women they should love their husbands: “That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands,” he writes. (Titus 2:4)

And so we see that God wants both husbands and wives to love each other from the heart and protect their marriage at all costs. We must be careful to protect our affections and conversations with others outside our marriage. Spouses must commit to each other emotionally and physically, meeting each other’s needs. They must avoid any sexual relationship outside marriage. (1 Corinthians 7:2) Flee temptation if it comes at you. If you indulge it, you will have a foretaste of hell that will sear your soul forever.



God’s principles of love can make your home a little heaven on earth.

There are four rules for a happy marriage:

1. We must forgive one-another. (Ephesians 4:32) No marriage can thrive if the bitterness of an unforgiving spirit is permitted to linger.
2. Accept the fact that you are married to someone physically, spiritually, and emotionally damaged by sin. (Romans 3:23) Someone once said, “Before you get married, view your prospective spouse with a magnifying glass. After you get married, look at your spouse with one eye closed.
3. Have empathy. When something bad happens, ask yourself, “What does this look like from his/her perspective?” Then ask God to take charge of the situation. (Eph. 2:14-16)
4. Be willing to die to self for the good of the other. Jesus put our welfare above His own.

Someone once asked a preacher, “What is the best thing a father can do for his children?” The preacher answered, “Love their mother.” And, of course, the same is true for a mother as well. “Love their father.” And these principles of love can make your home a little heaven on earth.

The relationship of children to their parents is also addressed in Scripture. The Bible tells us that children are to honor their parents. Paul also writes: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:1-4) Great counsel from the Lord!

### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

Yes, families are important. A Christian home is a wonderful testimony to the power of the gospel. Of course, in this world we can do everything right and things might still go wrong. The important thing is to insure that we are faithful in doing all we can to build up and protect our family. Follow the principles for success outlined in God’s commandments and leave the results with God.

### **BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

With so much trouble and conflict in the world today, our homes should be a haven of peace and love. It is in our homes that we should find a place of security where we are united in the bond of love.

Will you commit to build a home where Jesus is the center of everything? Will you be a part of a home which chooses daily to follow the Lord? Will you as husband and wife join hands in a pledge to make your home a haven of love? Remember, that marriage (and a family) still takes three - husband, wife and the Lord of love, Jesus Christ!