beyond the search



discover tomorrow

Uncover the story told through current world events that gives hope to a world in crisis

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Seem like we're just set here, a woman said to me recently, *and don't nobody know why.*

However ineloquently expressed, the woman's words say so much. None of us asked to be born. Each of us were, as she said, *just set down here,* and who hasn't at times wondered why, especially when life gets hard?

ALL THIS WAY—AND TO WHAT PURPOSE?

Writing 2,400 years ago about the human condition, an ancient Greek said that the best thing for any of us was *never to have been born.* In the past century, author Albert Camus wrote, *There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.*

Suicide?

Yes, because the real question in the face of so much tragedy, he said, is judging whether or not life is even worth living.

I cried when I was born, wrote poet George Herbert, *and every day shows why.*

A young man, just married, had survived the atomic blast over Hiroshima in 1945. His new wife, however, was obliterated. Nothing remained but charred bones. Desperate, he gathered the remains, put them in a small bowl, and managed amid the chaos to get on a train to another city where her parents lived. He wanted to give them the bones, something to remember her by.

The only problem? The city he went to was Nagasaki, where a few days later the second bomb exploded. The young man survived that bombing

as well, but the blast threw open the top of the bowl that contained her bones, and scattered them into oblivion.

Stunned, weeping, the young man cried out, *All this way! All this way, and her bones are scattered who knows where - and to what purpose?*

THE HARD QUESTIONS

And to what purpose?

We hustle, we struggle, we suffer, we go *all this way*, and then, after that - we die anyway. It seems too hard to make sense of it all. No wonder we wrestle with hard questions that cry out for answers that don't always come.

Why do we exist? What are our origins? What can we hope for? What is *this* we have found ourselves in? Where is it heading? What is the purpose of our lives now that we are, and not of our own choosing, *set down here*? Why so much pain and suffering? What can it all mean when death has the final word anyway?

The wise man Solomon, one of the Bible writers, agrees.



Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done
And on the labor in which I had toiled;
And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind.
There was no profit under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 2:11

King Solomon had everything - money, glory, women, power, fame, brilliance - that this world could offer - and then some. He had accomplished more than most humans ever would, even if they had five

lifetimes. And yet, as he came to the end of his days, he deemed it all meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Thus, the dilemma: We are beings who cry out for answers in a world that doesn't yield them easily to us.

SEAWATER SYRINGES

That's why, from the earliest days of recorded human history, humans have struggled with the reason for their existence, especially with the important question of origins. After all, how can we know how to live if we don't know the purpose of our life to begin with, and how can we know the purpose if we don't know how we got here?

Imagine if a shipment of medicines - say antibiotics - were to wash up on the shore of an island filled with pre-civilisation people who had no contact with the outside world. The curious islanders open the box and find all sorts of pills and liquids and strange little cylinders with sharp points. They might shake the pill bottles in order to make music in their dance rituals. They might use the liquid medicine as make-up. They might find the syringes useful for squirting seawater at each other for the fun of it. The point is, without knowing the origins of the medical supplies, without knowing why they were created, and what their purpose was - the islanders would miss out on the real benefits they could have.
How much more so with our lives? We have bodies, minds, imagination, drive, reason, passion, and spirit - all the things that make us what we are. And yet if we don't know what our purpose is, why we are here, how we are to live - won't we, of necessity, miss out on so much?

THE FITTEST

Thus, we have always told stories about our origins. The ancients believed in various creation stories, such as one about two battling gods in which the defeated one's body is split in two, half to create the heaven, half to create the earth. Today, we have our own stories. Many people, for instance, think that humans are the products of pure chance, and that our universe is just one of those things that happen from time to time. Francis Crick, one of the greatest scientists of the 20th century, believed that space aliens from another planet seeded life on earth, and that's how we got here. Indigenous Australian culture sees their origins in the dream-time stories.

Some speculate that nothing created the universe. *It seems impossible that you could get something from nothing,* one author wrote, *but the fact that once there was nothing but now there is a universe is evident proof that you can.*

Whatever one believes about origins, the concept remains important. Our conception of our past can greatly influence how we view the present. For most of human history, humans believed that we, in one way or another, came from God or gods; but today many from developed cultures believe we came from apes instead.

This shift isn't without consequences either. Darwinian evolution, for instance, teaches that humans are evolving from lower life forms. Consistent with this, the idea developed that certain people groups aren't fully evolved and thus not fully human. Some have argued that these inferior groups shouldn't be accorded all the rights and privileges of full

humans. Charles Darwin agreed that Australian Aborigines should be killed because they were sub-human.

A group of tourists in the 1990's were visiting the Nazi concentration camp of Dachau in Germany. A young German guide began the tour by talking about the theory of evolution, and he established a direct link between it and the Holocaust. *The whole idea behind evolution*, he said, *the idea of the survival of the fittest, helped pave the way for the attempted extermination of people who weren't deemed the fittest.*

A DIFFERENT STORY

In contrast to space aliens, or nothing, or evolving apes, the Bible gives a totally different picture of how it all started. We exist, the Bible teaches, because God took the initiative.



In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
Genesis 1:1

For centuries, students of the Bible have commented on the matter-of-factness of this opening line. There are no involved and intricate attempts at logic to prove God's existence. There's no proofs offered that He created the *heavens and the earth.* It's just stated as fact, period.

No doubt, the Bible teaching of God as our Creator makes a lot of sense, especially in contrast to the ancient notion of the earth being created by the body of a squashed god, or the modern notion that it was created by nothing.

Even more so, the Bible teaches something that, if taken seriously, helps each of us understand our incredible worth.



So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:27

What a stark contrast between evolution in which we exist only by chance, and the Bible account which teaches that we were not only purposefully created by God, but created in His image as well. It's a picture that places all human beings on an equal footing no matter what our ethnicity, gender, colour or creed.

Even so, the world God created that was *very good* is far from that today. What went wrong? The natural world today tells two stories - one of love, care and protection, and the other of predatory cruelty and death.

THE PROMISE OF A BETTER FUTURE

Yet, even with belief in God as our Creator, many questions and concerns remain. And one of the biggest is: How do we make sense of our own lives, our own place in this world, especially with all the pain and suffering and tragedy that's such a part of all our stories?
Interestingly enough, despite all the questions and all the suffering, the Bible gives us reasons not to despair. It offers hope and encourages trust. It looks beyond what we see today, and points us time and again to an amazing future.



For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.

Isaiah 65:17



And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Revelation 21:3-4

These are just two of many wonderful promises about what the ultimate future holds, a future offered to all who will accept it.

SIGNS

Unfortunately, until then, we all struggle in a world gone crazy. Yet it's precisely the kind of world that God has predicted we'd be living in. The Bible has warned us that our world would be as we see it today. In fact, God has given us signs, warnings even, about what to expect.

What are some of these signs, and what are we to make of them?

WARS AND RUMOURS OF WAR

For decades leading up to the 20th century, people really believed the world was going to get better, and that human beings, as they increased in knowledge, would get better and better as well. Many also thought that, as we came to the 20th century, we were entering an era where war would cease.

But, in contrast, almost two thousand years ago, Jesus Himself told us a story about the end times in which we live. He said:



For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...

Mark 13:8

And this:



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

Who was right? What does our world look like today? The optimism of the early 20th century, or the picture that Jesus painted?

Within the second decade of the 20th century, World War I started. It was soon followed by World War II, and between those two and after there have been ceaseless wars, many going on right now.

Who is right?

EXPLOSION OF KNOWLEDGE

About 2,600 hundred years ago, the prophet Daniel, in the Old Testament, wrote about our times:



But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.

Daniel 12:4

Knowledge shall increase? While it is true that there is a vast increase in knowledge generally today, this prediction relates to the increase in knowledge of the prophecies of the book of Daniel - prophecies that were *shut up* and *seal[ed] until the time of the end.* Daniel 12:4 This series will explore those prophecies that God has now opened for us.

And communication? In seconds we can communicate to almost any point in the world, something unheard of even 150 years ago, much less in the times of the Bible. All of this becomes important in light of these words by Jesus:



And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 24:14

The idea of spreading the gospel to the entire world, in a day and age of instant communication, is so much more likely now than when Jesus first spoke it almost 2,000 years ago. Today, for example, *Hope* satellite TV broadcasts the gospel to every corner of the globe.

RICH VERSUS POOR

One of the great curses facing humanity is the continued vast gap between the rich and the poor. Even with globalization, and an incredible amount of trade between nations, the cries of the poor - especially of those being exploited - echo across the planet.

All the while, the rich remain richer than ever. In Tokyo, for instance, the rich can indulge themselves in a $17,000 martini at the Ritz Carlton. Yes - $17,000 for one drink - the cost comes from a diamond found at the bottom of the glass!

Meanwhile, billions around the world drink water downstream that others defecate in upstream. And God alone knows how much blood, sweat, and tears were spilled by those digging that diamond out of the ground for subsistence wages!

No wonder the Bible says of today:



Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.

James 5:1-5

These ancient words speak powerfully in an era of sweatshops and child labour. No, child labour has not ended. Some estimate that about 158 million children between the ages of five and fourteen are forced into work worldwide. Today billions live on less than $2.50 per day.

When Jesus said, *The poor you will always have with you,* (Matthew 26:11), He certainly wasn't exaggerating.

FAMINES AND PESTILENCE

One of the increasing struggles the planet also faces - another sign - deals with the problems caused by overpopulation. It has helped lead to famine, poverty, and hunger - all the kinds of things that people have been trying to stop, and have failed to do so, since the beginning of time.

Today, millions live under the threat of famine, pestilence, hunger and starvation. Unimaginable numbers have died in the past century from famine and pestilence. From 1918 to 1920, the Spanish Influenza alone killed an estimated 50 million people!

Every day now almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes. That's one child every five seconds! Nearly 9 million children die before they reach their fifth birthday. One third of these deaths are due directly or indirectly to hunger and malnutrition.

Despite years of progress against hunger, it is estimated that more than 900 million people still suffer from it on a daily basis.

Again, none of this should come as a surprise, not when the Bible has so clearly warned us about it.



There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places.

Luke 21:11 NIV

Famines, pestilences, earthquakes? If this doesn't sound like today, what does?

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

All of this, and more, we see daily in our lounge rooms - through mass media. What do these signs mean? What can we take from them? How can they help us understand the story of our world, and our own place in it?

Firstly, one thing should be perfectly clear - the sad state of our world was predicted in the Bible. Most of these things, however sad, however horrific, must be understood in the larger context of what the Bible teaches about humanity, about evil, about suffering, and about the future of our planet. That's so much of what this series will be about - looking at the larger picture.

Secondly, these signs should help us know that tragedies are simply part of what it means to live in a world damaged by sin and evil. But how did it get this way? We will look very closely at that crucial question too.

Thirdly, these signs written so long ago should show us that, despite how things may appear to us, none of this has taken God by surprise. Far from being evidence that God doesn't exist, they help show that He does, because His Word has been so accurate. What else does His Word say to us about our times, and our place in it? The course will take us on this journey as well.

Fourthly, the signs were often given in the context of the end of this world, which leads to the promise of a better one. In other words, though often talking about distressful things, the signs point to the ultimate hope of a new world, one without everything that makes this one so miserable. In this course, we will study in depth the hope we have been given and the reasons for clinging to it.

THE SCRIPT

Even if it can *seem like we're just set down here,* deep down we sense a reason, a purpose for our lives. Eternity is etched deep in our souls. We're part of a story, a grand epic in which we each have our part to play. However small it might seem in contrast to the big picture itself, we are the stars in our own stories.

The Bible from beginning to end is essentially a book of stories—true stories. These hundreds of small individual stories, as well as yours and mine, collectively dovetail together as part of one big story. And that is the story God is telling.

These booklets are, really, all about the script.

NOTES

NOTES

NEXT IN THE SERIES:



Uncover the origins and issues of earth's epic conflict and find meaning in the bigger picture

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HOPE CHANNEL



discover meaning

Uncover the origins and issues of the earth's epic conflict and find meaning in the bigger picture

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discover meaning

TREES OF GREEN

There are a lot of good and beautiful things on planet earth, fortunately. We see this in people and in nature. Think for a moment of Fred Hollows and the good he did, and that the Fred Hollows' foundation continues to do. And he is just one of an army of good, selfless people. And in nature - what inspired the song *What a Wonderful World*, most famously sung by Louis Armstrong?

> *I see trees of green, red roses too*
> *I see them bloom for me and you*
> *And I think to myself, what a wonderful world.*

No doubt, as the writers were penning those lines, and when Louis sang them, evil was doing its damage - maybe not even far from them, maybe even within the sound of the notes and lyrics. How often too, among *the trees of green*, has death and destruction either from nature or from humans unfolded? The reality is that the beautiful rose and the thorns are a part of life.

Vasily Grossman was a Soviet journalist who followed the Red Army all the way into Berlin. As the Soviets pushed back the Germans, they reached one of the most notorious of Nazi death camps - Treblinka. What Grossman found haunted him until his death. Among the accounts he heard of the crimes committed there, one stuck out in particular. Grossman described it like this:

The chief commandant of the camp selected several children from one of the transports, killed their parents, dressed the children in the best clothes, gave them lots of sweets, played with them, and then gave orders to kill

them a few days later when he became bored with the game. And that was just the beginning.

However unique, the Holocaust was just one especially gruesome manifestation of the evil that lurks across all human history. Whether accounts of torture, slavery, rape, plunder and murder - then or now - who doesn't cringe, gasp, and writhe before the evil that reeks in the world?

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

The world seems manic - depressive - one moment full of goodness and charm, the next boiling over with evil and bad. It's as if there's a full blown contest, a struggle between good and evil, right and wrong, raging all around us.

Humans have for millennia sensed something of this battle. Many ancient religions taught, in one form or another, the existence of supernatural realities engaged in a fearful struggle in which we too are involved. Many centuries before Christ, the Zoroastrian religion taught that there were supernatural forces of good and evil locked in battle.

Poet T.S. Eliot wrote:

> *The world turns and the world changes*
> *But one thing does not change.*
> *In all of my years, one thing does not change;*
> *The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.*

A Dutch theologian from the 16th century named Erasmus wrote, *To begin with we must be constantly aware of the fact that life here below is best described as being a type of continual warfare.*

WHEN IT GETS PERSONAL

One doesn't need to be a theologian, or a poet, to sense the reality of this controversy. Who hasn't felt a sense of conflict, of a struggle between opposing forces going on inside one's very own mind, one's own conscience, one's own heart? *Should I cheat on my exam? Should I lie to my boss? What about this attraction to another person's spouse?* Who hasn't, at times, felt a powerful pulling in opposite directions regarding moral decisions?

We're constantly presented with choices, options, and forces seen and unseen pulling us in various, even opposing ways. And though sometimes it's clearly between right and wrong, at other times that distinction isn't always so easy. Or, even when we know what is right and what is wrong, why do we sometimes feel compelled, pushed by forces to do what is wrong?

Why do we do what is wrong even when we know it's wrong?

No question, many people sense the reality of this good versus evil struggle. And we don't just see it in the grand events unfolding around us. We see it, we feel it, and we experience it in our own existence, in our own struggles. We all have a story. Our own story from beginning to end is a struggle.

What are these forces? Are they merely part of our own imagination? Or, if not, if there are literal powers greater than ourselves, how did they get started? Where did they come from? What do they want with us? And how are we to relate to them?

THE UNIVERSE

For starters, one thing is sure: our universe is a very big place, much bigger than even scientists had ever imagined. For much of history, people had a very limited view of the size of the cosmos, some thinking the stars were only a few miles away. Many believed, even a century ago, that the Milky Way, our galaxy, was the extent of the universe. Today we know better, and our minds are staggered by the immensity of the cosmos.

And, even more mind-boggling, scientists now think that the universe we see with Hubble and other telescopes constitutes only about 10 per cent of what is out there anyway!

Given what we now know about the vastness of the universe and the number of stars and galaxies spread out across it, more and more people think that we're not alone, that the sheer odds would make it likely that other life in the cosmos exists.

In fact, there's a branch of science - astrobiology - devoted to the study of cosmic life. NASA has its own Astrobiology Institute, and its website reads, *Astrobiology is devoted to the study of the origins, evolution, distribution, and future of life in the universe. … Does life exist on worlds other than Earth? How could terrestrial life potentially survive and adapt beyond our home planet?*

THE BIBLE AND THE COSMOS

Scientists and astronomers are pointing telescopes toward the sky in the hope of retrieving an intelligent signal from the heavens. The more they discover, the more they reveal the scope and wonder of it all. While

they search the sky, the Bible not only talks about the existence of extra - terrestrial life, but has given us some fascinating insights into what this life is like. Scripture makes clear what science suspects - earth isn't the only place in the universe with intelligent life.

Why should it be? Again, considering the size of the universe and the vast number of bodies it contains, it's not far-fetched to believe that other life exists. And if that's true, what's illogical or impossible about the idea that this life could, in some way, interact with humanity?

In fact, that's exactly what the Bible itself says.



Then God would use the church to show the powers and authorities in the spiritual world that he has many different kinds of wisdom.

Ephesians 3:10 Contemporary English Version



For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:12

(It's important to note that when the Bible talks about heaven or heavenly places, it can mean the universe, the cosmos as a whole, and not just heaven as popularly understood. For example, see Psalm 19.)

Right from the start then, these verses point to the reality of intelligent life in other parts of the universe. More so, they depict these powers as interacting with us here on earth.



For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

1 Corinthians 4:9

A spectacle to men and to angels? This verse clearly indicates that beings from another part of the universe are watching this epic struggle unfold here.



Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, From where do you come? So Satan answered the LORD and said, From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.

Job 1:6-7



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. … Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.

Revelation 12:7-9, 12

A GREATER REALITY

These few texts, taken together, show:

- the reality of intelligent life in other parts of the universe
- we are being watched by that life
- we can interact with that life daily
- some of this life is openly hostile to us

Scripture depicts a war in another part of the cosmos - a battle between angels. The leading angel, called the *Morning Star* (Isaiah 14:12 or literally Day Star) and his angels - who according to the texts were the losers - were cast down to the earth, where the battle continues, only now with us involved. Taking these texts, along with ones that show other angels friendly toward us, we can see that according to the Bible we on earth are in the midst of this battle. It's a battle between good and evil - a spiritual battle between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. That we might not see these beings does not prove that they aren't there any more than the fact that we can't see radiation means it's not there either.

Think about this: How many mobile phone calls are in the air around us right now, as real as the breath coming out of our mouths? And yet, because we can't see those calls, because we don't have in and of ourselves the receptors to pick them up, are we going to deny their reality?

Many people laugh off the idea of Satan, or of angels, or of the supernatural itself. For them, only the natural world, which follows natural laws and scientific principles, exists. But that is a very narrow view of reality. In contrast, while the Bible acknowledges the natural world and natural laws and principles, it just doesn't limit reality to them, that's all. It points us to a greater world and reality.

THE FALL OF THE MORNING STAR

How did this struggle of epic proportions get started? Where did these evil supernatural beings come from? How did evil arise in a universe created by a God who claims to be all-loving and all-powerful? These are good questions.

One of the most fascinating insights the Bible gives about life in other parts of the cosmos is found in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. Using the symbolism of an ancient king for this extra-terrestrial life - the Bible often uses symbols of earthly things to point to greater realities - the texts talk about a majestic and exalted being in another part of the cosmos. See Ezekiel 28:11-19.

After describing this majestic, beautiful and exalted being, called the Morning Star - or Lucifer, the Bible says something amazing about him:



You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

Ezekiel 28:15

First, the verb for *created* in this text comes from a Hebrew word *bara*, that deals only with the creative activity of God. Which means this being was created directly by God. And having been created directly by God, Lucifer was *perfect,* even perfect in his *ways.*

How then could Lucifer, also called Satan - a being created perfect by God - have *iniquity* in him, even to the point where he starts a war in heaven? See Revelation 12:7-9, 12 above. A perfect being, in a perfect environment, created by a perfect God; yet iniquity - also called sin and evil - arose in him?

Without openly expressing it, the verse in Ezekiel above - one of many - presupposes the freedom inherent in God's intelligent creations.

What does this mean? The answer is found in one word - love. You may wonder what the connection is, but if you keep reading, it will become clear.

THE FREEDOM FACTOR

When asked about the most important commandment, Jesus answered that it was *to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.* Matthew 22:37

What's interesting is that the most important of all the commandments is the one commandment that cannot be forced. Love, to be love, must be freely given. Even God can't force love any more than He can create a circle with four straight edges. Once it has four straight edges, it's no longer a circle. In the same way, once love is forced, it's no longer love. God could force all His intelligent creatures to fear Him, to worship Him, even to obey Him. But He cannot force a single one to love Him. Love must be freely given, or else it's not love.

What this means then, is that a certain amount of moral freedom exists in God's creation. And that's because love demands it. If God's creatures weren't free, they couldn't love Him or each other.

Iniquity arose in this perfect being in a perfect environment because perfection included moral freedom, the kind of freedom needed if God were to have intelligent creatures who could love Him. And freedom, to truly be freedom, entails risk.

To paraphrase Gregory Boyd's point: *The warfare worldview (also known as the great controversy) first believes that God's creatures, both angels and men, were made free to choose as they wish. They could exercise their own power of choice. That means they could choose to go against God's will as well as with it. That is the risk God took. It means God would have to make plans for if and when that happened. And the cosmic drama believes this is exactly what happened. Thus the cosmos and this earth have become a war zone.* Gregory Boyd, *God at War*, p.58 paraphrased.

FREEDOM ON EARTH

This same principle of moral freedom is found in the earliest chapters of earth's history. The Bible says:



In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
Genesis 1:1

And when God was finished ...



Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.
Genesis 1:31

The God who created Lucifer continues His creation, but now in another part of His universe - the earth. We have perfect beings in a perfect environment created by a perfect God. And included in this perfection is the freedom that must exist in order for love to exist as well.

Freedom of choice was theirs:



And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

Genesis 2:16-17

The mere fact that God had warned them not to eat of the tree shows that they had the moral freedom to choose to disobey Him. No point in warning robots!

And, as their story unfolded, not only did they have the freedom to disobey, they chose to disobey, following the words of Satan in direct rebellion against God. And that brought sin, suffering and death into our world. It brought the battle between good and evil to planet earth.



Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.

Revelation 12:12

A closer look at these bible passages we have covered, reveals that Lucifer's key issue with God was that God's love and God's laws were opposites: God was not what He claimed to be - love. For Satan, he wanted a love with no restrictions.

ENMITY

In fact, after Satan, in the guise of a serpent, caused the fall of humanity (see Genesis 3:1-14), the Lord said to him:



And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.

Genesis 3:15

There's much in this text worth exploring, but what's crucial is that we can see a hint of *the* great controversy here between two opposing forces. There will be *enmity* - the spirit of enemies - and they will *bruise* each other. This points to the battles that we see raging, not only among the great nations and ideologies of the world, but in the inner recesses of our own hearts and minds.



Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

1 Peter 5:8

Though using some symbolic language, this warning isn't symbolic. It's real, just as the struggles, the challenges, and the conflicts we all face in our lives are real.

GOOD WINS!

The good news, however, is that the Bible reveals the end of all these struggles. And it is going to end with this wonderful promise:



God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no

more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Revelation 21:3-4

Evil will be eradicated, along with sickness, suffering and death. In this great controversy, good will ultimately win, and we along with the universe will see the goodness, mercy and justice of God in dealing with the misuse of the freedom God has given to all His intelligent beings.

The great controversy is a deep and crucial theme. It is the drama of the ages - the epic story. It is the biblical world view, and forms the entire background for understanding the world, history, the good and the bad we see all around us, the future, and our place in all of it.

Our journey through this series will illustrate that all of life is impacted by this cosmic drama.

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Uncover the story in the ancient scrolls
and the evidence why we can trust them today

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beyond the search



discover truth

Uncover the story in the ancient scrolls
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discover truth

This series makes it very clear that everything that happens around and in us is part of a greater story - God's story. It's a story with a glorious ending, and it gives us hope. But for now, God and Satan, good and evil, are at war. And we are caught up in the cross fire. Evil does all that it can to misrepresent and slur the characters and resources on the side of good. We should expect to see an attack on belief in God - and that He is love. We would expect to see attempts to discredit one of the main lines of communication between Himself and us - the Bible. And that is exactly what we see.

So many forces, so many voices, pull us in one direction or another. How do we know what to do, what to trust, what to hope in and for? Many believe that in and of themselves they cannot cope, that they must have something greater than themselves in order to survive.

Douglas Copeland - who coined the phrase Generation X - wrote: *My secret is that I need God - that I am sick and can no longer make it alone.* Maybe not everyone would be so blunt, so open, but who hasn't at times felt something similar as they've been tossed about in a great epic in which they have been given roles that they really don't want?

Yet, in the midst of this turmoil, fear and uncertainty, many people have found comfort, security, and hope in God, the God revealed in the Bible.

But there are questions: *Why should we trust in the Bible? What is it about the Bible that gives us reasons to believe it and the promises it offers?*

Good questions. Let's explore them together.

NOT BLIND FAITH

For starters, the New Testament book of Hebrews makes an important claim:



But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6

The Bible is telling us that faith in God is crucial, foundational. And, given the context, this faith is not just in any god, but in the God revealed in the Bible. So, in order to trust God, we need to believe the Bible.

The good news is that we do have good reasons to trust the Bible. In other words, we are not to believe blindly. On the contrary …

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

For instance, one of the most amazing events in the Bible was the resurrection of Jesus after being dead three days. All four gospel writers attest to the resurrection of Jesus.

Mark records:



Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.

Mark 16:9

Luke says:



Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, Peace to you. But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.

Luke 24:36-39

Matthew and John also tell about their experiences with Jesus after His resurrection. See Matthew 28 and John 20, 21. All four testify to the miracle of Him coming back to life, just as He said numerous times that He would.

THEORIES

The resurrection of Jesus from the grave provides powerful evidence not only for Him being the Messiah, but for the validity of the Bible.

Some argue that the Gospel writers were all hallucinating, a rather unusual theory because whoever heard of four people having the same hallucination?

Others argue that they conspired to make up the story of Christ's resurrection. But why would the Bible writers do that? All they got for their testimony about Jesus and His resurrection was persecution, ostracism, hatred, jail, and even death. Could you imagine J. K. Rowling going to jail or dying a cruel death because she insisted that her Harry Potter stories were true?

Others have argued that, though the disciples conspired to make up the story of the resurrection, things didn't go according to plan, and so they just had to keep telling the tale in order to save face. One big problem though: The Gospels were written in some cases twenty or thirty years after the events. That was plenty of time for the disciples to have quietly faded into obscurity. You couldn't exactly Google them back then, could you? Instead, decades after the events, they were still promoting the resurrection, even at the peril of their lives - a strange thing to do if the story that they would die for was their own fabrication.

GO ASK THEM

More powerful evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, and the truthfulness of the Bible, can be found in these verses by the apostle Paul:



For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

1 Corinthians 15:3-6

Paul says that more than 500 people saw Jesus, and though some of them are dead, most aren't. In other words, Paul is saying, *Don't take my word for the resurrected Christ. Go ask these other people, for they are still alive*. This is a rather strange ploy were Paul promoting a story that he knew was not true.

For these reasons, and many others, the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is powerful, which gives us good reasons to trust in the Bible.

In the last verses we looked at, Paul said something worth repeating:



That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 15:3

Paul emphasised that Jesus died and rose again *according to the Scriptures.* That is, the things that happened to Jesus were the fulfilment of Bible prophecies. They were predicted in the Old Testament part of the Bible long before they happened.

THE SURE WORD OF PROPHECY

The death and resurrection of Jesus, *according to the Scriptures,* was the fulfilment of just a few of the many prophecies that give us good reasons to trust in the Bible.

The apostle Peter was an eye witness of many miracles; he even heard the voice of God from heaven. But then he added this crucial point:



And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy.

2 Peter 1:18-19 KJV

In other words, Peter is saying that he - and the others - heard the voice of God, they saw the miracles, but they also had the *sure word of prophecy.* This shows just how important bible prophecy is in the Christian faith.

THE BIBLE AND EUROPE

What are some of these prophecies?

The book of Daniel gives a sweeping look at world history from Daniel's time - 600 BC - through our time until the end. The prophecy told about four great world empires that would arise, which are easily identified to be Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece and Rome. See Daniel 2.

The most amazing part of that prophecy is that, as it continues, it depicts the nations of modern Europe, symbolised by the feet of a statue - and this is what it says - remember, it was written 600 years *before* Christ:



Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.

Daniel 2:41-43

It said that some of the nations of Europe would be strong, others fragile, weak. What an accurate depiction of Europe.

What else was in this amazing prophecy? It said that they would *mingle with the seed of men*. In other words, Spaniards marrying French, French marrying Italians, Germans marrying Swiss, Swedes marrying Dutch, and so forth. In the previous centuries, many royal marriages were made between the European nations in order to prop up political alliances.

Yet, according to this Bible prophecy, what would happen?



As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.

Despite endless attempts at European unity, it would never come. Look at the history of Europe: One war after another right up through to the 20th century. From 1066 - the Battle of Hastings, to the wars in Balkans in the 1990s, from The Thirty Years War -1618-1648, to World War II - 1939 -1945 - these nations have been at war for centuries.

And though, at least for now, the invasions, the Blitzkriegs, and the trench warfare have stopped, Europe - with its fragile economic alliances - remains a divided continent, exactly as the prophecy of Daniel predicted more than 2,600 years ago!

The really good news, that we can trust our lives with, is that, according to this prophecy, the next kingdom to rule the world will last forever:



And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

Daniel 2:44

SADDAM'S BABYLON

Writing about Babylon, the greatest empire of antiquity, the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah said that not only would it be destroyed, but it would remain that way - forever.



Therefore the wild desert beasts shall dwell there with the jackals. … And the ostriches shall dwell in it. … It shall be inhabited no more forever.

Jeremiah 50:39

Imagine someone, today, predicting that the United States of America would be destroyed and never recover. That's what it was like for Jeremiah who wrote his prophecy at the height of Babylon's power, when it was the undisputed political and military power of the ancient world.

Thousands of years later, long after it was destroyed and plundered, Babylon sits in ruins in Iraq. Saddam Hussein had big plans to rebuild the city, but those plans are, as we all know, on hold - big time!

PROPHECY FULFILLED AS YOU READ

Bible prophecy is so powerful that you can even experience one being fulfilled right now.

Leading up to and during the time of Jesus, many Jews were expecting the Messiah to appear. There were two main reasons: Firstly, they were chafing under the rule of the Romans, and secondly, because there were prophecies pointing to the coming of the Messiah. Many claimed to be the Messiah. All of these would-be Messiahs, and their followers, however, have long been lost to history.

Jesus of Nazareth is the notable exception. We must remember, too, that Jesus never had a large following during His three and a half year ministry. He was basically an itinerant preacher living in a small and insignificant province of the massive Roman Empire. He never led a nation or commanded an army. From a purely worldly perspective, He was just one of the world's billions who should have vanished into oblivion.

Yet listen to the prediction that He made about Himself:



Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Matthew 24:35 KJV

What would not pass away? Jesus' words - words that you read right now, and by so doing, you just took part in the fulfilment of a Bible prophecy made almost 2,000 years ago.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

For years, archaeology had been seen as a weapon against the Bible, to cast doubt upon the accuracy of its teaching. The main thrust was the argument of silence. But the silence has been broken by discoveries that shook this argument like an earthquake.

Just two examples:



Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.

Daniel 5:1

Scholars argued this was inaccurate, that no archaeological evidence showed a king by that name sitting on the throne of Babylon. In the 1800's,

however, ancient tablets were uncovered, and much to the embarrassment of the scoffers, the name of Belshazzar - King of Babylon - appears over and over. Even more impressive, according to the dating of the tablets, he ruled at the time that the Bible said he did!

Also, for years, critics challenged the historical veracity of Luke when he wrote:



But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.

Acts 17:6

The problem, they said, was that the word translated rulers - politarches - was a non-existent office, and that Luke was not right in using that word. Unfortunately for the critics, an inscription was found with that exact term on it. In fact, about 35 inscriptions have been found with that word, nineteen coming from the city of Thessalonica where the incident in the text took place. And, even more intriguing, of the nineteen, three are dated to the first century AD - the time of the incident described in Luke.

These are just a few of the many times that archaeology has confirmed the historical accuracy of the Bible.

NO COPY MACHINES

The Bible says this about itself:



All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.

2 Timothy 3:16

Even if one were to accept that statement as true, what about the accuracy of the manuscripts themselves? People didn't have photocopying machines back then. How can we trust that the copies, which are often copies of other copies, are accurate?

That argument, at least with the New Testament, is a non-starter. Unlike any other Greek, Roman, or Jewish literature from antiquity, the collection of New Testament manuscripts is enormous. There are thousands of copies, from fragments to entire manuscripts, making the reliability of the texts of the New Testament a non-issue.

For a long time, the Old Testament was different. The earliest copies dated to the Middle Ages, about 900 to 1,000 years after Christ. Scoffers argued that these manuscripts couldn't be trusted. How could they be, so far removed from the time of the originals?

Then, in a story that reads like a spy novel, the famous Dead Sea Scrolls were found, many of them dated to before Christ. These are by far the oldest known copies of the Old Testament. And, to the amazement of the scholarly world, the Dead Sea Scrolls revealed just how remarkably accurate the Old Testament writings were. The differences were so minor as to be of no importance to the theology and history of the Old Testament. The Dead Sea Scrolls have all but silenced the argument that the Old Testament we have today isn't an accurate rendition of what the prophets wrote thousands of years ago.

No wonder the Bible says:



The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.

Isaiah 40:8

THE WORLD'S BESTSELLER

There is no book in history like the Bible: sixty-six books, written by dozens of people - from kings to fisherman, from scholars to shepherds - in some cases people separated by more than a thousand years. And yet the book has a unity of thought that boggles the mind.

And the unifying thought is that despite human evil, despite human sinfulness, there is a God of grace who loves us. Maybe that's why the Bible remains the world's bestselling book, because it offers us a hope that nothing else in the world can.

Millions of people have experienced a radical change in their lives through this book. Not because of the Bible itself, but because of the God revealed in it, the God who created us and who, through Jesus, offers us answers in a world that does nothing but throw out hard questions. In a sense, the Bible lays the glory of man in the dust, and reveals to us a God who will do for us what we can never do for ourselves.



And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Revelation 21:4

But for now, it's a very scary world out there. That's why we need something greater than it to give us hope. We need the God who has made Himself known to us in the Bible, and who has given us good reasons to trust it. After all, why would God reveal Himself to us in a book that wasn't worthy of our trust?

The Bible - the book - gives us the clearest and most authoritative account of God's epic story - His-story - of how His rule was challenged in heaven and then on earth. His story tells of His rescue mission in Jesus. It reveals where we are today with the signs of the times, and it points to a time soon, when that rebellion will be forever quietened.

There are a myriad of beliefs out there in the world. They can't all be true - they conflict with and contradict each other. The idea that there is no ultimate truth is popular these days. Many people believe that! But if the Bible makes anything clear it is this: There are such things as truth and error, good and evil, right and wrong. And they lie at the very heart of the epic story, the drama of the ages in which we are all involved.

It is not enough to believe something. We must go beyond belief and be certain that our belief is in fact based on truth. Jesus said about the word of God: *Your word is truth.* John 17:17

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Uncover earth's ultimate hero as predicted in prophecy and how we are involved with Him

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discover the saviour

Uncover earth's ultimate hero as predicted in prophecy and how we are involved with Him

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discover the saviour

The late atheist astronomer Carl Sagan wrote about a photo taken in 1990 of the earth from the spacecraft Voyager 1, about four billion miles away. Because the earth was basking in light from the sun, it appeared as if it were, he wrote, in a privileged position.

That appearance was, he said, an illusion.

Our planet, Sagan said, *is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from anywhere else to save us from ourselves.*

Sagan had it partly right. We do need help in order *to save us from ourselves*. Who doesn't see that? The idea, once very popular, that humans were progressing toward perfection and Utopia died out in the trenches of World War I, in the death camps of World War II, in the Killing Fields of Cambodia, and in the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York in 2001.

SUPERHEROES

Thus, sensing the grand epic that we find ourselves in is beyond our control, we all face the future with a bit of fear and trembling. We are trapped on a scary world, and we can never escape from it. Our only out, it seems, is under it - not the most exciting of prospects. And even if things might be going well for us now - today - who isn't aware of forces that can, without warning, toss our lives around like a soggy cigarette butt in a typhoon?

Maybe that explains our fascination with superheroes: Ironman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Spiderman, the Hulk, Superman, even Captain Australia. Perhaps it's the realisation, which Sagan hit on, that we cannot save

ourselves, which causes us to reach out in fantasy for someone who through mighty deeds and exceptional powers can. For a few hours, immersed in light and background music and an exciting theme, we can forget what we have to face when the credits are over and we walk out the theatre door into the angst of our own immediate existence, or when we eject the DVD and the computer screen brings us the latest catastrophe from which no Superhero saved anyone.

THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE

Many, though, believe that someone will save us, that someone *has* to or else we are lost, doomed to disintegrate into dust on this *lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark* that Sagan warned about. It seems that the desire for a hero is programmed into us.

In 1982, a man named Benjamin Creme spent two hundred thousand dollars putting full-page ads in newspapers around the world, proclaiming: *THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE*. The Christ, who was also, he said, Buddha Maitreya - and a host of other religious personalities all rolled into one - would appear and bring that salvation. He even invited journalists to an Indian restaurant in London where this Christ just might show up and save the world. An old man in robes did walk in, and as folks held their breath in anticipation - *Could this be the long-awaited Saviour?* - the old fellow asked for a cigarette from the maitre de and walked out.

No question, though, whatever one might think of Creme's bogus ad campaign for Christ, we need help. As we have seen in the *Discover Meaning* topic, we are in the midst of a great controversy between good and evil, and sometimes it seems that evil might win out.

But the Bible teaches something radically different. It teaches that though this world is filled with evil, and that though suffering, death, and fear, and sickness are part of this existence - they won't last forever. We're so used to death that we assume it's just part of life. But death is the negation of life, not part of it. And the great hope given us in the Bible, for which we have many reasons to trust, is that Jesus Christ - the true Messiah - has come to save us, not just from ourselves but from everything else.

That was the part Satan had wrong - big time.

Talking about Jesus, the Bible says, *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.* Hebrews 2:14

Notice in that text the theme we will be seeing over and over - the battle between good and evil, Christ and Satan. It's crucial to understanding the world, our place in it, and the hope offered us through Jesus.

What's even more astounding is that Jesus did all this for us in an amazing fulfilment of Bible prophecies, prophecies written many centuries before He came, prophecies that gave people in those days hope, and that give us powerful reasons for trusting that He is the true Messiah, the One predicted in the Old Testament. Jesus' life, death and resurrection were fulfilments of prophecies that have helped millions trust Him as the true Superhero, the only One who can do for us what we can never do for ourselves.

A NEW TESTAMENT PREDICTION

Though this study is about Old Testament prophecies that pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, we want to start with one New Testament prophecy, one that had a fulfilment in what we just read about with Mr Creme's ad campaign.

As we saw in the last booklet, from a purely human perspective, Jesus of Nazareth, who died young, was just one Jew among hundreds of thousands who perished at the hands of the Romans. As such, this Christ should have vanished into obscurity. Instead, look at what He said about Himself almost two thousand years ago:



Then if anyone says to you, Look, here is the Christ! or There! do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.

Matthew 24:23-25

How did He know that all through history people would come and claim to be Him? And Benjamin Creme's ad is just one of hundreds of examples.

The answer is easy. It's because He was the Christ, the Messiah predicted in amazing prophecies throughout the Old Testament, and the only person in history who fulfilled them all!

ALL THINGS MUST BE FULFILLED

After the heart-wrenching trauma of His death, which the disciples though repeatedly warned about, weren't expecting, Jesus rose from the grave. This was another unexpected event, though they were told about it too. Then He met with them and said the following crucial words:



Then He said to them, These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

Luke 24:44-45

The point made here - and in many other places throughout the New Testament - is that so much about Jesus was predicted in the Old Testament, including the nature of His birth, the place of His birth, the kind of life He lived, His death and resurrection, and more. Jesus said they all *must be fulfilled.* And it is in their fulfilment that those who are seeking truth can find powerful evidence for faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah - the one who can, and will, ultimately save us from ourselves.

BIRTH IN BETHLEHEM

For instance, more than 700 years before His birth, the Bible told where He would be born. The prophet Micah wrote:



But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,

Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from of old,
From everlasting.
Micah 5:2

The word for *everlasting* can mean from *eternity* - that is, He had no beginning. He was a divine personage. No wonder then that, for centuries, Jewish scholars saw this as a prophecy pointing to the Messiah.

Of course, in the New Testament, one of the best-known stories about Jesus, celebrated every Christmas - though Jesus wasn't born on December 25 - was His birth in Bethlehem.



Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.
Matthew 2:1-2

That would be like someone living in the 14th century predicting in what city a person would be born today. Even more interesting is that one of the most famous rabbinical commentators named Rashi, who lived in the 11th century AD, applied Micah 5:2 to the Messiah. He wasn't thinking it was Jesus, of course, but he still saw it as Messianic - that is, pointing to the Messiah.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Unquestionably, especially in our secular age where the whole culture and educational system is built on naturalism, a view that leaves no room for the supernatural, the idea of the virgin birth of Jesus, is mocked. And yet that's what prophecy predicted, and what the New Testament said happened.



Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

Again, this was written 700 years before the birth of Jesus. What does the New Testament say? In the well-known story, Mary who *did not know a man* (Luke 1:34), *is found with child of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 1:18), before being married to Joseph, who wanted to end the relationship because he thought that she had been unfaithful to him.



But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins. So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, God with us.

Matthew 1: 20-22

An ancient Greek translation of the Bible, written a few hundred years before the birth of Jesus, translated the Hebrew with a word that means primarily virgin. Thus, people who had no reason to try and deny that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy - He wasn't even born then - saw a good reason to translate the word as virgin. Again, the fact that she was a virgin is what made it so miraculous, so special. Otherwise it would be nothing out of the ordinary.

GOD IN THE FLESH

Here is another Old Testament prophecy, which some traditional ancient Jewish sources have seen as Messianic as well.



For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

Even the simplest reading of this text reveals that God Himself would be born into humanity. What's crucial is that this verse, written 700 years before the birth of Christ, captures a key New Testament truth about Jesus and the plan of salvation - that Jesus was God Himself!

Here are just a few New Testament texts that testify to the divinity of Christ.

Talking about Jesus, John wrote:



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:1

Verse 14 indicates the *Word* is referring to Jesus.

Another time, in a discussion with leaders on His identity, this is what happened:



Jesus said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM. Then they took up stones to throw at Him.

John 8:58

The reason for their harsh reaction is simple. Jesus used the phrase *I AM* for Himself, a clear reference to God. Centuries earlier, when the Lord appeared to Moses in order to use him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses asked for the name of the God who was sending him to lead his kinsmen to salvation.



And God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM. And He said, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.

Exodus 3:14

Thus, when Jesus used that phrase for Himself, the religious leaders acted as they did because they saw a man, a human being, refer to Himself as God! In this case, though – He was!

ISAIAH 53

One of the most powerful prophecies that pointed to Jesus, especially to His sacrifice for the sins of the world, came also from Isaiah 53, a prophecy that many traditional Jewish sources interpreted as Messianic. In fact, even in our day, the followers of Rabbi Menachem Schneerson have

applied this prophecy to Schneerson. However wrong in their application, they still interpreted it as a Messianic prophecy.

Though we can't quote the whole prophecy here, it says in part:



Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
Isaiah 53:4-6

If you have a Bible, read Isaiah 53 in total. It is amazing in its prophetic detail.

This is one of the clearest Old Testament predictions of the key truth of the New Testament - Jesus suffered for our sins; and He bore in Himself the punishment for the evil that we have done. This chapter is quoted or referred to all through the New Testament.

Just one example:



He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by

Isaiah the prophet, saying: He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.

Matthew 8:16-17

Volumes have been written showing how these themes in Isaiah 53 - such as that of human sinfulness, and Christ's death for that sinfulness - unmistakably point to the death of Jesus on the cross, a death that offers us all the hope of eternal life.

DANIEL 9

Another powerful Messianic prophecy, which actually gives the time when the Messiah would come, appears in Daniel 9. This prophecy was written more than 500 years before Christ. Though we can't get into it in depth here, this amazing prophecy pinpoints dates that fit Jesus perfectly.

Here's just one part:



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 …

Daniel 9:25

The command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 587/6 BC, was given in the year 457 BC. Briefly, *seven weeks and sixty-two weeks* - or sixty nine weeks taken literally - would have meant the Messiah would have come in less than two years after the decree, a date that's nonsensical. However, the Bible

teaches the day-year principle, in which a day equals a year for many of the prophecies.

Here are two examples where the day-year principle, acknowledged for centuries by Jewish and Christian Bible students, appears:



According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection.

Numbers 14:34



And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year.

Ezekiel 4:6

Much more evidence for this important principle of prophetic interpretation is found in the Bible. In the prophecy of Daniel 9, the 69 weeks - with 7 days in each week - equals 483 years. Starting from 457 BC, which is from the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, and adding 483 years to that date, brings us to the early decades of the first century AD.

The first century what?

AD. AD stands for what? The Latin phrase Anno Domini, which means the year of our Lord. What Lord? Of course, the Lord Jesus Christ to whom that prophecy, half a millennium earlier, pointed.

Talk about evidence!

JESUS, THE MESSIAH

The deeper one studies these prophecies, the clearer it becomes that only one person - Jesus Christ - fulfilled them. And by so doing He has offered us a whole new perspective, not only of the world, but of our place in it.

Sagan said the picture of the earth from Voyager 1 *offered no hint that help will come from anywhere else to save us from ourselves*.

That's one narrow view from one tiny and distant spaceship. The view offered from the Bible tells us, each of us, an entirely different story.

So, how does this fit into the cosmic drama in which we find ourselves? The entry of God in the person of Jesus into human history 2,000 years ago is the most dramatic demonstration of love planet earth has ever, or will ever, see. Single handedly He took on the villain and all he represents, and made a way of escape for us. And we are not done with this super-hero yet. Soon He will return for the final death struggle in this great controversy between good and evil, between Christ and Satan. The prophecies pointing to this final struggle will be fulfilled just as surely as were the prophecies for His first coming.

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discover insight

Uncover the secret meanings behind ancient rituals and why their insights are relevant for us today

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discover insight

In April 1943, during World War II, a fisherman found a body floating off the coast of Spain. The corpse was dressed in a trench coat, a uniform and boots, with a black attaché case chained to one of his wrists. His wallet identified him as Major William Martin, of the British Royal Marines. Though the Spanish authorities were willing to hand the case over to the English, the British declined. They asked that the handover go through regular channels. This was an odd decision, because in the days that followed the British had sent a series of frantic requests to the Spanish asking about the whereabouts of Major Martin's briefcase.

Meanwhile, the Germans found out about the corpse of the British officer with the attaché case chained to his wrist, and through the help of sympathisers in the Spanish government were able to get access to the contents of the case in a way that didn't reveal it had been opened. What they found astonished them! It contained secret plans which revealed that English and American forces planned to cross the Mediterranean from their positions in North Africa and launch an attack on Nazi-held Greece and Sardinia. In response, Hitler transferred an entire Panzer division from France to Greece, in an effort to halt the coming assault.

One slight problem - later that year, Allied troops from North Africa did launch an assault, but rather than landing in Greece and Sardinia, as the plans in Major Martin's briefcase clearly said, they invaded Sicily instead.

What happened?

Major Martin it turned out, had been a mentally ill vagrant who had eaten a fatal dose of rat poison. His body, removed from a London morgue, was dressed up in the uniform, given the fake identification along with the fake war plans in the briefcase, and then dumped offshore by the British

in hopes of the Germans getting their hands on him, which they did. Believing that what they read in the briefcase was true, the Nazis fell for what has been called one of the most remarkable deceptions in modern military history.

DECEPTIONS

Though, in this case, the deception turned out for the best, deceptions are just that - deceptions - purposeful means by which the false is hidden or covered by something that appears true and trustworthy.

And, as has been seen so far, Satan is working his deceptions upon the whole world which is involved in this grand epic. We are participants in a planet in rebellion - in a struggle between good and evil. It's the only worldview that makes sense of history and our world today; and it gives hope for the future.



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. … Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.

Revelation 12:7-9, 12

Satan is seeking to deceive *the whole world*. And considering the endless number of views about life, about God, about the meaning of human existence - views that are so often in contradiction to each other - many people are, in fact, being deceived. And the scary thing about being deceived is you don't know when you are!

COULD LIFE BE MEANINGFUL?

Such as poor Mitchell Heisman. Though once a believer in God, he lost his faith and wandered into Nihilism, which teaches that the answer to life's meaning is that there is no answer, no purpose, and no grand goal. We just exist, by chance, in a meaningless environment. Hence, our lives are meaningless as well.

Who hasn't, often in times of woe and pain - especially when that woe and pain seemed so pointless - wondered if that weren't true, and if life weren't meaningless? Such belief becomes even easier to accept because, for the past hundred years, atheistic evolution has been incessantly promoted by certain segments of society, thus giving Nihilism a scientific basis.

Mitchell Heisman's thinking led him to believe in the utter pointlessness of life - a terrible deception. *Every word, every thought, and every emotion,* he wrote, *come back to one core problem: life is meaningless. The experiment in Nihilism is to seek out and expose every illusion and every myth, wherever it may lead, no matter what, even if it kills us.*

THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

It is Satan who has been deceiving the world because, as with Mitchell, wrong ideas, wrong views, wrong teachings - all have consequences.

And no question, one of his greatest deceptions has to do with the character of God Himself. Unable to get everyone to believe as Michael Heisman did that God doesn't exist, Satan has done the next best thing, which is to get people to misunderstand God's character instead.

And he has been able to deceive many regarding the character of God through twisting and distorting the concept of sacrifice. Though in the Bible one of the most beautiful and powerful revelations of the self-denying, loving character of God has been revealed in the biblical sacrificial system, the whole idea of sacrifice has been perverted to make God look like a blood-thirsty and vengeful tyrant who demands these sacrifices in order to avert His anger.

For instance, in the city of Cuzco in Peru, ruins remain of the altar where the priests of that ancient religion would sacrifice young girls to the Incan gods. What kind of god would ask a parent to allow their daughters to be purposefully butchered? That's just one example of how the whole idea of sacrifice, which was to reveal what God Himself would do for us, has been perverted in a dreadful way that distorts His true character.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

In contrast, the biblical view of sacrifice and what it teaches about the character of God - as opposed to all these false views - can be summed up in these texts about Jesus:



Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

These few texts capture not just the essence of Christianity but the essence of biblical truth, which is that God, the Creator of the universe, offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. That is, God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, willingly gave Himself as a sacrifice for sin - yours and mine!

Someone once asked a Christian, *Explain to me in less than one hundred words what your religion teaches.* He answered, *My religion teaches that human beings, given moral freedom, have disobeyed the law of God, which has brought evil and sin and suffering into this world. Rather, though, than make human beings pay the penalty for that evil, which would be eternal death, God Himself, the Creator of the universe, came down, took upon Himself our humanity, and in that humanity paid the penalty for our sin and evil so we never have to pay it ourselves. That is what Jesus' death on the cross was: the Creator paying Himself the penalty for our sins.*

And the Old Testament sacrificial system pointed to the death of Jesus, the Creator, for our sins.

THE SIN-BEARER

There's a story in the Old Testament - one of many actually - that captures this amazing truth, that the sacrifices in the Bible were to symbolise God Himself, in the person of Jesus, as the One who would bear humanity's sin.

After the children of Israel were miraculously delivered from Egypt, they were soon in rebellion against God; sinning and doing evil. Knowing that they could be punished for such a flagrant violation of God's will, Moses prayed that the Lord would forgive them.



Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin - but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.

Exodus 32:31-32

What is incredible is the verb Moses used in the text, translated as forgive. It comes from a Hebrew word - *nasa* - which means to bear, to carry. By far, that's the most common use of the word. But it also means to forgive. In other words, forgiveness is linked to sin being borne or carried by another. Thus, that phrase could have just as correctly been translated, *Yet now, if You will bear their sin …*

Was Moses actually asking God Himself to bear the sins of the people? Yes! And many centuries later the Lord answered that request: Jesus bore those sins on the cross.

Talking about Jesus, the Bible says:



Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose stripes you were healed.

1 Peter 2:24

Here Peter is paraphrasing from the Old Testament book of Isaiah 53, which predicted Christ's death on the cross centuries before it happened. Isaiah wrote this about Jesus:



Surely He has borne our griefs.
And carried our sorrows.

Isaiah 53:4

And this:



And He bore the sin of many.

Isaiah 53:12

In both cases, the verb translated *borne* or *bore* is *nasa*, which also means to forgive.

Yes, God did institute the system of sacrifices, but not for the counterfeit reasons that Satan has pawned off on the world, that God was a bloodthirsty tyrant who demanded sacrifices in order to ward off His anger. Instead, they were to show that God Himself, in the person of Jesus, would ultimately come and pay the penalty for our sins.

THE SANCTUARY

This powerful truth, that God Himself would come into humanity and bear in Himself the punishment for our sins, was prefigured in the ancient Hebrew sacrificial system. After the Exodus from Egypt, the Lord said to Moses:



And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.

Exodus 25:8

This sanctuary, a portable tent structure, actually was the model for the later famous Temple in Jerusalem, whose ruins can still be seen today.

What this text says, however, is amazing. The Creator God tells these people, wanderers in the desert, to make a sanctuary, a building, so that *I may dwell among them.*

The Creator of the universe was willing to dwell among humanity!

That's one example; a symbol of what Jesus Himself would do: He would come to dwell among us.



And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

The Greek verb John used for the verb to dwell comes directly from the same Greek used in the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) for the sanctuary mentioned above. Thus, John related

the presence of God in the earthly tabernacle with the presence of God in Christ, who in the flesh *dwelt among us.*

TUMOT

However, that's only the beginning. It's one thing for God to condescend to dwell among humans in an earthly structure. That's hard enough to imagine. But that structure became a place defiled and unclean due to human sin. In fact, once a year there was a special service in which that sanctuary actually had to be cleansed from the sins of the people. It was known to the Jews as the Day of Atonement. Talking about the ministry of the High Priest on that day, Scripture says:



And he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD, and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

Leviticus 16:18-19

Uncleanness? God's dwelling place, the dwelling place of a holy and sinless God, becomes unclean!

How could that be?

The word uncleanness in Hebrew - *tumot* - appears in various forms hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible, and it often describes the sinful actions of people in violation of God's law.

And this gets to the heart of the gospel message as revealed in the sacrificial system. The sins and evil of the people, the things that made them *tumot*, were ultimately brought into the house of God, which itself became *tumot*. In a sense, the sanctuary - God's house - ultimately carried the sins and evil of the people, and it was through this process, and this process alone, that the people were forgiven those sins.

It was the system of animal sacrifices that represented this transfer of sin. When people were convicted of their sin, they would bring an animal for sacrifice - a lamb, a goat, a ram, a bull - to the sanctuary, confess their sin over the animal, symbolising the transference of their sin to the innocent animal. In that sense, their sin was transferred from themselves and placed on the innocent animal, which symbolised the sinless Jesus. The animal was killed and its blood was poured out beside the alter symbolising Christ's blood poured out for us at the cross. Some of the flesh of the animal sacrifice was eaten by the priest (see Leviticus 6:26), who symbolically became the sin bearer for the sinner as he came before God in the sanctuary. Though the people themselves, because of their sin, deserved death, the animal was slain in their stead, symbolic of the death of Jesus. Every single one of those sacrifices had one main purpose - to point the sinner to the substitute who would die in their stead.

And that substitute was Jesus, God in the flesh.

When Jesus began His ministry, John the Baptist pointed to Him and said:



Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

John 1:29

The lamb was a clear image from the sanctuary service. John was using it to point to what would ultimately be the death of Jesus, who would bear the sins of the world on the cross, all of which was symbolised, pre-figured, in the earthly sanctuary service. The innocent animal died in place of the guilty sinner, and its blood was brought into the sanctuary, God's dwelling place itself, which became filled with *the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and … their transgressions in all their sins.* Leviticus 16:16

That's why the Bible says this about Jesus:



For He 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

The parallel gets even stronger, because Jesus associated Himself with the sanctuary - or the temple itself - as well.



Jesus answered and said to them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then the Jews said, It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days? But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

John 2:19-21

Yes, the entire service, from the priesthood, the animals and their death, and the sanctuary and its furnishings, were all symbols, pictures, even prophecies, of what Jesus - God in the flesh - would do for the human race.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

God had given the sacrificial system to show humans two things. First, that sin had a cost; and second, that He Himself would pay that cost. The sacrificial system was to reveal to the world what God was like. It was to show that though humans have sinned and done evil, God could forgive, but only because He was willing to accept a substitute to pay the penalty for that sin and evil.

And He, Himself, was that Substitute!

We all have sinned. The Bible is clear on that point. In fact, who needs the Bible to know that truth? We see it all around us, and in us as well.

The Bible also teaches that sin is a rejection and violation of God's law.



Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

1 John 3:4

The great news of the Gospel, as revealed in the sacrificial system, is that though we have sinned, though we have violated God's law, we don't have to pay the penalty for it ourselves. If that's not good news, what is!!

The substitute for the law-breakers, wrote British theologian John Stott, *is none other than the Law-Maker himself.*

How unfortunate that, for thousands of years, the whole concept of sacrifice, which was to reveal the loving, self-denying character of God, has been turned into something that makes God look bad. Sacrifice has often been made to appear as if these deaths would somehow appease

God's wrath, satisfy His anger; that people would have to kill their own children in order to make themselves right with God.

What a deception! We're not made right with God by doing anything, much less killing our own children or killing anything, even an innocent animal. Satan successfully turned a beautiful truth about God into an ugly lie about Him instead.

And the truth is that, though sinners, we become right with God only because of Jesus and His death for us. We claim His death as ours, by faith. It was a death revealed in the ancient Hebrew sacrificial system - a system that was to show us, not what we could do to save ourselves, but instead, what God would do to save us from ourselves.



But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

Read this verse again - but substitute *me* and *I* for *us* and *we*.

Now that's love. And it's that truth that is at the heart of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. What is God like? Take another look at the cross.

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discover rescue

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discover rescue

Hardly a year passes without another end-of-the-world film of one sort or another, such as - *2012, The Day After Tomorrow, Dr Strangelove, The Road, Miracle Mile, War of the Worlds, I am Legend, Twelve Monkeys,* not to mention the *Left Behind* series.

Why? Is it fear because we now have the capability to annihilate ourselves, even accidentally?

THE SCIENCE AND THE END

Dr. Stephen Hawking - who holds the chair at Cambridge University in England that Isaac Newton once held, and is considered the greatest scientific mind since Einstein - has warned about the ultimate destruction of life on earth. One of his biggest fears, he said, is global warming. Meeting with college students in China, Dr. Hawking warned that our planet *might end up like Venus, at 250 degrees centigrade and raining sulphuric acid.*

In 2010, he said, *Life on Earth is at the ever-increasing risk of being wiped out by a disaster such as sudden global warming, nuclear war, a genetically engineered virus or other dangers. ... I think the human race has no future if it doesn't go into space.*

Foreign Policy - a prestigious journal of international politics - ran an article called *The End of the World.* The article began like this: *While the apocalypse is pretty unlikely to come in 2012, it does have to happen sooner or later. Here are five possible scenarios for the end of the world.*

The top five were:

1. Asteroids
2. Climate disaster
3. Nuclear War
4. Plague
5. The Unknown Unknown - something we haven't yet thought about but that could, indeed, kill us all.

Once the *End of the World* theme was a religious topic. Today, it's a scientific dogma - offering little hope.

OUR OWN END

Even if we forget about anything as big and dramatic as the end of all life on Earth, we always live with the spectre of the end of our own life on earth, or the life of those we love. And this is an ending that, as we know, can come at any moment, an ending that we can't avoid. Death is, surely, a case of not if but when.

And most of us, and with good reason too, find that thought greatly disconcerting. Even though we all know that we are going to die, we try not to think about it too much. As difficult as life can be now, dwelling on our death would, no doubt, make it that much worse.

THE DILEMMA OF BRYAN MAGEE

Bryan Magee taught philosophy at Oxford. He had been a Member of the British Parliament, a successful music and theatre critic, an author, and

a professional radio and TV broadcaster. By his own admission, his life was great.

One slight problem: *… in the middle of it all I was overwhelmed, almost literally so, by a sense of mortality. The realisation hit me like a demolition crane that I was inevitably going to die. … Death, my death, the literal destruction of me, was totally inevitable, and had been from the very instant of my conception. Nothing that I could ever do, now or at any other time, could make any difference to that, nor could it ever have done so at any moment in my life.*

Magee wrote eloquently about his struggle with meaninglessness - the realisation that no matter what he did, or all the success he had, whether he wrote great books, or became Foreign Secretary, whether he married or not, whatever - *none of it would make the slightest difference to me or to anyone else when all of us were nothing, as everyone was going to be, including everyone not yet born; that it could therefore make no difference when I died, and would have made no difference if I had never been born; that I was in any event going to be for all eternity what I would have been if I had never been born; that there was no meaning in any of it, no point in any of it; and that in the end everything was nothing.*

Toward the end of the book *Confessions of a Philosopher*, he wrote that, after all these years of seeking, *I am as baffled now by the larger metaphysical questions of my existence as I was when I was a child - indeed more so, because my understanding of the depths and difficulties of the questions themselves is now so much greater.*

Not surprising either, because the one place - the only place - that has the answers he was looking for, was the one place that Bryan Magee rejected, and that was - faith.

WHAT CAN WE HOPE?

If we deny the epic struggle of good against evil, involving forces seen and unseen, in which we find ourselves, or if we buy the idea of naturalism that assumes all there is to reality is the physical, material, natural world - then there is no logical or reasonable conclusion to come to other than what Hawking and Magee expressed.

We have seen that violence, sickness, suffering and death - the very things that make life here so hard - are not what God planned. All this is fallout from the cosmic battle - a battle in which, through no choice of our own, we are all involved. It's a conflict, though, that God promises to bring to an end.

The only real choice we have is whose side we choose to be on. Neutrality, by default, puts you on the wrong side, the side whose ultimate demise has already been made certain.

Amid all this, we have also made an amazing and incredible claim. We said that Jesus, though the Creator of the Universe, came down, took upon Himself our humanity, and bore in Himself the full brunt of all the evil in the world.

Look at these texts:



Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of

death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:5-9

His victory on the cross - and what may seem like a defeat - was in fact the pivotal victory that will liberate the world.

However amazing this claim is, one big problem remains - we're still here amid this great controversy. Sure, it's great that Jesus died for us, but how do we cash that in? What great hope does it offer for us in a world that ultimately offers us nothing but pain, disappointment, suffering and death?

The answer is simple - the Second Coming of Jesus - the promise that, indeed, this world as we know it is going to end.

Science, even Hollywood, have it right. This world will end for sure. It's just not going to end the way that they say it will. Instead, there is hope - this world, as we know it, will end with the Second Coming of Jesus.

THE PROMISES

The New Testament refers over and over to the Second Coming of Jesus. One scholar estimated that one out of every thirty verses in the New Testament talks about Jesus' return.

What are some of these promises?

Just before His death, Jesus said to His disciples:



Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will

come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.

John 14:1-4

I - will - come - again. How simple, clear and encouraging is that!

After Jesus was taken up to heaven in the sight of His followers, two angels appeared to them and said:



Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.

Act 1:11

… in like manner. You saw Him go to heaven - you'll see Him return from heaven.

The apostle Paul believed in Christ's return:



Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1Thessalonians 5:23

Here he is again:



For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

1Thessalonians 2:19

Again:



We should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:12-13

And again:



Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

These are just a few of the many texts that speak unambiguously about the Second Coming of Jesus. It's, in fact, hard to make sense of the New Testament, or even the Bible as a whole, without it. That's how important this promise is to the entire Christian faith.

THE FIRST COMING

Indeed, not only do we have this promise, we have great reasons for believing it too. And, without question, one of the greatest reasons to trust the promise of the Second Coming is the first coming.

What does that mean?

Here's what the Bible says:



… the Son of Man (a name for Jesus) ***did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.***

Matthew 20:28



For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

1 Timothy 2:5-6

According to these verses, Jesus came to give His life as a *ransom*. A ransom is a payment for something that you want, something that you are willing to pay a price for.

Imagine a child is kidnapped, held for ransom. The parents pay the ransom - a great sum of money - but then don't come and retrieve the child they paid the ransom for. That's kind of ridiculous isn't it?

In the same way, only so much more, who can imagine Jesus coming the first time, paying a ransom for us, and not coming back to get what cost Him so much?

Here's what Peter writes, showing the cost of our redemption:



… knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

1 Peter 1:18-19

We were redeemed by the *precious blood of Christ*. The idea of redeemed carries with it the same idea as *ransomed*. Christ paid for our redemption with His own life - that is what the cross was about. That's why He died. What could be more ludicrous then, for Him to have done that, to pay such a great price, and yet not come back and get what had cost Him so much?

And that is what the Second Coming is - Jesus returning to get what He Himself had paid for at His first coming. The main purpose of the first coming was to pay the ransom for sin. The ransom paid in full prepared the way for the Second. What Jesus accomplished at His first coming will not be fully realised until His Second Coming. If Jesus doesn't come back, then everything He did at the first coming - His incarnation into human flesh, His sinless life, and His death - all becomes a waste, nothing more.

Thus, just as we are absolutely sure that Jesus died for our sins at the cross - that He paid the ransom for us - we can be absolutely sure that He will return. The surety of the first coming is our guarantee of the Second, a guarantee *sealed in the precious blood of Christ*. Peter 1:19

Someone once paid 104 million dollars for a Picasso from the famous Sotheby's in London. One hundred and four million dollars! Now, could you imagine whoever paid that money not coming to get what cost so much? And yet, are we not worth more than a painting to God? Our worth can be seen in what was paid in order to ransom us.

That's why Jesus is coming back, and that's why we can be certain about it too.

LEFT BEHIND

Jesus will return. That's a guarantee. The question, however, remains: *What will happen when He does? What will it be like? What will happen to us, each of us individually, when He does?*

Years ago, a popular set of books was made into movies - The *Left Behind* series. The series depicts the Second Coming of Jesus as a secret event in which faithful Christians are quietly taken to heaven. Those left behind are wondering where their loved ones have gone.

The Bible, however, gives a radically different depiction of the Second Coming. As you read the texts, ask yourself what kind of event is being depicted - something secret and quiet, or something very public and open?



For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Mathew 24:27



Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him.

Revelation 1:7



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.

1Thessalonians 4:16-17

These few texts alone reveal that, whatever else we should believe about Jesus' Second Coming, it's not a secret and quiet event. On the contrary - read those texts again. Christ's return will be like lightning across the sky. Every eye shall see Him. Even more unmistakably, the dead in Christ shall be raised. All of Christ's faithful followers from the beginning of the world - those *dead in Christ* - will be brought back to life in physical bodies - certainly an event that one can't miss, especially when it says that those who are alive when He comes will be taken up in the air with Him. This is going to be a one-of-a-kind, world-shattering blowout of epic proportions, with nothing ever the same again!

With all due respect, the Second Coming, as depicted in these verses, is not the event so imaginatively scripted in the *Left Behind* series. It's not even close.

THE LAST ENEMY

Here's Paul, with more about the events at the Second Coming:



Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will 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: 51-53

The dead in Christ shall rise. Corruption shall - must - put on incorruption. Mortality shall - must - put on immortality. The point here, and we shouldn't miss this, is that - according to the Bible, death does not have

the last word. Death is not the end. Instead, one day death itself will be destroyed.



The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

1 Corinthians 15:26

The movies and the scientists are right. This world will not last forever. On the contrary.



But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

2 Peter 3:10

If that doesn't sound as if this world will be toast, what does?

And notice, He comes like a thief - not quietly like a thief - but unexpectedly like a thief. That's because no one knows when He will return. *But of that day and hour no one knows …* Matthew 24:36

And, in a sense, Hawking was correct too when he said that we need to get off the planet in order to survive. But rocket ships blasting off into space aren't going to do the trick.

The solace, the comfort, the hope, is found in Jesus, and in the promise of His return - a promise made certain by His first coming.

In the epic struggle between good and evil - this great controversy - the second coming of Jesus is a pivotal point. Planet earth will never be the same again. There are those who point to the pain and suffering in the world and ask: *If this God is a God of love, why doesn't he do something about all the pain and suffering?* It's a good question. The good news is

He will; and His Second Coming is when the clean-up begins. He comes to end all that's wrong and establish all that is good and right.

Now that's a hope worth living for.

And this is where the epic story becomes personal. How should we live now in anticipation of that event? How can we prepare? It's our choice where we will stand at that time.

NOTES

NOTES

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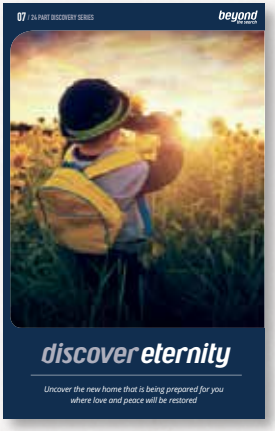

Uncover the plans for our new home
where love, peace and security will be restored

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discover eternity

Uncover the new home that is being prepared for you where love and peace will be restored

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discover eternity

You don't have to be a Bible-believing Christian to be pessimistic about humanity and human nature. The story of humanity is a story of wars, violence, hatred, exploitation and oppression. About 400 years before Christ, the Greek dramatist Aeschylus, wrote: *Alas for human destiny! Man's happiest hours are pictures drawn in shadow. Then ill fortune comes, and with two strokes the wet sponge wipes the drawing away.* About 2,400 years later, author James Joyce put these words in the mouth of a character: *History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.*

With our past so bad - and the present not a whole lot better - it's no wonder that people have speculated about what the future might be. And who among us, amid such speculating, hasn't been a bit anxious about what we might face either?

Interestingly enough, some of the most famous books depicting the future often portray it in rather nightmarish terms, as if the authors - so aware of human nature and its unrelenting capacity for evil - can't even imagine the future better!

1984

For instance, in 1949, George Orwell wrote his famous 1984, in which he depicted the world under the tyrannical rule of an absolute dictator called *Big Brother. Big Brother* constantly monitored the vast majority of people, and even a wrong thought by an individual was to be severely punished.

In the book, the thought police would get him just the same. He had committed - would have committed, even if he had never set pen to paper - the essential crime that contained all others in itself. *Thoughtcrime,* they called it. *Thoughtcrime* was not a thing that could be concealed forever.

You might dodge successfully for a while, even for years, but sooner or later they were bound to get you.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

In 1932, Aldous Huxley published *Brave New World*, his vision of the future - AD 2540 - where people are mass produced in artificial hatcheries, negating the need for families or familial relationships. Individuality is not allowed, and people are programmed at birth for their specific status and role. As in Orwell's *1984, Brave New World* depicts a future under the complete dominance of an elitist tyranny that controls the minds and behaviour of everyone, allowing no room for free thought or individuality. In Huxley's vision, the masses are kept in line through various forms of mind control, including vast amounts of a drug, Soma.

THE PAST AS PROLOGUE

Shakespeare once said, *What's past is prologue*, meaning simply that things tend to repeat themselves. If this is true, if all we have to look forward to is more of the same, we have no reason to think that the future is going to be any better than the past.

On the other hand, if you believe in the Bible, and the promises of the Bible, then you have every reason to believe that the future is going to be vastly different from the past, and that - after the Second Coming of Christ - nothing about this world is ever going to be the same again.

Here is a prediction that more of the same would be a popular idea before Jesus comes the second time.



Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

2 Peter 3: 3-4

And if things keep on going in the future as they have in the past, we have every reason to be pessimistic, don't we? The whole point of the Bible promises about the future, about eternity, is that it is not going to be a mere continuation of the past - but a radical break with it.

THE SECOND COMING

In the last study - *Discover Rescue* - we saw that the Second Coming of Jesus has been guaranteed by His first. The Creator of the universe didn't take upon Himself our humanity, and bear the sin, evil, and suffering of this world, only to leave us in this sin, evil and suffering. On the contrary, He has promised to come back and end it all, and forever too.

We saw, too, that despite popular notions about a secret coming, with the faithful taken quietly away to heaven while others remain wondering what-in-the-world happened, the Second Coming of Jesus is going to be a world-wide event that unfolds before everyone.



Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him.

Revelation 1:7

Nothing secret about this event, that's for sure.

CHAFF

In fact, there is an amazing Old Testament prophecy about the Second Coming of Jesus, and what happens to the earth after it. The prophecy itself centres around an image of a man with a head of gold, arms and breasts of silver, a belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet and toes made of iron and clay, and finally a stone kingdom that fills the whole earth. See Daniel 2. The Bible gives the meaning of this prophetic image. It is the most amazing long range time prophecy in the Bible. It gives the succession of world empires from Daniel's time of 605BC till the end - Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome, which later broke apart into the nations of modern Europe today.

All those kingdoms came, just as predicted. The only one that hasn't, at least not yet, is the final one - God's kingdom - which arises only after all these worldly ones do. In the prophecy, God's final kingdom is presented as a giant stone that crushed the statue and leaves nothing of it behind.

The prophecy itself reads like this:



This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the

stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Daniel 2:32-35

Daniel then interprets the prophecy, explaining that those metals represent various kingdoms that would arise sequentially over the centuries. When he got to the giant stone that crushed them all, he said:



And in the days of these kings (the nations of modern Europe) ***the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.***

Daniel 2:44

What happens to the nations of this world, to this world itself, at least as we know it? It's eradicated. It becomes as chaff, dust, carried away by wind so that *no trace of them was found.*

How much more explicit could the Bible be? When Jesus returns, nothing of this world as we know it remains.

TAKEN AWAY

This kind of imagery appears all through the Bible. Jesus Himself compares His Second Coming to the flood which destroyed the world.



But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.... the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Matthew 24:37-39

Notice the language here. Those who didn't get in the ark with Noah were those whom the flood *took … away.* That is, they were destroyed, killed, not taken quietly away to heaven while everyone else is left behind. They perished, and the earth was left desolate.

UPWARDLY MOBILE

The Second Coming is, then, a one-time-never-to-be-repeated event, an event that cannot be mistaken for anything else, a supernatural event that in its own way will reveal just how narrow, small, and limited all human rationality and science is.

At the Second Coming, the dead in Christ will be resurrected out of the ground - or wherever their dust remains - and taken with Christ to heaven.



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

Talking about the same event the Bible says:



Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will 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: 51-53

This is what the Bible, in the book of Revelation, calls the first resurrection.



Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Revelation 20:6

THE MILLENNIUM

A thousand years? What is that all about?

This *thousand years* is the biblical term for what has been called the *Millennium.* And, according to the verses we have looked at so far, the Millennium begins with the resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming, when they are given *immortality,* and then taken to heaven along with those who are alive when Christ returns. There they shall be *priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*

This is the fulfilment of one of the greatest promises given to all who believe in Jesus, the fulfilment of our great hope in the search for eternity.



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 14:2-3

In a very real sense, this is what it is all about. Without this wonderful promise, we have nothing - with it, we have everything we could ever imagine or desire. This is a promise, a hope - a promise and hope guaranteed by Christ's death - that the world, and all that's in it, can never offer us - never!

THE EARTH DURING THE MILLENNIUM

We have seen that when Jesus returns, the dead in Him - believers who have died - are resurrected. Then, with those believers who are alive when He returns, they are all given immortality and are taken to heaven. There they will reign with Christ for a thousand years - the Millennium.

The Millennium, however, isn't such great news for those who choose to be lost - to those who reject Christ and His ways. When Jesus returns, as we saw, the lost perish and the earth is left desolate, as after the flood. In another place, Jesus even compares what happens when He returns to the destruction of Sodom.



Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

Luke 17:28-30

Either the flood or Sodom, the results are the same: The lost, having rejected the gift of salvation, perish, and the earth remains desolate, all of which was predicted by the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah.



I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; and the heavens, they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld, and indeed there was no man.

Jeremiah 4:23-25

Jeremiah's use of the terminology *without form and void* comes directly from Genesis 1:2 - a picture of the earth before the Lord created life on it. This verse, then, shows that during the millennium the earth will become as dark, desolate and chaotic as it was before the Lord created life here.

SATAN BOUND

The book of Revelation gives us the clearest depiction of what happens on earth during the Millennium that begins at Christ's second coming.

Look at the following texts:



Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.

Revelation 20:1-3

The Greek word for bottomless pit here is *abussos* - from which we get the word *abyss* - and is the same word found in an ancient Greek translation

of the Old Testament for *the deep* in Genesis 1:2 - a depiction of the earth before God created life on it. This language helps show the desolate and lifeless state of the earth when Satan is bound there for these thousand years. This is the same Satan, *the great dragon … that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.* Revelation 12:9 Now, though, the texts expressly state that during this time, he will not be able *to deceive the nations … till the thousand years were finished.* And that's because all the redeemed are in heaven as *priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years,* and everyone else is dead. Meanwhile, for this thousand-year period, Satan is cast into the bottomless pit - this lifeless and desolate *abussos.*

THE EPIC'S FINAL BATTLE

Revelation 20, where this thousand years is mentioned numerous times, shows that, at least as far as the lost and Satan are concerned, not everything ends with the Second Coming. A final judgment will follow.



But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. … Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

Revelation 20:5, 7-9

Note the flow of events as God has revealed them to us. We have seen that:

When Christ returns, all the redeemed are brought to heaven, where they reign with Christ for a thousand years.

All the wicked are in their graves. Not in hell – just dead.

The earth is desolate and devoid of human life. Satan is bound on the earth for that same thousand years.

Now, at the end of the thousand years there is:

The resurrection of the wicked - the rest - the second resurrection. Satan is free again to lead those who chose to follow him and his ways. He gathers these followers from all times and places for a final assault on God's kingdom. God intervenes with final punishment and destruction

At the end of the thousand years, there will be a final judgment on the lost - Booklet 16 *Discover Justice*, gives details.

NEW CREATION

Revelation then continues on …



Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

Revelation 21:1



For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.

Isaiah 65:17



For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make shall remain before Me, says the LORD, so shall your descendants and your name remain.

Isaiah 66:22



Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

2 Peter 3:13

In other words, all the wrong in this world as it is now will cease. Everything, as shown in Daniel 2, will be eradicated, and a whole new existence will begin. Best of all, thanks to Jesus, we can be part of this new existence. God's intention is that we all be part of it. The only wildcard is our own choice. Do we choose Him, and the promise of eternal life that He offers us, or do we choose to go our own way?

No question, if the past is prologue, then the future is bleak. The great news for each of us, however, is that the past is not prologue; it is anything but prologue. The future is not going to be anything like the past, and we can thank God for that too, the God who says to us:



For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 29:11

And they lived happily ever after. Do you ever wonder why this popular expression is so often the final thought, even in children's stories? Because *eternity* is etched into the very fabric of our psyche. We want the story to end well. We want our story to end well. We long for that place and time where the trauma and problems of this life will be no more.

This epic in which we find ourselves - this great controversy - will end where all we have longed for will be reality. It's what we really want.

This is not a bedtime story - this is reality. All God's prophecies in the past have been fulfilled just as He said. We can trust Him with our future too.

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discover peace

This story hit world news. On a late spring afternoon in 1924, in the outskirts of Chicago, 14-year-old Bobby Franks was walking home from school when a grey automobile carrying two men pulled alongside and coaxed the boy in. They drove to a distant location where they grabbed the child and beat him to death. Afterward, they stopped at a restaurant, ate lunch, and then dumped the body in a drainpipe under a railroad track.

What made this case so infamous were the men who committed it. Coming from one of the wealthiest families in Chicago, eighteen year old Richard Loeb was the son of a retired vice-president of Sears and Roebuck, a well-known chain store in America. Nineteen year old Nathan Leopold, the son of a millionaire box manufacturer, had a genius IQ, was a law student at the University of Chicago, and planned on studying at Harvard.

What, then, caused these two young men to do this horrible act? Though many factors were involved, it seems that they wanted to commit the perfect crime - simply for the sake of committing it, nothing more.

Their perfect crime however, quickly fell apart when a workman stumbled upon the body, and found a pair of Nathan Leopold's horned-rimmed glasses nearby. One clue led to another, and the boys finally confessed, leading to the trial of the century in which world-renowned lawyer, Clarence Darrow, argued their case.

Darrow argued - working to keep them off death row - that they were just products of their environment, and besides, Nathan Leopold was a student of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, which helped explain why he did it.

NIETZSCHE MADE ME DO IT

This isn't the only time Friedrich Nietzsche's name has been invoked to help explain why young men commit horrible acts of murder and mayhem. After the Columbine school massacre in 1999 in Colorado USA, Nietzsche's name was again mentioned as a source of the two killers' motives.

In 2011, twenty-two year old Jared Lee Loughner opened fire at a political rally in Arizona, killing six and wounding fourteen others, including a U.S. congresswoman. He also, it was claimed, had been influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche.

What was it about this man Nietzsche, dead since 1900, that links him to all sorts of things - fascism, socialism, even Marilyn Manson? The fact is, however, Nietzsche is linked to all sorts of things that in most cases he would have had no interest in.

GOD IS DEAD

Nietzsche is best known however, for his often quoted and often misinterpreted statement: *God is dead.* It was simply his way of saying that, as humanity entered the 20th century, it had pretty much discarded not only Christian theology but Christian morality as well. *There was,* he said, *nothing transcendent above us. We have to make our own way, create our own morality, our own value system, because God is dead.*

Who, at times, hasn't perhaps felt that, indeed, *God is dead*? Who hasn't, in dark moments, when the whole world seems wrong, when your own life seems wrong, when in your quest for peace you feel only guilt - who hasn't in such moments wondered if, in fact, *God is dead*?

THE ROARING LION

These booklets, of course, take a completely different track. Far from God being dead, we confidently believe that He is real, that He is alive, and that He is actively involved in the fate of humanity. More so we believe the famous words - not that God is dead - but that:



God is love.

1 John 4:8

And this love, we believe, has been made especially manifest to us at the cross, where Jesus Christ died for the sins of humanity. We believe that through this sacrifice we have the hope that all the evil, suffering, and death in this world - for which He is not to blame - will forever be eradicated.

This is the good news of salvation. What makes that good news even better is that it has been God's plan even from before the foundation of the world. The plan is that each of us can have the salvation offered to us by Jesus. This doesn't mean that everyone will choose it - He respects our choice. It means only that God has made a provision so that everyone who does choose - could.

Unfortunately, though, as we've been studying, we also are involved in a great controversy, a literal battle between Christ and Satan, a battle in which more than anything else Satan wants to deceive us, wants to keep us from the salvation offered each of us in Christ.



Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom

he may devour.

1 Peter 5:8

The devil seems to have succeeded in devouring poor Friedrich Nietzsche who died totally insane. But he doesn't have to succeed with us, however, not if we choose to claim for ourselves what has been offered us in Christ, even from eternity.

BEFORE THE WORLD

What does that mean - *offered us in Christ, even from eternity*?



Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

Ephesians 1:3-4

Chosen in Him, even before the *foundation of the world?* That's very good news.

Look at this:



Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness - in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time.

Titus 1:1-2 NIV

Before the foundation of the world is incredible enough. However, Paul pushes it back even further. We were promised eternal life before the beginning of time. Whenever exactly that was, no one knows. But we can be sure of one thing, it was long before planet earth even existed.

Thus, the great news is that long before we even existed, it was God's plan for you to have salvation in Jesus.

PREDESTINED?

This wonderful promise, however, mustn't be confused with the false idea of universalism, which teaches that in the end every human being will be saved. The Bible is very clear that people will be lost. See Matthew 7:22; Matthew 8:12, 2 Peter 3:7 as examples - and there are many more.

Nor should we confuse this teaching with a popular view called predestination, which teaches that God chooses some to be saved and some to be lost. No, everyone, every human being, was predestined for salvation in the sense that it was God's plan, even before the world began, for everyone to have eternal life in His Son. Notice the recurring theme here - predestined in Him - predestined in Christ. And in His Son? The key to grasping this idea is to understand what it means to be in Christ.



But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Hebrews 2:9 KJV

Why die for *every man* - person - if it weren't planned for every man and woman to be saved, when every man and woman won't be?



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 53:6 KJV

Why take the iniquity *of us all* if the intention wasn't to pardon us all?

The plan was for everyone to take part in what God had provided. If people don't avail themselves of God's provision, that does not limit His provision any more than people starving themselves to death in a rich market place means there's not enough food. The provision has been made for every human being.

The only wildcard is our own choice - do we accept what has been offered us in Jesus, or do we reject it?

GRACE

Here's another text about what has been offered us from time immemorial:



[God] who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

2 Timothy 1: 9

Notice the *in Christ* key? Think through what these two very important verses teach. Paul is saying here that God's salvation was given to them through God's *purpose and grace* even before *time began.* Now, if something were offered us before we even existed, then it must be something that we did not and could not earn. After all, how could we

earn something that was offered to us before we existed, before the earth existed, and even before time itself did?

We couldn't.

That's why the text says that we are saved and called *with a holy calling, not according to our works*. It couldn't be according to our works, because it was offered us before we existed to have any works.

That's why salvation has to be by grace, and grace alone.

Hence, the amazing teaching, the amazing truth, that we are saved by what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ. It is what Christ has done for us that gives us salvation, not what we could ever do for ourselves, and that is because whatever we could do for ourselves is, simply, not good enough for salvation.

If we don't - and couldn't - deserve it, and yet we are given it anyway - then it must be a gift, something free, something unmerited.

And that's exactly what grace is; unmerited favour given to those who do not deserve it and who cannot earn it.

In short, our only claim for God's salvation is our great need for it.

SALVATION BY FAITH ALONE

This great truth is found all through the Bible, though its clearest explanations occur in the writings of the apostle Paul, who again and again showed how our salvation rests in what Christ has done for us, a truth symbolically taught in the earthly sanctuary service of the Old Testament that we studied in Booklet 5. And in it we concluded:

God had given the sacrificial system to show humans two things. First, that sin had a cost; and second, that He Himself would pay that cost. The sacrificial system was to reveal to the world what God was like. It was to show that though humans have sinned and done evil, God could forgive, but only because He was willing to accept a substitute to pay the penalty for that sin and evil.

And He, Himself in Christ, was that Substitute!

And the reason He had to be that substitute is that none of us is good enough to not need a substitute. If we could have done it on our own, then Jesus - God becoming human - would not have needed to die for us.

A GIFT, NOT A DEBT

To help get this crucial point across, the apostle Paul used one of the most faithful and holy men in the Bible - Abraham - as his example of someone who was saved, not by the works of the law but by God's grace alone. In other words, even one of the holiest of men needed the righteousness of Christ to cover his sins, because his own works, no matter how good, just weren't good enough.



For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted

for righteousness.

Romans 4:2-5

Paul is referring to the start of Abraham's story. God had promised this childless old man that through his own seed a great nation would be born. And then, in Genesis 15:6, it says that Abraham *believed in the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness.*

It was counted to him as righteousness. The theological term is imputed, which means it was granted to him even though he wasn't truly righteous. He was just considered righteous by God, He was counted righteous by God, and that's because, by faith he believed God would provide it.

In other words, Abraham didn't earn it. Abraham couldn't earn it. If he could earn it, it wouldn't be grace. It would be a debt that was owed to him, and this is a crucial truth that Paul is trying to make clear. How often people have this idea that if we work hard enough, pray enough, study enough, do enough good and loving deeds - then we can earn salvation, and if we have enough good works, God will owe it to us.

But what did Paul specifically say?



Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

Romans 4:4

If it were a debt, then it would be owed him. And if the Bible teaches us anything, it teaches that none of us are owed salvation. The only thing we, as sinners, are owed is condemnation and death.



For the wages of sin is death …

Romans 6:23.

Notice, it says *wages,* as in something that you earn. If we got what we earned, as sinners, we would all face eternal death, eternal condemnation.

Which is precisely why Paul says that even for a giant of faith like Abraham, a man with many good works - a man who was willing to sacrifice His own son at God's command (Genesis 22) - his salvation still had to be by grace, a gift from God apart from all the good things he does, or has done, even the works of the law.

And if a great man of faith like Abraham needed grace to be saved, what about us, who are hardly as great, but are by nature *deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?* Jeremiah 17:9 Of course, it's the same. We need to be counted righteous, reckoned righteous, and we can be, because of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD HIMSELF

How does this work?

Paul in the above texts quoted the book of Genesis:



Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

It wasn't Abraham's works that made him righteous; it was his faith. But faith in what?

Paul explains:



Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is

> ***revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.***
>
> *Romans 3:20-22*

God has a law - His law - a good law - the Ten Commandments - but this law does not and cannot bring us salvation. On the contrary, the law is what points out our sin, *for by the law is the knowledge of sin.* The law is what shows us our need of salvation. The law is like a mirror; it might show you the flaws on your face, but the mirror has no power or means to remove them.

That's why *by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified in His sight.* Instead, Jesus Christ lived a perfect sinless and righteous life, a life that revealed *the righteousness of God* Himself, and the great news of the gospel is that this righteousness becomes ours by faith, by claiming it for ourselves.

SALVATION BY FAITH

Look at this verse:



> ***Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.***
>
> *Romans 3:28*

To be justified means to be forgiven, pardoned, accepted. In other words, though you are a sinner, though you have done wrong, when you claim for yourself the righteousness of Jesus, which is the very righteousness of God, then as sinful as your life may have been, you are now counted as

perfect, holy and righteous in God's sight. Not because you really are, but because Jesus really was - and the great provision of grace is that God will accept Christ's righteousness as yours.

And it becomes ours by faith when we place our belief in Him. That is, we have to claim it, accept it, believe it, and rest our hope upon it and nothing else. We must trust that our acceptance with God comes, not from anything that we can do, but only because of what Jesus has done for us.

That is what it means to be *justified by faith.* After all, if we can't do anything to earn it, then how else could we be justified?

OLD NEWS

Here is the heart and soul of the gospel. From the fall of Adam and Eve onward, the message of the Bible is that you can be accepted by God, no matter how wretched your condition, because of what Jesus has done for you.

Your past, your guilt, your deeds - they don't matter. What matters is that, through the grace of Christ who died for your sins, you can stand pardoned, forgiven, justified - not because of what you have done, but despite what you have done. That's the whole point of it all. We are saved, not by our works, but by Jesus' works for us, because Jesus has embodied in Himself the very righteousness of God. This righteousness is offered to each of us. We claim it by faith.

And if the righteousness of God can't save us, what can?

Looking for peace? Want to get beyond guilt? Here is where you can!

And the great news about this good news is that it is old news - news that has existed, as we have seen, even before the foundation of the world. And that news is that God's plan is for each of us to have eternal life in Christ.

Nietzsche was wrong. God is not dead. God is love, and that love is powerfully revealed in the wonderful provision made for us even before time began, the provision that Jesus' perfect life and record can be credited to us, not because we are worthy, but because Jesus is, and God's grace allows that worthiness to be our own when we claim it by faith.

At the heart of this epic story in which we find ourselves, is the accusation by the devil that God is cruel; that He is holding good things back from us; that He is selfish, unfair and unjust.

But wait a minute. Take another look at Jesus, being born, living, and then dying on the cross - for you. Not because He had to, but because He loves you. Does that sound like a cruel and vengeful God? The Christian cross is a declaration that God is love. In the great controversy the devil accuses God of all that he, the devil himself, is! But the cross of Jesus silences that attack - it is the full unveiling of God's amazing grace, for all to see.

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discover steps

Uncover the steps to accept God's rescue offer and find joy in unconditional acceptance

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discover steps

Her name was Danielle. For her 18th birthday she got an unexpected present: A pregnancy test that came back positive. She wrestled for so long about an abortion that it soon became too late in her country, and so she brought the foetus to term. An adoption was arranged. No sooner had the child been born than it was taken away, by her own choice, without her ever seeing or holding the new born. All she knew was that it was a boy.

Afterward, she suffered doubt, guilt, and recriminations. Whenever she walked by someone holding an infant, she'd do a double-take. Was that her child? Whenever she'd see someone pushing an infant in a stroller, she'd peer in, looking to see if the child resembled her or the father. As the years went by, she looked at older kids - toddlers, pre-schoolers, children in the earlier grades. She would stare at little boys running around playgrounds, looking for the one who had been hers. She would actually take a bus to various schools around the city and watch children play, in hopes of finding him. Numerous times, over the years, she was sure she had found her lost child, but in each case she could do nothing but stare - and weep.

At times the darkness was so great she didn't think she could go on. Even in sleep, dreams betrayed her with images of her little boy, or who she thought was her little boy, reaching up with his tiny arms and crying, *Mommy! Mommy! I'm here! I'm here.*

Only when she became suicidal did she get professional help. Still, the guilt, though not as bad, never left.

Like Danielle, most of us, for our own secret reasons - and sometimes not-so-secret - have struggled with guilt, with a conscience that knows that we have done wrong.

Most of us, anyway.

A GUILTY RACE

Guilt to some degree is part of being human. And that's because we are all sinners, because we all have violated God's law, and because we all have been born with fallen sinful natures. And, if all that weren't bad enough, we are in the midst of a great contest between good and evil. Also dark and demonic forces exist, and take great delight in enticing us to do wrong, and then making us feel so guilty that we are sure we can't be forgiven for what we have done!

Paul passed on God's word to us when he wrote:



For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.

Romans 3:9-12

Nothing in two thousand years has changed about humanity, has it?

Look at this quote from the irreverent, foul-mouthed late comedian George Carlin.

I'm also tired of hearing about innocent victims; this is an outmoded idea. There are no innocent victims. If you're born on this world you're guilty, period … end of report, next case. Your birth certificate is proof of guilt.

If even George Carlin could see it …?

THE FAILURE OF THE FIG LEAVES

There's an old saying about someone who inherits a character trait: They got it honestly. That goes for our sinfulness, and for the guilt too, with the shame and the darkness that they bring.

As we read in an earlier booklet, the world was originally created perfect, pristine, and inhabited by perfect and pristine beings. However, part of that perfection included the capacity to love, and love - to be love - demands freedom. A robot could be programmed to obey - even perfectly - but never to love. God wanted us to love. Hence He created humans, not robots.

And, as we saw, the devil, who was also created with free choice, abused that freedom, and brought his rebellion to earth where he led other free creatures into sin. Notice what the Bible said happened after humans sinned, after they ate from the tree that they had been expressly commanded not to eat from. See Genesis 2:16-17.



Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, Where are you? So he said, I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.

Genesis 3:7-10

Two crucial points:

Firstly, they were ashamed and guilty, which is why they hid themselves from God. The first recorded human emotions after sin were guilt, shame, and fear - traits that have been handed down through every generation since then until even we, thousands of years later, have them entwined in our DNA.

Secondly, and most important for our immediate purposes, is what Adam said: *I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.*

The great irony, however, was that he was not naked. He had covered himself in *fig leaves.* Adam obviously sensed that this covering wasn't enough, that his works - that of covering himself with fig leaves - could not cover his shame and guilt.

What we have here is the first example of humanity trying to cover up - by its own works - its own guilt and shame. And the attempt failed as miserably then as it has failed ever since. We can immerse ourselves in fashion, sex, drugs, booze, entertainment, work, whatever. But all that only diverts us from the dragons that hibernate - at least part of the time - within our brains. The rest of the time they can ravage us, body and soul.

And that's exactly why we need a Saviour - a hero. And that's why Jesus came, to do for us what we can never do for ourselves.



For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Romans 5:6

Fig leaves won't cut it. As George Carlin said, you are guilty - *end of report, next case. Your birth certificate is proof of guilt.* Only the sacrifice of Jesus in our stead is sufficient.

And that is mainly what the plan of salvation is all about - Jesus removing our guilt. Because, at the cross, He took it all upon Himself. For we are … *justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* Romans 3:24

The good news is that because of Jesus our guilt can be washed away, eradicated, and never used against us anymore. The darkness of guilt can be gone, and we can walk in the light of God's love and forgiveness.

HEIRS

A newspaper in a major city had a full-page ad telling people that millions of dollars of unclaimed estate assets were sitting there, waiting for the rightful heirs to claim them. In other words, the ones for whom it was left needed to come and claim what had been granted them. If they accepted it, it would be their own.

Notice the imagery in the following texts:



For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect.

Romans 4:13-14



For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Romans 8:15-17



And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:29

The language is that of adoption, of heirs, of receiving an inheritance. That's why the newspaper ad was such a powerful analogy for what has been done for us in Christ. As we saw earlier, even before the world began, God's plan was for you to have the wonderful inheritance of eternal life in Christ. You are supposed to have salvation, you are supposed to be redeemed, you are supposed to have eternal life in Christ.

You just need to claim it for yourself. You need to make it your own. You need to reach out in faith and grasp what has to be given you as a gift, because you could never earn it yourself.

To repeat what was in the previous booklet: *Though you are a sinner, though you have done wrong, when you claim for yourself the righteousness of Jesus, which is the very righteousness of God, then as sinful as your life may have been, you are now counted as perfect, holy and righteous in God's sight. Not because you really are, but because Jesus really was - and the great provision of grace is that God will accept Christ's righteousness in your stead.*

And it becomes ours by faith. That is, we have to claim it, accept it, believe it, and rest our hope upon it and nothing else. We must trust that our acceptance with God comes, not from anything that we can do, but only because of what Jesus has done for us.

THE LAW

No question, we are sinners, and as sinners we all struggle with some guilt. And yet, at the same time, God can use that guilt because it shows us that we need help, that we need forgiveness, and that we need healing.

It works so simply - we see our need, we sense the futility of trying to cover it in fig leaves, and this leads us to repentance, to confession, and to Jesus as the One who has paid the penalty for our sins and who offers us complete pardon, restoration, and forgiveness.

Look carefully at these following texts:



What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, You shall not covet.

Romans 7:7



Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:20

What's crucial here is the link between the law, grace, and sin - a theme that will be explored in a later booklet. God's law - His Ten Commandments -

shows us what is right and what is wrong. The law points out our sin, points out that we have done wrong. The law shows us just how guilty we are.

Paul's argument, however, is that though the law shows the problem, it can't solve it any more than looking in a mirror can fix your facial blemishes, acne, grey hair, or whatever flaws you see there.

No, the law helps us see that we are sinners, and that we need forgiveness, and this realisation is what leads us to Jesus. And we, knowing that we are lost, knowing that we are guilty, knowing that we have nothing in and of ourselves to make us worthy before God, claim His grace as our only hope.

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

At times you might feel unworthy for salvation, or that you have crossed the line, or that it's too late and you feel enveloped in darkness. But the fact that you have those feelings is the greatest evidence that God's Holy Spirit is working on your heart, leading you to repentance, to confession, and to a commitment to accept what Christ has already done for you.

The crucial thing is never to wait until you feel good enough to be saved because, frankly, you are not good enough, and never will or can be good enough. If you could be, then Jesus would not have had to die. God could have simply made you good enough. But the fact that we can't be made good enough is precisely why Jesus came and died. Jesus - He was good enough - and that goodness is offered to you if you claim it for yourself by faith. All of us are in this together, regardless of appearances - the gossips

as well as those gossiped about; those who succeed as well as those who fail.

Look at this story Jesus told that shows how we can have the salvation He offers us. Look at how simple it is:



Also He (Jesus) ***spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess. And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner! I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.***
Luke 18:9-14

God, be merciful to me a sinner!

Here is the key to salvation in Jesus - acknowledge your guilt, confess your guilt, and then throw yourself upon the mercy and grace and salvation offered you in Christ. That's essentially it!

The tax collector - the bad one - is the one who walked away justified, not only because he knew he was a sinner but, confessing it, he threw himself on the mercy of God as his only hope of forgiveness.

What must I do to be saved? You must do what the tax collector did, pray his prayer: *God, be merciful to me a sinner!* Admit you are a sinner. How do you know you are a sinner? It's not just a guilty feeling - look into the mirror of God's ten commandments, and it will show you. See Exodus 20:1-17. Then confess your guilt, and claim for yourself what has been freely offered you in Jesus - forgiveness for your sins. Not because you deserve that forgiveness - you don't - but because God is gracious enough to forgive them anyway. He loves you.

In the great controversy, Satan's greatest ploy is to whisper in your ear that you can't be forgiven. And our greatest mistake would be to believe him.

Don't!

Instead, believing in what Jesus promises, admit your guilt, confess your sin, and throw yourself on the mercy of God. And the moment you do, then that guilt and sin are all washed away, cleansed away, and you can stand perfect, holy, and accepted in Christ Jesus, no matter how bad your past has been. That is the only way to true freedom.

You have, indeed, moved from darkness to light.

As the apostle said: *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.* 1 Timothy 1:15

This plan of salvation, worked out even before time began, is the provision made specifically for each of us, because we are all sinners. Each of us is alienated from God, and each of us has in our own way fled from Him - as did Adam in Eden - and then tried to cover our guilt and shame from the eyes of an all-knowing, all-seeing God with … what?

Fig leaves?

And, as we saw, and as we know for ourselves - that doesn't work, no matter how hard we try, or how big the leaves are.

A PLACE FOR ME?

One of the 20th century's most famous atheists, Sir Bertrand Russell, was an unsparing critic of religion - the author of *Why I Am Not a Christian*. Russell was a sexual libertine and a loudly obnoxious New Atheist, even before today's loudly obnoxious New Atheists existed.

Yet, after his death, his daughter wrote about her father and his tumultuous life: *I believe myself that his whole life was a search for God. ... Indeed, he had first taken up philosophy in hope of finding proof of the evidence of the existence of God. … Somewhere at the back of my father's mind, at the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul, there was an empty space that had once been filled by God, and he never found anything else to put in it.*

A man on death row in the United States was about to be executed. His last words were: *I've lived a rough life. I wonder if God has a place for me.*

God does. That place is found in Jesus, if he, or even Bertrand Russell, would have claimed it.

So where does this personal struggle fit in with the epic story - the great controversy? Just as there are many individual battles in a war, so the great controversy is the sum of countless personal struggles over the issues raised by the devil. Not only is there a cosmic drama being played out as we have seen, but the same issues are at stake and being

played out in your life and mine. Our freedom of choice leaves us to align ourselves either with the rebellion of Lucifer and his accusations against God, and to do it my way, or align ourselves with God and His love and His purposes for us, and do it His way.

Have you made that vital choice yet? It has eternal consequences either way.

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discover new

Uncover the new life that is found in God as He lives in us

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discover new

In 2009, actor Bruce Willis starred in *Surrogates*. Set in the future, the film depicted a world where people could, connected to a machine right from the comfort of their own homes, live their lives through robot surrogates. These robots were all beautiful, sexy, macho, smart, whatever the person wanted. You could live a whole new life, have a whole new identity, be whoever you could never otherwise be - all the while hooked up to a machine in your own bedroom.

In the story, Willis, the human Willis - chunky, bald, and ageing in contrast to his young, full-of-hair, and sleek surrogate - began having doubts about letting a robot live his life while he spent his life strapped in a contraption.

In one scene, the chunky, bald, and ageing Willis talks to his surrogate robot wife - young and stunningly beautiful - about the two of them going away, in the flesh, on a vacation. The surrogate wife asks: *You mean, leaving our units at home? Are you kidding?* When he complains that they don't spend much time together anymore, the surrogate wife says that they spend time together every day. He answers, *Yes*, but that they do it as surrogates, and so *it's not the same*. Staring into his eyes, his wife responds, *It's better*, and then walks out of the house, leaving her fleshy spouse - called Meatbags by the robots - standing there, unhappily alone.

LIFE CHANGES

Though just another Hollywood flick, *Surrogates* raises an interesting question that all we meatbags struggle with, and that is: *Are our lives what we really want them to be?*

Maybe not everyone would necessarily shout *No!* - though many, unfortunately, would. But most of us, however, would admit there are aspects of our lives that we wish were different, wouldn't we?

As we have been studying through these booklets, we are sin-damaged creatures living in a sin-damaged world, in the midst of a real battle - a great controversy between good and evil. We all have issues - physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, financial, whatever - issues that at times could make us wish we were someone other than who we presently are.

Sometimes, too, we find ways to escape - or we try to. More often than not, those escapes don't work either.

BORN AGAIN

However, there's good news in all of this - the good news of what Jesus has done for us. Though we have seen already that we have been forgiven in Christ, that our past wrongs have been wiped clean, that we can stand before God as if we have never sinned - the gospel is a gift that keeps on giving. And one of the most important gifts we have is a new life in Christ.

Think about it. How could you go from being in a state of condemnation, of guilt before God, of facing eternal ruin, to one where you now stand perfect in the sight of God, completely forgiven, having the condemnation wiped away, and having the promise of eternal life - and not have your life change here and now?

You couldn't. And the good news is that you don't. When you accept Christ, you have a new life.

Imagine a prisoner sitting on death row for 20 years suddenly being given a pardon. He's now legally declared forgiven, the charges against him dropped. Is he going to still sit in jail? Of course not! He's going to walk out and begin a whole new existence.

That's exactly what happens with us when we accept Jesus as our Saviour. Christians sometimes call this change the new birth.

Look at these texts:



There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him. Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John 3:1-3

Notice the imagery - born again. Birth implies entry into life. To be born again, then, implies another entry into life. And, in the Bible, this entry is into a new life, a life in Christ that is radically different from the old one.



Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

2 Corinthians 5:17



Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:4

Having accepted Jesus, having given ourselves to Him, we now have a new start, a new beginning, a new life. We have been born again, not into

the same life we have lived before, but into a new one, one in which we live by faith in the promises of God to us, and among those promises is that, through the working of the Holy Spirit in us, our lives will be changed.

HEIRS

Another image that is used in the New Testament is that of adoption. In the Roman world, the world where the New Testament unfolded, it was common for people to adopt others into their family, giving them all the rights and privileges as if they were actually born into that family.

Thus, in that context, using imagery his readers would understand, Paul wrote:



For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Romans 8:15-17

When someone is adopted, they become part of a new family, a new home. It's the beginning of a change, often a radical one too. Think of a child languishing in an orphanage in some developing country who is adopted by a loving well-to-do family in Melbourne or the like. This child's life will be changed, and in a big way too.

It's the same thing with us when we follow Jesus with all our heart, mind, body and soul. We become what the Bible says in numerous places - *heirs* of the most wonderful inheritance possible - eternal life in Christ.



That having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:7



And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:29

Becoming an heir to something that, at one time, wasn't yours, again gives the idea of how much we are changed through faith in Christ. We don't need robot surrogates to have a new existence. We need a life-changing experience with Jesus instead.

HOLY SPIRIT POWER

The Bible, too, is very clear that this change isn't anything that we can do for ourselves, any more than we could save ourselves from our own sins. Time and again the Bible talks about the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God Himself, working in us to bring about these transformations.



There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:1



For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living

in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Titus 3:3-5

When we surrender ourselves to Christ, the Holy Spirit, which already was working in us - otherwise we could have never made the surrender to begin with - continues to work in us, convicting us of sin, pointing us to righteousness, and giving us the power to change the way we live. See 1 Corinthians 12:3.



Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth).

Ephesians 5:6-9



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-25

THE ROAD AHEAD

No question, a person who has a born again experience, a person who has given himself or herself to Christ, who has made the surrender, has in a sense died to their old life, and that results in a new life in Him.



What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. … Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.

Romans 6:1-4, 6-8

This says clearly there is death to our old life and a new life in Jesus. This is real, this is powerful, this is so much of what it means to be a converted Christian.

At the same time, too, these changes don't always happen spontaneously. Though there are accounts of people who, the moment they gave their hearts to Christ, become instantly free from some powerful addiction, bad habits or lifestyle, the Christian walk is a work-in-progress. It's a daily experience, a daily struggle, a daily surrender. We have to make a choice,

a moment-by-moment choice, to put away the things that we know are wrong, are bad, and are sinful, and live as God would have us to. And sometimes we fail, but we are not cast off, not forsaken, because we can find forgiveness in Jesus.

That's what God's grace is all about.

And the great news is that we are promised that if we do these things our lives will be changed - and for the better too. Through prayer, through Bible study, through communion with God, the new life we have in Jesus becomes more and more real in us.

Through reading the Bible we will learn what God's will is for our lives, we will learn what is right and what is wrong, we will learn to understand what is important in life and what isn't. And we will come to know for ourselves the God who has done so much for us.

Through prayer, which is like the opening of our heart to a friend, we can commune with God. He hears our prayers, and He cares about our concerns, and by being *faithful in prayer* (Romans 12:12 NIV), we can come to know for ourselves, personally, the reality, love and nearness of our Lord, who will change us. Through prayer, we can draw close to God and receive the power promised us to put away the old things and put on the new.



Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

Colossians 3:9,10

This is God's promise to us, and it's a promise that millions of Christians can testify to as real. That's because Christ has changed and is continuing to change their lives.

Look at this promise:



Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

And this one:



But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:18

You don't have to be a believer to see it. Two men were having a public debate about the merits - or demerits - of the Christian faith. The Christian posed this challenge: *Suppose you're walking down a city street late at night when a group of five young men walk out of a building right behind you. Would you feel safer if they had just come from a bar, or from a Bible study?*

HEALTH AND WEALTH?

When you accept Jesus and are born again, that doesn't mean that suddenly all your problems will vanish. There is, unfortunately, the *Health-and-Wealth Gospel*, which gives the idea that if you are a true follower

of Jesus then, miraculously, your bank account will grow, your health problems will vanish, your relationships will all become wonderful, and you will even get better looking and sexier.

That's a false gospel. No question, Jesus will change our lives, and for the better too, but that doesn't mean all our problems will go away. It means, instead, that we have a foundation, a hope, a surety, which is God Himself, to help us cope with the trials that, inevitably, come our way.

In this epic story of planet Earth, the moment our first parents distrusted God and placed their trust in the serpent - Satan - God set the stage for the future. He said:



And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed …

Genesis 3:15

Enmity simply means hatred, or a state of hostility. God said he would put this enmity between *you* (Satan) and *the woman* (God's people); between Satan's *seed* (people only born naturally) and *her Seed* (born again people). So born again people should expect hostility.

And history is testimony to the accuracy and truthfulness of God's declaration. The enmity reached a climax on the cross when Jesus - the Seed of the woman - met the serpent - Satan - in deadly combat. And believers in God, born again Christians, are always the target of Satan's attack. The enmity still exists, and will always exist until Jesus comes again.

Perhaps the greatest example is the story of Job that we looked at in an earlier booklet. Even God admitted that Job was *a blameless and*

upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil. Job 1:8 Yet Job faced an unbelievable onslaught of suffering and pain, even though he was a great and faithful man of God!

The apostle Paul wrote about his own experiences:



> ***Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.***
> *2 Corinthians 11:25-28*

Where's the health and wealth there for Paul who, by the way, wrote many of his letters - not from a mansion that he got by following the so-called *Prosperity-Gospel* principles - but from a Roman jail?

As these studies have been showing, the Bible teaches that we are all in the midst of a great controversy between good and evil, Christ and Satan, and the battle rages. None of us is immune, and that includes those who have given their hearts to Christ and whose lives have been changed by Him.

Only a perverted reading of the Bible teaches that the new life one finds in Jesus is automatically a life of health, wealth, prosperity and worldly success. What one finds, instead, is that life is still filled with trials, suffering, disappointments, sorrow, loss, and pain. But amid it all we have

the wonderful hope and promise of God's love, God's care, and a peaceful mind. We have the assurance that whatever we go through, it's not meaningless. His promise is that He will never leave us or forsake us. See Isaiah 41:10. In addition we have this hope, the guarantee of eternal life in a brand new world.

Look at this promise:



And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28

This doesn't mean that all things are good. All things are, definitely, not good. The world is full of evil - evil is battling for control of the world. It means only that if we love God, if we are surrendered to Him in faith and obedience, He can bring good out of anything - even the worst of things that come our way.

And that knowledge alone and how we respond to it, in faith, forms part of the new life that we have in Jesus Christ. Our relationship with God is always one of faith; and He calls on us to trust Him. The more you know Him the more you can trust Him. It's never too late to start your journey of faith in God.

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that highlights the loving character of God

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HOPE CHANNEL



discover freedom

Uncover the Law of Liberty
that highlights the loving character of God

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discover freedom

Popular western morality today says you can believe what you like and behave as you like, so long as it doesn't hurt anyone else. Consequently, almost anything goes. It is saying that there are no moral absolutes - everything is relative. It tells us a lot about the current moral fabric of western society. And that is partly a logical conclusion from our western world view.

Obviously, in the end, no matter how nice it all sounds, few really believe in that kind of moral relativism, and even fewer will take it to its logical conclusion.

So, the question remains: *In this epic struggle in which we are all caught, is there a moral benchmark?*

TRAFFIC SIGNS

Years ago, a few friends, just normal young adults in their early twenties, decided to have a little fun, so they took down a stop sign at a traffic intersection. They just went behind the sign, unscrewed it from the post, and threw it on the ground.

They thought it would be funny. Plus, even better yet, it would be one less rule to follow.

Within an hour, a truck driver, not having that rule to follow, slammed into the side of a passenger car. Three 18 year olds, leaving a bowling alley, were in the car that got smashed.

All three died.

But, again, it was one less rule to follow, wasn't it?

SOMETHING ABOVE US

The story of those three teenagers has a core message - the need for law, for rules, for something transcending, or above us, to guide us, to limit us, to tell us what we can and cannot do.

Now, no doubt, the idea of rules or laws *to* limit us might sound very uncomfortable to ears used to hearing nothing but talk about personal freedom, moral autonomy, and personal rights. Yet no society can function without such limiting rules and laws. And no one would want to live in a society without them either. The irony is that true freedom is found only in an environment of law!

Imagine, for instance, a society with no traffic laws - no stop signs, no red lights, no give-way signs, no crosswalks, no speed limits, and no right-of-way - nothing to stop you from doing whatever you wanted behind the wheel of a car - except, perhaps, the semi or the SUV that squashes you flat. Are these the kind of roads you would want to be driving on, or that you would want your family on?

Of course not.

It's the same with morality. For all the talk about moral relativism, would you want to live in a society with no laws against stealing, murder, kidnapping, arson, assault, torture, rape, child molestation, sexual trafficking, and so forth?

Of course not. Who would?

Which means, then, that we all need to live under laws and rules that transcend us, that are over us, and that tell us what we should and should not do.

This, though, brings us back to the question posed above. OK, so we do need certain rules and laws to guide us. That's fine, even obvious. *Where, though, should those laws and rule come from?*

THE COMMANDMENTS

Look at the following texts:



The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul.
Psalm 19:7



My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.
Psalm 119:172



Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.
Ecclesiastes 12:13

The New Testament, too, talks about the commandments.



For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.
1 John 5:3



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



For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, Do not

commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

James 2:10-11



Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 14:12

Old Testament, New Testament - the Bible is clear. God's commandments are to be kept.

Here it is - simple, concise, clear and all inclusive. The only part of the Bible God wrote with his own hand. See Exodus 31:18.



I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
You shall have no other gods before Me.
You shall not make for yourself a carved image - any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.
For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.
You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.
Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.
You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's.
Exodus 20:2-17

It's God's law, that's why it's called *the royal law.* James 2:8

I DON'T LIKE IT!

Think of this: If our natural inclinations were to keep God's law, there would be no need for commandments calling us to keep that law and to point out our law breaking - because there would be no law breaking.

When the law of God is taken seriously, it's not long before we find things in it that we don't like. That's because God's law - how He wants us to live - cuts right across how we want to live naturally. Some think that real freedom means living without the restriction of laws. That's a false idea. Once a person rejects the restraints of God's law, they simply become slaves to the law of selfishness - and that's the worst kind of slavery there is.



Because the carnal (natural human) ***mind is enmity*** (at war) ***against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.***

Romans 8:7

The villain in this epic story is not slow to raise all kinds of objections and arguments to convince and deceive people that the law of God is irrelevant, or Jewish, or antiquated - or whatever, so long as it is rejected, and people remain in rebellion and sin.

God's law is a way of living apart from the tyranny of slavery to our own ideas and the awful consequences of our own poor choices. That's why it is called the *law of liberty.* See James 1:25 and 2:12.

THAT OLD OUT-DATED LAW?

When these texts talk about the commandments, or even the commandments of God, are they really talking about the Ten Commandments? You know - Moses, Charlton Heston, and Mount Sinai? The ancient, antiquated Ten Commandments from thousands of years ago?

Yes exactly! But before we rush to judgment about them being antiquated, out-dated, and so forth, it might be good to think through that idea for a few moments.

Ask the children of divorce, children from a home ruined when a parent violated the seventh commandment, the one that says, *Thou shalt not commit adultery.* Ask them if this particular *thou-shalt-not* seems antiquated and out-dated to them.

Remember Dean Shillingsworth? He was the two year old boy whose body was found stuffed in a suitcase floating on a lake in Ambarvale in Sydney in 2007. Wonder what young Dean, if he could answer, would say about the Ten Commandments being out-dated?

Ask anyone who has lost their life savings through a dodgy investment scheme about how out-dated the Ten Commandments are, particularly the one about stealing.

Out-dated? On the contrary, you probably wouldn't need five seconds before thinking of a person whose life has been severely damaged through someone's violation of one of the Ten Commandments.

In fact, each one us, personally, has more than likely known the pain, the hurt, the suffering, and the guilt that come from someone - perhaps even ourselves - who has violated one of God's commandments.

Of course we have. No one has escaped the horrible consequences of what violation of God's law has done to humanity. We're victims, all of us, and big time too.

FOR YOUR GOOD

Look at the following texts:



And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to ... keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?

Deuteronomy 10:12-13

A crucial theme is found in these verses, particularly the last part. He tells them to obey Him *for your good.* Your good.

Interestingly enough, too, the word for your in the Hebrew is in the singular. That is, it is talking about each individual, on a personal level. The Lord is telling us, individually, to obey His commandments, for our own personal good. That's a glimpse into God's character right there.

It's the same way a parent tells a child, individually, for that child's own good - not to eat any of the pills in the medicine cabinet.

In a crucial sense, the law reveals to us the character of the lawgiver. Parents set boundaries, rules and laws for their child to obey because they love them and want what's best for them. It's the same with God, and His law. The law reveals to us God's character, and His love for us, because the law is for our good. God is love, and His law reflects that love.

Look at it like this. What did the racist laws in Nazi Germany, or the American south, reveal about the character of the people who made those laws?

In contrast, God's law reveals what God is like. It shows that He loves us, wants to shield us and wants what's best for us. Disobedience to God is never good news. The outcomes of lawlessness are awful.

Then there's Satan, who seeks to get us to break God's law, to sin. Why? For so called freedom. He doesn't care that disobedience is deadly, and besides it makes God look bad as well. After all, who always gets the blame for all the sorrow and suffering in the world - sorrow and suffering that often come directly as a result of violation of God's law? In many ways, the great controversy centres on the very character of God Himself, a character that is revealed, at least partially, in His law.

LAW AND SIN

Isn't all this talk about God's law and keeping God's law legalistic? Haven't we just seen that we are saved by grace, without the deeds of the law? Aren't we saved by what Jesus did for us, symbolised before the time of Christ by the death of the animals as revealed in the sanctuary service? In an earlier booklet we have already seen that:



... a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Romans 3:28

Of course, we have. We read those texts and more, all of which teach that salvation comes only by grace, and not by law. In all those texts, however, the point was not to do away with the law, but to show the purpose of the law, which is to point out sin.

Look carefully at this text:



Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:20

Notice what Paul said: By the law is *the knowledge of sin*. The law, the Ten Commandments, shows us what sin is, shows us what the problem is.



What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, You shall not covet.

Romans 7:7

Again, the point of the law is not to bring salvation. The law can no more save us than scrubbing and perfuming a pig could turn it into a lamb. The law, instead, shows us our need of salvation, because the law reveals sin. And sin is what shows us our need of grace, of salvation in Jesus.

As we said in an earlier booklet: *The law is like a mirror; it might show you the flaws on your face, but the mirror has no power or means to remove them.* At the same time, smashing the mirror, or ignoring the mirror, isn't going to remove those flaws. The mirror simply shows you the flaws; something else entirely is needed to get rid of them.

LAW AND GRACE

Contrary to popular theology, Paul's purpose was never to tell people that, because of grace, we could violate God's law; that is - sin! On the contrary.



What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

Romans 6:1-2

In the last booklet we talked about a new life in Jesus, a life where we can be free from the slavery of sin, free from our old ways and habits. However much people sometimes talk about freedom from the law, the opposite is true. It's in obedience to God's law that we find true freedom, because in that obedience, which comes by God's power working in us, we are set free from the slavery of sin.



Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law.

1 John 3:4 KJV



Jesus answered them, Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.

John 8:34

The gospel frees us - frees us from the condemnation of the law, from the condemnation of sin, and from the choke-hold that sin has over our lives. And this freedom doesn't come by removing the law. It comes by giving us a new life in Christ, by bringing us into harmony with the law of liberty.

TRAFFIC ANALOGY

You get pulled over for violating a traffic law - those laws that we, indeed, need. You ran a red light, endangering not only yourself but others as

well by your violation. You are brought before a judge, and your guilt is established. They have even got it on video.

The judge, however, shows you grace and pardons you. You face no penalty, no condemnation; even the record of your violation is wiped clean. You are free from the penalty and the condemnation of the law that you have just broken.

So what happens? You walk out the door, get in your car, and - because you have been freed from the condemnation of the law - the first thing you do is run another red light?

Of course not. You have been pardoned, you have been shown grace, and you have been freed from the condemnation of the law. But that pardon, that grace, that freedom, doesn't mean you are now free to violate it again. No, what it means instead is that you are thankful for the pardon and freedom you have been given, and you seek to obey that law better than you had done before.

It's the same with God's law. We have violated it; that is what sin is - violation of the law - and we are all sinners. But, through the grace of God, revealed in the death of Jesus on the cross, we have been pardoned for that violation. The law no longer condemns us.

Does that mean, then, that we no longer have to obey that law that brought our condemnation to begin with?

Of course not. We need to obey, but thanks to Jesus, we are free - free from the condemnation of the law, free from the slavery that violation of the law - sin - brings.



Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

Romans 6:6-7

SIN ABOLISHED?

Ever hear preachers rail against sin and yet, in the same breath, declare that God's law is no longer valid? That makes no sense. How can sin - which is transgression of the law - exist, if the very thing that defines sin - the law - were abolished?

If God's law has been abolished, then sin has as well. And, last time we looked, people are still stealing, murdering, coveting, violating the Sabbath, and committing adultery. If the law were abolished, then these things must no longer exist, at least not as sin - and what serious person believes that?

No question, not only does God's law remain, those who love God are commanded to obey it.



For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

1 John 5:3

Seems simple enough.

As we have observed, we are in the midst of a cosmic conflict, a great controversy between good and evil, between Christ and Satan - and we

are all, each one, involved. No one is neutral, no one sits this one out on the sidelines. And there's nothing Satan likes more than to get people to sin, to get them to violate God's law, which, as we have seen, is sin. And sin is a pernicious form of evil, because it brings pain, suffering, hurt, and guilt - the kind of things that cause people to question God, question his goodness or, in many cases, even His existence.

In this epic story, Satan hates God's law because it reveals God's righteous character and his own deceitful one. And this story gets personal right here. Where do I stand in relation to God, and His law? Jesus invites us *If you love Me, keep My commandments.* John 14:15

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discover rest

Albert Einstein was known for his absent-mindedness. One time on a train, when the conductor approached, Einstein started looking for his ticket. After a minute of watching Einstein groping and digging, the conductor said, *Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.*

Einstein nodded appreciatively and the conductor moved on. After checking a few more tickets, he looked back and saw Einstein on his knees looking under the seat for his ticket. The conductor returned and said, *Dr. Einstein, it's OK. I know who you are. You don't need to find the ticket.*

Einstein looked up and said, *I know who I am too. But I need the ticket because I don't know where I am going.*

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

That could be a metaphor, a symbol, for a lot of people. You're born, and next thing you know you're living a life defined by a lot of factors that you didn't choose, and filled with a lot of questions that you need answered. And, among them is, *Where am I going?*

So far in this series of booklets, we have seen that those who put their faith and trust in Jesus know *where* they are going. They know because they have claimed God's promises. Promises like this:



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.

1Thessalonians 4:16-17



Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

Revelation 21:1

These are just a few of many wonderful promises that point us to our final destination. And it's certainly a better, more hopeful end than what many secular people believe awaits us. Here's a famous quote by atheist Bertrand Russell:

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving, that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system.

How grateful, and thankful we can be, that not only do we have the hope of a much better future, but we have good, logical and sensible reasons for holding that hope too.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

As we have been studying, however, we are in the midst of a battle, a battle that most of us sense, see, and feel - a literal battle for our hearts and minds. And part of the struggle itself is to not forget where we are ultimately going. That is, it's so easy to get caught up in the daily struggle

for existence that we lose sight of what really matters, and we push to the background of our lives the God who created us, who redeemed us, and who offers us something that this world never can. Regardless of how many endless ways the great controversy scenario is played out, both in us and around us, Satan ultimately triumphs when he can get us to live more for this world than for the one coming.

And we can be such easy targets, too, because we are so busy. No matter how fast our computers, no matter how fast our internet connections, no matter how fast and quick we can communicate, and send and receive information - who feels that they have enough time? Who doesn't get stressed out?

It could be turned into a formula. Let *s* be the speed at which we move and get things done, and let *q* be the time we have after we move at the speed s.

The formula is this: The greater *s,* the less *q*.

Which can be translated as: The faster we move, the quicker we can get things done, the less time we have. And the sad thing is, the faster we move, the more we need to rest. But unless we force ourselves, unless we make a concerted effort, we will push and push and push. That's just the nature of the kind of society that most of us live in.

THE SEVENTH-DAY SOLUTION

God, however, has given us a powerful antidote. Even before sin came, God gave the Sabbath. See Genesis 2:1-3. It's also found right in His law, which, as we saw in the last booklet, still defines sin, still shows us what is right and wrong, and is still given *for your good*. Deuteronomy 10:13

What is this commandment?

It's called the Sabbath, and, as with the other nine commandments, we are commanded to keep it. And who, amid the rat race, can't see just how much good a weekly rest could be for us?

It reads:



> ***Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.***
>
> *Exodus 20:8-11*

Yes, right along with the other nine - which include commandments about theft, idolatry, murder, adultery and so forth - is the commandment to rest on the Sabbath day.

SAVED BY GRACE, RIGHT?

But isn't this legalistic? Aren't we saved by grace, without the deeds of the law?

Of course. We have dedicated booklets to this point: Salvation is by faith alone, not by keeping the commandments. But salvation by faith alone

doesn't mean that we are saved to continue in sin, and as we have seen, the law - the Ten Commandments - defines sin.

And what does the Bible say about sin?



What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

Romans 6:1-2

In other words, do we continue in adultery, theft, murder - put in any of the commandments here - that grace may abound? Paul's answer is, *Certainly not!*

Imagine, as a believer in Jesus, you are tempted to violate a commandment - theft, adultery, whatever. But in the name of Jesus, you resist that temptation. Someone then challenges you by saying: *You legalist. Don't you know that you are saved by grace, not by working your way to heaven by being honest and pure?*

Pretty ridiculous, isn't it? In most cases, no Christians would say that in reference to any of the commandments, with the exception of the fourth - Sabbath-keeping.

How is it, though, that the one commandment devoted to rest, the one commandment that specifically expresses rest, the one commandment that gives people a special opportunity to rest, has been turned by some into the universal symbol of works?

TRUE REST IN CHRIST

Rather than being a symbol of works, the Sabbath is the Bible's oldest symbol of the rest that God's people have always had in Him. From the pre-fall world of Adam and Eve in Eden, to the New Covenant rest that God's followers have in Christ's work of redemption for them, the Sabbath is a real-time manifestation of the rest that Christ offers to all.



There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

Hebrews 4:9-11

Anyone can say that they are resting in Christ, and anyone can say that they are saved by grace. But the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is a visible expression of that rest, a living parable of what it means to be covered by His grace. Weekly rest from secular, worldly works, stands as an expression of the rest Christ's followers truly enjoy through the complete work that Christ has accomplished for them.

JESUS AND THE SABBATH

But didn't Jesus abolish the Sabbath, or change it to Sunday? (See the next booklet on the topic of change.) No, the Bible makes it clear that Jesus' concern was how the Sabbath was kept. The issue of abolishing it, or changing the day, never came up.

For example:



So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.

Luke 4:16

As Jesus' custom was … If Jesus wanted to abolish, or change, the Sabbath, He certainly gave no hint here. And if He planned to abolish or change it, he had to do it before His death. It's criminal to change a person's last will and testament after their death. See Hebrews 9:16-17. That helps to explain why all of the apostles, and the church, from Jesus death to the end of the New Testament, kept only the Sabbath. Changes did come later, but for political reasons - not spiritual.

Some argue that, as a Jew, Jesus would have kept the Jewish Sabbath. The problem with that, however, is that the seventh-day Sabbath isn't Jewish. Indeed, Jesus, as our Creator (John 1:1-3), had established - and kept - the seventh-day Sabbath way back in Eden.



Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Genesis 2:1-3

And this:



And He said to them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

Mark 2:27

These verses prove:

Firstly, the Sabbath existed before sin did, which is an important point against the idea that the Sabbath was abolished after the cross.

Secondly, the seventh-day Sabbath isn't Jewish, but was created long before the Jews existed. The Jews have been keeping it, that's true. But this doesn't make it exclusively Jewish any more than the fact that Australians have been celebrating Christmas makes Christmas exclusively Australian. Christmas pre-dates Australians, wasn't invented by Australians, and is kept by others besides Australians. It's the same with the Jews and the Sabbath. The Sabbath pre-dated the Jews, wasn't started by the Jews, and is kept by others besides the Jews. Hence, Sabbath is not exclusively Jewish any more than Christmas is exclusively Australian.

JESUS, THE SABBATH KEEPER

Here's another example of Jesus and the Sabbath:



Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?

> ***But He said to them, Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him? And He said to them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.***
> *Mark 2:23-28*

Though a lot of issues are revealed in these passages, the keeping of the Sabbath is not among them. On the contrary. Why would Jesus emphasise that the *Sabbath was made for man,* if the Sabbath were to be phased out? In fact, Jesus' final words in the passage - *Therefore the Son of man is also Lord of the Sabbath* - are rather strange if His intention were to end the seventh-day Sabbath.

The fact is that Jesus spent more time teaching people how to keep the fourth commandment than He did any other one. Why do that if the Sabbath were to be abolished?

Another example is in Luke 13. One of the leaders was angry that Jesus healed a sick woman on the Sabbath, even though nothing in the Bible taught that helping the sick was wrong on the Sabbath. This point powerfully reveals that Jesus was fighting against man-made ideas about Sabbath-keeping, ideas based on human tradition, and not against Sabbath-keeping itself. How did Jesus respond?



> ***The Lord then answered him and said, Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey***

> ***from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound -think of it - for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?***
>
> *Luke 13:15-16*

Again, the issue was how to keep the day, not whether one should keep it.

THE SABBATH REST

Note also that Jesus, when talking about the destruction of Jerusalem - which would come decades after His death - said to His followers:



> ***And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.***
>
> *Matthew 24:20*

Why tell them that if Jesus intended to abolish the Sabbath?

More evidence for the seventh-day Sabbath occurs with the death of Jesus and what immediately followed. The Bible is clear that when He died, *it was the Preparation day, and the Sabbath was soon to begin.* Luke 23:54, NIV The Bible goes on to say that after the women prepared His body for burial, *they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.* Luke 23:56 Which commandment would that be, other than the fourth? If Jesus had indicated that this commandment was to be abolished or changed, even after His death, these women knew nothing about it. Luke even went out of his way to stress that they kept the Sabbath, *according to the commandment.*

Now, notice these texts:



Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

Luke 24:1-3

Thus, Jesus died on Friday, the preparation day for the Sabbath, rested in the tomb on Sabbath, and then was resurrected on the first day of the week - a work day.

When Jesus finished His work of redemption, He cried out on the cross, *It is finished* (John 19:30), a phrase that echoes the language used when He finished His work of creation - *Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.* And, again, what did He do after finishing that first work? *And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.* Millennia later, after finishing the work of redemption, Jesus also rested on the seventh-day Sabbath as well, this time in the tomb.

The point? When finishing both His work of creation and redemption, our Lord rested on the seventh day - the Sabbath day. And, according to the commandment, we are to do the same. Thus the New Testament says:



For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

1 John 5:3

BURNOUT?

Burdensome? On the contrary. They are anything but. Especially the Sabbath, which is there to help free us from the burdensomeness of our busy lives!

In the 1880's, the famous Russian author, Leo Tolstoy, wrote a short story called, *How Much Land Does A Man Need?* In it, a struggling farmer named Pahom thinks, *If I had plenty of land, I shouldn't fear the Devil himself.*

The Devil himself, listening in, silently replies, *We will have a tussle. I will give you land enough, and by means of that land I will get you into my power.*

Anyway, Pahom then hears about Bashkirs, people who sell land cheaply. Pahom goes to the Bashkirs, and they offer him land for a thousand rubles. As far as he can walk in one day, that's what he can buy for his thousand rubles, but on one condition: *If you don't return on the same day to the spot whence you started,* they said, *your money is lost.*

Thrilled, Pahom takes off, walking and walking and walking, marking off the edges of this rich, virgin soil that will soon be his. He keeps going and going, as far as he possibly can before making a turn. Though covering a lot of land, he soon realises that he must get back or he'll have none. Drained, exhausted - he had walked so far - he sees that he has no time to lose, that the sun is almost setting, and if he's not back right away all will be lost. He runs as fast as he can, in a panic that it will be too late. Then, just as he gets close to reaching the point where he started, Pahom collapses - dead.

Tolstoy ended his story like this: *His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahom to lie in, and buried him in it. Six feet from his head to his heels was all the land he needed.*

What a powerful symbol for how we can get so caught up in the things of this world - and for what? Six feet of ground? Is that where we, ultimately, are going?

That's another reason why we have been given the fourth commandment. So we can live and experience the spiritual rest that we have in Jesus, so we can take time to stop and recharge, and so we can remember not only where we came from but where we are going to.

By keeping the Sabbath, we reveal that we are not slaves to work, we are not slaves to making money, we are not slaves to the things of this world. And if we are working so hard that we are burning out, then whether we admit it or not - we are slaves.

In contrast, keeping the Sabbath is our declaration - a declaration of freedom, of the freedom we have in Christ, who promised us:



Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

And nothing reveals that rest better, in a more concrete and real way, than the time off from the world we get each week by keeping the fourth commandment.

In a later booklet we will discover the role that the seventh-day Sabbath will play in the final scenes of the epic drama on Planet Earth.

NOTES

NOTES

NEXT IN THE SERIES:



Uncover the master counterfeit that challenges God's authority and learn how we can avoid deception

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discover authenticity

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discover authenticity

Amedeo Modigliani was an Italian painter and sculptor who became famous after his death at age 36, a death helped along by excessive drinking and drug use.

Around 1912, eight years before he died, Modigliani spent a summer in the Italian city of Livorno, where he pursued his sculpture. According to one story, he brought one of his sculptures to a cafe in order to show friends, who mocked it. Upset, Modigliani tossed it into a river outside the cafe. So ashamed at the ridicule, Modigliani, it was rumoured, then took a wheelbarrow with three more sculptures and dumped them all, wheelbarrow included, into a canal.

Well, in 1984, the curator of a museum in Livorno wanted the city to dredge the canal. They were celebrating the centenary of Modigliani's birth, and uncovering these works would be an incredible artistic coup. The city council agreed and, much to everyone's astonishment, an old wheelbarrow and three sculptures were brought out of the water - right in the spot where he had supposedly dumped them!

Not only did all the sculptures have all the special characteristics of Modigliani's work, they were suitably blackened in mud, showing apparently the decades of immersion. The experts agreed - these were real! One critic burst into tears upon seeing them. Prominent art historians declared them treasures, magical faces, splendid primitive heads, even a resurrection.

Only one problem. Weeks later, three local students said that they had built the counterfeits themselves, using hammers, chisels, screwdrivers, and a Black and Decker electric drill. They also explained what they did to age the fakes. The art critics, not ready to give up, demanded that the

students prove it. That was a mistake, because right on television the forgers reconstructed the Modiglianis in about four hours. The critic who had burst into tears upon first seeing the statues collapsed and had to be hospitalised. The experts - despite all their knowledge, authority and expertise - looked like fools. The big winner was Black and Decker, which ran an ad based on the stunt. It said: *It's easy to be talented with a Black and Decker.*

THE DECEIVER

All this fits in very closely with a theme that runs through these booklets - that of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. As we have seen, we are all in a real battle, a real struggle for hearts and minds, and there are eternal consequences.

And, at the heart of this battle is deception, such as the kind pulled off by these art students.



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.

Revelation 12:7-9

Who deceives the whole world? That's an incredibly heavy, even frightful thought.

Of course, for a deception to work, those being deceived must not know it. Had the students not come forward, the fakes would be sitting in some museum as thousands of mesmerised visitors gaze at the fantastic masterworks of the great Modigliani.

What, then, about Satan's deceptions, the ones through which he deceives the entire world? Can we know what they are, and how to avoid being deceived ourselves? God warned us that the *lawless one* would come. See 2 Thessalonians 2:9.

THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

So far, in these booklets, we have seen that salvation is by faith in Jesus alone, not by the works of the law. You'd have more chance of bringing a statue to life by stuffing food and water into its mouth than you do working your way to heaven.

At the same time, we can't forget Paul's words that, even though we are saved by grace, we cannot now sin with impunity:



What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

Romans 6:1-2

Or:



Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Romans 3:31

Or the words of John:



For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

1 John 5:3

Or James:



For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

James 2:10-11

No question, grace does not nullify the law. On the contrary, the law which defines sin shows us our need of grace. Thus the law and the gospel are inseparable.

THE GREAT IRONY REVISITED

As we have also seen, included in the heart of God's law is the Sabbath, the commandment to keep the *seventh day* - Saturday - holy.

The great irony is: Why is keeping the one commandment to rest, to refrain from works, deemed as salvation by works, when obedience to the other nine isn't?

AMAZING ADMISSIONS

The issue of Sunday as the day of worship, as opposed to Saturday, gets even more interesting when many who keep Sunday admit that nothing in the Bible teaches that Sunday - the first day of the week, was to replace or to supersede Saturday - the seventh day.

Writing in a book entitled *The Lord's Day*, which promoted the keeping of Sunday, Samuel A. Cartledge conceded: *We must admit that we can point to no direct command that we cease observing the seventh day and begin using the first day.*

Concerning the change of Sabbath to Sunday, James Westberry - at one time the head of an organisation devoted to the promotion of Sunday worship - confessed: *There is no record or statement on the part of Jesus authorising such a change, nor is there recorded such a statement on the part of the apostles.*

Evangelical author Harold Lindsell, writing in the prestigious magazine *Christianity Today*, said: *There is nothing in the Scriptures that requires us to keep Sunday rather than Saturday as a holy day.*

And Roman Catholic James Cardinal Gibbons wrote: *You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorising the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify.*

THE PROPHECY OF DANIEL

Why, then, do most Christians keep the first day of the week when even those who keep it admit there's no biblical basis for the change from the seventh day to the first?

The key is found in the Old Testament book of Daniel, which, in an amazing prophecy, predicted many years beforehand that there would be an attempted change.

In Booklet 3, we studied a bit of Daniel 2, a prophecy covering the sweep of world history, starting in ancient Babylon and then finally ending with God's eternal kingdom.

To summarise the fulfilment of Daniel 2, the sequence of kingdoms was:

- Babylon
- Media-Persia
- Greece
- Rome - broken into the nations of Europe
- God's kingdom

In the book of Daniel, this sequence of kingdoms is repeated in Chapter 7. But Chapter 7 gives more details, especially concerning the fourth kingdom, almost universally understood by Bible students through the centuries as Rome.

In Daniel 7, the prophet has a dream in which he sees four beasts rise out of the sea.



In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts. Daniel spoke, saying, I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.

Daniel 7:1-3

Later in the chapter, he is told that these four beasts represent *four kings* (Daniel 7:17), or kingdoms that will arise over the centuries - and these are the same four kingdoms of Daniel 2: Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The chapter then ends with God's eternal kingdom, as did Daniel 2.

Daniel 7, however, spends a great deal of time on the fourth kingdom, Rome, and especially the little horn power that arises out of it:



Thus he said: The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces. The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; he shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings. He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law.

Daniel 7:23-25

THE LITTLE HORN

There's so much in these texts worth exploring, but for now we will touch on only a few points.

Firstly, this little horn power, as it is called in Daniel 7:8, is a Roman power. It is not a separate beast, a separate power, as were the three beasts that preceded the fourth. This little horn power is, simply, another phase of Rome, and remains part of it.

The fourth beast is described earlier in the chapter as having *ten horns*. Daniel 7:7 The above verses interpret them as ten kings, or kingdoms, that will arise out of this fourth beast. This is reminiscent of the feet of Daniel 2 - ten toes. Daniel 7, as did Daniel 2, is predicting the breakup of the great pagan Roman Empire here. And, according to the text, this little horn power is described as uprooting three of those kingdoms in order to attain power.

It is also described as speaking *pompous words against the Most High*. This shows a religious dimension to this power, a dimension not emphasised in any of the other kingdoms.

This little horn will be different from the other kingdoms.

The little horn power will *persecute the saints of the Most High*.

And it will *intend to change times and law*.

Finally, this little horn power is described in the chapter as being in existence until the end of time, when God establishes His eternal kingdom, the same one described in Daniel 2:



Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast … and the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows. I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favour of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.

Daniel 7:19-22

Thus, because the little horn power is destroyed at the end of time, it must exist until the end of time.

SOLELY, TOTALLY AND ONLY ROME

What one power alone fits this description? Only one - Papal Rome. It is a Roman power, coming directly out of pagan Rome. As political philosopher Thomas Hobbes wrote in one of the great political treatises of all time, *The Leviathan*: *If a man considers 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 grace thereof.*

History shows that the papacy uprooted three kings in order to consolidate its position.

The papacy certainly was different from the other kingdoms.

The papacy is a religious power.

The papacy has persecuted people, such as in the Inquisition.

And it is still in existence today. And it would have to be, because according to the texts above it will exist until the end of this world.

Then, finally, another crucial characteristic is that it would think to change *times and law.* Daniel 7:25

Did the papacy do that as well? Though historically the change of the Sabbath to Sunday is rather involved, these few quotes - all from Roman Catholic sources - answer the question:

Question - Which is the Sabbath day?
Answer - Saturday is the Sabbath day.
Question - Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?
Answer - We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church, in the Council of Laodicea A.D. 364, transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday. Peter Geiermann, C.S.S.R., *The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine*, p.50, 3rd Edition, 1957

Most Christians assume that Sunday is the biblically approved day of worship. The Catholic Church protests that it transferred Christian worship from the biblical Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday, and that to try to argue that the change was made in the Bible is both dishonest and a denial of Catholic authority. If Protestantism wants to base its teachings only on the Bible, it should worship on Saturday. Rome's Challenge, www.immaculateheart.com/maryonline, December 2003

Regarding the change from the observance of the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Sunday, I wish to draw your attention to the facts: 1) That Protestants, who accept the Bible as the only rule of faith and religion,

should by all means go back to the observance of the Sabbath. The fact that they do not, but on the contrary observe the Sunday, stultifies them in the eyes of every thinking man. 2) We Catholics do not accept the Bible as the only rule of faith. Besides the Bible we have the living Church, the authority of the Church, as a rule to guide us. We say, this Church, instituted by Christ to teach and guide man through life, has the right to change the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament and hence, we accept her change of the Sabbath to Sunday. We frankly say, yes, the Church made this change, made this law, as she made many other laws, for instance, the Friday abstinence, the unmarried priesthood, the laws concerning mixed marriages, the regulation of Catholic marriages and a thousand other laws. It is always somewhat laughable, to see the Protestant churches, in pulpit and legislation, demand the observance of Sunday, of which there is nothing in their Bible. Peter R. Kraemer - Catholic Church Extension Society, 1975, Chicago, Illinois

Many quotes like this exist, which show the origin of Sunday keeping, a practice that has no sanction in the Bible.

DOES IT MATTER?

For starters, this is not an attack on individuals, particularly on those in the Roman church. This study is simply on what the Bible teaches about a religio-political system that has gone awry, and that has sought to usurp the authority belonging only to God.

Look at these texts:



Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the

> ***man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.***
>
> *2 Thessalonians 2:3-4*

Paul here warns about a deception in which a power claims the prerogatives that belong only to God. This is what is meant by Anti-Christ, which means not merely against Christ but in place of Christ, usurpation of Christ - and what could be a greater usurpation than seeking to change God's law, especially the part that specifically points to Him as the Creator?

As we already saw, the seventh day is the biblical symbol, the biblical sign, the foundational sign of God as God Himself! In the creation story, embedded deep in it, is this sign of that work of creation, the seventh day. You can't get any farther back, without going to God Himself.



> ***And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.***
>
> *Genesis 2: 2-3*

Thus, to usurp that sign of God as Creator is to usurp the role of God Himself!

Of course, the millions of folks who go to church on Sunday are not consciously seeking to usurp the role of God as Creator. Most simply don't

know. But that shouldn't be surprising, because, as we have read, Satan manages to deceive the whole world.

During the 2008 presidential election in the United States, the Obama campaign caused a ruckus when someone had created for candidate Obama his own version of a presidential seal - the sign, the symbol of the presidency.

Why the fuss? Because even though it was a fake - not even looking exactly like the real thing - it came close enough in symbolising the power, the authority, and office of the President of the United States, and at that time Barak Obama didn't have that power, authority or office.

Imagine, though, if the Obama campaign had made one that looked real and tried to pawn it off that way?

This is what has happened with the seventh-day Sabbath, the original sign of God's creative power and authority, being replaced with the first day, which is symbolic of another power, one seeking to usurp the place of God Himself.

Thus, the issue isn't merely about a day. Instead, it is about loyalty to the God who has called upon us to *worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.* Revelation 14:7 This is language taken almost directly from the Sabbath commandment itself (Exodus 20:11) and, as such, is further reason why we should keep it, and by so doing, enjoy the rest in Christ that the seventh-day Sabbath has offered since the foundation of the world.

So how does this counterfeit fit into the epic story, this great controversy between Christ and Satan that is unfolding around us? Many major

events in this epic story are already history, but there are more to come. This counterfeit undermines God's authority, and it strikes at the very foundations of worship - who to worship, when to worship and why to worship. We are going to see how these issues of worship are played out on a global scale in the final warning, and the final struggle between right and wrong, truth and error, before Jesus comes the second time.

Is it important? Is this a serious matter? Deadly serious!!

1260 DAYS

What's so special about 21 May 1988, 6 September 1994, 21 May 2011 and 21 Oct 2011? Nothing much, except that those were the days that the world was supposed to have ended. Claiming to have discovered a numeric code in the Bible, radio preacher Harold Camping gave these as the dates on which true Christians were to be taken to heaven, while those remaining on terra firma would face ultimate destruction.

Didn't quite happen though, did it?

All through history people have used the Bible to come up with dates for various end-time events. In most cases - and in all cases where they have predicted the end of the world - they have obviously been wrong. Yet hardly a year goes by when someone isn't making bold predictions about some future event, all based upon some supposed numeric code that they have discovered in the Bible.

Such predictions deceive gullible people, confuse others, destroy the faith of many, and in general make all Christians look bad - even the vast majority who don't believe such predictions any more than a typical atheist does. Jesus said of His second coming: *... of that day and hour no one knows* ... Matthew 24:36 He said we could tell when it is *near* - not when it is here. Matthew 24:33

But God has included a time element in many prophecies, none of which refer to the time of His second coming. So as we take God's word seriously, we need to consider these time prophecies.

PURPOSE OF PROPHECY

Failed predictions help show just how right physicist Niels Bohr was when he quipped: *It is very hard to make an accurate prediction - especially about the future.*

Those who make these predictions, as well as those deceived by them, could spare themselves a lot of embarrassment and hurt if they understood the purpose of Bible prophecy and why God gave prophecy to us.



So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near - at the doors!

Mark 13:29



Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He.

John 13:19



And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe.

John 14:29

Jesus is saying that the purpose of prophecy is to help affirm faith when we see it fulfilled. Those who have heard the prophecies, then see them fulfilled, have their faith strengthened. Prophecy isn't so much to help us tell the future, though that's part of it. But rather prophecy becomes most powerful when predicted events come to pass, even events that have happened long ago.

In a sense, prophecy is as much about the past as it is the future.

DANIEL 2

For instance, we have already studied the amazing prophecy of Daniel 2, which covered the scope of world history, from ancient Babylon - more than six hundred years before Christ - right up to our day and beyond.

The sequence of Daniel 2, which was symbolised by a statue made of various metals, could be summarised like this:

Babylon
Media-Persia
Greece
Rome
Kingdom of God

Looking back today, we can see how accurately all those predictions about the earthly kingdoms - made 600 years before Christ – were fulfilled. Think, though, about the advantage we have today in regard to these prophecies in contrast to someone who lived, for instance, in the time of Media-Persia. They didn't have anywhere near the historical confirmation of the prophecies that we do living in our day and age. The predictions, which were fulfilled, help confirm our faith in the Word of God.

DANIEL 7

We also saw in the study on the change of the Sabbath to Sunday, that Daniel 7 presents the same sequence as did Daniel 2, only in more detail. In that chapter, Daniel the prophet had a dream in which four beasts rose out of the sea.



In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts. Daniel spoke, saying, I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.

Daniel 7:1-3

Later in the chapter, he is told that these four beasts represent *four kings* (Daniel 7:17) or kingdoms that will arise over the centuries - the same kingdoms of Daniel 2: Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The chapter then ends with God's eternal kingdom, as did Daniel 2.

Daniel 7, however, spends a great deal of time on the fourth kingdom - Rome - and especially the little horn power that arises out of it, which we saw was Papal Rome. Daniel 7 also gave a depiction of a heavenly judgment that takes place after a phase of Rome but before the kingdom of God at the Second Coming.



I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things. I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and

> ***ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.***
> *Daniel 7:8-10 (KJV)*

It's after this judgment in this prophecy that God sets up his eternal kingdom. Thus, if you were to place Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 together, they would look like this:

Daniel 2	Daniel 7
Babylon	Babylon
Media-Persia	Media-Persia
Greece	Greece
Rome	Rome (pagan/papal)
	Heavenly Judgment
God's Eternal Kingdom	God's Eternal Kingdom

A TIME PROPHECY

If we go back to Daniel 7, specifically the little horn power that is part of the fourth beast - Rome - we are given the first prophetic time prophecy in the book of Daniel. This is crucial because it helps us understand firstly how time prophecies work, and secondly how to decode many of the time prophecies in the Bible.

Here again, for review, is part of the prophecy concerning the fourth power of Daniel 7 - Rome - both in its pagan and then papal stage:



Thus he said: The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces. The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; he shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings. He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.

Daniel 7:23-25

Talking about the second phase of Rome, it says that *the saints* - a term for God's faithful people - will be persecuted by the little horn power. Those who know European history know the sad story of the centuries of persecution by the official church upon those who based their beliefs on the Word of God rather than tradition.

For how long?



Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.

Daniel 7:25

What is this *time and times and half a time?*

Firstly, it's obviously a reference to time!

Secondly, this is the first prophetic time period introduced into the symbolism of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7.

Thirdly, this time period does not point to the destruction of the little horn power or the second coming of Jesus.

What does *a time and times and half a time* mean? A *time* is simply one year, times two years, and *half a time* half a year. Thus it is a prophetic way of saying three and a half years.

Let's see the evidence for this.

THE DANIEL – REVELATION CONNECTION

It is saying that for this period - this three and a half years - the saints will be given into the little horn's hands, a reference to the verse when it said that he would *persecute the saints of the Most High.* Daniel 7:25 The persecution would last for this time period. Revelation 13 depicts this same power (using different symbols) resurging in the end times and playing a role in the final crisis. The point is, Rome doesn't end here; just this phase of its persecution does. It will return.

Talking about the same event - the persecution of the church - though using different symbolic language, the book of Revelation reads:



But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

Revelation 12:14

Notice the *time, times and half a time,* just as in Daniel 7:25.

SAME TIME – DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS

Again, the same picture - the woman in the wilderness, for the same length of time - is depicted a few verses earlier in Revelation like this:



Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Revelation 12:6

So the Bible begins to interpret itself as we compare texts together. Thus we have the same period of time for the same event expressed differently here: a time, times, and dividing of time = a thousand two hundred and three score days (1260 days).

Further, notice that in the following text from the book of Revelation, the language is very similar to Daniel 7 in talking about the little horn. Notice, too, the time frame given in this text as well:



And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.

Revelation 13:5

Remember what Daniel said about the little horn?



He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.

Daniel 7:25

Now, look at this verse again:



And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.

Revelation 13:5

How long is 42 months?

	12 months	1 year
	24 months	2 years
	6 months	Half a year
TOTAL:	42 months	3½ years!

And, as we have already seen, three and a half years equals 1260 days. Thus, the 42 months, the three and half years, and the 1260 days of these prophecies are all talking about the same time span.

3½ years = 42 months = 1260 days

Thus we can confidently conclude that in prophetic time, a year is 360 days, because three and half years equals 1260 days. We are not talking about years in our calendar, but biblical prophetic years, which are 360 days each.

	One year	360 days
	Two years	720 days
	Half a year	180 days
TOTAL:	3½ years	1260 days

These verses taken together give us a firm foundation for understanding the meaning of the prophetic time given in these parallel texts.

JESUS AND HIS PEOPLE

Notice this: Revelation 12:1-4 talks about the dragon attacking the boy child - who was Jesus. This attack started at His birth, was unleashed with ferocity from the time of Jesus' baptism, and continued for the three and a half years of His ministry - 27 to 31AD. This was literally 3½ years, or 42 months, or 1260 days. That's interesting!

Then the texts (Revelation 12: 6,14) say that the dragon (Satan) turns his attack on the woman (the church). And how long does he do this for? As we have seen – 3½ years, 42 months or 1260 days.

THE DAY–YEAR PRINCIPLE

If taken literally however, these verses, talking about the period of persecution inflicted by the established church in Daniel and Revelation, show we have a big problem. Anyone who knows history knows that the church held political and religious dominance for almost all European history - from the establishment of the Roman Church about half a millennium after the cross up until practically the 19th century. How could the text say that persecution lasted only three and a half literal years?

God has used a symbolic representation of time. We have discovered, by comparing texts, that a symbolic period represents a longer literal period. This is known as the day-year principle. It simply means that, in prophetic time, a day equals a year.

For instance, look at these texts:



According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection.

Numbers 14:34

Each day was paralleled to a year. One day, one year. Forty days, forty years. Hence, we see the day-year key to time prophecy.

Here is another:



And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year.

Ezekiel 4:6

Again, we see a day for a year; hence, the day-year principle.

ANOTHER QUESTION

How can we be sure that this principle should be applied to the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation?

Good question.

As pointed out earlier in this booklet, the purpose of prophecy has just as much to do with confirming our faith, as it has for giving us hope for the future. Also in Booklet 4 we have seen that there are hundreds of prophecies that pointed to the Messiah - the anointed one, and were fulfilled in Jesus Christ - the anointed one.

One of those Messianic prophecies includes a time prophecy found in Daniel 9. It pin points the time of Jesus' baptism and of His crucifixion.

The Daniel 9 prophecy is for 70 weeks. If taken literally - one year 18 weeks, or 490 literal days - it makes no sense at all. But being part of a symbolic prophecy, it makes good sense to interpret it prophetically - one prophetic day representing one literal year. When we do that, then it makes perfect sense. And Jesus fulfilled that symbolic prophecy exactly when the day-year principle is understood and applied. That is history now. The fulfillment of that prophecy confirms our faith, and gives us assurance that we are on safe ground in interpreting prophetic time by applying the day-year principle.

Further, Daniel 7, as did Daniel 2, covers thousands of years of history - from the Babylonian empire, to the time of Christ, through the dark ages, to our time and beyond into the future. More than 2600 years are covered here.

Taken literally as 1260 days, 42 months or 3½ years - the prophecy makes no sense. The persecution and exploits of the little horn power were played out over centuries - even more than a millennium! But when we use the biblical day-year key to symbolic time prophecy, then history fulfills the prophecy.

Remember, this is symbolic prophecy - look again at Daniel 7. The prophecy is not about a lion that has eagle's wings, or about a leopard with four heads, or about a beast with iron teeth, or about a talking horn. Those are all symbols, images pointing to things larger and other than themselves.

So amid all these prophetic symbols, none of which are to be taken literally, does it not make sense to take the time prophecy as symbolic and not literal as well?

The same is true for the prophecy in the book of Revelation in Chapter 13. That refers to the same power doing the same things for the same period of time. And notice - it was still future in John the Revelator's day!



But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

Revelation 12:14



Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Revelation 12:6

Revelation isn't talking about a literal woman with the wings of an eagle hiding from a serpent. Those are symbols of the church being persecuted and having to flee and hide. If all those are symbolic, it's both biblical and logical for the time prophecy to be symbolic as well.

THE PERSECUTION

What do we have here?

Regarding the little horn, we have a religious power, an extension of Roman power, a persecuting power, a power that arises directly out of

pagan Rome, a power that extends across a span of time covering at least 1260 years.

What else is there other than Papal Rome? It fits perfectly. If one begins the 1260 years in the 6th century, the beginning of Papal political control, then the 1260 years end somewhere in the late 18th or early 19th century, when Papal political control pretty much ended. In fact, some scholars have given exact dates: 538 AD - a pivotal year in Papal Rome's ascension to political power, to the year 1798 - when French General Berthier entered Rome and took the Pope captive.

The important point for us here is - with the application of the day-year principle, we can see how this prophecy spans through much of European history and into the beginning of the modern age.

The rise of the antichrist power and the long period of persecution were prophesied by God. God is telling us that in this Epic story He is still in control. All these prophecies end with the establishment of God's eternal kingdom and the end of rebellion. Now that gives us hope; that's something to which we can look forward.

NOTES

NOTES

NOTES

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Uncover the secret of what happens after death and take the fear out of your future

BEYOND THE SEARCH – DISCOVERY SERIES

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discover immortality

Uncover the secret of what happens after death and take the fear out of your future

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discover immortality

In ancient Egypt, when the rich gave a party and the meal ended, a man carried into the room a coffin, carved and painted to look like the real thing. Egyptian coffins, as we've seen in pictures, were often painted and carved to look like people. The man carrying the coffin, anywhere from 18 inches to three feet long, would then show it to the guests and utter these words to each one individually: *Look upon this body as you eat and drink and enjoy yourself; for you will be just like it when you are dead.*

That might seem a little crude by our standards - especially at a party - but who can argue with the point? Death is real, death is cruel, and death is an ever-present reality. Who hasn't struggled with the reality of death, the pain of parting when it comes, the fear of the unknown, or the harsh finality when it does?

And we hate it too. And that's because we *were* never meant to die. Death is, really, the most unnatural act. We're so used to it we just take for granted that death is part of life. Kind of ironic isn't it, to say that death is part of life. Death is the negation of life, not part of it. Life and death are a contrast, like existence and non-existence - *I am and I am not, or something and nothing.*

BLAME GAME?



Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned …

Romans 5:12

Yes, through one man - Adam - sin entered the world, and through sin death followed. But it was never meant to be that way - never - and that's

why we buck and kick and fight so hard against it. It is our natural enemy. See 1 Corinthians 15:26. We were created to have everlasting life. We were never meant to know or experience death. Thus, we hate and fear it so much.

As we have seen, we are in the midst of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, between good and evil, and literally between life and death. Just as Satan brought sin into this world, he has brought death as well.

At the same time, we have been given this wonderful victory over death that Jesus has won for us in this great controversy.



Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Hebrews 2:14

ETERNAL LIFE?

That's a powerful promise, a heavy promise, one filled with hope for us in the face of the overwhelming reality of death. Someone, however, might justly ask: *That's nice, but, well … we all still die, don't we? Where's the victory that we are promised there?*



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

And this:



Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

John 6:47

And this:



For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

The common and popular answer is: *Well, that's easy. When Christians die, they go soaring off to the bliss of eternal life in heaven. They have gone to be with their Lord. That's the victory.* Let's take a closer look at this commonly held belief.

TWO VIEWS OF DEATH

There are basically only two views of death. One is the Biblical view, and the other, found in one form or another in every other religion, says in essence that we live on in another form and/or another place.

In fact, both these views are found within Christianity too - two views that are mutually exclusive, that is, they are so different that the truth of one automatically means the other must be false.

One belief, the one mentioned above, claims that at death the person goes off to his or her reward or punishment immediately. It's the idea that they go right away to heaven, or to hell, or in some cases to purgatory. This belief is common, not just in many segments of Christianity but also in many other faiths as well.

At the centre of this view is the often assumed notion of an immortal soul, the belief that there's an immaterial and, hence, immortal consciousness that can exist apart from the human body, and this entity goes off to a new realm of conscious existence after a person dies. Where they go, and why, and what happens when they do, depends upon whatever the traditions teach. But the common view among most Christians, and most other religions, is that something in us goes on living, consciously, after death. In other words, you don't really die; you just enter a new existence.

The second belief, though having a long history, is much less common, but is still held by many Christians. In fact, more scholars are leaning this way too. According to this position, the Bible teaches that the dead are asleep - unconscious - and remain that way until Jesus returns and they are resurrected to eternal life in new bodies. The resurrection is the Christian's hope, not the intruding enemy that is death.

Sleep is used as a metaphor for death. They are not asleep in the sense that they are alive, but unconscious. They are dead - no more life. The metaphor illustrates a state of inactivity, emotionless, unconsciousness, resting - but they died with the expectation of waking up.

As stated, these views are mutually exclusive. Either the dead are asleep, unconscious, and oblivious to everything, or they're in the bliss of heaven - or, as the case may be, in the torture of hell, or in some other conscious state.

Which is correct?

IMMEDIATE REWARD? IMMEDIATE PUNISHMENT? IMMEDIATE SLEEP?

The Bible talks a lot about death. After all, we're going to be dead much longer than we are going to be alive, at least the way things are now. Plus, with death being so real, so present, it makes sense that the Bible wouldn't leave us in the dark about this important aspect of human existence.

Because of the disagreement about death, it's crucial to look at the following texts in the light of these two differing views. And, as we read, we need to ask this question: *Do these texts make sense if the dead go immediately to another conscious state, or do the texts make better sense if the dead sleep, unconsciously, in the grave until the Second Coming, when they are resurrected and given new physical bodies?*

Keep in mind, too, what we studied in Booklet 6 about the Second Coming and the promise of the resurrection of the dead. That is a crucial factor in understanding what happens after death.

For starters, here's Jesus talking about the dead and what awaits them:



Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

John 5:28-29

Do these words give the idea that the dead have gone, right at death, to their reward or punishment? Or do they give the idea that they are in the grave, awaiting end-time judgment? Which view makes the most sense? Which view makes the only sense? Jesus gives the idea that the fate awaiting *all that are in the graves* hadn't happened yet, even though millions of people had already died by the time Jesus spoke these words! If they had already gone off to their reward or punishment what is Jesus talking about?

Or how about this text?



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

And many that sleep in the dust of the earth *shall awake?* The Hebrew verb is in the future tense. What does that mean, if the dead were already being rewarded or punished as soon as they died? What does the text mean when it says that they are asleep in the dust of the earth, if the common and popular view is biblical?

Both those who face everlasting life and those who face everlasting contempt are in the same place - the dust of the earth - until they awake, and only then do they face reward or punishment. Nothing in that text indicates that they got either a reward or a punishment at death. In fact, it says the opposite. They are asleep until they awake to one fate or another.

Look at this text. Does it sound as if the dead are in some conscious state in another existence, or asleep in the ground?



For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?

Psalm 6:5

This text makes sense if one accepts the idea of the dead in an unconscious sleep, but it's nonsensical if they have gone at death to their final fate.

PAUL AND THE RESURRECTION

In his letter to the much-troubled Corinthian church, the apostle Paul confronted the teaching among some that there would be no resurrection of the dead. See 1 Corinthians 15:12. What would be the result of such a teaching, were it true? Again, as we read these words, we need to ask which of the two positions makes sense?



But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up - if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

1 Corinthians 15:13-18

Look at the last verse: *Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.* Paul linked the resurrection of Christ with our resurrection.

Because Christ was raised from the grave, we will be too. But if Christ were not resurrected, then we aren't either - and if not, then those who *have fallen asleep in Christ* have perished? And our faith is *empty* and *futile?* How, though, could that be if those who are *asleep in Christ* have, at death, already gone off to their eternal bliss?

On the other hand, if the dead are in an unconscious sleep until the resurrection, then the texts make sense, because if there were no resurrection, then the dead remain asleep in their graves, which means they have *perished* forever. So the faith of his readers is futile, because they have no eternal life. In other words, if there is no resurrection there is no hope beyond the grave!!

It seems clear that Paul understood the dead in Christ to be asleep in the ground until the resurrection, which occurs at Christ's Second Coming.

THE SECOND COMING

In fact, here's Jesus referring to the Second Coming:



And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Revelation 22:12

He's bringing His reward with Him? What does that mean, if the faithful get their reward immediately at death? Many of Christ's faithful followers have been dead for centuries. Certainly they should have been enjoying their reward long before now, rather than when the Second Coming happens.

Here's Jesus, again in reference to the resurrection when He returns:



Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:54

Raise him up at the last day? If they are already up in heaven, what is Jesus referring to when He says that He will raise them up? Supposedly they already are up in heaven. If, though, the dead are in the ground, in an unconscious sleep, the text makes perfect sense.

THE STATE OF THE DEAD

The Bible speaks with one voice on this. Note these texts:



His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

Psalm 146:4 KJV



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 any thing.

Ecclesiastes 9:5

Again, which view is revealed in these texts? The answer is obvious.

WITH ME IN PARADISE?

What, though, about Jesus' words to the thief on the cross?



And Jesus said to him, Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.

Luke 23:43

Is Jesus telling the thief that he - the thief - will be with Jesus that day - *today* - in paradise? If so, what about all the texts that we have just looked at?

The answer is found in the punctuation. Here are the same words of Jesus, the words originally written down in the Greek manuscripts, only now with a punctuation change - punctuation that, by the way, wasn't in the original manuscripts but was added centuries later! *Truly I say to you today, you shall be with Me in Paradise.*

What's the difference? The text that had Jesus telling the thief he would be in paradise that day now has Jesus saying something completely different. The comma, commonly placed before the word - today - *Truly, I say to you, today you shall ...* - is now placed after it - *Truly, I say to you today, you shall …* - and the meaning changes. Jesus wasn't telling the thief where he would be immediately after death. He simply wanted to assure the dying thief at that moment - today - that he will one day have a place in Christ's kingdom. The context of the story is about the promise of eternal life; it wasn't about the nature of death.

In fact, why would Jesus tell the thief that he would be in paradise that day when Jesus didn't even go to paradise that day? Jesus died on Friday,

was in the tomb on Saturday, and was resurrected on Sunday. When Mary appeared to Him on Sunday morning, what did Jesus say to her?



Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

John 20:17

What does He mean when He says that He had not yet ascended to the Father, to heaven, to paradise, when two days earlier - on Friday - He supposedly told the thief that both would be in paradise that Friday? It means that Jesus hadn't told him that he would be in paradise that Friday. Instead He wanted to give the thief the hope of eternal life right there and then - *today.*

THE GOOD NEWS AND DEATH

The biblical evidence is powerful. The dead are unconscious and decayed until the resurrection. From the perspective of the living, that might not sound so pleasing, but for the dead it's another matter.

Have you ever been under general anaesthetic? If so, you know that from the instant you go under until you awake - be it twenty minutes or ten hours - no time seems to have passed. You closed your eyes, and the next thing you know is that you are awake.

Imagine, then, what it must be like for those who aren't merely in an induced sleep but, in fact, are dead. Whether they died thousands of years ago, or a week before the Second Coming, as far as they are concerned, as far as their own experience goes, it's the same - they close their eyes

and the next thing they know is that Jesus raises them from death and they have eternal life in Him. In the realm of time, what the dead in Christ experience is not that different from what they would experience were they, as the false teaching has it, to go right to their reward at death.

A POWERFUL DECEPTION

What about all those who claim to have met the dead or to have talked to them? What are we to make of that?

Most importantly, we must not forget that Satan *deceives the whole world* (Revelation 12:9), and false teaching about death remains one of his most evil and cunning deceptions. As long as someone understands the truth about what happens at death, however, that person is completely safe from all sorts of occult or New Age deceptions, almost all of which are premised on the idea of an immortal soul, a concept that is Greek, and not biblical in origin. God is the only one with inherent immortality. See 1 Timothy 6:16. And where humans are concerned, Jesus is the only one who has life in Himself. See John 5:26, and John 10:17-18.

The Bible teaches that the soul can be destroyed and, in some cases, it will be. Jesus Himself said:



And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matthew 10:28

Many confuse spirit and soul. Of man's creation God says: *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 (KJV) Dust *forms* our physical body; the spirit of life is *breathed* into us, and we *become* a *living soul,* or *being* as stated in the NKJV, with consciousness, intelligence, emotions and feelings. Adam did not exist before he was created. And death is the reverse of the creation process:



… till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.
Genesis 3:19

What about near-death experiences? So many stories have been told about people who, having been clinically dead, are revived, and then have given incredible accounts about an existence in another realm, including conversations with the dead.

So, what is going on here?

Again, we must remember that we are in the midst of a great controversy, and so we urge great caution, especially with such overwhelming biblical evidence that the dead are in unconscious sleep. Remember the conflict between Christ and Satan was brought to earth when God said, *You will surely die* (Genesis 2:17), and the devil countered with, *You will not surely die.* Genesis 3:4 It is the same issue we have to deal with. Who will you believe?

Also, these are not called near-death experiences for nothing. They're only near death, and to be near something isn't the same as to be there. None of these people were dead - as in rigor mortis dead - so we should be careful about what conclusions we draw from them about death. Just as you can't learn much about cirrhosis of the liver from looking at a beer commercial, you shouldn't draw too many conclusions about death from

the near death phenomenon. Having a near death experience is like nearly winning the lottery. It's vastly different to winning the lottery. And so it is with death, and near death experiences.

Thus, our only safety is to stick with the overwhelming number of Bible texts which make it clear that our beloved dead are asleep, and safely remain that way until waking up time - the resurrection - at the end of this world.

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Uncover the epic plan that overthrows death and assures us that death does not have the last word

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discover restoration

Uncover the epic plan that overthrows death and assures us that death does not have the last word

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discover restoration

Years ago, a Harvard biologist went to Haiti to investigate the phenomenon of, believe it or not - zombies!

Zombies? Like in the movies, such as *American Zombie, Swamp Zombies, Tokyo Zombie, Zombies Gone Wild, Vampires v. Zombies,* and so forth?

Not exactly - but closer than most of us might have thought.

Though a lot of myth and folklore in Haiti exists regarding zombies, there might also be something to them. In the 1980's, E. Wade Davis, an ethno-biologist, investigated the many reported sightings of zombies, people who had apparently died but then were reported to have later been seen alive. The most famous case was that of Mr. Clairvius Narcisse, who had been pronounced dead at the Albert Schweitzer Hospital in Deschapelles, but then turned up alive and well 18 years later, claiming to be an escaped zombie - or a *nzambi* - as zombies are called there.

What Wade claims to have discovered is that people are given a very powerful drug, extracted from the deadly puffer fish, that in just the right amount - too much leads to death - can make them appear dead, even to physicians. These people are buried, then quickly excavated, revived, and kept under drugs as slaves in a vast underground secret society known as the Bizango sect.

There's even a word for this - Zombification.

COMRADE LENIN

After the founder of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Lenin, died, some leaders - having a magical faith in the power of science - wanted to embalm Lenin, believing that eventually through Soviet science he would be brought back to life. The first key to this eventual resurrection was preserving the body. Despite their best efforts, though, the corpse kept decaying, and only by intensive work and constant attention was it preserved. Many claim much of it is just wax.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, some wanted him buried and done with. Others from the older generation wanted to keep him on display, which he still is. However, Lenin requires a lot of work. The corpse gets an extreme makeover every year and a half. The mausoleum is closed for two months, and the body is immersed in a bath of glycerol and potassium acetate for 30 days. Though it's said that Lenin now looks younger than he did for decades, no one is talking any more about him being resurrected.

Whether the context is supposed zombies, or the scientific resurrection of Comrade Lenin, there's no question that, as human beings, we live with the spectre of death. No matter who we are, how much money, position, or power we have, none of us are immune to death, which sooner or later always wins, despite our best efforts.

Thus, part of our own story, our own journey, is dealing with death. Not just the prospect of our own, which is bad enough, but with the death that we see all around us, the death that touches us, the death that scares us, that threatens us - and that is so hard to understand.

What we do understand, though, is that we are in the midst of a great controversy, a real battle between good and evil. And we have seen that sickness, suffering, and death are all part of this struggle.

At the same time, we have repeated the central claim of Christianity, which is that Jesus - though the Creator of the Universe - came down, took upon Himself our humanity, and bore in Himself the full brunt of all the evil in the world, in order to finally end that evil once and for all.

And one of the most central of all evils is death. Hence the promise:



The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

1 Corinthians 15:26

But, until then, we have to live with death, the most alien of intruders for beings such as ourselves who were never meant to die to begin with.

DEATH AS A SLEEP

As we have seen, contrary to popular notions, death for the Christian does not lead to an immediate soaring off to heaven. Instead:



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 any thing.

Ecclesiastes 9:5



His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

Psalm 146:4 KJV

These are just a few of many texts that show the dead are asleep, in an unconscious state.

However, is not this idea of death as an unconscious sleep similar to what atheists and secularists believe? What hope can we have if that is the fate of the dead?

RESURRECTION

In the last century, a man named Edmond Gurney lost three sisters in a boating accident on the Nile. Afterwards, he became obsessed with death, and realised that if death ended everything, life itself was hopeless and not worth living. He wrote: *... if I found in myself and all around me an absolute conviction that the individual ceased with the death of the body ... I should desire ... the immediate extinction of the race.*

Though a bit over the top, he still had a point, which is the pointlessness of this life were it to end permanently at death, and there was nothing more. God's promise, however, is that death is not the end, and that the grave does not have the final say. As we have seen already, Jesus came to give us eternal life:



For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

Eternal life - that is something radically different from the sleep in the grave. If the grave were the end of the story, then Hitler's end was no different from that of Mother Teresa's, and what kind of justice would that be?

Instead, as we have seen, the grave is only a temporary stop - a rest - until the Second Coming of Jesus, when those who have died in Him receive immortal bodies in a whole new existence.

Look at these texts, and especially look at what they promise.



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.

1Thessalonians 4:16-17

These verses are talking about the resurrection of the dead in Christ, which happens at the Second Coming of Jesus. As we also said before - for the dead, the moment they close their eyes, the next thing that they will know is the return of Jesus and the gift of eternal life.

In fact, as far as the dead are concerned, there is no delay in the Second Coming. Whether for Adam, who died thousands of years ago, or someone who dies a day before Jesus comes back, it's all the same. The promise of eternal life, as far as their own personal experience goes, comes instantly!

No wonder Jesus could say almost two thousand years ago:



And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

Revelation 22:12



He who testifies to these things says, Surely I am coming quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Revelation 22:20

And that's because, for all of us, the Second Coming of Christ is no longer than our own individual personal lifetimes. The Second Coming, and the resurrection of the righteous dead, is really never but a moment longer than our own span of existence here. No matter how long we live, we close our eyes in death, and as far as we are concerned, Jesus Christ returns a moment later.

As far as the dead are concerned, then, the Second Coming is instant. It's we - the living - we are the ones who are still waiting for it. But even then, especially considering how quickly our life passes by, the Second Coming isn't delayed at all. Thus, Jesus' words about how *quickly* He is coming …

THE MESSAGE OF THE STARS

Look at these texts:



Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption,

> ***and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has 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 these verses are teaching is something radically different from what science, rationality, and our own experience say to us. Those dead for thousands of years will be resurrected, *changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye* - given immortal bodies?

In this context, the following text in Hebrews becomes especially pertinent:



> ***Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.***
> *Hebrews 11:1*

Of course, we have to *hope* for the resurrection. It's our only hope. Without it, we are no different than road-kill as far as our eternal destiny goes. And yet, at the same time, the resurrection is something that we have not seen or experienced, and something that goes powerfully against what modern science tells us.

That's all true, but we have been given reasons to believe in it anyway.

Firstly, the Bible tells us that it will happen, and if we trust the Bible then we can trust in this promise.

Secondly, a young man had become a new Christian and came to understand that the dead sleep until the first resurrection when they will be raised from death and given immortality. But, having been a secularist,

he found it hard to believe in something so incredible, something so far beyond anything science or experience had ever shown him.

One day he walked into a bookstore and picked up a science magazine. It had a photo of a galaxy, and it said that there were hundreds of billions of such galaxies, and that each galaxy contained hundreds of billions of stars.

At that moment, his wavering about the resurrection vanished. The existence of billions and billions of stars - much more than the number of people who ever lived on earth - though not proving the resurrection of the dead, proved only that God had power and potential so much greater than the human mind could imagine. If God could create all these stars and sustain them, the young man thought, then certainly He had the power to resurrect the dead!

Though probably not what the Psalmist was thinking, these verses become relevant here:



The heavens declare the glory of God.
Psalm 19:1

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

And finally, we have the resurrection of Jesus. As we have studied, there is powerful evidence for His resurrection. In fact, His resurrection is really the only logical and sensible explanation for the events that followed His death. And, according to Paul, the reality of His resurrection is what gives us the assurance of our resurrection.



But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is

empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up - if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

1 Corinthians 15:13-20

Paul calls Jesus the *firstfruits of them who have fallen asleep*. That is, Christ was resurrected before we will be, hence the *firstfruits* - the first part of a harvest offered to the Lord. And in the certainty of His resurrection, we have the certainty of ours.

THE SECOND RESURRECTION

Because the dead sleep, the great hope for believers in Christ is found in their bodily resurrection, which happens at the Second Coming. This is what the Bible calls the first resurrection.



Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Revelation 20:6

But another resurrection comes later. We have studied the Millennium, and saw that this thousand years begins with the Second Coming, when the righteous dead are resurrected and brought to heaven, where *they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.* And, as we saw, for those same thousand years the earth sits desolate and empty of human life.

However, that isn't the end of the story.

Look at these verses:



But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand* years *were finished. ... Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

Revelation 20:5,7-9

Firstly, it says that *the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.* Who are these *rest of the dead?* They are those who weren't in the first resurrection. That is, they are the lost, those who did not accept the gift of eternal life in Jesus, those who chose to do it their own way.

Next it says that they did *not live again* until the thousand years ended. Considering the state of the dead, this can only mean that they slept in the grave until they were resurrected at the end of the thousand years.

They are not in hell fire or limbo or anywhere else - they sleep the sleep of death till they are awakened by the great Life-giver. This is the resurrection of condemnation that Jesus talked about.



Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

John 5:28-29

These are two different resurrections, but as far as the lost dead are concerned, this resurrection will seem - as with the saved - to come the moment after death, because there is no consciousness of time in death.

GOG AND MAGOG

These above texts in Revelation also talk about Satan being released from his prison - that is, as we saw, the desolated earth - after the thousand years. He then sets out *to deceive the nations,* and again we see the great deceiver at work. These *nations* are the lost, those who have been resurrected after the thousand years end. Thus Satan is released from prison at the same time the lost are raised from the dead. The number of these people is depicted *as the sands of the sea*. They are also called *Gog and Magog* - an Old Testament symbol of rebellion against God. See Ezekiel 38.

What do they do? The texts say that Satan, deceiving them as he had done while they lived before, gathered *them together to battle* against *the camp*

of the saints and the beloved city. This must be referring to the heavenly Jerusalem, shown as coming down to the earth:



Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

Revelation 21:1-3

Satan leads these hordes in an attack against God and His people in the New Jerusalem, one final assault in the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

What happens?



… and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

Revelation 20:9

This same idea is captured, in different imagery, in these texts, which come a few verses later:



Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:14-15

There is much more to study, and we will flesh this out more in the next booklet. What the Word of God shows us here, though, is a final judgment that will bring to an end, once and for all, the great controversy. Indeed, right after the depiction of the heavenly Jerusalem coming down, which is then attacked by Satan and the lost, we are given these words - words that clearly imply the final resolution of all that we have all gone through - words filled with hope for beings like us who have known only sin and death and the tears they bring:



And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Revelation 21:4

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discover justice

Uncover the good news that God's justice liberates us and will bring unfairness and injustice to an end

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discover justice

Life is not fair!

In his classic book *The Road Less Travelled*, Scott Peck says that this is one of the great certainties of existence – Life is not fair. He suggests the sooner we accept that fact, the sooner life makes sense.

But before the epic story ends, justice will be done.

THE COMING JUDGMENT

Centuries ago a German philosopher named Emmanuel Kant said that if you could accept one premise - just one - which is that *God is just*, then you had to assume that some sort of afterlife, in one form or another, had to exist.

Why?

Because, he argued - it was so patently obvious that God's justice was *not* being revealed in this life. If we were ever to see justice, it would have to be in another one!

And we will. The Bible is clear - God is a God of justice and judgment.

If we have learned anything about God's epic drama, it is that the story is still unfolding. Not until the end of the final scenes will the full significance of the story come into clear focus. God is just. Justice is a vital ingredient of love, just as grace, mercy and compassion are.

Look at these texts:



For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:14



But the LORD shall endure forever; He has prepared His throne for judgment. He shall judge the world in righteousness.

Psalm 9:7-8



And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Revelation 22:12



But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

Matthew 11:22



And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.

Hebrews 9:27



But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

2 Peter 3:7



Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come ...

Revelation 14:7

There are many other texts besides these, and though all appear in various contexts, the one point in all this is that God is a God of judgment, and justice will come. How could it not? How could a loving God, a just God, not at some point manifest the justice that is so lacking in this world now?



Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

Romans 12:19

God's people have always looked forward to the time when God's justice would be exercised. In fact they plead for it. The cry from God's people - *How long?* - is heard all through the Bible. For example, David cried to God: *How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?* Psalm 13:1

JUDGMENT AT THE CROSS

The Bible is clear that sin brings death, and once Adam and Eve sinned they should have died. They should have faced the righteous judgment of God against sin right then and there. God said very clearly: *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.* Genesis 2:17

The original language is unambiguous - that very day you eat from it you will die. Adam, though, didn't die - at least not that day. In fact he lived hundreds of years more.

Why not? Because the moment there was sin, there was a Saviour. God had a plan, that, should mankind rebel, He would make a way out.



He (Jesus) ***indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.***

1 Peter 1:20

When our first parents sinned against God, the foreordained plan was revealed and put into operation. He gave Adam and Eve the hope and promise of redemption, which was revealed to them and Satan in Genesis 3:15:



And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.

In Booklet 2, we saw that this verse revealed the hope of the gospel - that the serpent would one day be defeated. And we also saw that this defeat was made certain by the death of Jesus on the cross.

In other words, the judgment and the condemnation that Adam and Eve deserved for their sin - as well as the judgment and condemnation that we all deserve - fell on Jesus at the cross. He was judged there, and condemned there, in our place.



For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

John 3:16-17

Satan expected God to condemn the world. Instead, He sent Jesus to save it. And central to that salvation was the cross. Right there was an amazing revelation of God's character of love.

Look at these texts:



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



For He 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



Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree).

Galatians 3:13

Though expressed in different ways, all these texts teach the same thing, which is that Jesus paid in Himself the penalty for our sins. God executed His righteous judgment, His righteous wrath against sin, but He did it on the person of Jesus on the cross. Though innocent, He was judged guilty, so that we, though guilty, can be judged innocent.

Hence Christ's words just before going to the cross:



Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.

John 12:31

That was a turning point in the epic story - a revelation of both God's and the villain's characters. The world was to be judged, judged guilty, and yet

Jesus Himself would take that judgment upon Himself, thus assuring that Satan - the ruler of this world - would be cast out. That is, his doom would be certain.

THE SEPARATION

Jesus died as our substitute. We don't have to pay the penalty for our sins, because Jesus paid it for us. The moment we accept Jesus, our sins are covered and we are forgiven. The provision has been made for everyone. All we have to do is accept it for ourselves.

Of course, even a cursory reading of the Bible reveals that people will be judged and condemned in the end of days. There is going to be a separation between the saved and the lost, the justified and the condemned.

Look at these texts:



Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

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

And these:



When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

Matthew 25:31-33

And these:



And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matthew 10:28



If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Matthew 5:29-30

Hell is the final act of God in eliminating sin from His universe.

These texts, and others, are very clear that not only is there a hell, but there are going to be people cast into it and destroyed. There is going to be a final judgment, and those who have not been covered under the

blood of Jesus, those who have not claimed the righteousness of Christ for themselves, are going to have to stand before God in the full shame of their sin and evil.



For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:14

Every work, every secret thing, is to be brought into judgment before an all-knowing, all-seeing God. Who could stand before the scrutiny of God when every wrong thing that they have ever done is exposed?

No one. That's why we all need a Saviour - a substitute - now and in the judgment.

This final judgment, the eradication of rebellion and rebels once and for all, is what is known in the Bible as hell.

THE GREATEST INJUSTICE

TIME magazine once ran a cover article entitled, *What If There's No Hell?* It was about a popular American preacher who challenged the whole notion of anyone being condemned to burn in hell for eternity. He reacted so strongly against it that he wondered if it was all totally symbolic, and if, in the end, everyone would be saved.

He's wrong, at least on a couple of points. The Bible is clear - people will be judged, and condemned, if they are not forgiven. They have to be. Otherwise, what? Adolph Hitler winds up in the same place with all those whom he had murdered?

What kind of justice would that be?

Hell is real, and the fires are real, too. What he's right about, however, is the incredible injustice and absurdity of the idea of this hell fire burning people for eternity.

Talk about injustice! That would be the greatest one.

EVERLASTING DESTRUCTION

Look at this, one of the most quoted texts in the Bible:



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

Notice carefully one of two fates that await everyone. One is everlasting life, which is placed in contrast to what?

Everlasting torment?

No, it says *perish*. Perish, as in being destroyed. Perish, as in being gone forever. Perish, as in death - eternal death. The opposite of eternal life is not eternal torture, because that is still life - life in agony. The opposite of eternal life is eternal death, eternal destruction.



Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

2 Thessalonians 1:9

Everlasting what? Torment? Torture? Punishing? No, everlasting destruction. The end result is everlasting, eternal, which is death, oblivion, not torture in a hole in the earth as is popular belief.

The destruction is eternal, not the act itself of destroying.

Look at these texts:



Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

Matthew 7:13



Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things.

Philippians 3:19

Hell is real. The punishment is real. The fire is real. It's just not eternal. People are destroyed in hell, not eternally tormented there. In fact, the fire of hell is hotter than the common notion teaches, because in the Bible hell fire ultimately consumes the lost, destroys them completely, as opposed to tormenting them forever.

Look at the words of Jesus:



And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matthew 10:28

If ever a text proved that the soul wasn't immortal, or that hell wasn't eternal, this is it. What is the fate of those who face hell? They are destroyed, and that is not the same as eternal torment.



And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Matthew 25:46

The punishment, not the punishing itself, is eternal. The result, the punishment, which is death, lasts forever. Again, eternal death, eternal destruction, is the opposite of eternal life. And it is the fate that will await the lost in the second resurrection:



But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. ... Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

Revelation 20:5,7-9

The fire came down from God and did *what* to them? Started tormenting them forever and ever and ever? Of course not! Instead it says that it *devoured them.* Devoured, as in destroyed.



For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

It does not say the wages of sin is eternal life in torment. It says the gift of God is eternal life in happiness. The contrast is - death or everlasting life.

FOREVER

Talking about final punishment, the book of Revelation says of the lost that they shall be *tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.* Revelation 14:10-11

Isn't that eternal torment?

The book of Revelation is filled with language and imagery from the Old Testament, and in numerous places in the Old Testament the word forever, and the concept behind it, means something different than what we commonly associate it with today.

For example, talking about Jonah in the belly of the whale, the Bible says:



I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God.

Jonah 2:6

Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days - not forever - and yet that is the word he used.

The book of Genesis tells about the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. The New Testament, referring to those cities as an example of the fate of the lost, says: *Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.* Jude 1:7

Eternal fire? Those places aren't still burning. No, they were destroyed. If an eternal fire were still burning there, they would be easy to find. The idea of eternal, in this context, means completed, fulfilled, eternally accomplished. This is the kind of language the Bible uses.

When Scripture referred to God bringing judgment upon a place, such as Jerusalem, it talked about him destroying the place with a fire *that shall not be quenched*. Jeremiah 7:20 A fire not quenched? Does that mean it's burning forever? How could it? There is no eternally burning fire there. Instead, it's biblical language that gives the idea of completion, of fulfilment, the idea that the fire will do its work and nothing can stop it.

THE END

One of the devil's most successful pictures to distort God's character is to present Him as a tyrant that tortures sinners throughout eternity. That is the issue at the heart of the great conflict - Is God love as He claims, or is He ruthless and unjust? How the devil must rejoice as he sees people taking up his arguments, and presenting them as truth, in the name of Christ! No wonder there have been more infidels created through the doctrine of an eternally burning hell then through any other false teaching.

Psalm 37:10 reads:



For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more.

The wicked shall be *no more*. In a real sense, the lost go back to the nothingness out of which we all came.

And so the epic story nears its conclusion. A loving God will not let sin, suffering, heartache and pain go on forever. He is not a tyrant. He waits, because He loves us, wanting as many as possible to choose Him. *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.* 2 Peter 3:9

No one is in hell yet. Hell is still future. It is God's final act of eradicating sin from His universe. He does it by fire, and it is only for those who reject his offer of everlasting life.

NOTES

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Uncover when God's final judgment begins and how that affects us

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discover judgment

Uncover when God's final judgment begins and how that affects us

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discover judgment

What do Lindy Chamberlain and O.J. Simpson have in common? Both were arrested in cases that involved innocent deaths. The difference? Lindy spent years in jail for a crime that she never committed, while O.J. walked free from one he most certainly did.

Why, though, be surprised? Human courtrooms, even in free and open societies, often get it wrong. After all, who hasn't heard of stories - especially in recent years with the advancement of DNA testing - of men or women who have spent years, even decades, behind bars, only later to be exonerated?

VENGEANCE IS MINE

One can only imagine the incredible injustices done through history by human courts. Some of the most insane were the witch hunts in Europe. In some trials, the accused women would be held under water. If they drowned, they were innocent - if they survived, it proved that they were witches and, thus, were burned at the stake.

However, time and again the Bible talks about God as a God of justice, and we can be certain that He will make no mistakes. Look at this text:



For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:14

The God who knows *every secret thing* is a loving God, a forgiving God, but also a God of justice, who has also promised:



Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them.

Deuteronomy 32:35



For we know Him who said, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord. And again, The LORD will judge His people.

Hebrews 10:30

No question, God is a God of judgment, and judgment and justice will be executed. We already saw, in the booklet on hell, a great example of the justice of His judgment, in that, contrary to the horrific notion of eternal torment, God's justice will bring final destruction to the lost. They will return to the nothingness out of which they arose; a far cry from billions and billions of aeons writhing in the fires of hell. As we said, such a punishment would, in itself, be the greatest injustice.

GOD JUDGED?

The charges Lucifer made when he rebelled against God in a sense put God on trial. Was God what He claimed to be, or were Lucifer's accusations true? It's the greatest trial ever to take place.

That's why there's another element of judgment in the Bible that many people miss. Though aspects of this concept are found throughout Scripture, one of the first explicit explanations occurs in Psalm 51. King David had committed a horrible crime. After he confessed and repented of his sins, he wrote:



Have mercy upon me, O God ... blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. … Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight; that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.

Psalm 51:1-4

What did he say? He asked the Lord to blot out his sins, to wash him and cleanse him so that ... what?



… that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.

God found just when He speaks? God *blameless* when He judges?

The text gives the idea that God Himself is going to be judged on how He deals with David's sin. In other words, God Himself is going to face scrutiny regarding how He has dealt with erring humans.

The idea is picked up also in the New Testament, which quotes from this Psalm on that same subject. Talking about the sinfulness of humanity, Paul wrote:



Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged.

Romans 3:4

The same idea appears again, which is that God Himself is going to be judged on His interaction with humanity. The Authorised Standard Version translates it like this: *That thou mightest be justified in thy words, and mightest prevail when thou comest into judgment.*

God Himself, coming into judgment? Though the idea, at first, might seem blasphemous or even absurd, when you understand the context, it not only makes sense, it also makes God appear more just, kind, fair, and loving than ever. God is so open that He puts Himself on trial - open to judgment. That's what the epic story is unveiling. It's the big picture. Miss the big picture, and the personal stuff on earth becomes distorted.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

All through these booklets, we have come back to the crucial theme of the great controversy, which began with the rebellion against God in heaven. We saw, in earlier studies, that Satan sought to usurp the throne of God. There is cosmic warfare going on, and the issues in it are bigger and broader than what happens here on earth. Would not even some of these beings have questions about the horrible situation here on earth? And they, indeed, are watching: *... for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.* 1 Corinthians 4:9

Among the issues at stake is the character of God Himself. Look back at those texts we just saw. God Himself is going to be judged. This is not in the same way as people are judged guilty or innocent, but in the sense of how He dealt with the whole rebellion. The universe is watching.

After all, for many people, the biggest question about the existence of God is usually around one issue - why is there evil and suffering? If God is all powerful, all loving, and all knowing, why do we go through so much here?

Personally, haven't we suffered great injustices in our own stories? And we've seen others suffer in theirs, and wondered about the fairness of it all? Who hasn't asked - *Why has God allowed all this to happen?*

With these ideas in mind, look at the following texts:



And I heard the angel of the waters saying: You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things.

Revelation 16:5



And I heard another from the altar saying, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.

Revelation 16:7

They are praising God for the kind of judgments that He had executed. What we can see here is called theodicy. It comes from two Greek words that together mean the justification of God. Not justification in the sense that we need to be justified, forgiven our sins, but in the sense that we will see the love and goodness and justice of God, despite all the terrible things that have happened.

MY REWARD

In the Bible, all sorts of judgments occur. Jesus, we saw, was judged at the cross, condemned in our stead. There is a judgment at the end of the millennium when the lost are destroyed forever, reaping the just reward of their sins.

But the Bible also clearly teaches another kind of judgment, a pre-Advent judgment, a judgment that occurs before Jesus returns.

Look at this text:



And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

Revelation 22:12

This text makes it clear that before the Second Coming of Christ a divine reckoning or judgment takes place. If His reward is with Him, there must have been some sort of pre-Advent judgment, some sort of decision making that determined who got what reward.

What can we know about this judgment?

THE SCOPE OF HISTORY

We pick up the story with the sequence of kingdoms in the vision of Daniel 2, which we covered in an earlier booklet, with the statue made of various metals. It can be summarised like this:

Babylon
Media-Persia
Greece
Rome
Kingdom of God - Second Coming

We saw, too, in the study on the change of the Sabbath to Sunday, that Daniel 7 gave a parallel sequence of the same nations, only now with a bit more detail. In Daniel 7, Daniel the prophet had a dream in which four beasts rose out of the sea. See Daniel 7:1-3.

Later in the chapter, he is told that these four beasts represent *four kings* (Daniel 7:17) or kingdoms that will arise over the centuries, and these are

the same four kingdoms of Daniel 2 - Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The chapter then ends with God's eternal kingdom, as did Daniel 2.

Daniel 7, however, spends a great deal of time on the fourth kingdom - Rome - and especially the little horn power that arises out of Rome.

What is fascinating, however, is that just after the depiction of Rome in Daniel 7:23-25, the Bible then talks about a heavenly judgment that eventually leads to God's kingdom.

Look at what immediately follows the description of Rome's little horn and before the second coming of Jesus:



But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever. Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.
Daniel 7:26-27

A divine court takes place, and the result is the final and eternal kingdom - the one that Jesus will create on earth after the Second Coming and the millennium, as we saw earlier.

The point here is that before the Second Coming of Jesus, before the establishment of God's final kingdom, there is a judgment - a judgment that leads directly to God's kingdom.

THE BOOKS WERE OPENED

This crucial reality is seen even more clearly earlier in the same chapter. After describing more activity of the little horn power in Daniel 7:7-8, the following scene is depicted. The Roman power is in regular type, and *the heavenly judgment in italics*.



I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things. ***I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.***

Daniel 7: 8-10 KJV

Talk about a heavenly judgment scene! Books opened, thousand thousands ministered to him, the court was seated, and the books were opened. If this is not a heavenly judgment - what is? God is not conducting a secret trial, hidden from view. No, many heavenly beings are there and books are open, which implies scrutiny - a biblical theme. God knows all things, yes. But we have to remember that thousands and thousands up there don't. Again, keep in mind the great controversy scenario. Other beings could easily have questions as well as we do. And now there's a judgment going on, open for them all to see just how God will judge.

For our purposes, though, the crucial point is that this judgment occurs before God establishes His final kingdom. That is, this is a pre-Advent judgment, a judgment that occurs before Christ returns.

Thus, if you were to place Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 together, they would look like this:

Daniel 2	**Daniel 7**
Babylon	Babylon
Media-Persia	Media-Persia
Greece	Greece
Rome	Rome
Heavenly Judgment	
God's Eternal Kingdom	God's Eternal Kingdom

The crucial point now is that there is a massive judgment scene going on in heaven. And the end result of this judgment is that God's eternal kingdom is established. Thus, this pre-Advent judgment is a big deal.

More so, it's good news for God's people, because this judgment leads to *the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.* Daniel 7:27

THE CLEANSING OF THE SANCTUARY

Each vision in Daniel builds on and expands the previous one. Deeper insight into the nature of this judgment comes from Daniel 8. As in Daniel 2 and 7, a sequence of kingdoms appear, now though depicted with the symbols of a ram, a goat, and a little horn - like the little horn that symbolised papal Rome in Daniel 7. The vision then ends with Daniel 8:14, which reads: *And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.*

The first fourteen verses of the chapter, the vision itself, could be summarised like this:

DANIEL 8

Ram – Goat – Little Horn – Sanctuary cleansed

The second half of Daniel 8 then interprets the first half. This is what it says:



The ram which you saw, having the two horns - they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece.

Daniel 8:20-21

Unlike Daniel 2 and 7, this vision skips Babylon, probably because at the time it was written the Babylonian empire was on its way out. But notice how two of the kingdoms are named outright, two of the same kingdoms that appeared in Daniel 2 and 7. The rest of the explanation goes into depicting the little horn, which arises after these two - a persecuting

power, which, as in Daniel 2 and 7, was Rome - both pagan and papal. It then ends with that kingdom being *broken without hands* (Daniel 8:25), symbolic of a supernatural demise, just like the stone kingdom in Daniel 2 that was cut out *without hands,* a symbol of the end of this world at the Second Coming of Jesus. See Daniel 2:34.

Thus, we could summarise the interpretation of the Daniel 8 vision like this:

Media Persia
Greece
Rome
Sanctuary Cleansed
Second Coming

Look familiar?

The parallels between Daniel 2, Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 are obvious:

Daniel 2	**Daniel 7**	**Daniel 8**
Babylon	Babylon	
Media-Persia	Media-Persia	Media-Persia
Greece	Greece	Greece
Rome	Rome	Rome
Heavenly Judgment	**Sanctuary Cleansed**	
God's Eternal Kingdom	God's Eternal Kingdom	God's Eternal Kingdom

THE SANCTUARY ANGLE

Notice that the pre-Advent judgment scene in Daniel 7 parallels the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8. Daniel 8, however, brings in the crucial element of the sanctuary, which we studied back in Booklet 5. We saw that the sanctuary was a symbolic presentation of the entire plan of salvation. The sacrifices of the animals, and ministry of the priesthood, symbolised the work of Jesus, not only as our Sacrifice but as our High Priest in the sanctuary in heaven.

Yes, the Bible teaches that there is a real sanctuary in heaven, and that after His death and resurrection, Jesus now ministers there in our behalf.

Look at these texts:



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 8:1-2

What the author had done in the previous chapters in Hebrews was explain the work of the priests in the earthly sanctuary service, which we have already studied. He then explains that they were symbols of the work that Jesus, our High Priest, is doing for us now in the heavenly sanctuary, the one that is clearly depicted in the book of Hebrews.

There's much to get into on this fascinating topic, including the timing.* What's crucial for us now, however, is that the sanctuary element adds the most important component of all, and that is grace.

Yes, there is this pre-Advent judgment that will lead directly to God's eternal kingdom. That's so clear from Daniel 7. And that judgment is also given, we are told, *to the saints of the Most High.* Or, as the New English Version translates it, judgment was *rendered in favour of the holy ones of the Most High.* Daniel 7:22

Is that favourable judgment because these people are sinless, flawless, and perfect? No; it is because of the righteousness of Jesus, which covers them in the judgment, a theme that is taught in the sanctuary service. That's why the introduction of the sanctuary theme in Daniel 8, and its cleansing, is good news. It shows us that, yes, though judgment is coming, we have Jesus, the Lamb who was slain for us as our substitute. And we also have Jesus, our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, and according to the Bible that's good news too. *Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.* Hebrews 7:25

Thus, because of what the sanctuary reveals to us about Jesus, and what He has done and is doing for us, we can know that *there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1) - not now and not in the pre-Advent judgment.

We will wait long and in vain for justice and fair judgment here in this world. That's why our great hope is in the justice and judgment of God - the pre-Advent judgment that culminates in His Second Coming.

Events in the world are signalling that the epic story is building to a dramatic showdown. The preaching of the gospel, with God's final appeal, includes this urgency: *... having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth ... saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give*

glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come. Revelation 14:6-7 Meanwhile, in the courts of heaven too, the pre-advent judgment is in process, and will soon end. When that judgment ends, every person's destiny is forever sealed. It's too late to change your mind then.

God has revealed this to us so that we have the assurance that He who promised He would come, will come. God's time frame knows no haste and no delay. As a consequence of God's openness and fairness, another outcome of the judgment is that ultimately all will see that God is what He has always claimed to be. For it is written: *As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.* Romans 14:11

* For a detailed explanation of the timing for the start of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the pre-advent judgment, see supplementary material.

2300 DAYS

In the 19th century, Russian author Feodor Dostoyevsky created a character who was going to do a study on why more people did not kill themselves.

Not kill themselves?

Yes, because the character understood that more and more people were denying the existence of God, of Heaven, or of any kind of final judgment in which all the injustice meted out here would somehow be made right. Thus, with this life being so miserable, so hard, and with no hope of anything beyond the short and often painful spasm of cellular metabolism here - the character wondered why people even bothered not to just end it all now.

Of course, in these studies we have viewed life from a completely different angle - an angle based on the teaching of the Bible, which shows among many other things that not only does God exist but that justice will come. There will be a judgment. That's good news!

In fact, we have already seen that the Bible teaches about various phases of the judgment that will occur in the final days of earth's history. In Booklet 17, for instance, we saw a general time frame when a judgment occurs in Heaven, a judgment that precedes the Second Coming of Jesus, a judgment that is clearly given in favour of God's people. In this supplement we are going to look at this judgment in more detail, because it helps us understand how, as believers in Jesus, we can have complete assurance of salvation.

PARALLEL PROPHECIES

In previous booklets we have seen that Daniel 2, 7, and 8 were long-range time prophecies showing the scope of world history from the time of ancient Babylon up until the end of the world. The following is a summary of what we discovered:

Daniel 2	Daniel 7	Daniel 8
Babylon	Babylon	
Media-Persia	Media-Persia	Media-Persia
Greece	Greece	Greece
Rome	Rome	Rome
	Pre-advent Judgment	**Sanctuary Cleansed**
God's Eternal Kingdom	God's Eternal Kingdom	God's Eternal Kingdom

We saw in Booklet 17 that the pre-Advent judgment scene in Daniel 7 is the same thing as the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8. Daniel 8, however, brings in the crucial element of the sanctuary, which we studied in Booklet 5. We saw that the sanctuary was a symbolic presentation of the entire plan of salvation. The sacrifices of the animals and the ministry of the priesthood symbolised the work of Jesus, not only as our Sacrifice but as our High Priest in the sanctuary in Heaven.

What's fascinating, however, is that in Daniel 8 we are given a very specific time prophecy concerning the start of this judgment. As the summary above shows, Daniel 8 is about Media-Persia, Greece, Rome -

both pagan and papal, and then the sanctuary being cleansed, which is depicted in Daniel 8:14: *And he said to me, For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.*

Thus, we are given a precise time frame for this cleansing of the sanctuary.

When do the 2300 days end? What is that date? And what does it mean for us today?

AN INCOMPLETE EXPLANATION

The dream of Daniel 2 is followed by a complete explanation of the dream. The vision of Daniel 7 is followed by a complete explanation. Daniel 8 is also a vision, but only a partial explanation is given. Daniel 8 ends with Daniel saying he didn't understand part of the vision shown to him. It wasn't explained, as was the rest of the vision.



And the vision of the evenings and mornings (means days in Daniel 8:14) ***which was told is true; therefore seal up the vision, for it refers to many days in the future. And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it.***

Daniel 8:26-27

Of the four elements in the vision of Daniel 8 - ram, goat, little horn, and the sanctuary cleansed - only the part about the sanctuary being cleansed - *the vision of the evenings and mornings* - was not explained.

Thus, Daniel 8 ends with Daniel not understanding the part about the 2300 days - the time for the start of the pre-advent judgment.

DANIEL 9

Now we come to Daniel 9. One point here cannot be overemphasised: Nowhere in this chapter is Daniel asking for an explanation about anything. The bulk of the chapter consists of Daniel's prayer about the captivity of his people - that's it.

The crucial point is that the only thing that Daniel does not understand is the timing of the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14.

Now, in Daniel 9, after Daniel offers his prayer, confessing his sins and the sins of Israel - what happened?



Yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand.

Daniel 9:21-22

Skill to understand about what? Obviously, about the last thing he didn't understand from the previous Daniel 8 vision.

Look what follows. Gabriel then says to Daniel:



At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision.

Daniel 9:23

Understand the vision? What vision? Well, the last vision that Daniel had - the part he didn't understand - the vision about the 2300 *evenings and mornings* of Daniel 8:14.

Note, there are two different words for vision in Daniel 8 - one word for the whole vision, (*chazon*) and another specifically for the vision of the 2300 days (*mareh*). Interestingly enough, the same word for vision (*mareh*) is the exact word that Gabriel uses when he says to Daniel - *understand the vision (mareh).*

Also, what kind of vision was the prophecy of Daniel 8:14? It was a time prophecy. What is the next thing that Gabriel says to Daniel after he tells him to understand the time prophecy of Daniel 8:14?

He immediately says to him, *Seventy weeks are determined for your people ...* Daniel 9:24

What kind of prophecy is that? Of course, it's a time prophecy as well. Thus, it's very clear that Gabriel has now come back to give him the explanation about the time prophecy - the 2300 days - that Daniel had not understood when Daniel 8 ended.

DAY-YEAR PRINCIPLE

So, we have two time prophecies: the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14, and the 70 week prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27.

2300 Days (Years)

70 weeks = 490 days (Years)

Why, though, have we converted the days into years?

Again, these are prophecies given in symbols and metaphors. Daniel 8 comes in symbols - ram, goat, and a little horn. Thus, the time element itself is symbolic as well. Hence, the day-year principle is needed in Daniel 8. As we studied in the 1260 days supplementary material, we need to apply the day-year principle in symbolic prophecies like these.

Also, Daniel 8 itself started with Media-Persia, many centuries before Christ, and goes through Greece, and Rome - both pagan and papal - into the future even from our time. A literal 2300 days is less than seven years. How could the vision, which covers such a long span of history, climax with a time prophecy that covers less than seven years? Makes no sense. Apply the day-year principle and suddenly it turns into 2300 years - a vast span of time that fits so much better the range and scope of the prophecy than does a mere seven years. This is another good reason why the prophecy calls for the day-year principle.

It's the same with the 70 weeks - 70 weeks with 7 days a week comes to 490 days.

As we have seen, Daniel 8 and 9 are two parts of the same prophecy - Chapter 9 giving an explanation of Chapter 8 - and both need the day-year principle. Thus, with the day-year principle it becomes 490 years. This truth will be become more obvious as we continue.

THE SEVENTY-WEEK PROPHECY

As we saw, Daniel didn't understand the 2300 year vision (*mareh*) of Daniel 8:14. In Chapter 9, the same angel - Gabriel - comes to give him the

explanation of that vision (*mareh*), and he starts out with a time prophecy - the 70 weeks.

Here's the prophecy as a whole. After Gabriel tells Daniel to *consider the vision* (*mareh*), he says:



Seventy weeks are determined
For your people and for your holy city,
To finish the transgression,
To make an end of sins,
To make reconciliation for iniquity,
To bring in everlasting righteousness,
To seal up vision and prophecy,
And to anoint the Most Holy.
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;
The street shall be built again, and the wall,
Even in troublesome times.
And after the sixty-two weeks
Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;
And the people of the prince who is to come
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.
The end of it shall be with a flood,
And till the end of the war desolations are determined.
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.

And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,
Even until the consummation, which is determined,
Is poured out on the desolate.
Daniel 9:24-27

Though there's much in this prophecy worth studying, we need to concentrate on a few points.

Firstly, it says *seventy weeks are determined*. The Hebrew word for *determined* is literally cut off. Thus, the 70 weeks - or the 490 years - are cut off. Cut off from what? Obviously, from the unexplained larger time prophecy - the 2300 years. Hence, we can see more evidence about how closely related these two time prophecies are. The 70 weeks is just a small part of the larger 2300 day prophecy. And because the 2300 days needs the day-year principle, the 70 weeks does as well.

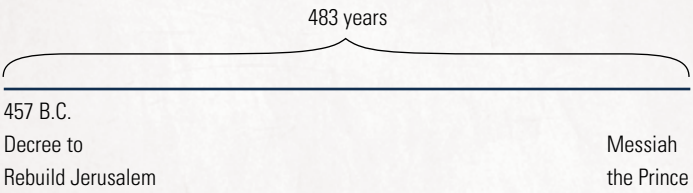
It says 70 weeks - or 490 years - are cut off from the 2300 day prophecy. But when does the prophecy itself begin? We are immediately told:



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.
Daniel 9:25

From the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the Messiah the Prince will be 7 weeks and 62 weeks, which comes out to 69 weeks. Thus, right away, 69 of the 70 weeks are accounted for. If we apply the day-year principle - as we must - 483 years of the 490 years are covered here.

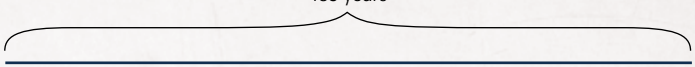
The command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel wrote after the ancient city had been destroyed by the Babylonians) can be accurately dated to the year 457 B.C. - a date, by the way, that Sir Isaac Newton used for this prophecy.



THE MESSIAH THE PRINCE

The word *Messiah* is the translation of the Hebrew word meaning anointed one. The word *Christ* is the translation of the Greek word meaning anointed one. Thus the prophecy states that from the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (457 B.C), *until the Messiah the Prince* (Daniel 9:25), will be 483 years. The Messiah the Prince is, of course, Jesus the Christ. It's no coincidence then that if you go from 457 B.C and add 483 years you come to the year 27 A.D. This is allowing for the conversion from B.C. to A.D., which adds one year, because there is no year zero. Thus instead of 26 - which you get it you subtract 457 from 483 - the date comes to 27 A.D.

Our best historical records show that John the Baptist baptised Jesus in the Jordan in 27 A.D.



God leaves us in no doubt about this. He tells us specifically when Jesus of Nazareth became Jesus Christ - the anointed one:

… how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Acts 10:38

It was at his baptism that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and began His public ministry as the Christ, and Luke, in his gospel, gives us the exact time. Notice this:

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Luke 3:1-3

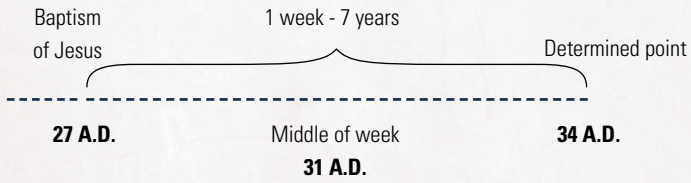
It's no coincidence that history confirms that the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar was 27 A.D. But it continues:

> ***When all the people were baptised, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptised; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him.***
>
> *Luke 3:21-22*

The fact that this points to Jesus is more proof of the day-year principle, because if we were dealing with literal time - a mere 69 weeks - the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (457 B.C.) would not get us anywhere near the known dates of Jesus, which is in the first century A.D. With the day-year principle, the problem is solved.

The prophecy, talking about the Messiah - Jesus - also says:

> ***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*



This verse brings in the last week - the last 7 years, as the first 483 years have already been covered. Thus, the full 490 years - which started with 457 B.C. - are now accounted for in the prophecy.

What does it mean that in the *middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering?* Earlier, the prophecy said that the *Messiah shall be cut off* (Daniel 9:26), a clear reference to the death of Jesus. In fact, history shows that Jesus was baptised in the Jordan River in 27 A.D., and it was exactly three and a half years later that He went to the cross, where He was *cut off, but not for Himself.* Daniel 9:26 No - He was *cut off* for the sins of the world. The Scripture shows in Mark 15:38 that, at the moment of His death, the veil in the earthly sanctuary was supernaturally ripped apart. This symbolised the official end of the sacrifices having any true meaning, because their fulfilment was met in Jesus. Sacrifices were still carried out in the Temple itself until it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., but they had no more prophetic significance than do the slaughter of animals today.

The middle of that last week - after 3½ years - comes to 31 A.D., the date that Jesus was indeed crucified - *cut off.*

Finally, the idea that *He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week* is often linked with the stoning of the first Christian martyr - Stephen. See Acts 7. This occurred in 34 A.D - the end of the 490-year prophecy. At this point, the covenant promises made to Israel itself were now given to whoever believed in Jesus - Jew or Gentile.



And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:29

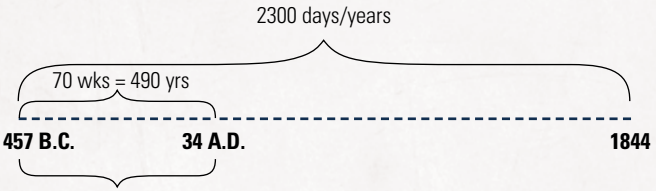
THE YEAR 1844

Here's a chart that shows the essence of the Daniel 8:14 prophecy:



Though there's much more here in this prophecy that could be explored, for our immediate purposes there are two crucial points. Firstly, the 490-year prophecy is cut off from the larger 2300-year prophecy. Secondly, the starting point of the 490 years, and hence the 2300 years - which was not given a starting point in Daniel 8 - is 457 B.C.

Let's look at the two prophecies together - for they really are one:



70 weeks (Daniel 9) cut off from the vision (mareh) of the 2300 days (Daniel 8).

When we cut off the 490-year prophecy from 2300 years, what do we get?

$$\begin{array}{r} 2300 \\ -\ 490 \\ \hline 1810 \end{array}$$

So 1810 years beyond the end of the 70 weeks or 490 years, which is 34 A.D., brings us to 1844.

The cleansing of the sanctuary of Daniel 8:14 starts in the year 1844. With the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem as the starting point, when you add 2300 years, remembering the shift from B.C. to A.D., you get the year 1844. If you start with 34 A.D. - the end point of the 490 years - and simply add the remaining 1810 years - you come to 1844 as well.

The 2300 years of Daniel 8:14 reach to 1844 - the longest prophetic time period in the Bible, and the one that brings us from antiquity into the modern era.

What's fascinating, too, about this date, is that it harmonises with the other supplemental lesson, where we saw that the date of the little horn's persecution would end about the year 1798. As we saw, it was after that date that this pre-Advent judgment began. Thus, the year 1844 fits perfectly with that prophecy in Daniel 7.

IN FAVOUR OF THE SAINTS

Hence, the beginning of the cleansing of the sanctuary is in the year 1844. That's when the pre-advent judgment begins, so powerfully depicted in Daniel 7 like this:



A fiery stream issued
And came forth from before Him.
A thousand thousands ministered to Him;
Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.

The court was seated,
And the books were opened.
Daniel 7:10



And a judgment was made in favour of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.
Daniel 7:22

This judgment, which began in 1844, is made in favour of the saints. Indeed, it's so much in their favour that when it's over they posses God's eternal kingdom. That is, when this judgment ends, Jesus returns, the world as we know it is gone, and the saints get their kingdom.

If that's not important - what is?

Remember, too, that this is a judgment in favour of God's people. Why? Is it because they are perfect? No, it's because Jesus died as their substitute and is now their High Priest in Heaven. And so now they stand in the judgment covered by His righteousness, His holiness - and not their own, because their own is not good enough - not even close. See Isaiah 64:6.

In the earthly sanctuary model, when the sanctuary was cleansed (Leviticus 16), atonement was made for all the people because blood was shed in their behalf - blood that symbolised the death of Jesus. This once a year ritual - known as the Day of Atonement - is the earthly symbol, the earthly type, of the judgment depicted in Daniel 8:14. And the good news about this judgment is that, all through Leviticus 16, atonement was being made for the children of Israel. Atonement is always the work of God on behalf of His people, to do for them what they cannot do for themselves - which is save them from their sins.

Thus, this Old Testament Day of Atonement symbolises the time that we are living in now - a time dedicated to the work of God in bringing us into His eternal kingdom.

That's why this judgment - the pre-Advent judgment which began in 1844 - says to us: The end is near. Be covered by the blood of Jesus, which becomes our covering when *we walk by faith, not by sight.*
2 Corinthians 5:7

In the light of the Epic story, while on earth the forces of evil are marshalling their final assault on God's people (Daniel 8 and Revelation 13), in Heaven, the pre-advent judgment is in process (Daniel 8). God's final three angels' messages (Revelation 14:6-12) bring these two into focus, with a powerful call and urgent warning that the end is near.



Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth - to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people - saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.
And another angel followed, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.
Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His

indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.

Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 14:6-12

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discover allegiance

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It's said that the race to become the next prime minister begins the day after the last election is ended. And only one emerges victorious. And in the cosmic epic drama that we have seen - only one side emerges victorious. The good news is - good wins!



For it is written: As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.
Romans 14:11

See also Philippians 2:9-11.

So how does this conflict climax?

THE FINAL SHOWDOWN

There will be a final showdown on planet earth, a climactic end-time struggle in which only one emerges victorious. Christ wins, Satan is vanquished, and those redeemed by the blood of Jesus share in the fruits of His victory. In a real sense, the outcome was assured at the cross. The battle for us is simply to choose whose side we want to be on in the final showdown - the winner's or the loser's.

Yes, Satan has been waging war on earth ever since his fall from heaven. The book of Revelation - often in highly symbolic language, mostly drawn directly from the Old Testament - depicts various aspects of his battle against God and humanity. We now want to look at his final and most furious effort this side of the Second Coming.

To do so, we start with Revelation 13, a book filled with symbols of beasts. In the Bible, beasts are often symbols of political and military powers and empires. We have seen that in Daniel 7, which we will come back to.

Revelation 13 opens with a description of a powerful anti-God power - often described as the anti-Christ, which we saw in Booklet 13 doesn't necessarily mean against Christ but can also mean in place of Christ.

Look at these texts:



Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marvelled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him? And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Revelation 13:1-7

What is this power?

THE BEAST OF DANIEL 7

Interestingly enough, however bizarre the symbolism of this beast, we have encountered some of it before. In Daniel 7, which we studied in Booklet 13 (on the change of the Sabbath), the prophet had a dream in which he saw four beasts rise out of the sea - beasts that represented four great empires, symbolised by their kings. We saw, too, that these were the same four kingdoms that appeared in Daniel 2. Here's a summary of these four kingdoms in Daniel 7:4-7.

The first was like a *lion* with eagles' wings - representing Babylon.
The second was like a *bear,* and raised itself on one side - Media Persia.
The third was like a *leopard* with four heads and four wings - Greece.
The fourth was *dreadful, terrible,* and strong, with iron teeth and ten horns - Rome.

The vision spent a great deal of time on the fourth power - the Roman one - first shown in its pagan phase, but then the emphasis switched to its papal one. (A review of Booklet 13 would be very helpful here.)

Daniel's attention was then drawn to the ten horns on the fourth beast:



The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; he shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings. He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.

Daniel 7:24-25

THE PAPACY IN PROPHECY

Notice the similarities between the composite beast in Revelation 13 and what appears in Daniel 7. The beast in Revelation 13 has the characteristics of a lion, a leopard, and a bear - symbols of three of the four beasts in Daniel 7. The composite beast in Revelation 13 also has ten horns, as did the fourth beast of Daniel 7. Thus, immediately we see that Revelation 13 points back to and expands on Daniel 7 - just as Daniel 7 built on and expanded on Daniel 2.

Thus, we see here another depiction of the Papacy - the power that has changed God's law by seeking to replace the seventh-day Sabbath with Sunday, a day that has no Scriptural authority.

But there's more. The composite beast in Revelation 13 was a blasphemous power, *speaking great things and blasphemies* (Revelation 13:5) - a parallel depiction of the little horn, the last phase of the fourth beast in Daniel 7, which is also said to *speak pompous words against the Most High.* Daniel 7:25

Blasphemous, pompous words?

Though endless examples could be used, some of the most recent come from the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the first catechism published since the Middle Ages.

For example, in the Gospels, after Jesus had healed a crippled man, He said the following to him: *Man, your sins are forgiven you.* Luke 5: 20

Look at what happened next.



And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?

Luke 5:21

They were right. What man can forgive someone's sin? No man - *but God alone.* Of course, as we have seen, Jesus was God, so He could forgive sin.

Notice, the following quote from the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995, New York: Doubleday, 1995, No. 982

The church cannot forgive?

Or this quote:

By Christ's will, the Church possesses the power to forgive the sins of the baptised. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 986

The church forgives sin? Hardly. That forgiveness comes only, and directly, from God Himself, with no need of any earthly institution as a mediator. A careful look at the institution of the Papacy itself shows the entire structure is built around the concept that the salvation offered every human through Jesus Christ must be mediated through the institution of the Roman Catholic Church itself - an idea that's blasphemous to the core, for it puts the church, in fact, in place of God.

The church is catholic; she proclaims the fullness of the faith. She bears in herself and administers the totality of the means of salvation. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 868

These are just a few of the many examples of how, over the long centuries, the institution of the Papacy has sought to usurp the role that belongs only to God. Note again that anti-Christ means also in place of Christ. Hence, we see the depiction of it both in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 as a blasphemous power.

THE PERSECUTION

Another common feature of the little horn of Daniel 7 and the composite beast of Revelation 13 is that of persecution. Both persecuted the saints - God's faithful people. In Daniel 7, it was said that the saints were given into his hands for *a time and times and half a time*. Daniel 7:25 In Revelation 13, one phase of the beast power is described like this: *And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.* Revelation 13:5 The verses then go on to describe its activities, which include the power to *make war with the saints and to overcome them.* Revelation 13:7

See the supplementary material on the time aspect of this prophecy of three and a half times (years), forty-two months, or 1260 days of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13.

All these verses together show the persecution of *the saints* as occurring during this same time period. These saints - God's faithful people - are often depicted in the Bible as a woman. See Jeremiah 6:2 and 2 Corinthians 11:2.

THE WOUND

As we have seen, Revelation 13 starts out depicting a hybrid beast power, based on the prophecy of Daniel 7, that symbolises papal Rome. What else could it be? Daniel 7 showed four great empires through history - Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Rome was the final power to exist before a judgment in heaven that leads to the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. See Daniel 7:23-27. Pagan Rome vanished long ago, but papal Rome - the little horn power (the latter phase of the fourth beast) - exists today. After all, what power other than Rome arose after ancient Greece and is still in existence? As we can see, too, many characteristics of that little horn power are repeated in the description of this apocalyptic power in Revelation 13.

It is, unquestionably, the Papacy.

In fact, many Bible interpreters use the date A.D. 538, when the Roman Catholic church, through a decree of Emperor Justinian, secured both political and religious control in the West, as the start. Then, 1260 years later would be 1798, the exact year when French General Berthier invaded Rome and took the Pope captive. There were Bible students, even before 1798, who predicted something drastic would happen to Rome around that time. Though the Papacy itself didn't end then, the 1260 years in which *the saints shall be given into his hand* (Daniel 7:25, and see also Revelation 13:7), certainly did.

After Revelation 13:1-2 describes the beast, another element is added. In what many Bible students believe is a direct reference to that 1798 captivity, which ended the 1260 years of the specific period of persecution, Revelation 13:3 reads: *And I saw one of his heads as if it had been*

mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marvelled and followed the beast.

In other words, though something terrible happened to the beast, a *deadly wound* that was to kill it - after all, what else is a deadly wound - was healed, and the beast power was revived. Though the Papacy has had ups and downs since 1798, it's hard to imagine - given its stature in many parts of the world - anything like what happened in 1798 happening to it again.

The point is - though the 1260 years of persecution ended, and though Rome itself had a deadly wound, Rome today has regained a lot of stature and wields massive influence through the devotion of millions and millions of dedicated members all over the world. Also it is widely believed that in conjunction with the United States of America she engineered the demise of the European communist bloc.

Hence, its depiction in prophecy as this beast power in Revelation 13.

THE SECOND BEAST

When planning mischief in Europe, Joseph Stalin was asked about how the Papacy might react. Stalin has been famously quoted as responding: *The pope, how many divisions does he have?*

However cynical, his response does raise an important question regarding this prophecy. No matter how much influence Rome might have, how could it possibly yield the kind of power in which the entire world is pressured to get the infamous mark of the beast?

Fair enough question. And it gets answered right away.

Revelation 13:1-10 is a description of the first beast - the Papacy.

After the Papacy power is identified in Revelation 13:1-10, the next verses introduce another massive power that arises one that has global influence - but only in the context of the Papacy - the world-wide religious and political power that precedes it in the prophecy and in history as well. The verses depicting the Papacy end with a reference to the wound it received in 1798: *He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.* Revelation 13:10

Look at what immediately follows:



Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

Revelation 13:11-12

A few points to consider:

Firstly, this second power is seen *coming up* right after the reference to the wound of the first beast in 1798. Thus, it's logical to assume in and around this time the second beast would arise.

Secondly, this second beast is seen *coming up out of the earth.* In Daniel 7, the beasts were seen as arising out of *the Great Sea*. Daniel 7:2 Meanwhile, Revelation 17:15 says: *The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.* Often in the Bible, masses

of people are depicted by water or flood imagery. The fact that this second beast arises from *earth,* and not from water as did the other beasts, would indicate that it arose from a relatively unpopulated region, as opposed to the part of the world from where the previous empires arose.

Thirdly, this nation had two horns like a lamb. A lamb, in contrast to the animals in the other composite beast - leopard, lion, and bear - symbolises something gentle. Also the second beast had two horns. Horns in the Bible often symbolise power, but unlike the horns on the first beast, which had crowns on them (Revelation 13:1) indicative of monarchies, this beast has none. It represents another kind of government.

Fourthly, the second beast would have be to a major world power - a superpower - because look at what it does: It *causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed*. Revelation 13:11-12 Only the most powerful nation on earth, at least in terms of military might and world-wide influence, would ever be able to do what the prophecy predicts.

ONE NATION ALONE

What power fits this description? Only one - the United States of America.

Firstly, it came into existence as an independent nation in 1788, after the Constitution was ratified by the states - just 10 years before 1798.

Secondly, unlike the other beast powers, it arose from a relatively unpopulated area, often called the New World.

Thirdly, the lamblike qualities, in contrast to the crowns of previous nations, represent a new kind of government - one with gentler features.

Even with all its faults, the United States for most of its history has presented a great hope, and even a model, for religious and political freedom to the world. (Imagine, for instance, how different our world would be had the Soviet Union, not the United States, won the Cold War!)

Finally, the United States is still by far the world's dominant political, military, and economic power - the only nation that could conceivably force the world to worship the first beast power.

What's interesting too, is that in the 1800's, when America was nowhere near the mega nation it would become, many Bible students had identified it as the second beast. This, even when the Americans were still waging war with the Native American population - and not always winning either!

We come, however, to another feature of the second beast. Though it starts out with two horns *like a lamb,* what happens next? Unfortunately, it will speak *like a dragon,* and then force the world to worship the first beast. In other words, though we are not told in the Bible how it will happen, something will cause the United States to become - instead of the beacon of religious freedom and liberty it has always been - the major cause of religious persecution in the world!

Speaking about this beast power, Revelation says:



He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy

or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

Revelation 13: 15-17

Of course, big changes will have to come. But, as we all know too well, we live in a world where, overnight, everything can change - and not for the good either, as we can see regarding America and the mark of the beast.

So in the final stages of this epic struggle on planet earth, God has revealed in Revelation 13 that there will be two powerful agencies that will cooperate to bring about the final global showdown between truth and error.

And the amazing reality is that those two powerful agencies - as identified above - are today significant players in global affairs.

What happens next and how does God respond? Booklet 19 will answer those questions.

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discover safety

Uncover God's final warning for earth's epic showdown and how we can be prepared

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Years ago in a small village in India, a girl was born who had a very rare condition in which a single head has two faces. Her name was Lali. With the exception of two ears, every other feature was doubled - two noses, two eyes, and two mouths.

Many in India saw the infant as a god. They brought gifts to her, worshipped her, and even asked the government to build a temple in the village in honour of the child, who they saw as the reincarnation of Ganesh, a Hindu god who is half person, half elephant.

It has been said that humans need to worship something. It doesn't matter what or who, just something, anything - themselves, money, power, sex, a deformed infant, whatever.

This reality is also seen in the book of Revelation, where the great controversy between Christ and Satan will climax at the end of the ages over - of all things - the question of worship.

Who do we worship - the true God, or any of the myriad of false ones? All false worship will be manifested in what the Bible calls the mark of the beast - the symbol of all false worship, all false gods, all error - in contrast to those who worship the true God, the Creator, the one *who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.* Revelation 14:7

THE ROMAN POWER

As we have seen, Revelation 13 starts out depicting a hybrid beast power. That first beast is based on the prophecy of Daniel 7 that symbolises papal Rome. What else could it be? Daniel 7 showed four empires throughout history - Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Rome

was the final power to exist before a judgment in heaven that leads to the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. See Daniel 7:23-27. Pagan Rome vanished long ago. Papal Rome - the little horn which is the latter phase of the fourth beast - still exists today. After all, what power other than Rome arose after ancient Greece, and is still in existence? As we saw in the last booklet, too, many characteristics of that little horn power are repeated in the description of this apocalyptic power in Revelation 13.

It is, unquestionably, the Papacy.

THE AMERICAN POWER

As previously noted, the Papacy doesn't have many soldiers, but the United States does, and this powerful nation was the second power to appear in Revelation 13 - the only power that fits the prophecy so well. And though a model for religious liberty, America will change. It will, as the prophecy says, *speak as a dragon* (Revelation 13:11), forcing the world to worship the first beast. Though we don't know how this will happen, something will cause the United States to become - instead of the beacon of religious freedom and liberty it has always been - the major cause of religious persecution in the world!

Talking about the United States, Revelation says:



He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy

or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

Revelation 13:15-17

Notice, too, what is the crucial issue here? It is worship. In the final showdown of earth's history, as the great controversy between Christ and Satan climaxes in the end of the age, the question over who we worship will be seen more clearly than ever before. From the beginning of time humans have worshipped either the true God or any one of a myriad of false ones, and in this final showdown the lines will be very clearly drawn. We will worship and serve the Lord, or we will worship and serve the beast power. There is no middle ground.

Or, as Jesus said so clearly: *He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.* Luke 11:23

What these texts show us is that in the last days, as the controversy climaxes, political and religious powers will unite to force the conscience of people to worship the beast and his image.

Thus, the question here for us is: What is this *image,* and the *mark,* or *the name of the beast* that the book of Revelation so powerfully warns us about?

Or, even more importantly - what can we do to avoid getting this mark?

THE IMAGE OF THE BEAST



And he (the second beast) ***deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the***

> ***sight of the*** (first) ***beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.***
>
> *Revelation 13:14*

An image is a reflection of or a likeness to - not a sameness - just as we humans are made in the image of God. See Genesis 1:26-27.

Notice God identifies the characteristics of the first beast before He says an image is made to it. Notice Revelation 13:6-7:



> ***Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.***

The two notable characteristics of the first beast listed here are blasphemy and persecution. We can confidently conclude then that this image is a reintroduction of blasphemous and persecuting activity - but now on a global scale.

THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES

God has a strong warning about worshiping *the beast and his image,* and receiving *his mark on* your *forehead or on* your *hand.* Revelation 14:9 The warning comes in three stages, and is referred to as the *Three Angels' Messages*. And it's here we can learn more about what this mark really means.

In fact, all this talk about persecution leads right into the Three Angels' Messages, because in them we find not only the key to what the mark of beast is, but also how to avoid it.

The first angel says:



> ***Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth -to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people -saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.***
>
> *Revelation 14:6-7*

First and foremost, it begins with the *everlasting gospel* - that is, the foundation of all these truths rests on the great news of Jesus Christ and His atoning death for sinners. It then says that the *hour of His judgment has come* - the judgment that we looked at in Booklet 17, the great judgment that precedes the Second Coming of Jesus.

Notice what else is mentioned, because this is crucial. As we have seen, the issue in the last days centres around worship. Those who worship the beast and its image will face the punishment of God Himself. In contrast, the first angel tells people to *worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.* Revelation 14:7

There is only one God - the Creator, the one *who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water* - and as such, He alone is worthy of our worship. Also, in this call to worship the Creator, the language is taken almost verbatim from the fourth commandment - the seventh-day Sabbath.

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Exodus 20:11

This link is very clear and becomes very important, as we will quickly see.

The second angel says:

And another angel followed, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city. Revelation 14:8 The empire of Babylon, of course, disappeared thousands of years ago. Instead, the name has become a symbol of all the world's false religions and political powers - the religions and powers that will ultimately accept the mark of the beast. This global coalition of false religion is headed by the second beast, as shown in Revelation 13. He *causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast,* and *he deceives those who dwell on the earth,* and he tells those *who dwell on the earth to make an image to the first beast,* and he *causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads.*

Next is the third angel.

His message begins with the fearsome warning that we have been studying. *If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation.* Revelation 14:9-10

That warning, however, is immediately contrasted with God's people, who are depicted as follows:



Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.
Revelation 14:12

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Here are two crucial points. Firstly, God is calling people to worship him as the Creator, and that call uses language taken from the fourth commandment - the seventh-day Sabbath. Next, in contrast to those who worship the beast and its image, are those who are identified by their worship of God as Creator - that is those who *keep the commandments of God.*

So, two characteristics identify God's faithful people in the climax of the great controversy:

1. They worship God as He *who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water* (Revelation 14:7) - a direct reference to one of *the commandments of God.* Revelation 14:12

2. They keep *the commandments of God,* which includes the seventh-day Sabbath. *For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day.* Exodus 20:11

Thus, the first angel's message, with its reference to the Sabbath commandment, ties in directly with the third angel's message, with its reference to keeping the commandments of God. This includes, especially given the context, the commandment of God that points to Him as the Maker of *heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water* (Revelation 14:7) - the One who people are to worship as opposed to the beast.

Remember, too, what we studied in Booklet 13: *It was the fourth beast power, the little horn, which is the Papacy - the beast of Revelation 13:1-10 - which had usurped that commandment and replaced it with Sunday, a day never attested to in the Bible!* Daniel 7 warned that this power would *think to change times and law* (Daniel 7:25), exactly what happened with the one law about time - the seventh-day Sabbath - which the Papacy tried to replace with Sunday.

Are we saying, then, that the issue around the mark of the beast will be its opposition to the commandment to *worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water* (Revelation 14:7) - the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, as opposed to Sunday, the day that was instituted by the beast power itself?

Exactly.

Let's look at the logic. The issue in the last days will climax around worship - either we worship the Creator, or we worship the beast. Unfortunately, as we have seen, the two beast powers will work together to compel everyone to receive the mark of the beast.

Those who worship the Creator, in contrast to those who worship the beast, *keep the commandments of God,* and the only commandment that points to God as the Creator - the One *who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water* (Revelation 14:7) - is the commandment that the beast power, as predicted, sought to change!

And this change has been accepted by most of world!

FOREHEAD AND HANDS

But doesn't the warning talk about anyone who *receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand?* Revelation 14:9 How could that be Sunday worship, as opposed to keeping the biblical Sabbath?

Have you ever seen pictures of religious Jews wrapping Tefillin? That is, they wrap a small box on their hand, and the other on their forehead, while they pray. This comes from the Old Testament, when the Hebrews - after being given God's commandments - were told: *You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.* Deuteronomy 6:8 Also: *Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.* Deuteronomy 11:18

The *frontlets between your eyes* - translated *foreheads* in the NIV - symbolise what we have in our minds, while our *hand* symbolises what we do - our actions. Though popular interpretations often depict these as literal marks that will be on our foreheads or hands, the book of Revelation, again using language and concepts from the Old Testament, shows where the loyalties (forehead) of those who receive the mark lie - a loyalty revealed in their works (hands).

Are we saying, then, that whose go to church on Sunday have the mark of the beast now?

Of course not.

Instead, the Bible teaches that a time will come when the choice that all people have always faced - the choice between eternal life and eternal

death - will come to a head, will come to a final world-wide climax, and only then will the mark of the beast come into effect.

What we are going to see in this final day is what we have seen all through history - religious entities using the power of the state to enforce their doctrine. Most of us, living in what have been called liberal democracies, know only religious freedom. But we are the exception, not the rule. The rule for many people today - and for much of the world historically - has been the force of law to compel the conscience in religious matters. Unfortunately, as these verses reveal, this is going to happen again on a global scale, but this time with the seventh-day Sabbath front and centre.

THE FOUNDATION

This crucial truth comes into clearer focus when we review what the seventh day means.

Look at this quote from Booklet 13: *As we already saw, the seventh day is the biblical symbol, the biblical sign, the foundational sign of God as God Himself! In the creation story, imbedded deep in it, is this sign of that work of creation, the seventh day. You can't get any farther back, without going to God Himself.*

Think about it. Everything that Christians believe is, really, rooted in one reality - God is our Creator. Nothing in Christianity makes sense apart from that foundational truth. The cross, salvation, the Second Coming, every teaching, every doctrine - everything is based on God as the one who made the world.

Creation, then, forms the ground - the foundation - of all biblical teachings, and the seventh-day Sabbath - embedded in the Genesis creation itself (Genesis 2:1-3) - stands as the eternal and immutable sign of that creation. In other words, the Sabbath is the most basic reminder of the most basic teaching. The only thing behind it, and more fundamental - is God Himself.

Thus, to usurp the seventh-day Sabbath is to usurp the Lord's authority at the most prime level possible - that of Him as Creator. It is to get behind everything and uproot it at its core. Indeed, it is to seek to take the place of God Himself (2 Thessalonians 2:4), which we have seen is what this power seeks to do. It claims worship that belongs only to the Creator.

God's people are called to worship Him. They are also depicted as *keeping the commandments of God*. Revelation 14:12 And, of all those commandments, the seventh-day Sabbath alone stands behind everything else, because it alone points to God as Creator - the only One we are called to worship - in contrast to the same power that sought to usurp not only the commandment but the role of God Himself.

No wonder millions around the world believe the seventh-day Sabbath will be the outward symbol of the final divide between those who worship the Lord and those who worship the beast.

Considering how basic and fundamental the Sabbath is to everything else, it's hard to see how the final issue could be around anything else.

How this will all unfold, the Bible hasn't told us. It has just told us that it will, and has given us a powerful warning about what we should have, figuratively speaking, impressed deep within our foreheads and our hands - and that is *the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus*. Revelation 14:12

The final warnings increase in intensity and reach a climax with God's final appeal:



After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury. And I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

Revelation 18:1-4

In these verses the prophecy is fulfilled. Note the tense - *have - have - have*.

SEALED BY GOD

While the mark is being received by a disobedient world, God is doing something special too for His faithful ones.



After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with

a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

Revelation 7:1-3

While people in rebellion are receiving the mark of the beast, God is sealing his people. Where do they receive the seal? *On their foreheads.* The sealing is the work of the Holy Spirit - leading people to heed God's warning and to obey the truth. See Ephesians 1:13.

The end has not yet come. It is near, but not here - not yet. God's message is today being beamed around this planet in rebellion. *Come out of her my people* (Revelation 18:4) is God's final appeal. God has His faithful ones in all religions. As the issue is made clear, and the message received, these faithful ones come out of her and take their stand with those *who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.* Revelation 14:12

This is decision time.



And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Revelation 22:17

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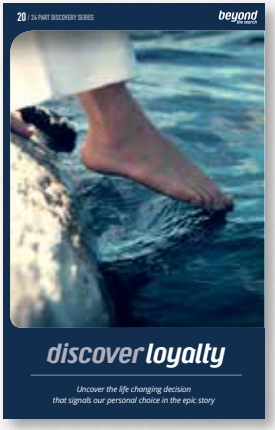

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discover loyalty

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discover loyalty

The short story writer - known as Saki - penned a tale called The *Lost Sanjak*. It was about an Englishman whose life had come crashing down around him, and he wanted a new start, but just didn't know how. Then, walking home one night, he found the corpse of a Salvation Army captain who had been badly mauled, apparently hit by a speeding carriage. Spontaneously, he changed clothes with the corpse, and put his papers on it. The corpse would be identified as him, and he could go away, starting a new existence as someone else. At least that was the plan.

Unfortunately, the dead man had not been killed by a hit-and-run carriage, but rather had been murdered. To make matters worse, someone wearing a Salvation Army captain's uniform had been seen in the area, and was now the prime suspect. In other words, he himself - supposedly the murder victim - was also the suspected murderer!

Saki's story tells us what most people already know - it's not so easy getting a new start in life.

NO CONDEMNATION

The Bible also talks about a new life - a new start, a new beginning - but it is something that, unlike the man in Saki's story, we cannot do ourselves. This new life comes, instead, only through Jesus - through what He does for us and in us.

As we have seen, one of the key themes of these booklets has been the great news - the amazing news - which is the promise of justification by faith. It is, beyond doubt, the most important Bible teaching, and it says that, no matter our past, no matter our sins, we can stand before God

perfect in Jesus Christ - not because of what we have done but, in fact, despite what we have done. The perfection comes because of what Jesus has done for us, in that the perfect life He lived is credited to anyone who claims it through faith. And, thus, no matter how sinful our life has been, we are viewed by God as having the perfection of Jesus Christ. And this is how we, though fallen, can be made right with God.

Hence, the amazing promise:



There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:1

No condemnation? Why? Is it because these people had become sinless, or perfect, or had they somehow been changed enough to where they lived lives that were so good they were no longer condemned by God?

No, the condemnation was taken away because they had reached out and, by faith and in faith, claimed the righteousness of Jesus Christ as their own. And the great news is that, through the wonderful provision of the gospel, anyone who does that is credited with the righteousness of Jesus. His righteousness, His holiness, His perfection, becomes theirs, and they stand forgiven and justified before God. And, again, it's not by our own works, which is impossible, but by faith in Jesus and His works for us.



Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

> ***even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.***
> *Romans 3:20-24*

All this leads to a simple question. Can we go from being condemned by God to eternal death for our sins, to being forgiven and justified, and not be transformed? Said another way: After all that God in Christ has done to save us - how then shall we live?

It's like a prisoner who is pardoned, even from the death sentence, and released. Whatever the paper shuffling involved in a government office miles from his cell, the result will radically affect him. The pardon isn't just legal paperwork. It becomes the subjective experience in the prisoner's life. After all, he walks out of the jail - a free man! If that's not a radical change, what is? Though the pardon itself was accomplished outside and away from him, his life has been, indeed, greatly changed by it.

It's the same with us. When we're no longer condemned by God's law, our life changes. And that change, however subjective, however personal, begins with what Christians call - the new birth.

BORN AGAIN

In one of the most famous texts, Jesus - speaking at night to a religious leader in ancient Israel - said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* John 3:3

Jesus is very clear here - unless you are *born again,* that is, unless something new happens to you - you can't see the kingdom of God. In other words, you can't have salvation.

Is Jesus teaching something different than salvation by faith alone? Of course not. Instead, He's teaching that the inevitable result of being justified - of being saved by faith - is a whole new life in Him, a new life characterised by the phrase born again.

After all, if birth is the beginning of one life, then what is being born again but the beginning of a new one?

And that is what happens to anyone who has given themselves in faith to Jesus, claiming His righteousness as their own. The condemnation is removed, and they stand pardoned, forgiven, and justified before God. And their lives are changed as a result. Again, how can we pass from death to life, from alienation to reconciliation, from guilt to pardon, and our lives not be changed?

Look at these texts:



He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:13-14



In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence.

Ephesians 1: 7-8



And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

Colossians 2:13

Redeemed by His blood, our trespasses forgiven, delivered from the power of darkness, being made alive together with Him - these things cannot happen to a person, and that person's life not change.

No wonder Paul writes:



Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Through what Jesus has done for us, not only our standing with God changes, but our life does as well. We have a whole new existence, a new life in Him. And, according to the Bible, this new life, this new existence, is symbolised by the ritual of baptism.

BAPTISM

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul spent the first five chapters making essentially two points:

Firstly, we are all - Jews and Gentiles - sinners. Secondly, salvation for all - Jew and Gentile - comes only through faith in Jesus Christ and His righteousness, which is *the righteousness of God*. Romans 3:21-22

Paul, then, in chapter six, writes the following:



What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:1-4

From Chapter 6 onwards, Paul takes all this and brings it down to the personal, individual level of what it means, both personally and practically, in the life of the person who has accepted what Jesus has done for them. Not only have their sins been pardoned and forgiven, but through the power of God working in them they have, by faith, died to their past sinful life, they think of it as dead, and now have a whole new life - a new birth in Jesus.

Read again what Paul says in those texts. By accepting Jesus, by accepting His life, His perfection, His holiness, we have a new life. And this happens when we die to self and live for Him.

Baptism is the outward expression of this inward choice.

DEATH BEFORE LIFE

In the New Testament, the English word *baptise* comes from a Greek work - *baptizo* - which implies immersion, because it comes from another Greek word - *bapto* - which means to dip in or under water. The New Testament evidence clearly points to immersion in and under water as opposed to sprinkling.

For instance, when John baptised Jesus - He did it, not because He needed to be born again, but to be our example - the Bible says:



It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.

Mark 1:9-10

He was baptised *in the Jordan* and then he came *up from the water.* These verses make sense only if talking about immersion.



Now John also was baptising in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptised.

John 3:23

... because there was much water there. If baptism were mere sprinkling, all one would need would be a cup of water - nothing more.

Note: Sprinkling is not baptism. Sprinkling came to replace baptism in the dark ages. The good news of justification by faith had been gradually replaced with a teaching of justification by ritual or works. And so to be sure babies were not lost before they were baptised, they sprinkled them. Baptism does not save us - Jesus does. Baptism is the sign of the choice we make when we accept Jesus. It's important. Jesus says it is a sign of loyalty.

Romans 6 talks about us being *buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ... Knowing this,*

that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Romans 6: 4, 6-7

Look at the imagery of crucifixion, death and burial. All this is symbolised by the act of going under the water - the death of the former self, the old sinful self being buried with Christ, the old man, the former person being crucified with Him.

What does that mean?

When we accept Christ, when we accept what He has done for us, we make a choice. By faith we believe that Jesus died for us - that when Jesus died we died!! To personalise it, replace the *we* with *I* - Christ's death becomes my death. Notice this:



For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

His death is counted as our death. We claim that by faith. We paid for our sins, when Jesus died for us!!

So we have a new way of thinking now. We consider our old sinful way of life as dead. In that sense we have been *crucified with Christ* (Galatians 2:20), which means what we have just read in the verses above - dead to self, freed from sin, because the *old things have passed away.* 2 Corinthians 5:17 Baptism, the going under the water, the immersion, symbolises the crucifixion of the old life.

It is not only a death but a burial, for we are *buried with Him in baptism.* Colossians 2:12 As a burial follows a death, so when the believer goes down into the watery grave, the old life, which passed away when they accepted Jesus, is buried.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Of course, baptism is not only going under the water. We also have to come up, symbolic of the new life we now have since we have given ourselves to Christ.



Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:4



And be ***… alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

Romans 6:11

Newness of life! This is the change that begins in us after we have been justified, and our sins are forgiven. Like the prisoner pardoned, we walk away, free - free from condemnation, and free from the slavery of sin.



But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Romans 6: 17-18

Notice the idea of being a slave of sin. This is an important point. All through this series we have talked about the great controversy - the battle between good and evil that rages, not only in the world but in our hearts as well. A person who has given himself or herself to Christ, and has been baptised - a symbol of their death to their way of life and a new one in Christ - doesn't instantaneously and automatically somehow become sinless. It's just that now they have new motives, new purposes, new desires, aims and goals, even if the battle with self still rages, and even if they sometimes fall. It's the new mind and heart that God promised.



I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:26



If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:8

It's just that now, connected to Christ, we can have victories that we didn't have before. We can be freed from devastating and destructive habits. We can be free from having to fall for Satan's temptation to sin. We are now fully on Christ's side. We have switched allegiances.

Again, this doesn't mean that the great controversy still doesn't rage inside us; it doesn't mean that temptations won't come, and it doesn't mean we won't ever fall.

GRACE FOR THE CHRISTIAN

To sin as a born-again Christian, though, is not the same as to live in sin, or to be a slave to sin, as we were before our new life in Christ. A believer in Jesus, therefore, mustn't lose hope and must never give up if they do sin.

Grace and forgiveness aren't just for the unsaved, the lost, the worldly. Grace and forgiveness are for born-again-baptised Christians as well. It's a daily experience.

A new birth, a new life in Christ - even after baptism - doesn't guarantee that we won't sin. It just means that, in our new experience with God, we will be sorrowful for our sin, we will repent of our sin, and choose through the promises offered to us not to do it again.

But if we do, we can still find forgiveness and pardon at the cross. We can still claim the righteousness of Jesus for ourselves - we have to, because it's our only hope. That's the great news of the gospel - as long as we don't forsake Jesus, He won't forsake us.

Indeed, being a born-again Christian, baptised in Christ, means that we can claim the myriad promises of what God will do in us if we let Him.

Like this:



No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

Or this:



Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

And this:



But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

Romans 6:22

But it also means that we can claim the promise of the gospel, of grace, of salvation, if we do sin.

Like this:



My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

1 John 2:1

Or this:



There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:1

THE BAPTISED

Jesus Christ died for us. He offers us complete pardon for anything we have ever done, or will do. He offers us His righteousness instead of our own unrighteousness. He offers us a new life in Him, one in which we are free from the condemnation of sin and the power of it to dominate our lives.

The decision to accept Jesus as our Saviour - our personal hero - and our choice to follow him obediently in baptism, is a significant event in our own epic story. It is an event where we publically show to the watching universe whose side we are on in this cosmic battle. And baptism is our declaration that we have claimed God's promises for ourselves.

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discover wellness

Uncover the abundant life through health and wellbeing

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discover wellness

The most famous trial and execution in antiquity, besides that of Jesus in the first century A.D, was that of the Greek philosopher Socrates, executed in Athens in 399 B.C., a little over 400 years before Jesus went to the cross.

Scholars have noted some interesting similarities between the deaths. Both men had teaching that the authorities feared. Both faced sham trials. Both were accused of ungodliness. Both men had faithful followers. Both Socrates and Jesus, though able to escape, went willingly to their death.

Of course, many huge differences existed, the greatest being that - unlike Jesus - no one claimed to have seen Socrates rise from the dead in the flesh!

There's another important difference, and that has to do with Socrates' whole concept of death, flesh and the soul. According to Plato, who wrote down the last words of Socrates, the condemned philosopher spent a great deal of time before his execution talking about the evils of the body, arguing that as long as the human soul is trapped in the flesh it will never attain to perfection.

Our body, Socrates said, *fills us with loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense, with the result that we literally never get an opportunity to think at all about anything.*

ANOTHER VIEW

In contrast, Jesus presents a radically different view of our bodies. As we have already studied, the concept of a separate, conscious, immortal soul is not biblical. Instead, historians can show that, from Plato and

his teachings, the idea of an immortal soul - which is alien to the Bible - infiltrated Christian thinking, and is still doing so even up to this day. How ironic that Plato's view of the soul and body has more influence in Christianity than does the Bible itself!

For example, the Bible not only makes it clear that God created the human body, human flesh, but that it was good.



So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Genesis 1:27



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



And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.

Genesis 1:31

The ancient Greeks taught the idea of a fall into the body. The Christian idea, instead, is a fall in the body. For many Greeks, the body was something to shed, to get rid of, something evil that our souls, by transgression, fell into. This is alien to the Bible, to both Jewish and Christian thinking which view the body as a masterpiece of God's amazing creation. God intended us to have bodies. In fact, having a physical body is part of being truly human. But when sin and death entered, it also affected the natural world - and that includes our bodies. Along with the environment, our bodies need redemption.



And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

Romans 8:23

CORRUPTION

No question, though, our whole being, body included, has been greatly damaged by sin, which has invaded our whole planet like a malignant cancer. No one escapes that sad reality. But the idea that the body is bad in and of itself is a radically different concept to the idea that our bodies - originally created by God - have been damaged and corrupted by sin. The latter is a biblical concept - the former is pure paganism.

Plus, after God created Eve, *bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh* (Genesis 2:23), they were to become man and wife, and do what?



Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24 See also Matthew 19:5.

In the light of such texts, it's hard to see our bodies - our flesh - as anything but good.

Now, one can find verses in the Bible that talk about the *flesh* in a negative sense, but only in the sense of carnal fallen flesh - of our corrupted passions, which are bad and can lead to the loss of eternal life. But that is a different concept completely from the idea of the flesh in and of itself, and the desires of the flesh - all gifts from God - being inherently evil. They are not.

God gave human beings, for instance, the gift of sexuality. The gift itself isn't evil. When someone, however, abuses that gift, and for example molests a child, the act itself is evil. That act, however, doesn't mean that sexuality itself- as God gave it – is evil. On the contrary, it isn't.

JESUS AND HEALING

The greatest proof we have that our bodies are good can be found in all the time Jesus spent healing people. If our bodies were inherently evil, why would Jesus have spent so much time restoring them? In fact, an estimated 20 per cent of the Gospels are dedicated to Jesus healing broken bodies.

For example:



And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

Matthew 4:23

In fact, when Jesus raised people from the dead, He raised them back into their flesh - more proof that the flesh wasn't evil, or bad, even though it has been corrupted and damaged.



Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say to you, arise. So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

Luke 7:14-15

No question, our bodies are gifts from God.



Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

That humans do bad things with their bodies is one thing, but that does not mean the body is evil any more than water is evil because people use it to make alcohol and then drive drunk and kill people.

BOUGHT WITH A PRICE

What do these verses mean? On one level, it's easy - you didn't ask to be born. You didn't create yourself. God created you. Were it not for Him, you wouldn't be here. What price is that?



Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

1 Peter 1:18-19

And because of this great price, we are told to do what? *Glorify God in your body and in your Spirit, which are God's.* 1 Corinthians 6:20

That is, you - your flesh, your thoughts, your mind - they all belong to God. And thus, you are to glorify Him, and not use your body for sinful purposes.

Right there is the motive for taking care of yourself physically. Knowing that our bodies are the *temple* of God, and that we have been told to *glorify God in your body,* it makes sense that we should take care of our health, and take care of our bodies in a way that will glorify God.

What is more likely to glorify God - abusing your body with drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and unhealthy food and bad lifestyle practices - or living a moderate and temperate lifestyle that will help you achieve the best health possible?

No question, as long as we are here - in fallen flesh - we are going to face sickness, ailments, and - unless we're alive when Jesus comes - death.

But, because our bodies are gifts from God, we have a moral obligation to do what we can to take care of them the best we can. Just as hand-made gifts from friends have that added value, so it is with our bodies - hand-made gifts from God.

And though the Bible itself doesn't present any kind of systematic treatise on health, we can take from it certain broad principles that can make a big difference in the quality of our existence here.

DIET

Over the years, especially in Western countries, there has been a great increase in lifestyle diseases - diseases directly related to how we live. And time and again medical experts point to diet as crucial for good health. In most cases, too, it doesn't matter what diseases are being talked about - diabetes, cancer, heart disease, whatever - similarities appear in all the dietary recommendations - lots of fruit, whole grains, vegetables, and nuts, as opposed to flesh foods and saturated fats. All one has to do

is look at what are considered optimal diets, and though the charts do vary somewhat, the emphasis is almost always on more fruits, vegetables and whole grains than on most everything else.

Interestingly enough, what was the original diet given to humanity before the fall? Pretty much the same kind of diet that we are recommended to follow today!



And God said, See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.

Genesis 1:29

Humans were given a vegetarian diet - the kind of diet that medical science implies can be the healthiest.

Coincidence?

The Bible does not demand a vegetarian diet. It's just that, with the example of Eden, we can see what the ideal diet was. It is true that, after the flood, with so much life destroyed, humans were given the option to eat meat, though that was not the ideal.



So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. ... I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.

Genesis 9:1-3

Also, as Noah was getting ready to bring animals onto the ark, look at the distinction between the kinds of animals that were brought in.



You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that are

unclean, a male and his female.

Genesis 7:2

This is important because, much later, in writings given to the Jews by God regarding what animals they could and could not eat, the distinction between what were clean animals and what were unclean was clarified. What these verses here in Genesis show, however, is that the clean-unclean distinction existed before the Jewish nation did. That is, it was not something only for the Jews. That's why many people, though not vegetarians, don't eat unclean foods, which are generally from scavengers anyway. Besides Jesus didn't die to make unclean foods clean! He died for unclean people - sinners - so they can be clean, and live clean lives.

HEALTHFUL LIVING

Though it has been said, we are what we eat, that's not quite true. Diet is important for health - but there's more.

When God created Adam and Eve, where did He place them?



Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

Genesis 2:15

A few points come through here from which principles of health can be derived - principles that are supported by the findings of medical science.

Note: They were to work in the garden. That is - exercise. Time and again medical science shows that exercise is crucial to good health. Medical advice is needed, though, before exercise, if a pre-existing health problem exists. Exercise is so important for good health.

Living in a garden, Adam and Eve also had the advantage of fresh air and sunshine, two important components for good health. Sunshine, however important, must not be overdone. Here, too, advice from a doctor can be very helpful in knowing just how much sun can help toward optimum health. As far as fresh air goes, pretty much the rule can be - the more the better!

COMMON SENSE

Look at this text:



Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

We can glorify God in what we eat and drink? That's awesome! That's what it says, and whatever exactly Paul meant, he surely included the idea that what we eat and drink can glorify God by how it impacts the bodies God trusted to us. Alcohol, illegal drugs, and tobacco are not only bad for you, it's hard to imagine a true-blue Christian sitting at a bar drinking a beer, smoking a cigarette, or smoking a joint, and glorifying God.

The image doesn't fit.

Also, the Bible often puts alcohol use in a very bad light. It's no wonder, either, because who hasn't seen the devastating effects of alcohol on those who get caught up in it, especially when anyone who picks up their first drink doesn't know if he or she has the tendency toward alcoholism.



Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

Proverbs 20:1

In the 1960's, during the Hippie era, Timothy Leary had become an iconic figure of the drug movement. He coined the infamous phrase, *Turn on, tune in, and drop out!* More than any other man, he made illegal drug use - especially LSD - seem hip. Many years later, long after he faded from the news, his daughter wrote about what it was like growing up surrounded by drugs. Interestingly enough, of all the drugs - heroin, marijuana, LSD, cocaine, etc. - that permeated her home life, none was more devastating and destructive, she said - than alcohol!

With the Bible giving a strong emphasis on taking care of the body temple, and with alcohol being so damaging to it, both mentally and physically, the smartest and safest route with it, as well as tobacco and tobacco products – is total avoidance. Don't be fooled by what the alcohol is mixed with. Alcohol is a toxic poison. Include some in fermented grape juice - wine - and we are told it is good for your health! The nutrition of the grape is, but the alcohol is still toxic, addictive, and deadly.

CHILLING OUT



The sleep of a labouring man is sweet.

Ecclesiastes 5:12

Of course, one doesn't need medical science to know just how healthful and beneficial sleep is to the human body - both mentally and physically. Who hasn't experienced the amazing phenomenon of how much better life can seem after a good night's sleep?

Then, too, as we have studied, the Sabbath - the physical rest that comes from the Sabbath - can be a wonderful way to improve and maintain health.



But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.
Exodus 20:10

We are commanded - commanded, just as with *thou shall not kill* - to rest from our work on the weekly Sabbath day. Studies have shown the powerful advantages, both physically and mentally, from taking time away from work. Let's face it - how many of us, in the mad race for the dollar, would work seven days a week to get ahead, even though by the time you finally get there you are dead?

TRUST IN GOD

One of the most amazing, and still not fully understood aspects of humanity, is the link between our minds and body. Our thoughts, our moods, our attitudes, have, without question, an impact - even a powerful impact - on our physical health. The more negative your thoughts, the more negative the impact on your body. Though all sorts of theories exist on how this links works, one thing is sure - the link works. Our mental attitude can have an impact, for good or for ill, on our bodies.

Hence, how crucial that we learn to trust in God, to take God at His promise, to not just believe in God and His love but to experience it and the peace of mind it can bring.



Be still, and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10



Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5

Jesus said it the best:



Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Matthew 6:34

No question, we all have problems, we all have struggles, and we all have things in our lives that we wish were different. No question, too, that we all have things to be thankful for, to be grateful for, and to be happy about. How important that every day, in every way that we can, we focus on the positive, praising and thanking God for the blessings that we do have. We have to remember, too, that this world is not our final home, and that whatever happens here, however terrible, God calls us to live just one day at a time.

In what sounds like it could have come from a modern medical journal, the Bible says:



A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.

Proverbs 17:22

BALANCE

God wants us to be in as good health as possible.



Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

3 John 1:2

Our lifestyle choices can go a long way in helping us to attain to that ideal.

But we must also balance this out with these words of Paul:



For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Romans 14:17

We are not saved by what we do or don't eat or drink, or by how much, or even how little we exercise. We are saved by the righteousness of Jesus, which covers our sins and gives us a new life in Him. However beneficial a healthful lifestyle is, we must always remember that a healthful lifestyle based on biblical principles is not the means of salvation. It is, instead, a grateful expression of that salvation.

We might be tempted to think that our health habits have little or no bearing on the cosmic struggle in which we find ourselves. Don't be fooled! It was on the very point of food that the villain brought his rebellion against God to planet earth. See Genesis 2:17 and 3:1-4. The issue is who do you believe? Who do you trust? It's at the heart of the epic story. It's at the heart of your story too.

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discover intimacy

Uncover the secret to growing a relationship with God and to finding joy through our daily interaction with Him

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discover intimacy

His name is Paro, and he's a cute little white seal. But he is a robot - one that functions as a companion for elderly people. Indeed, Paro the robot is made for one purpose - to be a lovable and cute friend, like a pet, but without the problem of live ones.

The amazing thing about Paro, this cuddly and little furry robot, is that it can, indeed, cheer you up. That's why models are being used more and more as companions for the elderly. There are more advanced versions on the assembly line for Paro, which has been called by the Guinness Book of World Records - *The World's Most Therapeutic Robot*.

THE GRAND EPIC

But God did not make us as robots. And God is not a robot. As we have been studying, we are all real victims, casualties to one degree or another, in this grand epic - the great controversy. It's real, it's here, and none of us can escape the battle. Yes, through Jesus we have been assured - even guaranteed - of final victory. But until then, we, daily, are players in this literal cosmic drama.

Through these lessons we have been pulling back the veil that has covered so much of what is going on. And we have, through the teaching of the Bible, learned a lot about why so many things have happened and how it is all ultimately going to end.

Most importantly, of course, we have learned about Jesus - about His love, about His death, and about the grace and forgiveness and healing He offers us. And we have learned about the great promise of His second coming, and about the new heavens and the new earth that await the redeemed when He does come.

We have seen the progression of kingdoms in conflict (Daniel 2:36-45) that bring us down to today. We have seen that every time the great prophecies climax with *... the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.* Daniel 7:18

In other words - Sure, this world is a tumultuous and tough place but, in the end, God's people will live in a kingdom of peace that will last forever.

And the good news is that, through Jesus, we all have the opportunity to be there.

THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE

Until then, however, we have to contend with the harshness, the struggles, the battles, and the disappointments in our own story, in our own personal epic. And yet, we have not been left alone. On the contrary, we can have a deep and abiding relationship with Jesus, a sense of His presence, and the comfort from not only knowing Him but knowing that He loves us and is with us in our trials and struggles right to the end.



Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.
Matthew 28:20

As humans, we can have a lot of experiences - good ones too. But, as those who have known can testify, nothing comes close to experiencing the reality that not only does God exist but He loves you - personally. To know that love for yourself, to experience that love, is the most life-changing experience anyone can have.

We're not talking here of a relationship with Paro. We are talking about a sinful, fallen human being having a personal one-to-one relationship with God - as close and as intimate as if we were the only person on the earth!



And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

John 17:3

What is eternal life? He said eternal life was to know Him and to know the Father - that is, to come into a relationship with Him, and to know Him for ourselves and what He is like.

Bible teachings can give us an objective foundation to help us know God. To know that God is so loving, and that He died on the cross for us, tells us a lot about His character. To know that He isn't going to burn people in hell for eternity tells us a lot about what He is like. All these teachings, and the others, have their role in helping us know God.

But, as in any relationship, the key is to spend time with the person you want to come to know. And, thus, to come to know God, to know for ourselves what He is like, to know for ourselves His love, we need time with Him. And one of the greatest and most fruitful ways to do that is through personal prayer.

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him. Steps to Christ, p.93

How often, when simply talking to a person, do you come to know and appreciate that person better? Imagine, then, what it's like when you talk to God and come to experience what He is like?

For starters, Jesus prayed a lot.



Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.
Luke 11:1



... in those days ... He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.
Luke 6:12



And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.
Matthew 14:23

If the spotless and sinless Son of God thought it so necessary to pray, how much more important would prayer be for sinners like us?

WHAT PRAYER DOES

Prayer is like quantum physics - we don't know how it works, only that it does. Our mobile phones, for instance, use quantum physics - yet no physicist alive can explain why things in the quantum realm do what they do.

Somewhat similar, in ways that we don't fully understand, when we pray, earnestly and fervently pray, our hearts are drawn upward toward God. The very act of praying is how we, as fallen beings, reach upward toward Him. Prayer takes our mind off this world and focuses it on a higher one - something that we need to be doing all the time!



Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.
Colossians 3:2

Also, when we pray, we are acknowledging our utter dependence upon a power greater than ourselves; a power that can do for us what we can never do for ourselves. Prayer constantly reminds us that we are but dust - fleeting, weak, and at the mercy of forces in the great controversy that we are powerless to stop. Thus with prayer, we - by default - become more dependent upon God and less upon ourselves.



Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.
Mark 14:38

When we pray, we tend to empty ourselves of self - of selfishness and self-centeredness - so that more of Christ can come into our lives. Prayer is a means of self-surrender, a means of helping us realise our need of grace, of forgiveness, of a change that helps us be more focused and caring about others and less about ourselves. Only those who have been there and have done it, know the reality of how prayer deadens us to self and helps make us more alive to God.



For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
Colossians 3:3

When we pray, we acknowledge the reality of God's presence, of His grace, and of the fact that there is a God to whom we will have to answer. In short, with all the distractions, with all the things of the world that can bring us down, that can separate us from God and make us forget what matters - prayer helps not only to keep us connected with the Lord, but is a constant reminder of our need of that connection, which is why we are told to continue *steadfastly in prayer* (Romans 12:12), and *in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.* Philippians 4:6

Prayer, too, offers us great power against sin. When we are pouring out our heart to God in prayer, all the powers of Satan and His minions cannot overcome us. When praying, whatever else we might be doing, we will not be sinning. Through prayer, we become connected with God, who has promised:



No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

And prayer is, perhaps, the only way to make that promise a reality.

THE POWER

Because of these things, there is necessity for diligence in prayer. We should make every effort to keep the line of communication open. What's great, too, is that you can pretty much pray anytime, anywhere - you can

be in a crowded boardroom of business executives making a billion-dollar decision, but you can pray. You can be walking down a crowded street, but you can pray. If you can think; you can pray. And our own lives have surely shown us in the great controversy, we need a constant connection with God.

We are not talking about formal prayer here, but a personal conversation with God - not prayer books or reciting memorised words. You don't talk to a friend that way. It's not natural or spontaneous. So too, prayer is just talking to God as to a friend.

Another point is that though we are told, in numerous places, to pray for things that we want, prayer is not so much to get God to do what we want, but to get us in a frame of mind so that we are open to do what God wants. Prayer changes us. After all, how can we be connected with the God of the universe and not be changed? An attitude of prayer, which by default brings us into an attitude of surrender, will open us to God's will for our lives. How often do we hear it said that God answered my prayer; meaning God did what I wanted! Who now is playing the role of servant?

No question, the greatest example of this was Jesus in Gethsemane. Three times He prayed:



... saying, O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.

Matthew 26:39

Those who have made prayer a habit know exactly how this crucial principle works. In many ways, it's the ultimate reason for prayer.

GOD SPEAKS – THE BIBLE

As central as prayer is to our life with God, Bible study, devotional time in the Word of God, is central too. Prayer is the way we talk to God; reading the Word is the way God talks to us.



Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.

Psalm 119:11

When tempted by Satan in the wilderness, time and again what did Jesus do? He quoted the Bible:



But Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

Luke 4:4

Paul told Timothy that from *childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.* 2 Timothy 3:15

All through the Bible, especially the New Testament, the Scriptures play a central role. In his gospel, after he wrote about the miraculous birth of Jesus, Matthew immediately linked it to the Scriptures:



So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, God with us.

Matthew 1:22-23

Even with something as miraculous as this, which itself could have convinced many people that this event was of God - that wasn't good enough. The virgin birth had to be linked to the Scriptures; it had to be confirmed by the Word of God - a principle seen all through the Bible.

BIBLE STUDY

Of course, there are things in the Bible that are hard to understand. Peter even warns about this in 2 Peter 3:16, and if we come to the Bible with an attitude of criticism, doubt, and scepticism, we will come away only more deeply entrenched in that attitude. Unfortunately, many do just that. Only in the millennium will we learn for ourselves the sad cases of those who made a shipwreck of faith because, instead of making their views and morals and ideas subject to the Word of God, they made the Word of God subject to their own views, morals and ideas. That's like an illiterate telling Shakespeare how to write!

Instead, we must come to the Bible as humble supplicants, as sinners in need of grace, humbly seeking in faith to know what the Word of God has to say to us. The Bible itself points to its own great authority. How crucial then, that as believers we take the Scripture at its own word.



All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16

There are always going to be things we don't understand in the Bible. God has revealed what we need for salvation, and what is secret belongs to

God. See Deuteronomy 29:29. Should we be surprised, then, when there are aspects of God's Word we don't fully grasp?

When we come across things we don't understand, we should just prayerfully accept that, at least for now, we will not grasp these things, and then move on to what we can understand. Many times, later on, these things will be opened to us. Every Christian has had that experience. At other times, we might never understand them this side of eternity. So what? Our relationship with God is based on trust - not proof.

There are many different ways of studying the Bible, including the way we have done so far with this course. Some like to go deep, using other resources like concordances and commentaries.

At a minimum, however, everyone should read their Bible devotionally. That means reading it with the purpose of knowing God and His will for your life. For many, early in the morning, before their day begins, they read and study. Again, opening the Word in an attitude of submission, in an attitude of a sinner in need of grace, is so crucial. We must come in submission to it; never, never vice versa.

The Bible is essentially a story book - about God and people. We learn of God by watching Him in action; and we get caught up in the action and emotion as he deals with people just like you and me. We can see many great things about God in nature, but nothing in nature can teach us, for instance, about the cross, about the resurrection, about the promise of the Second Coming.

Someone once said it would be good to spend a thoughtful hour every day thinking about the life of Christ. In the end, however much time one spends and whatever aspect of the Bible they study, the principle is crucial - time

in the Bible, reading, praying, studying with an attitude of humility, of gratefulness, and of praise, is an essential part of what it means to live the Christian life. It is an essential way of getting to know the Lord for yourself - to know His love, His goodness, His compassion and, yes, His justice and His wrath against evil.

And when you have experienced Him - you just want to tell others. Like the disciples, *we say we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.* Acts 4:20

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

During World War II, a Swedish businessman named Eric Ericson spied on the Nazis. He was, arguably, the Allies most valuable asset. One time, in a restaurant in Sweden, a Jewish friend came up to him. Knowing that he had to assume the role of a fervent Nazi, Ericson just berated the man, yelling before other patrons, *Stay away from me. I don't have dealings with Jews!* He had no choice; anything less would have jeopardised his mission, even his life.

As Ericson was leaving the restaurant, the Jewish man walked up to him, slipped a note in his coat and walked out. Ericson quickly pulled it out and read: *I don't know why you are doing this but I will never believe that this is really how you feel. If I can do anything for you, please let me know.*

Ericson immediately burned the note.

The point? The Jewish man knew Ericson well enough to know that, no matter what happened, he could trust him.

It's the same with God. When we are told that this is eternal life, *that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent* (John 17:3), how much more so should we know the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we too can trust Him - no matter the circumstances?

Our personal epic story is written just one day at a time. Who am I living for? Whose side am I on today? As the final cosmic crisis comes upon planet earth, and the whole world has to stand for the beast power or for Jesus - where will you stand? It will be too late then to get to know God personally, by experience. Too late then to learn from God's word the meaning of what is happening on the earth.

Trust comes only by experience - talking together, listening to each other, and doing things together. Just think of that! God wants to be intimate with us.

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discover tribute

How then shall we live? This is a good question when we consider the full salvation that God has provided for us.

FORMER SLAVES

As we have studied, humans have been involved in a long warfare, a very psychological one as well - the great controversy between Christ and Satan. And as we have seen, through Jesus, we have been given the victory - the victory over Satan, over eternal death, over slavery to sin and to self. We are no longer slaves to a cruel taskmaster, and we need to view ourselves that way as well.



Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

John 8:36



Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

Romans 6:6-7

This doesn't mean that we live perfect lives. Jesus is the only one who has ever done that. The great news of the gospel is that, through the amazing grace of the Lord, Christ's perfect life, His perfect record, becomes credited to us, by faith, as if our own. His perfection, His righteousness, His holiness, are all given to us, and we stand before God in the perfection and righteousness of Christ.

That is what it means to be justified by faith - to be born again, to have a new life, a new existence in Jesus. We, indeed, are no longer slaves to sin, to death, and to Satan. This is the heart and soul of the Christian faith.

And, as we have seen, when these things happen to us our lives will change, often even drastically!



Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

2 Corinthians 5:17

THE CONTRAST

Yes, we have a whole new existence in Jesus, with purpose, meaning, and direction. Thanks to the good news of the gospel, this epic story we find ourselves in doesn't have to end as a tragedy.

In the 1700's, a famous British philosopher named David Hume, who rejected Christianity, wrote about the confusion of life in general. He said that life presented so many questions, and it seemed - at least to him - offered so few answers, if any. He wrote:

I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? And on whom have I any influence, or who has any influence on me? I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself

in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed with the deepest darkness, and utterly deprived of the use of every member and faculty.

What a contrast to these words:



For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ.

Galatians 3: 26-27

And these:



Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

1 Peter 1:3

See also Ephesians 3:14-19.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

The question for us, though, is - *How are we supposed to live, knowing that we are Christ's, first by creation and then by redemption?* What does God ask of us, having given us so much, and free of charge too?

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, He said to His followers:



And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

Matthew 28:18-20

These verses have been called *The Great Commission*, and they have spurred on millions of believers in Jesus to go all over the world, teaching people about Jesus and what He has done for them.

Of course, not everyone can pack up their bags and move to a far-off land and spread the gospel. But everyone who claims to serve the Lord has been called by God to use their gifts and abilities for Him, and what better way than to seek to reach out to others with the good news of salvation?



But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.

1 Peter 3:15

There is no greater privilege than to be a link in the chain, sharing the good news we have heard from God with others. In fact, it becomes unstoppable. *For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.* Acts 4:20

Jesus told a parable that started like this:



For the kingdom of heaven is like a man travelling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another

> ***two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.***
> *Matthew 25:14-15. Please note that in this parable a talent is an item of currency.*

Notice he gave to each *according to his own ability.* Not everyone was given the same thing, and thus not everyone was expected to do the same thing. But all were expected to do something.

When the parable ends, however, the one with the least, who did nothing, was the one who was punished. He had two problems. Firstly, he thought one was insignificant, and secondly, he did nothing. All we have is from God - there is nothing insignificant.

THE GIFT OF TIME

We have studied the Sabbath, and have seen that God commands us to keep that special time holy. Remembering to keep the Sabbath holy is our practical acknowledgement that all our time - every moment of our lives - belongs to God.

As Paul said, *For in Him we live and move and have our being.* Acts 17:28

In whom we live, move, and have our being? How much more ownership over us could God have?

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul used the analogy of the different organs of the body as symbols of how each of us, with our different gifts and talents, must use those gifts and talents for the betterment of the church and for witness to others. Whether ministering to the poor, clothing the

naked, feeding the hungry, helping the sick, or teaching, or preaching, or whatever, we have been called to be servants, ministers to a dying world.

GIFTED PEOPLE

Western culture idolises really talented people and their abilities - people with the X factor. Psychologists tell us that we see in them what we would like to be ourselves. But God says we are all gifted; and the kinds of gifts we have, and how much and how many, all come from Him. When we take our eyes off the stars - the really gifted people featured in the media around us - and stop comparing ourselves with them, we begin to see our true potential. What God has entrusted to us may be small or large, it may be few or many. Whatever it is, it's God's trust to us. And all God asks of is faithfulness.



Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

1 Corinthians 4:2

God has gifted us to be a blessing to others, to serve. What a contrast to using God's gifts purely for self and for the pursuit of fame.



And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

1 John 2:17

The question we need to ask ourselves is: *What legacy will we leave once this world is gone?* What will the X factor mean then? Or what will medals, or honour, or fame, or fortune, matter then? God simply wants faithfulness.

All that will be left from this world will be ourselves and others like us - saved by the blood of Jesus - souls who might not have known about Jesus were it not for us and our efforts to reach out to them!

THE TEN PER CENT SOLUTION

There's an old, trite saying - but the triteness of the saying arises from the blatant truthfulness of it: *Put your money where your mouth is*.

And that works with faith as well. God says it like this:



For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

James 2:26

After all, anyone can profess faith. Talk is cheap. Putting your money where your mouth is, or where your faith is, however - that is a powerful way of affirming for yourself just how much you believe in the words you profess.

That's why God has established in the Bible what is known as tithing, from a word that means a tenth. And the idea behind it is simple - it's putting your money, or at least ten per cent of it, where your mouth is. Those who tithe, who reach out in faith and return ten per cent of their income to the Lord, know that - more than anything else - tithing is an act of worship.

To take ten per cent of what you earn and give it to God takes faith. Tithing is in itself an act of faith. It is a part of what it means to live by faith.



The just shall live by faith.

See Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38.

And for many people, both rich and poor, faith sometimes stops at the purse or wallet - which isn't true faith at all!

TITHE IN THE BIBLE

Long before the establishment of the nation of Israel, Abraham returned tithe to God. The story reads like this:



> ***Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand. And he*** (Abraham) ***gave him a tithe of all.***
>
> *Genesis 14:18-20*

And he, Abraham, gave the priest, a representative of *God Most High,* a tithe - ten per cent of what he had gained. Thus, long before the nation of Israel was established, tithing was already practised.

The principle was seen again later, when Jacob, an exile and a fugitive, said to the Lord: *Of all that You give me, I will surely give a tenth to You.* Genesis 28:22

Notice the words of Jacob: *Of all that You give me ...* In other words, Jacob was acknowledging that the material goods that he possessed came from God. Tithing, like the Sabbath, helps us remember that everything good is from the One in whom *we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28), a point that is often very easy to forget. Tithing is a very real and concrete way to help us not to forget. It's also a way of protecting us from greed:



For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

1 Timothy 6:10

The tithe belongs to the Lord - it is His tenth. *And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S. It is holy to the LORD.* Leviticus 27:30. Instead of time as it is with the Sabbath, it's now money. The returning of tithe is our way of acknowledging that all we have ultimately comes from God anyway:



The earth is the LORD'S, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.

Psalm 24:1

In the New Testament, the concept of tithing is assumed. If something so profound and ingrained were to have been abolished, wouldn't the New Testament have said so, as it did so clearly with circumcision? Instead, there's not a word against it. Also, why would such a powerful antidote to greed and selfishness - something that is so beneficial not only to the community but to the individual believer as well - suddenly be abolished?

When denouncing the hypocrisy of some of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said:



Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin (small seeds), ***and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done,***

without leaving the others undone.

Matthew 23:23

The issue here wasn't the paying of tithes - that was assumed. It was instead the lack of mercy and justice on the part of some of the religious leaders. Christ here condemned the abuse of this sacred obligation. The obligation itself - the paying of tithe - Jesus did not set aside. He affirmed it by speaking out against its abuse.

Paul, also, drew upon the ancient Israelite system of tithing, which was used to support the work of the priesthood, when he wrote:



If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:11-14 NIV

Interestingly enough, one of the few times in the Bible where God tells us to test Him has to do with the tithe:



Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven

and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.

Malachi 3:10

Because God is the creator, and therefore ultimately the owner of all things, He has the right to claim some things for Himself. We have seen that He did that with time. Right in the beginning, in Eden, God set aside a tree, and said not to touch it. Was the tree poisonous? No. Was it repulsive looking? No. Was it's fruit bitter, sour? No. Then why did God reserve that one tree? It was, as the story unfolded, the point of opportunity for Adam and Eve to demonstrate their trust in God. What would trust be without some way to show it?

It's the same with tithe. Ultimately, all of our material possessions belong to God. To remind us of that, and as a practical opportunity to demonstrate our trust in God and belief that He cares for us, He reserves one tenth of our increase for Himself.

In our western society, where people are measured by the size of their bank balance, or the car they drive, or the house they live in, or their prowess at business, God says, wait. That's not how I see it.



Who (God) ***fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end - then you say in your heart, My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth. And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He***

swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

Deuteronomy 8:16-18

There is nothing that we possess - either material or spiritual - that does not come from God, the great giver. Tithing is our way of saying to God, *I acknowledge you as my God, and all I have comes from you. Thank you.* We can trust God. It's amazing how nine tenths, with God's blessing, goes further than ten tenths without it!

TO WHOM MUCH IS GIVEN

In the end, in Christ, we are no longer slaves, and so we shouldn't view ourselves that way. Instead, we are free; with a new life in Him. Because we can't earn our salvation, all we can do is show our gratitude and thankfulness for it. And we do that by living as God has asked us to live, and by being good managers of every aspect of our life, which includes two of the most precious aspects that we can tend to be most selfish with - our time and our money.

Perhaps the principle that reveals it the best is found in these words:



For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

Luke 12:48

In this epic story in which we find ourselves, the issues remain the same. Remember, God gave Adam and Eve the fruit of all the trees except one. It was a test of faith and trust. God was serious.



Then the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Genesis 3:4-5

Is God fair? Absolutely. Is He holding something good back from us? Absolutely not. He provides the very air we breathe. Like the one tree in the garden, with His tithe God gives us the opportunity to show, in a practical way, our trust and dependence on Him. The epic struggle comes right down to the personal level too.

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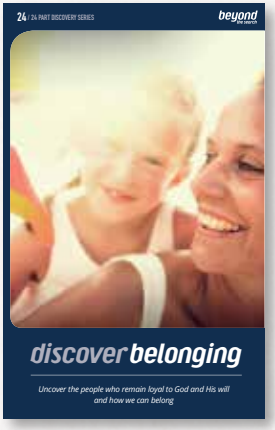

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In the movie *Cast Away*, Tom Hanks plays a character stranded on a deserted island. Before long he gets so desperate for company that he takes a Wilson basketball which is part of the debris left over from the plane wreck, paints a face on the ball, names it Wilson, and starts talking to it. Wilson becomes his constant companion. There's an especially powerful scene where, in a storm, the ball drifts away from him, and he screams, reaching out desperately for it and crying, *Wilson! Wilson!*

The point is, of all the privations he suffered, loneliness was the worst. And that's because, as human beings, we were made for community. We were made to interact with other people.

All this leads into one of the most important aspects of Christian faith, of what it means to be a Christian, and this deals with the idea of community - community that is based on and centred around a relationship with God.

BOOKENDS

This concept - that of community and our need for community - becomes, as we will see, especially important in the context of the following text:



And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 12:17

First, in this text, notice the great controversy theme. Then, notice the context - Revelation 12:7-9. It's the start of the war in heaven.

These verses reveal the reality of the cosmic conflict which began in heaven and has come to the earth - a conflict that we are all a part of, a conflict in which we all get pretty battered up and bruised, too, don't we?

Satan here is called the *dragon ... that serpent of old* - depicted as *wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed.* Revelation 12:17 KJV

In this verse, then, the following elements exist - Satan, the woman, and her seed, specifically the remnant of her seed. Though expressed in the context of the last days of the great controversy on earth, these images go back to the beginning of that conflict here, even to Eden itself.

Deceived by *that serpent of old*, Eve fell into sin and Adam followed her. The Lord then said to the serpent, Satan:



So the LORD God said to the serpent … I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

Genesis 3:15

The same elements are found here, in the beginning of the epic struggle on earth - Satan - the serpent, the woman, and her seed - that are found also in Revelation 12:17, near the end of the conflict. These verses form bookends to the great controversy, at least as it is being played out here on earth, and in our own lives and our own epic journeys.

REVELATION 12

Thus, from Eden down to the end of time, the great controversy has raged. In Revelation 12, *the woman* - the church, is depicted as being persecuted by Satan, which happened through the long centuries of persecution, as we studied in earlier booklets.

Revelation 12:17, however, focuses on the *remnant of her seed.* A remnant is a part of the original that is left over, that is remaining. Her refers to the woman, God's people, the church. So God's people at the end of the epic story, will face conflict with the dragon, Satan himself.

Who, then, is this remnant?

A crucial factor can be found in the context of the chapter itself. Revelation 12 is a quick summary of key events in the great controversy, though not necessarily in chronological order.

First, was the war in heaven, a war that resulted in Satan and his angels being cast down to earth. See Revelation 12:7-9.

Then, the woman gives birth to a child, obviously Christ (Revelation 12:5), who was born on the earth, where the dragon - Satan, already cast out of heaven, was ready to *devour the child as soon as he was born.* Revelation 12:4. See also Matthew 2.

Next, the dragon attacks the woman:



Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child.

Revelation 12:13

As a result of this attack, the woman - God's church - is twice depicted as fleeing into the wilderness:



Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Revelation 12:6 See also Verse 14.

Then, following the time the woman fled into the wilderness, the remnant is introduced:



And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 12:17

Thus, Revelation 12 unfolds like this:

1. Satan's rebellion in heaven and his being cast down to earth.
2. His failed attempt to destroy Christ.
3. Satan next attacks Christ's church.
4. The 1260 days (years) persecution of the church.
5. Satan, then, makes war on the remnant of the woman's seed, those who *keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.* Revelation 12:17

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REMNANT

We can start to look more carefully at this remnant.

The first characteristic is that it comes after the period that the woman fled into the wilderness, the *one thousand two hundred and sixty days* or the *time and times and half a time,* which we saw in an earlier study, was the period of papal persecution that ended in the year 1798.

Thus, the first characteristic of this remnant is that it arises after 1798.

The next characteristic is that they *keep the commandments of God*. This is simply stating that they keep the Ten Commandments, the law of God - all of them. Remember this?



For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

James 2:10-11

So the remnant will be a commandment keeping group, which includes the seventh-day Sabbath.

They also take the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14 to the world - the messages in which last day events are clearly depicted. In contrast to those who get the mark of the beast, God's people - in essence, the remnant of the woman's seed - are described like this:



Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 14:12

Further, by linking this verse with Revelation 12:17, we can see that another characteristic of the remnant is that they have the faith of Jesus. Whatever else that means, these are a Christ-centred group of Christians whose faith rests in Christ and in His salvation. They live by faith - the faith of Jesus - trusting in the Bible and in the Lord of the Bible, as did Jesus.

THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

There's another characteristic of the remnant, as depicted in Revelation 12:17:



And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 12:17

The *testimony of Jesus Christ?* What is that? Revelation later gives the interpretation:



And I fell at his (the angel's) ***feet to worship him. But he said to me, ... do not do that! ... Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.***

Revelation 19:10

What is the spirit of prophecy other than a manifestation of the prophetic gift - the gift of prophecy - which is taught in the New Testament?



But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy.

1 Corinthians 12:7-10

To another prophecy - that is, the prophetic gift is seen operating in the remnant.

And again:



And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-12

A prophet?



For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

Luke 7:28

This is heavy. Of the prophets - Moses, David, and Isaiah, to name just a few - none were greater than John?

For our immediate purposes, what's a crucial difference between these other prophets and John?

John the Baptist has no writings in the Bible, as do all these others. And yet he is still considered not only a prophet, but the greatest one?

The point is simple. One doesn't have to be a Bible writer to have the prophetic gift. As those other New Testament texts have shown, the gift of prophecy will be manifest in the church. According to Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 19:10, it is one of the marks of the *remnant of her seed.*

For these reasons, and many others, millions around the world believe that this gift has been seen in the life and writings of Ellen G. White (1827-1915), the world's most translated woman author. Her writings, which cover a span of about 70 years, have influenced and still exert influence all over the globe. Her writings are filled with counsel, admonitions, and direction that have helped in the establishment of churches, hospitals, and schools in almost every continent. Her work is a truly remarkable achievement, especially for a woman who never went past the third grade. Her writings speak for themselves, and for the Spirit that inspired them.

Also, in all these studies, what has been the only authoritative source of all the teaching? Of course, the Bible - and the Bible alone. Every teaching has been based on the Word of God, nothing else. Whatever the various purposes of the spirit of prophecy and the prophetic gift, the gift remains subservient to the teachings of the Bible. Ellen White's last public statement to the church was, *I commend to you this book* - and she held up the Bible.

These booklets - by keeping the Bible as the sole authority for the teachings presented - help make that position clear.

THE REMNANT OF HER SEED

From these points, we take the position that the one community best fitting this depiction - that of *the remnant of her seed* - is the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Firstly, the Seventh-day Adventist church arose in the mid 1800's, that is, after the prophetic period depicted in Revelation 12.

Secondly, the Seventh-day Adventist church upholds the keeping of the *commandments of God,* including the fourth. The name *Seventh-day Adventist* testifies to the importance it puts on that commandment.

Thirdly, the Seventh-day Adventist church is Christ centred, with the focus on the *faith of Jesus,* meaning that it teaches that salvation comes only by faith, faith in the righteousness of Christ.

And, finally, though many people outside the Adventist church read and have been blessed by the ministry of Ellen G. White, her life work and ministry emanated from within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist church itself. Hence, it can rightly claim the spirit of prophecy as one of its identifying marks.

But these claims don't mean that only Seventh-day Adventists are saved. That has never been a position or teaching of the official Seventh-day Adventist church. It means only that now, as has been all through salvation history, God has a group of people - often deemed a remnant - who have been blessed with truth that the world at that time needed to hear. In our time, right before the Second Coming of Jesus, this truth is the Three Angels' Message of Revelation 14, which the Seventh-day Adventist church alone - with a presence in more countries than any other Protestant

denomination - is preaching *to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.* Revelation 14:6

Like the early Christian church it has a mission - to take the gospel to the world. *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.* Matthew 24:14 Revelation 14: 6-12 gives the setting of the preaching of the gospel in the last days.

A COMMUNITY

Of course, even if one were to accept the idea of a remnant church, and that the Seventh-day Adventist church fits that description, many have a dislike, and understandably so, for organised religion.

What, though, would they prefer? Disorganised religion? The western world today is characterised by individuality. This individuality is seen in many ways, but notably in a fear of commitment. But avoiding commitment, like the quest for freedom, is elusive. That issue is at the heart of the epic struggle. Remember, it started with Lucifer - *I will be like the Most High.* He wanted to be free from God's restraint - but to be so, he was committed to his own agenda. It's the same issue today. In God's world where true freedom reigns, there is deep commitment to God, to what He says and what He does.

The fact remains that the concept of a church - a community of believers bound together by a mutual sense of love for each other and by a common goal and mission - is profoundly biblical. One could even argue that organised religion is just another term for the biblical concept of

community, the fellowship of the *called out* ones - the Greek meaning of the word church - a concept that is central to biblical faith.

The church was called out by God to represent Him, to be a community that serves - serves Him by obediently following Him and serving others. This is what the Seventh-day Adventist church strives to be - imperfectly, as with all churches - and to do. A global network of schools, hospitals and humanitarian agencies is the result.

In the great controversy, we all take big hits. Who among us can make it alone? Who of us has in and of himself or herself all that he or she needs? We all come with strong points, we all come with weak points, and we all come with gifts in some areas and deficiencies in others.

And God knows that. And He knows that we often need each other. Our lives are often full of turmoil. Problems arise, needs arise, crises happen that we in and of ourselves can't always handle. And sometimes we just don't know where to turn to, or where to get help.

But if you are part of a community, a caring community of fellow-believers, you can find help. And not only that, if you are part of a community of believers - a church - you can be in a position to help others. The church isn't just a place you go to get. On the contrary, the church is a place where you go to give. And so often, as anyone who has ever experienced the results of selfless giving knows - the more you give of yourself the more you get back in return.

That's what the New Testament concept of a church is all about. The apostle Paul uses the analogy of the body for the church, the idea being that the different parts of the body cannot function properly without the

others parts. That is, we not only need others, others need us. That's what the Christian church, ideally, is to be about:



But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, on these we bestow greater honour; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honour to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

1 Corinthians 12: 20-25

Who, among us, amid the terrors and trials of the great controversy, doesn't at times need to be cared for in one way or another? Even more importantly, who among us doesn't need, in one way or another, to care for others?

The church - the community - is God's venue for both. And He calls us, as part of our own stories, to be part of it - for our own good, and for the good of those whom we can bless.

God loves the church. See Ephesians 5:25. He can love them in a way that others won't let Him love them. They have said *Yes* to Jesus. One of the recurring images used for His church is His *bride*. How romantic is that? Ever since the open face to face relationship between God and His first

church - Adam and Eve - was broken by the rebellion, God has been looking forward to the time when He is back with His bride face to face again.

When Jesus comes again, when the closing struggle of the present age is over, notice what comes next:



Then he said to me, Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb! And he said to me, These are the true sayings of God.

Revelation 19:9

Friends, it's almost supper time! He has prepared a place for us - His bride (John 14:1-3), the wedding breakfast is ready. You are invited.



And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Revelation 22:17

This is your personal invitation. What a reception it will be when we, with the saved of all ages, meet Jesus face to face in His kingdom.

I have accepted Jesus as my personal Saviour. By His grace I will be there. It's been my privilege to open God's word with you. Chances are we will not meet on this earth. But I look forward to catching up with you some day, at the supper. It may just be that what we have studied together has helped you to make sense of this life, and to choose Jesus.

Really, in comparison, there's nothing else in life worth living for!

God bless you.

Clifford Goldstein

NOTES

NOTES

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