

“Bad to the Bone”

The following draft book is indeed a commentary on The Bible and to some will seem a little out of place on a charitable foundation for political leadership website. There is merit in that argument, however I as the author feel sincerely that leadership in every facet of life, family, education, religious, and political is being severely strained from lack of a moral compass. Some will say, “This is not new” and correctly but certainly we have seen an acceleration of this problem in recent years. There was a time in America’s history when the family and educational institutions recognized that the Bible and its moral codes were central to the strength of our nation and its government. We are losing that notion rapidly. One reason our religious organizations lose the fight is division among the different groups. There is a church on every street corner with few agreeing on anything. The world desperately needs to restore the original Church that Christ died for and the Apostles and disciples established in the 1st Century. It had a simple autonomous organization, plan and mission unlike the modern organizations polluted by man’s dreamed up, do your own thing doctrines. Our political and family leadership is fairly caught up in the failures of our moral values that have resulted from the convoluted doctrines of divided/denominated religious leaders. **“Bad to the Bone”**, yes we all fall far short of who we need to be as leaders.

The conclusions drawn by the writer in this Commentary were carefully formed and surely personal. I invite your critical comment on this site’s space for interaction. Perhaps the writer may learn from your perspective. I do encourage each one commenting to seek the whole truth of Bible teachings in forming their conclusions and applying those Bible truths to their leadership opportunities wherever they may find them. It is ever so easy for one to take a simple phrase from the Bible and form a whole theocracy from it without giving a thought to its context or other text on the subject. Regardless of your religious perspective: **Never fail to lead for if you look back you will always find someone following.**

Billy Bearden

Genesis

Creation and fall of Man

The definition of Genesis is “the beginning”, and so, this Bible chapter of Genesis is about the beginning of God’s creation of Earth, its Heavens and all its inhabitants. Let’s not think however that it is the beginning of God Himself for we have no way to identify his beginning other than to say that He is of eternity that has no ending or beginning. In mathematical terms we would express His existence as infinity. Perhaps this is the reason that we have such a hard time understanding the concept of God. **Man is finite (limited) on earth** in his physical form and finds it almost impossible to deal with the **infinite**, which is a term descriptive of man’s spiritual self. The spirit of man survives eternally (forever) as surely as God’s own physical laws of science and nature declare that matter merely changes states but never ceases to exist. Consider that when we look up at the stars at night into the heavens, we can hardly imagine how many stars and galaxies are out there. There are an “infinite” number, uncountable, the heavens are unending, and because we can’t grasp the scope of the heavens, it almost seems useless to look and consider their vastness. Consequently, we rarely take the time to gaze into our beautiful skies at night. How many times have you considered the unending nature of the heavens? If you wish to experience infinity and your spiritual self spend more time looking into God’s universe. Imagine if you wish that out there somewhere are spirits, even spirits of those you love who have died and are with God. Where is God’s Heaven; where are the spirits who have gone to be with God? In some infinite realm, perhaps even within one of God’s celestial bodies is the closest we can imagine. These are questions we all have. God’s word leads us to believe His spiritual world is all around us and ultimately above us in the vastness of the Heavens. **There is scriptural evidence that there are different levels of Heaven and that those Godly of the Old Testament and Christians that die before the “last Day” are held in an intermediate realm called a Paradise of Hades (a Heavenly temporary home for the godly, a spiritual bliss) while the ungodly are held in presumably, a hellish side of Hades until Christ comes on the last day.** Certainly we are not given glowing details of this entire process in God’s Word but scripture concerning the thief on the cross when he was told by Christ he would be with Him that day in Paradise based on his confession of Jesus as the Christ gives us a glimpse of what the process may be.. (The thief did not require baptizing as we do because Christ had not died, been buried and arisen at

that point. Baptism had no meaning under the law except from a priestly cleansing sense done prior to offering sacrifices.) Those not “in Christ” **Church** are held in a separate part of Hades, that is **their Hell, awaiting the last day to be judged and sentenced to an eternal fiery hot lake of fire.** Then we see on the last day Christians in the grave first, and then all Christians alive being transfigured, coming forth with a new spiritual body and carried into that final Heavenly home Christ promised to prepare for His Church. On that same day, presumably, all those in their Hades Paradise home will be relegated to their permanent heavenly assignment: Heaven for those “in Christ” and a Hellish home for those rejecting Christ. You may ask what will the new spiritual body look like? Who cares as long as long as it favors our creator! It’s perhaps a little of that forbidden knowledge God withholds. There is nothing wrong with our imaginings, which may help us internalize and excite us about God’s realm and that spiritual body we may have. What would such a gift as salvation be without the excitement of looking at the imagined magnificence of a gift concealed?

You will see an exciting beginning (a genesis) of God’s creation as we study, and an end beyond your imagining. Even though the end of God’s creation is difficult to imagine, there is a **revelation** of that end in the last book of God’s Word of a beautiful eternal home for the Christian. And so we begin now with Genesis and will end at God’s Revelation. It is an

exciting journey. When we finish you are encouraged to launch off on your own study of God’s Holy inspired word that is **unadulterated** by this writer and will be much more exciting and meaningful when personally internalized. A daily visit of the word is a worthy adventure. A goal of studying yearly the whole Bible adds meaning to life that grows and changes each journey you make. Frankly, the writer can hardly imagine anyone ever completely understanding God’s Will for his/her life or for that matter, the meaning of life itself without a dedicated routine study of God’s Word. Everyone has an opinion on God’s Will and Way based on, in most cases, a very shallow self study combined most likely with some preachers ranting and raving from a pulpit, neither of which will grow a strong spiritual relationship with our God and Christ.

Before we begin this next paragraph, let me say that herein you will find my dissertation on God’s **creating and forming** of man as two separate actions, foreign and perhaps rejected by most readers. As far as I know, I have never had an original thought on any matter and this, as well as my later dissertation on marriage represent perhaps, the only two original thoughts of my lifetime. (I’m

not proud of that) Now I may be wrong but truthfully I am not aware of anyone else espousing these conclusions. Bear with me please and to my Christian friends I ask you to indulge my efforts to internalize the meaning of God's word. I encourage all to do likewise as that seems to really add meaning to the word.

Of special interest in Genesis are the individual stories of **creation**, and the **forming** of man from the dust of the earth and the woman from the rib of man as his helper and companion. It is also important to note that God was not alone at the creation. Note that at Gen 1:26, God said, "Let **us** make man in **our** image, according to **our** likeness...." The Bible reveals that the Godhead is three persons in one. Perhaps a more descriptive way to explain God's being is as **three personalities**. The three personalities of God are commonly referred to in the religious world as **the Trinity** and although the term is not in the Bible, it is fairly descriptive. The activities of this trio are extensive throughout the Bible. The Trinity was and is God's spiritual personage in eternity and was present during the creation story. The Trinity, consist of **God, the Son (The Christ Jesus) and The Holy Spirit**. God may, has, and does manifest himself in at least these three personages that we know of from His Word. We can't limit God however, so there may be other ways that you may have experienced God, like in his natural creation, the sunset and sunrise, the wind, the flowers and trees and yes, even angels. (On angels, see Heb 13:2) Psalms 19:1-6 states, "...The sky proclaims God's glory." In these other realms however, we must be mindful that God's word also cautions us to **worship Him and not his creation**. Indeed in Psalms 148, God's creation is called on to "**worship Him**". We read in world history and the Bible of those who worshipped the sun, moon, and various paganistic objects and neglected the worship of God the creator. In God's Ten Commandments he admonishes the Children of Israel to have no other God's before them. Their mistakes in choosing their other gods led to devastating effects on generations. You should understand that it is in **our human nature to worship those things that we can see, smell and touch and we find it difficult to worship that which we cannot experience physically**. Even so, we can be assured that our outcomes will be devastating as well when we allow our affections to settle on "**things of this world even things of God's creation**" and neglect worshipping the Spiritual God of our creation. More than likely, you will experience people who say and even you may say, I do not need to attend a worship service of God; I can go deer hunting on Sunday morning and worship him in my deer stand looking out over His grand creation. Pray that they or you may more fully understand God's Word and Will. God's creation is absolutely beautiful for certain and we are called upon to appreciate and nurture it, but God never intended we worship His creation or "creature". It simply is not His Will.

See Romans 1: 25 “ Who changed the truth of God to a lie, and worshipped and served the **creature more than the creator** who is blessed forever.”

The creation story of Genesis is perhaps the most debated story of the Bible and has caused great divisions among the religious and the scientific communities. Here the writer will propose another point of argument on the subject, one that no doubt will be rejected by many.

We discussed above that the Spiritual Trinity was present at the creation and that male and female were **created** in the Trinities image that is a spiritual image at Gen 1:26,27. See also John 4:24 “..God is a spirit..”. The fact that we find God “**formed**” a physical man “out of the dust of the earth” at Gen 2:7, suggest that two separate actions have taken place here. Man’s spiritual self was **created** in the **spiritual image of God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit** and at Jeremiah 1: 5, Jeremiah is told by God that He knew him from before his Mothers womb or before he, Jeremiah, was “**formed**” in the womb. Then we find at Gen 2:7, God “**formed**” man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” Two separate actions, one is **a spiritual creation** and the last is **a physical forming**. How close together on a time line these two actions take place is subject to unnecessary debate. The female was spiritually created along with the male in Gen 1:26,27. Then her physical self was **formed** from the rib of Man, again two separate acts. We were **created spiritually** before **God formed us** in our Mothers womb. At some point God combines the two entities. Hey, this should give an entirely new view of reality to the abortionist and the “right to life” folks. We may kill God’s physically formed fetus, which is morally repugnant and perhaps murder in it self, but what happens to the spirit God created? Can we, or do we suppose to kill it as well? One would hardly think that possible. How does God handle a created spirit after a man has destroyed the formed body to house that Spirit? One would have to be totally devoid of a belief in God to do such a thing knowing surely that an all powerful God would bring total damnation to anyone aborting His creation, His Will. To those who cannot see or hear God’s will on this matter of abortion, rest assured you will understand on your last day loud and clear. You can rationalize all you wish my friend about; what if rape or incest is involved or risk to the mother’s life or what ever, and you can make a choice, but never forget God’s thoughts are not the same as your thoughts on any subject and your choices will be accounted for before God as a Christian and Judged as a non-Christian.

As we go forward we will understand the Christ (named humanly by God as Jesus) as spiritual God himself whom God **formed in the womb of Mary to**

become our Messiah, a physical sacrifice. Look also at Gen 2: 5,6 and in similar manner, see that the trees and herbs were **created** but lay dormant in the soil, invisible to the eye, much as a spirit, until God caused a great mist to water them. (Gen 2:9) Then they were then manifested (**formed**) as **physical specimens, visible entities**. In a sense the seed is brought forth in a formed or reformed state from, if it were possible, a spiritual like entity to a formed living plant. Think about it. A seed can lay dormant in King Tut's tomb for thousands of years or for an eternity, but once it comes forth as a visible plant it is doomed to die a physical death. In like manner, man exists infinitely spiritual, but physically and temporarily manifested. Man must die physically in order to be reformed into his Godly spiritual self and such is the cycle of God's creation.

Here is a challenge for you. Can you think of anything that man has truly created? Be truthful. In this physical world is there anything in existence which man has **created from nothing**. Would we not have to say that all things which man has **engineered** were **formed or reformed** from God's material creation? What we develop in this discussion and exercise is to learn who we are and that is no small question. Most of us spend a lifetime struggling with this question. We should understand that we are **at least two distinct persons in one**. One is in **the "created" spiritual image of God** and the other the **"formed" physical or carnal (another word for Physical) man/woman**. But lets not forget that God's image consist of three entities or persons/personalities and His created man and woman was to have within them a third dimension of the Holy Spirit with them. Original Man and woman's (Adam and Eve) spiritual and physical image consisted of God the Father, His Son, and **His Holy Spirit**, which are one. Man is meant to **have within him the Holy Spirit of God and that is precisely what he lost in His original sin in the garden**. Not until Christ death and ascension into Heaven did God send man **once more as his comforter**, His Holy Spirit that once again can restore us to that spiritual image, which God can relate to and yearns to be in relation with. Then man, when he **accepts Christ, becomes a whole man, in a sense with a trinity personage**. To our God we become as he meant us to be, in the spiritual image of God, His Son and His Holy Spirit. Man had that relationship/image until he experienced sin in the garden. At that point man experienced his spiritual death and a break with his designed relationship with God. From that moment on and throughout the Old Testament Bible, we will experience God's plan to restore man to a proper Spiritual relationship with Him, first through temporary physical steps of worship and then ultimately and finally, through Christ the Messiah, God's Son, a manifestation of Himself. We will experience first God slowly reorienting man through a spiritual journey but largely physical path (in the form of God's Old

law) back toward his spiritual self. It was a slow process taking thousands of years before God could bring man back into a state of accepting his spiritual relationship with his creator. Try to grasp the hurt that God felt when man chose to nurture his carnal body rather than the spiritual self that God created to have a personal relationship with. It had to be similar to loosing your best friend. In our later lessons about God's Spiritual Son Christ coming to this earth in a physical body to redeem man from his sins, please understand the gravity of His appearance on this earth. Understand also that when we accept God's gift of redemption through His Son, we have regained the image that God created us to be. We suddenly regain who we were designed to be, a spiritual image. ***If we reject Christ sacrifice, we remain a distorted image, which may imagine being satisfied, but can never understand the true joy of recognizing who we are and truly being who we were created to be.*** We will say it again, most of us spend a lifetime trying to determine who we are and what our purpose is. ***Don't waste your time wondering. Get in God's Word and understand His plan. Then follow the plan.*** Remember God's word is the mirror that reflects our spiritual image. James 1:23-25 says, "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror. For he goes away and immediately forgets what kind of man he is.. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty (**as in a mirror**) and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer **but a doer of the work**, this one will be blessed in what he does." (Parenthetical emphasis of the author) Can you imagine a builder building a house without a plan? We have no less a mess when we attempt to build a life without the creator's plan. Get in His word and stay there and ***do it early in life because you do not have a lot of time. Really!*** Please notice the problems we as humans experience in psychological stress, and huge problems with substance abuse. We talked about looking into God's word as in a mirror. I have tried to equate many of our psychological problems of the world with man looking in a mirror at himself and if he/she has not cultivated their God given image as God intended; If they have not accepted Christ, God, and His Holy Spirit and fed that spirit adequately, then the image they see in the mirror is indeed distorted and perhaps a gross and frightening image to view. Imagine an image of yourself in a mirror, the left side is your physical side, never missed a meal. The right side is that spiritual side, rarely partakes of spiritual food. Left side is perfectly beautiful; the right is deformed and starved. Frightened by the sight of our distorted self we run to do any number of things including strong drink and drugs, bitterness, anything to blur our vision and psychic to the point we no longer see our distorted self. From here we may seek our favorite Psychologist. **Seek God.** **Don't be a fool!** Psychologists are good but God is better and if you are lucky you may find both.

At Gen 1:24 God commanded that the earth bring forth all manner of living things according to its kind. Later in Gen 2:18 –23, look carefully. Here we have God determining that Adam, whom He had formed, needed a companion and helper. So what did God do? He **formed** a woman from Adam's rib as his mate, correct? **No He did not.** God **next formed** from the ground every **beast and bird**. Then God marched them in front of Adam to see what he would name them, **and, to see if Adam would choose a mate and helper from among the animals.** Gen 2: 20 states, "**But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.**" Imagine that. Out of all these animals, Adam could not find an animal to satisfy his need for a helper and companion. So, **God then** "...Caused a deep sleep to fall over Adam and He took one of his ribs ... Then the rib which the Lord had taken from man He made (**formed**) into a woman...."(don't forget now, God has already created her spiritual image). Now there is no doubt that God had foreknowledge that Adam would not find the animals appealing as a mate. But examine this closely. While God knows what our decisions will be before hand, **God is more interested in mankind (us) knowing and observing the results of our choices. God created us with free choice.** He knows what our choices will be, but the more important point is that **we only know our choice after we have made it.** Then we are shown the results of our choice only after we have made an independent decision. God wants us to make choices according to His Will and when we do not, he shows us the result of our choices. **Fortunately** Adam made a correct choice of not choosing a mate from the beast and birds **in accordance with God's will.** Now some who have grown to worship their dog are saying, man made a mistake! The Dog is man's best friend; why did he not choose a dog? How many times have you made decisions in your life and then realized, "**this is not right**". If we are wise we will then make corrections in our life. Or, perhaps we make a decision and later realize, you know, that was the right choice I made. By seeing the results of good and bad choices we reinforce good decisions and learn to avoid bad choices. **We should praise God for giving us choice and pray that he will also give us the wisdom to make decisions compatible with His will and the spiritual image he created in us.**

An interesting question might be, "What if Adam had selected an animal, say a dog, to be his mate and helper?" Would Satan have caused Adam's beast mate to sin and lead Adam to sin? The reader might see a scenario here of the sin of bestiality. Would Adam have sinned in so choosing a beast as his mate in the first place with devastating results?" The later is a likely scenario. Either way the results would have been the same in that Adam would have sinned in choosing to select a beast of the earth as his mate. Later we find bestiality as definitely a

sin against God's will. God gives us freedom of choice and then he uses those choices in blessing mankind with spiritual bliss in selecting His will or a carnal predicament when we choose not to follow His plan.

Precious subjects OF GENESIS:

1. **The creation** is a grand description of how God **spoke** into existence the world (earth), its heavens and inhabitants as we see it today. The creation story as told by the Bible, God's Word, meets stiff resistance from academic and scientific circles as they themselves support an **unproven theory** that all living evolved from the one celled organism and over millions and even billions of years, man evolved from **other species** such as chimpanzees and monkeys; that the earth itself came about when a cataclysmic event in space, which they call "**the big bang**", caused the planet and the heavens to form as they are. Again these theories are just that, theories unproven. The scientific and academic community will rebut that we also have no proof of the creation story. What they do not understand is that those that hold to the creation as God initiated, do not seek proof, but have complete faith in an all powerful God who spoke into existence the environment we live in today just as His Word tells us. We take the Word of God through Holy inspired men and Prophets of God which over thousands of years have recorded the story as revealed to them and we reject the word of men who have no relationship with the God of the universe. If the men of science and academia wish and prefer their theory, then it is certainly within their free will to do so. In fact it is our/ their God that created them with that free will. We may concede in principal the use of the word evolution from the standpoint that all living organisms do evolve or change over time. That is we do, for example, change in physical attributes such as muscle structure and cultural adaptation. Our ancestors were much more likely to have been agrarian versus city dwellers and probably were stronger than their later cosmopolitan cousins. Our cultures and psychological attributes do change over time. **We cannot, however agree that evolution includes evolving from another species altogether.** We may claim our stronger farming cousins as our forbearers but not a monkey in a zoo as our kin; sorry, but we want go there with you. What the atheist may not realize, and certainly will not admit is **that their beliefs are not based on proven facts either, but on "faith". Yes, their beliefs or based on faith that unproven**

theories hold true. The Atheist will ask you to prove **your faith** that God exist. Our answer would be in response; look at yourself, look at all the created world around you and then, prove that there is no God. **Prove that your “faith” in unproven science is justified.** Listen, if the Atheist wishes to believe that the world and all species were created by one “**big bang**”, so be it. That idea does not preclude God’s speaking and causing a very big bang indeed, as the elements under His control react together to form a universe, planetary system and one special planet (Earth) which would sustain the life of His creation. But of course, it want do to argue with the Atheist for even God’s Word teaches us **that one who believes there is no God, is a fool.** (Psalms 14:1) **Never argue with a fool or someone you must educate first** is a saying we have perhaps heard and how true it is.

Moses is believed to be the writer of Genesis and the following four books, i.e. Genesis through Deuteronomy, commonly called the Pentateuch (“penta” meaning five). All of these five writings came to Moses through ancient story telling handed down by many generations of Godly Fathers who had been guided directly by God in shepherding their families through life. It is believed by many historians that Moses wrote his books during the 40 years wilderness period. As we study the Bible we can generally divide the Bible into three periods of History. The Period that Moses writes about in the Pentateuch is generally called the “Patriarchal” period (Patriarch meaning Father). This was a period of time when God spoke somehow, directly to the Fathers. The Period of Moses, leading the Israelites till the appearance of Christ, is called the Mosaic age where again, chosen men of God called Prophets, provided council to the followers of God. There is substantial evidence in Old Testament scripture that God used angels to communicate, but also Christ and the Holy Spirit can be seen at work as well. Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush was certainly more than an angel when Moses was told to take off his shoes as he was standing on Holy ground. Mere Angels did not command such a warning. These Prophets would have seemingly communicated with God in the same fashion that Moses did on the mountain in the Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given.

Then the present age began with Christ birth and death on the cross. We call it **“The Christian Age”**. You will hear this Christian age also referred to as **“the end times”** for it will end as God wills, the last day or as scripture calls it, **“The Day of The Lord”**. The **“Christian age” is the last age or days.**

Communication with God continued in this period through Christ and even the Holy Spirit as in the case of Paul on the Damascus road, until after all those who had been with Jesus on earth had died. Since then our communication with God

has been largely through the recorded inspired scripture of the prophets and Apostles letters and writings. Christians continue to have access to God through the Holy Spirit through Prayer, the word, and God's providence until "the end day". Watch closely this expression as we proceed however. There are many who have misapplied the end day phrase in their misinterpretation of Christ Revelation to John. In Revelations we will learn that much of the religious world make the mistake of believing that Christ will return and establish his Kingdom on this earth and after a rapture of Christians dead and alive, will reign for a thousand years from an earthly throne, giving the ungodly one more chance to redeem themselves. That 1000 yr period would then become "the last days" to those who so believe. This is a tragic misapplication of God's word in the writer's opinion, and will lead many, including those who call themselves Christian today, rejecting Christ once again just as earlier Jews did. Please follow this in the Revelation study carefully when we get there, being cautious not to fall for this error. It is crucial to the proper application of God's plan.

Let's first outline Genesis and break it down into its subparts. A good friend and teacher of Genesis, Wayne Dunaway, gives a one-sentence summary of Genesis thusly; "**It all begins because of sin**".¹ That is aptly spoken, for without sin, man would have never needed the Bible or Genesis. Genesis means, as stated earlier, "Beginning" and man had his beginning in the Garden of Eden and were it not for his sin, there he would have remained and there would not have been any need for what follows. Dunaway continues by outlining Genesis as follows:

- 1. Chap 1-11(the beginning of human race)**
 - a. Creation of this earth, all the rest of the universe, and all species of beings.**
 - b. The fall of man in sin.**
 - c. The flood (God destroys sinful man to begin again with Noah and his Family in the lead.**
 - d. The tower of Babel (God's restart does not work); Sins overtake man once again. God scatters man to break up his concerted effort to become a god himself.**

To further breakdown the first chapters;

- **Chap 1-3: We have the presence of sin with Adam and Eve disobeying God in the Garden.**

- **Chap 4-6:** We sin getting worse and worse.
- **Chap 9-11:** We see that sin gets not only worse, but appears to be permanent (Noah gets drunk and commits incest soon after he leaves the Ark). His son Ham sins against his father and it just keeps on going.
- **Chap 12-50 (Beginning of Hebrew Race):** These final Chapters Gives us Gods plan and promise of our redemption from sin through his seed, Jesus Christ. You might remember Gods plan was being worked in those of the days of the Old Law, but it was “concealed” until the New Testament Covenant where then it was “revealed to all”.
- In Ch 12-50, a three-letter acronym, LDS, may be used to reveal God’s plan to redeem man. It stands for Land, Descendants, and Seed. Bro Wayne Dunaway of Ohatchie, Al Church of Christ, Al used this acronym in His lessons on Genesis and we will use it here with his permission.¹

LDS

- 1. L- Land-** the land of Canaan was promised to Abraham- and,
- 2. D- Descendants** Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Tribe of Judah, David, Jesse would bring the seed (Christ) through their lineage in the fullness of time.
- 3. S- Seed (Christ)** Galatians 4; 4 “ In the fullness of time God sent his So,” Jesus the Christ.

Some ask; why did God wait so long to send Jesus to redeem man from his sin? Undoubtedly, he foreknew that man would never accept the fact that he was powerless to save himself from his sinful nature. God knew that He would have to prove to mankind over and over that he was powerless over his own sin. Look around even today. Man will scarcely accept the fact that Christ is needed in his\her life. No, God had his timing just right. The scriptures tell us that in **the “fullness” of time**, He brought us Jesus. (Gal.4: 4) God has his own time schedule for everything and we best not forget it. It requires our **devotion and**

patience to wait on God's timing. You will see this again because we need to be reminded that there is a reason for God's timing always and we must wait on the Lord. Look for a beautiful hymn with those lyrics, "I will wait upon the Lord". It's one of Papa's favorites.

Let's spend a good deal of time and continue in Genesis because if you don't get the beginning right, the rest won't come easy. This is the greatest love story ever told, and like any story, especially love stories, try starting in the middle; you will never understand the story and most likely quit before the end. I heard another speaker say that; "**If man could have written the Bible, he wouldn't have. If he would have, he couldn't have**". This quaint little saying speaks to the divine inspiration of the scriptures. **The scriptures are God's Words and reveal His plan. Man would not have and could not have written such a perfect treatise without God's Devine intervention and inspiration. We must also give great credit and faith in the Godly Men and most probably Women, who under Devine inspiration transcribed and preserved faithfully the words of God and His prophets of Old. These efforts are Holy Inspired and are miracles in and of themselves.**

You will notice several things relating to understanding God's word. One, He does not waste words and specific use of words have deep and everlasting meaning. So, in your study, **be careful with His words** lest you misinterpret His will and wrongfully apply His Word. Remember, God/Christ is referred to as "**The Word**" (John 1: 1) and as you seek God, pay close attention to each word. If you miss His Word(s), you miss Him.

Playing golf one day with two friends, one hit a beautiful fade shot. He disgustingly said, "ugh, another slice"! I quickly corrected him by saying, "that's not a slice it's a controlled fade, you need to be careful with your vernacular, I said." He looked at me and said, "**Is that something you could step in?**" The point here is, be careful with God's word because to miss His meaning is to step where you do not need to step. *Hopefully, God and the reader have a sense of humor here.*

Let's get this out of the way and this is another Wayne Dunaway saying; Creation is as the artists' painting; it assumes the appearance of age on the day it was created. If you had seen a tree at creation, you might have said, "Wow! What a tree, it must have taken 100 years to grow that tree." Seeing Adam, you would have perhaps said, "he looks maybe 20 years old." Now, If one does not accept with faith the concept of an all powerful God who spoke into creation the world, its heavens and inhabitants, then you surely don't want to waste your time with the balance of this writing. Find a more productive use of your time. It is

not the goal of this writing to convert the “**bright**” Atheist of this world. That will have to wait till another time. A fine Book will be recommended for the Atheist who may have mistakenly picked up this treatise. Read Dinesh D’ Souza’s book, “What’s so Great about Christianity?”². It is a book that will, fairly and intellectually challenge your perceived “**brightness**”.

God **the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit** (‘*us/our*’) created man in His own image. Man is provided for in every way as he is placed in a perfect garden. He is given a choice of eating the fruit of any **Tree of Life**, but instructed not to eat of the **Tree of Good and Evil**, for to do so, he will assume that he has the power of God and has the freedom to form and direct his own world. Man will assume that he has the “**world by the tail**” and has no need for the creator of his universe. If we choose the Tree of Good and Evil, our God and our creator loses what he wants most from us and that is a loving, worshipful relationship with him. If this sounds strangely the way the majority of our acquaintances thinks and act, as if gods, there is a good reason. Truly a huge number in this world have assumed they are beyond God and have no need for him. Man continues to choose the fruit of the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. We continue to seek **forbidden knowledge** in life. That indeed is exactly what happened in the Garden of Eden when Satan convinced Eve, Adam’s wife, whom God formed for Adam as a helper, to partake of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. She told Adam of Satan’s message, that it was fine to eat of the forbidden tree, and Adam gave in to eat the forbidden fruit. Until that time, Adam and Eve were happy as Larks running around nude unaware of their lack of dress. Upon partaking of the forbidden tree, they became fully aware of their nakedness, their carnal/physical natures and sought to cover themselves and hide from God. We can see this natural reaction play out even in our children today as they run around the house gleefully nude until suddenly one day as they near puberty we find them more conscience of their nudity appearing fully dressed from behind a jealously guarded and closed bathroom door. As they mature they become aware of their natural self after tasting the fruits of the forbidden tree. You or others may ask, what is the age of accountability for the young. Perhaps the answer is somewhere around puberty when one realizes his/her nudity. Interesting?

God’s introduction of Satin in the Garden gave Adam and Eve and all men, freedom of choice. Who will we choose to follow? The choice of Satin versus God is the choice with us in our present state and, as in the Garden, the choice of following Satin’s lead separates us from a relationship with God. Adam and Eve were cast from the Garden and the door was shut to Eden and the Tree of Life, at least for a time, that **fullness of time, after man has been shown by God that he is hopeless without a savior (Christ)**. Gal 4:4, Eph 1:10 This separation

from God is a spiritual separation and is a spiritual death in God's spiritual view and in the true spiritual sense. Remember Gen 1; 26 stated that man was created in God's image and John 4:24 says, "**God is a Spirit....**", so we were first and foremost created, a spirit. To die spiritually for man is then the only death that is meaningful. As we travel along we will understand our physical bodies as a temporary tent in which our spiritual soul lives while on this carnal (physical) earth. In Jas 4:14, think about it, our physical bodies are God given and they should be respected as God's gift but really, as James says, **our human body "is but a vapor". One may even say the body is a "figment of our imagination".** This saying, which I believe is original with the author, shocks some hearers but hear me out and think about it. Think of the time we spend in front of a mirror making sure our image is just right. Can you remember what you looked like after leaving the mirror. The book of James alludes to this. Our time would be better spent, don't you think, if we spent more time developing a prettier spiritual image since it's the only thing permanent. Consider The word of God, our Bible, as our spiritual mirror. In a discussion of our spirits, you may long for a definition of "Spirit". What is Spirit as it relates to mankind? We may define it as simply that which is not physical, or not carnal.

How does the Spiritual side of man manifest itself? We are searching here now so work this question in your own mind. For now, we can perhaps agree that it manifest itself in man through his soul but then that concept begs an explanation of the soul, does it not? In common speech, we often talk about our heart, thoughts, and in scriptural references such as Ephesians 5:19 "Making melody in your '**heart**'" ... Man apparently was the only being created of God wired with a brain capable of discerning right and wrong, good and evil and is blessed with a soul akin to God's own being, capable of having a relationship with Him. We often then use the term "**heart** to refer to this brain and intellect. We also have a heart, a physical pump for circulating blood within our bodies don't we? But, when we refer to doing this or that from **the heart**, we are figuratively talking about utilizing the **reasoning powers of our God given brain and intellect which is a manifestation of our spiritual soul** or, if you will, our spiritual "**heart**". No other animal of God's creation has this intellectual heart or soul capable of a relationship with God. If an animal had a soul then God would have told us that all animals were created in God's image, which He did not. No matter how the world may wish or believe his or her pet to have a soul, it does not.

Our souls are the precious and special element of God's creation, which were created to be, "**the image of God**". It is that you, that God created, whom he desires to have a special relationship. But this relationship is only possible if in our choices, we choose God (Christ) as our Master to the exclusion of all other

Masters. In Rev 1: 8, God says, “I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the end”...and we mentioned earlier that God is of eternity, which is what the term Alpha and Omega stands for. It refers to an endless time, or infinity. Do you then know that our spiritual selves are also infinite. Rev 13: 8 says, “All who dwell upon the earth will worship the beast all the people since the beginning of the world whose **names “are not” written in the Lambs book of life from the foundation of the world**” This verse suggest that our spirits, as a creation, existed before God created the world and His book of life. This verse is also saying that God had **foreknowledge** of those who would choose Him as Lord and those who would not. **It does not show that God predestined our path and choices.** Many have developed their own Theology around an idea that God predestines who are His and who will not be saved. There simply is no scriptural basis for this, but there is scriptural proof that God created us with **choice and that he had foreknowledge of our choices from before the world was created.** In Jeremiah 1:4 God tells Jeremiah, the prophet, “**Before I formed thee in the belly of thy Mother’s womb, I knew you, I sanctified thee and ordained thee a prophet...**” Now he is talking to Jeremiah specifically here but just the same he speaks of all mankind as far as his foreknowledge is concerned. 1 Peter 1; 24, James 1; 10 speaks to the same subject.

This creation story is a powerful testimony of who **we are, and where we come from.** The answer to those two questions, it seems, is something that man continually seeks for most of his carnal life and God’s Holy word provides us with the answer from the beginning. It should confirm that we are special with God among all his creation.

After the fall with Sin

Adam and Eve are now without God and out of the perfect garden that God had provided. They are spiritually separated from God but God has not forsaken them. He will continue to use them in his plan and will continue to give them choices and whatever choices they make, God will use those actions in his plan. That’s one thing we all should be assured of; we can choose to leave God out of our lives but he will never leave us and whatever decisions we make He will use those actions in whatever way he sees fit. **God may just as likely allow Satan to use our decisions in ways that may affect our lives or the lives of those within our sphere of influence. Examine the Book of Job for an example of God’s use of Satin.**

Adam and Eve initially have two sons Cain and Able. Cain was a tiller of the soil while Abel was a keeper of cattle and sheep. We are not given the details of exactly when the worship of God included a sacrifice but we have an account here of the two sons bringing their sacrifice to God. Cain brought an offering of the first fruits of his farm as his offering. Able brought a sacrifice of the first born of his sheep. God was more pleased with Abel's sacrifice than that of Cain's. We are not shown initially why God preferred Abel's sacrifice. Later however, as we understand more completely God's intent of the sacrifice, we learn that it is God's plan to redeem man through a **blood sacrifice** of his Son on the cross of Calvary. In bringing man to the understanding of this, God directed man to offer annually a Sin offering, the blood sacrifice of their first born animals, without blemish, painting a picture showing man that He would eventually offer His first borne son, Jesus as our perfect blood sacrifice. Cain became very jealous of Able and eventually killed his brother. God, ask Cain where is your brother? Cain responds in Gen 4; 9-11, "Am I my brothers Keeper?" This question screams out from all mankind today; so what is the answer? The whole of the rest of the Bible answers that question and especially at Romans 14; 7, "**we are our Brothers keeper**". So God cursed Cain from then on from the earth from which he would forever toil to make his living. Adam and Eve then had another son, Seth and daughters as well. A descendant of Seth, Lamech, had a son, **Noah** that leads us to our next story.

The Flood

Noah had sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth and they **took** wives. Over time, man became increasingly evil turning from God and God finally said "they are now nothing but evil except that Noah and his family are Godly". God then told Noah that He would destroy the earth and all living thing upon the face of the earth; to build an ark, a large boat of some 450 ft in length. This would have been the longest ship ever built until the middle 1800's. Noah was given every detail for building the ark including the pitch (black tar) that was to be used to seal it. It's interesting to note that Noah and later Abraham both lived in an area which is today Iraq. We know of course that much of Iraq today oozes, even at the surface, with a pitch which comes from the Oil resources of that region.. This resource must have been a common resource even in Noah's time. We need to understand that Noah was then building this huge boat on dry land in a time when there had been no rain on earth from creation. Instead after creation, the earth consisted of underground water and water within the Heavens, but no rain

as we know it. Some have speculated that this atmospheric condition may account for the very long lives that mankind lived in those times. At any rate we have a man of God building this Boat at a time and place where there was not a drop of water to float it in sight. Can you imagine the taunting and criticism that Noah must have received as he spent years building this ark, especially when Noah told his neighbors that his God had ordered it to save him and his family from the coming flood. They must have thought him a little Looney. Noah kept on building on his faith in God, which serves as an example of the action our faith should take. In **James 2: 17-24, our faith demands action not simply an intellectual belief as some would have you believe. Can you imagine that God would have saved Noah and his family had Noah refused to continue building the ark?**

The floods did come after Noah and his family of eight loaded the ark with the required number of pairs of animals and birds and the ark was sealed including the doors and windows. Why seal the doors and windows? Hard to say except it does not take a lot of imagination to see hundreds of men who stood by taunting Noah as ignorant, climbing aboard trying to get in unsuccessfully as the waters rise. It's the same picture we may see on the last day when Christ returns to lift Christians up and out of the fiery earth, leaving behind those ungodly on an earth doomed to destruction. This day of the flood represented how God took the only Godly men he could find and **saved them with water and an ark, using that same water to cleanse the earth of the ungodly sin of man. Watch closely as we study and you will find this same picture in God's plan for redeeming or saving His people throughout Bible history over and over. A common medium of water will be seen in every instance of God's provision for mans salvation or rescue/redemption.**

After 40 days on the waters, the floods cease and Noah and his family with the animals exit on a mountaintop in Northeast Turkey, Mt Ararat. I've flown over this mountain many times with the USAF and have gazed down on it imagining Noah and the Ark resting on this tremendous mountain. After exiting the Ark, God made a covenant, a promise to Noah and us, his descendants, that he would never again destroy the earth with water. He placed the rainbow in the sky, supposedly the first ever rainbow since there had never been rain before, as a sign and seal of that promise. **Note and remember that when God makes a promise or a covenant with man he always seals it.** Another interesting fact is a rainbow seen from above, as in an airplane, is a perfect circle unbroken while from the earth appears as an arch. This seal says to us that God's promises are never broken, they are sealed forever, and in that, we can have security. So God has given man another chance at the perfect place, his Eden, His Heaven, without sin. What a day, what an opportunity, we say, but wait...

After The Flood

After Noah and his family exit the ark, Noah builds an Altar of rocks to the Lord and offers a burnt offering of every clean animal and bird to the Lord God. God had instructed Noah to load extra pairs of clean animals and birds, presumably for the reason that they would be needed for God's sacrifice and for food. Why did God demand that only clean and unblemished animals be used as sacrifice? As we continue you will see that God requires His Priest to cleanse them selves before entering into His Temple's Holy of Holies. He also required that the animal used as a blood sacrifice be without blemish, perfect. God's pure and perfect Son is used as our perfect, without blemish of sin sacrifice on the cross to pay for our sins. God introduces many things from the very beginning for the sole purpose of **pointing or leading** us to understand and accept His perfect Son's sacrifice; to accept His plan to restore man to his original state and purpose. This is not the only example of the importance of purity to God. All of the Old Testament in some way points to God's plan to redeem man from His sin through the clean and perfect sacrifice of Christ. Watch carefully the excruciating details of the Levitical laws, the perfect plans for the tabernacle and temple, the ritual cleansing of priest and the endless attention to maintaining a pure genealogical line from which Christ came. Some of it is boring to most readers but never forget that it all has meaning and without it one will never come near to understand God's plan. Many give up in disgust. Listen. There is a treasure, a gift waiting for you in all of His word. The Sum of Gods word is Truth and is precious, says David in Psalms 119. Do not give up on God's word.

Gen 9: 1 says, "God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them; 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.'" God also declares that **every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. "Bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply it."** Gen 9: 7

Now the sons of Noah were Shem, Ham and Japheth and from these sons all the nations of the earth were formed. The sons of Japheth were generally white/ Caucasian and European people. Shem's descendants were the Hebrew/Jewish people and were generally, of Canaan, Syria, and Bedlamites. Ham's

descendants were Arabic, Egyptian, and of the East Coast of Africa. It is ironic that this flood was brought by God to rid the earth of all evil and sin and to begin again. But it did not take long for Sin to creep back in. Gen 9:20-22 Noah, being a farmer, grew grapes and on one occasion was found drunk and lying uncovered in his tent. Ham sinned when he looked upon his father's nakedness and sinned. Here we see that man cannot, it seems, go far without sinning. When Noah awakened, he knew what his son had done to him and he cursed Ham.

Supposedly, Ham had committed some untold sexual act of incest while his father slept. Gen 9: 26, "Cursed be Canaan, A servant of servants he shall be to his brothers." Ham had sons, Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. Cush begot Nimrod who became King of Shinar within which laid the city Babel and another story.

Tower of Babel

Gen 11:1-9 "In the land of Shinar, the descendants of Ham said to one another, "come let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had stone for brick and asphalt for mortar. (This again is modern Iraq where today as then, an oil-based material, asphalt/pitch, oozes from the earth and is abundant) And they said, "...come let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the earth." But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of man had built". And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language. And this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them." God understands His creation. "...whose heart (of man) thou knowest." 1st Chronicles 6:30 "If they imagine that they can reach as high as their God, **they will imagine that they are Gods.** Come let **Us** go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." Notice again, God says "**let Us go down**", speaking of God, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is another like picture of Adam and Eve taking it upon them selves to gain strength within, that they may rule their life. The tower of Babel whose top was to be to heaven was to strengthen them as they would be as high as God and so they felt they could better control their environment and not be scattered abroad as God's plan called for. We have our own towers of Babel today as we go about making decisions that will, in our own egos and mind, make us feel more in control, without any thought about what may be God's plan for us. We may even Pray to God to show

us his way for us and then not have the patience to wait on God's answer. We often bull headedly press on without God and sometimes God stops us as he did the tower of Babel or as likely, he lets us go and later uses our mistake to show us where we err or even show someone else where we erred. God can use our decisions any old way He likes. That's what it means when we say, He is a sovereign God.

So the building of the City and Tower ceased when their language was confused and their speech was heard as Babel (indistinguishable language), thus the name, Tower of Babel. Archeologists have found ruins in the area of Iraq where this tower was built which could have been remnants of this brick towered structure. But the genealogy of Shem becomes the lineage of God's chosen people who will usher in God's eventual and ultimate redemption of man through his Son Jesus. Lets then follow Shem's lineage to a descendant named Abram. Abram will be led away from his homeland of Ur in the Chaldean area of today's modern Iraq and the area around today's Baghdad, to a place, a land that he promised to show him (Canaan). God promised Abram that He would make Abram a great nation and a great name. So, Abram obeyed God, **in faith** that God would fulfill his promise. Don't miss the lesson here again, that **our faith (Abram's faith)** leads us, demands of us, requires of us, **action**. Without action faith is but words and words are cheap. Before we go any further, let's define faith. It is important to us. Heb 11:6 Tells us that, "...For without faith it is not possible to please God." Heb 11:1 defines faith thusly, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Then in many other scriptures we learn that faith manifest itself or proves itself, only with an action of obedience. Again, words are cheap in any ones eyes, especially God's. Remember we said the atheist would have believers of God to prove His existence? Faith in action is our evidence, our proof that our God, not physically seen, nevertheless, exist. Faith then is belief and hope "in Action". That will be our definition here.

The Wanderings of Abram and Promises of God

So Abram took his wife Sarai and Lot, his brother, and they proceeded to Haran in what is today modern Syria and later went south to Canaan as God directed. In Gen 12: 7, God tells Abram in Canaan, "... To your descendants I will give this land." Soon there was a famine in Canaan and Abram had to move his herds and family south, even into Egypt. As Abram entered into Egypt, he was concerned that his wife Sarai was so beautiful that the Pharaoh of the area would take her to wife and kill him which was often the custom of the day for the Pharaohs. He arranged with Sarai that he would tell inquisitors that Sarai was his

sister, not his wife and it was not a complete lie as he had married Sarai, his half sister. True to form, his wife was recruited as a beautiful concubine for the Pharaoh. The Lord sent plagues to the Pharaoh's household for this indiscretion and when it was realized that the Pharaoh had nearly taken another man's wife (perhaps nearly had sex with her), Abram was confronted and asked by the Pharaoh, "Why did you do this thing?" Abram told him why but the Pharaoh demanded he leave the country. Abram was then forced to return toward Canaan. Lot, Abram's brother was with him on these travels and they both had many livestock. So many, that they needed to split them up to different territories. Abram offered Lot first choice. Lot looked eastward toward the salt Sea (Dead Sea) and saw that it was more fertile and chose the valley around the Salt Sea, near the growing cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Visits to Israel confirm vividly that the area around the Dead/Salt Sea, 1 to 2 miles from its shores is prolific for agriculture compared to the area westward toward Jerusalem. Abram then went toward the west into Canaan. This turned out a blessing to Abram and a curse to Lot in that Lot's home was near to the very corrupt and sinful towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot's Family was naturally influenced by the sin that abounded there but Lot remained faithful to God. God told Abram that he was about to destroy the cities and all its inhabitants. At some point the King of Sodom's enemies take Lot as a prisoner and Abram hears of it. Abram takes his men and they rescue lot and bring him home. The high priest of Salem (Old name for Jerusalem), Melchizedek, came out to greet Abram upon his return and blessed him. After this, the Lord appeared unto Abram and said, "... Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." Gen 15:1 But Abram answered the Lord by asking that he be blest with children as heirs. It was very important to men in that day that they have male children as heirs to carry on their name and lineage. God tells Abram that indeed he will have two heirs, one, which is not of his body, and one from his own body. The one not from his body will be of his wife's servant, Hagar although Abram does not know this at this time. The heir from his own body is from his wife Sarai and will be his designated heir. God tells him that his descendants shall be as countless as the stars of the heavens. **And Abram believed in the Lord and He (God) counted it to him as righteousness. Gen 15:6.** This is the first time in the Bible that the term, righteousness is used but certainly not the last time so we best define it now. **Righteousness in God's Word means to be right, in line or obedient with God's plan. Before Christ, God counted simple obedience to his Will as righteousness, which really remains his standard to this day, even "In Christ" except that righteous obedience now includes obedience to those items that places us "into Christ".** Ultimately, God sends his Son to die on the cross to cover our sins once and for all, making us **righteous**, clean,

unblemished, and unspotted from the world when **we believe that Christ is the Son of God and in so believing “obey” Him by confessing Him as Lord of our life, repenting of our sinful nature, and being baptized into his name.**

That is God’s plan (if we can call it “a plan”) for righteousness in the Christian era. In earlier history, the simple **obedient belief** of Abraham (Abram) was counted as righteousness but we must notice and recognize that sin was not forgiven forever under the Old Covenant with Abraham. It was simply overlooked by God for another year when the High Priest offered a blood sacrifice for their sins once per year. The ultimate permanent forgiveness of sins for the Godly people of the Patriarchal and Mosaic age did not occur **until Christ died on the cross for all. Christ’s death on the cross, paid for all sin forever for those obedient Godly people during the Old Covenant and those of obedient faith in Christ in the New Covenant period.** You may find yourself as we go forward asking, “why does he keep repeating the necessity of believe, repent, confess and be baptized?” These are ultimately the only obedient steps that God expects of us in order to make us righteous and pure for a relationship with Him. It is the core and cornerstone of our relationship with our Lord and it will be repeated over and over herein so get ready. Some would say, “how about the virgin birth, how about believing in the Mother Mary, how about the Trinity?” Aren’t these the “core” beliefs?” The answer to all these questions is, Yes, they are and it helps to understand and believe all of the story **but all that we can do or need to do in the Christian age to be right in God’s eyes is to be obedient to God’s plan for man’s redemption, these four steps. If we can bring ourselves to act on our faith by taking these four steps we will be saved.** Some will point to scripture where it is said, “Believe and you will be saved”. These Scriptures are of course true. If we could only come to understand that in God’s Word, when we see the word Believe, God automatically presupposes that one **Acts on that belief.** The “Acts” in this case are obviously the four small steps above. When we **act on our intellectual belief, belief becomes faith and “without faith it is impossible to please God”.** **Heb 11:6** Enough said here but as important as these steps are, you will see them over and over because the plan to redeem man is at the center of all of the Bible. It is what God’s plan for man is all about, being fit and pure enough for God to have a personal relation with. Why are we talking about Christ here; what do Abram and Sarai have to do with Christ? We here and throughout this writing will be developing the lineage of Christ and Abram and Sarai are in the path, so follow closely.

But, now back to Abram and Sarai. They were both old in age, in their 90’s at this point. Since Sarai was not having children for Abram, she offered her

servant Hager to Abram to have a son and he accepted her invitation. This was a common occurrence in these times if they could not have a natural heir with their wife, they would take liberties with a servant for an heir. We can't be positive that this was an acceptable thing in God's eye but here goes man's freedom of choice. Remember, God allows our choices, knows what they will be and uses them positively or negatively to shape our world and work His plan. We do know from previous scripture that God had foreknowledge that a child would be had "not of his body" for He had spoken of it before to Abram. When Sarai saw that Hagar was pregnant with child, she became very jealous and demanded that Hagar leave. God finds Hagar by a spring in the wilderness and tells her to return to Sarai for she is with child and shall name him **Ishmael and He will make of him a great nation, a great multitude. He will be a great and wild man and his hand will be against every man and every man's hand shall be against him.** Gen. 16:1-12. Today we can see the trouble that Abram's and Sarai's choice of using Hagar caused as we look at the Moslem extremist world. Hagar's child, Ishmael becomes a Great Nation indeed and is today the Moslem world whose extremist elements are causing such trouble for us. Abram at age 90 years old meets God who tells him; "I am almighty God, walk before me and be blameless and I will make a covenant (promise) between you and me and will multiply you exceedingly. Abram falls on his face and God talked with him." Gen. 17: 1-27. God further told Abram that he would be the father of many nations. At that point God **renamed Abram, Abraham**, the meaning being, the Father of many nations. **Note here, when God acts with a promise or covenant, he changes your name.**

Today when we accept Christ we are participating in God's New Covenant with man and, **we are renamed or referred to as Christian** and disciples. So never be ashamed to be called Christian or disciples of Christ for it separates you as belonging to Christ/God. Actually, the term Christian is only used two or three times in the bible whereas Disciple is used more extensively but the term Christian does give more honor to our association with Christ. **To God, there is a lot in a name. It then should be no small matter for us to be called by the name Disciple or Christian, and not some manmade denominational name.** I was absolutely amazed once when an individual became incensed when I referred to them as Christian. They insisted that they were first and foremost a (denominational name- you fill in the name). When asked why they did not want to be known as Christian their reply was that the world presumed you were Catholic when called a Christian and they were not and did not want to be associated with the Catholic Church. On reflection I had to admit, it is true the world today presumes exactly that most of the time and what an unfortunate thing it is. From strictly a historical time line standpoint, the Roman Catholic

Church's beginning is closer to the forming of the 1st Century Church than any other body and **should** be expected to have a structure and theology closer to the Biblical-Apostolic pattern than any so called "**denomination**". Sadly however, the Catholic Church does not come anywhere close to the original pattern seen in the 1st Century Churches. Even so, the name Christian should be our label for it marks us as Christ's and honors Him. That the world has accepted the Roman Catholic Church as Christians and the rest of the religious world as Protestants is of no consequence except it is based on ignorance. What matters is the name Christian applied first at the Syrian Antioch Church by Paul's account seems to be the preferred name of those in the first century church. **Which Church on this earth today fits the described New Testament Church is the question we each must answer. Unfortunately today with all the many different divisions or denominations of the Roman Catholic Church on every corner it is very confusing as we search for Christ Body first established in Jerusalem but find it, we must.**

God then instructs Abraham to take every male child of his family and circumcise each one eight years old or older. This was God's command **to seal his covenant** sanctifying each man-child and his descendants as belonging to God. It was an act of separating his people unto himself. So when you look at a Covenant of God, look not only for a change of name but also look for his seal that separates those of the covenant unto Him. To the Christian Covenant, **the Act of Baptism is our seal and our new name is "Christian"**. Do not let anyone tell you that baptism is not necessary for salvation. It may not seem important to some men but **to God it is the sealing of his promise. It places us "into Christ" just as circumcision marked and separated the Hebrew as God's.** This circumcision, by the way, was the beginning of the Hebrew Nation (Later) called Jewish Nation in the Babylonian captivity. Gen 17:15; God instructs Abraham that now he shall from now on **rename Sarai, Sarah** for God shall also bless her as the Mother of Nations. So, a boy child is borne to Abraham and Hagar. He is named Ishmael as God instructed them. Ishmael would go on to be the father of the nations of Arabic and Moslem people, truly a great people. It is not difficult to see however, that God's prediction that these people would be hostile to others and other people will be hostile to them, has largely become true and is still playing out as prophesy. At the same time we must be prayerful for these Arabic and Moslem Families, that its more radical elements will come to realize the harm and destruction they are heaping upon their own families who are indeed a wonderful nation of people. If you think about it a moment, if we still lived only with the initial Covenant of Abraham **and we chose a path of extremism**, our extremist just may be as dedicated and Jihadist against

paganistic people as are many Muslims today against non-believers of Allah. Think about the commands that God gave His followers to attack cities and countries of people and slaughter every man woman and child and leave no animals to live. We also find that the Moslem nations also count Abraham as the Father of their Nation as the Hebrew and Christians do theirs and scripture supports it. Moslem's will never agree with the Jewish people or Christians that is probably true. The fact that a growing number of Moslem's are extremist in their views is what concerns us and has us embroiled in conflict.

While we are on the subject of Moslems, a personal observation is offered if you will allow. If Christians were as devout and united as most Moslems we would be more able to convert the world to Christianity. The Spread of Christianity would be unstoppable. If you visit a Moslem country such as Palestine, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey e.g. you will be impressed at how devoted they are to the call to Prayer five times a day and to other rituals of their faith. Ishmael's descendants are indeed a great nation of dedicated people today and one we will unfortunately contend with till the end of these last days it seems.

But then, as God promised, Abraham and Sarah had a boy child and God said "name him **Isaac**" and God said, "Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand for I will make him a great Nation". Gen. 21:18. This great nation would be the chosen nation of Hebrews called Israel who would nurture the lineage of God's son, the Christ and Messiah who would live as the image of God on this earth, and suffer and die on the cross as the one and only blood sacrifice for our sins. Through Christ, God would more clearly show us Himself. But before Christ will be accepted as this sacrifice, God would have to **grow man; show man** that he was incapable of saving himself from the sin that was within him. Man must be placed in the wilderness of life and experience sin from every angle before he can recognize his eternal failure to avoid his sinful self. The rest of the Old story (Testament) will take us through Man's journey through this wilderness until finally, in God's "**fullness of time**" He shows us his sacrificial Lamb (Christ), in person. Gal 14: 4 We say again; some would ask, why not bring Christ into the world earlier when Adam or Noah sinned. The answer is; because man was much to arrogant to have accepted Christ at this point. **We scarcely will accept him today after we have seen every manner of sin we are capable of; How much less likely would man have accepted him earlier without first experiencing all manner of sin available to us as we travel through the wilderness of life. In order for God to accept these Hebrews into the family of God he would have to strip away much of their haughtiness in sin.** We are told in the scriptures that for one **who does not know sin, to him his sin is not sin. God then has to rub our nose in sin before we will recognize sin for what it is.** You might equate it to placing an

ore containing hidden gold in a smelting pot with fire and separating all the extraneous minerals and finally ending up with pure gold, in fact the scriptures use this analogy to explain God's purifying process for us all. **So, lets watch as God's chosen nation is led through their wilderness experience, their smelting pot.**

God's first test was of Abraham himself. "Then God said, "Take your son Isaac to the land of Mariah (a Mountainous area just North of Jerusalem) and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains..." Gen.22: 2. This had to be something Abraham could not imagine that God would require of him, to kill and sacrifice his precious son as a burnt sacrifice unto the Lord. He obeyed God and gathered up firewood, his servants and Isaac, and set out to do the deed. He surely must have had faith that God would provide another way, perhaps another sacrifice, but without hesitation, he in faith, obeyed God's command and will. He arrives at a mountain of Moriah, leaves his servants at the base and takes Isaac, the fuel and his knife and goes up the mountain. He prepares the fire and raises his knife to kill Isaac, the sacrifice. God stops his hand just as he is about to do the obedient deed. God directs his attention to a ram trapped in the bramble near by as God's provided sacrifice instead of Isaac. **Abraham has passed God's test of faith by his actions. We discussed the fact earlier that God has foreknowledge of our decisions and you may ask then; why did God require Abraham to go as far as he did to prove his faith? The answer is with us. God knows our faith and what we will do, but we don't. We must know our faith exist, understand it, act on it and prove it daily. When we understand that our faith is a faith of action and that it places us in a relationship with God that gives us power over sin and Satan, then we can fully appreciate our God and what he means to us.** Without Abraham's obedience, he would never have seen the delivering, redeeming power of his God. He never would have seen the trapped bullock in the brambles available as a sacrifice. Can you imagine the absolute relief and reverence he felt toward God at the moment God's hand held back the knife from being thrust into Isaac and showed him a substitute sacrificial Ram caught in the bushes. Today, if **we** never follow God/Christ Will in our daily decisions, we can never see how God can and does reward our faith. And, the less we see God in action, the less **we** believe he exist and are willing to take action on behalf of our Lord. Remember though, it takes more than belief in God's command; it requires you be willing and to follow up with action, in order to see God's handiwork. He knows **what your choices/actions are beforehand**, but the larger point is, **you want know what your choices will be until you act** on your belief and faith in God's command for you. This story serves as a prophesy of God's plan to redeem all of mankind by sacrificing his son Jesus on the cross, to cover once and for all, the sins of you

and I. You and I have sacrificed a lot in and of our life and will continue in vain until we understand and accept the fact that God has a sacrifice for us over in the bushes. It is Christ, the perfect lamb and Sacrifice. Just as Abraham had the faith to obey God in sacrificing his son Isaac, so has God in Sacrificing His perfect son on the cross at Calvary.

Sarah was very old when she had Isaac and then died. Abraham remarries and fathers other children and finally dies at the age of 175 years. Isaac inherits all of his father's wealth as well as the promises that God will nurture through Isaac, the Hebrew nation and through Ishmael, the Arabic/ Moslem nations.

Isaac married a Syrian woman within his Father's family, named **Rebecca**. She conceived and delivered two twin boy children named **Esau and Jacob**. Esau was delivered first with Jacob following so closely behind that he was said to be born holding to the heel of Esau. Being the first born in the Hebrew family meant special privilege of heir to the fathers blessing and much of his estate. Esau as the firstborn and as a rough and tumble kind of man, was the most favored of his father. Jacob was more favored by Rebecca. We often see children who it seems that a father and or mother loves and cares for more than another child. It is not fair that this can be so in many families. Most likely what we are witnessing is not a lack of equal love but a natural occurrence in human nature of selecting one over another that is more compatible to ones spiritual and physical being. It is a natural occurrence that we migrate toward the more pleasant relationships yet it can and does cause inappropriate feelings within any family. Much later we will see in the story of Jacob, his partiality for the son Joseph. It caused terrible jealousy between the brothers and led them to sin. You will see Jacob, Joseph's father as we continue, that Jacob had been the happy recipient of his Mother's partiality and had used his Father, Isaac, deceitfully to gain his blessings. And we will visit Jacob later giving partiality to his son, Joseph. Sometimes we as families get stuck in a rut with our sins don't we? But lets go back to the basic story of Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau.

One day Esau came in from hunting and was starving as his brother Jacob was cooking a pot of Stew. Esau asked of his brother for a bowl of that **good smelling Stew**. Jacob, having been made aware that Esau, the oldest, was to inherit the blessings of his father, flippantly told his brother, " you may have a bowl if you will sell me your right to my Father's blessings." Esau quickly said, " what need have I of such blessing, its yours, give me some of your stew."

Jacob provided him stew in return for Esau's agreement for Jacob to receive his inheritance. Gen 25: 31,32. Of course there still remained the more important matter of getting his father to actually bestow upon Jacob his blessings in place of Esau, the rightful heir under Hebrew Custom. **A lesson in this story for us is**

that we should not so easily give up the blessings we have in God's family for just a bowl of stew. How much do we value our spiritual and physical blessings in Christ's(God's) family? Being in Christ family and receiving the blessings thereof should be more important than our earthly family and certainly more than being accepted in the family of friends and neighbors we have. (See Matt 10:37) This inheritance we have available is a life with Christ who is the descendant of Adam, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Tribe of Judah, Jesse, David, and Joseph. What a blessing from God our Father to be adopted as Christians into this lineage. Don't sell out on this blessing, especially for a bowl of stew.

Esau will go on to form the nation of Edomites, which held lands to the west of the Salt/Dead Sea and became an enemy of the returning Israelites later. God uses the Edomites to test the medal (determination and faithfulness) of the Israelites before they are allowed to cross the river Jordan and into Canaan. The Edomites are soon lost to History as they are defeated and integrated into the Arabic populations of the region. Jacob, in concert with his Mother was able, obviously through trickery, to successfully get Isaac, his father, to bestow his blessings upon Jacob instead of Esau. (Gen Chap 27,28) Jacob is later directed to go into Haran (Padam Aram), Syria and to find a wife among his kinsman. On his way to Haran, he sleeps on the wayside using a rock as a pillow and has a significant dream. He sees a ladder reaching up into Heaven with angels going up and down the ladder. God speaks to him in the dream saying, " I am the Lord God of Abraham and your Father Isaac; the land upon which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad from the North and South, East and West and in your seed **all the families of the Earth shall be blessed.**"(**Note in His words, "all the families" not just the Hebrew families, includes all of the non Hebrew or Gentile families as well; us**) Gen 28:12-14. So, our blessings today as Christians come from this great lineage beginning at Adam and extending to this point, through Jacob. Jacob continues his journey to Haran where he meets a cousin Rachel and falls in love with her right away. Laban, her father agrees for Jacob to have Rachel who is not the oldest daughter customarily given first, but he must remain with him and work for her. When he has worked the prescribed time, which was a number of years, Laban consents to their marriage, but instead of sending Rachel in to Jacob's bed, he sends his oldest daughter, Leah, instead. **Jacob unbeknownst has sex with Leah and is thus considered married to her.** When he discovers what Laban has done of course, he was very discouraged but has to accept Leah. He reminds Laban it is Rachel he wishes most. Laban again agrees that he may have her but must work more years for

her. Jacob agrees to work more, for it is Rachel whom he truly loves and eventually is joined to her as wife.

Now before we move along, lets take a close look at Leah's "**going in to the bed of Jacob**". There has to be an assumption that Jacob and Leah were joined in the sexual act **during this "going in"**. Further we clearly see that, whether Jacob likes it or not, he has a wife in Leah and not his beloved Rachel until later. **In God's eye two joined together are married and "joined does not mean holding hands or a formal preacher stand-up ceremony". While man decreed ceremonies are nice and mean a lot to us culturally, we need to understand they are not God's definition of marriage. The consensual sexual act marries you spiritually (period). And the writer acknowledges that few will accept this observation, especially men of God today. To admit that it is true means that a substantial number of preachers, elders, Sisters in Christ would have to admit their adulterous relationships; to admit their sin. The question then becomes, how do Godly men properly confess their guilt and seek God's cleansing of sin if they admit no sin in the matter? This will be an interesting discussion for later. Remember this note.**

Jacob later returns to Canaan and wrestles with, apparently, the Lord who eventually blesses him with an oath and as God always does in blessing us with an oath or promise, He changes a name. Jacob, God renames Israel. Gen 32: 24-29 The name Israel then becomes, in the rest of our study, the name given to the descendants of Jacob, who eventually are those led out of Egypt to the promise land that God promised Abraham much earlier. We will however use the name Jacob for the man Jacob and Israel as the nation of descendants of Jacob. So Jacob went on to have 12 sons by Leah, Rachel, and their maid-servants. Leah had six boy children, her maid had two, and Rachel's maid had two and Rachel had two sons, **Benjamin and Joseph**. **Very important to God's plan was the Boy named Judah from Leah and through the lineage of his tribe (Judah) would come Christ**. Of Rachel's boys one named Joseph would save and nurture all of his family during a terrible time of famine, offering them protection to grow their nation or family for many years (nearly 437 years) in Egypt. Each of these 12 boys would become head of a Tribe of Israelites that would form the favored Hebrew Nation of God's people that would bring eventually, Christ the Son of God and Our Messiah. The son Joseph becomes the center of our next story.

Joseph's Story, The Saga of Moses and The Exodus

One of the sons of Rachel, who was Jacob's most favored wife, was Joseph. Remember that Jacob had worked for Laban many years for the privilege of marrying Rachel and when time came, he was given Leah instead. He then worked several more years before he took his most favored wife Rachel. Joseph was one of the younger children, very Handsome and smart. So special was he that his father had a special coat of many colors made just for him perhaps to set him apart from all the other eleven boys. All of the boys were brought up to herd and care for the many livestock of Jacob but Joseph was more apt to stay closer to home and to Jacob, his father. This special treatment of Joseph made his brothers extremely jealous of Joseph. One day Jacob sent Joseph to the fields with food for his brothers. As he was approaching, the brothers began to scheme to kill Joseph. They instead threw Joseph into a dry water well nearby and soiled his coat with animal blood so as to tell their father that they knew not of Joseph's whereabouts but had found his soiled coat and presumed he had been eaten by a wild animal. As a Caravan of traders of Edom approached, one of the brothers, Reuben, seeking in some way to spare Joseph, suggested that they retrieve Joseph and sell him as a slave to these approaching traders. The traders accepted their offer and proceeded to carry Joseph into Egypt to be sold. Joseph ends up in the control of the Pontifical, an official of the Pharaoh.

As Parents or future parents, there is a lesson in this story to this point. It is not good to show favoritism of one child over another less you lead the other children into sin as they may despise the other sibling and maybe the offending parent. Jacob of course had himself been a schemer and conniver in his dealings with his brother Esau so he probably should not have been surprised that his sons learned to be conniving, perhaps from him. **Our failures follow us, do they not? Amen.**

Not all slaves were used in menial ways in those days. In the case of Joseph, he being a very handsome young man and intelligent, was made a special agent of the Queen. The Queen, finding Joseph so attractive, tries to seduce him into a sexual tryst. Joseph rejects her and runs from her grip leaving his cloak behind. This angers the Queen so that she carries the cloak to her Pharaoh and falsely accuses Joseph of making advances on her. For this, the Pharaoh has Joseph placed in a cell of the Prison for an indefinite period. At some future date, the Pharaoh has a dream that no one seems to be able to interpret. Pontifical reminds his Pharaoh of Joseph in prison who is very intelligent in such matters and Joseph is brought in to interpret the dream. Joseph interprets the dream to be a prediction of a great famine that is managed perfectly. The Pharaoh decides that Joseph is the perfect one to place in charge of Egypt's future management of

resources. From that date Joseph rises in power and influence in Egypt, especially during the Famine years that did come about.

Meanwhile, in the land of his father Jacob, Canaan was under a sever famine, so much so that Jacob sends his sons to Egypt to buy food and grain. So many years had expired that his brothers would not recognize their brother. However Joseph recognizes them but does not reveal himself. Instead he loads them up and sends them on their way with grain. After their second trip for food, Joseph reveals himself as their long lost brother and they have a grand reunion. Joseph tells them to bring his father and all the family to Egypt and they will be provided for and flourish. This is done and over many years the Family of Jacob (Israel) grows rapidly. Everything goes well as long as Joseph is in power. Many years later these descendants of Jacob come under the terrible rule of Pharaohs who never knew of their Israelite relationship to Joseph. In fact subsequent Pharaohs used the Israelites as slaves in grand building projects such as the Pyramids we see in Egypt today. While they were well fed, the leaders cruelly used them. The making of brick was one of their specialties and cutting of stone. During a recent trip to Egypt we witnessed one of the earlier pyramids built with the mud and straw brick of the Israelite period. It now sits extremely deteriorated compared to the carved stone pyramids around it.

Even under hardship, the Israelites had prolific offspring and their numbers became so large that the Pharaoh became afraid of their growing numbers and power. As a decree to control the growth of the Israelites population, the Pharaoh instructed the midwives who helped deliver the babies of the Israelites to destroy all the boy children as they were born. They did not completely obey this order however especially when it came to one male child born who becomes the subject of the rest of the story.

This child was born to a woman who was a descendant of Levi that was later designated as the Priestly tribe of the Hebrews. One mid wife saves the child by placing him in a basket made of reeds and places him in the river Nile. **Cruising down the Nile in 2008, I could not but think of Moses in the Reeds that to this day line the banks of the Nile.** The sister of the child Moses follows as the child is placed in the river and travels along the bank making sure he is OK. Later a maiden of the Pharaoh comes to the stream to bathe and sees the babe in the basket and retrieves him vowing to save him and take him to her home to raise him. She names him Moses because he was found among the reeds of the river. (The Hebrew word, Moses, means, “drawn from water”) Gen 2:1-10 Moses sister approaches the maiden and ask would she like for her to find her a maid to help care for the child, to which she responds positively. The Sister of Moses then fetches the Mother of Moses who becomes the caretaker of Moses in

the Pharaoh's home and raises him to manhood. **Notice, once again God uses water to save the life of one, young Moses as a chosen one of God.**

In regard to water being a means to saving Moses, lets continue to look forward to Christ's own acceptance of John's water baptism as a sanctified act of God, Christ calling it a **fulfillment of righteousness. In our baptism, likewise it is a fulfillment of our obedience to Christ Will in our Christian Covenant.** We will continue to point to God's continual use of water in saving his people from their sin and other predicaments. Our new Covenant with God clearly delineates immersion in water or baptism as the final sealing, obedient act, in separating the Christian unto God and Christ, thus saving the baptized eternally for as long as we remain "in Christ".

Before we leave this subject, please remember even though Christ acknowledged John's Baptism as fulfilling all righteousness, it was fulfilling all that which was right at that particular moment. The righteousness we achieve "in Christ" was not yet possible with John because Christ had not at this time died for our Sins, resurrected and been Glorified by going to His Father. Thus John's baptism did not give one eternal access to forgiveness of sin as it does under our New Covenant with God or since Christ sacrifice on the cross. Thus we will see later, those followers of John soon after Christ death and resurrection, seeking to be re-baptized to receive the Holy Spirit Baptism, placing them "in Christ" and redeeming them of their sin permanently. We cannot be certain that their rebaptism was necessary but they apparently believed it prudent probably to see if they would be personally touched and given the special gifts of the Holy Spirit as some of the other disciples. But let's get back to Moses.

We can imagine that as Moses grows, his mother, being a Hebrew Israelite, instructs Moses in the ways of the Hebrews and makes him aware that these are really his people. As a young man while in the fields observing the work of the Israelites he sees an Egyptian beating one of the Israelite which angers him so that he kills the Egyptian, he believes, secretly. After a few days he is confronted by an Israelite who makes it known to Moses that he was a witness to the wrong that Moses had committed. Moses fled to the land of Median, which lies to the East of the Sea of Aquaba, for fear of the consequences if the Pharaoh found him out. Here he dwells with a Priest called Jethro and falls in love with and marries Jethro's daughter, Zipporah. He had children of her and dwelt with the Midianites for many years. One day as Moses was tending the flocks of Jethro, the Lord appeared to him in a flame amidst a bush, yet not consuming the bush. This caught his attention. The Lord said to Moses, "Moses, Moses" and Moses responded, "Here am I Lord". Exo.3: 1-4 The Lord tells Moses that he is chosen to return to Egypt and lead the Children Of Israel, the Hebrew Nation, out of

their bondage. Now we will see throughout the Bible where God sends an angel to earth to send a message of guidance. In some cases the Angel is “The Lord Christ” and in the case of the burning bush, this angel is obviously God in the image of Christ our Lord yet not all future appearances of angels will be a visitation of Christ Himself. There will be other occasions when one bows to an angel and the angel admonishes that one should not bow before him for he is not as God. Another incidence with Moses as he comes into the presence of an Angel as he receives the Ten Commandments, he is told that he must remove his sandals for he stands on Holy ground, obviously in the presence of God, the Son, or Holy Spirit. But, we continue with Moses current visitation. Here with the burning bush he is for sure in the presence of God who is directing him to lead the Israelites out of their bondage. Moses initially rejects the idea, arguing that he is not a leader of men nor a good speaker but the Angel of God insist that he go and assures him that God will supply him with all he needs to lead and in fact will use his brother Aaron to assist him in this mission. “ I will teach you what you shall do.” Ex 4:15. A support scripture for us today would be Mk. 12:37. God makes ordinary people special and can use anyone of his special people, as he needs. **We should never limit God in his use of us but have faith that He will provide us the words and ability to do his good Will through his guidance and power.**

Moses then takes his family and departs for Egypt and He and Aaron gather the people of Israel with all their Elders and gave them God’s plan to free them of their bondage and deliver them to the Promised Land that God had promised Abraham.

Its important that we realize that the family of Jacob (Israel) has been now in Egypt no short period of time, in fact they have been there over 400 hundred years as slaves. God’s chosen nation will bring through its lineage, the Messiah, who will die on a cross to redeem man from his sin that began with Adam and Eve’s fall. But first they must be hardened and prepared for this mission of God. Their experience in Egypt as well as their coming Exodus is but a training camp provided by their God. Our journey here on this earth is much the same, a boot camp in preparation to receive our Promised Heavenly home, a perfect Garden.

Moses and Aaron go to the Pharaoh and say, “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, let my people go that they might hold a feast to me in the wilderness”. Ex. 5:1 Pharaoh refused Moses and Aaron and each time God brings a plague, which places great stress upon the Pharaoh and his subjects. Nine times Pharaoh refuses as God hardens his heart. Plagues of flies, locust, frogs, dead fish, waters of Nile (their lifeline) turning to blood, a total of ten plagues were sent. The Last plague worked and Pharaoh finally declared that they might leave. The tenth

calamity was that God would kill each of the Egyptians first-born children. God instructed Moses and Aaron to have the Israelites to each sprinkle blood on their doorpost so that the Angel of death would **Passover** each Israelites household so that their children may not be affected. At the completion of God's promise, Pharaoh let the Israelites flee. It is believed by some that the Pharaoh we are dealing with here is Rameses II. That is not important except to establish a time line for this event. Moses told them to pack lightly, prepare unleavened bread (so as not to spoil) and demand of their Egyptian captors as many valuables as they could carry. They formed up and their Exodus began toward the lands of Canaan which God had promised Abraham many years ago. Their Exodus, It is believed began in the most northern swampy area of the Nile Delta, an area called, in the original Hebrew, the Reed Sea versus the Red Sea, which was rather shallow with fluctuating tides, Swampy, and covered with reeds. It is interesting that through nine of the plagues God sent upon the Egyptians, the Bible says that **Pharaoh hardened his heart** and he refused to let the Israelites go. The last Plague, it says **God hardened Pharaoh's heart** so that even though he let them go, he (Pharaoh) would change his mind, and pursue them. It seems then that God set the Pharaoh and his Armies up for their own destruction.

Moses gathers the Israelites there at the edge of the Reed Sea wondering perhaps how he would lead the Israelites across this wet region. To make matters worse they looked back and there pursuing them were the armies of Pharaoh with men and chariots bearing down on them. The Israelites began their moanings and groanings by saying to Moses, "see what you have done here. You have led us to be destroyed by our captors." But Moses quieted them when he said, "**Stand still and watch the salvation of the Lord which he will accomplish for you today for the Egyptians which you see today, you shall not see again!**" Ex 14: 13-30. As Moses obeyed God by stretching his rod out over the waters, God rolled the waters back to either side and left a dry path before the Israelites and they crossed the area on dry land. The armies and their chariots pursued them but as they all were in the midst of the rolled back- waters, God allowed the waters to collapse back together, drowning all the armies, their horses and bogging down the chariots.

Here is the lesson in this for us. **We again see, God destroying our enemy with water at the same time using that same water to save His chosen, the same picture as Noah's salvation and that of Moses.** Looking forward again we will look to our baptism with water into Christ and our salvation. Our Obedience to immersion in water (baptism) destroys our sin and affords us salvation in Christ at the same time those who reject God are spiritually destroyed by rejecting baptismal salvation. You've been warned of this repetitious lesson and you will

hear it again and again. It is the main point and to miss it, you'll have missed all that's important. Some will say no doubt, "could not God have killed the Egyptians just as easily by **sprinkling** them with the water of the sea rather than covering/**immersing** and drowning the poor wretches." No doubt He could have; **but He did not do it that way.** Others in their effort to justify sprinkling with water versus immersion will say, "Look, God saved the Israelites first born by sprinkling blood on their doorpost why would he not allow our sprinkling of water?" This was not God's way to save His Chosen Nation, just their firstborn children. It did serve as a picture of God using the Shed blood of his only Son to redeem mankind but if He intended for the act of sprinkling of blood to serve as action to save our soul then why does one sprinkle water. Why not blood? Let's be consistent. Why did John and the Apostles teach baptism in water? Why did Christ Himself subject Himself to Baptism/Immersion in water and his command was later "**He who believes and is baptized will be saved....". Mk 16:16**" The very definition of the word baptize is "**immersion**" and not sprinkling and by all examples presented, it is immersion in water. God is not confused and he "**is not the author of confusion**" I Cor. 14: 33 so again, if we are confused on this issue then we must look somewhere else besides God. Satan perhaps.

The Exodus journey continues. God directs their Journey, not directly to the land of Canaan promised to their father Abraham, but instead toward the south away from Canaan into the Sinai wilderness. This had to be a pretty harsh path for over 600,000 men plus women and children and all their animals. (This could have been all total, some Million plus people plus animals) But this was the path God chose for them. We can imagine that God knew that it was going to take a long time and many trials for these people, who had been cared for by their captors for 400 hundred plus years. They had to learn how to take care of themselves, become disciplined hardened and wise enough to enter into Canaan and capture and possess these lands and people. In fact they will remain in the wilderness for over a year before they consider crossing into Canaan. There were many hardships with too little food and water for all of them and their animals. Many complained to Moses for having led them here feeling that they were better off under their captors. At least they were fed well and had plenty of water in captivity. Moses had a constant struggle to keep them in line. They were not strong in taking responsibility for themselves or having faith in a spiritual God. We can see parallels today with us in our Christian walk with God. In many ways, our life here on earth is but a wilderness, a training camp that is designed to show us just how much we need a redeemer, a Messiah to save us from ourselves. It prepares us to accept a Moses, a Joshua, and finally our Christ to lead

us to our promise land. God gives us freewill to go here and there, succeed and fail, laugh and cry, love and hate, reject God one day and accept him the next and finally, with an accepting attitude of Christ as our savior, to enter Heaven, the promised land of God.

So, for over 40 years, one whole generation, the Israelites remained in the wilderness. Many times they were hungry and God provided them a food called manna, which was a white residue from a tree of the area that had nutritional value and had a sweet taste much like honey wafers. At one point as they complained that there was not adequate water, God instructed Moses to speak to a rock in their presence promising water to flow. Instead Moses wrongfully struck the rock and from it, water flowed a plenty but this displeased God in that Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it as God had commanded. Was this unfair? We need to understand the probable reason that God directed Moses to speak to the rock versus hit it. There is in the Sinai region a rock that if struck may present water. God, no doubt wanted to exhibit His miraculous powers in providing the Israelites needs and by Moses speaking to the rock would eliminate the possible interpretation that the rocks offering water was a natural result. Moses' disobedience but more importantly, lack of faith in God's miraculous powers, was later the reason that God did not allow Moses to go into Canaan.

Later they complained, "If Moses had left us in Egypt and not led us into this wilderness, we could have all the meat we wanted". To satisfy them, God caused quail to fall at their feet, enough to feed them all the meat they wanted. The point is, God will provide for our needs if we will but ask and have faith in him. Now there is some evidence that in the Sinai, at certain times of year there is a great migration of quail from Africa toward the North as they ride strong winds from the South but there is no evidence that these birds fall exhausted at ones feet in the numbers required to feed hundreds of thousand of people over 40 years. The manna as we said is also a natural occurrence from one particular tree of the region but again likely not in a volume necessary to feed such a mass of people. Even so, we can expect that God provides and uses all these natural occurrences of our world that are a blessing to us all. God is big on having us remember his provisions for us. To the Israelites, he instructed them through Moses, to take an Omer of the manna and save it forever as a remembrance of how He had provided for them. That was one of the items carried in the Ark of the Covenant. Later, we hear Christ telling us that **he is our bread of life**, our "**manna so to speak**", and **the woman at the well, he tells her and us that He (Christ) gives us living water and with it we shall never thirst**. John 4: 11,12, Psalms 18: 2, God is described throughout the Bible as our rock, a rock that presumably flows living water, just as the rock in the wilderness provided water

for life. Can you see the symmetry so far? Oh, these stories tell us so much about life if we will only follow them closely and prayerfully, all of them serve in one way or another as pointers to the coming Christian era, to Christ our ultimate restorer. Latter the scriptures tell us that the Old Testament, the Law of Old, is our schoolmaster and is there for our learning. Gal 3: 24 In the Christian era, we are not held to its laws, but are rather under the New Covenant of Love, through Christ. We should not fail to study the Old Law but only to the extent that it enables us to understand the way and law of Christ.

Soon after the Israelites arrived in the wilderness of the Sinai, God called Moses to a mountain of the Sinai while the Israelites were camped on the plains below the mountain. Moses was on the Mountain with God for forty days. While there, God Gave Moses his plan and promises for the Hebrew Nation and Laws for them to live by. God was said to have personally written the laws upon two stone tablets. It is interesting that only one other time do we find Christ/God writing in the Bible and he is writing in the sand with His fingers. John 8:8

There were 10 key laws that God gave to Moses, which he wrote on stone. We call them the 10 commandments. Basically there were 4 laws that pertained to their relations with God (Ex 20:3-11) and 6, which dealt with their relationship with man. (Ex 20:12-16) Notice that the first four commandments relate to honoring and loving God. The last six relate to our relations with our fellow man. Now, look to Christ's answer to the question, "what are the greatest commandments." Paraphrased, he says that loving the Lord your God is the first greatest and the second is love your neighbor as your self (fellow man). (Matt. 22: 36-40) These two commands of Christ totally encompass the original 10 commandments of God. Being called a law makes it sound rather formidable but it simply gives guidance and enforces or reinforces the relation between God and man and man versus man. It enforces the righteousness of God's chosen people. Pay close attention in your study. God's plan in Christ completely covers the Old Law with "**a more perfect plan or way**"(Acts 18:27, 24:22) Christ told us that he came not to do away with the law but to fulfill it. By following Christ New Way, the more perfect way, we also fulfill the more cumbersome Old Law, which was very difficult to follow perfectly. Of course so are the two new laws of Christ way, hard to get right perfectly but fortunately we have a perfect sacrifice in Christ to cover our failures. Christ as our sacrifice is a one-time thing whereas under the Old Law the perfect animal sacrifice had to be submitted every year. With a more perfect way available to us, why do so many of our Churches insist on the mixing (syncretism) of the old Laws with Christ new and better way? It is very confusing and does little to honor Christ's sacrifice. Lets go on then.

Moses returns to the plains below with God's laws in hand only to find that the people have given up on him. In their impatience, they have petitioned Aaron to allow them to make and worship a golden calf statue. This is a testimony to all men today. In the absence of our acceptance of the God of our creation, we will find something or someone to worship. Why? Because that's the way we were created. God created us as spiritual beings that will always seek a god to worship, ideally Him. We as spiritual beings seek a spirit to worship, like it or not, it is our nature. God our creator expects us to seek and prefer Him and have a relationship with Him. Our creator sees this as our whole reason for being. And we think its all about us; that we don't need the God of creation. In the academic or intellectual world we read entire text books about **self-actualization** as if that's all life is. Well, get over it, "**it isn't about us**". We can marvel at the atheist when he says he does not need God or believe in Him. They normally are advertised to be very intelligent, liberal, progressive people yet, if they were real intelligent they should readily see that they have chosen a god and indeed do worship that god for it's their makeup to do so. The god they choose can be many things, cars, animals, wives, husbands, and almost for certain, **themselves**.

When Moses returns from the Mountain, he finds how impatient people really are. Now he was gone 40 days and think about it, that's a long time when hundreds of thousands of people are waiting on you and depending on you for leadership and all their needs. **How long could we have waited patiently.** It angers Moses so that he throws the tablets down and breaks them into pieces. God calls him back and God writes them again. The lesson in this entire episode is we must wait upon God for he is a sovereign God and will do His will on his schedule and not ours, and His timing is always perfect. It is a sad fact that when we become impatient with God's schedule we begin to fall away and seek other gods.

God goes on to give Moses many more laws to provide to the people laws concerning, for example, treatment of slaves, strife, murder, theft or loss of property, priest, cleanliness for hygiene and for worship, sacrifices, etc. We can look at all of our laws today and we will find that they are all derived in some fashion, from God's provided standards and laws. Our justice system is founded on these laws of God. We as humans were blessed with God's justice system. These laws served to guide and move forward the Israelites toward the Promised Land of Canaan (which lands covered what today includes land held by the Modern state of Israel and Palestine). We said earlier that these laws were not done away with but are still very much a part of our secular world, but Jesus in his ministry said that he had fulfilled these laws. He, so to speak, placed a neat bow around them supplanting them with two commands; "Love the Lord thou

God with all your heart and soul. Then secondly, “love your neighbor as yourself.” Lev.19: 18. Scripture was quoted earlier that the Old Law of Moses stands as our schoolmaster and is for our learning. It is a pointer toward God’s ultimate plan of providing a savior in Jesus Christ.

An overriding lesson for us is that we humans need specific laws to guide us and push us as we travel through our wilderness toward our Promised Land, Heaven. It is God’s plan that we grow more spiritual every day and more apt to accept a savior who can cleanse us to make us acceptable to come into his presence and have a personal relationship with him as a Father. A key question we must ask ourselves daily is, where do we stand in that Journey?

God promised Moses that he would provide his guidance in their journey namely by providing a fire lighting the way at night and a cloud before them during the day. When it moved they were to move and follow. We have a light today guiding us as well and it is the Holy Spirit inspired Word of God. Later God provided Moses with a detailed plan to build a tent (a tabernacle) that would be where God could be found. “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them according to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and all its furnishings...” Ex 25:8,9 and Ex 28-40. He instructed Moses to build an Ark, a box of Achaia wood, overlaid with gold. The Ark would hold several items, which would serve as reminders; the Staff of Aaron, the Manna, and the Tablets of Commandments. The Ark was to have handles along the side with wooden rods running through them so that the Ark would be **carried by men of Levi's tribe only(the priestly tribe)** and **never touched except for the handles**. The Ark would be held behind a curtain that would separate the front of the tent from where the Ark was held behind the curtain. The Ark was to be behind the veil and was called the Holy of Holies. Once per year the High Priest (Aaron in the case of the Israelites) would go behind the curtain and offer a Sin offering for the people. The sin offering was a blood sacrifice of a perfect animal that had to be offered once per year rolling forward but never, until Christ died on the cross, totally forgiving sin forever. You will find this process continues with the Hebrew people until the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and their Babylon captivity. The coming of Christ and His death on the cross was the final act of offering of any blood sacrifice. He/Christ was a once and for all perfect blood sacrifice for sin which cleared all sin committed by **Men of God**, including the Israelites, Prophets and Godly men of old times, and of course, Christians. The various instructions of how to build God’s Tabernacle, His Sanctuary, how the Priest were to cleanse themselves and present the sacrifices were physical in nature. They were precursors to the spiritual plan God had for mankind. His plan was to restore man to the spiritual state (image) he had created from the beginning. Gen 1:26 God’s Spiritual Tabernacle is Heaven and

the hearts of mankind, His Sanctuary is the Church Christ died for and is also the Christian's Sanctuary. Christ is our Spiritual High Priest along the order of Melchezidek, and Christians are priest under Christ. The Priesthood of Christ is permanent while the high priest of old times was temporary. Our cleanliness as priest is for eternity while the priest of Moses day had to cleanse themselves each time they presented a sacrifice to God. God's spiritual Promise Land for the Hebrew/Jew and the Gentile is Heaven eternally. Our Spiritual Jerusalem, Mt Zion, our Temple is the Church which Christ died for, referred to as the Church of God in one scripture, and another as the Church of Christ. What ever you call that church, it consists of mankind, which has accepted Christ as their Messiah and savior, people who have been saved by the blood of Christ. As our High Priest, the Blood of Christ, not as in washing of hands, cleanses us. Our sacrifice is our bodies, our obedience, our worship in spirit and truth. It is our gifts brought forth as a cheerful giver, not begrudgingly, and given as we purposed in our heart and as we have prospered. II Cor. 8:7 There is no tithe nor is any specific amount or percentage of income such as a tenth, prescribed in the new way of Christ. Every act of worship, before Christ's sacrifice, was of a physical nature and giving was prescribed as a physical tenth or tithe; after his sacrifice every act of worship was of the Heart, intellect and conscience.

It's important that we keep in mind the difference. To hang on to or mix the old with the new covenant is to completely miss the mark with God. God values spiritual worship, obedience and relationship based on faith. This is what He had in the Garden of Eden until man sinned. This is what he restored through Christ's sacrifice. The physical details that the Hebrew's had to follow in the physical laws of God were near impossible to follow and thus **fulfilled their intent by showing man that he could not satisfy God physically**. God's plan, having shown man that he cannot fully obey God's laws physically, was that mankind would jump at the chance to accept **a more perfect way, a spiritual way** (Acts 24:22) with Christ as their Lord and Savior. Well, many accepted him but unfortunately many remain(ed) stiff necked and unbelieving. What a shame that they have so little insight into God's plan. It has to be a matter of willful ignorance implanted by Satan himself.

Leviticus

Leviticus, is all about holiness, perfection and cleanliness. One thing for sure: Holiness and perfection are a relative entity. Most would say that being perfect or Holy as God is an impossibility unless you were Christ himself and they would be right. You may have heard, are even said, “he/she is holier than thou or they think they are perfect.” Well hopefully no one says that of us for that would imply that we have been less than humble before others and God, and that is not something God honors. It is a fact that we can never be perfect on our own or some other person’s eyes as we live in this physical body. However, we can be perfect in God’s view if we have accepted his Salvation **in Christ**. That is, we have a faithful belief in Christ as the Son of God. What does that mean, “**in Christ**”? There he goes again. **“In Christ” means one has confessed a belief in Christ before men, has repented and acknowledged a sinful nature, and has submitted oneself to baptism by immersion in water. This is our path to perfection today in meeting the standards of, even the purity of Levitical times and Christian times.**

Lets look at some of the key teachings of Leviticus in regard to purity:

a. Ritual impurity for priest (Christians are priest) is not strictly speaking sin, but it had the same affect as sin in that it separated one from God. The Priest of Old had no access to God unless they went through a cleansing process. As you look about the old city of Jerusalem today, near the old Solomon Temple site, you will see many remnants of pools around the complex. There was a special water jar made of clay that was also used in the cleansing act and found in many archeological digs of the area. You may have seen replicas of them. They are a large urn with two small hand-holds on either side of the neck. A cleansing was necessary in order to approach God. Our baptism in the Christian age represents that cleansing act and is necessary for us, as priest, to approach our God. Yet most of our religious world rejects it as necessary for salvation, believing in an intellectual belief only theology.

b. Holiness distinguishes God from people. It also distinguishes God’s people from un-believing people. It sets you apart from others who have no interest in God or His son Jesus the Christ or Messiah. Some will say, “but I don’t want to be Holy. I’d rather be like all of my friends in the world.” Do you not want to be who you really are; who you were meant to be? One created in God’s image was

made to be Holy as God is Holy. Do you really want to live a lie? What kind of life is that? Think about it. Who are you? These are questions you must answer before your life is over and the sooner you answer those questions, the sooner you can begin to live the life God gave you. To live any other life is a waste and as we will see in Ecclesiastes, it is useless or “Vanity”.

c. The sacred space must be defined and preserved. As an example; the job of doing this in the Old Law was given to the High Priest and those priest under him. Our new law, covenant and testament, defines each Christian as a priest and Christ as our High Priest. 1 Peter 2:5. So as priest, we must continually examine ourselves and look to Christ who continually cleanses us of our sin and makes us Holy, giving us access to God. Being cleansed and Holy we can boldly approach God through Christ, our High Priest, and offer our sacrifice to God. What then are our sacrifices. They would be our singing of praise, our study of God’s word, our prayer, our giving of our means, our time, our breaking of bread, literally our bodies; all and perhaps others are our reasonable sacrifice to our God.

d. How do we preserve unto God his Holy space? God’s Holy space with the Israelites was a physical tent, a tabernacle. The tent as we said earlier, had a curtain hung that separated the back room called the Holy of Holies where the Ark was kept. This was an area where the High Priest could communicate with God. Only the High Priest could go there and talk with God. We have already discussed the once per year sacrifice the Priest offered to God there. We find that on the day Christ was on the cross, when he died, the curtain that at this time was no longer in a tent but in the grand temple of Solomon, was rent/torn top to bottom, signifying that now man had access to God as long as he came through his High Priest, Jesus. Mat 27:5

Yes, things changed at the cross. Those who accept Christ as theirs have access through Christ, their High Priest, and a personal relationship with God just as Adam and Eve had in the garden before their sin. We as Christians are back in the garden, which God from the beginning prepared for us. The Space is reserved for God and his people. It is not a physical space but is a spiritual space reserved for us within our heart. It is the Tabernacle of God. It is not a tent nor a grand temple but a permanent grand space not made with hands. II Cor. 5:1 You ask, how do we claim this space reserved for us? You know, by now and certainly before we reach the end, you will all be saying enough already; **We get it!** Even so, we will continue because it is the road map for participating in the whole plan of God. We claim this sacred space **by Believing He is the Son of God, Confessing Christ as Lord, repenting of our sinful nature, and being baptized into his name, putting him on (Matt 6:3)**. It’s that simple and it is the

only route to the promise land, a land of milk and honey, and a land where grace abounds. Where many stumble is on baptism. It's almost as if they are shedding blood themselves to accept the fact they have to participate in such a humiliating act as submitting to another's hand in dunking your body under water, in the likeness of Christ burial and resurrection. A whole theology has developed around avoiding or denying this act for salvation. Oh yes, many do baptize but will not acknowledge that it is done to seal the deal on our salvation. Rather, they prefer it as a **symbolic ritual** that places you in "**their**" **membership**.

Where they came up with this idea is a big question? We can call it **believe only theology** and it could not be further from God's word. Scripture on the **believing, confessing and repenting** imply that these acts are necessary but **are "toward" or "unto" salvation (see Rom 10:10,1:16), where as baptism, "that also now saves us"**, (1st Peter 3:21) is the final step that places us "*into Christ*" and "*into Salvation*". They all are necessary steps to salvation, **but baptism is the seal of our Covenant with God and our salvation.** **What saves us is the Blood of Christ and it is a free gift given as grace from God, we will not forget that.** How we come in contact with His saving blood entails the four steps given above and in scriptural examples. For those who claim that baptism is a ritual which confirms one has believed in Christ and is entering **into "their church/congregation"** and may go so far as to vote on receiving a new convert, let us note that at Acts 2:47, "**... the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.**" **Certainly there is no need to confirm by human vote or otherwise that one is worthy to be added to ones church congregation. God adds you to "His Church" and that's the end of that. There we have done it again!**

Once we are in Christ there is no way we can be separated from him short of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. **That is the sin unto death.** (Romans 6:16) You might say that I would never deny Christ or the Holy Spirit once I had accepted Him. **Don't be so sure.** We only have to look at one of Christ's great disciples, Peter, to see one who walked and loved Christ while on earth, deny him three times as Christ awaited execution. We have to examine ourselves continually to ensure we have not denied Christ and His Holy Spirit. We must continually examine ourselves to ensure that some other entity has not occupied the sacred space in our hearts reserved for God. We will call them here, "**Things**" (in Southern dialect, "**Thangs**") or Sin that can takeover our spiritual space. When you find that God no longer occupies your sacred space, you must ask for forgiveness and return to God as your first love. Remember that God accepted the children of Israel back after they sinned over and over again and He will us as well if we come to know, acknowledge our sin and seek forgiveness. Lev 26:40-45

Numbers

The book of Numbers, again written by Moses, continues the History of the Israelites forty (40) plus years in the wilderness of the Sinai. This writing of Moses tells of the great troubles he continued to have keeping the Israelites organized and proceeding toward the goal of the occupying the lands of Canaan, promised long ago to Abraham, the Father of their Nation. God instructed Moses and Aaron to take a census in which they determined that there were 603,550 males over the age of 20 not including the priestly tribe of Levi who was reserved as the caretaker of the Tabernacle and all its furnishings and chores. Men under 20 were not counted. Hebrew custom held that not until the male reached 20 plus was he responsible for serving in the Hebrew army or for other services to the nation. The women and children were excluded also in the census. In all, it has been estimated that counting all, there would have been 1.5 million plus people on this journey. One of God's purposes for the Census was presumably to establish a base line from which to show the people what God would or could do with the numbers they had in their camp. Num 1. Later we will see Hebrew leaders asking for another census of their own, which God had not required. The leaders purpose was to determine if they had enough men to begin their invasion of Canaan or overtake the enemy. God was angered at their taking the census on their own initiative because it pointed to their complete lack of faith in God to provide the strength to win against their enemies. They completely misunderstood God's purpose of the first census and figured that if God could call for a census, then He would not mind if they used the census to determine if they had the strength to move forward in battle. The lesson is clear to all men of God. Take care that you not fail to move forward based on your evaluation of your strength, instead, have faith in your God to provide the strength you need to overcome your enemy or shortcomings. Consider the Story of David destroying the Philistine giant with the single smooth rock from his sling and the power of his God. 1st Sam 17:40 That is the faith God expects of us. David did not say, "wait a minute, let me count how many of these men on my side will come to my rescue if I get in trouble with this well armed Philistine."

Numbers also describes how Moses was instructed by God to organize the 12 tribes or 12 families of Jacob/Israel. The tribe of Judah will be the tribe that leads. This is the tribe through which Christ's lineage will come. The Levites were to be the carriers of the Ark of Covenant. Num 2, and Ch 4. The Israelites after a year at Mt. Sinai were ready to set out after God's guiding cloud began to move toward Canaan. God had told Moses, "**You have been at this Mountain long enough. Get ready to move**".

Here is another lesson for all. **There is such a thing as staying in your comfort zone to long and when you do, you fail to realize your own potential and neglect to satisfy God's plan for your life.** There can be a time you need to wait upon the Lord, but never fail to remain vigilant for God's guidance and **always be ready to move out.** In military training we often heard, "**keep your boots on!**" another way of saying, "**be prepared to move**".

Moses' plan was to go from Mt Sinai directly into Canaan but as they approached, it was decided to send 12 spies in first to see what they would confront. Num 13:2-30 They came back reporting that the area was truly a land overflowing with great assets and even brought back samples of some of the fruits of the land. Ten of the spies however reported that the men were like giants compared to them and that they would surely be defeated if they proceeded. Num 13: 27 Two men of the twelve, **Caleb and Joshua**, reported that the time was right and encouraged Moses to proceed. Moses felt compelled to listen to the majority and turn back into the wilderness from which they came.

Democracy never has worked well in military leadership or in leading God's people, His Church. In the books of Timothy and Titus we see that the Churches first established were independent of each other and were led by Elders, which had sole control of final decisions concerning the congregation of God's people. **Voting and majority rules** will by its very nature, cause division within any group and must be avoided if at all possible in matters pertaining to God's Church.

The Israelites rebellion and refusal to follow God's lead so angered God that he threatened to strike them with disease and disinherit them. Moses pleaded with God as he had done on several occasions now, not to abandon His chosen people. God's anger subsided but he promised that this generation would not inherit the Land of Canaan except for Caleb and Joshua. The lesson for all is that God is faithful to reward us when we have an **obedient faith in him and is just as faithful to his promise to punish those who have no faith**. It is also important that we understand the faith that God recognizes as faith. It is not an intellectual decision only. **It demands action. We only have to look at some of the prominent men and women of faith of the Bible to understand this.** As a matter of fact that is the only reason these stories are in the word of God

and to miss there meaning is a travesty. Abel offered his blood sacrifice faithful that this was God's desire. Abraham left his homeland faithful that God would provide and fulfill his promise, Abraham offered his most treasured son as a sacrifice having faith in God to either provide another sacrifice to replace his son or perhaps, raise him from death if he had to carry out God's command. Noah built the boat and got on board in faith. David killed the Philistine giant on faith in God. Moses led and the Israelites crossed the Reed (Red) Sea on faith. Joshua marched seven times around and the walls of Jericho fell, on faith. Actually, the Israelites marched around Jericho once per day for six days then seven times around on the seventh day, 13 times altogether.

Some will tell you that a simple belief in God will save you and if you understand that such a faith will lead you to **act** and complete the other steps of salvation, then they are right. But then in the same breath, some of these teachers will say, oh no, you are saved at the point of your intellectual decision to believe in Christ. They say especially of baptism, that baptism, which they call **a work by man** does not save, completely ignoring Peters statement, "baptism doth also save us" and Christ words who said, " Go ye therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" Matt 28: 19 and again at Mark 16:16 Christ tells us that, "**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned.**" They fail to comprehend that **our obedience is not our works but the working of God** on our hearts, which leads us to obedience. **It is God's works that saves us not ours and His baptismal act seals us unto Himself.**

God caused the Generation that decided not to invade Canaan to continue to wander in the Sinai wilderness for another 40 years; long enough for that generation to die off except Caleb and Joshua, leaving the younger ones to later complete God's Will. Caleb and Joshua were the only ones of the original wilderness generation to go into Canaan with Joshua leading. Moses was not allowed to go in because he had earlier hit the rock to bring forth water rather than speak to the rock as God had instructed. Had you forgotten about that misstep by Moses? **God does not forget but is faithful to reward our obedience and disobedience.** As Christians He will not judge you to spiritual death but will hold you accountable and not provide the awards you may have received otherwise. Remember the story where God had told Moses to speak to the rock to bring forth water for which the Israelites were complaining. Moses failed to obey God and struck the rock instead, losing his opportunity to go into Canaan. If we fail to obey God's plan to redeem us from sin we should not be surprised in our last day that God does not allow us into our promised land. If you are asking, "why are we talking about God's Plan of salvation here again?"

Don't forget there is not a subject in the Old Testament that is not in some way tied to God's plan of redeeming man. That plan to redeem has been in God's playbook from before the foundation of the earth and is the sole reason for His Word, our Bible. One of the Key verses of Numbers which directly points to Christ is Num 24:17, “a star will come out of Jacob (Israel) a scepter will rise out of Israel.” Listen up and be careful with God’s word. If we fail to see Christ and God’s plan for redeeming man through Christ His son in His Old Covenant and New, we miss the whole point and intent of our study of both Testaments.

It's a long way between Genesis and Revelations and entirely too many have gotten lost in between because they failed to comprehend the single message of all the Bible and that is God's plan to restore man to a spiritual relation with Him. This writing is not going to allow that to happen so get over the repetition of God's plan presented.

Aaron having died somewhat earlier, Moses is called by God to Mt Nebo, which lies on the eastern side of the Salt Sea/Dead Sea and River Jordan, and he is shown the promise land, which he will not be able to occupy. Moses dies there on Mt Nebo. There is no record of the people retrieving his body and burying Moses, probably for good reason; had they been allowed to find and bury him, more than likely they would have found reason to worship his shrine or some representation of him. Can you imagine the tourist industries delight in having such a unique monument to show off? It is surprising they have not fabricated one.

There is one other interesting thing about Moses’ view into Canaan. The scriptures say that he looked all the way to the Great Sea (Mediterranean). Having been there, it would seem virtually impossible for a man to have looked that far and seen the Mediterranean Sea. Mt Nebo is not that high a mountain, especially considering that it emanates from an area that is some 1300 ft below sea level. If Moses saw all the way to the Great Sea, he saw it most likely through God’s eyes and perhaps, **in the Spirit he saw what God wished him to see.** Remember in future scripture, after Christ death, our promise land is not **physical Canaan** (that real estate now called the modern state of Israel) but is Heaven, a spiritual home. As a political aside, it would bode well today if modern Israel realized that God has never been in the Real Estate business and has not necessarily given them this physical land in perpetuity. **God has not given any of us any thing of this world to own for eternity.** He did promise to be with them as their nation conquered the area as a base for ushering in the Messiah. Once that mission of God was accomplished, God dispersed their

nation and certainly they need not shed blood over “land” on God’s account nor does America need to help them keep it on account of any existing promise of our common God. To fight over it must be perceived as a carnal pursuit, not a religious mission of God’s choosing.

Two tribes, Rueben and Gad, petitioned Moses to allow them to claim the lands east of the river Jordan for it was very fertile. (Remember this area had caught Lots attention also as it was fertile land) Moses agreed providing they go on into Canaan and help conquer the area first. They agreed. Before they cross the Jordan with Joshua in the lead, Moses gives them more explicit instructions and reminds them of all laws laid out before. My good friend and Elder, Wayne Dunaway has a catchy phrase that summarizes Moses purpose for the book of Deuteronomy; **“The Law repeated is what was needed”**.³ **In a sense, you may consider the repetition you find within these pages a fulfillment of this principal.**

Moses’ Instructions follow the general themes below in Deuteronomy and are essentially a reminder of all the Laws of God that Moses had given the Israelites before.

Deuteronomy

1. God’s people are called to Love Him and to Worship Him.
2. All Law is derived from God’s Ten Commandments and impacts all our lives.
3. God expects obedience to his will and laws but he wants most of all a personal relationship with His people. This means He respects our obedience if it comes from our heart. God is faithful to reward obedience and punish disobedience. Expect both.
4. There is one God, He claims one people, one sanctuary, and one law and we are called to be faithful to this **unity**.

Sadly, we are a divided people today as Denominations/divisions abound. This is far from the plan and will of God and is a Sin we can only pray that God will forgive. I Cor. 1: 10-13 Our only hope of unity in this life is a return to the Bible described Church of God/Christ. That is a restoration of that body.

One of the immediate problems that the Israelites had was their acceptance of religious practices of the Canaanites and intermarriage with them, which was counter to all instructions of God and Moses. Moses had commanded them, “**now, Oh Israel, listen to the statutes and judgments which I teach you to observe that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to or take away from the words I am giving you, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God.**” **Duet 4:1-2** (Look to Revelations 22: 19 for a second and last warning in God’s Word to not add to or take away from His word) “**So He declared to you his covenant which he commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and he wrote them on two tablets of stone; and the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you those statutes and commanded that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess.**”

Duet 4:13-14 True to form, the Israelites would obey God initially but fall away quickly, following other ways and intermarrying, worshiping Baal, Sun gods, anything but the God of Abraham, their Father. “ Hear oh Israel; the Lord our God; The Lord is one! You shall Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Duet 6

“And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, **that it may be well with you**, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the Lord swore to give your fathers.” Duet 6:18 “ The Lord did not set his love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were least of these people, but because the Lord loves you, and because he would keep the oath which he swore to your fathers; the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the land of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. Therefore know that the Lord your God who keeps promises and mercy for a thousand generations with those who Love Him and keep His commandments.” (Duet 7:7-9) Notice also in Gen 15: 18, Duet 1:7 and Duet 11:24. Moses, in Numbers 34 describes a territory similar but seemingly less territory than originally described. God and Moses tells the Israelites to go into Canaan and possess land to the Great Sea, Northward to Lebanon, and in Gen 15:18, Abram was promised Southward to the Egyptian river (Nile) and to the Euphrates River in and around present Iraq. This could be roughly 75,000 sq miles of territory. **They in fact never captured more than approximately, 6,500 sq mi of the land, about 8% of what God presumably promised them.** Why? **They failed because of a lack**

of faith. We can only imagine what the current state of Israel may have been today had they followed God's command and will. Their current enemies of the Middle East would presumably have been vanquished long ago. **Our lesson is to follow God with total faith and accept the promises that he gives us. For the Christian, he promises us a promised land (Heaven) unequaled by any other but we must accept the challenge and possess it in faith, all through His Son, Jesus Christ.** Many will half-heartedly accept the prized promise and seek some other route or an easier assignment. In most cases we seek our own way and forget God's way and we just may miss the mark in so doing. Judges 17: 6, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." In like manner we have fallen victim to the same error as the Israelites of old. We have placed many gods above our one true God. We all need to ask ourselves, what are our god's. Is it our homes, our children, our TV, games, our food, our drink, our unbelieving friends, children or wives, our congregation, our preacher; what drives your life? None of these things are an unforgivable sin in and of themselves but anything that dominates our life and takes the place of our God, becomes our god and that is a sin against our true God and one that may not be forgiven, especially if not repented of. We must constantly guard against this happening as it separates us from God. Oh, God may let it happen for a time but God does not care for us in this state and **because he loves us he will eventually allow you to fall.** That does not mean he will forsake you but remember, he is just as faithful to punish **those he loves** who lacks faith, as he is to bless the faithful. One of our prayers should be that when we place other god's before him, that he will correct us by giving us **a glimpse of hell this side of the grave.** That would be his great gift of love; showing us hell this side of physical death. **It's our wake-up call back to God** before we die spiritually and physically. You don't want to be introduced to Hell at physical death for to do so places you spiritually in Hell for an eternity. You will never be introduced to Hell by the world for they (the world) would not have you know of it. Only God will show you Hell and you best have your eyes wide open when He gives you that glimpse. Read closely the account of Christ death burial and resurrection and you will notice that Christ in his death took on the burden of our sins. This meant that he had to experience in his death, our sins as if he had sinned. **Christ presumably experienced Hell before his resurrection.** The world would rather we not discuss Heaven or Hell and many will not believe in either and are turned off by any mention of them, but our whole physical and spiritual world is held together by positives and negatives with the same surety of any physical law. A battery would never work without both a positive and negative and so our world will never work without the positive of Heaven and Negative of Hell. Thus we have natural

laws that cannot be broken and represent reality, so likewise we have Spiritual laws that stand and are just as much a part of reality as are natural laws. What escapes many, especially the Atheist community, is that both Natural laws and Spiritual laws emanate from the same Creator God. Our Spiritual beings are held together by the reality of Heaven and Hell, take it or leave it, **it remains a reality regardless of your acknowledgment**. The Scriptures gives us a fairly vivid idea of how grand Heaven is and how unpleasant Hell will be but it may be helpful if we each had a personal idea of what we consider Heaven and Hell to be in order to personalize the two places. The scripture describes Heaven as a place where there is no pain or tears, a beautiful place with streets of Gold. Hell of course is described as a lake of Fire and totally unpleasant. One might internalize a view of Heaven as a place where one is caught in a pleasant dream, one from which they would never wish to awaken and will not awaken. Hell, on the other hand, may be a place where one is captured and held in a nightmare from which **they cannot and are never awakened**. Which one would we choose?

At this point let us give a well-known atheist author, Richard Dawkins, his take on Heaven and Hell particularly in regard to his view on the misuse of the concept of Heaven and Hell to the detriment of children. He mentions an interview he had with an “**obviously bright** and honest woman” where she told of her horrible experience in a Catholic school of her youth. (**Atheist or fond of the term “obviously bright” considering themselves to be one and the same**) She explains, “I’ve gone through life suffering much conflict and a deep down fear of hell fire ..” “I’ve had some psychotherapy which has enabled me to work through some of my problems but can’t seem to overcome this deep fear.” Hawkins suggested that, “If hell were plausible it would have to be moderately unpleasant in order to deter.” He adds, “.. it has to be advertised as very very scary indeed, to balance its implausibility and retain some deterrence value.”⁴

Let us say from the outset, there have been many parents, teachers and preachers, priest, and pastors who have used or misused the word of God concerning Hell and Heaven in a careless fashion with children, even a reckless fashion in order to literally drag the young kicking and screaming into the religious halls. One who has been coerced unwillingly and scared half to death is most certainly not a valued convert in God’s eye. Let us not fail to guide the young mind to grow in understanding of God’s plan for His/Her life, presenting God’s person as a God balanced in Love and yes, Justice. It cannot be wise to scare a young, mind or any mind for that matter, to the Lord. The Bible does however freely use the term, “**fear the Lord**” though the Hebrew, Latin or Greek words normally used in translation for “fear” is a word defined as

“respect”. The proper and respected way to bring one to a relationship with God, His Son and Holy Spirit must be intellectually derived, that is emanating from the Heart of the individual (our intellect), so as to be internalized and personalized.

Do not fail to read God’s words and apply them carefully and be sensitive to the one we nurture. They (God’s Words) are powerful and misused in the insensitive’s hand can be a dangerous thing. God’s words were not meant just for His chosen people of old, but also His chosen of all times and ages; that includes you and I and the youth of our day. Christians today are the Chosen of God in this Age. The Christian is the new Jew, the new Israel, and the Temple of God. 1st Cor. 6:19 Christ is our sanctuary. “What? Know ye not that your body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost (God)... ye are not your own but are bought with a price..” Let us guide mankind lovingly toward their favored status as God’s own. Amen.

So Joshua is the appointed one to lead the Israelites across the river Jordan into Canaan. “Hear oh Israel, you are to cross over Jordan today and go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourself, a people great and tall. Therefore, understand today, the Lord your God is he who goes before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you.... Do not think in your heart that the Lord your God cast them out because of your righteousness, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you. You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day I knew you. Yet, they (the Israelites) are your God’s chosen people and your inheritance that you (Moses) brought out of Egypt by the mighty power of your outstretched arm. Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Do not look upon the stubbornness or the wickedness of these people or their sin” Duet 9:1-27. Moses had reminded the Israelites in very specific terms how they were to remember and worship their God. They were to worship God, not as they saw fit, but in a manner prescribed by God through Moses and later Joshua. There is a lesson for us today in these instructions to the Israelites. First, we have a crossing over Jordan in our conversion to Christianity. Remember how God has so many times used water as a medium to deliver man from one side of a situation over to a redeeming, saving side. Crossing the River Jordan was such an occasion with the waters of the river being rolled back just as the Red (Reed) Sea had been rolled aside. Our crossing over, as Christians, is done through the medium of baptism. Another lesson that should not be missed is that God expects us to worship him in a way that pleases him and not just any

way that represents a pleasing of ourselves. Visit a few different assemblies and you will find in each a different way of worship. The religious world today is fond of saying, "It does not matter what church you attend as long as you attend." or, "It does not matter how you worship as long as you worship." This is pretty far from what God's word teaches. We are provided adequate instructions, through example mostly, of how the early Church worshiped and when it worshiped. We are told that God is a Spirit and we are to worship him in Spirit and in Truth. John 4:23-24 What is Spiritual worship in truth? John 4:23 What is truth? Again scripture tells us that **God's Word is truth and David in the Psalms further says the Sum of God's word is precious.** II Cor.

1:18,4:2,6:7,1st Thes. 2:13,II Tim 2:15,II Sam 7:28, I Kings 27:24,Psalms 138:2, 139: 17 Prov. 22: 21. We must look exclusively to God's word to tell us how he wishes to be worshipped. We see in the Old Testament under Mosaic and Leviticus law, many acts of physical worship that are described in excruciating detail. The New Testament gives less descriptive instructions on acts of worship but does give, and not all in one place, examples of when and how the first century Christians worshipped. These examples of their worship we should follow as best we can. It is as close as we can come to knowing what items of worship God may expect of us. One caution stems from David's observation. We must look to the sum of God's words in answering any inquiry and avoid latching on to one favorite scripture and developing our theology or answer around one statement or writer. Why, you may ask, should the way 1st Century Christians worshipped be considered so significant? Apostles that had followed and listened to Christ ministry instructed assemblies of the church in many areas including items of worship. John said in His Gospel that he supposed that if every act of Christ had been recorded, the world would not hold the books. John 21: 25 This verse strongly implies that we are going to have to look further than direct commands of Christ to understand God's/Christ's will and way for many things including proper worship. Christ ministry only being 3 good years, left many things in the hands of His apostles when he told Peter and the others that what ever they bound or loosed on earth or required or allowed on earth he would honor in Heaven. Matt 16: 19. We cannot know but what Jesus' Apostles actions were a result of Christ Instructions to them.

We find first of all that early Christians worshipped on the first day of the week, which was on their calendar and ours, Sunday. This day was chosen presumably not because of a direct command from Christ (although it could have been) but as a day commemorating and honoring Christ's resurrection day. Acts 20:7, Heb 10:25. Some people today prefer to worship on Saturday as a matter of convenience and others because Saturday represents the Old Sabbath day which the Old Law commanded to be kept Holy. They are scripturally either doing their

own thing or hanging on to old law in keeping the old Sabbath. Instead Christians should give honor to **a Sabbath in Christ**. Why? Look to all the times that Christ and his followers violated the Jewish command to keep the seventh day (The Sabbath) as a day of rest and were reprimanded by the keepers of the Old law. Look then to Heb 4 where there is a clear lesson that **Christ is our Sabbath**, our day of rest. Hebrews 4 clearly points to **every day “in Christ” as a day of rest and a Sabbath day**. **Our Sabbath as Christians is every day and not a particular day. The Sabbath changed at Calvary and to hang onto the old Sabbath and worship on Saturday is to ignore Christ as our Sabbath and to once again cling to the Old imperfect Law.** One can truthfully say that we should worship our Lord every day and yes we can agree with that. But, in choosing a day in which all the Saints assemble for the express purpose of worship and commemoration of Christ sacrifice, we should follow the example set by the Apostolic formed congregations of the first Century. They assembled on the first day of the week (Sunday) for whatever reason; the day of Christ resurrection or perhaps because of Christ's undocumented commands to His apostles, most likely the former.

What were the first Century Churches acts of worship?

1. It seems that their primary act of worship was partaking of The Lords Supper or Communion, the act of breaking bread and partaking of fruit of the vine as Christ had done the evening of the Passover supper. In the scriptures, it is often simply referred to as “breaking bread”. It was not part of the Jewish Passover meal or any common meal but was separate and apart from the Passover and common meal. In scripture, one has to look to context to separate the “breaking of bread” as a meal or the sacrament because both the meal and the Sacrament are expressed as a breaking of bread in different scripture. This is the only act of worship and commemoration that Christ himself instituted and it is hard to imagine a worship service in the Christian era not including this worship item. Many do in fact however neglect this sanctified act in their worship. Few observe this act except at their convenience. It is truly amazing that not even on Easter Sunday do many Churches observe this act of worship. Acts 2:42, 20:7, Matt 26:26-30, and 1Cor. 11:20-22. 6. They honored Christ sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection on the first day of the week by partaking of Communion (breaking of bread) on the **first day of the week. Since there are**

52 first days of the week in each year, can we not be assured they broke bread each first day of the week? Is there no logic in this? *Some would argue that this breaking bread was a regular meal and of course, there were occasions when they had a common meal, but the sanctified communion was separate and apart from the normal meal which was also at times called, breaking bread. As an example, there was one occasion when some of the disciples confused the communion with a regular meal and they were reprimanded when Paul stated, “do you not have homes to eat in?” I Cor. 11:34* To not Honor Christ’s sacrifice in our normal Sunday Worship service is to completely ignore God’s will. Some might say, “Let your conscience be your guide”. Would it not be better to let God’s word be your guide. Some will say, “well Christ did not say to do it every first day of the week and they would be right He never used those exact words. If you will reflect again to a scripture we referenced much earlier where Peter and Christ had a discussion, Christ told Peter and other disciples there, “What ever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven and what ever you loose on earth or allow will be allowed in heaven.” So, we need to look to what the disciples did, not just what Christ said in red lettered Bibles. If they felt it was needed to meet on the (52) first days of the week (each first day) to break bread, so should we, and who knows that Christ did not tell the Apostles to observe this communion each first day of the week. We should stop trying to make excuses about when to take Communion and decide to follow those who walked and talked with Jesus, those Apostles, who should know best what our Lord meant us to do in worshiping Him. Again, John said that he “... supposed that if all the things that Christ did were recorded, all the world would not hold the books.” (John 21:25) We will say it again “Sam”; One thing we should understand is that neither God nor Christ waste words on us mere mortals so we must listen and read closely for God’s given will and obey it. We will revisit the subject, acts of worship, later in the New Testament but now let’s press forward.

2. They sang Hymns, with understanding, speaking Hymns (perhaps chanting them), making melody in their hearts. This

implies that melody was made in the heart and not by mechanical instruments. Eph 5:19, Col. 3:16. Today it is often hard to distinguish between worshipful Hymns and hard rock entertainment. Some will point to the use of David's harp in his worship of God. Listen, David did love his God but not every act of David did God endorse. We have emphasized before that worship under the Old Law was a physical act but it all changed with Christ to become worship from the heart. David's prancing around with his musical instruments half naked got him into trouble if you will remember (2 Sam 6:14-23) and in (Amos 5: 23 and 6: 5) we find God's Word from His Prophet describing David's instruments as "**noise**". In 1st Cor. 13 and 14 we find Paul equating those who spoke in tongues without an interpreter as **essentially making "useless noise" and that when we pray in a (babbling) tongue we may be in the Spirit but understanding is unfruitful**. Then he concludes that as we pray in the Spirit we should also pray with **understanding**. In like manner, he says at 14: 15, "**...I will sing with the spirit and I will also sing with the understanding**. Ephesians 5:19 says, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody unto the Lord in your heart." **Melody can be made two ways, with a mechanical instrument or with our God given vocal chords that are struck by our spiritual Heart**. Then some would suggest both are applicable the instrument and the heart. That may be so but then there is pretty good evidence that under Christ way, speaking psalms with understanding along with some evidence that David's instruments were noise to God, puts us in a spot where we perhaps should err on the side of caution and forego the instrument of Music. Acapela music, it seems, should be the choice for the Church's worship of God. Random House College Dictionary (Revised ed), 1980 defines acapella as "without instrumental accompaniment" and "in the style of Church or Chapel music."

3. They Prayed. Jas 5:16, Acts 2:42, 1Tim 2:1-2, 1Thes 5:17.
4. They preached and or taught the Scriptures in the early Church. Scriptures would have been the Old Testament Scriptures since there were no scriptures published yet from the new era. We still

today can and do learn much from those old Scriptures but we must be careful to not hold on to and demand obedience to the old Mosaic/ Levitical laws which Christ said he did not come to do away with but to fulfill them. They were not a perfect law bringing liberty from sin as Christ's way did. The Old Law was God's way of proving to mankind that he could never be perfect in obedience to the old physical law unless he obeyed through the perfect sacrifice of Christ and from his heart. By proving this and offering a way through Christ to **become perfect in God's eye**, mankind would more readily accept the perfect sacrifice of Christ. Today by, as God's word puts it, "the foolishness of preaching", we can understand that the old law while serving as a **Schoolmaster**, was never designed to eternally save us, that by accepting Christ as the more perfect way, we can be saved unto God through Christ our Lord and Savior. 1Cor.1: 18-21, Gal 3: 24. Those of the old law who died trying to obey the old way were held in God's heavenly Paradise until Christ died on the cross; then they were saved eternally as we all are, **by the blood of Christ**. Note that in much of our denominational preaching there are numerous examples of their hanging on to the Old Law demanding obedience in fulfilling the teaching of the tithe, instrumental music of David, altar calls, all are just a few examples of this. In regard to so called "Altar calls" seen in so many denominational services where individuals come kneeling publicly before a so called altar, usually the podium of the auditorium. Look to Joshua 22 and read the story of how some of the Israelites that returned to occupy the lands on the East of Jordan, built themselves an Altar beside God's one Altar at Shiloh (Jerusalem). Joshua 22: 10-29 Verse 29 summarizes by saying, " Far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord and turn from following the Lord this day, to build an Altar... beside the Altar of the Lord our God which is before the Tabernacle." It all seems so innocent and touching perhaps to see one publicly fall prostrate before "who knows what", supposedly the Lord, but what does God think of this. Is it not an effort to hang on to the Old law way of worship. Is it for our own personal benefit or is it truly honored by God? Let God's Word and Spirit answer that question. The denominational world needs to learn that God has fulfilled the Old Law with his son, Jesus. Obeying a preacher's requirement to tithe or obey any other item of the Old

Law is like paying **blood money**. Watch them closely. (**The writer just deleted three sentences here because the Spirit revealed that they were a mite unkind**) I pray God's forgiveness and will press on. Our worship in Christ is from our heart and not of a demand from a physical obedience to the Old Law. Instead of paying **blood money** in tithe to ease our guilt and line the coffers of mega-churches with rock bands, we should accept the blood of Christ, which paid it all to rid us of guilt. Do not let anyone give you a load of guilt for not following the old Jewish, Hebrew, Mosaic Law of giving. Give from the heart instead as our New Covenant with God suggest and that may be ten percent, more or less.

5. They gave of their means. Our giving should come from, **“giving as we have purposed in our heart”**. **I Cor. 16:2** If that means a tenth or more, as long as it is of the heart and **not of some preacher’s syncretism**, (the act of combining multiple theologies to form one) so be it. See item 4 above.

Well, are we ready to cross over Jordan? For us of the New Covenant (Christians) our new path, symbolically and in a spiritual sense at least, is a form of crossing over Jordan as the Israelites were called upon to do under the leadership of Joshua. Before we cross though lets refresh our memories of what God and Moses told the Israelites. Deut. 7: 1-3 “When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to posses and has cast out many nations before you...and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. **You shall make no covenant with them or show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriage with them.**” Quickly we shall see that the Israelites did not go in and utterly destroy their enemy and they made covenants with them and married their daughters. They utterly ignored God’s commands and suffered the consequences, as do we all when we ignore God’s will and Commands.

Joshua

Watch as Rahab the harlot goes from the

“House of shame to the Hall of Fame” 5

To Joshua God said, “Pass through camps and command the people saying, prepare provisions for yourself for within three days you will cross over Jordan, to go in to possess the land the Lord is giving you to possess. “Now Joshua sent out men to spy out the land they were to invade, especially Jericho. So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab and lodged there. It was told the King of Jericho that Rahab had visitors who had come to spy on the city. The King sent men to Rahab demanding that the men be brought forth. Rahab arranges to hide the men and tell the King’s men that they have departed a certain way and that they must haste if they are to capture them. The spies then are told by Rahab to depart but before they go Rahab says, “ I know that the Lord has given you this land and the terror of the Lord befalls us.... Now therefore, I beg you to swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my Fathers house and Brothers and Sisters and all that we have and deliver our lives from death.” So the men answered her, “ Our lives for yours. We will deal kindly with you. Tie a scarlet cord in the window and we will not harm your house.” So the spies returned to Joshua with a good report for the invasion.

Joshua 1:10-18, 2:1-21

This story of Rahab and the spies is an important one for several reasons. One, it shows that God uses people, even those that are involved in sin and under his judgment but will spare those who turn to him in faith. Rahab had faith in God and his people and turned and asked to be blessed and saved by God’s people. Notice the resemblance of the scarlet cord in her window compared to the blood on the Israelites doorpost in Egypt that caused the death plaque to pass over the Israelite first born. This parallel is not coincidental. It is also a parallel to our own salvation in Christ in that his blood on the doorpost of our lives as a Christian provides us salvation and eternal life. Rahab’s family was spared in the later invasion and conquering of Jericho. Secondly, we find that Rahab marries within the Israelites to an Israelite son named Salmon whose lineage, when traced forward, goes through Joseph, the earthly adopted Father of Christ. Rahab then was in God’s plan all along to usher in the redeemer Christ. Never doubt that God has had a plan from the very beginning to save and redeem mankind and he knows how to work the plan. In His working, He can and will use you or anyone He pleases, even those in sin or as said earlier, under God’s judgment. That includes the “**bright**”/ **Atheist**.

Joshua placed the Ark of the Covenant out front of his marching army and approached the River Jordan from the East. The Jordan is normally not very wide but could vary in width season to season. Its depth is quite deep in places and fast flowing from the Galilee Lake in the North to the Salt Sea. As had been promised, When the souls of the priest carrying the Ark touched the waters of the Jordan, the waters were rolled back allowing the invaders to cross with all equipment on dry river bed in the same manner as the crossing of the Reed (Red) Sea in the Exodus. After the crossing, the water closed back. Joshua 3&4. Once again we see God using the medium of water, in this case to provide safe passage in crossing over into the Promised Land, a foreshadowing of our passing through the water of baptism into our Promised Land of eternal salvation. Yet the religious world again often denies that our baptism has anything to do with our salvation, disregarding scripture to the contrary. 1Pet 3: 20,21 “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now saves us...” Mk 16:16 “He that believeth and is Baptized shall be saved but he that believeth not shall be damned.” For those who teach intellectual belief only salvation, they should study the whole word of God in the **Spirit** it was intended. Some use the words Believe and Faith as if they were the same word. They are not. Believing is an intellectual act while Faith is an expression of that intellectual belief through action. We Act on our belief having faith. As the scripture states, without believing, we are damned before we start. Belief is a start. If we have faith in a belief we will act as Noah did, as Abram (Abraham) did, as Moses did, as Joshua did. Without believing we have nothing to have faith in thus no faith. Without faith, “it is impossible to please God”. Heb 11:6 If one blindfolded you and told you that there were three steps ahead which would lead you up to (toward) a threshold requiring a forth (last) step to cross that threshold, which would place you in a most pleasant room, would you do it? If you failed to believe and turned away you would not cross into the pleasant room (be Damned). If you believed and had enough faith in the instructions to blindly take the requisite steps (take action) as Noah, Abram, Moses, and Joshua and others, you would reach and receive the promised reward. We must be careful here though. The scriptures and even our statements often carelessly lead us to the conclusion that believing, repenting, confessing and baptism saves us, places us over the threshold, over our Jordan or Reed Sea. **None of them saves us.** There is a “**what**” that saves us and it is **the blood of Christ** (His sacrifice) only. The steps of believe, confess, repent and baptism are the steps that “**When**” they are completed, we come in contact with the “**What**” (the blood of Christ that saves us). Without completing the “**When**”, we never get to or cross the **What (the threshold)**. If only we could get this right we could see a lot more unity in our understanding of God’s plan to redeem mankind. May God lead us in that conclusion. Let us

not fail to teach the truth of God's word by studying His Word diligently and prayerfully and teach His plan, faithful to His intended meaning. God has never minced words and is said, "**not to be the author of confusion.**" 1 Cor. 14:33 We should not be confused by His Word then. It's hard to imagine a teacher teaching error purposely. Certainly God knows that we are imperfect mortals who are capable of innocently getting things wrong and for teachers there is a **greater accountability** so let's pray for God's grace and guidance in matters of interpretation. James 3: 1, I & II Tim and Titus, II Peter 2) Do you understand the message yet? No! Well then, later we will go over it again. Or, maybe you will want to just put this aside for a latter date, or perhaps even retire it to the "trash can" of life. I pray not. Endure with me please.

So crossing Jordan was a new beginning and before that crossing there was a lot to do. Jericho was one of their first objectives and we all surely remember its story. After marching around the city walls six times, once each day for six days, they then marched seven times around on the seventh day blowing trumpets until, as God promised, the walls came tumbling down and the city was conquered. Rahab and her family were saved from destruction as she was promised and God used Rahab's life in that she was in the lineage of Christ. Again God shows us how he can and will use any ones life, even ours or even the ungodly to work His plan.

There were many more battles to come in Canaan most won with God's power on the side of the Israelites. But, some were lost as leaders failed to show faith in God. Some were lost when the combatants failed to give God the Glory for the win. Some were lost because they failed to obey explicitly God's commands in regard to spoils. There were a lot of Battles that were lost because they never began. What we are saying here is that God promised he would give the Israelites much more land than they eventually conquered but they had not the faith or fortitude to fight for it. While the Israelites were mixing marriages and mixing pagan worship with worship of God, they would have been closer to God's plan to conquer the Pagans instead of compromising their Godly principals. Over many years there were many failures, many lessons learned. As land was conquered each of the 12 tribes were provided for. Eleven of the tribes were given land and cities to settle as theirs. Remember also that there were two tribes (Rueben and Gad) that settled lands east of the Jordan River while nine tribes settled the lands in Canaan itself. One tribe, the tribe of Levi, was not assigned land but was given designated land and cities within each of eleven tribal areas as their own assigned space. The tribe of Levi was the Priestly tribe, with Priestly duties, the sons of Aaron. So each tribe had their space designated as is common to us all. However, it is so easy and human nature supposedly,

which mistakenly leads us to the conclusion that any land is truly ours. It is too easy to forget that while God blesses us, and the 12 tribes with their space on this earth, the land still belongs to God and will forever. We are merely stewards of what God gives us as our possessions. The only Promise Land God gives by promise is a home in Heaven. Any thing else we may hold in this life we are entrusted and blessed with to use in God's honor. To use it in any other way will lead to disappointment, guaranteed.

Joshua, at the age of 110 years finally dies and was buried on the mountain Gaash in the land of his inheritance. The bones of Joseph had been carried from Egypt and were buried at Shechem in the plot of land which Jacob, his father had bought years ago. Gen 23: 1- 19

Judges

Watch in the Book of Judges as Israel turns to sin, suffers its consequences, turns to supplication (prayer) before God raises up a Savior in the form of a Judge. All this reflects man's journey through life, even today, with Christ raised as our Savior and Judge.

Even as the Israelites began to conquer the lands and distribute the land to its different tribes, they became increasingly disobedient to God's commands and His will. They intermarried adopting the gods of those they conquered and entering into covenants with them, which God had specifically prohibited. After the death of Joshua there was definitely a lack of leadership in their camps. As they separated to their own lands, **you can imagine the sense of autonomy each felt as they were now each empowered with their own space**. Their remained a central Tabernacle and Sanctuary for God in their midst but for most it was not just outside their tent door as it had been in the wilderness. And at one point, the Ark itself was stolen by their enemies, the Philistines, and kept in their cities for a while. The Philistines began to have plagues and diseases that they ascribed to having the Ark in their presence and eventually sent it back to the Israelites. As the Israelites continued to fail for lack of leadership and their own failures to Worship and obey God, God allowed them Judges who were men of God with strength and wisdom to lead them in the way they should go but even they were imperfect as you might imagine. Some of the noted Judges were Samson, Gideon, and Abimelech. The last verse of Judges says, “ **In those days**

there was no King In Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

Judges 21:25. Doing what seems right in our own eyes has seldom worked for long. I’m reminded of a song made popular by Frank Sinatra, “I did it my way”. Seldom does our life turn out so well when we “**do it our way.**” “**A man’s steps are of the Lord, How then can a man understand his own way?”** Prov.20: 24 You don’t have to look far today to see many, even in religious circles, doing their own thing as they see fit and contrary to the Word of God, it’s a **common plague. This should be a testimony to all of us; we need a standard bearer in our lives.** In 1811, President Adams petitioned our Congress to establish a special Bureau of Standards for Weights and Measures. It’s hard to imagine our country becoming the success it has without the institution of standards. The civilized world could not be without standards. Young people may rebel with their parents but most would agree, if they were honest, that they are appreciative of their parents imposing standards and limits on their behavior. Prov. 16:25 states, “**There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof is death.**” Jeremiah 10:23 states, “**It is not in man’s ability to direct his own steps**”. II Tim 3:16,17 says, that the Bible (Word of God) is **our standard and is the Holy inspired Word of God and is sufficient to all good works.** (Paraphrased , parenthetical remarks added)

Key lessons of Judges are as follows:

1. God is patient, Just, Merciful, and Faithful to bless and to correct disobedience.
2. God will accomplish his plan even with and through flawed relationships and flawed personalities. God’s grace does not negate his Justice. When God’s people sin against Him, God through his Love and Grace, will forgive and accept us back into his fellowship over and over as long as we will acknowledge our sin and ask his forgiveness. That does not mean that we will escape the consequences of our sin. Let it be forever known that God will allow you to feel the results of sin. It always takes effort and time to shake off the hurt of sin. It hurts you and others around you. Paul said in Romans 5 &6:1, “Just because God is quick to forgive, are we to sin more; God forbid.” **We need to get out of the business of sinning at every opportunity not only because we honor and love God, but because “It Hurts”.** If you stick your hand in the fire it hurts and often takes a while for the pain to go away even though you have, or some doctor has, given medical attention to the malady. There is no doubt that we all are sinners and will sin. Rom 5:12 and other scripture states as

much. When we say get out of the business of sinning, we simply mean stop sinning **habitually or being a slave to sin. Rom 6: 16-23.** Habitual sin will certainly bring spiritual death but you must know also, it can considerably shorten your life and bring premature physical death as well.

Ruth

The book of Ruth is a book that tells a story about faithfulness and how God uses faithfulness during a period of unfaithfulness in “Judges”, to usher in the period of Kings. During the period when Judges led Israel, there was a famine in the land. A certain man of Bethlehem named Judah and his wife Naomi, went to dwell in the country of Moab East of the Salt/Dead Sea) where there was less famine. While there, Judah died and Naomi was left with two sons who married Gentile wives of Moab named Ruth and Orphah. The Sons died in time and Naomi later heard that there was now no more famine in Canaan and wished to returned to her homeland. She told her daughters in law that they owed her no more allegiance and that they were free to stay in there home land. Ruth replied, no I will continue with you and help you. Naomi agreed for her to go with her. After their return, Ruth was faithful and went into the fields to glean the leftovers of the harvest. It was Hebrew law that landowners were to allow widows to do this for their support. Ruth chose a field that belonged to a relative of Naomi, named Boaz. Boaz looked upon the beauty of Ruth and invited her to return over and over. It was also a law of the Hebrew nation that if a widow was left without a boy child as heir, a close relative was obligated to provide her with an heir and Boaz was the only close relative available to do this thing, so he took Ruth as a wife and had a boy child whom they named Obed. Obed later, as we follow him, becomes the father of a man named **Jesse who later fathered David** who was a chosen King of Israel whom the Prophets of old, long ago had prophesied to be in the lineage of Christ, the Son of God (Our Messiah).

What lessons does the story of Ruth provide? Ruth is a Gentile but she accepts Yahweh (Hebrew name for God) as her God. Ruth 1:16,17. Ruth’s faithfulness To God and to Naomi was impressive to Boaz which we are told is one of the reasons he was so willing to fulfill his duty to provide her with an heir. But Ruth, as we said, is a Gentile, and has no covenant with God, no law to base her

faithfulness. We must understand that faithfulness is not just a trait of Godly people. It can be found anywhere and wherever God finds it, He can and often does use it to carry out his plan. **He can and has used even ungodly people for many reasons that often are confusing to us. Witness the Rahab story.** He can use ones unfaithfulness or their faithfulness and we may make the mistake of thinking, well the ungodly can be blessed with a relationship with God as well as we. **The ungodly can escape God's justice. Not so!** Just because God has used the ungodly for his purposes, it does not follow that they are saved and redeemed by God to be in a covenant relationship with him. They can have a relationship with God but not necessarily a relationship of Promise (Covenant). It is very important to understand this. There are many examples of God using bad people or people not in agreement with Him to further his cause and plan such as Goliath, the Philistine that David slew. Another example is King Cyrus of Persia in returning the Jews back to Judah after years of captivity. King Herod in Christ day, and Saul a persecutor of Christians, who later became a disciple of Christ, and many other examples. Here, God used Ruth. This is not to say that an ungodly person used, cannot go on to accept God as Ruth did and come into a covenant relationship with God. Ruth accepted God the scriptures said, so God accepted her but she was not then a Jew, one of God's chosen. If we look forward to God's new covenant with man we should understand that it is God's plan that **all can be and will be God's people if they accept Him as theirs.** Ruth, we are told did follow Yahweh. Did that make her a Jew and a child with a covenant with God? Perhaps not in the mind of the Jews of the day, but from our complete understanding of God's Word and Will, one must conclude that Ruth's **actionable faith in God** was just as acceptable as righteousness as Abraham's. Regardless it is in God's hand and the story stands with lessons.

God blessed Ruth and Boaz and through them, all of Israel and us as Gentile Christians today. Through them comes the lineage of Christ. Ruth, in effect becomes another Abram (Abraham) who leaves her home in a faith of Yahweh (God) and in Naomi. Her faith provides a faith link between Abraham and David. The book also provides a link between the 400-year period of poor leadership of Judges and the years of better (although imperfect) leadership under the Kings.

I Samuel

Now, there was a certain man of Israel named Elkanah who had two wives, **Hannah and Peninnah.** (**Papa Bear has a beautiful granddaughter with the name Hannah and he is very proud of her.**) Peninnah had children but Hannah's womb was barren. (She apparently could have no children initially) Elkanah went up to Shiloh (later called Jerusalem) each year to make sacrifice, and to worship God through Eli, the High Priest of the time. His wives would go with him and often Peninnah would tease Hannah that she could not have children. One day near the temple, the Priest saw Hannah crying by the wayside after being teased of Peninnah. Eli read her lips as she prayed to God to allow her to have a child. She promised God if he would allow her a child she would dedicate him to the Lord's service. Eli, thinking she was drunk, reprimanded her but she told Eli that she was not drunk but was asking God to bless her with a child. Eli answered her, "go in peace and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him." 1st Sam 1: 2-17 Hannah does have a boy child and names him **Samuel**. When the boy was weaned of the mother's breast, Hannah, true to her promise, took the child to Eli the Priest to serve in the Temple and to live with him. Eli had two sons himself and both were corrupt to a fault. As Samuel grew, one night he heard a voice calling him, "Samuel, Samuel." Thinking it was Eli calling, he went to Eli's bed and asks, "did you call" to which Eli responded, "No it was not I." Samuel heard the voice on three more occasions, each time Samuel announced it was not he calling. The third occasion Eli told Samuel to return to his bed and if he heard the voice again answer, "Here am I Lord". Upon returning to bed and hearing the call again, Samuel answered, "Speak for your servant hears." God responds, "I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned (overlooked) forever by his sacrifices. 1st Sam 3:1-19. Later in a recurring battle with the Philistines and because of disobedience of Samuels's household, the Philistines won a key battle and captured the Ark of the Covenant and took it into their camp. In this battle Eli's two sons were killed. Eli, learning of this at the age of 98, falls over breaking his neck and dies. Samuel becomes the next Judge of Israel. I Sam.4, 5 Over time, the Philistines begin to have plagues and disease in their camp to which they ascribe to the presence of the Ark. They decide to get rid of the Ark. Unsure of how they should rid themselves of the Ark, they decide to place the Ark on a cart hooked to oxen and let them proceed as they will. If the Oxen go toward the Israelites camp, then it must be interpreted an omen that God, because of the Ark, had brought them plagues. If the Oxen went in the opposite way, then perhaps they could conclude that God had nothing to do with the plagues. **The Oxen did go toward Israel and so they allowed the Ark to return to the Israelites camp .** I Sam. 6: 1-14.

Samuel continued to rule and judge and he had sons who also were judges in Beesheba but they were corrupt and did not walk in their father's ways. The people were displeased with the Judges ways and finally **they pleaded with Samuel to plead with the Lord that he may send them Kings to guide and lead them.** This of course displeased Samuel but he did petition the Lord on behalf of the peoples request. God responded, " Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you but have rejected me, that I shall not reign over them." (1st Sam 8:1-8) God then directed Samuel to sanctify one, **Saul**, who was of the tribe of Benjamin, as King over Israel. Samuel is very distraught with the people and tells them that he is appointing them a King as they wished, but warns that kings will not be good for them. Saul was a strong leader and took charge immediately making war often with the Philistines, their chief enemy of the region. Before one particularly big battle, Saul called for Samuel to come as Priest and offer sacrifices to God so that the Armies of Saul would be successful in battle. Samuel was not on time and as Saul waited he became so impatient that he decided that if Samuel would not come, then He himself would offer a sacrifice. Then Samuel came and was very angry with Saul for his impatience and condemned him saying, "You have done foolishly and have not kept the Commandment of the Lord your God which he Commanded of you...your kingdom will not continue." I Sam.13: 8-14. The battle was lost. Saul's son was named Jonathan and as time goes on he begins to take more control of the armies and commands in battles with their enemies. A lesson we need to understand here is that we all are guilty more times than not, lacking patience to wait on the Lord when we ask for his guidance. We have the attitude that we want it now, instant gratification, and if God does not respond in our time frame, then we will take charge and do it or get it our self. This attitude seldom works to our benefit and is more often disastrous. In general, the older we get and having taken the initiative to satisfy ourselves without God over and over again, we only have to look once to see the painful mistakes we have made with our life. Look at it close enough and you will see a real mess. Most of us can't bear such close scrutiny and refuse to look. That may keep you in a blissful state in this physical world but it will not sustain a spiritual life. We need to recognize our failures, ask God's forgiveness and accept his forgiveness in order for our spiritual selves to live here on this earth and in eternity. Don't forget what we said earlier in Genesis. **The only part of "Us" that is real is our spiritual self, the one that's in the image of God. Gen 1:26 Physical life is but a vapor. James 4:14 (not our first visit of this subject is it; not to worry, it is worth remembering). Which one should we protect more? Which one do we protect and feed more the physical self or the spiritual?**

Samuel was eventually grieved that he ever chose Saul as King because of Saul's disobedience to God's way. God led Samuel to go to a man named **Jesse to choose a son of his to be King over Israel. Remember, Jesse was in the family line of Ruth and Boaz's son, Obed whose lineage eventually led to Christ. He asked Jesse to bring before him his sons.** Jesse brings all of his sons except one, David whom he left in the fields tending his flocks. Samuel looked upon the sons that came and was not satisfied. He asks Jesse, is this all of your sons? Jessie replies, no there is one more named David. Samuel, when he had interviewed David, selected David as the next King. David then is brought into the courts of Saul as an armor bearer and had other chores to learn in order to be King. King Saul began to have deep depression illness and called upon David to play for him beautiful music on his harp to relieve his depression. David enjoyed his harp and was apparently a good player having used his harp in the fields as he cared for his fathers livestock. The Harp had a soothing effect on the grazing animals as it did on King Saul.

David continued with Saul serving him as a faithful servant. David also became best of friends with Saul's son Jonathan and was just as faithful to him as a friend as he was Saul. In fact this faithful friendship is one of the great stories and lessons of friendship in the Bible. David continued to grow in wisdom and in strength.

The Philistines continued to be a chief enemy and thorn in the side of Israel. These Philistines occupied those lands lying west of Jerusalem along the Mediterranean coast. One reason the Israelites found it so difficult to defeat them was because they were so much more advanced in weaponry. They had perfected the manufacturing of weapons from iron and steel and their men, their soldiers, were generally larger than the average Israelite. In fact the Israelites often described them as giants. There was one such supposed giant of a man in the Philistine camp named Goliath who taunted the Israelites continually. No one could seem to put him down. On one occasion when David was near the battlefield he heard Goliath present a challenge to any Israelite who would defeat him and no Israelite answered, David answered that he would accept the challenge. Everyone in the Israelite camp was shocked. David, this little young man was smaller and less aggressive than any of them. Saul offered David armor to wear in the fight. David tries it on but decides it is too cumbersome. So David approaches the Philistine Goliath who is "dressed to be killed" in all his armor, carrying great knives, clubs, and spears as tall as he. Little David wears his simple Sheppard wear of the day and carries a sling shot, which he has expertly used from the days of his youth herding sheep and fighting off wolves. David approached Goliath as Goliath laughs at his person saying, "**Who am I a dog**

that you shall kill with a stick?" David says to Goliath, "you come to me with a sword and a spear but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Host, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defiled. Today the Lord will deliver you and I will strike you dead and take your head from you." I Sam 17 David bends down as he crosses a streambed and picks up two small smooth rocks and continues on toward this Giant of a man. David places one stone in his sling and begins to twirl the sling over his head taking a few more slow steps toward the Giant. Finally, he releases the sling and the rock travels straight to the Giants forehead striking him in the forehead dropping him to his knees. He finally falls to the ground and is dead. The Giants head is removed as David promised. David became very popular and was placed in charge of more of Saul's armies. His success as a leader became an increasing source of jealousy for King Saul and caused him to fall further into depression.

Before we get bored with David, asking, Why study David's actions; let us remind ourselves that David is in the direct lineage of Christ. Many of the prophets thousands of years before, predicted that a Messiah would come through a king called David and that the coming Messiah would rule forever as a Davidic King. Christ is then today, in a manner of speaking, our King David. So Little David plays a very important role on the stage of Christianity. He is a forerunner of Christ, our Lord and our savior. We often today, forget or pay little attention to, who our Forefathers and Mothers were. What they accomplished, how they accomplished it, what experiences they lived through. What mistakes they made. What made them who they are/were and how did they influence our lives. We cannot know ourselves very well without paying attention to the Who, What and Why of our fore bearers. They are much of who we are, as physical and spiritual individuals. In like manner, we can never know ourselves spiritually if we never consider our fore bearers of the spiritual world; that includes God first, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit and all the players in between; Adam and Eve, Noah, Abram David, etc.

Saul's jealousy over David's accomplishments became so rampant that he asks his son Jonathan to kill his best friend David. Jonathan instead warned David of his father's intent. David continued to serve his King faithfully if not cautiously. Saul eventually goes after David seeking to kill him but after Jonathan warned David, David took to the hills. Several times while Saul was trying to kill him, David purposely crept into the Camp of Saul and got near enough to Saul to cut away part of his night robe as he slept. David on several occasions showed Saul how close he had been able to get in order to convince Saul that he could have killed him had he wished. David's motive was of course to get Saul to cease his efforts to kill him. It did not impress King Saul and he continued his pursuit.

Jonathan, the son of Saul was soon killed in a battle that brought King Saul to his end. He asks one of his Soldiers to kill him with his own sword to which the Soldier refused. In despair, King Saul kills himself by falling on his own sword. David then becomes the legitimate King of Israel as had been prophesied many years before. The stories of David abound in 1st Samuel and all are worthy of study. Later in the story we find David still true to his friend seeking out the son of Jonathan, to see what he may do to support his deceased friends children. He found a son of Jonathan named Mephiboseth who was handicapped in both feet. (II Sam 9:3-13) David took him in and cared for him from his own table. What a testimony of friendship and loyalty. David continued as a great King of promise being in the lineage of Christ and God's plan to redeem mankind unto himself. But even with David's divine mission and God's use of him, David was an imperfect soul. He sinned over and over, even to the point of lusting after the wife of one of his key officers. David falls in love with Beersheba, the wife of one of his Generals, Uriah and eventually gets Beersheba pregnant. David has Uriah set up in a battle to be killed and he is indeed struck down in battle, freeing David to marry Beersheba. The only redeeming quality David had with God was his acknowledgement of his wrong doings and his willingness to continue with God and seek his forgiveness. This is very much the state that we as Christians find our selves in. We can never be worthy of our salvation through Christ. But yet through Christ we can have forgiveness of our sinful nature if we will but acknowledge our sin and turn away from it. Not that we don't remain imperfect sinners. We can never reach that sinless state, but in Christ, God can relate to us through His Son and overlook our repentant sin.

A second lesson is that key to any successful kingship or position of authority on earth is acknowledgment that God is the true King of us all and is the one who ultimately entrust us with the authority to rule. Never forget that in Revelations we Christians are referred to as kings, priest, and saints. Christ himself describes this fact in his exchange with the Roman Governor who was about to have him Crucified. Christ told him that without God allowing you the power to crucify me, you could not do it. "You could have no power over me unless it was given you from above..." John 19:11. Paul, in Rom 13:1-7 tells us "Let every soul be subject to the governing authority for there is no authority except from God and the authorities that exist or appointed of God." On the other hand look at Acts 5:29. "...we ought to obey God rather than man." Is this a conflict? Of course not. Given its context, it simply infers that where there is a conflict between God's law and that of man, we should follow God's Command. This seeming conflict is a prime example of understanding Psalms 119:160

"... the entirety (the sum) of your Word is precious and truth". Much of man's seeming inability to agree on God's Word lies in man's insistence in not studying

and putting God's word together as a whole, rightly dividing the Word, picking and choosing what sounds good. See II Tim 2:15 on rightly dividing the Word of truth. It is a problem and divides us as God's children.

II Samuel and I & II Kings

II Samuel is a continuation of I Samuel describing David's faithfulness to God and the books of I and II Kings also describe many of David's failures as well. A major failure of David was his infatuation for the wife of one of his favored General, Uriah. We have already told part of the story but here are the interesting and colorful details. While Uriah was away on a military campaign for David, David looked down to a courtyard where Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, was bathing. In lust, he committed adultery with Bathsheba (had sex with her) and she became pregnant. David called Uriah home from battle, thinking that Uriah would go in to his wife, have sex, thus there would be no way that Uriah would know that the child was not his own. Instead, Uriah would not go to his wife even though he and his army were in the city. Instead military protocol called for commanders to stay with their men, which Uriah insisted he would do. David was disgusted because Uriah refused to go to and sleep with his wife. David commanded that Uriah be sent back to the battlefield and placed in a position of maximum exposure to being killed in battle. Uriah was subsequently struck down and died in battle. After a requisite period of mourning, Bathsheba was brought before David and he took her as his wife. A child was born of this adulterous relationship. David's adulterous relationship brought him many problems (II Sam 12:11). The Child later becomes very ill. David is very distressed and goes into a deep depression and mourns, praying for the child's recovery. The child eventually dies and David immediately came out of his depressed state, so fast it seems, that his friends ask him; you seem relieved after your son's death yet you were in such terrible distress as he lay ill." (II Sam 12:15-23) His reply may serve as a lesson for us all as it tells a lot about David's understanding of God and Physical death. David told them, "While my son was ill I fasted/prayed and wept, and said to myself, while he is alive who can tell whether my God may have mercy and that he may live, but now he has died; why should I fast/pray? Can I bring him back again? I can go to him but he cannot return to me." This gives us as Christians a way that we perhaps should look at the death of those in Christ. When the sick are with us we should pray

and care for them but if God chooses to take them in death, even though we will miss them, we should have faith that our children and those friends and family who are Christians are safe in death. We may truly celebrate the death of one who has believed in Christ as our Lord and Savior (confessed him), repented of their sinful nature, and been baptized into Christ. The same is true of the child who dies before God counts him accountable for sin. What age is that? Only God and the young person can presumably know. We may suggest that it is somewhere around puberty.

David and Beersheba had another son, Solomon who would go on to become King of Israel and a great one he was. Before David died he wished to build a beautiful Temple for God to take the place of the temporary tabernacles, the tents that the Ark had been kept in since the days of the wilderness. The Ark had been kept in numerous places, peoples homes etc. Remember also that the Philistines had captured it as well and it stayed with them for a time until they sent it back to Israel. **But God expressed to David that he needed no better place than the tent he had in the wilderness.** Again, a lesson for us is that on this earth our existence is at best temporary and we have no need to build up such a grand abode on this earth, rather we should be building our spiritual life toward a permanent home in Heaven. (Matt 6: 19) God also objected to David building this temple in that his hands had too much blood on them, to include the blood of Uriah. Instead, God told David that he could design and plan such a temple, but his son Solomon would be the builder.

We are combining the Books of Samuel and the books of Kings here so we enter the books of Kings.

Some key teachings of Kings will be:

1. God is the giver of all wisdom and understanding.
2. The story of Naaman's cleansing of leprosy required he obey Elisha's instructions of dipping seven times in river of Jordan. Naaman refused initially questioning, "why the Jordan?" "Why not the rivers of Syria?" The point is it's not which river you dip in nor is it the act of dipping (Baptism) that cleanses. It is Obedience, which cleanses Naaman and us. In our Salvation the same is true with the act of Baptism which so many reject as a required step in our Salvation. **Just do it Naaman!** 2 Kings 5: 1-15 Naaman does obey and his leprosy is healed.

3. It pleases God to live among and have a personal relationship with his people. God's continued presence with us is conditional. We must respect God and obey his Commands and Will to continue to enjoy a relationship with Him.
4. God is faithful to his promises and in his grace, warns and forgives over and over again when we ask his forgiveness. We must never forget however, that God is just as faithful to punish sin as he is to reward our obedience. There are also consequences for forgiven sin. Sin Hurts!
5. God reigns forever. The King of all Kings and has the power and authority over all governing powers.

David prepares to die and he tells his people, “ I go the way of all the earth; be strong and prove yourselves a man and keep the charge, commandments, the judgments, the testimony, of the Lord your God... that you may prosper in all that you do.” I Kings2: 2-3

I Kings 3:3-17; Solomon, as he replaces David as King of Israel, prays to God “ I am as a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.... therefore give to your servant an understanding heart to judge your people that I may discern between good and evil...” God was very pleased with this humble petition of Solomon and says to him, “ Because you have asked for these things and **have not asked for long life or riches**, nor the life of your enemies, but have asked for understanding to discern justice; I have done according to your prayers and I will give also riches and honor like no other before you.” **Wow! What a reward for a humble beginning. God really honors one who is humble and places Him first in his life.**

The lessons for all in this exchange, especially those who lead, are enormous. God will provide and arm us with all we need to lead others in the way of our God if we will only place Him first in our life and seek and pray for an understanding of His Will and Way. That should be our constant prayer and more than this, we must understand that we can never understand God's will without being **in His Word (our Bible) daily**. There are other ways such as attending worship and Bible study and even circumstances, but even these are full of danger if we are not in his Word personally and often. It was an admonition of Paul to Timothy to “study to show yourself approved” II Tim 2:15. To depend on circumstances often brought on by our poor decisions against the Will of God is a poor way of getting to the truths of God and again, very hurtful to you and those around you, even your loved family. Without God as the center of our life we often follow the ungodly for we will always follow someone if not God.

Then its left to God, if he sees any redeeming value in doing so, He will pull us back into his arms. II Kings 17: 7-15, “ Do not do as they do and they did the things that the Lord had forbidden.” We all have this tendency and must guard against it. But how shall we know what God has forbidden unless we know His Words? Study always. Know His truths and follow him in humility as Solomon. But as wise as Solomon was, he still made plenty of bad decisions. As men grow in power, we find that they invariably begin a tendency to go after strange gods. In Solomon's day strange gods meant mainly gods of other nations around him such as the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites who worshiped graven images representing the Sun, Moon, harvest etc. **But it can also mean, and today more than likely is represented by, worshiping the things that God has given us including material things and our power and influence over others.** Either way, our God is often not in the center of our life and for us that can spell spiritual destruction. King Solomon was guilty of going after the women of the countries around him which was counter to the instructions given of God to Moses and Joshua for the Children of Israel as they invaded Canaan. God's reason for not wanting the Israelites to mix with the Canaanites was that he was using **the Hebrew Nation to usher in his pure son Christ to redeem man. The Hebrew nation needed to be a pure race, not intermingled with a pagan race of people.** It is human nature that when we mix with pagan people or people of low morals, we will sooner or later adopt their practices and become as they are. I Cor 5: 6-8 “...Know ye not that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ... purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump..” The lesson for us as Christians of course is to prefer the company of other Christians and not the company of the ungodly. Be careful of the company you keep. It does not mean that we should not be friendly with those who do not know or believe in God. It means that we must not mix with the world to the extent that we are tempted to adopt the world's norm as our own; rather we are to stand apart from the world's standards and keep to God's Will and standards.

So Solomon did evil in the sight of the lord, says I Kings 11:1-13. Solomon's taking women of other nations led his subjects to do the same and eventually there were divisions throughout the Israeli camps. Eventually it led the tribes to split, with nine tribes forming a North Kingdom and two and one half tribes a Southern Kingdom thus weakening the whole Nation. Both books of Kings focus on the errors of leadership and the breakdown and division of the Nation of Israel into two camps. The central worship place of God remained in what are now Jerusalem and the Temple, which David designed and Solomon built. The Northern part of the Kingdom still made at least an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship and celebrate Passover and other special days but the trend diminished over time as they found it more convenient to celebrate some

worship rituals in their own area and indeed began to worship even the gods of those around them. So they began to **mix God's worship items with those of Pagan gods**. What a mess! But, look around you today and you will find the very same thing happening in our worship services. We do what **seems right to us** and in many cases **what entertains us or attracts the crowds** rather than simply worshiping God as the earlier Christians did according to the teachings of His Apostles. We may even decide to worship with a group just down the street allowing us more sleep on Sunday morning versus a church family further away that we know scripturally worships God more perfectly according to His Will.

The Northern Kingdom, labeled **Israel**, was very much under the influence of the Syrian nation and eventually was completely captured and destroyed as a cohesive nation. The Northern Kingdom was located in an area known as Samaria and is referred to by that name in many New Testament references. Many years later the Southern Kingdom, eventually referred to as **Judah**, was defeated by the Babylonian nation to their East (Now Iraq) and they were slowly carried into captivity to Babylon. There was a small remnant left in Canaan and some fled to Egypt, but God allowed this captivity to stand because of their complete falling away. They were in a sense placed back in the wilderness from which they had come in order that God might show them that their disobedience was not to stand. We see during this period that Prophets such as Elisha and others became instruments of God as much or more than the Kings as leaders of the Nation. They constantly warned the people and the Kings of the impending destruction of the Northern kingdom and the exile to Babylon and while in captivity, they (prophets) schooled them back into a more proper relationship with God. As is the way with all kingdoms, Babylon eventually failed as the Persians (Now Iran) grew as a power. A King Cyrus of Persia invaded and conquered Babylon. While the Israelites were in Babylon for some 70 years, they were called Jews because they were of the tribe of Judah. This then is where the name "Jews" or "Ju" began. King Cyrus was not in the habit of holding the peoples of his conquest as prisoners and he was of the opinion that these captives held by Babylon should return to their home, so he called on them to return if they wished. In fact he sent a first group back to rebuild their city of Jerusalem in preparation for the return of Judah. The walls needed rebuilding and the temple of their God needed to be rebuilt, for it all had been destroyed. We need to remind ourselves at this point that earlier we mentioned that it was God's plan that He would send His Son Jesus Christ to live as man on this earth through the tribe of Judah. Judah was a child of Jacob (Israel), remember, and was head of one of the 12 tribes called Judah. Of course when Christ is born, Judah is long since dead but his descendants are everywhere.

The thing we need to learn in this old story is that Israel was not a perfect group of people but they were who God chose to be His people and the nation through which He would complete his plan to redeem man from the sin initiated in the “Garden of Eden”. The Israelites failed over and over again but God continued to cultivate them, to refine them. God at one point reminded the Israelites as they conquered Canaan that they were not winning these battles because they were godlier or better than the Canaanites but because the Canaanites were totally corrupt. Sometimes we may look at ourselves and say, Hey I must be blessed of God because I have been such a good Christian. Be careful, you probably are not be as good as you think. The Jew's in their captivity were drawn back into a better relationship with God and were practically cured of their tendency to worship Pagan gods. Their captivity and other trials that God sent their way was for the purpose of showing them that they would fail over and over again and in time they would realize that they on their own could never reach perfection. In time, In fact, God's Word says that “**in the fullness of time**”, God sent His Son to die on the cross to pay for our failures. John 7:8, Gal 4:4. Through his death and our acceptance of his sacrifice, the Jews first, then we Gentiles, could present our selves to God as perfect, even as sinners. It took time to bring man to the point that he would realize his utter inability to reach the perfect state that God requires of us to be in relationship with Him. Someone, perhaps Noah, may have said and we have stated similarly before, “ Well God, why didn't you tell us that you required us to be perfect or that we could be perfect only through your Son and sent him to us much earlier as our savior. God would have surely said, “Because you would not have received him; few do even today after all these thousands of years; what makes you think, Noah, that you would have received him earlier?”(Author's words) Many, in fact, the entire first converts to Christianity, were Jews in Jerusalem. Later with the Gentile Cornelius' baptism, there were Gentiles (Non-Jews) converted to Christ. There were many Jews though that rejected Christ and had him crucified by the Roman Governors of the day. Today most all Jew's see Christ as a prophet and teacher but fail to acknowledge him as their Messiah. **One of their prime reasons for not accepting Christ was because they believed their scriptures taught that the Messiah, when he came would conquer all evil and their enemies and reign here on Earth in His established Kingdom on Earth.** They totally misunderstood (misinterpreted) their scriptures. Even many of His disciples held this view until Christ resurrection. Christ came to establish a Spiritual Kingdom, His Church he left on this earth, as a betrothed bride, but His throne was in Heaven. When he returns, he promises to wed his betrothed bride and carry Her (the Church) away to heaven with all those who are in Her as Christians. His Kingdom, His Bride, the Church, will be in Heaven and not of

this earth. Some will ask but what of the new Heavens and new Earth after the old one is burnt up? Well you can bet, where ever or what ever it is, you'll not recognize it as our current abode. **There are many today, Jews and others, who are still looking for a Messiah who will reign on this corrupt earth.** Most Jews and denominational bodies believe in a literal interpretation of Revelations that talks about a 1000-year reign upon his return. However, there are a few, including this writer, who interprets Revelation as the apocalyptic writing that it is. Few consider the real meaning of biblical writers use of numerology and symbolic language that describes much more than a literal 1000-year period. As a result, many of those who take the literal interpretation may see no need to accept Christ until he returns or perhaps sometimes during His 1000 year reign. There will be plenty of time to accept Him, they may say. No sweat! The question that begs to be answered by that group; "if Christ again does not establish a kingdom here on earth for 1000 years, what are you going to do?" Will you reject him again as the true Messiah as the Jews before? There is a good possibility you will. In fact, logically if you are wrong in your interpretation and, as far as Christ comes is, "in the clouds", where he will meet those in Christ, which is exactly what I Thessalonians 4:17 says, then you will have waited to late to make a decision to accept our Lord. We can discuss this again in other study ahead so let's press on shall we?

Chronicles I & II

First Chronicles begins with genealogies from Adam, through Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, continuing in great detail to Kings Saul, David, Solomon, even to the leadership after the twelve tribes split into two separate kingdoms, the Northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern kingdom of Judah. Finally, the leadership was through the prophets during the Babylonian exile and return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and walls of Jerusalem. While these genealogies seem cumbersome and perhaps even boring, we need to remember that it was absolutely imperative that the genealogies be recorded in history so that the chosen bloodline of Christ could be **proven to the Israelites** such that they would accept the Christ as the prophesied Messiah. We now know that in spite

of this documented lineage, the majority of Israelite leaders of Christ day rejected him and indeed called for his crucifixion that was prophesied thousands of years earlier. At the same time the entire initial converts to Christianity were Israelites, are as they were called after Babylon captivity, Jews. There continue to be some few Jewish converts today but for the most part, modern Jews merely acknowledge Christ as a prophet and teacher of their region but reject Christ as the Messiah and their Savior. We can add that Muslims also acknowledge Him as a prophet and teacher but never as Deity.

There are four main concepts of I Chronicles that should be emphasized:

1. The basis for continuity in our religious life is to undergo transformation from one generation to the next seeking always to maintain the theological stability taught in the Word of God. Another way of saying this is; we may change, but God does not change. Jer. 2:11. We also cannot change our genealogy and neither does Christ or God. We are who we are and God is and will always be who He is; as God said of Himself, “I am who I am.” Ex 3:14.
2. It Highlights “Retribution theology and the role that Priest of the tribe of Levi had in it. The Priests were to care for the Temple, intercede before God on behalf of the people when they sinned. They administered warnings of God's retribution or punishment when they failed to obey God's will and command. For example, the Priest continually warned over and over of the impending loss of their freedom if they continued in their idol worship and it of course came about as they were captured and exiled to Babylon and Assyria. We should also add that the Catholic Church also subscribes to Retribution Theology. That is, the Catholic Priest and Pope represents the common members to God. This theology rejects God's Word telling us plainly that all Christians are **priest, saints and kings**.
3. Chronicles shows how Judah, the exiled community, was to reform from its monarchy Kingship to a Theocracy led by God's will.
4. A recurrent theme is:
 - a. Reform or turn aside from your old ways. Pagan worship became less a problem for example during their captivity. The temple, having been destroyed, was no longer their central worship place although the temple was restored after the captivity on a less grand scale.
 - b. Repentance of sin is a means of returning to God's blessings.

Lets review several key stories in Chronicles:

Remember when the Philistines in one particular battle that they won with Judah, captured the Ark of the Covenant and carried it into their camp. While they had the Ark, they began to have plagues, which they interpreted to be from The Israelites God, punishing them. They determined that they should place the Ark upon a cart drawn of cows and set them loose to go as they please. If the cows went toward the Israelite camps then it must have been The Israelites God, which sent them the plagues. The cows did turn toward Judah and the Philistines were happy to see it depart them. The Israelites intercepted the Ark and returned it to its rightful place. If you recall, a tent had been the place of rest for the Ark during the exodus. There still was no permanent home for the Ark and it was kept for sometime in the home of one of the Israelites outside of Jerusalem. Not until Solomon finally built the Temple did the Ark have a permanent home.

David had tried to build a fine Temple but God disallowed it saying that David's hand had blood on them from his involvement in arranging Uriah's death on the battlefield so that David could have Uriah's wife as his own. Instead God allowed David to design the Temple and gather material for it but called upon Solomon, his son to build it. Compared to David, Solomon had clean hands at least in the beginning of his reign. Of course, to the Israelites, the Temple built for God's Ark and living space had to be grand but as for God, all he wanted was a temporary dwelling place. He never meant for the grand Temple to be permanent on Earth. God had earlier said to David when David petitioned Him to allow a temple built, that a temporary tent is all he had ever needed. In time, the Babylonians destroyed the temple of Solomon. Many years after the Babylonian destruction, in 70 AD, a less grand rebuilt temple was destroyed by the Romans. **Again later the European Crusaders tried to restore the same temple but the Muslim forces of the day and region won out and today in Old Jerusalem where Solomon first built the temple, stands the Dome of the rock, a Muslim temple.** The Muslims do not allow Jews or Christians to enter this edifice as of this writing. **There is certainly a moral to this story; God considered his presence on this earth as a temporary stay needing only a tent; we are here as well in a temporary physical state. Our permanent home is a spiritual existence either in the presence of God or in eternal Hell with Satan and his angels (our Choice). There should be no doubt especially to modern Jews, God's Temple is not to be here and especially not in Old Jerusalem. More likely is God's Temple in the hearts of men who make up His Church.**

I Chronicles 17:9-27 provides a prophetic promise or covenant to all of Israel, Gods chosen people, concerning our house with the Lord. (Vs. 9-14) Nathan the Prophet God spoke to David saying, "Moreover I will appoint a place for my

people Israel, and will plant them that they dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore as previously, since the times that I commanded judges to be over my people, Israel. Also I will subdue all your enemies. Furthermore, I tell you that the Lord will build you a house. It shall be for when your days are fulfilled, when you must go to be with your father, that I will set up your seed after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish His Kingdom. He shall build me a house and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his Father and he shall be my Son and I will not take my mercy away from him as I took it away from him who was before you; and I will establish him in my house and in my Kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever." These were the words spoken by the prophet Nathan to David concerning God's promises.

Now, even though David clearly was hearing Nathan's prophesy in the context of David desiring to build God a Temple, and understanding that God was not going to allow him to build it but rather his son Solomon, clearly, God, through Nathan, has a much larger agenda in mind. **When he speaks of David's throne being forever he is referring to the Davidic King Christ**, who was to ascend through David's lineage and establish his throne in heaven over the heavenly kingdom of his Church. God is here promising David that He will bring a Davidic King and Savior to earth to establish his Kingdom forever, **not on earth**, but in Heaven. This has to be The Kingdom he refers to because we know of no other Kingdom, which has or can last forever here on this earth. **Any reference to Israel in this context also refers to all the chosen people of God that includes all people of the earth who call upon God as their God, that is those who confess Christ as God's Son, repent and are baptized into Christ name.** After Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit was sent to this earth as a comforter to guide us in all righteousness in a body called Christ Body, His Church. His Church with the Holy Spirit then is what he left us here to represent His Kingdom that is forever and is now, in Heaven. **Let us not be confused when we refer to Christ's Church. It is much more than a building or an assembly of people although that is what we commonly call our assemblies and buildings.** It is a convenient term and was even used in the early days of the Church. Paul, in some of his letters used the expression, "The churches of Christ greet you". (Rom 16:16) Note that the expression above has a small "c" in "churches". The expression "churches of Christ" is not then necessarily the name for the Church Christ established. In fact the scriptures do not name "the Church". However if we are to call the Church any name and certainly it seems appropriate to identify it by some name for convenience, it seems appropriate to refer to it as a body established "in Christ name". As the bride of Christ it seems humanly logical for

“His Church” and bride to carry His name, Christ. A reading of Ephesians 1-3 especially 3: 21, “to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations...” clearly points to giving Christ the glory in any matter of His Church and we could say, especially in naming His Church. We are clearly taught that Christ Church is his body made up of his followers and that it is an earthly representation of His Kingdom in Heaven; That the Church is the betrothed bride of Christ whom, upon Christ return to Earth, he will wed and return to Heaven with his wife, the Church and all Christians in her, who are his chosen. This is the eternal Kingdom that shall never go away; the one Kingdom that last forever. It is not just a building or an assembly but is within the hearts of all those in Christ. If we are going to name it, lets give Christ or God the glory in naming it and not just any name. Remember as you name His Church, God places a lot in naming His own.

Now, as we study the Bible, we find story after story, almost to the point of being boring, God commanding that His house and all that goes into it must be pure (interpret “His House” as our hearts) and clean of worldly things. All that approach or intend to have a relationship with God must be pure and Holy as he is Holy. We see this in the Priest who had to go through very rigid procedures of cleansing themselves before they went into the Holy of Holies where the Ark was housed. Even they were not perfect and did make mistakes. One story is told as the Ark was being moved to the new temple. One of God's Laws was that the Ark could not be touched. As they were traveling, the Ark began to fall and one of the Priests, or a Godly man, reached and touched the Ark to stabilize it. He was struck dead. We may say how can we be perfectly clean of all worldliness and obey all the commands of God perfectly. **The answer is that in our eyes or other men's eyes we can't. But, in God's eyes we are perfectly clean if we are in Christ. By accepting Christ sacrifice we have obeyed God perfectly. That is the only way we can present ourselves clean in God's presence.** Some would say regarding the story of the dead priest who stayed the Ark with his hand; No fair God! Listen, we have said it before; God is a faithful God to bless obedience and punish disobedience and that is as fair as it gets with God. God's thoughts are not as your thoughts. Look again at who your God is. God deals with disobedience just as faithfully as he blesses obedience. That's what God's word means when it is said, “He is faithful”. You can't accept the one without the other. Some will say, “The God I know would not punish one as you say He did the Godly man who stabilized the Ark.” And, we would have to say, “sorry, but you don't understand your God or know His Word for “I or your teacher did not say it, but God's Word said it.” Duet 7: 9, Jer 12: 5

So how can we become perfect enough for God to dwell within our heart? Only by following his Son into his death, burial and resurrection by believing, confessing Him as the Messiah and Son of God, repenting of sin, **and being baptized into his name**. In Christ, even though we appear imperfect in our own eyes and the eyes of our friends, and or indeed imperfect and remain sinful, God does not see our sin but sees Christ in us. Certainly we should no longer be slaves to sin and others should see that we are no longer addictive to sin, but make no mistake, we remain sinners. The important difference when we are in Christ, we become convicted in our heart when we sin and we ask God's forgiveness. Those that are outside of Christ are not convicted in their hearts even though God certainly convicts them. Most will think they sin with immunity and it may appear so with the naked eye, but make no mistake, **sin outside of Christ is a deadly game, often physically but certainly spiritually and definitely for eternity**. One in sin may even prosper temporarily or even a lifetime as God allows Satan to imitate Him and provide the sinner with seeming success. **Never forget that Satan's Spirit can imitate God's Spirit.** The book of Job is a testimony of this with God even giving Satan permission to control Job's life for a time. See also Matt. 7:16. One must continually in this life evaluate the Spirit he/she is following or accepting and **the only way to discern this is if you are “in Christ” and listen to this, “personally in His Word”**. Notice carefully, we said **“personally in His Word”**. That means you can't depend on anyone else including your favorite preacher to keep you straight. **It is your personal responsibility.**

As Christians, if we sin publicly, we should confess our sin publicly and if it is a private sin then a private confession to God is all that we need. I Jo 1:9, Matt 18:15-17(private confession) Jam 5: 16,19,20 (Confessing to one another) Pro. 28:13 (the folly of concealing sin)

You will come across a theology in the denominational world referred to as **“once saved, always saved”**. This teaching claims that once you are saved, there is no way you can live in such a way as to be lost. The scriptures simply do not support this although it is certainly true that it is hard to lose your salvation. **But there is a sin wherein one denies the Holy Spirit of God/Christ that will lose your soul. When we make sin the center of our life and not Christ and the Holy Spirit, we have denied and blasphemed** (**Blasphemed means to deny Christ and the Holy Spirit**) **the Holy Spirit and in so doing, lose our salvation.** “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of truth, **there remains no more sacrifice for sins of man.” Heb 10:26** Once you have fallen away, it is possible to come back to Christ but it becomes harder and harder each time until finally one **likely** will give up and lose his/her soul.

If you are asking again, “why are we talking about Christ when Chronologically he has not been born yet”; remember that the “Old, Old story”(Old Testament) points us to Christ and loses much of its meaning without reference to him. It’s also true we have to refer back to the old story to fully comprehend the New Testament. So when we look at the mistakes made by Israel in the Chronicles and in Kings we need to compare it to our present situation and the blessings and failures of our world Governments and of ourselves personally. How Governments apply the Will of God or not and the results of that relationship is worthy of observation. We should learn readily that serving God and maintaining a relationship with him is more important than Political or National status and, Kingship has no meaning on this earth without God in the midst of the Kingdom. Earthly political leaders or Kings are ordained by and ultimately get their authority from God. Leaders will deny this and neglect to give attention to this truth, but that means that they and their leadership will fail ultimately. Oh, they may be allowed by God to continue over time to lead, but we will most likely see that God will use their failures to show others the result of not following God's Will. The Bible is replete with stories where God uses the ungodly to help steer his ship. Many of those ungodly that have been chosen never recognize how God has used them. Some will brag that they have been blessed of God when in reality they have been blessed of **their master**, Satan, whom God allows to bless his own. Just because God has chosen you to lead does not mean he will save you unto himself. In fact that can never happen unless one accepts The Christ as his Savior and is obedient. An example of this might be Paul in the New Testament. Paul, as a Jew, had persecuted Christians for years until Christ in the Spirit confronted him on the road to Damascus and convinced him to stop persecuting Christians. He was led to one, Ananias, who baptized him **Into Christ** and from there he became a great evangelist converting others, mainly Gentiles, to Christ. Allowing Paul's earlier zealous persecution of Christians probably was God's way of bringing Christians of that day into a closer and more cohesive relationship with each other. Bringing them together was important to give them encouragement and strength to stick together against the persecution not only at the hands of the Jews, but also the Roman Empire. It was the same encouragement we get today as we assemble together on the first day of the week to worship God except our assemblies are much more positive (hopefully). Heb 10:25

Ezra and Nehemiah

Author's note: You will notice again duplication here and again your indulgence is solicited. One reason that we will repeat our self is that it is so easy in studying the Bible to forget where you are, where you have been and where you are going in your study of God's word. I find that repetition is helpful, at least for many, in staying focused on the story line.

These books primarily describe the return of Israel from captivity in Babylon for 70 years and rebuilding the Temple and walls of Jerusalem. Lets review though what led to Israel's Captivity. Remember that The Israelites were 12 tribes headed by the 12 sons Of Jacob (Renamed Israel by God). In Canaan they had divided lands among the tribes based on the population of each tribe. Jerusalem was the designated place of their worship but there were tribes who were not convenient to this center of worship, namely Israel, the Northern Kingdom, which soon began to mix their worship of God with worship of local gods. It was this **Northern Kingdom of 10 tribes of Israel** who were displaced North of Jerusalem toward Syria, who decided that they needed a separate King from the central one in Jerusalem. They then established the Northern Kingdom of Israel leaving the **Southern Kingdom of Judah** located around Jerusalem. It is easy to understand that such a move would in time weaken the chosen people of God. You have probably heard the term, "a house divided can not stand". Well man did not initiate such a thought, God did and it's His concept. Mark 3: 25 The Northern Kingdom of Israel was eventually taken over by Assyria and eventually lost its identity as God's chosen. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was preserved by God for quiet a long time but eventually was captured by Babylon over a century after the Northern 10 tribes were overtaken by Assyria. Remember that God had chosen the tribe of Judah for Christ lineage so we can see here that Judah, one of the two tribes in the South, would be preserved over time and at least till Christ ministry was fully manifested.

With the Northern Kingdom (Israel) under domination by Assyria, it soon became so mixed with the pagan nation that its identity as Israel, a chosen people of God, was lost in history until 1948 when the dispersed Jews after WW II returned to form the present State of Israel in Palestine. Even so, these returning Jews had lost much of their genealogy documentation that could substantiate their claim as Israelites. At best, they had in most cases, retained

some evidence through family ties of their origin but no longer did they have documented records of their complete Hebrew ancestry. For example some of the earlier detailed genealogies recorded in scriptures of the Bible, including Matthew's New Testament writings, would no longer be possible today for lack of official records. In other words many of those in our modern times may indeed lack proof that they or their descendants are truly of Jewish or Hebrew lineage. It is rather ironic that the writer has one acquaintance that claims to be Jewish yet declares himself to be an evangelical Atheist and claims to be Jew mainly because he "**likes the Jewish traditions**" and their **dietary rules**. This same individual submitted His newborn son to the Jewish circumcision ritual, which to the Jew and God's Old Law, is a seal of separation and dedication of a child unto God. Why would a self proclaimed Atheist do that? It is a contradiction of unbelievable magnitude. But then many as Christian's also live contradictory lives do we not?

Judah, the Southern Kingdom, was overcome quite a number of years (a century) after Israel was lost to Assyria, by the up and coming Kingdom of Babylon. Babylon consisted of that territory that today we call Iraq and in Biblical times had been the cradle of civilization. The story of Abraham (the father of all Israelites and Muslims) began there in a small town called Ur that is today near to Baghdad, Iraq. The Garden of Eden had been some where near this area also. The town and tower of Babel were in the area as well. As earthly Kingdoms do, they come and go; Assyria was the dominant power when Israel was integrated into Assyria but then Babylon became dominant and occupied Assyria and many other nations. In their dominance, they overtook Judah and its Jerusalem and began over time to take captive many of its prominent people. A young man, Daniel, and three of his friends were young smart and good looking young men who were captured and taken among the first to Babylon where they were placed under Eunuchs and servants of the King and his wives. A Eunuch was a male who had been castrated or was born that way and had lost any sexual desires.

Remember the stories of Daniel in the Lions den and friends being thrown into a fiery furnace and God protecting them in the ordeal. This all occurred in Babylon during the first part of the captivity. In time, Jerusalem, its walls and the Temple were all destroyed by Babylon and most of its prominent leaders were taken to Babylon as captives. Those left behind had to fend for themselves and basically were leaderless accept for several Prophets of God. Many, without spiritual leaders, fell further into the worship of pagan gods of the Canaanites and Philistines and they continued to intermarry with them. God in his infinite wisdom literally placed the Israelites in Babylon captivity and back into a kind

of wilderness setting such as they had been during their exodus from Egypt. The experience of captivity clearly showed them where they had wronged God by following other god's and polluting their lineage by intermarrying with infidels of Canaan. Another major failure of the Israelites that led to their failure was that due to their lack of faith, they failed to occupy the lands that God had initially promised them. They in fact had only occupied a fraction of the area God had promised them. Had they occupied the lands to the Euphrates that God had promised them they would not have had to deal with Babylon.

Later we will read of Esther and Mordacai and others and the influence that other Prophets such as Jeremiah, Nehemiah and Ezra had during this period. These stories will show us how God can take a very stressful situation in our lives and through it grow us to be stronger and more faithful people. We will also see especially in the story of Job that it is not always God who brings us trials but it just may be that God allows Satan to enter our lives. The point is God is in control of our lives and controls Satan's power over us. The Book and story of Job points this out clearly. Job by the way should be studied along with Gen. chapters 10 and 11 because it's very probable Job's trials and his life took place chronologically during this Genesis period.

Another bit of trivial information needs to be given here before we move on much further. During the 70 years of captivity, the Jews had no temple or tabernacle in which to approach God. No place to assemble and offer their sacrifices through their High Priest. It was during this period that the Jews (people of "Ju-dah") began to meet with their prophets in what they called Synagogues to read and study the scriptures. Today Jews assemble in their Synagogues and some refer to their houses of worship as a temple but there is no longer a functional temple as Solomon's. Their places of worship are no different than our church buildings that we assemble in today.

Again, Kingdoms come and go and are completely in God's hand. After 70 plus years of Babylon domination, Persia, (modern Iran) grew to be the dominant power of the region and under King Cyrus, Persia overtook Babylon. Cyrus was not of the habit as other Kings were of dominating or enslaving his captives. In fact he had no interest in keeping the Israelites captive in Babylon. He decreed first that a group be allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild all that had been destroyed, in preparation for all Jews to return to their homeland. He put it in writing claiming God's guidance, that the "Lord God of Heaven has given me a charge to build him a house at Jerusalem." Ezra 1: 2 Cyrus then brought out all the stolen articles taken from the Temple, which Solomon had built and returned them to the select Jews, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Mordecai, Bilshan, Bigval, Rehum, and Baanah. A total of 42,360 besides the 7337 male and female servants and 200 men and women singers were let go in the first release. Again, it was during

the captivity in Babylon that the people of Judah began to be called “Jews” in Babylon, which was short for Judahites. The return of Judah to Jerusalem was a fulfillment of the Prophet Jeremiah that they would in time be returned to their homeland. Many of the Jews would choose to stay in Babylon for although they were considered slaves, most were very smart, hard working people and had found satisfaction in their work while in Babylon. In fact many had been used in positions of authority, management and leadership within the Kingdom of Babylon. Mordecai and Daniel both had been given positions of considerable power within the kingdom. In our more recent history and during the Jews dispersal to points all over the world, we can see many examples of the strong leadership qualities of the Jewish race that is strong testimony of what mankind is capable of when he maintains a strong spiritual relationship with the God of his creation. You can also see the blessings and the trials that will befall followers of God. We must quickly understand again that God has not promised us **smooth sailing** but His promise allows a **smooth landing**. **Never lose sight of the landing for it is the most critical phase of flight.** All of my flying friends can appreciate this saying. In Golf we also have a favorite saying; Its not how you drive, its how you arrive. Heaven is our home and that arrival will overshadow all the potholes and sand bunkers (we never call them traps) along the way. **Hang in there!**

We said that many stayed on in Babylon because they had it good under King Cyrus. Other Kings came into power and those Jews who remained there later wished they had left for most new rulers were not kind to the remaining Jews. Those Jews who had been sent back to Jerusalem to rebuild had been stopped by some of their Canaanite friends because the Canaanites felt that the Jews would once again become strong and dominant if they were allowed to rebuild the walls of old Jerusalem. They petitioned the Kings of Persia to stop them and they did until one King Darius came into power. He was convinced to look for King Cyrus' decree in their Archives where Cyrus had issued the decree allowing the returning Jews to rebuild. The decree was indeed found and Darius told them to rebuild the wall and eventually the Temple as well. There were many in the region that were not of Judah who helped in the rebuilding. One such group in fact were descendants of Ishmael the brother of Isaac, both sons of Jacob. Remember the story? Ishmael was the rightful heir to the promises given to the father Jacob by God but through the conniving of Isaac and his mother, Isaac receives the blessings from Jacob instead and Ishmael is promised a great nation as well and goes his own way. Ishmael's people, the Edomites and others become the Muslim nations of people as we know them today, and all, along with Jews and Christians today, claim Abraham as the Father of their promise.

How ironic is it that this conflict between Ishmael and Isaac remains today. That the great city of Jerusalem because of the Jews refusal to accept the Messiah, the Christ that their old scriptures and Prophets had foretold throughout history; Rome would eventually destroy their city and temple once again. That the dispute over the Christ would end up splitting the City of Jerusalem. Today as we write, where Solomon's Temple stood, sits what is called the Dome of the Rock that is a Muslim Temple and neither Christians nor Jews are allowed to enter. It sits on a rise of land (Mt Zion) within the walls of Jerusalem over a rock from which the Muslims claim their Prophet Mohammed ascended into heaven similar to our Christ. Some say the site is also where Abraham attempted to offer Isaac, his son as a blood sacrifice to God. **II Chronicles 7: 19-23 gives us some insight here.** “**And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, 'why has the Lord done thus to this land and house.' Then they shall answer, because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers who brought them out of the land of Egypt and embraced other gods and worshipped them; therefore he has brought calamity on them.”**

It is hard to stand on the Mt of Olives today and look out over Old Jerusalem and see the Moslem section and its beautiful Golden Dome of the Rock occupying the very spot where Solomon built God's Temple. What a tragedy and fulfillment of the prophetic verses of II Chronicles. It is painfully clear that the Jews of today in modern Israel are holding on to their mistaken understanding of Gods promise to them. His promise of the land of Canaan was an intermediate step to Christ and after Christ's' sacrifice, their Promised Land was Heaven through Christ, **as it is for us all.** Yet, the Jews today are hanging on to the idea that God has promised them the real estate they occupy today. Having not accepted Christ as their promised Messiah, they fail to see that Christ and the Church/Kingdom he died for, is their Promised Land. **Likewise, we should all understand that the lands we live on are not ours but God's and our home is in Heaven, the only Promise Land we have.** It was purchased not by us but by the shed blood of Christ on the cross of Calvary. Amen.

Esther (Hadassah, Hebrew name)

The book of Esther is a beautiful story of great drama, which occurred during the exile of the Jews in Babylon. Interestingly, the book never mentions God yet God's power is evident throughout its story. Esther (Hadassah, her Hebrew name) was a Jebusite or Jew of Judah and a very beautiful woman it seems. She was without family except for an Uncle, Mordecai, who had adopted her as daughter during the exile. Some of the Jews were used as slaves but most were found to be of such intelligence or as in the case of Esther, so beautiful and intelligent perhaps, they were often placed in positions of trust and authority and honor. The story of Esther begins with a King in Babylon, Ahasuerus having a big banquet. During the party as they are drinking and becoming rather boisterous, the King begins to brag upon his Queen, Vashti. The men folk urged him to bring her forth so that they may observe her. He calls for her to come to the party. She refuses. Her refusal is an abomination and the men advise the king that he must take drastic action for if it is learned throughout the Kingdom that wives can refuse their husband, they, the men, all will suffer the consequences. Well now, as men we can certainly sympathize with that course of logic. The King in response dismisses Vashti as his Queen. His court is ordered to cultivate candidates to be his next Queen that he may choose between them. Esther is encouraged to present herself as a candidate. The women go into a long process of learning how to be Queen and great care is taken to make them over, giving them great wardrobes and oils and perfumes for their skin. They were made more beautiful each day. Esther, unbeknownst to the King as a Jew, was chosen to be the next Queen. Esther's Uncle, Mordecai was well known as a devout follower of God and intelligent. He was also well known as one of the captive Jews. He encouraged Esther not to let anyone in the Kings court know that she was Jew or that they were kin. Mordecai was proud of Esther and felt that her favor with the King would prove somehow to be helpful to all the captive Jews. At one point Mordecai had an occasion where he overheard several of the Kings Eunuchs plotting to kill the King and he immediately told Esther who in turn informed the King what Mordecai had overheard. The Eunuchs were tried and hung on the gallows. The King then replaced the Eunuchs with one named Haman to oversee his Kingdom. Haman was a proud and devious man. When he rode through the city, he expected all to bow as he passed, which to the devout Jew was not appropriate. The Jew/ Hebrew knew to never bow to any man save His God. Mordecai especially refused to do this and it made Haman very angry but he was afraid to punish Mordecai alone. Afterward, Haman told his King that these Jews refused to bow to the Kings leaders and with Haman's urging, the King issued an order to kill all Jews in the Kingdom of Babylon. Mordecai immediately approached Esther and told her she must approach the King on the Jews behalf. Her initial reaction was to tell Mordecai that she could not approach

the King unless he called her. To do so was to risk her life. Finally convincing Esther she had to do something, she agreed and plotted a plan that she could approach the King on her terms. Mordecai warned her to be careful, that just because she is Queen she would not be safe, especially if she was found out to be a Jew herself. The courage of Esther is shown in Esther 4:14. Mordecai said, “ for if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, (God will deliver the Jews with or without Esther’s help) but you and your fathers house will perish for not helping. Yet who knows whether you have come to the Kingdom as Queen for just such a time as this”. Esther replied, “ Gather all the Jews who are present and fast for me (pray). My maids and me will do likewise. Mordecai was saying to Esther; if you don’t take this opportunity to serve your God, God will find another way to save his people and you and your family will lose this opportunity to serve God. To do so means you perish. **To us the story means we must never fail to take advantage of all opportunities that God gives us to serve him.** If we fail to serve when called, others will be used and we will lose our reward and opportunity to serve.

After three days Esther puts on her best robes and stands outside of the King's court where he sits on the throne until he finally recognizes her and says, “What do you wish Queen Esther? Ask and it shall be given you up to half of the Kingdom.” Her reply was to invite the King and Haman to her Banquet. The King agreed that he and Haman would come. The King and Haman went to Esther’s banquet and the King again asked her what he could do for her. She replied only that you and Haman come again to a second Banquet that I will hold in your honor. The King agreed. Haman went home that evening again noting that Mordecai still refused to bow as he passed. He bragged to his wife and friends that he had been with the King to a banquet of Esther's and had been invited again tomorrow. But yet he said, Mordecai, the Jew, remains a thorn in my side. He still refuses to bow down to me. His wife and friends advised him that he must have Mordecai hung on the gallows for such an offense. He agreed that he must do this. That night the King could not sleep and asked of his Eunuchs to bring him the book of records. In the books he read and was reminded in the readings of the day Mordecai came and reported to Esther and Esther to him that his servants were plotting to kill the King. The King called for Haman who was just outside his door in preparation to enter and to suggest that Mordecai be hung for not bowing to the Kings Court. Haman entered and the King asked, “ What shall be done for the man whom the King desires to honor? ” Haman immediately thinks he is asking what shall he do to honor me, his servant. The King was instead trying to figure out how he should honor Mordecai. Haman replies, “ Let a royal robe be given him, one which you have

worn, and a horse which you have ridden and parade him throughout the city square.” Thus the King told Haman to do this then to honor Mordecai in this way. Well, Haman was devastated. Soon after, the King's Eunuchs came to escort the King to Queen Esther's banquet as Haman followed. At the banquet, the King asked Esther once again what he could do for her. Esther answered, “ If I have found favor with my King, let my life be given me and my people at my request. We have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, annihilated....” King Ahasuerus answered and said, “ Who is he, and where is he who would dare to do such a thing?” Esther identified Haman as the wicked one. Haman was terrified before the King and Queen. The King arose in his wrath and went into the palace garden to think on this thing. Haman remained with Esther and pled for his life. In his exuberance he fell across the couch where Esther reclined, crying in despair. The King returns to the room finding Haman spread across the couch of Esther. The King was furious at the sight of Haman lying across his wife’s couch thinking evil of him. Haman’s fate was sealed. The Eunuchs who stood in wait responded by saying to the King, “look, the gallows which Haman had built to hang Mordecai stands ready. The King responded, “Hang him (Haman) then on the prepared gallows.” On that day the King gives Queen Esther the house of Haman and Mordecai was brought before the King. Mordecai was given the office of Haman and his signet ring for sealing any official decrees that he felt appropriate. One of Mordecai’s first acts was to reverse the decree of Human for the death of all Jews. Then Mordecai issued a decree to kill anyone who were deemed enemies of the Jew and refused the worship of their God. He further issued a decree to all Jews that on the 14 and 15th day of Adair, they would forevermore celebrate those days as the day in which they found rest from their enemies in the land of Babylon. They called the celebration “Purim” after the name “Pur” which in Hebrew means to caste lots. Jews celebrate Purim to this day everywhere.

This book and story is a great compilation of what amounts to a great play of deceit and intrigue. The word “God” is never mentioned in the book but his presence is obvious on every page. As a stage play, there are directors behind every curtain directing as the show progresses. They are never seen but the show would not go on without them. **God is the director in all of our lives and we are mere actors on the stage. God in this play shows us that he is in control of the play and its players. He shows us that he can direct through coincident and circumstance as well as he can through the direct action of miracles. He is an all-powerful God and a sovereign God.** This play or book thrives on hidden meanings and role reversals, twist and turns much as our own lives play out.

Let's review some of the hidden meanings:

1. Esther hides her identity as a Jew
Haman hides the identity of Mordecai from the King; the one he intends to destroy.
2. The King hides the identity of the one he seeks to honor.
Esther hides the reason for her called Banquets.
3. Esther hides the identity of the people she seeks to protect.
Mordecai hides his relationship to Esther, his adopted daughter.

How about Irony and role reversal that all good dramas have:

1. Mordecai refuses to honor Haman; Haman is forced to honor Mordecai.
Haman thinks it is he who will be honored by Esther in being invited to her Banquet when in fact Esther is setting him up for a fall.
2. Haman is hung on the very gallows that he built for Mordecai's hanging.
The Jews in captivity can find good and blessings in their circumstances; their prison can become their haven; no matter where we are in life's play, we should accept and have God as our refuge.

One truth prevails in the Book of Esther or this play; there is always more going on behind the curtain of a play or life than meets the eye. God's control cannot be calculated, denied or avoided. God has more control over what plays out on the stage of life than we can ever imagine. His control can be from circumstances that he allows or he creates. The truth of all this drama will be played out similarly in the Book of Job.

Job

As said before, the Book of Job should be read in conjunction with your reading chapters 10 or 11 of Genesis because this is chronologically when Job lived and experienced his life. It will have more meaning read in that sequence. To simply read the book of Job, one may conclude that the story is about a devout man of God and indeed Job was that. But you may look closer and see that Job had faults that are not unlike us all. We, nor was Job, such a perfect man of God. He had plenty of weaknesses and sin as we all do. You will see that Satan noted to God that Job is a devout and faithful man because of all the blessings God has bestowed upon him and that if those blessings are taken away, Job while remaining faithful, will be subject to sin against God. This is the story line but the deeper one looks, the writing is more about God's Sovereignty; his absolute control over all of our lives and the actions of Satan as well. A sidebar lesson also concerns friends and their presence in time of our need.

Satan petitions God to allow him to test Job's faithfulness by bringing hard times to Job. Satan contends that Job's Faith and Love of God is because he enjoys all of God's blessings provided him. God then allows Satan to test Job but not to lay a hand upon him directly. Now Job was a blessed man of God with large fields and flocks of livestock. His barns were full and his family had many possessions. He was blessed with a large family. Then Satan begins to bring forth many hard circumstances, which Job has never experienced before. He loses his crops, his livestock, and his home and finally Satan destroys his whole family. Job is thrown into great anguish but he continues to have faith in his God. He cries out for relief but the bad times continue to come. Satan petitions God to let him go further by attacking his body. God allows it but demands that Satan spare his life. Job is then struck with all manner of physical maladies such as boils and other vile skin conditions. He lies in pain for over 30 days and Job finally begins to sin by speaking against God. All during this period, Job has three friends: Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad. In time of need these friends were with Job all the way. Like many friends though, Job's friends had little idea how to comfort and contend with Job's problems. Basically all they could offer Job was to encourage him to examine his life and see what sin he had committed that would have caused God to bring these calamities upon him. That is perhaps the first reaction we all as friends may have as we witness the sudden hardships that befall our acquaintances. We may immediately think that our friend has displeased their God. They did accomplish getting Job to examine his life. In doing so, Job could

not find any sin known to him, which would have justified God giving him these problems, and he remained faithful to his God. Still he cried out to God to take his troubles away and even though he said that he would never sin with his lips against God (Job 2:12), he did on several occasions strike out at God with words one should never use toward our God. His friends were faithful to remain by his side but frankly other than their faithful presence, they did not offer much constructive help. For us this may serve as a lesson. **It is important that we are present and offer any help we can when our friends are in need, but be careful how you help. Some times, and perhaps most times, it is sufficient to just be there and be in prayer. Silence, presence, and prayer just may be the best course to truly help.** After all the trials that Job was put through by Satan and even though he cursed his own life and blamed God; He never lost faith in God and when Satan was through, God restored all of what had been taken from Job ten fold including another great family. Job understood that one must keep the eye on the ball and pay attention on landing.

The lessons for us follow:

1. God has sovereign power (Power to do as He wishes) over our universe and our lives and most importantly, He has power over and controls Satan's power over those who place their trust and have faith in God. God, in his infinite wisdom over time, may at any time allow and use Satan's power to steer and influence our lives as children of God back to his approved course. We should have the wisdom to recognize when we have lost our way, or better God's way, and remain faithful to God through these not so pleasant times. As a point in fact, read Job 28. It offers an interlude to discuss the promise that God's operation of the world is not only based on justice but on his infinite wisdom as well. God never tries to defend or explain His justice for it is based on his wisdom and no man will ever have all the information needed to challenge God's decision or actions nor how He runs this world or influences our lives. Job 40: 8-14. If we believe God is wise, we must accept that He is also just. God is in control of our world and operates it with infinite wisdom and thus we must ultimately accept his justice as Job ultimately did. Satan lost his argument. Job demonstrated that his righteousness was not simply a pursuit of happiness, blessings and prosperity, but was a result of his faithfulness to his God. May we all be able to prove this as well and remain faithful in good and bad times. One of Job's friends had suggested that God never brings trouble to the innocent. This is true, however, we are given this story of Job to show us how God and Satan interact in our world. God can allow our choices to

influence outcomes and even allow Satin to test our resolve. There are plenty of innocent people who experience hurt in this life. We, the guilty and the innocent must be ready and able through faith to endure the good and the bad. Think of life as a battery. It has a positive and a negative pole. Without both, a battery will never work. God's way and our life are very much like that battery. We must live with both positives and negatives operating in our lives and thank God for the direction he takes us. We, like Job, may complain and beg God to take away our negatives and this is not an unforgivable sin as Job's complaints to God were not unforgivable. They were indeed understandable by God. We are mere men as was Job. But, in the end let us never forsake our God as our Sovereign God of infinite wisdom. Again, our God never promises us a smooth flight through life but he does promise a smooth landing; a home in heaven.

Some have asked, why does God allow bad things to happen to good people, even godly people? The answer is two fold. **There are no good people**, save God Himself.⁶ See also **Mark 10: 17,18** Secondly, God created us with free will and many things we choose to do bring hurtful results for which we cannot blame God. My granddaughter Emily, observing me once after a particularly bad golf swing and a few choice words, said, are you having a bad day Papa? After my disgusting grunt, she responded, "**deal with it Papa!** We often try to blame God or someone else for our choices when we should only look to our own mistake. **Get over it! Deal with it!**"¹¹ But you must know dear Emily, no golfer wants to blame him self for a bad shot. It is always some outside influence which may help the golfers feelings about his game of that day but rarely does that approach improve ones game in the end. **You were right, deal with it!**

2. Job never lost sight of the Fact that God was in control of his life. Neither should we.

Psalms

The book of Psalms was composed mostly by David and is a compilation of personal prayers and songs of David with many generic prayers that could be used as model prayers and songs in worship of God. King David of course was a great musician with the Harp, which probably began with him in his youth as he watched his father's sheep. The Harp and flute were often used by the Shepard to pass the time in the fields and to sooth the sheep or livestock. The Psalms tell a story generally, and paints a picture of the attributes of our God and our relationships with him. The book is the largest book of the Bible with chapter 119 being the longest chapter with 176 verses. The Book contains material composed over a 1000-year period.

The best we can do here is to summarize key verses of Psalms:

1. Psalms 1: 1-6. “ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord... He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.... and what ever he does shall prosper... the ungodly are not so but are like the chaff which the wind drives away... for the Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” You may read this and say, well we all perish so what is the big deal. The ungodly perish in a different way than the righteous. The ungodly (those who reject God) perish in the sense that they remain alive spiritually, but separated from a relationship with God. Remember, we made a statement early on that our physical lives or temporary and deserving only a tent while on this earth. Our spiritual selves or the only part of us that do live **forever in Heaven with God or in Hell without God**. Have you ever wondered what this world would be like without God. Even if you do not believe there is a God present influencing this earth, what would living on this earth be like if we had no standards of conduct or no moral standards. If you have a hard time answering this you only have to look back a few thousand years and in some cases just a few hundred years to see what it was like to have basically weak moral standards which would hold civil behavior together. In those periods of History we had a **barbarian mentality and in fact many factions were classified as just that, “Barbarians” and for good reason**. There was no limit to their crude behavior. They were often totally uncivilized in comparison to those who established limits and standards to their behavior. If that is acceptable behavior to those who reject a God of limits and standards then we will let you have it but leave us that want order, out of

your plan. The Atheist of today could not handle an earth without that the order God has provided to this earth and its society. Sadly there will come a time when the presence of God and His Holy Spirit will be taken out of this earth and the Atheist left behind will witness first hand what an earth without God is like. Psalms 51:11, Luke 11:13 Thank God those “in Christ” will have left this sad old earth and will not witness the barbaric hell of this earth without God. Those without God will have to handle the problem on their own with whatever help Satan can afford. The only thing working in their favor, for those stranded here on Earth with no Holy Spirit, is it won’t be for long (like in a flash) and all left will retire to the Hell prepared for them.

2. Psalms 18: 1-3. “I will love you, O lord, my strength and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I trust: my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.” There is a spiritual song which we sing in our worship services that Papa Bear Loves with the very words of the last sentence.

Allow if you please, a personal note of the author; I have never inherited, to this point in 2010, any material thing except one. I inherited about 900 lbs, yes 900 lbs of beautiful rocks of a wonderful Christian Aunt (by marriage) Myrtle Ward, who was a collector of rocks all her life. She told me once that her rocks represented to her, and should to me the absolute strength and faithfulness of our God. She was able to quote many scriptures that portray Our God as a rock, our stability in time of need. She provided me with a special understanding of God’s Love for us. Psalms 18: 31 “For who is God, except the Lord? And **who is a rock except our God?**” Psalms 8:46. “The Lord lives! Blessed be my rock: Let the God of my Salvation be exalted.” (By the way, there is also a beautiful Christian Hymn with this scripture’s exact lyrics and it also is a Papa Bear favorite) If there is anything we need today in our modern lives it is the stability of our God’s love that stands forever strong as the rock of his creation. Based on Peter’s confession to Christ that He (Christ) was the son of God, Christ told Peter that based upon the truth of his confession He (Christ), upon “this rock” or this firm truth, He will build His Church. **Christ then becomes the corner stone for His Church.** For anyone who doubts the existence of this God of our creation, Psalms 19:1 tells us, “The Heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament (the earth and its environs) show his handiwork.” **Psalms 53:1**

says, “ The fool has said within his heart, there is no God; they are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; there is none who does good.”

3. Psalms 55:22, “cast your burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.” We all need to look upon God's creation and handiwork and consider the depth of his perfection, to fully understand His power and the stability of his love. We spoke earlier of looking into God's universe to experience the infinite and the spiritual. Take the time and lie on your back in a meadow or your back deck on a dark night and look into the vastness of the space beyond. **Let no fool come into your space and tell you there is no God, no master of the universe.**
4. Psalms 62: 1-2 Wait upon the Lord. There are many times in our bible where we find that we and men of the bible are admonished to “wait upon the Lord.” We as humans are an impatient lot, are we not? We think things should be done on our own schedule. We pray to God for different things and grow impatient. We read earlier where King Saul was waiting for Samuel to come and bless his troops and offer sacrifice to God before going into battle with the Philistines. When Samuel was late in arriving, Saul decided that he himself would have to offer the sacrifice and did. Samuel, upon his arrival, condemned Saul for his actions and the battle was lost. Psalms 62: 1-2 says, “ Truly my soul silently waits upon God; from him comes my salvation.” Verses 5 and 6 say, “ My soul waits silently for God alone for my expectation is from Him. He is my defense; I shall not be moved.... **The rock of my strength and my refuge is in God.**” How many times without asking God's guidance do we make decisions in our lives or ask his guidance and proceed in our decision without waiting on God's direction? Rarely do we wait silently and patiently for God to speak to our heart or mind. We end up making decisions, very important life changing decision, having never heard God's advise on the decision at hand. Do this for a lifetime my friend, say for 60 or more years, and look back at your life. You will experience a new meaning for “hindsight is 20-20”. More than likely, in your older life, you will be rather disgusted at some aspects of your life created by very poor decisions on your part. How sad it is that in our old age we can only look back and with 20/20 see mistake after mistake that changed our life and other peoples lives, perhaps negatively, simply because we did not seek the

guidance of a wise God or maybe even a wise parent or love one. To the young person; do not make this sad mistake. When you choose your life work or that first sexual experience, that one and only wife or husband that God will provide for you, never fail to seek God's wisdom in those decisions and other decisions. Be patient and wait on God. It will be worth the wait, that's a promise. You may be saying; "well how do I get in contact with God and how will he contact me. Well now that is a very important question and therein lies the biggest problem. Truth is, in our immaturity, few of us have taken the time to develop, a close relationship with God. To have a close relationship with God, to the point of hearing his words on a matter, we must first and foremost "**be in Christ**", be Christians. As Christians, God answers our prayers. For our intellects to hear his Will and response, we must be in his Word. We study the period of the Old Testament where there was no printed word of God and during that time God spoke to Patriarchs and Prophets directly in the spirit. In our age we have God's written word, imbued we are told and trust, with His Spirit. God speaks to us directly now through his Word. Our scriptures tell us that God's Word is not of private interpretation but of Holy Men of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. (Jer. 36:2, Acts 1:16, 2 Timothy 3:16,17, 2 Peter 1:20-21, 3:15) If you are not in the habit of hearing and studying His Word, it is hardly likely that you will experience God's response to your dilemma. You will most likely have a long wait if you are waiting on an audible conversation with God. Get in his Word and make it a habit to stay there throughout you life. We still hear godly people talk loosely about God speaking to them. They surely mean that his Spirit speaks to them through his written word, read by or taught to us, prayer and perhaps through circumstances (providence), which God uses to guide us through life. But, if you are not one who is and earnestly into God's Word, it is not likely you will recognize or respond to circumstances. Talk about waiting upon the lord to guide you! Many of us may never recognize God's answer to our prayer not knowing his Word or Voice. Not knowing God's Word is equal to being **deaf** to God's voice. How will you follow him if you are deaf to his call. How would little Samuel have answered God's call had not Eli told him it was God calling and to answer Him thusly, "..Here am I Lord". This was an example of God speaking directly to the Godly. It is not a sweet little story just for little children. Today if you are waiting upon a voice from heaven, you will probably get very discouraged and go on without receiving God's spiritual guidance. Get in his Word and listen to Godly men preach or teach his Word, being careful to know his Word through your own personal study for there are many men who teach and

claim to know his Word yet teach it falsely or unknowingly perhaps in error. The best any other person can do is to reinforce what you know to be true from your own personal investigation of God's Word. II Tim 2: 15
“Study to show ***yourself approved***, rightly dividing the word of truth...”
Many will say today in their youth, I really don't have the time to sit down and study God's Word as I should and it is true, our lives have gotten entirely to busy. It is much easier as we draw to the close of our lives. But to neglect the study in our youth generally means we will completely miss God's guidance when we need it most. The result will be that, as we said before, you may look back on your life at age 60-70 and see a disgusting life full of mistakes obviously absent of God's Will and yes, full of hurt. What a shame and waste!

5. Psalms 67: 1-4; “God, be merciful to us and bless us and cause His face to shine upon us; That your way may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. Let the people praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy. For you shall Judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth.”
6. As a people and as a nation, we should recognize that God's Justice is righteous and worthy of our praise. He is in control and all that govern, govern at his pleasure and **He in turn governs through those who are in authority**. There is a checks and balance in place for all Governments through God in addition to man's checks and balances.
7. Psalms 69. A plea and prayer for God's help; “Save me O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mud where there is no standing; I am weary with my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God. Those that hate me without cause are more than the hairs on my head; They are mighty who would destroy me and are my enemies wrongfully; Though I have stolen nothing I still must restore it...” Further in this chapter at verses 21-36, the prayer reflects the future sacrifice of the coming Messiah, Christ death on the cross. Note verse 21 in particular; “ ..they also gave me gall (a bitter food) for my food and vinegar to drink.” Also Matt 27:34.
8. Hey, life is tough at times and we need to understand that God controls the blessings we receive and **allows** harder times as well. Think of the hard times Job experienced. In faith, we grow in God's corrective actions. If we

had no exposure to hard times we would not appreciate nor understand God's blessings. Our prayers should include our thanks for the blessings God provides and pray for his wisdom in understanding and for the wisdom to handle the trials in such a way that we glorify God in all things and yes, we can pray for relief from the trials. Moses and others proved through prayer that God can be petitioned to give relief from his harsh corrections and we can feel comfort in our petitions as well as long as we respect God's sovereignty. Witness the scripture following.

9. Psalms 103: 17, 11-12. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear (respect) Him... for as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him; As far as the East is from the West, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." You have to love the perfect use of the example used in this scripture of distance of East from the West. Think about it. From the North Pole to the South Pole is a definite distance, 12403 miles. But from East and West, there is no set distance for there is no set spot on the globe from which to measure. It is an infinite, non- ending, infinite circle similar to our look into God's Heavens. Such is God's love, mercy and forgiveness. **When we accept Christ as our savior, repent of our sinful nature, and are baptized into Christ name, God no longer sees our sin.** Our old sinful nature is hidden from God. Have you ever felt like hiding from God? Hey, being "**in Him**" **you can hide.** We are in his eyes, pure, righteous, perfect, and sinless. Knowing that, as Christians, we should strive to live as close to Christ as is humanly possible. Not for vanities sake, but for God's sake. While we remain sinful by nature while in this human form, our striving should be to avoid having sin as our master remembering that Christ/ God alone can be our master. To sin as a habit that controls you is dangerously close to being blasphemy of God, His Holy Spirit and unforgivable. In short, we will sin, but **we must get out of the business of sin.** Avoid letting sin control you and be your master. God alone must be your master. When you sin be quick to recognize it, ask God's forgiveness, pray for his guidance and accept his forgiveness; that is, accept His forgiveness with faith. Don't carry around a long face or a guilty one. Remember as long as you stay "**In Christ**", you are covered and cleansed by the blood he shed for your sins, hidden from the wrath of God. Isn't that great and worthy of our praise. **It is the reason we as Christians should be the happiest people on the planet and God worthy of our praise.** If as a Christian you have a long guilty face then you must examine your faith in God's

redemptive plan. And, we might also recommend you examine what you have been taught. There are many who teach God's plan wrongly and leaves us with nothing but guilt and no Hope. Be careful of false teachers. Again, take personal charge of your life and your salvation. "***Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling***" *Phil 2: 12*

10.Psalms 110: 1-4. Here is another scripture foretelling the coming of Christ, the Messiah, and it matches perfectly with the New Testament scriptures describing Christ. "The Lord God said to my Lord (Jesus), sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool... The Lord has sworn and will not relent, you (Christ) are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Christ was Priest as Melchizedek in that neither were Priest automatically by virtue of being of the tribe of Levi as had been the case of all priest of the Israelites through the exodus and much of their early history in Canaan. Melchizedek and Christ were Priest because of God's covenant and not because of being of the tribe of Levi, the Priestly tribe of Israel.

11.Psalms 111: 10 " The fear (or respect) of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His Praise endures forever." Psalms 112: 1-3. "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord; who delights greatly in his commandments. His descendants shall be mighty in the earth; the generation of the upright will be blest. Wealth and riches will be in his house." What a promise. Who would not want wisdom? Remember King Solomon. The only thing that he asks of God when he became king was for wisdom. God was impressed and said because you have only asked for wisdom, I shall give you wisdom plus riches such that the world has not seen and long life. But, understand one thing. God's spiritual world does not count riches or long life as the world may count them. If we understand that the only thing in life that matters is spiritual and that we are first and foremost spiritual beings in human bodies, then **we shall value properly spiritual wisdom, spiritual riches and spiritual long life (as in eternity)**. And Oh by the way, there is more than an even chance that your proper pursuit of spiritual blessings can result in material blessings and a longer than average physical life. There has been plenty of evidence provided in recent years that one who is godly or religious, heals from disease or illness faster than the otherwise individual. Psalms and the entire Bible continually stress the

importance of placing God first in our lives and the physical and spiritual blessings of such a relationship.

12.. Psalms 119:127-130. “God's word gives light therefore I love your commandments more than gold, yes than fine gold! Therefore, all your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; **I hate every false way**. The entrance of your word gives light.” Have you ever been in a room, or perhaps, a cave when the lights were all turned off? In a cave, you cannot see your hand less than an inch in front of your eyes. You would not dare to take a step in such an environment. How do we dare to take a step in life without the guiding light of God's Word. But we do don't we? It's no wonder we take such missteps as we grow. God's word gives light. **It shows us who we are, where we come from, where we are headed, the path to travel, and shows clearly our destination. It lights the path.** Some travel everyday in the dark. We run into them every day as we travel. Lets make sure that it is not us who runs into them in the dark. Instead, let's show others the Light of God's word. The Psalms are wonderful scripture like no other in the Bible. It is poetry at its best. You want find a lot of commands in it but you will find a portrait of God himself and what he offers to us his children and his creation.

13.. Psalms 139: 20 -24. “For they speak against you wickedly; your enemies take your name in vain. Do I not hate them O Lord, who hates you? And, do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.” Is there a time to hate then? Yes there is a time to hate and grow angry for that, which is against God's Will and nature.

14. One of God's 10 commandments given to Moses was to not take the Lord's name in vain as is the habit of the wicked. In our modern age we are caught in the habit of using God's name in vain in our everyday expressive conversations which we in no way intend in the reverent way God intended his name to be used. To do so is to use God's Holy name in a useless or vain way. In Vain, we hear, “My God!” “Good God!” “God D_”. Some of our slang such as “Gee”, “Gosh”, has become so common that we no longer question it but it has not always been so. “Gee” or “Geese” is short for Jesus. “Gosh” is an acronym for God. You can even

hear the expressions within casual conversation in church and Bible class. Few question it anymore and most who use the terms have never been challenged on their use before and so are unaware of their error. The point is, the name of God should be reserved for our show of reverence and not used in casual conversation or expression. **Remember Psalms 20; “your enemies take your name in vain”** Are we God's enemies? God forbid!

15. Another lesson comes from Psalms 139:24. “...and lead me in '**The Way**' everlasting. We can look to the New Testament's Matt 18: 25 also where it said of Jesus, “This man instructs in ***The Way of the Lord..***” These verses and many more in the Bible point us to the fact that there is a “The Way”, a single way to the Lord. New Testament scripture in Acts 4: 12 says **Salvation is in no other name but Jesus.** Isaiah 35: 8 speaks of “walking in **the way...**” The point is that we, as in those seeking a home in Heaven with our God/Christ, must be looking for “**The Way**” and not **any way that man may have devised through his fallacious interpretations.** Again, look at our great division today in the religious world at all the many different ways that man has decided is the way to Salvation, the way to worship, the way to live for Christ. Be careful how you choose the religious group to follow. Remember, it is our individual responsibility to study God's word to know that we are in “**His Way**” and not in mans way. Mom, Dad, or Grandma's way (not to mention Papa Bears) may be in error and you must prove any way taught you if it is true to God's Will. This can be a divisive effort on your part but must be done if you are to internalize your faith. Paul in I Cor. 1: 10 prayed that there be no divisions among us and that we all speak the same things. Of course it did not take long, even in the early church, to begin dividing wrongfully the Word of God. Today we are weakened as Christians because of this division and our falling away from “The Way”. The only way we can ever hope to return to “The Way” that Christ established and His Apostles originally taught is to **restore** the original Way that Christ and his disciples established Christ' Church. Many beginning with Martin Luther have tried to **reform** the Church of Rome (Catholic Church) but **few have sought to restore the church of Christ or church of God.** To do that requires an un-adulterated effort to reach back to the original scriptures as best we can to seek God's Holy Inspired Word and description of what that Church practiced. That is the Church for which Christ will return in the last day and carry back to Heaven. That's the Church we want to be a part of. It will be a Church that carries his name, just as the Bride carries the name of the Husband, for

God's word describes His Church as His Bride. Look for it, search for it. It will be worth your time and effort. Don't settle for any **old body which man has devised**. They are a dime a dozen and on every street corner, especially in the Southern United States. Be careful **not to assemble** with people, as good as their motives may seem, who are following a path to "**reform**" Christ's Church. **His Church does not need reforming for it has never left us.** There are many that hold "it does not matter who you assemble with as long as you are worshiping God". Don't fall for that line. That is the very same rational that the Israelites followed in Canaan as they commenced to mix the worship of Their God with the Pagan's gods. John's second letter beginning at verse 7 through 11 states, "For many deceivers have gone out into the world that do not confess Jesus as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves that we do not lose those things we worked for... He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. ... If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him **shares in his evil deeds.**" (Emphasis added) That just about says it. Flee from error of doctrine and take it as your personal responsibility to do so. At the same time we must confront those who are in error in a loving and tactful way seeking to **restore** their knowledge of God or implanting it where needed and sought.

Proverbs

We may consider Proverbs as a collection of ideas and statements that generally give order to our lives. The emphasis is on "generally" because a "Proverbial" statement is a generalization and while true in most circumstances, there is no guarantee that it will be true all the time. An example would be; "**crime does not pay**". Well, we all know that there are those who do escape after committing a crime but eventually most are all caught and have to pay but you don't have to look far to find one that never gets caught and profits monetarily from his crime. Regardless, Proverbs offers many statements of wisdom, which again, generally, if used wisely, are excellent thoughts, that function to promote an orderly, stable and secure life and culture. ⁷

Key teachings of Proverbs:

1. God is wise and delights in our pursuit of wisdom.
2. God does not tolerate fools. Prov. 1:7. “The fear (respect) of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instructions.
3. God directs the paths of those who trust him.
4. The fool is one who shows a lack of judgment, scorns knowledge, does not understand love, is inconsistent, and **acts in ways that suggest a disbelief in God**. Be careful how you act for your actions speak louder than words.
5. Proverbs provide rules for disciplined living.

Key verses of Proverbs:

- Proverbs 3: 5,6, “ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and he shall direct your paths.”
- Proverbs 3: 11-13 “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest his corrections, for whom the Lord loves, he corrects just as a father, the son whom he delights. Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding.”
- Proverbs 10: 12,14. “Hatred stirs up strife but love covers all sins. Wise people store up knowledge.”
- Proverbs 9: 10 “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy one is understanding, for by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you.”
- Proverbs 13: 1,3,4. “A wise son heeds his Father’s instructions, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. He who guards his mouth preserves life but he who opens his lips shall have destruction. The soul of a lazy man desires and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be rich.”
- Proverbs 16: 2,3,6. “.. all the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit. Commit your works to the Lord and your thoughts will be established. In mercy and truth, atonement is provided for iniquity and by fear of the Lord one departs from evil.”

- Proverbs 19: 13,14,18. “A foolish son is the ruin of his Father, and the contentions of a wife are a continual dripping. Houses and riches are an inheritance from Fathers but a prudent wife is from the Lord. Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.”
- Proverbs 19: 26,27. “He who mistreats his Father and chases away his Mother is a son who causes shame and brings reproach. Cease listening to instructions my sons and you will stray from words of knowledge.”
- Proverbs 28:26. “ He who trust in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered.”

These key verses are but a few of excellent sayings in Proverbs, which are guides to a productive and spiritual life.

Ecclesiastes

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, King in Jerusalem, “Vanities of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity” Eccl 1: 1,2. This sets the tone of this book. When something is described as “vanity” we understand that something is rather useless or means nothing. This Book then sounds harshly negative, self- defeating testimony about life on earth (Under the sun). Remember we have said that our life on this earth “is but a vapor”. That this physical body and all its desires and needs are insignificant compared to the spiritual image we were created to be. The physical body is insignificant compared to our spiritual self and while this sounds negative in itself, it’s really a positive testimony to our understanding of God’s spiritual plan for us. God, though in addition to creating us spiritual, also gave us (formed us) a physical body to house the spirit just as he did Christ whose spirit manifested itself in a human body for all mankind. That’s no small feat and ones physical body is to be honored and glorified. We must protect and use our bodies to glorify our creator and keep them pure for that Spirit created by God. But remember in the end all that is left is our God given Spirit, the rest is certainly vanity. This is the Theme of Ecclesiastes.

Much of our life on earth is spent trying to reach self-fulfillment. Put another way, we go through life filling our lives with self. Psalms 2:10-11 says, “What ever my eyes desired, I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure. For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this is my reward from all my labor. Then, I looked on all the works my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for wind. There was no profit under the Sun (or on this earth).” (Parenthetical statement is Authors)

The book pretty much carries this theme throughout. Lets look at some other key thoughts of Ecclesiastes.

When one reads books on psychology and or management you will read a lot about how important it is to achieve **self-fulfillment or self -actualization**. It is important for supposedly our mature mental growth in this life here on this earth, but in a spiritual sense, it is more likely self- defeating when it comes to our all-important Spiritual self. Perhaps we should approach self-fulfillment from the standpoint of filling our self with a healthy balance of a God centered life and a healthy physical body. That approach is better described as a God fulfilled life rather than a self fulfilled life.

Ecclesiastes recognizes that there are many things in this life that are not enjoyable and would not be considered as gifts. They may be frustrating, even painful, but a God centered life recognizes that God is in control of blessings and suffering. God can use both to control what is good for our growth. Frustrating things and painful things can change the course of ones life either for good, with the right attitude, or for bad with the wrong attitude. If God is in the center of our lives, our attitude is more likely to lead us toward a positive outcome. With an Un-Godly life our attitude most likely will lead us toward negative decisions and further off course and finally off the cliff. It might not happen right away and one might not recognize where the fall came from or perhaps, that it happened at all. It will happen. It is all too easy for the Godless person to forget from where he started, forget the errors of his life and even not acknowledge them. Recognition may not come till the end of ones life or until the Lord returns. **It would be a shame if in your final breath you learned that because you had a self fulfilled life instead of a God centered life you failed to achieve everlasting life in a Heavenly Home. Can you imagine learning that on your deathbed?**

Both prosperity and adversity come from the hand of God and are allowed by God (Ecclesiastes 7: 14) No ones life is problem free. With a Godly attitude we will adjust our lives and change course if adverse circumstances come our way. With wisdom comes knowledge. **We learn.** The Godless lack wisdom and knowledge and generally **don't learn** from their mistakes. They then are more

prone to continue in error. To put it bluntly, it is normal that we have difficulties. We live in a broken world. We often have too high expectations of what life should be like. Learn to lower your expectations. Learn that there is no sure path to this self- fulfillment that so many textbooks tout. Never forget that God is in control. Ecclesiastes 7: 13,14 states, "... consider the work of God for who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity, be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other so that man can find out nothing that will come after him." Ecclesiastes 10: 14. "...no man knows what is to be; who can tell him what will be after him?" My wife loves to travel and I for the most part enjoy traveling with her. We both have visited well over 50 countries and she has a goal of visiting every country of the world before she dies. I have had to ask, without seeming negative, why? No one wants to know anymore about your experience than to ask, did you have a good time? Hope you took a lot of pictures. But please don't invite me over to look at them. When you die will you care, will God care, will anyone care that you visited so many countries? I come from a small town in Alabama where hardly anyone travels in there lifetime further than the Florida panhandle or Gatlinburg, Tennessee. They think I'm crazy for traveling as much as I do and I'm about to agree with them. Will I cherish the days I spent traveling this earth as I sit in Heaven praising my Spiritual Father forever in my Heavenly home. Not a chance nor will it cross my spiritual conscience! In defense of any ones inclination to travel, we can say if one can financially afford it, experiencing other parts of God's creation including His people of different cultures, one may more fully appreciate God's marvelous creative hand and perhaps that is worth it.

Ecclesiastes concludes at Eccl. 12: 13,14. "let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing whether good or evil." Now, let it be understood here. For those who die "in the Lord", their works do indeed follow them and they will have to give an account for those works or lack of works but their sins do not follow them.

Rev 14:13

Song of Solomon

This is the most beautiful poetic book of the Bible. It describes the beauty of marriage, love, and sex as God given. In addition, it provides a beautiful picture of the perfect love that God has for his chosen people. For the Jew it describes God's love of the Jewish Nation of Israel. To the Christian, it describes God's love of the Christian as a member of his Church. For both the Jew of today and the Christian alike, both should know that through God's New Covenant with both, His Church has become the new Nation of Israel, His new Jerusalem and "His chosen ones" consisting of both Gentile Christian and **Jewish Christians**.

There are some powerful lessons on human sexuality herein:

1. Love and sex are important forces in our lives and even though God is not mentioned in this Song, we know from other scripture, these emotional forces are God given. God created them for our enjoyment and for the purpose of advancing creation within marriage and not for recreation. He expects us to use these emotions in an appropriate way and with wisdom. Chap 2: 7. "I charge you Oh daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases." (Pleases who? Answer: God) God is telling us here to look to the deer and the gazelle. They do not go about seeking a mate, having sex are making love until the time appropriated naturally by its creator, God. Seek God's wisdom in all things especially matters of sex and love. Look to your local news for a time and see the crimes and what evil things occur daily involving love and love triangles, marriage break ups, and children of those broken contracts of love. Death and cruelties abound relating to these broken covenants of love and sex. The recent (2008) violent death of a retired Tennessee Titan football star involved in an extramarital affair, comes to mind. It is a serious matter with God. Don't forget that we intimated in and around our Genesis study, that to God, the sexual act consummates or begins marriage and it is God's plan that man have one wife and the woman have one husband. Bluntly, your first sexual partner should be your one and only mate for life unless adultery is committed against the marriage, so make it a good and wise choice. Love used wrongly in such a way as to influence another for your benefit and pleasure is a sin against God. Remember we enjoy and use God's gifts by his authority or said another way, "**in His name.**" When someone gives us the authority to act in his or her name, they fully expect us to act as they

would act and would in most cases spell out those details. When acting in another's name we are acting with the power of that name and God is indeed powerful. Be careful how you use "it". God allows (Authorizes) us love and sex within the marriage for pleasure, closeness and creation of offspring. Gen. 2:24. "Therefore a man shall leave his Father and Mother and be **Joined (as in sex)** and they shall be one flesh." I Cor. 6:16.... "Do you not know that he which is joined (**as in sex**) with an harlot is one body for the two shall become **one flesh.**" We are to flee irresponsibility of sexual immorality. "Every sin that man does is outside the body, but he who **commits sexual sin, sins against his own body or do you not understand 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?**"(Parenthetical and bold statements added for emphasis) Now, these scriptures tell us a lot. Wisdom and appropriate timing of love and sex is important for a happy and spiritually healthy use of them. Also, a healthy understanding of God's Will for these strong emotions and physical drives is important to the responsible use of them. Used wrongly and at inappropriate times can bring heart ach and a lifetime of regret. Ask any of our older generation the regrets they look back on. For the young person, we of the older generation, beg you to consider these instructions of God. If you are in Christ Church, a Christian, your instructions are clear; remain celibate, a virgin, until the time is right and appropriate to choose your mate for life. Now, we all know that given the present worldly culture, you will be criticized plenty for such a decision but remember it is God's Will and approval you are seeking, not man's. As we mature, this urge for sex grows stronger and stronger and harder to resist but it is worth all to forego it until marriage. To give in to the natural urge can bring a life of regret. Resist the physical urge and please your self and God. If we make the mistake of premarital sex, you will, as a Christian, feel the results with guilt in sin. It is a sin and sin will bring hurt but it is not unforgivable to one "in Christ" who asks God's forgiveness. He does forgive us but the hurt of sin carries on in our life and is hard to erase. Sin has a cost and often a scar is left, even after God removes the cancer of sin. Even though we said the sin is forgivable, let not that be your license to sin more, for it is not. Romans 6: 1,2, Paul says, "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?" Paul is saying, as Christians just because we know God forgives our sin does not mean we can sin freely without consequences.

Isaiah

We have gone through several different periods in history with our God. In the beginning, God dealt directly with Adam and Eve until their sin separated them from God. The next phase, God dealt with the fathers of the family such as Abraham, Noah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. We have come to call this period the Patriarchal period, Patriarch meaning “fathers”. All of God's instructions to the fathers, were passed by word of mouth by those fathers and recorded by scribes as time went on. The next period, God communicated with Moses as he led the Israelites out of Egypt and Joshua led them into Canaan. This period until Christ appearance we refer to as the Mosaic age. After Moses and Joshua, God led his people through his chosen prophets, kings and priest. After Christ birth begins the Christian age and will last till the second appearance of Christ on **the last day of this earth**. The Books of the Bible from Isaiah to the end of the Old Testament at Malachi are named for the major and minor prophets who guided the children of Israel and wrote the account of this period. Much of their account describes the problems of Israel and their periods of falling away, returning and falling again from God's Will.

From Isaiah we have several Key verses of interest:

1. Is 1: 2-3 “For the Lord has spoken; I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me: **The ox and the donkey knows its master's crib but Israel does not know. My people do not consider.**” How many parents have said pretty much the same words of their own children who rebel and choose to ignore their own parents good advise. Our master, our owner, our creator, our father, our protectorate, is God. That's our place of rest or our crib. **The prophet Isaiah says that Israel is not as smart as an ox or a donkey that knows who there master is and where his crib is located. Could we question this sinful world? Are we as smart as an ox or donkey; do we know our master or where our crib is? Kind of reminds you of the TV series called “Are you as smart as a six year old?” Are we?**

2. Is 2: 17-18 “The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of man shall be brought low; The Lord alone will be exalted in that day (**the last day**), but the idols, he shall utterly abolish.” We should take inventory of our life periodically. Most of us have established idols in our lives and in effect worship them instead of God. An idol is nothing more than something that has become your master, the center of your life. It has control of you. We are talking habits here and/or objects of affection. They come first, even before the God of your creation. God is among other things, a jealous God. He expects to come first and if you expect to receive his blessings, you must put him first in your life. The Israelites after entering Canaan were guilty of entering into the worship of the Canaanites gods such as Baal, little figurines of cows, little carved dolls or other items, which represented their harvest, fertility and so forth. Man has always sought to worship something tangible, something he/she can touch. It has been a continuous struggle for man to understand his spiritual self and his spiritual creator separate from his physical self. That is why God had to send his spiritual son, Christ, to earth in the form of a man, born of a virgin woman so that man could witness his spiritual God in physical form. Through Christ, man might come closer to understanding their spiritual Father. Many have now accepted this Heavenly Father but sadly many still reject him and don't understand Him. They continue then to worship the physical world and even their physical selves. As our beginning scripture says, “The loftiness of man shall be bowed down...in the last day.” Rom 14: 11. “...Every knee shall bow to me, every tongue shall confess to God... every one shall give an account of himself to God”(referring to the last day) Sadly, this will be to late as this last day will bring judgment to those who have rejected God as their Master and have set up for themselves other gods, as their personal master. The plea here is that we all not wait till the Last Day of God to accept Him as our God, Master and Savior. By the way, Rom 14:11 is further evidence that an intellectual confession of Christ (**belief only**) want hack it with God. You see that on that last day of the Lord, every knee will bow and confess a belief. Even Satin? Yes and we have already quoted that scripture. Go find it. Do you expect Satin will be saved as he confesses Christ?
3. Is 3:12 “As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. Oh my people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths.” God has from day one set man as the head and leader of his family and affairs of His Church. This scripture shows

that it was a problem even in the time of Isaiah that men were failing to live up to their responsibilities as leaders of their families and worship of God. It has become a huge problem in our religious institutions, the Church, and our families today. When mature men of faith refuse to lead their children, and wives in the family or Church, men, in the absence of your leadership, women will fill the vacuum, which leads them toward error, away from God's plan. The true Church of our Lord will not have women as leaders of men in Church governance. When you see Women as Elders, Preachers or Deacons in a religious body, you can be sure you have not found the Church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Look to the Books of Timothy and Titus to find the proper role of men and women in the true Church. Women play an important role in our family and in the Church, but by God's plan it is not to lead and govern in place of men in spite of what women's rights organizations may demand. On the other hand, when you find women acting outside of God's approved role, you will often find men who have utterly failed in their responsibilities and are steeped in sin against their God. Either way, flee from such a situation unless you think you may correct the error by your presence.

4. Is 5: 20-22 “**Woe (watch out for God's Wrath) to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; and are prudent in their own eyes, in their own sight.**” Our lesson here is that we are to be careful in trusting your own assessment of what is good and will stand up to the light that God shines to give us a clear view. Jeremiah 10: 23 says basically that it is not in Man to direct his own footsteps. God's word is the only thing that you can fully trust and is the light that ultimately illuminates the world and is the standard from which any act or thing can be judged good or evil. If you think in your own intellectual way that you can make appropriate judgments without applying God's standard, think again. If you are wise and prudent enough to make proper judgments of right and wrong or determine good and evil, you must give God the credit. He has given you the light of his word to guide you. Well, what if you have never availed yourself to the light of God's word and or perhaps you may be an Atheist or Agnostic. Did God bless you with the light of his word? You may not acknowledge it but regardless of your rejection of God, most all of us even in early childhood, or before you became so full of self, have been exposed to God's word and his wisdom, passed through parents, grandparents, friends, perhaps children's bible classes in a church assembly and even in your exposure to the many laws of man. Even such beginning exposure to God's laws will

leave you, at some level, exposed to the Will of our (or your perhaps your rejected) God. The point is, if you think wisdom comes strictly from your masterful intellectual abilities, you are sorely mistaken and sadly misled. Stop to consider all the societal forces within which prudent people must live with and are subject to. They were formed and based upon God's law given to ancient men and lives on today. Have we stopped to consider that we are subject to these societal forces based on God's, his Son and His Holy Spirit's plan for man? Will you not consider that perhaps your forefathers, someone in your immediate families lineage, may have placed the family on a God centered path. If you are an Atheist and have any sense of right and wrong, you can be sure you did not grow to know this by chance, your natural leanings, or your own intellect. It was God given, believe it or not. For the Atheist; just as you grew and were given a sense of right and wrong, you can just as easily let your guard down and be given a sense of God himself thus losing your intellectual elitism and foolish position as an Atheist. As an Atheist one surely must be constantly on guard, taking no small amount of energy and effort to maintain the Atheist position, for it is a position entirely counter to the nature of man or his universe. It requires an untold amount of life giving energy to maintain an Atheist position. It can only be an eternal fight with little rest against the forces that lie within man naturally. A life recognizing man's natural state, contrarily is a life of faith in a creator God and considerably more **restful believe it or not**, than you currently have. To our Atheist friends and love ones, we love you, pray for you and our hope is that you may see and hear. We will not debate or argue with you.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah was a unique spiritual leader of the tribe of Judah. He served from 547BC to about 587BC when Judah was carried into captivity by Babylon. The ten northern tribes of Israel had long since been lost to the Assyrians. Much of Jeremiah's time was spent trying to correct the falling away of the Southern tribes of Judah from God. He continually warned them that to continue in their worship of foreign gods would bring God's wrath upon them. Finally it became increasingly obvious to Jeremiah that Babylon and its King, Nebuchadnezzar, were going to be allowed by God to punish and correct the tribe of Judah. His message to Judah was unpopular and he was continually rejected and punished by Judah. He admonished them to not try to fight this nation of Babylon and instead accept God's correction. They did not believe him. The results were devastating. Jerusalem fell and the Grand Solomon's Temple did as well, destroyed by Babylonian occupiers. The great walls of Jerusalem fell and all the beautiful furnishings of the Temple were carried away along with the best men and women of the tribes. It was done in stages, and some were left behind but the leadership of Judah was carried away and remained in Babylon some 70 years. **One of Jeremiah's prophesies predicted that Judah would be restored to Jerusalem as the tribe chosen by God to usher in a permanent Davidic King who would restore a New Jerusalem that would reign forever. While this prophesy more than likely was perceived by the Jews and perhaps even Jeremiah, as a physical restoring of the physical city of Jerusalem and its Temple, which did eventually happen but then destroyed again under the Romans, the prophesy really was a foretelling of God bringing Christ into the world as our permanent Davidic King out of the tribe of Judah; that Christ would establish a new Jerusalem and Kingdom in His Church.** This was the same prophecy, which had been foretold by earlier prophets such as Isaiah and God's covenants with Abraham, Jacob and Isaac.

Here are some key concepts of Jeremiah:

1. The presence of the Temple within the walls of Jerusalem would not shield the people of Judah from the judgment of God and his wrath.
2. The People of Judah had broken God's covenant over and over and the judgment and God's wrath would be administered through the

Babylonians. Remember, God can use anyone, any circumstance, or any country to steer and correct His own.

3. Restoration of Judah will not come until after 70 years of captivity.
4. A new covenant is in the future of Judah and the world when God reveals himself in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, who will be born of a virgin in the city of Bethlehem, live in Galilee and die on a cross to redeem all mankind of their sin.
5. God's ways and his plans are not always easy for man to understand.
6. God is not conflicted by his vested interest. That is, he does not slavishly protect His own people or their precious city or possessions while they are serving sin. He loves his own but is not "in love" to the point of not taking, sometimes strong corrective action. Parents should be able to relate to this principal although few do in our present age. They are so "in love" with their children that they will do anything to avoid correcting them preferring popularity rather than respect of the child. This mindset will eventually destroy a nation of people, their children and infrastructure.
7. God is a sovereign God and can make decisions as he pleases to include making a new covenant with his chosen people. God, from the very beginning, had a final covenant in mind for mankind, and how He would restore his beloved relationship with his created man. **In this new covenant was a redefinition of who his chosen are: a redefinition of His Holy City Jerusalem and His Chosen People. The Church of God or Christ is all of these through Jesus, God's Son the promised Messiah. The Church is God's new Kingdom.** Jer. 31: 31-36.

Before we leave Jeremiah, there are a couple of more interesting side lessons we can explore:

We have explored this before but again we can discuss it as it comes from the book of Jeremiah. Jer.1: 4-5. To Jeremiah God said, " Before I formed you out of your mothers womb, I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you and

ordained you a prophet to the nations.” Is. 49: 1,5. About the same words were used in regards to Isaiah's calling. “The Lord has called me from the womb.” Some have labeled these passages as evidence of **predestination** and indeed established a whole brand of theology based on them. Their theology of predestination subscribes that God, from before we are born, determines who will be saved or is lost in sin or whatever. In other words it sounds like he puts names in a hat and draws names randomly and we have no say in the matter. This cannot be the case however as we were created with free choice of whether we serve God or Satan. Our serving of God and our relationship with him would mean nothing unless we are able to exercise free choice in the matter. Can you imagine a father who never sees or feels his children's appreciation or love of him except when he has given them something or when he has to ask them to love him. **A more plausible interpretation of these scriptures is that God created us with free choice of whether we will serve him or not and God has foreknowledge of what our decisions will be even before we are born.**

Don't forget where we began. God created us a Spirit in His image; God is a Spirit. We are a Spirit created in and for eternity **and before God Formed us in our Mothers womb.** God knows our beginning, our end, and all our in between decisions and actions. Some will ask; how about the Great Commission of Christ at Matt 28: 19-20; “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Or at Mark 16: 15-16, Go into all of the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who believes not will be condemned.” Why do this? What difference will it make? These of course are not logical questions. We, and all our choices that God knows before hand are in his hands, a tool by which he directs His world. Moses said to the Israelites by God's inspiration, “See I have set before thee this day life and good, death and evil.” Duet. 30 15-20. Hopefully you will be used in a positive way for God. Otherwise you may have the mission of being God's negative hand, the hand of Satan whom God also uses to steer his ship. Which are you to be? Notice we say, **“you are to be”**, not, **“you'd like to be”**. **You do not know what your choices will be but God does.** The best you can do is your best and pray your choices have a positive result for God's plan and your eternal life. In short, work His plan and pray for His Grace and Mercy. **His only predestined plan involves you being “in Christ”.** If we are in Christ and working His plan we can be assured of our outcome in advance. That is the one decision we can all make and be assured of our end game. **If you have the attitude, “why bother”, you miss out on half the excitement of living this life and being part of His plan. What you make of your decisions are for God to know and “you to find out”.** It's the mystery of life and it just might be the only real and lasting excitement

this life has to offer. Don't miss out on it! Don't ignore it! Remember, you are nothing more than a very important actor on God's stage and it is your choice which director you follow, God or Satan. God already knows your choice and will use your choice to shape the outcome of the play. God is a very "creative" director. He can use your acting either as a villain or the guy with the white hat. Which will you prefer?

Lamentations

Jeremiah the prophet is believed to have written Lamentations as well. The theme of the book is a sad and sorrowful poetry over the loss and downfall of Judah, and destruction of Jerusalem's city walls and the treasured Temple. Chapter 3 displays most graphically, the sorrow of the people. At the same time, God's faithfulness to restore his own after repentance is emphasized by Jeremiah. The book concludes with a prayer for restoration of Judah and Jerusalem. As the Israelites and as we read of the Prophet's foretelling the restoration of Judah and their city, the reader needs to understand that the prophesy is referring to, yes, a temporary physical restoration but more importantly, **the permanent Spiritual establishment of God's Kingdom, His Church.** God/Christ's Church is the restored Judah and Jerusalem for the whole world, Jew and Gentile.

Key concepts and lessons of Lamentations:

1. Ones situation and ones spiritual condition often is a sorrowful matter and calls for genuine sorrow and "**Lamentations**". (Sorrow is a definition of Lamentation) Lam. 3:22-25 "Because of God's love we are not consumed for his compassions never fail.. The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him..." That's something we can be happy about despite our Lamentations or sorrows.

2. Any circumstances of life can and does provide opportunity to better know God and often serves to steer us back toward him. God shows over and over again that He communicates with us through His Holy Spirit, which displays itself through God's Word, as answer to our prayers, Angels, and God's provided circumstances (His Providence). We need to be open to any of these mediums and more, because we cannot limit God. We show great wisdom when we recognize God's efforts and power. We show foolishness and lack of wisdom when we disregard God's power.

3. God is righteous and faithful to his covenants/promises, which include blessings for obedience and punishment for disobedience or rejection of "**His Way**". If we choose to reject our hope in God we can lose our crown. Lam.5: 15-22 "The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!" This is Israel's sorrowful lamentation.

4. God feels our sorrow or lamentations and will restore those who return to his embrace. His faithfulness and compassion never fail and he is good to those who have faith in Him.

Key Verses:

1. Lam. 2:17 " The Lord has done what he planned; he has fulfilled his words."

2. Lam. 3: 22-28 " Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness... the Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him."

3. Lam 15: 15-22 "**The crown has fallen from our head.** Woe to us, for we have sinned." This is an acknowledgement by Judah that it has lost its

position of favoritism of God because of its sin. We all sin and are in jeopardy of losing our crown but we must have faith that through our repentance we can return to God and He will forgive and restore just as He did Judah and Israel time and time again. There are some in the religious world who teach that it is not possible to lose ones salvation or crown once saved. It is true that one would have to totally forsake their God and His Holy Spirit in order to lose their salvation but it is not beyond man to do that and is called Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Matt. 12: 31 “... all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven you but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men”. Refer also to Romans 8: 12-13 if you continue in God’s spirit and **not live** in the flesh (as a matter of habit and choice) you will not die spiritually. James 5: 19-20 following or falling from the truth leads to spiritual loss of salvation. Galatians 5:4 You who become estranged from the truth and attempt to follow the Old Law; you can fall from Grace (There is no salvation without God’s grace). The lesson is unless you remain in a walk with and in Christ you can lose your salvation and spiritual life. (This does not mean we do not sin and are indeed sinners but we are not dedicated as sinners and we seek God’s forgiveness; that is we continue to recognize and accept God, Christ and His Holy Spirit as our master and none other). ***Short of this, we can be lost and do blaspheme the Holy Spirit and are “Lost”. Once saved always saved? Not so fast. (Parenthetical and other highlighted text added by Author)***

Ezekiel

Ezekiel was a prophet of God who, as Jeremiah had predicted and forecast to Judah, God through Babylon would punish them as a Nation for having fallen away from God. Ezekiel was carried away into Babylon in the first captivity in 597 BC and ministered to the Jews in their captivity.

Some of his key teachings follow:

1. The tribe of Judah will be restored to their land after 70 years of captivity.
2. God will return again and dwell among his people.
3. There will be a new covenant between God and his people and a **New Jerusalem** and **New Temple**. Perhaps neither Jeremiah nor Judah understood that his prophesy of the new covenant, New Jerusalem and New Temple would be through Christ birth, death, burial and resurrection. Indeed, They were restored to Jerusalem after 70 years when the Persian King, King Cyrus allowed them to return and they did rebuild Jerusalem eventually and rebuild the temple, although not to its original grandeur. But their rebuilding was in vain since it all was torn down again by the Roman Empire hundreds of years later. **As for a new covenant, there was no new covenant until Christ life was sacrificed for the Sins of the Jew first and then all the world/Gentiles. For this reason we must conclude that Ezekiel and Jeremiah's Prophesy pertained to Christ and His Church, a new Jerusalem and New Temple.** Israel will know after this captivity that Yahweh is God.
4. Ezekiel's vision of a nation of dry bones symbolizes Israel as a fallen nation, dead or likened to dead men. The vision however goes on to show these dry bones coming back together and forming men alive again. The vision prophesies that Israel will be restored to their homeland. We will give this incredible story a little more attention at item 6 of key verses and thoughts. It's a dream really, of an army of dead soldiers lying there with no flesh on their dry bones. Slowly with their bones rattling, they begin to come back to life as flesh slowly covers their bones. It is a story of a slow restoration of God's chosen people, the Israelite's restoration to a relationship with God after many years of disobedience to His Will. Read

this story and reflect. Look at your own life, your current generation. Are you and your generation alive in God or are you, as Old Israel, dead and a sea of dry bones. What will it take to restore you and your generation to a life within God's plan? What part can you play in its restoration, Remember, the dead soldiers slowly, one by one, came back to life and that's kind of the way we all have to do it, one by one.

5. God holds individual generations responsible for their sins. Remember the Israelites when they were turned back into the wilderness, when they failed to have faith to go into the promise land after the spies gave their negative report. Not until the current generation was dead did Joshua finally lead the new generation into Canaan.
6. God does not need a place for his residence, and he revokes the privilege of His presence if His people are faithless.
7. God is the Sanctuary for His people and His Temple lies within the Heart of His people under His New Covenant. The New Promised land is not in Palestine or current day Israel but is instead His Kingdom, His Church (body of Christ), which is left on this earth with Christ reigning (since his death burial and resurrection) in Heaven over Her awaiting **the last day when he will return to wed Her and carry Her and those in Her to Heaven to live forever there with Him.**

Key Verses and Thoughts:

1. Ezek. 12:2. "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house."
2. In many ways, there are many around us that seemingly are captive to a life apart from God and are indeed rebellious. We should be on guard and take continual inventory of our lives to insure we are not part of the rebellious toward God. Are we obedient and open to his blessings as well as his divine corrections? Through the circumstances of their captivity, Judah learned and was convicted in their hearts of their error and returned

to know their God upon returning from captivity. God loves His people and as a Father will correct his children, so our Father in Heaven will correct us. God will correct His own House as we should ours. May we always recognize our error and God's correction for what it is; a loving act. If you by chance are walking around in a rebellious state saying, "Hey look at me, I'm doing my own thing and I'm blessed with this and that. I must be doing something right. You may say, "I know many who dedicate themselves to their so-called God and hey, they are not as blessed as me." Consider my friend, the God you have rejected just may have turned his back to you and given you up to Satanic Spirits who can bless whom they wish only as God has allowed. At Matt. 4: 1-10, look at the promises Satan gave to Christ during His Fast after being Baptized of John. The God of creation just may have forsaken you and lost his love of you. Fathers who love their children correct them and those who have given up on their children at a certain point must let them go without further correction.

3. Ezek 18:20,21. "The soul who sins shall die; the son shall not bear the guilt of the Father, nor the Father the guilt of the son; The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. But if the wicked man turns from all his sin and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him..." (dieing here is referring to a spiritual death or separation from God)
4. Ezek 18: 25-32. " Repent! Turn away from all your offenses... get a new heart and a new spirit." This is under the old law, but in our Christian lives, we are also told to repent of our sins and God will forgive and restore us with a new heart and a clean spirit. God knows that we are sinful creatures and are all in a constant state of repentance. For the Christian, it means that our continual attitude and certainly every time we utter a prayer, we must be repentant for we remain sinful although redeemed.
5. Ezek 34: 4-12. A lesson on leadership of God's people and others. "The weak, you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those that are sick, nor bound up or broken, nor brought back those driven away.... My sheep wandered through all the mountains and every hill; yes, my flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one searched for them.... therefore, oh shepherds.... I am against the shepherds and I will require my flock at there hand. I will cause them to cease feeding my sheep... for thus

says the Lord God, “Indeed I myself will search for my sheep and seek out...” God here is bringing those who are charged with leading his people to account for their failures to lead and take their responsibility seriously. He tells them if you will not lead, I (God) will hold you accountable and will replace you. **Its God's way of saying, you are fired!** When we are placed in a position of leadership by God or any other entity, we bear a great responsibility (and reap greater rewards) and to fail to fulfill our responsibilities has dire and costly consequences for us personally and for those we are charged to lead. **Always consider it an honor to lead and very seriously discharge your responsibility or else some one else may take your place at your shame and discredit.** A vacancy in leadership cannot be tolerated in any vibrant organization for long. And, think long and hard before you say, “I'm not charged with leading”. We all are in some sense, a leader. You will be surprised as you consider life, how many ways and how many people are looking to us to lead. If you remember the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis; After Cain killed his brother Abel, God ask him “where is your brother Abel”. Cain said, “Am I my brothers keeper?” God's reply pretty much says it all. “Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.” Yes!! We are our brother's keeper!! And not just your siblings, but also all of your fellow man. Always keep a sharp eye on your rear to see who is following for you are at all times leading someone. My wife Esther (Shu-Shin Lee) organized a non-profit organization some years ago called Foundation for National Political Leadership (FNPL). Its Charter was to encourage participation in the political process and to especially mentor the Chinese communities participation. It remains a goal of both of us to encourage everyone to take their responsibility of leadership seriously. You may find it interesting to visit the Website at www.fnplweb.org.

6. The **Valley of Bones**: Ezek 37: 1 -28. “The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the spirit of the Lord (a dream) and set me down in the middle of a valley; and it was full of bones... and He said to me, ' Son of Man (Ezekiel), can these bones live?’(This is a prophesy of restoring sinful Israel from a spiritual death to once again being alive through a **new Israel and Jerusalem, Kingdom of Judah** which will be under a King from David's lineage, namely, Christ.) Ezekiel replies, “O Lord God, you know.” Thus says the Lord God to these bones, “surely I will cause breath to enter into you and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.” So I (Ezekiel) prophesied as I was commanded and.... there was a noise, and then a rattling; and the very dry bones began to

come together, bone to bone to form a skeletal man. As I watched, muscle and flesh began to appear and skin covered them over but there was no breath in them. Then God said to me, “ Prophesy to the breath and command a breath of air (a wind) to come from the four winds and breath on the slain that they may live.” So I did and they stood, an exceedingly great army of men.... they spoke saying, “ our bones are dry, our hope is lost and we ourselves are cut off!” God told Ezekiel to tell them, “ I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your death and bring you into the land of Israel.” **Say to them Ezekiel, “Thus says the Lord, surely I will take the stick (lineage) of Judah and make them one and they will be one in My hand; I will make them one nation again and one King will be over all (Christ from the lineage (stick) of Judah shall be their King and Christ's' Church shall be their new Kingdom of Judah, one unified Jerusalem and nation. I will make a new Covenant of Peace with them and it shall be everlasting. I will establish them and multiply them and set my sanctuary (the Church) in their midst.”** Here in the dry bones story, God is likening the sinful children of Israel to the dry bones of dead men. They, through their rebellion and sin against God were spiritually dead, separated from a relationship with God. But regardless, God's plan continues despite our and their rebellion. God remains faithful to His covenant/promise to the Israelites and us. His plan from the sin of Adam and Eve was to cultivate a pure Nation of people (a lineage) through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David (the tribe of Judah) to introduce Himself as His Son Jesus, born of a pure virgin; a savior to redeem man from sin, capable of once again having a relationship with Him (God). Through Christ death on the cross then, a new nation of Israel is created which is His Kingdom, The Church, A Kingdom, belonging to Christ as its King and thus called in the Scriptures the church of Christ or The church of God. The word church comes from the Greek term, ecclesia, meaning a group of called out people. So, the Church belonging to Christ/God consists of God's called out people. Church then in English is the appropriate word to describe God's called out people. Called from the World to be Godly or Spiritual. The Bones Story then shows that through Christ a breath of fresh air will be breathed on a dead Israel to make a new Israel, alive in Christ Church. In Acts 2 then we see at the first Jewish Pentecost celebration in Jerusalem after Christ's death, the first breath of life for the Church as the Cloven toques of fire come down and a great “ rush of wind” is witnessed. What a great moment and one to never forget. A sad tragedy is that

the old Jerusalem and the Tribe of Judah, the Jews of today still hang on to old fulfilled promises and reject the new promises of God. They remain largely dead bones in God's eyes. Yet again, God's plan continues despite their rejection and the door will remain open until the last day of the Lord. We talked about earlier that God sanctifies all governments. All their authority comes through God. Why we find our own government continuing to support Israel's constant battle with the modern day Palestine we cannot know. We must assume it is God's plan and honor his wisdom. It may be that this is God's effort to preserve the Jewish remnant until His last day. We know from God's word that all knees shall bow and acknowledge Him on the last day. But, will that be to Late? Phil 2:10. Some may say "better late than never". That is a cute quip of man but we can't find it in God's word. One might wonder what the current state of Israel would be like were it to become a Jewish Christian enclave versus Jewish. That is an interesting proposition. We know for certain that it would be God's Will that every Jew today be accepting of Christ, Baptized into Christ and be a Jewish Christian. (Parenthetical comments by Author)

7. Ezekiel chapters 40-48 should be read as a figurative language much as Revelations is. God paints a picture with figurative language of not the rebuilding of Jerusalem its walls and Temple after the return from Babylon's captivity, but the building of Christ Church as the New Jerusalem with its figurative walls and Temple. Of course the Jews understood it differently and set out to restore their Promise land. At every turn God destroyed what they built until, at last the Romans finally destroyed Jerusalem and its temple for the last time. Then the Moslems began their conquest of the region and of course they still occupy the old Temple site with their grand Dome of the Rock over the very site where the old Solomon Temple sat, and where Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice. Jews and Christians alike are in 2008, not allowed to set foot in this Moslem structure. Even the valiant efforts of Christian Crusaders of Europe had limited success in restoring old Jerusalem and finally gave in to Moslem claims. In 1948 when the Jews of Europe were offered Israel and old Jerusalem as a home-land. They shared their occupation with Moslems for a period. Numerous clashes over the years have led to a very strained political condition for the entire area and a complete separation of the two parties, especially as it pertains to the Temple Mount of Jerusalem. There is little hope today that men will ever resolve this conflict. As for

God, He resolved any conflict now seen when he gave His son as a sacrifice for man's sin. He established a New Jerusalem, His Church and a new Zion in Heaven for all.

Daniel

This book of Daniel, set in the sixth century BC, will necessarily have significant repetition especially as it pertains to many of the same stories of Esther but there will be some diverse meanings applied.

There were three carryings away of the Kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians, the Northern Kingdom of Israel having been conquered and captured by the Assyrians Hundreds of years earlier leaving only Judah to the South. The Period of Daniel was the sixth century BC (Before Christ Birth or Before Common Era (BCE) some prefer to say).

The first carrying away of Judah was under their 17th King, Jehoakim. (609-598 BC) II Chronicles 36:5-7 Daniel was a young, good looking and intelligent young boy at the time and was one of the first to be exiled to Babylon. The 2nd carrying away was under the 18th King, Jehoiachin (598-597BC) the third carrying away was under Zedekiah (597-586BC)

During Jehoiakim's reign, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and captured and carried into exile the youngest and best of Judah and many of the treasures of the Temple. As was the custom of many Kings of that era, they were fond of making Eunuchs (that is castrating some of the males to make him lose his sexual drive and in general, masculinity) of the young good looking and healthy males. They would then become servants of the King or his Queen.

Daniel, of Judah, was then one of the first to serve the then King of Babylon and his court. His friends, Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego were also among the captives taken to the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar. A common belief of their captors would have been that these people's God had forsaken them and that their god is weaker than our gods. But as we read the Book of Daniel, we should learn that even in Judah's military defeat, God is still very much in control and working his plan. He shows Daniel and his friends that though they may be in a den of lions or in a fiery pit, God is still with them and will see them

through. And just as important, their captors learn over and over again of Judah's God and before it's all over they come to respect the God of Judah and began to integrate the Jews into their culture, government and personal lives. Esther became a Queen. Her uncle Mordecai becomes a governor of Babylonian affairs of State. Daniel as he reads and understands the Dreams of two of Babylon's Kings gains their respect and is given great responsibility in the Kingdom. In the end, one of the last Kings of Babylon, King Darius, declares Judah's God as Lord, stating, "he is the living God and he endures forever; his Kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and saves; he performs signs and wonders in the Heavens and on the earth." Dan.6: 26-27. **One has to wonder; if pagan Kings can come to see and understand the existence of the Living God, why can't men of today, who have been exposed to God's marvelous world and his power, why cannot they accept Him as their Lord.** But then, God's word tells us that they (all) shall eventually accept God when in Romans 14:11 and Phil. 12:10 it says, "Every knee shall bow in that last day..." But, then that will be as they are being Judged in the last day and cast into a fiery lake for eternal damnation and God will not be there to rescue them as he did David's friends who loved their God.

There are many great stories in the Book of Daniel and there are other interesting points in history that we can explore.

During Daniel's time in Babylon, Babylon was a magnificent city. It was of course in what we know today as Iraq. We've said before, Kingdoms come, they also go and so did Babylon in time. It fell into captivity toward the end of Judah's captivity, to The Persians (Iranians). Later, Alexander the Great, a powerful Greek conqueror captured it. The Beautiful city fell into ruins under all these captors. Today, in much of modern day Baghdad Iraq, one can see much of its infrastructure, its streets, sewer systems, its canals and water systems that are built of the very handmade bricks of the old city of Babylon.

Remember that the Jewish laws prohibited the eating of certain meats and strong drink. With Daniel under the control of the Kings chief eunuch, Daniel's diet was closely observed and it became a concern to the chief eunuch. The chief eunuch said to David, "I fear my Lord the King, who has appointed (or prescribed) what you shall eat, shall see your face and know that you are not eating as we are the diet provided and that my King will require my life." But David says, please test us for ten days and let them give us only vegetables and water. Let then our appearance be compared to those who eat the King's diet." The Chief agreed. After 10 days a comparison was made and revealed that the appearance of David and his fellow Jews appeared more radiant and youthful than all the other eunuchs. The chief eunuch then directed a complete vegetarian diet and no wine

for all the eunuchs. Well, how about that testimony for a vegetarian diet and abstinence of wine. (and, perhaps explains Papa Bears lack of good looks). David continued until the first Year of King Cyrus, The conquering Persian King who ordered the return of certain of the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the City. In all likelihood, Daniel did not return to Jerusalem as far as we know. Many of the Jews did not return, especially of those Jews born in Babylon. They were well integrated into Babylonian society and many had done quite well there and thus had no need or desire to return to Jerusalem, which lay in a very poor state compared to the very modern City of Babylon. The first Captives to return to Jerusalem were chartered by King Cyrus to rebuild Jerusalem, its walls and infrastructure. They began but were stopped by their neighbors in large protest who remembered that they had been under the rule of these Jews before and they had been fairly repressive and demanding. Several Kings came and went after Cyrus and none of them remembered and honored Cyrus's charter. Finally a new Persian King, King Darius comes to power in Babylon and he is asked to look back in the archives and find where King Cyrus had approved in writing the rebuilding of Jerusalem. He did find the order and told the Jews to commence rebuilding again. The walls and the Temple were rebuilt although not as grand as before. The Temple they rebuilt stood until the Roman's destroyed it in 70 AD. After that, there has never been a grand Temple for the Jewish people. Even with a new Temple, and really beginning during their captivity, the worship of Judah (the Jews) began being held in what is now called Synagogues. Synagogues, was and is what the Jews began to call their houses of worship as we call our places of worship, Church. It's really nothing more than a building of course, where we meet to worship but for the Jews it represented an even larger shift. The Temple no longer held the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. Sacrifices by a High Priest were perhaps not of the same significance as they had been before. Much had been lost of their traditions during the captivity and we see today a significant shift in the Jew's items and order of Worship. Their worship, for the most part today consists of readings of their Old Scriptures, prayer and celebration of special days and remembrances.

A summary of Daniel would be:

God's people need to be “**Little Daniels**” and know that despite our captivity in this pagan world we live in, God will provide and deliver us back to freedom provided we have faith and conviction to follow God's way and abide in His will.

Here are little sayings that might help you remember Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshak, and Abednego, Three “Bs”, Three “S’s” and Five “P’s”.⁹

- **They would not:**
 1. Budge,
 2. Bow,
 3. Burn,
- ***Our Faith should be;***
 1. Settled
 2. Sure
 3. Steadfast

When God treats us to a show of his power we should always be ready to see and learn of His 5-P's

1. His power,
2. His patience,
3. His pity,
4. His punishment,
5. His pardon.

Let's look at a couple of particularly interesting stories of David's experiences and see what we can learn from them. Early in David's captivity, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and as was the custom, Kings have wise men, wizards that can interpret such things. So, the King brings in his wizards but they cannot interpret the dream. Some one suggested that David can interpret the dream and he is brought in to interpret. **The dream is interpreted by David to mean that the King will be temporarily driven from the power of his thrown and will become insane and eat grass in the fields as oxen, he will be wet with dew from living outdoors with the animals, his hair will be matted and long. His nails will grow to be as bird's claws.** (Daniel 4: 24-33) What a terrible dream!

The lesson for the King and us is that it sometimes takes a kick in the rear or worse for us to acknowledge God's role in our life, King or not. In 2008 we were all concerned about who would be elected our next President. But you know, this story in Daniel should tell us that whomever we elect, God is in control and can

use even an insane person, even as crazy as Nebuchadnezzar, as our Governor or President. Finally, David tells the King, you, the King will eventually acknowledge God and His place in His Kingdom and then your Kingdom will be restored.

As we've said before, God has foreknowledge of our choices. Some may say, so why vote? **Stupid question**. God also expects and allows us to elect as our leaders, **actors on his world stage**, and, expects actors of all descriptions. God needs us to make our choices and "vote". Hopefully we would **prefer actors who are devoted to God**. In that case let us **vote** using our God given wisdom, but better yet, lets "**Devote**" **ourselves** to our God and King in all decisions of State. As an actor on God's world stage, be a "Devotee" of God and let God use our choices of elected leaders and us for his purpose and plan. *After voting, "devote", then sit back and watch the "play". You can bet it will be interesting.*

No one is told what tomorrow may bring:

A latter King during the captivity was King Belshazzar and during one of his banquets he and his party were drinking wine, ironically from some of the fine cups that had been carried away as loot from the Temple in Jerusalem. While they were having a Ball, suddenly a hand appeared on the wall before them and began writing a message. Whoa! No one could interpret the handwriting. The Queen remembered again that Daniel was available and could interpret mysterious happenings and dreams. David's interpretation was that the King would die that night, and He did.

The balance of the book of Daniel foretells of the rise and fall of several powers of the future, including Egyptian, Persia with King Cyrus and King Darius, the Greek conqueror, Alexander the Great and his various Generals who ruled after Alexander's death. There is prophesy of various leaders of the Roman Empire which would rule and in the end destroy the rebuilt temple in 70 AD which marked the ending of Israel as a "**God favored nation**". Much of the latter part of Daniel is a prophesy of the end time of the earth and closely parallels that of John in the book of Revelations. As such this prophecy is presented in an allegorical way filled with much symbology and numerology. Because of this one has to have a studied understanding of this method of writing in order to come away with an accurate interpretation of its meaning. Without this understanding we have many today who wrongly interpret the pronouncements of works of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelations.

Here is one interpretation of the latter part of Daniel's prophecy:

Daniel was assured (and we) that in **the end times**, (interpret the end times as the Christian age) he (we) would/will be rewarded. God has given us just enough details to know that there has and is a spiritual warfare going on in the unseen spiritual world around us even now; Dan. 10:13 and 12:1; That Michael, an Angel of God, stands watch over the people of God. (Eph. 6:12 also confirms this).

We, the living need to understand that we have a special work. That God gives power to whomever he will and they, like Alexander The Great, King Cyrus, Roman Caesars, etc., unbeknown to them, are manipulated and controlled by God to do his work. God's use of these Characters does not necessarily mean these famous men will be favored with salvation unto God. Look at our recent 2008 election; God was in complete control. He used you, the majority of Americans, not all Christians, to control the outcome of that election. His intent and the final outcome are yet to be seen as this is being penned.

(See Is 46:10, Dan. 11:36) The lesson here is, as citizens of this nation, do your civic duty and **Vote**; but in the end your devotion to God and his outcomes are what counts most. Vote, for whom ever you will, **but even better, “be devoted” to God’s Will and pray His Will is done in whatever election comes our way. Amen.**

Hosea and Amos

We are now moving to what are called the Minor Prophets. You may suppose that their works and words are seen as minor because much of what they say has already been said by earlier prophets and that is true, but no less important, is that their works and words were of a different time under sometimes different circumstances and so they remain important and interesting. Let it not be said

that any word in God's Word is not inspired and useful, even required in order to completely receive God's Holy Will.

The Name Hosea means "Salvation". After the Assyrians had captured Israel (the Northern Kingdom), Hosea came from the Northern Kingdom of Israel to Judah.

Key concepts of Hosea and Amos:

1. Loving God, being compassionate and merciful to those around you are the values most desired by God.
2. Israel is guilty of Syncretism and injustice. Syncretism is the act of combining elements of different religious theologies or practices. The Israelites were guilty of worshipping the gods of Canaan such as Baal and combining Baal worship with worshipping the One True God of Abraham. The prophets continually warned Judah and Israel of their Sin and warned continually that they would be punished of God.
3. A key theme of the prophets then, is whether the people will respond to God's warnings and instructions.

Key stories and lessons of Hosea and Amos:

1. God actually commands Hosea to love and marry a Harlot (prostitute).
Why on earth would He do that? Here is why. Because God needed to show Hosea what it was like for ones love to be **unfaithful and adulterous**. It was a picture representing how God felt about the adulterous affair that His chosen Israelites were having in worshiping other gods such as Baal. God has a wide definition of adultery. Also, God would show Hosea that God is faithful and will continue to love his errant people even though they have committed spiritual adultery against God.
God obviously has a wide range of what he considers spiritual adultery. When we sin or rebel against God's Will we commit adultery against our relationship with God and we should know that our unfaithfulness grieves our Lord just as an unfaithful marriage partner would. In like manner, when we talk about divorce being allowed only if a marriage partner has committed adultery, remember that God's definition of adultery is much broader than the act of sex outside of a marriage and what men consider adultery. **In fact, one might say that God in essence gave Israel a divorce because of her adultery of following other gods.** God's Justice is tempered by mercy and love, but is not eliminated by it. In

other words we can expect God's Justice even as he continues his mercy and love. Even when we forsake Him and adulterate our relationship with Him, he never forsakes us. He may not come running after you begging you to come back though. That's not going to happen, but He will always be there for you if you **choose to come home in repentance just as the Prodigal son's father welcomed him home with celebration. That includes the adulteress, murderer or any sinner. He does not require the impossible either in requiring a person dissolve a marriage contract because it was entered into in sin.** Similarly, He does not require the impossible of a repentant murderer in reversing a murder. God takes us from where we are in repentance and carries us forward in Christ. This concept is something that leaders within the Church need to pay prayerful and careful attention to in their decisions regarding Children of God who have had the unfortunate and painful experience of divorce. Many decisions of leaders have had devastating consequences on repentant divorced and remarried Christians and the Church family. May God forgive leaders who make these erroneous decisions.

2. God desires that we have a true knowledge of Him and that we have mercy. “ For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt sacrifices.” Hosea 6:6. God has always and will always prefer our faith and our worshipful sacrifices to come from our Heart. The Old Law sacrifices were tedious and almost impossible to accomplish in accordance with the Old Levitical physical principals and were so physical in nature that there was little people or God could see in them that was spiritual or from the Heart. God seeks worship from our Hearts and not so physically oriented as under the Old Law.
3. When we forsake the Lord for sin and realize our error, we should seek his forgiveness and return to him. “... Come let us return unto the Lord, for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up that we may live in His sight.... He will come to us like the rain. Hosea 6:1-3. Is this a prophesy of Christ? Yes it is and more.

Joel and Obadiah

In Joel, the occasion is a plague of locust, which was common in this ancient world and was devastating to their crops, their sustenance and livelihood. As in old times, even today, natural disasters and other seemingly natural circumstances in our lives, can and do serve as a warning by God for the Godless who need a steering correction. Then again, you just may be in the wrong place at the wrong time when God decides to bring a corrective lesson to others. Either way, these corrective actions by God should get our attention and cause us to reflect on our lives and to offer compassion to those so affected by circumstances presented by God. A day of God's Judgment and Justice is to be feared and therefore should motivate us to change. Only a lack of wisdom would have no effect.

Prophecy is more important for what it reveals about God than what it reveals about the past or future. Fulfillment is sure, but the message is primary. For some, prophecy is rather dull reading. But, if you are seeking to know more about your God, then it will be profitable and even exciting to pay close attention to prophecy. Never neglect its importance. Much of it or perhaps all of it in some way, points to Christ and our Salvation.

The last part of Joel provides a discussion of “**the day of the Lord**” and its connection to Peter’s sermon on Pentecost in Acts 2 where the Holy Spirit of God descends with a mighty rush of wind to empower the Apostles and The Church of God/Christ. It brought with it the opportunity to call upon the name of the Lord our God for our Salvation. It was certainly a “**Day of the Lord.**” The term “**Day of the Lord**” throughout the Bible refers either to a special display of God’s power and presence (appearance of His Holy Spirit) or the prophesy of the very last day of this earth and God’s Judgment of the Godless. By the Godless we mean the unrepentant sinner, unbeliever, unbaptized, Israel’s and the Church’s enemies. To the Christian it means that last day when Christ gathers up and meets the Godly in the sky and returns them and His Church to their Heavenly home. For the Christian, there is no Judgment day as there is for the Godless. When one becomes a Christian, He/she has been judged as pure from the day they put on Christ in baptism. Any time you see the expression in the Bible, “**Day of the Lord**”, pay close attention. Either something spectacular is about to happen, or has happened.

Key Concepts:

1. Spiritual renewal begins with putting an end to ones unjust treatment of others.
2. God is against those who plan to do evil.
3. God is a righteous judge and you can thank him for his correction for you will know his correction is “right” or “righteous”.
4. God will rule Jerusalem forever. Realize that when the prophets speak of “forever” as it relates to Jerusalem or Israel, they are, most certainly, foretelling the coming of the Messiah (Christ) and His Church. Admittedly, there are times when a prophet is speaking of Israel, Judah and Jerusalem in their present tense (at the time of writing) but there are others when the Church in perpetuity is the subject. One needs to be careful in their study regarding these points.
5. God does not fix all of societies problems, but instead expects us to right the wrongs in our behavior toward those who are weak, vulnerable or oppressed. Christ did not address many of First Century societal problems including slavery, preferring perhaps to allow men to choose to correct his own problems and errors in his own time. Remember also that slavery was not seen in old Bible history or experienced always, as we understand slavery in our times. People of means often assisted others and accepted in return the servitude of those indebted. Christ did address this condition of servant hood describing even himself as a servant. At one point he clearly describes the proper service to ones master. The Christian understands his/her position of servitude with God as master.
6. God is ready to forgive those who recognize their rebellion or error and are able to repent. Sadly, there are all to many of us who cannot find the **wisdom** to repent and turn to our God, the creator of our life.

Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Malachi

The following Minor Prophets are summarized by listing key concepts and teachings from “Essential Bible Companion”(2006) by John H. Walton, Mark L. Strauss and Ted Cooper Jr., Pgs 68-73. ¹⁰

Key Concepts:

1. The Prophets arose in troubled times to declare the message God gave them.
2. Even in times of crises and confusion, God expects His people to be faithful and to trust Him.
3. God takes vengeance on behalf of the oppressed; He will not let the wicked go un-judged. Problem is we may lose faith in this when God does not act on our time schedule. The faithful must have patience. In the book of Psalms, David spends much of his time writing prayers to God, asking and begging for God to bring His judgment to bear against his enemies. We, as David, have to understand that God may allow the wicked to prosper in this life but what we may not see is the punishment and torment they will see in eternity. **We may struggle with our enemies in this life, but our home and eternal life “In Christ” will be paradise and opposite from our enemies. We would never trade the eternal life of evil for our eternal life as the righteous of God.**
4. God is slow to anger, great in power, compassionate and quick to forgive. God is good and a perfect refuge. He cares for those who trust Him and have faith in Him.

5. God is ready and able to save you from yourself. He is a refuge in time of trouble. (Nah. 1:7) The righteous will live by faith. Hab. 2:4. You will not be put to shame...the Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save you. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with this love, He will rejoice over you with singing.
6. God expects to be our highest priority, the center of our life. God remains with His people even when they are under discipline. He will not forsake His own. Who are God's own? God's own are those who call upon His name. So who are those who call upon His Name? Those that believe in the God of Heaven and His entire being, which includes His three part personality; God our Father, God His Son, And God His Holy Spirit. Better known in religious circles (but never entitled as such in God's word) "The Holy Trinity". **Believing is the beginning** of calling on the name of God. Believing is what we do before we confess that Christ is the Son of God. But we would never reach the point of confessing Christ or Believing were we not convicted in our Heart/Minds that we were sinners and were repentant of our sinful nature and turned from our habit of sin. All of these steps were available to all the ancient Men of God before the Christian era except the understanding and belief in Christ or His Holy Spirit and the availability of eternal salvation from our sin through Christ. When John was baptizing in the Jordan before Christ death on the cross, he was baptizing for the remission of Sin but his baptism was not "Into Christ Death" which meant that John's Baptism was not a permanent removal of Sin. It did not make one "righteous in Christ" but it did fulfill that which was righteous for John's time. After Christ died on the cross, arose, and after 40 days with his Apostles went into Heaven to be glorified, Baptism became the final step, which placed Men who called on God's name "**Into Christ Body**", His Church and into Salvation. **It (Baptism) is now the final and sealing act of "calling on the Lord" in our Christian age.** Baptism is said by many not to be what saves us and we should agree it is not "**What saves**". The shed blood of Christ is **what** saves us. But there are footsteps to Christ, which we must follow for the purpose of coming in contact with Christ saving blood. A serious study will convince you that the step of water immersion Baptism is a **required step to finally be "In Christ", in His Church and thus saved.** Think of it as a perfect symbol of Christ death (our death to sin), Christ burial (Our burial in water), and Christ resurrection (Our resurrection from the burial of water). Well, is this not the least we can do in following his footsteps? Christ even allowed John to Baptize Him, although Christ had no need for baptism. **Christ said**

it was “to fulfill all righteousness”. In other words, “the right thing to do”. There is nothing any of us can do of ourselves, which would make us right enough or pure enough to be in God's presence or have a relationship with him except Baptism and that is our reasonable act to make us perfect in God's eyes. When God sees the righteous, he is looking at us as he looks through Christ, His son. As long as we continue then to call upon the Lord, “Call on His Name” and never forsake Him, we shall be with Him forever.

7. God does not need or have to have our worship nor our service, **but because he is worthy of our highest honor and praise and is rightly offended when He is treated with disdain, we are called to worship and praise Him daily.**
8. The Prophets continually cry out for God's people to respond to God and deal with their sin.
9. God does not change. Our religious world in this modern age is continually seeking different ways to worship God. What we must realize is that God has not changed, will not change and that the simple examples of how the first Christians and Apostles, who were taught by Christ to worship should be sufficient to please God. If you will observe closely, you will most likely find that men today, who claim to worship God, are **worshipping as it pleases them** and draws a crowd with little regard for how God's word describes how we are to worship Him. There are at least two types of worship mentioned in God's word:

- Worship in Spirit and truth (which is the only worship God approves. John 4:23)
- Vain worship (which is as it implies, is vain or without meaning and useless) Col. 2:18, Mark 7:7

The author would add a third not mentioned but observed over and over; Worship, which pleases the worshiper, but of course this one also fits under vain worship. It might also be labeled **“do your own ‘thang’ worship”**. This **“do your own ‘thang’ worship”** is precisely what the Israelites were guilty of in following after pagan gods and is the predominant mode of worship in our modern day. It is to God an act of adulterating or making impure our relationship to Him.

11. God has a claim on a portion of our income. You think the sacrifices of the Old law we no longer are called upon to do are finished, and they are, as far as sacrificing the blood of bulls and goats, but God still accepts our sacrifices as long as they are from the Heart and Spirit and are offered with the right attitude. What are some of the sacrifices we offer God today? Consider; All of our items of worship are sacrifices in God's eyes and if the examples of that worship in the New Testament is what those who walked and or talked with the Lord Jesus thought to be acceptable to our Lord, then they are our reasonable sacrifice today. We know that Abraham began to offer a tenth of his possessions (a tithe) to the High Priest of his region. Since all the Old Testament acts of worship were virtually impossible to keep perfectly, Christ showed a new way of sacrificing a portion of our means or money by giving as you have purposed and prospered. Yet, we have denominational giving often defined as an Old Law Tithe of 10 % of our income. There is nothing wrong with anyone giving 5%, 10% or 50% but it is a sin for Preachers to teach that God demands 10 % as in the Old Law. It is fiscally convenient we'd have to say, that preachers and denominational churches preach this Old Law of giving. It certainly builds grand church buildings ("White Castles" by the authors definition), basketball gymnasiums, even supper clubs in basements of some Church buildings, and places a lot of diamond rings on preachers and their wives hands, but the tithe is not God's plan of giving through Christ Church. Is this a big deal? It is, because; if you look at this apostasy close, you will find a flood of other errors as well in any denomination teaching the Tithe. If they are willing to ignore God's will in this one area, they will disregard all of God's commands except those that fit "**Their Plan**" and **Budget**. In choosing a Church assembly be very careful to look for their apostasy or error. Remember, no one is saved by error, only truth. (the truth shall set you free, John 8: 32)Then of course, we must know God's truth in order to make these judgments.

12. God purges His people of guilt and sin through His Son Jesus who was broken and bled on the cross at Calvary.

So, we conclude the Prophets and the Old Testament of God. Sometimes it is difficult to see how the Prophets writings or the Old Testament is relevant to us today. When we look closely however, we find that all the instructions and messages to the Children of Israel (Jacob's family) are just as relevant to us and

that we need to study and understand the Old Testament scriptures in order to completely understand God's New Covenant and stay in relationship with our God and creator. We are shown in the Old Testament, and must never forget, as members of Christ body, the Church, **that we are the Children of Israel, we are Israel, we are Jerusalem, we are the chosen nation of God, God's temple resides in our body, Christ is our Sanctuary and in no other is our rest. He is our Sabbath.** The only difference between the original Israelites and us is that they had only a promise of a savior (Messiah) and we now have his presence with us on earth in the form of His Church and His Holy Spirit. There are over 75 references in the Old Testament writings that point to and prophesy of the coming of our savior and Christ. The modern day Jew today, as are all men, lives still with a promise that was and is before them, but most refuse to accept it. May God help them to one day see this and accept their free gift before the last **"Day of the Lord".**

The period of the Old Testament writings end around 420 BC (before Christ or Before Common era). There will be at least a 400-year lapse of time between the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. Where as the Old Testament began with **"In the Beginning... Gen 1:1,** we find **the New Testament ending with a new creation, a new beginning, a new promise of a new Heaven and a new Earth, Rev 21:1. The Old is tied to the New in one neat package.**

Let there be no doubt that without the Old Testament writings (Scripture) we cannot understand nor believe God's plan for the Christian age. We must study diligently and prayerfully the beginning to understand and believe the end. As we move on to God's New Covenant (Promise) to us we will find in our New Testament that our Christ came to fulfill the Old Law, to complete it and while it remains for our learning and serves as our schoolmaster, we are no longer under the old law. We are now under a new way of Christ and must follow the way in order to please God. See Gal 3: 24-27. Let this scripture remind us that yes we must study and understand the Old way but the New Way of Christ is our pattern to follow and we should not be guilty of mixing the Old way with the New. Living our new Christian life under the Yoke of God's Old Law was and is not God's Will and that is made abundantly clear in the New Testament writings ahead.

The New Testament

God's plan to redeem Man from his sin in the Garden

*So, let's enter into our Study of God's New Covenant and promise to Man with a prayerful heart, for it is really a **restatement** of an old promise of God provided because of Adam and Eve's sin, and promised to Abraham and his descendants. And, remember that every time God enters into a promise to man or a new covenant relationship with man, **he changes a name**. We were called then, "**Christian**", first at Antioch after the Gentiles were grafted into the Church Body. Acts 11:26. Let no one go by any other name for it gives glory to Christ our savior. Amen.*



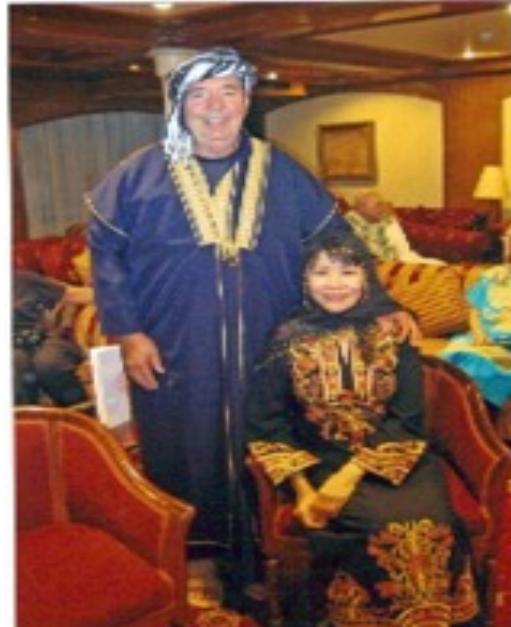
The Nile 2008 notice the reeds
observe a floating baby Moses



Ladies stroll side of Nile-easy to



(left) Camel Caravan trip in Egypt



The Dead Sea (Salt Sea) Papa Bear and Esther, Egyptian night on a Nile Cruise

Matthew

Matthew was a tax collector for the Roman Government. As such he was a man of means and power and in most cases among common folk, despised. Yet there was something in his character, perhaps it was his zeal and faithfulness for the Roman cause, that Christ saw and selected him to be one of His Apostles. It is thought that Matthew's writings were intended mainly for the Jews in Jerusalem. The Church, which was established in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost celebration after Christ death and Ascension into Heaven, consisted initially of the three thousand Jewish converts which were baptized into Christ as a result of Peter's first sermon. From Acts, we learn that there were at least 8000 Jewish converts in the earliest days of the Church. Matthew begins Chapter one with a very detailed genealogy of the Jews from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Judah, Jesse, David, to Christ. This genealogy was important for one reason. The Jews knew that the promised Messiah had been prophesied through the Old Scriptures and the ancient Prophets, to come through the specific family tree that Matthew spells out in the beginning of his writing. Matthews's genealogy offers proof that Christ did in fact come through this family tree and if they rejected Christ as the Messiah, they would have to do it for some other reason than genealogy.

It's interesting that from Abraham to David was 14 generations (a generation being roughly 40 years) a total of 560 years. From David to the captivity in Babylon was another 14 Generations. And, from Babylon to Christ are another 14 Generations. You have to love the symmetry of God's plans. Certainly the evidence of this symmetrical genealogy presented to the Jews along with most of them having witnessed Christ ministry, should have led even more to have accepted Him as the Messiah and should today. Sadly that was not to be the case. In fact those who rejected Him initially were led to crucify Christ for claiming to represent God, which in itself was a fulfillment of their Prophets teachings.

The conception of Jesus was by impregnation of a Virgin Mary, not by a man but by the Holy Spirit and was fulfillment again of Prophecy. Matt. 1:21, "and she (Mary) will bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus, for he will save His people from their Sins." It's interesting that Jesus is our Savior and leads us out of our wanderings of this world's wilderness into our promised land of Heaven and the name Jesus has the same meaning as the name, Joshua, (both meaning Salvation) who led the Israelites out of their wilderness into Canaan, their

promised land. Again, God's symmetry is amazing. The story goes that a man named Joseph whose ancestry was from the lineage of Jacob would betroth (become engaged) and wed a virgin, Mary. The lineage shows again that Jesus was a legal heir to the promises God gave to Abraham and to King David in I Chronicles 1-9. Luke 3:23 shows Mary's lineage, which was as to Jesus human nature, a descendant of David (Rom 1:3) The understanding, or we should say, **misunderstanding of the Jews and the Roman Governor** at the time of Christ and King Herod, was that the promised Messiah of ancient prophesy was to come and establish **His earthly Kingdom and sit on a throne here on earth.**

This in fact, is still the belief of the Jews and the majority of the Denominational religious world. A literal reading of the Revelation book, instead of correctly comprehending **its apocalyptic and symbolic style**, can mislead one to come to this conclusion. Sadly, and as stated earlier, **if Christ does not come back and reign here in an earthly Kingdom and sit on a physical throne as most expect, he will once again be rejected by most because of this misinterpretation.** King Herod's belief and misinterpretation that a coming Messiah would claim his throne led Herod to order all boy children under the age of two to be killed. Can you see what grave errors one can make while misinterpreting scripture? Scripture is a powerful and dangerous thing in the wrong hands. Witness today the Moslems extreme use and mishandling of their Koran.

Matt 2:4. When Joseph and Mary heard of Herod's intent to murder the children, they fled to Egypt and stayed there 2 years until the threat was over. Even this had been prophesied 450 years earlier. Hosea 11:1 The family of Jesus then returned to Nazareth of Galilee which fulfilled the prophesy of Isaiah 11:1. There is much to the story of Christ birth, which has to be read closely to realize the absolute miracle of His birth, life, death and His resurrection as our Savior, our Messiah. A lot is not recorded about Christ younger life as he grew into a man except the one story where Jesus as a boy stayed behind in Bethlehem where his parents had gone to pay taxes. Mary and Joseph had to go back to retrieve Him as you recall. They found Him in the Temple teaching the Scriptures to learned men of God and when His parent's scolded Him His reply was that he had to be about His Father's business. Not until He had attained the age of about 30 do we find Him seeking John the Baptist, who was a relation of His, baptizing with water in the River Jordan, a baptism of repentance. The coming of John the Baptist had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier by Isaiah saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness; prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight." Is. 40:3 and Matt. 3:3. Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the river Jordan to be baptized by him. And, John tried to prevent him saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you are coming to me?"

But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to ‘**fulfill all righteousness’.**” Don't let Jesus' words pass on without fully understanding his meaning. Why must we complete baptism today in order to be “In Christ” or saved? **Because it fulfills all that is right/righteous before God and Christ.** Yet many say baptism is not necessary for salvation. They will say that one reaches a saved state when one “Believes”. Should it not be understood that baptism is a necessary step to come into contact with the saving Blood of Christ and thus Peter could say and did that, “**Baptism does now also save us?**” I Peter 3:21 When Jesus had been baptized of John, He came up immediately from the water (**coming up, thus He was immersed and not sprinkled as some would have you believe**); “ and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him and suddenly a voice came from Heaven saying, **this is my Son in whom I am well pleased.**” The fact that baptism by immersion is required for salvation to take place is one of the biggest reasons for division among the different denominations today and an issue that prevents them from being unified as Christ one true Church. Yet, here we see plainly Christ showing us that baptism is for **righteousness and that “Heaven is opened up to us after baptism”.**

Baptism serves as our substitute participation in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. **Righteousness places us in a state of being right with God, forgiven of our sin and “saved”.** He clearly paints the picture that the **“Heavens are opened”** to Him and us after baptism and it pleases the Father that we all participate. Even though Christ had no Sin and no need to be baptized, it did afford him the opportunity to experience and participate in man's sin, failures and redemption. It marks the beginning of Christ short ministry just as it marks our beginning of a new life “in Christ”.

After His baptism, Angels escorted Christ into the wilderness for a 40-day fast and temptations by Satan. The wilderness place was thought to be somewhere East of Jerusalem in the hills looking down on the City of Jerusalem. His fast of 40 days matched Moses' 40 days on Mt Sinai getting the Ten Commandments. Ex 34:28, and Elijah's 40 days fast on the way to the same mountain. I Kings 19:8. Moses represented the Old Covenant (Law) and the Patriarchal age, Elijah the age of Prophets, and Christ of course, the Christian age or **end times**. It is fitting that during his fast, He could look out from the Mountains and perhaps see Mt. Nebo where Moses and Elijah had ascended to God. Three years after Christ 40 day encounter with Satan and His short ministry, Moses and Elijah appeared together with Christ on Mt Harmon 100 miles North of Jerusalem as Christ was Transfigured into his Heavenly body. In Matthews's writings, primarily to the Jews of the day, he imitates Genesis through Deuteronomy presenting Jesus as our new Moses.

After Christ was tempted by Satan and defeated him at every turn by using God's Word as a sword of the Spirit, an Angel administered to Him. His Ministry began by going out and choosing 12 Men to assist Him in His ministry. History refers to these 12 as Apostles or disciples. Why twelve? Remember that Christ was born from Jewish ancestry and was circumcised as a Jew. He was trained in the scriptures as a Jew and His upbringing was as a Jew. We can assume that His choosing 12 Apostles represented His effort to symbolically represent the twelve tribes (twelve sons of) Jacob/ Israel. Jesus, we would have to say, chose some of the most unlikely characters. Matthew, also known as Levi, was a despised tax collector of the Romans. He may also have been from the tribe of Levi who many hated as the Priestly tribe who were in charge of enforcing the Laws of God. One of Christ first acts of ministry was to give the world its **Great Commission**. **Matt 28:18-20.** This great instruction to His Apostles and Disciples was to go into all the world ... "making disciples of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father, the Son and 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." A disciple is one who follows and teaches Christ as our savior. It is we, Christians who are charged with the responsibility to share the Gospel of Christ and lead the world to its salvation in Christ. The two terms disciple and Christian could be used interchangeably.

Here are additional thoughts on Matthew, which also may apply, to all the following Synoptic Gospels of Mark and Luke.

1. On a mountain North and looking Southward over the Sea of Galilee, Jesus gave a lesson and a blessing to a crowd of people. The lesson is called "The Beatitudes". In it he describes those who will be blest with the inheritance of eternal life. **He marks forever those who are poor in spirit, the mourning, and the meek, down trodden, pure in heart, peacemakers, and the persecuted for doing the will of God (doing right).** He said that these are the Salt of the Earth; they add flavor to life as salt does to our food. All are a lamp that gives light and lights our way to heaven. Christ goes on to say that He did not come to destroy the Old Law of Moses but to fulfill (**redefine**) the Laws of Moses as **laws of the heart instead of Laws requiring just physical performance.** (Emphasis added) So much of the Law of Moses had lost its original meaning with men responding to it strictly from a physical requirement of men. These same Patriarchal men, in their zeal, soon began to add their own interpretation to God's instruction requiring or emphasizing more a physical response to the

Laws than a spiritual one. Rather than an act of love of their God, their acts of worship became increasingly physical in nature. Does this not sound like so many of our religious efforts today to worship. It certainly does. Christ came to redefine our worship to its original intent, to reestablish the original intent of all of God's Laws to Laws written on men's hearts. Let's look at a couple of examples. Matt 5:21, Christ said, "you have heard it said to those of old; you shall not murder and whosoever murders shall be in danger of the judgment. But, I say to you that whosoever is angry with his brother without cause, shall be in danger of the Judgment... but whosoever says "you fool" shall be in danger of hell fire." Read all of Matthew 5 and 6. **Many things changed with Christ coming, His death and resurrection.** You may conclude that much of what Christ lays before us seems impossible to achieve, even harder than the Old Laws and you would be right except that in Matt. 5:48 Christ tells us that, "**therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect.**" How? You will learn by further study **that by calling on the name of the Lord in faith, that is, accepting (Confessing) Him as your Savior, Messiah, the Son of God, repenting of your sinful nature and being buried with Him in Baptism, you are remade perfect, because you are declared perfect by God.** God will see you as perfect even though you remain carnal and prone to sin on this physical earth, **we must accept, have faith, that in God's eyes, we are spotless, not from a haughty spirit but from a humble stance as Christians, "perfect in Christ".** To think of your self otherwise is sin itself representing a lack of faith in Our Lord and Savior. Be ready also to understand that the world, men/women who are outside of Christ, will never acknowledge your perfection, for that concept is foreign to them. That does not change God's truth however. **Never forget that.** The one in Christ is as a perfect jewel of God as long as we never forsake Him as ours. Listen, God will never forsake us or leave our side as long as we never leave Him. The Devil will constantly try to draw you away so be ready always to repel him with God's Word just as Jesus did during his 40 day fast in the wilderness. The Gospel tells us that God's Word is the sword of the spirit. Eph 6: 17 Christ used it as a sword, the Apostles used it and so we must be ready and willing to use it as well. That was one of the reasons God allowed Satan to tempt Jesus in the wilderness; to show Jesus first what it was like to be carnal (physical) as man and to give us the example of how to remain faithful to God despite Satan's attacks on our spirit. Remember the story of Job also. Job showed us that in spite of our trials and the efforts of Satan to

lead us away from our God, we must remain faithful to the end and if we do, our end will be better than our beginning.

2. To Judge, generally means to come to some final decision on some subject or person. "Final" is the key word. Certainly we commonly use or perhaps misuse the word when we are referring to making a decision on a matter after careful evaluation of the facts about some subject; a circumstance, persons behavior, actions, or perhaps ones character. Wisdom would deem that we have that responsibility but we should never consider our evaluations as Judgments in the since of being final. "To Judge" as in final judgment, is not in our charter with God. That is God's business. Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not Judged for with what Judgment you judge and with what measure you use, it will be measured back to you." Again, understand that we as Christians are called on to make constant evaluations of what God Judges as correct according to His Will and **His Word** to make these evaluations. God's Word is our measure or standard. In our English language our evaluations can and are referred to commonly as judgments with a small "j" that are not final as in condemning, but more, evaluations based on the wisdom given of God. Of course we know that Paul in his letter to the Corinthians admonished them to make hard decisions (judgments) concerning their mixing with many who were falling away from the truth. I Cor 6:3 Paul says, "...do you not know you shall judge angels." Paul tells them God's Word used properly by you Christians is your standard and wisdom to judge, that which is Godly or not. So the next time you hear a Christian say, "Who am I to judge", remind them, they indeed don't have final Judgment but they are charged to judge even angels eventually using God's measuring stick.
3. Christ great commission gives us the charge to spread his message. Matt. 28: 19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name (by the authority of the Trinity) the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Christ also stated that there are limits when the message of Christ is rejected over and over. He says to not continue to give away that which is Holy to the dogs, "nor cast your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you to pieces." Matt 7:6 The Apostles were told if they were rejected or not supported wherever they went, dust off your feet and keep moving. On several occasions it was said in the scriptures that the Apostles and disciples went into the Temple

seeking honest hearts to teach. To teach anyone requires that they have an open and honest heart. In the absence of an honest heart one will be non-receptive and so we must move on.

4. You know or have heard what we call “the Golden Rule”. Some may not know its origin is of the Prophets and Christ. Christ stated, “whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the Prophets.” Matt 7:12 also Lev 19:18 It is shocking when you think about how few realize that most of our common expressions, so called customs, laws of order, standards of conduct, all emanate from God’s word and are not original with man. The Atheist gives himself all to much credit.
5. Christ said, “Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. But he who does the will of my Father in Heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? And then, I (Christ) will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness'.” Matt. 7:21-23. How sobering is that. *If we are not doing God's will even though we do great and wonderful things and are sincere, we may not see the gates of Heaven. For those good people who are doing there own thing and calling it God's way without looking exclusively to God's Holy word wherein dwells God's Holy Spirit, they should take heed to Christ warning. Those who insist on worshipping God their way is one audience to whom Christ speaks.* There are many different religious groups today, that call themselves Churches and Christians who truly do many great things sincerely in what they claim is in the name of God. They often miss the mark of God’s Will however. Indeed, there are over 700 different denominational Churches in the world today calling themselves Christian or, more than likely some other name, like Methodist, Baptist, or Lutheran or what ever body they are affiliated. This in spite of the fact that Christ said that he would establish His **C-H-U-R-C-H** (No “S” here folks, Singular) and one will find throughout the New Testament that there are no instances where Church is used in a plural sense except Paul in his writings to the group of Churches/congregations which he formed throughout Asia where he declared that, “The Churches of Christ salute/greet you”. In this context alone do we find the word Churches, plural. Eph 1; 22,23 says, “and he put all things under His (Christ) feet and gave Him to be head overall things of **the Church**, which

is His Body..." And, Eph 4: 3-6 says, "**T**here is one body, one Spirit, one faith, one Baptism and one God, one Father who is above all and through all of you.... till we all come to unity of the faith... that we should no longer be as children tossed about to and fro, carried about by every wind of doctrine, **by the trickery of men and by craftiness of deceitful plotting.**"(emphasis added) Our religious world tosses about the Word "Church" all to carelessly. Division of Christ Church is a monumental sin. **We will not say it is unforgivable for that is up to God Himself and it most certainly is forgivable when one turns away from error.** Personally, we do hope and pray it is forgivable, for there are many sincere people family and friends who want to honor God and sincerely go about it continuing even though in error, in many different Denominations. Have you ever wondered why they are called Denominations? You'll not find that word in the Bible. Where does it come from? We will have to look at secular history to find that out. The Church was established on the first Jewish Pentecost celebration after Christ ascended into Heaven. Peter preached the first Sermon on that occasion in Jerusalem and we are told some 3000 souls were baptized into the Body of Christ on one occasion. See Acts 2: 41. All were Jewish converts and in fact all of the early Church consisted of only Jews. When the Holy Spirit led Peter to Caesarea to meet with the Roman, Cornelius, a Gentile (non- Jew), and converted him and his household into the Church, we find that not only Jews are in the Church but the whole Gentile world are now accepted. See Acts 10. Right away, the Jews insisted that these new non-Jew converts should be circumcised as Jews before being allowed into the Church. Paul disagreed and taught that this was not Christ intent and not His way. Division thus began quite early in the Church. The matter was resolved however at a council meeting in Jerusalem among the leaders of the Jerusalem Church and the leaders their. It was resolved that it was not God's will to look back to the Old law and require Gentile converts to obey rites of the Old law, especially circumcision; that Christ came to fulfill the Law and we must look to the New way of Christ in order to follow God's will In Christ. We look on in the history of the Church to witness the strong Roman Empire whose emperors often declared them selves as Deity (god's) and demanding the population reverence them as their god. Christians knew better and did not obey them and thus were persecuted for years. Finally with emperor Constantine, he under the influence of his Mother who had high regard for the Christians and had been converted, decided that the Roman Government would establish its own Church patterned somewhat after the existing Churches of the region but also had elements of the old

Pagan gods and customs and festivities. That way He felt perhaps the Church in Rome could bring the Christians into its fold and finally gain their allegiance. Simply put, it has been said, Constantine's attitude was, "if you can't lick-em, join-em". It worked. The Roman government had much more power of persuasion than the average autonomous congregation's leadership that the Apostles had established, especially given the persecution that the congregations had experienced at the hands of the Romans. Soon the Churches, which the Apostles established began to adopt the practices of the Romans and they **soon lost the pure Doctrine of Christ Way**, which the Apostles had built them on. Congregations of the Church increasingly began to compromise the "way of apostolic teachings". It all rocked along for centuries until one, Martin Luther in the Roman church decided; there is something wrong here. A challenge for us today as we flounder in our religious world is to accept our personal responsibility to be in God's Word, understand His will and be ready and willing to say as Martin Luther said, "**something is not right**". Martin Luther broke away from the Roman Universal (Catholic) Church and set out to "**reform**" the church. It was a bold effort and we must give him credit for recognizing that something was wrong. From Martin Luther's efforts came all the different denominations (division) we see today. The Church of England, Lutheran, Baptist, and Methodist... all are divisions (denominations) of the original Roman Catholic Church. **It is their roots.** Had Martin Luther set out to **Restore** the Original Church described in the Gospels, Acts and the Apostle's epistle instructions, things would have been closer to God's will, but instead Luther **Reformed churches from the Roman church**. Thus the divisions we have today exist. Again, division began with the Jews trying to hang on to the Old Law instead of accepting the New Covenant with God. This today remains a major problem in division. II Tim. 2:15 says to "**rightly divide the word of truth**", implying things changed between the new and old testaments and that we must divide them correctly. The Old Law remains our "schoolmaster", the scripture says, but the New Testament tells us, we are bound to the **New Way of Christ**. We need to adhere to and honor this division of God's truths and the only way to remain faithful to the way of Christ is to subject your self to His **New Way**. Throughout the New Testament, the Apostles often refer to the **Old law as "darkness" and the New Way as "light"**. We need to follow the Light and shun the darkness of division. Paul admonished Christians of his day to "**speak the same thing**". He prayed for unity and we should as well. One thing is for sure; there will be unity on the last day, "**the day of the Lord**". *Ask Adam and*

Eve, they would tell us that following error did not save or preserve their spiritual life but instead lead to their spiritual death. Their search for knowledge outside of God's tree of life led them to a spiritual death. Our search for Godly knowledge using man's interpretation of God's Will rather than God's Word's of Life (read tree of Life) does no less today.

6. Christ shows us that our confession of Him as the Son of God and our Savior/Messiah is central to the foundation of His Church and Kingdom. He said to Peter, "...But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, " You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, " Blessed are you Simon Peter, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven. And I (Jesus) say unto you that you are Peter (Peter comes from the Latin word Petra meaning "Rock") and on this rock (this firm and truthful confession of who Christ is) I will build my Church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.... and, I (Christ) will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and what you bind on earth, I will bind in Heaven and what you shall allow or loose, I will allow or loose in Heaven." Matt 16:13-17. The Roman Catholic Church has used this scripture to justify and institute their Office of Pope, stating that Simon Peter was the first Pope and every Pope thereafter has had the exclusive Keys to Heaven. What a ridiculous claim. First of all, Peter was not the only Apostles present when Christ was conversing with Peter. Most, if not all the Apostles were present. Secondly, Peter was married and would not, at least today, meet the qualifications of celibacy of the Catholic priesthood or Pope. (Matt 8:14, reference Peter's wife's Mother) (See also I Cor 9:5) Thirdly, there is no scriptural evidence that Peter ever visited or wrote to the Roman church of Christ established in that city and certainly never held a position of leadership of it. Furthermore even at the Council meeting in Jerusalem concerning circumcision of new Gentile converts, Peter was not leading this great event as some would have thought had he been the Pope Catholics claim him to be. Instead it was James the half brother of Jesus leading. The more accurate lesson to come from this conversation with Christ is that Christ, and later his Holy Spirit which he promised would come to give them strength and remembrance of all instructions He had given them, would give them all they needed to know about teaching the way to Him and Salvation. For Christ to have appointed a Human being as Peter to be the Head of the Church would defy all the rest of the New Testament scriptures, which clearly tell us, that **Christ alone is the only Head of His Church**. There is absolutely no scriptural basis for Christ's Church to have

any **hierarchical organization on this earth made of men** other than **autonomous** congregations and assemblies of Christ Church with Christ as head, Elders (pastors, bishops or presbyters) as overseers and deacons as helpers. The fact that Christ told Peter and the other listening Apostles that they would be shown the way to Heaven through Christ is the larger story. We then, in our study, should pay close attention to all the apostolic writings concerning the Church and their instructions and practices regarding saving souls to God. To do otherwise would mean we may be guilty of only considering what Peter and Christ says regarding Salvation and neither these two nor any other one Apostle, gives the complete picture in any single writing. It often depends on what audience any one Apostle is talking to as to what they reveal in a particular passage of scripture. Mistakes are easily made then when one reads one simple passage and considers it the end of the subject and neglects **the Sum of God's word. Remember Ps. 119. "The Sum of your Words are precious"**, says David. **Yes I know; I've said it before and will say it again most likely.** All to often we find teachers and preachers emphasizing only the **Red Letters of Christ's** statements in the Bible and picking and choosing what they like when it comes to the Apostles writings, and examples of action. A favorite of denominational teachers and theologian is the gospel of John where they lock onto John's statements of "**believe and you will be saved.**" A grave mistake that leads to error and division. **John's statements on believing are totally true but he never intended for the world to run with a simple belief only doctrine as they have. Most of his writings were to individuals who had already obeyed the Gospel in belief, confession of Christ, repentance and baptism. John in his dissertation had no intent to once again spell out the complete salvation steps to a group of people who already understood the Way.** His audience understood, as did he, that one who believes in Christ as Lord will obey His will and obey steps of salvation **and will thus indeed be saved** after following His will of each convert being ultimately baptized. Why some denominational teachers wish to deny this fact is a huge puzzle and is surely caused by a total blinding by Satan himself. What is even more distressing is that many teachers of the denominational and Catholic world tend to discount Paul's writings calling them "**Pauline**" in nature whatever that means. What we may assume it means is that many do not accept to this day, much as some early Jewish Christians did not, the fact that Paul had a spiritual encounter with Christ on the Damascus road and after his baptism, was ordained by Jesus as a disciple especially to the Gentiles. His encounter with Jesus gave him the

same responsibilities, authority and powers of any of the original 12 Apostles. To discount some of Paul's directions presents a large problem in that Paul was the most prolific writer and missionary of New Testament scripture giving much detail in our proper relationships with God and His Church. Women of the world and some in the Church today are particularly critical of much of Paul's writings and refuse to accept his teachings especially in regards to leadership within the Church.

7. Shortly after Peter's confession, Christ began to explain that He must soon go to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the Jewish leadership, be killed, buried and raised from the grave on the third day. Matt 16:21. Peter rebuked Him and said, "No Lord, this can not be!" Christ quickly rebuked Peter in turn, considering his statement as motivated by Satan saying, "get behind me Satan!" Christ here uses the same defense against Satan as he did in His 40-day wilderness fast. The lesson for us is that we should quickly recognize when Satan's influence is leading us away from God's plan for us and be able to use a "**thus says the Lord**" in order to repel the world's influence. Again we emphasize, the Jews of history and many others today believe wrongly, that the Messiah would or will come with power and sit on an earthly Kingdom's throne. They failed to understand the lesson we have already learned, that God is a Spirit, and that the Messiah in the form of a Man (Christ) was first and foremost a Spirit and His Kingdom is a Spiritual Kingdom; That Christ sits on His throne at the right hand of God in Heaven today, leaving here on earth until he returns for Her, His Church Body and betrothed bride consisting of Christians. For this to happen, Christ is telling Peter, He (Christ) must fulfill prophecy of old, which said He would be killed by His own chosen people, buried and resurrected on the third day. What symmetry with the Old Testament parallel story of the Children of Israel! Let's review the old-old story. It deserves repeating.

God had Moses to establish a Tabernacle, a tent for God to dwell in among His people while they wandered around in their wilderness. The tent had a cloud over it during the day and a fire like light at night. When the cloud or fire moved, the Israelites moved and followed. This was their guide and security blanket, so to speak, as they progressed toward the River Jordan and into their promised land of Canaan. King David, as you will recall desired to honor God by building a grand Temple. God's reply to David was that He did not need a temple and reminded David that He had always lived in a simple tent. God denied him the right to build a Temple because David had blood on his hands

(He had arranged the death of Uriah). He did allow David to design the temple and to collect materials for building but it would be Solomon, David's son who would build the Temple in Jerusalem. We know that the Babylonians eventually destroyed Solomon's Temple. After rebuilding it following the captivity, the Romans eventually destroyed it in 70 AD. The Crusaders from Europe made various efforts to rebuild the temple on the old site but never to the grand scale or purpose as it had been before the captivity. It's a reminder that God's original statement to David, that he only needs a temporary tent, still holds. God's Church here on this earth remains a temporary tent for Him as he dwells among his earthly children. Matt 17:1-6 tells of Christ carrying Peter, James, and John, James's brother, up on a high mountain. There these Apostles witnessed Christ, with Moses and Elijah by His side, transfigured before their eyes into a Spiritual being. This so impressed the Apostles that impetuous Peter suggested to Christ, "Let us build three tabernacles, one for you one for Moses and one for Elijah. As Peter was speaking suddenly a bright cloud appeared and a loud voice says to them, **this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear Him!!!**

Whoa!! God's point is no doubt; forget Moses, and Elijah; God/ Christ is to be the object of your worship and center of your life. I (God) do not need your buildings on earth. My tent on earth is enough. My Son is your Tabernacle, your Sanctuary and your heart is my temple and where I (God) shall live and that's all you need now or forever. **Look around you today and see what grand "White Castles" man has built, purportedly for God. It is fitting that we have a convenient place to gather and worship God, but let's never think that God requires or considers a building as his Holy Tabernacle.** Many today even call their auditoriums where they assemble, Sanctuaries. Nothing wrong with that except that **it just may be that you mislead someone including yourself into thinking wrongly, that God requires us to build him a Sanctuary.** He is our Sanctuary. Listen, how we use God's words is a great indicator of our understanding or misunderstanding of God's Will. God expects our hearts to be His dwelling place, "not built with hands." Christ is our Sanctuary and lets not be misled. (II Cor. 5:1, Heb 9:11) There are not many ways to say that using certain words and terms in any discipline can lead to erroneous conclusions and error in decision making. This is no less so in our Study of God's Word. Perhaps the best we can do is to endeavor to speak God's Word as it was inspired of His Holy Spirit through Godly men. **Speak where it speaks and be silent where it is silent. Using Scriptural names for Scriptural subjects is a fairly safe policy.** Be careful with the words you use. Remember earlier my golfing friend when told to be careful of his "vernacular"? His answer was.. "is that something you could step in?" Well, yes it could be!

When Christ returns he will Wed the Church as His engaged Bride and it will be gathered up with all its members, Christians, and carried into Heaven, its permanent home. What are left on this earth, the scriptures tell us, will be non-Christians and they will all be quickly gathered up and cast into a Lake of fire that will not kill, but serve as a torment for their eternal lives. (Even the spiritual lives of the Ungodly is eternal like it, believe it or not) The earth as we knew it will be consumed by fire. Matt 25: 31-41, “When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all of the Holy Angels with Him, He will separate them one from another as a Sheppard divides his sheep (Christians) from the goats (Ungodly). He will set the sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, come you blessed of the Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.... then those on the left hand depart from me ye cursed, into the **everlasting fire** prepared for the dead and his angels.” Now, which do we want to be identified with, the goats are the sheep? **Will you be a sheep or a goat? If you are “in Christ” you are the sheep. Amen.**

There is much more in Matthew's book deserving of study but we shall move on to Mark and Luke and see what they add. Much of the next two writers cover some of the same stories of Matthew but with a little different perspective. We will try not to be repetitive.

Mark

The Bible, as the Word of God, was written to reveal to mankind **“The way of Life”, God's way and His plan to redeem man from his Sin.** Christ said at Matt 28: 20, “..I am with you to the end of the age.” and Christ is referred to As **“The Word”.** (Acts 10: 37) Matt 24:35 Quotes Christ as saying, “ Heavens and Earth shall pass away but, My Words shall not pass away.” Mark introduces his work as the beginning of the gospel, (Gospel means “good news”) the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, prophesied by Isaiah 1:1-3. The Gospel is revealed as the Kingdom of God, or reign of God in Mk. 1:14-15. **While we know that God has always been the King of the universe, Jesus announces that God's end time salvation, His sovereign reign, is arriving through Jesus' works and deeds.** We used the term, “End Time” above. Some will ask, “When is the end time”? Again we tell you, guess what; **we are in the end**

time. **The Christian era is the end time.** This is our last time to get it right. There should be no doubt in that. We might say that when the Roman soldiers, who had just crucified Jesus, looked up at Him and confessed, “ Surely, He is the Son of God”, (Mk: 16:39) **this marked the beginning of our end time.** Though the Messiah, Christ, Son of God, Jesus’ role at this His first coming, was not to establish an earthly Kingdom or to subdue all the enemies of His disciples as they had thought, but to suffer and sacrifice Himself on the cross for our Sins and to fulfill Isaiah's prophesy of Is: 53. If we are to be followers of Christ (Christians) then we are called upon daily to take up our cross and follow Christ, suffering where necessary and offering ourselves as a sacrifice to Him. Mk.: 10:45. **Let no one tell you that there is no cost to following Christ.** If you have not experienced a cost then you may want to examine whether or not you are truly following Him. Ask Christ. Ask eleven of His Apostles if there is a cost. Eleven of His Apostles died tortuous deaths for following Christ. Only John, the writer of Revelations died a natural death but he did suffer similarly as the others. His exile on the Island of Patmos in the Mediterranean Sea, where he recorded Christ words of Revelations was no picnic. Consider the cost, but remember, there are blessings in this life and surely in your eternity of blessings, all is well worth any temporal cost on earth.

Now here are other lessons of Mark:

1. Mk 2: 18-22. The Jewish authorities questioned Christ on why His disciples were not observing the Fast, as the Old Law had required. Remember, Christ and His Apostles were all brought up as Jews and were under its Laws and traditions. Christ basically told the Jewish leaders that His disciples had no need to fast (Pray) as long as they had Him (Christ) with them and besides that, Christ offered them a little story that better explained His rationale. “ No one sews a piece of un-shrunk (new cloth) cloth on an old garment as a patch for if they do the new will shrink and pull away from the old and cause a tear. And no one puts new wine into an old wine skin for as the new wine ferments and expands, the old dry wine skin will burst and spill the wine.” What Jesus is telling these old Jewish leaders and keepers of the Old law; Hey, I have come to bring **a new way** to salvation. The old way was fine for its time but now there is a more perfect way to God through Him (Christ). **Don't mix the old way with the new. It don't fit, it want work!** This should serve as a reminder of a

previous scripture we studied, II Tim. 2:15, where we are told to “.. rightly divide the word of truth.” You can learn from the old law but you can't live up to both the old and new at the same time. “Think not that I have come to destroy the Old law but to **fulfill it** or complete it.” When something is complete or fulfilled it is sealed and done with. You can't add anything to a full or filled glass of water. Some people act as if they have no idea what it means for God to fulfill something. It means it is done. You can ponder it and learn from it but we are told in Deuteronomy and Revelations not to add or take away from His Word. Don't mess with it in short. His purpose of coming was to complete all the Old law and its Prophesy, not to destroy it but to complete or fulfill it. It remains our schoolmaster but not the master of our life. (Rom 15:4, Gal 3:24.) Every thing under the Old Law was changed or replaced by something in the New Way. Christ, when asked what was the greatest commandment answered at Matt 22: 36,37 “.. Thou salt Love the Lord your God with all your heart and the second is to love your neighbor as your self.” Take a close at the Old Law Ten Commandments and you will see that all of them entail two things. Honoring, worshiping, that is, loving your God and secondly loving your neighbor and treating him as you wish to be treated. The point is the two Commandments Christ gave perfectly take the place of the Ten Commandments. That is true for each and every Old Law; there is a corresponding replacement for each Old law in the New Testament of God. That's why Christ could say that he did not come to do away with the Old Law but to fulfill it. A couple of years ago in Alabama, a Judge bodily defended a monument depicting the Ten Commandments standing at the court square in Montgomery after the ACLU successfully challenged its presence on the grounds of separation of Church and State. You have to respect his stand and tenacity on the basis that, yes our very laws in America stem from God's given Laws to Moses during the Mosaical age and he (the Judge) as a man defending the law had an intellectual and religious, perhaps even an emotional appreciation of that fact. However, one might wonder what Christ may have done had He been there on the square observing. Given Christ predisposition to become angry at the money changers at the Temple, we might expect that He just might have overturned the heavy carved monument, reprimanded the Judge and all his sanctimonious but sincere friends and sent them on their way saying, **“write these Laws on your heart where they belong and stop wasting your time with these ungodly elements who resist you.” There is no estimating the number of potential converts who watched perhaps disgustingly or not understanding this stand on the Courthouse**

grounds in the name of God who fulfilled these Old laws and replaced them with more perfect laws. A couple of examples of how many in our present day are improperly mixing the Old law with Christ Way: Those **requiring Tithes** (10%) of income or worshipping and keeping the Sabbath (Saturday Holy per the Ten Commandments of the Old Law) are violating Christ Way. James 2:10 says, “for whosoever shall keep the whole Law, yet offend in one law (neglect to keep one of the laws) is guilty of all the old laws.” How ever you read this, logic should tell us if we are going to keep one of the old laws we best keep them all and it will certainly be very hard to sacrifice all those bulls and goats and keep all the ritual of the old law. Indeed, as we said earlier, one of God's reasons for giving the old law was, over time, convince man that he was incapable of keeping it to the point of being perfect in God's eyes. By man's failures in keeping the Old law, God led men to the point that they may, **just may**, accept a Savior to make them perfect. Of course we see that many did, but many more did not and do not today.

2. As Christ taught by the Galilee, the unclean spirits, when they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out saying, “you are the Son of God.” Mark 3: 11 It is ironic, is it not, that evil spirits confess Christ as the Son of God, while so many seemingly kind, good, religious people, refuse to admit that Christ is the prophesied Messiah and Son of God. Witness the current Jewish community and Muslims who may believe Jesus as simply a great teacher but not the Son of God or Messiah. Witness the numbers of Atheist and agnostics of our communities who profess nonbelief.
3. John the Baptist, as he preached a Baptism of repentance for the remission of Sin said, “I baptize you with water, but He (Christ) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” John 1:33. After Jesus' crucifixion, Peter preached the first sermon of the new Church to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost celebration. During this assembly, the Holy Spirit descends as cloves of fire upon the Apostles and all heard a mighty rush of wind. These cloves of fire upon the Apostles represented a sort of **Baptism by fire (a Baptism of the Holy Spirit)** to which John had prophesied. (Acts 2:38). On this very special occasion and **special Baptism**, the Holy Spirit of God and Christ gives the Apostles the power to do miraculous things in Christ name for the implied purpose of being able to better convince others of Christ power to save. Their powers will enhance their capabilities to

spread the Church and its Gospel to their known world. There was only one other recorded occasion where the Holy Spirit visibly appeared directly to execute publicly the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. This was at the home of Cornelius when Peter, led by the Holy Spirit, was led to Cornelius's home to teach He and His household the Gospel of Christ. After teaching Cornelius and after Cornelius and his family received the Holy Spirit, Peter directed and accomplished a Baptism of Cornelius and his household as a final act of placing them "into Christ body". This occasion represented God's acceptance of all mankind, (the Gentile world) when they obeyed and accepted Christ Way and were baptized into His Church/Body. Now not only are Jews God's chosen, but also all mankind has access to God through Christ. While John's Baptism was of repentance and **toward** salvation, this Baptism now takes on added meaning after Christ death, burial, and resurrection. It is of Christ authority (In Christ Name, the Father's name and The Holy Spirit.) and is a fulfillment of Christ Great Commission to man given by Christ in Matthew. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost **for the remission of Sin.**" **And at Mark 16: 16, Christ says, He who believes and is baptized will be saved...** Today our confession of Christ, our repentance of sin, takes us toward salvation, our baptism places us "**In Christ**", in touch with Christ blood sacrifice, which is "**what saves us**". Christ blood is "**What**" saves us, all the rest, including baptism, are necessary steps that have occurred **When** we are saved. So are the steps taken **when** we are saved necessary to our salvation? **Yes they are.** Peter said in I Peter 3:21, "**Baptism doth now also save us.**" While Peter was fully aware that it was Christ shed blood on Calvary that saves us, he is surely telling us here that without the step of water (immersion) baptism, we cannot be **in Christ** and thus saved. Before we proceed further, please allow a regression to a term we used above which has caused no small amount of theological division in the denominational world. Some religious groups have tried to justify the baptism of infants on the fact that the scriptures said, "**Cornelius and all his household were baptized**", implying **that surely** "his whole household included some infants". If there were infants they surely were not mentioned and we may dare say, not baptized. Let us note that there are plenty of scriptural references including Peter's teaching of the Ethiopian Eunuch at Acts 8: 36-38, "... **If you believe** with all your heart, you may." (may be Baptized) That should teach us that one must be **mature mentally to "believe"**. One cannot argue credibly that an infant can comprehend to the point of believing in any matter. Besides this,

Christ gave plenty of comfort to any child and parent when he said, “**such are of the Kingdom of Heaven**”. **Matt 19: 14 Infant baptism is heart warming but is not scripturally necessary or called for.** And in conducting it we are in danger of misleading one, especially our precious children, that they need not make a decision from their mature heart and mind to believe and follow Jesus. There is no historical evidence that Christ was baptized as an infant. There is scripture showing Him being baptized as a 30 something year old adult by John, which God said fulfilled all righteousness. One other comment on this subject might be in order. If a parent, in their proud moment after the birth of their child, wish to stand before witnesses of their brethren and personally **dedicate themselves** to the raising of their newborn in the way of Christ, this probably is perfectly acceptable and could be celebrated. But, let’s call it what it is, a dedication of the parents. Watch your vernacular, ok? Personally, this writer would be more cautious in regard to standing before God and His congregation and essentially committing an oath or promise to God or anyone that I will succeed in raising my Child unto the Lord. We certainly can and must try but our children or formed just as we are with a choice and have the right and responsibility for their religious, moral or any decisions.

4. It may be appropriate to discuss the Holy Spirit before we move on. Remember again, God, is a Spirit, as are we primarily, and God is Holy, as he wants and expects us to be. So it should not be hard to see that God has a “Holy Spirit”. Further, we can see in Christ and in us, that God is fully capable of presenting himself (a Holy Spirit) in the form of a carnal man (Christ) or however he wishes to present His Spirit even as an angel. When Christ returned to his spiritual body (transfigured) and His home in heaven, he left here on this Earth a spiritual side of himself, The Holy Spirit, to Guide you and available to dwell within you on your journey through this life. Christ promised His Apostles to send this Comforter (Holy Spirit) after He left them. How does this Holy Spirit present itself to us today? How does it guide our lives? Well the answer is that **it doesn't unless we accept it as our guide**. Just the same, it does affect every man's life, but it may not be his accepted guide. Men and women who accept Christ are guided today primarily by God's Word (inspired by the Holy Spirit) through His Apostles and other prophets of God. Secondly, His Holy Spirit may steer our lives through circumstances or the providence of God. We most certainly come into contact with the Holy Spirit in our prayer life. He indwells us as Christians and is a powerful force in the

Christian who stays in tune, open to God's Holy Spirit and the best way to ensure we are under the Holy Spirit's leadership is to **stay in His Word daily**. That is our primary way of coming in contact with God's Comforter. As a reminder, we much earlier stated that in so far as Christians have the Holy Spirit indwelling us and the fact that we are first and foremost created spirits in the likeness of God and formed in the womb carnal humans to live and walk on this earth; can you see how precious the Christian is to God. ***Can you understand how God sees not a sinful carnal man when He looks at the Christian but instead sees us "as Christ" His child. What a wonderful feeling that is. Thank You my Lord!***

5. God's Word, The Bible should be our constant companion. Christ told John in His Revelation to "**Eat the book.**" If you studied nothing else in your lifetime, studying the Bible faithfully would give you an education anyone could be proud of. It is a fact that many otherwise uneducated people of Old America, would have never learned to read or write or apply wisdom and logic were it not for their faithful study of the Bible. To some it was their sole education and it served them well as their educator and spiritual guide. As mentioned in the foreword, my parents, and many like them grew up in the very rural, agrarian Southern United States in the early 1900's and received much of their education in Bible study and it served them well in the world in addition to blessing them with the peace and love of God. It stands as just as potent a force today if one depends upon it. Sadly fewer and fewer are taking advantage of God's Holy Word today.

6. It is interesting to note that in the story of Cornelius, he was not yet a Christian but was a devout and prayerful man and the story goes that the Holy Spirit of God led him to send for one, Peter, to better teach he and his household. This shows surely that the Holy Spirit can interact with all men who sincerely seek the Lord, Christian or not, **but his continuous guidance, power and promises are not guaranteed unless one is "in Christ" or in tune with His Spirit.** In Cornelius's story, he "**called on the Lord**" and God listened and sent him Peter who **baptized Cornelius and his household into Christ Body.** Had Cornelius merely "**called on the name of the Lord**" verbally, **but had not obeyed Peter's direction to be baptized would he and his household have been saved?** No person who considers the whole picture can say that merely "calling on God's name" without obeying God's Will in Baptism saves. Believing does save when one **presupposes obedience** to God's Will and that

includes repentance, confession, and baptism. And no, **those three actions are not your works so give it a rest; you are right we are not saved by our works but by the grace of God and “his works” upon our heart.** If they are works at all **they are works on ones heart by the Holy Spirit not of our own selves.**

7. Some of us so easily lose sight of why God sent His Son to die on the cross to pay for or cover our Sins. At the risk of again being repetitious, we will review the “Old Old story” that answers, why. *Why is He doing this again? Good Question. Keep asking it?*

In the beginning somewhere around the region we now call Iraq, God began his creation to include man and his helper and companion, the woman. They were named Adam and Eve. They knew no sin and were placed in a perfect home called the Garden of Eden. All of their cares were taken care of by God and they had a relationship with God as their Father. We may call it their Heaven, physical and spiritual home, their promised land. They were created by God to be His and to have a loving relationship with Him. They were created in His Spiritual image but **“formed in a physical body as an animal”**. (Science has classified man as a bipedal primate of the homosapien species, Homo sapien being a Latin term meaning “knowing or wise man”.¹² (Wikipedia, The free Encyclopedia) However science chooses to classify man, there are unique features of man resembling God’s own spiritual nature that separates it from the common animal. In order for man’s dedication and love for Him to have meaning, God gave him/her a mind with **mental choice** of accepting Him or not. It indeed is an **intellect** unlike any of God’s animals that we commonly call **“a soul”**. **It is that part of man which is in the image of God’s Spirit.** Without this choice or soul, you see, Adam’s and Eve’s relationship with God would not have meaning. What if you only loved your Father or Mother when they gave you everything you wanted; would your love be genuine? Love has to be a choice to be meaningful to man or God.

God also allowed Satin, a counter force to God, to live and roam just as he allows Satin today to roam the earth and give us an alternative choice. Adam and Eve were to eat of any tree of life in the Garden but not of the one that was called the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Satin approached Eve and told her that God did not want them to eat of that tree because God knew that if they did they would come to believe themselves as a god themselves. Believing themselves as gods they would have no need for the God of their creation. Satin convinced Eve to partake of the fruit of the forbidden tree. She

in turn told Adam what Satin had told her and he partook of the tree. Here we find the picture of man seeking forbidden knowledge and the lost world are still seeking forbidden knowledge today. Until they partook of forbidden knowledge they both had walked around with no clothes and needing none. But immediately they realized they were naked and had an immediate desire for clothing. They each sought cover. **Eve was not a shopper ladies, till Satin interfered and man began to have to pay for his and especially Eve's cover.** (I jest) But then God saw that they were hiding from him and were now clothed with leaves covering them. God confronted them of course and expelled them from their perfect home. They had chosen Satin, Sin and **forbidden knowledge** over God and they experienced a Spiritual death just as we do when we become slaves to Sin without God/Christ. Without God/ Christ as the center of our lives we are running around nude and most look for cover in this situation. Our cover today is Christ as we are baptized into Christ; we put Him on even as a suit of clothes. Rom 13: 14, Gal 3: 27. That's how we literally can hide our sin from the face of God by wearing the clothes of Christ such that God does not see our filth but the righteousness of Christ. ***How great is that!***

We want to reflect more on forbidden knowledge. The Bible Old and New Testaments, have many stories describing God's admonishment of those who seek after knowledge in their own way and ways dreamed up by mankind. In general, we are referring to, in large part, things outside of God to include the Occult. Games of chance and Luck. As Christians we should be careful how we place trust in horoscopes, Psychics, Angelic visitations, and such. The term "I was lucky" should never cross the Christians lips. Instead we should understand and know that God is in control of our lives. He who blesses us with what ever comes our way, good/pleasant or corrective lessons which, at first may present themselves as not so good, is our God of Heaven. Some will point to some fairly bizarre things that happened in the early days of the Church such as raising individuals from the dead, Angelic visitations, and speaking in tongues. True, but you must understand that God allowed these things for very special reasons. Namely, so that the people's conscience could be pricked and influenced to convert and come into Christ New Way; To grow His Church Body. The miraculous gifts given to the Apostles and those that the Apostles laid hands on and blessed, were given these gifts for the express reason of spreading God's Kingdom. In the Absence of a Published Word Of God in the form of our Bible, there was no other way to accomplish the growth of the Church. After that generation passed, and after the Holy Spirit inspired Word of God was made available, there has not been another

incident of these same miraculous gifts being bestowed on man as far as this writer is able to tell. At the same time we must not limit God. Let us say simply then; be careful in your acceptance and reliance on the display of spiritual gifts outside of the realm of God's Word and test spiritual happenings and knowledge which may be outside of God's Will. May God alone be our guide in this matter. **Does God provide us with miracles today? Certainly he does. Prayer is answered each and every day and each answering is God's miracle to you. The miracle of healing is possible through prayers of the righteous especially the Elders of the Church. (James 5: 13-16) We said earlier, God's Word itself is a miracle. Amen.**

From the point of seeking knowledge outside of God's wisdom, man and woman were in a world full of complications that they had to deal with. God was still present with them but he had not the relationship with them that he desired from the start. But God had a plan to regain this relationship with His created Man. The first part of his plan was to show man that he was incapable of following God's Old law and that a Savior would have to redeem him from his own sin. The second part of the plan of course was to present Christ, God's Son as Savior for helpless man to accept him. That's what happened, but since God's plan also gave us choice, many (did) do not accept God or His Savior and choose to become themselves, as gods. They, in their estimation, then do not need God. So be it, a perfect picture of the Atheist.

So Adam and Eve leave their perfect home and have two children initially, Cain and Abel. Over time, God requires them to bring Him a sacrifice. Abel, being a Shepard by trade brings an animal of his flock, a blood sacrifice. Cain, a farmer, brings God some of the first of his harvest. God is more pleased of Abel's sacrifice and this makes Cain jealous and angry with Abel even to the point that Cain kills his brother Abel in the fields. God confronts Cain and ask where is your brother, God knowing full well of Abel's murder. Cain answers, **I have no idea; "am I my brother's keeper?"** God was displeased with this answer and dispelled Cain to a rough life. God clearly says to us here that, **yes we are our brother's keeper** and secondly, and more importantly, He revealed to all mankind His plan of redemption. **The plan being that mankind's condition will require a blood sacrifice to save him from sin.** For thousands of years then we find men of God offering to God the sacrifice of blood of bulls and goats without blemish on an alter to appease God and save them temporarily from their sin. Finally, and in God's own time schedule, His own son's blood on the cross of Calvary was offered

as the last sacrifice ever needed. Christ as a blood sacrifice did save man from sin in that Christ was a perfect man, a perfect sacrifice. God always required a perfect animal without blemish be chosen as His sacrifice. Why perfect? Use your intellect here. If we give up something that is damaged and of no use to us, where is the act of sacrifice in that? That is clear when we read all of the old Leviticus laws that an undamaged animal was required to be considered a sacrifice. God's ultimate sacrifice of Christ was as pure and unblemished as they get.

Luke

Luke was a Gentile, a physician, and a companion of the Apostle Paul. He wrote this book carrying his name plus the book of Acts. The central theme of Luke is best summarized by Luke 19:10. "For the Son of man came to seek and save what was lost." This is largely interpreted to mean, "**the whole world.**"

The key points of Luke seem to be:

1. The Gospel message is based on Historical truths.
2. The Gospel is for all people everywhere.
3. All the (Old Testament) scriptures speak directly and indirectly of the coming of the Messiah, Christ, God's Son.
4. The Holy Spirit appeared and touched the Apostles and disciples on the first Pentecost after Christ ascension into Heaven. It appeared one other time inaugurating the grafting of Gentiles into the Body of Christ, His Church. These were the only physical appearances of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament but not the last of its spiritual guidance, for the Holy Spirit is our true guide forever.

5. Joy and Praise are appropriate to celebrate salvation's arrival to man.
6. Christ calls for our special concerns and attention to the poor, oppressed, sinners and Samaritan's (a lower class of Jewish people in the time of Christ).
7. Christ placed special emphasis on women's service in His ministry. They were not openly evangelist but they played an important part in ministering to the needs of Christ and others and He honored their ministering. Christ's honor of those women who administered unto him should be of special significance to women today; especially those of religions that denigrate women to a dishonorable role. There has never been any scriptural basis for women to have a leadership role in the Church but Christ and His Church definitely give great honor and credit to the ministering and service of each and every woman in their midst and there were many. Romans 16: 1-2 Paul mentions a woman named Phoebe, a servant of the Church, which is coming to Rome, that they should support her needs is but one example.
8. Jesus used and gave special attention to the Temple in Jerusalem, at one point throwing men out who were selling pigeons for sacrifice of the poor who came to the temple, accusing them of money changing in God's Temple. The poor were allowed to offer pigeons rather than the more expensive bulls or goats. It's interesting today as one travels around Israel, Palestine and Egypt; many have pigeon coops near and sometimes on the roof of their homes. It serves as a food and its eggs are nutritious as well. The Temple to Christ as a Jew represented no doubt that Church and Body that He was to die for. He understood full well that His death, burial and resurrection would establish a new Spiritual Jerusalem and a new spiritual Temple of God, but he had been reared in the Jewish faith and found the physical Temple a place He wished to be on occasion. It was a place where He could interface with Godly men. In the same way we as Christians should prefer our houses of worship as a place to assemble with those of like mind and devotion to God.
9. As Jesus was teaching a crowd of people by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two fishing boats and two fishermen washing and putting away their nets. Jesus asked them to push their boats back out into the sea so that he could speak from their boat out from the shore and get away from the crowd. He probably also wanted to speak from this position because He knew that His voice would travel over water more easily and he would be heard more

easily by all. **To the young ones this may serve as a Physics lesson on the characteristics and dynamics of sound. Remember there are many ways that early Americans got their education from the Bible and other literary works.** Don't miss these tidbits of information then. When He had finished speaking to the crowd, He asked Simon Peter, one of the fishermen, to take their nets out further into the deep water and cast their nets once more. Peter said, "Master we have fished all night and have caught nothing, but at your word we will do it." When they had cast their nets, they caught so many fish that they filled their boats almost to the point of sinking and their nets began to break. James and John, the sons of Zebedee were astonished and afraid. Christ told them, "do not be afraid, from now on you will catch men", and so from that day, they followed Christ giving up their nets in favor of catching men and bringing them to Christ.

10. Our lessons are several here.

- A Physics lesson. Sound travels better and easier over water so keep your voice down when out on the water especially if you do not wish all on the shore to hear you. Or if you catch yourself needing to communicate with a crowd without the use of a PA system, get out in a boat away from the shore a bit so that your voice will carry better without shouting.
- Never hesitate to obey the Lord your God for He will bless you abundantly.
- When God tells you to move, never hesitate to obey, even if it requires you to extend yourself out of your comfort zone. We all often prefer to stay within our comfort zones, our own little boxes. Stretch your wings toward God even as the Cherubim's over the Ark of God stretched forth their wings. It was God who told the Children of Israel and Moses, as they lingered and camped around the base of Mt Sinai in the wilderness after Moses got the Ten Commandments from God, "You have been around this Mountain to long". Move on toward the promise land, He was telling them. You will hear more and more in your life and many make huge salaries for their abilities to "**think out of the Box**". Many great productive ideas come from the few who are willing and able to think **out of the Box**. Of course one must also be wise enough to choose the best of the best decisions from among the rush of ideas one may have in such open thinking. That can only be assured if you hold on to the wisdom and guidance, which God alone provides.

11. Then you may ask, how does God call us? There certainly appears to have been the time when God spoke directly with the Fathers (Patriarchs).

During Moses time, the Mosaic age, God talked directly with Moses and through Prophets and leaders. Remember the story of Samuel when as a boy in the home of Eli the prophet and a Priest of God, God spoke to Samuel in the night saying simply, Samuel, Samuel. Samuel thought it was Eli calling him and went into him asking Eli what he wished. This happened several times until Eli told Samuel, it is God calling you; next time say, "**here am I Lord**". So we know how God spoke directly to ancient men and we certainly cannot limit God today. He certainly can speak to men directly today if He wished and although we hear many loosely speak that "God told Me thus and thus", we must understand that "likely" they mean that God spoke to them through their intellectual reading or hearing of God's Word. As far as we know, there have been no occasions in this age where man has heard God's verbal word directly. If one thinks he has heard God's Will through any other means than through His Word which is of the Holy Spirit, let him beware and test his hearing to ensure it is of God's spirit and not of Satan who has imitated God well throughout time. In the Christian age we are given God's Word and that is God's chosen method of speaking to us today. Problem is, so few spend enough time in His word (Bible study) neither to hear His instructions nor to discern of what spirit they are listening to. It is supremely important that we keep our Hearts (our intellect) pure, for our intellect is the keeper of our spirit and if we continually pollute it with earthly influence and never or rarely expose it to God's Word we can expect to not understand or hear God's words, thinking as Samuel, it is the man down the hall. In Hebrews 3: 8,15 and Psalms 95: 7-11, God's word admonishes us to "harden not your heart" to His callings. There is a clear and present danger that if we ever are touched by the hearing of God's Holy Word and continually refuse to respond to His call, there will come a time when our heart will harden and never respond to God's calling. Parents, watch and listen closely for your Children's questioning voice and encourage them to answer God's call as Samuel did, "Here am I Lord". God's call may not be heard in a hardened Heart so answer and encourage your young to heed His call while the Heart is tender and young. Even so, let there be one word of caution here regarding encouraging our young. Guide your children lovingly toward Christ in their youth but never push them. Children have tender hearts and will respond to the Love and tenderness

which Christ teachings provide but their minds and hearts must be given the opportunity to decide to follow Christ Way in their own time.

12.Luke relays a story of John the Baptist that is important to us as Christians and some have had a hard time understanding the story. Jesus said of John the Baptist, “among those born of women, there is not another greater than John the Baptist, but he who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he.” What has Christ said here? Those that are in Christ Church, His Kingdom, which had not come at the time of John the Baptist, would be greater and more blessed than John. Remember John the Baptist was preparing the world for the coming Messiah just as were all the prophets of the Old Testament so the same comparison of Christians of today and Moses, Elijah, etc. could be made. Those that are in Christ Kingdom, His Church. Christians, by virtue of having their sins washed away, cleansed by the blood of Christ, have the greater gifts than all the Prophets, including John the Baptist. This is not to say that men of God of the Old Covenant were not saved unto God, but it does say that we, who are of Christ, were blessed by a more perfect sacrifice than earlier men of God. This should not be a source of pride by Christians, but more humility. How much more blest are we than our earlier brothers who had not Christ. Again, you can be sure those faithful men of God of the Old Testament will be saved unto God’s heaven and are indeed in a Heavenly place until the last day when Christ comes to redeem all of His own and finally settle His Bride the Church, in the Heavenly Home he has prepared and promised all of His faithful. Amen.

13.A life as a non-believer (not a Christian) is not worth saving- Lose It! By losing it, letting it go (that's what we do when we accept Christ's' sacrifice), we save our life to Christ. We lose our self-centered life steeped in Sin. Luke 9:24 “Whosoever desires to save his life with Satin (as center), will lose it, but whosoever loses his life (of sin) will save it. For, what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is him self lost? For whoever is ashamed of me and my Words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes into His own Glory, and in His Father's and the Angels.” What have we said here people? What we said in Genesis. Treasure and save that spiritual body God created in His image. **It is who you are**. It is the only thing of you worth saving. That physical body which God “formed from Dirt” is not worth saving. Its good for what God formed it for, a temporary tent to house the Spirit, and it is fun to play with, but that's it. It is not you or yours so get over it!

14. On setting the Kingdom of God as your priority: Christ said, “do not worry about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body or what clothes you shall wear... seek the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom... Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, not on earth for where your treasure is, there your heart shall be also. Luke 12:22-34. Does this not confirm what we said above?

The Gospel of John

John is written by John, the brother of James and the son of Zebedee and is identified in John 21:20 as the “Apostle whom Christ Loved” not that Christ did not love all His apostles, it was a figure of speech used to distinguish this John from all others so named. The Gospel was likely written to believers and unbelievers of the regions of Ephesus in Turkey. The book's mission, it seems clear, is to reconfirm that Christ is the Son of God, the self-revelation of God in the flesh. The prologue of John 1:1-18 portrays Christ's identity as the Deity of God and worthy of being believed by all. Principally, we should conclude from the scriptures herein that Jesus is “The Word” or the expression of God Himself. “The Word” is Christ Himself when used in New Testament Scripture or Old Testament Prophecy. We use the expression, “**The Word**”, to generally mean also the Bible's words or scripture. There is nothing wrong with using the term in that way as long as we understand that the Bible is the reflection of God and His Trinity (Christ and the Holy Spirit). II Peter 1: 20-21, We have quoted several times, “the scriptures are not of private interpretation, but of Holy Men of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit.” No other book in the Bible declares so openly the Deity of Jesus Christ. John's primary theme is that Christ is to be “Believed”; that **Believing** in Christ “will save you”. It is unfortunate that there are some in the religious world who have based their theology on this one principle of “Believe only.” There is no doubt that intellectually believing in any thing will lead one to take steps toward a goal and **attaining your goal after taking action is a logical conclusion. But one must take physical steps to reach a physical goal.** Reaching a spiritual goal also demands action. When we take the sum of

God's word on the matter of attaining **His Salvation**, we find that if we do not confess Christ before Men, Christ will not affirm us as His before the Father in Heaven. (Matt 10:32-33, Acts 8:36-38, step one). Step two, we must repent of our Sinful nature (Acts 2:38, Luke 13:3). Step three; we must be **baptized into Christ**. (Acts 2:38,22:16,10:48, I Peter 3:20-21, Gal 3:27) Look, if men can take "Believing" and base the whole theology of Salvation on this one item, they could just as easily take any one of these other steps and say that one is saved merely by confessing Christ; or for that matter Hearing the Word (Romans 10:17, Matt 7: 24-27) or remaining faithful (Rev 2:10) or Baptism. Truth is, none of them saves you **but all are necessary steps** one must take before one comes in touch with what saves you, **Christ blood**. Take John 2:23-35, speaking of Jesus and those who simply believed in Him; "Now when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, **many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did but Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew all men and had no need that anyone should "testify" of men for he knew what was in man."** On Believing only, look to James 2:19 where it says, "... The Devils also Believe and tremble..." When we look at all the examples given in the Bible we will find that, the converts first heard God's word taught, They contextually certainly believed, but in some writings we have to see implication of there actions or statements where they confessed or repented. **But, in all cases we see a final act of Baptism** before one goes his way rejoicing in his salvation. Given all these examples, one still ask, so what is required for one to be saved? **This is probably the most important question man will ever ask. It should be a question that we all have a correct and scriptural answer to. Our spiritual souls eternal life depends on answering correctly this question.** Obviously, each of these steps is required to bring one to the point of salvation, the point of achieving contact with the **blood of Christ, which is what saves us**. That's the "**What**". But, there is a "**When**" that confuses most and is the source of division among religious groups. **Surely it is possible that we can have unity over what saves and prayerfully, shall we some day understand and agree to the When.** In John 3:5 on Baptism; " Most assuredly, I say unto you, unless one is born of water (Baptism) and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God (**be saved**)."**"** Can we deny the importance of Baptism to God? We certainly do when we ignore even Christ's words when he gave us the charge to, "**go into all the world; he who believes and is Baptized shall be saved.**" Matt 16: 15-16 Most of the denominational world believes that baptism is merely a symbol of our faith and we are saved when we believe and without baptism. They would be right, believing saves, the blood of Christ saves, but should they not understand that **if to God baptism is a symbol**, it certainly is a **necessary** symbolic act that does as Peter says, "**Baptism doth**

also save". God's Symbols are real, meaningful, necessary, and not trivial as some propose. We should pray that one day the denominational world will see that Baptism is a necessary step and cease *misapplying* John's great writings. When one believes as John believes, he will seek the whole of God's Word to guide him to the truth. It was David who said in Psalms 139:17, "how precious also thy thoughts unto me, O God **how great is the sum of them.**" There is "a way" or "the way" to live this life and that is "In Christ". If you wish to know that way into Christ you must study God's Words and pray that His Holy Spirit will Guide you in "His Way". II Tim 2:15 says, "Study to show your self approved unto God, a workman that needed not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Notice Paul in his admonition to Timothy uses the term "**rightly dividing**". Paul understood that there was a wrong way to study, a wrong way to divide God's Word. Remember back when we discussed how early Jewish converts to Christianity tried to reach back into the Old Laws of Moses and require circumcision of Christians. This was a wrong division of the Words of God. With Christ there came a new way, "**a more perfect way**" one scripture says. Acts 18: 26, 24:22. In several New Testament Scripture, the Old Law is described most often as "darkness" and the new way of Christ as "Light". John's Gospel is filled with truth and light and a wonderful tribute to the Deity of Christ. It should not be taken as giving the **complete steps** toward Salvation with its **believe** emphasis however. The writer was first baptized **into the Baptist Church** but not "**into Christ**" and I still attend a Baptist service with my family when home and it amazes me that most every sermon I hear there draws its emphasis invariably from the beautiful book of John especially when delineating the plan of salvation. "**Make a personal profession of faith in Christ as your Lord and Savior**" now as we stand and sing. That's it. **If you can stand up and speak you are saved.** Talk about salvation being free! If one who responded and professed Christ asks about his Baptism at that point, what would he be told? Supposedly he/she would be told, you are saved go on home now and we will baptize you later at a convenient time. I overheard a Baptist preacher neighbor talking to another Preacher friend on his cell phone one day in our yard. I heard him say, "**Oh I've got to baptize three people that day** I want be able to go." I'm so sorry, really I am, but afterward I said (lovingly), and I did say, "**bless your heart**", "**If you had Baptized those people the day they responded when you should have you could have met your friend tomorrow.**" Oh, I so hope my Baptist family and friends can understand my loving understanding of this. I hope they can understand that I sincerely believe that following God's Word and His steps to salvation is crucial to ones Soul, and Spiritual life, the only part of you that's important enough to save. If I am wrong Lord, please show me in your Word and please, my prayer is, forgive those who

may teach and believe error that honestly have striven for your truth but may have failed for whatever reason, **including your humble servant**. Amen

Other verses of John with comments:

1. Jesus admonished the Jews and their leaders who continually ask Him for a sign that they could believe Him as the Messiah. Jesus said unto them, “ Unless you people see signs and wonders you will by no means believe!” (John 4:28) We too often believe but have so little faith. We search for reasons, signs and miracles in order to confirm our belief. Why can't we just believe with faith without all the proof? One of Christ Beatitudes was “ **Blessed are those who believe yet have not seen.**” It never ceases to amaze as godly people continually seek some miraculous sign that God, Christ, His Holy Spirit is with us. Witness those who have supposedly seen a miraculous appearing of Mother Mary or a picture or statue that overnight produces tears streaming down the face. **Imaginations or prevalent, we all have them, but where is our faith?**
2. God is working for us, in us, and with us just as He did for the children of Israel. Because He works with us, this implies we must be working also. Romans 8:31, I Cor. 3:9, Phil. 2:13, Heb 13:21 II Cor. 7:6. Jesus said in John 5:17, “ My Father has been working until now and I have been working.” So did God rest on the Sabbath day really or did he rest in the sense that he was satisfied with what he had done? Can we not agree it was the later? Every day in Christ is a day of rest for us as Christians but our work is never done until our, or the Lord's last day. See Hebrews Chap. 4
3. Those that are “ In Christ” will have eternal life. We have heard this and perhaps said it and it is a correct statement except for one thing. It is not a matter of **will have**, But we **Do have**. God's promise is that we in Christ, **do (presently)** have eternal life In Christ. John 5:24 Christ says, “ Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My Word and believes in Him who sent Me, **Has** everlasting life and shall not come into judgment, but **has** passed from death to life.” Now think about what a wonderful gift that is. We hear so much of the Judgment day from Christians and non-Christians with many Christians thinking that they will be judged at Judgment Day.

Christians will not experience the final Judgment of God on that last Day; only those who have rejected Christ will be Judged and cast into the lake of Fiery torment. I'm sorry, so sorry Atheist. We should be more sensitive and not mention that old lake of fiery torment commonly called Hell. It may frighten the children. **Let's just call it the place where God is not, shall we? Atheist will learn on the "Last Day" that to be left in a place without God's Holy Spirit is indeed, "Hell".** Believe in God and accept Christ or not, you have had the privilege of living in this world influenced, even directed by a creator God and His Holy Spirit. The Laws that protect and give order to your very existence testify to this. Take that away and you will experience Hell released. Even the Atheist should be able to admit that he/she is living a wonderful life having the benefit of an orderly society under law and order begun by God's Ten Commandments. Any way you look at it, the Christian will be evaluated and receive different levels of rewards in Heaven, **but he will not be finally judged or condemned.** The Christian has already been judged and because of Christ's sacrifice, has been judged as innocent. This should make Christians the happiest, the most joyful people on earth. Think on it, we **have** (not will have) "passed from death to life". Those who reject Christ are living today in a spiritually dead body (they are the walking **spiritual** dead). This puts a whole new meaning to the expression "**get a life**". **Those who reject Christ do have eternal life as a spirit of Satan but will live eternally in a painful arena, much akin to death, without God. Not much of a life, would you say?**

4. Christ is the bread and water of Life: In John 6:27 Jesus says, " Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him. John 6:53-58 "...I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and unless you drink of His blood, (this is all stated in a figurative sense and not literal), you have no life in you (you are spiritually dead). Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood **has** (not will have) eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day." There was a time when some, probably pre- millennialist who insist on interpreting Revelations literally, accused Christians of being cannibals because of a literal interpretation of this scripture. What Christ is saying here is that we must be consumed by (eat) His words. Participate in the shedding of His blood even as if drinking His blood. Christ obviously felt strongly that His followers were to take seriously His Sacrifice and experience it in some meaningful way without literally dieing a physical crucifixion as He had.

He then leaves us with the commemoration ceremony of His last Supper as the only act of worship, which He personally sanctified. It's an act that ironically few congregations of the Denominational world celebrate on every first day of the week as it was done by first century Christians. They do it when convenient and at their pleasure. Christ, referring to Him self as the bread of life, is certainly a parallel to the Manna provided to the Children Of Israel in the wilderness as their bread and sustenance, which is once again an Old Testament pointer to the coming Christ. Our lesson here is that our blessings are of God, His Word, His Son is our manna from Heaven. Eat it for everlasting life. In Revelations during one of John's dreams of Jesus, Jesus tells John to "**eat a little book**". John, in his dream eats the book. Sounds unreal but remember, anything can happen in our spiritual dream and it's the spiritual meaning that is most important here. It's as saying, God's working in our lives must consume us, put Him first in all things. Consume His Word. "Eat the Book." Rev. 10:9.

5. Sometime being late is on time: A noted public speaker and friend told of his habit of arriving just on time to take the podium. His purpose was to increase anticipation on the part of the audience, in their questioning, "**Where is he?**" and secondly, to better hold their attention after he takes to the podium. Some may even be sitting there anticipating that if he walks in late he will fall flat in his speech because of being late. If you will remember on the occasion of Lazarus's death, Martha sent for Jesus to come while Lazarus was sick and near death. Christ delayed 2 days before coming to Judea. When he met Martha on the road, she said, "Lord if you had been here my Brother would not have died." Lazarus had been dead in the tomb now three days. Christ told Martha, "Your brother will rise again." Christ went to the tomb and called Lazarus out and Lazarus rose from death and walked out of the tomb as a whole man. So why did Christ wait three days to come? That He, Christ, may be glorified. John 11:4 People who witnessed the resurrection would be edified (built up in faith). John. 11:15. Christ's' love would be magnified, clearly seen. John 11:33

We often lack patience in waiting on the Lord to act and answer prayer but we may rest assured that when God answers prayer it will be on His own schedule, own time, for good reason, and for His purposes. Some will ask, and it represents yet another repetition on the writers part and for reason, "Why did God wait so long to bring Christ to earth to redeem man from his sin?" For example, when God noticed that all men of His creation was full of sin except Noah and his family, why did he not bring Christ to redeem man then or just

after the flood when all things started new? If you will remember, even knowing that God had just destroyed all man because of sin, except Noah's family of eight, Noah just after getting off the ark sinned after getting drunk. Man was not ready and had no thought that he needed redemption and a savior. God had to show man, that man could not save himself; that a divine savior and sacrifice was the only way. It took thousands of years of experiencing sin for man to finally realize that without a Messiah, sin could not be covered or hidden from God. Gal 4:4 Says, "But when **the fullness of time** had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman (Virgin), born under the law." Gal 6:9 says, "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (patience). Eph. 1:10 says, " That in the dispensation of, 'the fullness of time', he might gather together in one, all things 'in Christ', both which are in Heaven and on earth 'in Him'." This of course refers to **the last day of the earth, "The Day Of The Lord"**. We sing a song entitled " In His Time", a beautiful song. "Let us all learn to wait on the Lord", another great song; wait on his schedule. When we press on without God's will being part of our decision, we risk making grave errors in our lives, errors that we all later, as our lives grow to a close, can and do look back on with some measure of regret.

Look at our divorce rate today, near 50% young people. Go back to Genesis and other New Testament scripture and even in Jesus' direct teachings and you will know that it is God's original intent that one man has one wife for a lifetime. Divorce, except for adultery (Matt 5:32), is not in God's will and is a sin. Not unforgivable, but a sin nonetheless that creates everlasting pain for yourself, others and God.. The point is, marriage a contract between a Man and a Woman, is a serious decision that must have God in the center of it. If we go head first into a marriage without God's will satisfied, we are doomed to a failed marriage and a pain that will never go away. Don't forget also that we discussed before, that there is strong scriptural evidence that God considers that when a man and woman commit the consensual sexual act, they are then "one flesh"(joined) or married in God's eyes. Premarital sex is what we call it, but how it really must be labeled is "**the sexual act of marriage**". This is where the world has made a large and grave error. When you join your body to a member of the opposite sex consensually, you have chosen your "one and only". Think about it! Divorce, in the New Testament scriptures of Mark 10:6-12 teaches that two divorced people must remain without another partner. Why? Because God still considers them married and that they could reconcile. If, in a separated state, or under man's law, a bill of divorcement has occurred, if either one commits sex outside of the relationship of the original contract of marriage, whether they have fulfilled a manmade law of divorce or not, God considers that person an adulterer and the

one who committed the sexual act with her/him has also committed adultery. They have adulterated an otherwise sanctified by God contract of marriage. Such an adulterous act would bring into play **a scriptural and spiritual divorce** from the original spiritual contract by the, **man or woman, who had remained faithful to the contract by not participating in sex with another party.** This, and or the death of the other party are the only case in which God would sanctify **a remarriage.** Divorce and remarriage are very serious, misunderstood and misapplied subjects today in many Churches. Improper application of some of the Scriptures has driven a wedge into many church family relationships and should be shameful to many Church leaders. At the same time, this writer is very mindful that this interpretation of God's word is a subject that not everyone can agree. It is the writer's prayer that you will digest God's word on this matter and prove or disprove opinions stated herein. For the one who ignores these principals and remarries without regard for there original contract of marriage (in the absence of adultery) have no doubt committed a sin against God. **Is it forgivable by God?** The only unforgivable sin, as said earlier, is a denial of Christ or blasphemy. This sin of adultery, as any sin is forgivable as long as we acknowledge our sin and repent of the error. God forgives then and takes us back if we sin as Christians and repent. Some church leaders will say that one must abandon any resulting marriage and return to a single state to avoid a condition of continuing in a sinful relationship, which **they** say (the writer believes in error) is unforgivable. God's word does not support this theory in this writer's study and conclusions. Consider the sin of murder; can a murderer be forgiven without undoing a murder (which is impossible)? The answer is yes and if this is so, then why should one dissolve any resulting marriage because of error? To do so is to compound the error. May God help the writer see and understand in the event God's word is misunderstood or misinterpreted? Bottom line is that, yes we sin when we dissolve a marriage for reasons **other than adultery** and we should feel guilt for it, guilt which calls for repentance. As a Christian we have the sacrifice of Christ for our Sins and through His name and God's grace, we have access to forgiveness. With that forgiveness, God accepts us back into His graceful loving relationship and we **should continue from where we are within any marriage we find ourselves in, and without guilt.** Go and sin no more as Christ told the Samaritan woman who had five husbands (been married five times or had sex with five men; (although specific detail is not given) and the one she was living with presently was not her husband. Knowing all this we can avoid the mistakes of this sin from now on. But listen young people. Why not avoid this sin altogether and avoid having to look back in your older age and see all the sin you have been involved in. Sin can be forgiven but is ugly and hurtful to look at. Why not avoid poor decisions while you are yet young; make good

decisions early on and avoid the hurt and regrets. The Title of this book is “Bad to the Bone”. We are all sinners, bad to the bone and if we can acknowledge that and ask God’s forgiveness we will be well on our way to being redeemed through Christ sacrifice.

To Church leaders who have determined that men or women in their midst have committed a sin in divorce for causes other than adultery, God's word is in agreement but where your wisdom fails the test is in a lack of understanding that the sin is forgivable; that God forgives sin and takes us back into his family when we confess our sin and repent. They also possibly misunderstand God's definition of adultery and marriage itself and if they honestly, prayerfully and from their heart looked at the sin of adultery in the context of God's definition of marriage, they just may find that they and many of their leaders around them who make decisions to disfellowship Christians for adultery, are perhaps guilty of adultery themselves. If God's definition of marriage is the “joining” of ones self (having Sex with another) and a person, church pastor/elder **was not a virgin** when one finally married under **man's law**, then his second marriage in God's view (the one executed under man's law) would to God be adulterous; the act of sex with the first woman was his “one and only” sanctified marriage, in God's eyes. Remember young people and all; God created man first then woman as a helper and told them both to **join** themselves together as one flesh (have sex) or marry (**marry means “to Join together in sex” consensually**), reproduce or multiply, leave your father and your mother. Gen 1:28.Gen 2: 24. We should not make the mistake of thinking that joining ourselves to a woman means to simply hold hands, stand before a preacher or other state official. It means, **“to have sex”**. Why then do we not emphasize abstinence in our religious teachings to our young? Good Question. Why do we avoid the question altogether?

In Mk 10:6, the writer further clarifies what is meant by the word “joining ones self to another”. I Cor. 6: 16 Paul writes, “What! Do you not know that in joining oneself to an Harlot the two become **one flesh (married)**?” This scripture tells us plainly how Paul understood God's definition of the sexual act as an act of marriage. He considered a joining of man and woman as one flesh/ married. Today we find it acceptable by many in modern society, for two to live together before marriage and to have sex, presumably to determine if the couple is compatible. This customs is fraught with danger in that the temptation for sex is overwhelming for most and before a mental commitment has been made. Just remember; even though you have not committed to satisfying man's law of marriage, **if sex occurs consensually, you are married by God's definition**. When I hear a young couple who have been living together for several years perhaps come out and announce they are now getting married, I am sorry but I

chuckle under my breath thinking, "Hey you are already married". Under English Common Law in America, our legal system will even accept as legal marriage, the consummating act of sex or living together for a specific time in which the law can and does assume that sex would have occurred or that marriage was intended. Our Laws, even common laws, follow very closely the laws of God. **You will find it hard to find religious leaders of today in any church who will agree that the interpretation of this writer is correct in this point. Why? They cannot afford to acknowledge the truth. To do so would require so many men of God to acknowledge their sin of adultery and miss out on the sacrosanct extra money of conducting a made-up marriage ceremony.** Some were virgins when they first satisfied **man's law for marriage** and were thus married in God's eyes, once and for all time, to their first love and wife in their wedding night sexual experience. **Some, perhaps many, were not sexually virgin when they finally got married and lay with their lawfully married woman/man under mans law.** That person, Elder, Pastor or what ever, is committing adultery before God and against the first partner he had sex with, causing him/her to be an adulteress in God's eye and has caused the new partner that was lawfully married to be labeled adulteress as well. **To anyone so trapped, especially you Elders and Pastors who have disfellow-shipped others for adultery, are thus by your own interpretation of scripture and God's definition of marriage, may find yourselves in an unrepentant state of adultery in your own manmade marriage.**

Mothers and Dads shame on you if you **are not** teaching your children abstinence from sex before satisfying man's laws on marriage. Shame on our society that has grown to think it acceptable for two to live together before marriage knowing full well the spiritual hazards.

It's hard to expect young immature people to make wise Godly decisions on sex and marriage without our more mature knowledgeable input. More than likely some have made these mistakes early on as have I, not knowing any better and never being taught differently. Near the end of our lives we may learn of our mistakes and are burdened by many poor, unscriptural decisions, which become a heavy load of excess baggage.

Just recently, the airlines have begun charging for excess baggage, Guess what! Excess baggage in our lives has been going on long before recently and it cost! It cost us joy among many other things. There is even a physical cost. Consider the news stories you have heard or experienced where people lose their lives to murder or suicide over divorces, separated children, etc. Lets see if we can better lead our young in wisdom such that they don't find themselves stooped in later life under the burden of excess baggage, ungodly acts.

My wife is Chinese and several years ago she was going to China. Preparing to load her baggage, I ask her where her baggage was and she told me, “in the Bedroom closet.” There I found one small backpack. When asked where her other bags were, she replied, “have you ever heard of **washy-washy**?” I could not believe she could get enough clothes in that one small bag for a two-week trip to China. The good news for us is that, yes we do make mistakes (they began with Adam and Eve) and we end up with too much baggage. God though has shown and provided us a way to rid ourselves of excess baggage and that is through acceptance of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. Matt 11:30 says, “ for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” It is the greatest gift of God, Christ, His Son who died on the cross for our Sins and Baggage. We get into Christ through Baptism where our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ (**washy, washy**). Even better news, and this is one of my wife’s reasons for packing light, is that you don’t have to go through baggage retrieval (hell) upon landing but go directly to the departure level with carry-on luggage in hand to meet God, or whom ever is picking you up on the departure level without going through baggage claim; that’s the advantage of traveling with just your carry on bags (no check in baggage). How great is that! Well we have covered a lot of ground on the subject of waiting on God’s schedule and doing things His way have we not, and covered a very important side bar lesson as well.

Acts

The Acts should be studied in conjunction with Luke for Luke wrote them both and both are addressed to Theophilus, a devout man who probably supported much of Luke’s work. Acts tells more about Jesus and how he empowered His chosen Apostles and Disciples through the Holy Spirit to go and teach His Way, the Way of Jesus, to a sinful world. When we remember Christ’s words to Peter and His Apostles at Matt 16:19; “I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and whatsoever you bind on Earth I will bind in Heaven and what ever you allow (loosed) on Earth will be allowed in Heaven.” That is, Christ either showed or told His Apostles and chosen disciples of the day what they were to teach as necessary to enter into the Kingdom Of Heaven (Which is “the Church”, Christ’s Church). God/Christ would back up what they taught. So now, lets not read this book hastily. Wherever we can find an example of one of the Apostles telling or doing something to or for someone who has believed in

Christ, confessed Him as Messiah and sought salvation, we need to pay attention to what is said and action taken by one in the process of being saved. The Book of Acts is the most descriptive of the New Testament explaining how man attains salvation. His plan is not set forth however in this one book although it does include most all examples of individuals being saved in God's New Way.

Remember, that Christ ministry did not span but a few years and the book of John tells us that if everything that Christ did (or perhaps said) were written down, "I suppose that all the world would not hold books." John 21: 25 Some may say, it's hard enough to accept Christ's words, much less all these other mere men, but really, were Christ's chosen Apostles mere men. Were they not especially blest being in the presence of our Lord for several years? Of course we have read II Tim 3:16 which tells us that all scripture is not of private interpretation but of inspired men of God. So, yes, we must then have faith that those men who walked and or talked with our Savior were inspired by God, His Son and His Holy Spirit and were something more than, "mere men". Without this faith, we might as well forget the Bible and go to the library and check out a good novel. We can be sure (have faith) that the writers of the Holy Scriptures of Old and New Testaments were inspired to portray God and His Son accurately and reverently. How about after Christ left them and ascended into Heaven? He did as He promised, sending the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide them and us in truth. It's true that many of those disciples who had been following Him, threw up both hands however and left their calling to follow Him. Many thought that Christ was here to conquer all of His and their enemies and to establish an earthly Kingdom and sit on an earthly throne. When He did not do this in the way many expected, they had no interest in continuing His work. Even today we **have a majority of religious people** who expect Christ to return and to reign 1000 years here on an earthly throne. They come to this conclusion from interpreting Revelations, Daniel and Ezekial, literally rather than figuratively or symbolically, as it should be. Scripture that discusses the end times leads us to believe there will be many who come calling themselves "the Christ" and we must prove them before following them. We have said it before, guess what; All the many who expect Christ at His second coming and last coming to reign on earth for a 1000 years, stand a very good chance of rejecting the true Christ on His second coming. When you read Revelations correctly and understand the Sum of God's word you will come to know God's true plan for this earth. First of all concerning the end time. **We are and have been living in the end times since Christ returned to Heaven** after His Death on the cross over 2000 years ago. Next know that with God 1000 years is as a day, i.e., and we don't know how much longer we have till the last day. (II Peter 3:8) We are told that on that last day, Christ will **come as on a cloud and no mention is made of Him**

setting foot on the earth. We know that first the dead in Christ shall be taken up out of their graves and the sea to meet Him in the sky followed by those remaining alive in Christ (Christians). The remainder, those without Christ, every knee will bow and acknowledge Christ as Lord and “**be saved**”. **No, No, No!** **No, they will be judged guilty of sin.** Romans 14:11 Their sentence is decided. They are thrown into the lake of fiery brimstone to live, yes, an everlasting spiritual life of torment. Some speak of a battle called Armageddon. Look carefully in Revelations; there are those seemingly gathered for this battle, but **there is no battle**. God destroys and cast the lot into the fiery lake **before any Battle begins**. That's the great news for the Christian and **hell for nonbelievers; the battle is won before the war begins.**

But let's return to those Apostles left behind by Christ after His ascension into Heaven. They had to be a little discouraged like what's going to happen to us. They went on to meet on the first Pentecost in Jerusalem after Christ left. Peter spoke and while they were there, suddenly a great rush of wind came through the area and just as suddenly their appeared cloves of fire coming down from above and lighting on each Apostles shoulder. Acts 2:2-4. They each were filled with the Holy Spirit and even began speaking in foreign tongues such that men of different countries with different languages understood the Apostles teachings in his own language. A miracle, and some thought them drunk but they assured their audience they were not drinking or drunk for it was not even the hour for such things. (You might hear someone say, “Well it must have been 5 o'clock somewhere!) It was not a mere babbling or some special language of God that some religious people call miraculous speaking in tongues and a special prayer language. No, it was a meaningful conversation understood by each, in their own language. That was miraculous enough was it not? If you will remember, Christ taught the Apostles how they were to pray what we often hear called “The Lord's Prayer” and there is no scripture that speaks about any special prayer language instructed on this occasion. Matt. 6: 9-11. God gave these powers of speaking in a foreign language and other powers, such as healing, to the disciples for the express reason of spreading the good news of Christ as the Savior of Man. The Apostles while they remained alive were also given the power to lay hands on other disciples giving them the same powers of the Apostles. This same Holy Spirit led them to write their words, inspired by the Holy Spirit for our guidance and understanding of Christ as the new way of God. We have copies of those writings today, transcribed again by Holy inspired men of God that put us in touch with the same Holy Spirit that imbued the first Century Apostles/disciples. There was only one other occasion, in Acts 10: 1-48, where there was a miraculous appearing of the Holy Spirit and that was on the occasion when Peter was led to the home of a Roman soldier in Caesarea

(Maritime) to teach Cornelius, a devout man, who had prayed for guidance to “the way” of Christ. Cornelius was a Gentile and represented the first time that a Gentile had been given access to the teaching of Christ Way. This occasion was special because it was God's initial step to open up Salvation to not just the Jew, but also the whole world (non-Jews/Gentiles). As far as we know there have been no other appearances of the Holy Spirit physically descending onto men. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit is not with us mind you and we cannot limit God. But no one has proven to this writer that God has physically manifested Himself to man in that manner since. The Miracle of the Holy Spirit inspiration within the words of our Holy Bible is grand and miraculous enough and we can have faith that through it we have access to the Holy Spirit of God without flames of fire and rushes of wind.

Looking back at Cornelius's conversion we see several things. One is that first, Cornelius had heard of Jesus and His way and wished to know more. He Prayed to God as he understood him and while generally God does not answer the prayer of the non-believer, He does hear one who prayerfully seeks Him. That does not mean that just verbally “**calling on God**” will save you but calling on God will have the effect of leading you to the obedience of repenting and confessing Christ as Savior (which likely occurs as you call on God) and finally following Christ in the immersion of Baptism wherein **you put on Christ**. Notice that a lot took place between Cornelius's prayer and His eventual conversion. First Peter is called and brought to Caesarea. He taught Jesus (Cornelius heard the Word preached) and as he did, a miraculous appearing of the Holy Spirit came to Cornelius. But that was not the end of the matter. Then Peter asked, “Is there any reason that one can think of that this man should not be baptized?” Some today would resound, he is already saved when he believed or the Holy Spirit already baptizes him. He does not need water baptism! But, there was no reason or objection so Cornelius and His household were then baptized “**In the name of the Lord**”(**by the authority of the Lord**) before Peter was caught away. Note that Peter was not “caught away”, nor was his job finished until he had completed God's Will of baptizing Cornelius. (As was said at Christ baptism, “**to fulfill all righteousness**”) We find on Pentecost there had been 3000 converts baptized. Baptism, we find in all of the examples of one being saved in the New Testament is the last step of one being saved. It is the last act, which places a believer in touch with the saving blood of Christ, offered as a gift of love and through the Grace of God. Many will say, and base their theology on the fact that Cornelius was saved at the point where **he “called on God” or where he “believed” or having received the “Holy Spirit”**. There is no evidence that this is true. Nor can we say Baptism alone saves you. **Christ blood, his death burial and resurrection, his sacrifice saves you**. The other

items are essential steps however creating a timeline to **when you reach, come in contact with, Christ saving Blood**. It is “**when**” you put on Christ in Baptism that you enter **into** the New Covenant with God that is different from the Covenant God had with Abraham, Jacob and Moses and his Chosen people of Old. We must grasp the fact that **Christ himself is the New Covenant**.

Putting Christ on like a suit of clothes places us in the new covenant with God and marks the point in “time” whereby we are in Christ and saved. We need to stop arguing about **what saves us** and pay attention to our **obedient steps** toward God in this carnal world. The argument of what saves us (**the blood of Christ**) should be a unifying point and not a point of division. Let's make another point here. Cornelius was referred to as a good and devout man. Good and devout men and women today are calling on the name of the Lord for salvation. They hear God's words from pulpits, read it from their Bibles, they approach God in prayer, they truly believe in Our God, the Christ and the Holy Spirit. They are in touch with God's Holy Spirit and respond to it by calling on His name. For some who don't respond to the Holy Spirit and Obey, it may be a disturbing experience and others who obey the Holy Spirit and follow it's calling toward obedience, even to Baptism, it is Comforting. 1st Peter 3:21 says, “... baptism doth **now also** saves us..” Baptism is our putting on Christ, our new covenant with God. It seals us unto God and the only way one can become unsaved is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit or deny the Holy Spirit. Matt 12:31,32.

Central to the Book of Acts is the Birth of the Church of our Lord, the Church Christ died for. The Church became reality at the physical appearance of the Holy Spirit descending as clovers of fire upon the assembled Apostles at the first Jewish Pentecost after Christ resurrection. This is a picture of the Apostles immersion/Baptism of fire that John promised Christ would bring. This Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the only Baptism we have record of that the Apostles experienced although it is hard to understand why they would not have gone on to a water Baptism if for no other reason than setting the example and they probably did. But their special Baptism by the Holy Spirit (not in the name of) was most likely all they needed. It is the same Holy Spirit which Christ referred to as a comforter he would send to them after His resurrection; one which would comfort them and give them a ready recollection of all things which Christ had told them and instructed them. It is this Holy Spirit which we can have faith and accept as authority when we read and accept the Apostles writings as the word of God and follow their examples in Christian worship and living. The Apostles with this Baptism by the Holy Spirit are not then mere men but empowered men. They were empowered by the Holy Spirit of the Godhead. We often find men of God glossing over the words of the Apostles and disciples writings. Not so fast!

Again, lest we forget that Christ told Peter and other Apostles with him at the time, that what ever they bind on earth or loose on earth, he would bind or loose in Heaven. Is this not the reason that the scriptures tell us that Scripture is not of private interpretation but is Holy (Spirit) inspired words of God.

So This Holy Spirit appearance and baptism was a powerful event. It established God's Kingdom, the Church, and it empowered these Apostles with miraculous powers in order for them to spread the New Covenant Church throughout the world. Notice that **The Church, God's** kingdom was established and it placed Christ as its head and on a throne at the right hand of God. Please note again that we are talking Church as a singular entity. We are all too quick to refer to Christ Kingdom, the Church in the plural sense. Nowhere can we find in the Bible a reference to Christ Body, the Church as plural except in the context of Paul's letters to multiple congregations of the **churches of Christ**. Paul in the context of these same letters admonishes them to all teach the same things that they (the Apostles) had taught them. Also lets get over thinking of the Church as a building. It is not. The Church is the Body of Christ consisting of baptized believers. We are not the Church but are its members as the arms and legs are the members of a human body. A building where we, the members, assemble is a building and its assembly room is an auditorium at best and not a Sanctuary or a place of rest. We find our rest in Christ only. He is our sanctuary. It is nice and presents an orderly circumstance to have an assembly point that is comfortable and for convenience we call the building a church building. For as long as we understand that a church building is all that it represents, there is nothing wrong with using the expression. The Scriptures tell us to do all things in an orderly fashion. I Cor. 14: 26, II Sam 23:5 Doing things in an orderly fashion leaves room for all sorts of things we can do in our worship which add order to our worship and are edifying. Problems can even arise however from this license to add order to our worship of God as men we often begin to “**imagine**” all sorts of ideas to worship God “more pleasingly”. Often men then add items to worship, which were seemingly never intended in scriptural examples and directives. One of these is the use of musical instruments and even bands when simply singing as an item of worship is all that is described in New Testament Worship. Singing is definitely an act of worship in New Testament scripture but there is no directive or example of the instrument being used in New Testament worship. Then we hear from those who use the instrument; look, you use power point presentations for the sermon and there is no example in the New Testament about using it either. The fallacy of such an argument is in the fact that the power point presentation can add order to the item of worship such as preaching but is not preaching in and of itself. The instrument of music is another way, a mechanical way, to make melody whereas the scripture clearly describes **singing**

as “the” item or “the way” of worship that should be accomplished by making melody *within ones heart to the exclusion of the musical instrument*. This would logically imply that melody made with the instrument is not preferred of God in our worship of Him. In fact, despite David’s Old Testament use of His instruments of music, we have pointed out earlier that in Amos, his instruments were referred to as noise, with other implications in New Testament scripture that they (instruments) were in need of interpretation similar to speaking in tongues.

Is it necessary to assemble at all? Yes it is. We are told in Matt 10:20 that where two are more are assembled together, God/Christ/The Holy Spirit, will be with you there. And then in Heb 10: 25 we are admonished to “not neglect the assembling of yourselves together.” Why? For edification, building up each other, “so much the more as you see the day approaching” (the last day). This no doubt is why we experience a more faithful attendance among our elderly as they see their last day approaching. Then of course our young as well should understand and see that their last day could and often is tomorrow. Young people do not neglect the assembling with the Saints (fellow Christians). Your last day may be sooner than you think. What does that **last day** mean to us as far as His Church is concerned. Lets explore the Church its members and that last day and rest assured it is realized that much of the following is repetitious. What does it mean for the Church and you?

When Christ left this earth and ascended to Heaven to sit at the right hand of God as King of His Kingdom (which is His Church), His Church was left on earth for those who believed on him to cling to in faith. It was described as His betrothed Bride. He promised to return to earth on the last day, just as he had left, in the clouds, and retrieve his bride, the Church and wed her. Please note in your study that in all accounts of that last day, Christ does not set foot on earth but remains on His white Horse in the clouds. Instead of Him coming down to get us, He raises us up to meet him. Some will point to Revelations to say that Christ will return to Jerusalem and sit on a Throne there for a thousand years giving many a second chance to accept Him. **This literal interpretation of Revelations contradicts all other accounts in the Bible of that last day.**

Please study this point carefully. Read the Revelation account prayerfully and in the light of its apocalyptic style, the highly symbolic nature of its approach. The last day is just as it implies, the last day where all the dead in Christ are raised first from their earthly and watered graves, then those “in Christ” left alive next. All of those in Christ are to be taken into the Heavenly Kingdom, and those “not in Christ” cast into eternal lakes of fire. The Earth shall be burnt up and

destroyed totally (nothing left). The Battle of Armageddon never happens. The Devil prepares to do battle at Armageddon, but the devil does not understand. How many times have you heard of the Battle of Armageddon as if it will happen. **It doesn't happen; Get over it! God disposes of the Devils intent by destroying him before any Battle can ensue.** On this last day, scripture tells us that there will be a **wedding party for Christ and His bride, the Church.** All are invited but those that attend must be properly attired (have on their proper wedding party garments). Those not wearing appropriate clothes shall not be let into the party. (Mat 22:10-14) What does this mean? Remember we talked about those "**In Christ**" are believers who have confessed Christ as Savior, repented of their sinful nature, and, have "**put on Christ in baptism**".

Your appropriate wedding dress is all of these components to include Baptism. That is what this story tells you to **put on Christ as your wedding dress.** See Matt 22:12-14. If we equate baptism to wearing a suit of clothes it becomes quite ridiculous to imagine going to a wedding, especially Christ's' wedding, naked. For those who think baptism is not essential for Salvation, they may as well be naked and anticipate a possibility of being turned away at the door. From all scriptural references we must say that to be saved one must be baptized into Christ but we will not argue the point further here. Rather, we will leave it up to you to interpret and God to decide. It's left up to your study to read all the accounts of Conversion in the New Covenant. Read Acts 2:38 (3000 saved) Acts 8:12-25(Simon the sorcerer) Acts 8:26-40.(Ethiopian Eunuch) Acts 16:26-33(Philippian Jailor) Acts 18:8(Crispus). Baptism is the common last step in each of these conversions. Please note that. It also is apparently important to be baptized for the right reason or belief. Apollos was baptized the baptism of John the Baptist who baptized before Christ death on the cross, before Christ Church was established. His was a baptism of repentance only and not one of the authority, in the name of God, the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He then was baptized **again** in order to receive "The Holy Spirit". (Acts 18:25,26, 19:1,2) Many today are being taught baptism as a mere symbol which attest to their Salvation from their Belief. They are taught that they were saved the moment they believed and baptism had nothing to do with their Salvation. These believers **may** find themselves in the position of Apollo's, baptized without the Spirit or as a minimum, with the wrong Spirit. Are they saved then? **That's up to God. He can save whom he wishes.** It just seems closer to God's Will, displayed in His inspired Word, that one should be baptized for the right reasons given the example of Apollo's. Be prayerful for your understanding of the Lords instructions on this subject. Some will insist their baptism is/was not required for salvation. Are you willing to risk your soul that the act of baptism is not necessary or that your baptism is a mere symbolic act and not really required for

salvation? The writer has made a point of unscientifically surveying members of one denomination over a period of time and the majority **testified that they were baptized for the remission of Sin. When they were asked to make inquiry of leaders of the group which baptized them, they were all told in no uncertain terms that their denomination did not baptize for the remission of sin; that they were saved when they believed in Christ as their savior.** Some of those surveyed have subsequently been re-baptized for the remission of sin scripturally, while others choose to find ways to accommodate the theology under which they were initially baptized. Why? One could probably guess the answer might be that they just don't believe their God would be so particular or maybe they just can't bring themselves to the point of admitting they might have followed the wrong crowd. Most likely they followed parents who had become Christians under the same denominational theology as they had been baptized. To the later group it is hard to fathom that "Mom, Dad or grandparents led them to the wrong theology". The Author struggles with this later situation as well. It is easy to make one self believe that our God will hold **those who teach error** to a higher standard than those **who are taught and believed in error**, but that is not for us to say is it. It can be a constant prayer however and is. We will have to let God settle the matter. I, and you may take some comfort in knowing that God has foreknowledge of what honest hearts that have earnestly sought to obey His Will in their salvation would have done had they been taught the truth. God knowing their heart knows that if they had been taught truthfully His will, they would have followed. But then this rationale presupposes that God does not hold us individually responsible for our own decisions, choices, our own study and determination of truth. Our rationale hardly holds up in the light of the scriptures does it? Again, God will settle the matter. **In the end we have to "work out our own salvation" and that my friends means we best take responsibility for our own study and understanding of God's Word and Will on any subject.** **Phil 2:12 Papa Bear heard one preacher say in this regard, "don't leave your brain in the parking lot of the Church assembly".**

ROMANS

Paul writes this letter to the Church in Rome. When this Church was started and who established it is unknown. It was apparently a fairly strong congregation of Christians. At the time of writing the letter, Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea for preaching the Gospel. Caesarea was a grand Roman port city built on the Mediterranean Sea North of Tel Aviv/old Joppa Israel. The Jews brought charges to the Roman Governor that Paul was preaching a message that was blasphemous of their Old Scriptures and ask that he be beaten and imprisoned. Paul had planned a missionary journey to Spain and in this letter he is soliciting the help of the Roman Church to assist him in his mission. He also expresses the intent to visit this group of Christians on His journey to Spain. Otherwise the letter emphasizes the righteousness of God in Rom 1:16-17 and explains that all have sinned and stand condemned before a righteous God. Rom. 3:23. He emphasizes that only because of Christ sacrificial death on the cross do we have Salvation and stand righteous before our God.

Other lessons from Romans:

1. Adam, in Genesis, was the likeness of Christ in that because one man, Adam, and his sin, all mankind fell out of relationship with God; In like manner, all man can be restored to a proper relationship with God through the obedience and sacrifice of one man, Jesus. Through Christ Blood, “many will be made righteous.” Romans 5: 18,19. By accepting Christ Sacrifice, being baptized into Him, God, as he looks upon the redeemed, sees not our sin but only the pure blood of His Son.
2. We have studied earlier that Paul says that all are sinners and have fallen short of the glory of God. As Christians we continue to sin. The difference in the redeemed Christian as he sins, and one who has not accepted Christ as Savior, is that **the redeemed knows their sin and seeks continually to not be a slave or servant of that Sin**. Rather we determine to be the servant of righteousness provided by our God. We must have faith in that relationship with God. Many, including this writer, has at times become discouraged and have nearly given up on more than one occasion as one failure after another occurs, I tell you, “I am Bad to the Bone” and if it weren’t for Christ you can’t imagine how bad I could be! Romans 6: 14-17 “ For sin shall not have dominion over you... **do you not know that to whom you present yourself slaves to obey, you are that one's slave**

whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness.” (Emphasis added) So of what are we to be slaves? Righteousness. Romans 6: 22-23, “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to Holiness and in the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.” It is an important part of the faith, which God expects of us to not give up but have faith that God can, and will redeem us of that sinful nature we carry around in our very make-up. All we need to do is remain in fellowship with God, keep walking in his steps. Where or when we stray we are careful to not become slave to sin. We are repentant of our failures. To remain slave to any sinful path and to remain **unrepentant** is the very same as blaspheming the Holy Spirit, rejecting God's path and placing ourselves in danger of losing our souls eternal life. There is a Theology taught by some religious groups, which maintains that once saved, always saved. It is true that it is nearly impossible to lose ones salvation, but there is one unforgivable sin and that is blaspheming the Holy Spirit or denying the power of the Holy Spirit to save. To turn ones back to the Holy Spirit of God is to lose ones salvation. Christ himself said that you can deny me but never the Holy Spirit.(Matt 12:31,32) Paul talks a lot about his own struggle with sin. He says he continually is at war with the sin around him. Romans 7:19-25, “ for the good that I will do, I do not do; But the evil I will not to do, that I do... I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord, I serve the law of God with my mind but with the flesh, the law of sin. 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.**” The key thought here is to **walk with Christ** rather than a path of sin. It does not mean we are perfect in that walk nor do we never stray but it is not our habit to stray. Continue to walk, persevere in your effort to stay on Christ trail. It’s a constant battle between our carnal self and spiritual self and one that we must fight till our last day.

3. Romans 8: 28; “.. and all things work together for good to those who love the Lord, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Paul in his imprisonment and in his other tribulations as he spread the Gospel (good news) of Christ, describes the groaning and suffering that all Christians can experience in following Christ. Christ told us that he did not come to bring peace to men but to divide and he encouraged his followers to take

up their cross and follow him which is to say, you must be able to suffer much in following Christ. His Gift is free but there is a cost. If that sounds contradictory, consider that when someone offers you a gift and you accept it, you accept it knowing **that a cost was paid by the giver and in your heart of hearts, you know that you will return the favor with, yes, a cost.** Just as our giving feels good, with the right attitude in serving our God, we will readily see and feel the rewards of our service and giving. All the service, which we do in the name of Christ and the suffering we may experience in serving and giving, will work together for good. The trick is to realize however, that we may not see this revealed on our time schedule. Be patient and wait on God's revelation. You may not get to see the results in your life- time or this side of Heaven but you can be sure, you will reap the award for your faith and patience.

4. The context of Romans 10 is not to describe the complete steps to salvation. Baptism is not mentioned here as it is in other places. What Paul describes in Romans 10 are steps, which take us **toward** Salvation. Note the use of the word "**unto**" in Paul's text. Unto means **toward** something, does it not? Verse 11 of Rom. 10 states that "..whoever believes in Christ will not be put to shame." Verse 10 said that one believes "**unto**" **righteousness and confession is made "unto" salvation.** Now, It is true that in much of John's Gospel writings and a few other places, he (John) writes that if one **believes** in Christ he will be saved. In John's writings we must realize that his intent was not to spell out each step, which our spiritual mind follows in reaching the point where we are in touch with Christ sacrificial blood and are thus saved. John is not incorrect in stating that if one believes, he will be saved in that if one is given directions on the road to a place and "**he believes" in those directions and acts upon them, he shall arrive at his destination.** Rom. 10:13 states that whoever "calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved". Does this mean that if one simply lifts up his voice and shouts," Lord Save Me", then he is saved. If so then all this talk and examples of salvation in other scriptures stating that one should confess and repent and be baptized, is nonsense. Baptism, as we have said over and again is the final step in every example of conversion in the New Testament. I Peter 3:21 again reiterates, "**Baptism doth also now saves us.**" How many more times will we mention this scripture? **So, what does it mean "to call upon the name of the Lord."** **It most certainly means that we accept God's plan of Salvation for our soul, we believe in the Christ, we confess Him as our savior, we repent of our sinful nature and we follow Christ Into His death, Burial and**

resurrection by the Baptismal act that places us “In Christ”. Lets be clear now. We are not talking about what saves us; what saves us is Christ shed blood on the cross. We keep emphasizing this because it is the favorite defense of the believe only theology to say that baptizing does not save. Ok already, but it is necessary and Peter does say it, Baptism doth also save us. No, we are talking about the steps, which bring us to the point of contacting Christ saving power.. Who ever reads this little dissertation is surely going to ask, “Why does he keep going over this plan of salvation again and again?” The answer is very simple. Of all the words in the entire Bible, in the end, knowing, understanding and obeying God's ultimate plan to redeem man, to save him from his inability to meet God's standard, is all any person has to know in order to be saved. All the rest of the Bible can be learned over a lifetime and will add great meaning to ones walk with God. Some would say, he/she cannot be baptized until we are sure they have been taught of the virgin birth, about Moses and on and on. Listen again; we are not saved **by growing in knowledge**, but **“by knowing” and obeying God’s Will**. I had a young man working in my home recently and he proudly announced that he was going to start his Catholic confirmation class that night. The next day when asked how his class went last night he stated that they were delaying him to next months class. I ask him what would be the state of his souls salvation if he died before he completed his confirmation classes and was baptized (sprinkled). He said, that’s a good question and he thought he might ask it next time. I have not seen him since that day. Knowing God's way to Salvation and following His Plan is all we need for salvation. **The truth is, all the knowledge in the world will not save you. But the simple act of knowing enough to accept Christ sacrifice for your sins is the only message of the Bible that one must understand and obey to get “in Christ”.** It is the ultimate message of the whole Bible. The rest is salt and pepper, which gives flavor and is useful for our complete appreciation of God's plan and more perfectly follow His Way. Remember we started out in Genesis saying, if it were not for the sin of Adam and Eve, God would never have needed a plan to save us and there would have been no need for the Bible Old or New Testament or Christ sacrifice. “It all began because of sin.”¹³ This is a favorite saying of my favorite preacher and Pastor Wayne Dunaway meaning, had it not been for Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden we would never have needed a plan to redeem us. Our Sin is a reality however and as soon as we come to understand that and know God’s plan to redeem us we should not delay our obedience.

5. Chapter 12 of Romans has a flourish of verses, which depict the Christians life and what it should be and they follow:

- Romans 12:12, “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, Holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Now that is a tall order. We are carnal, physical people and live in a physical world. Yes, and God knows that. But He also knows that he created us primarily a spiritual body in His image (remember Genesis) and gave us a temporary physical body just as he did Christ. God expects us to Honor his spiritual image even as we sacrifice our physical desires (Body).
- Romans 12:9, “let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor (despise) what is evil. Cling to what is good.” To that we may also say, **“and know the difference”**. We may look briefly at Isaiah 5:20,21. “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.” Again, **“know the difference and seek the good, the light, and the sweet”**
- Romans 12:16. “Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.” The long and short of it is, God does not like a haughty spirit but values the humble attitude. Pray that we are not haughty with what we understand as God’s truths and constantly seek God’s divine hand in guiding us in His Way. (I must confess to being worlds worst at appearing haughty in my opinions regarding what I consider to be God’s truths. **May God guide me in His truths and continually humble my stance.** Amen.
- Romans 12: 17,18. “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, **live peaceably with all men.”**
- Romans 13:1,2 “Let every soul be subject to the governing authority for there is no authority except from God and all authority that exist are appointed of God; therefore, those which resist authority, resist the

ordinance (laws) of God and those that resist, will bring judgment on themselves.” What does it mean? If you speed, steal etc. and are not stopped by the police you have not escaped the eye of God and his justice. Verse seven goes on to tell us we must pay our due taxes as well. Bottom line is, as Christians, our faithfulness to God includes being faithful in our civic responsibilities as they are sanctioned of God and not contrary to His will. Notice the last few words, “not contrary to His will”. One must certainly understand God’s will to properly apply this, but when governments are definitely demanding obedience to rules that are counter to God’s word, then men of God must follow God’s Way first and foremost.

- Romans 15: 12,13. “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. A friend of the writer is fond of saying in reference to this scripture, **“It’s hard to cope when you have no hope.”**¹⁴ **In Christ we have hope.** Where is our hope if we have not Christ? We have no hope. To the “Brights” or Atheist, those without Christ, we must ask, where is your hope? What is your hope? We all need hope.
6. Romans 16:16. Paul says, “greet one another with a Holy Kiss. **The Churches of Christ** salute (greet) you. Now, I urge you brethren, take note of these who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine that you learned and avoid them. I Cor. 1:10, admonishes Christians to “speak the same things and have no divisions among you.” Today the religious world abounds with every kind of doctrine man can dream up. All say they are following the scriptures and we must let God be the final Judge of that. At the same time, we as Christians are given God’s Word to make decisions on what is or is not God’s Will. These divisions we call today, **“Denominationalism”**, We have talked about it before on other pages and we will not belabor the point except to remind that the 1st Century disciples gave honor to Christ in invoking His name in naming congregations of the Church. There is one other scripture, which refers to the Church as **The Church of God.** And this name gives preeminence to God as well. The point is, why on earth are we so determined on giving our denominations names, which do not credit God/Christ as the head of the Church. This one issue of divisiveness of the denominational world

reflects a split with the original 1st century Church which Christ died for and it all began when the Roman Emperor Constantine, with all the power of the Roman empire behind him, decided, “**if we can't lick-em, lets join-em**” and that's the writers words. Remember that previous Roman emperors had persecuted the first Christians terribly when they refused to honor Emperors as Deity (Gods). **This is the perfect example of how Christians must follow God when confronted with government orders contrary to God's Will.** Constantine, under the influence of his mother who had been drawn toward Christianity, led Constantine to honor and adopt the Christian Philosophy. In so doing he adapted many of the Roman empires and Greek philosophies, which were pagan in nature, with those customs and teachings of the 1st century church. The Roman Church became what is referred to today as the Roman Catholic (Universal) Church. Later, the Church spread to Constantinople and that branch was called the Eastern Orthodox Church, which was similar but had several differences as it does today. Now that the Roman Empire and its Emperor had its own Church, modeled as the Government wanted it, Christians would be drawn into the Empires model Church. Martin Luther was a devout member of the early Catholic Church. Until Martin Luther, a Catholic member, broke away from the Catholic Church in rebellion of its failures, it remained the preeminent religious body of the known world. The Catholic Church and the Emperor, had great powers over its people. Martin Luther's efforts, as he separated from the Roman Catholic Church, led to a great **Reformation** of religious doctrine. The new Churches formed during this period were labeled “**Protestant**” appropriately, for they were formed out of a **protest** against the Catholic Church. The resulting churches were later further labeled as **Denominational**, that is to say denominations or divisions of the Catholic Church. As churches are beginning to acknowledge that they are appropriately labeled divisions of the Catholic Church, many are quick to say that they are **non-denominational**, but saying it does not make it so. The only way one can make such a claim is if they are earnestly and faithfully restoring the Body of Christ, the Church that Christ died for and which is described faithfully in New Testament Scriptures. That is the Church which the old prophets foretold and which those apostles and disciples of Christ spoke of in their writings. The Church and its congregations of people were formed and described throughout the New Testament writings. Any Church claiming to represent Christ Body today must be a **restored** (Not a Reformation of the Catholic church) **Church**, faithful to the original Church described by the apostolic writings. God's Church does not need

reforming for it is and will always be perfect but It must be **restored** to its rightful position with God/Jesus as its head and not men to come anywhere near perfect. Congregations that call themselves churches can only approach the perfection of Christ Church and then only if they reform the church to its original design. Again their only hope is to look to the root, the original apostolic church congregations of the first century. As long as our congregations claiming to be of Christ look to the Catholic church for its roots to graft upon, they will always be an apostasy and far from the true Church. Their wedding clothes will be inappropriate and they just might get turned away from the wedding party upon Christ return to wed his Bride, His Church.

1st Corinthians

Corinth was originally a Greek city that was occupied by the Roman Empire. Paul writes this letter to the congregation of Christians there that had been in existence for some time. The Church was established there on Paul's second missionary journey. The congregation is apparently having difficulty with questions on marriage, lawsuits against each other, orderly worship, eating of foods sacrificed to idols, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection of Christ from the dead, plus collecting money for support of the work of the Lord. Paul's epistle (letter) offers encouragement to the people but he also is rather strong in his admonishment of them for there wrongdoing. The original churches were established in an era of extreme immorality, idol worship, worship of the sun, moon, seasons, etc. There remained, even among Christian converts, remnants of belief in these traditional forms of worship including Hebrew/Jewish worship. Earlier we discussed the Roman Catholic Churches mixing of Pagan traditional worship with Christianity. It also, as evidenced here, infiltrated the congregations of Churches of Christ/God in those days, and remains a problem even today in all our Churches/denominations. It was a constant battle which the disciples had with new converts; keeping error from creeping into the newly formed congregations of Christ's' Church. They had to continually encourage the different Congregations to continue teaching and practicing those things that they were originally taught and stop trying to reach back to old habits and

traditions. Romans 1: 25 implores that we should “worship the creator; not the creation.” (sun, moon, cows, our harvest, etc.)

Who was Paul? We have not yet discussed this man, his great influence over the Church or his rather auspicious beginning. It is a story that reinforces so many other stories of the Bible that show us that God often chooses the most unlikely people to be his leaders. Paul was from the beginning, born a Jew, from Tarsus of modern Turkey and highly educated by Jewish teachers of that day, including a very prominent philosopher and teacher of the time, Gamaliao. He was extremely zealous in his religious and philosophical ideas. As a Jew his zealousness eventually led him to persecute Christians, accusing them, as so many Jews did, of blasphemy and hearsay against God. Paul's Jewish name was “Saul”. Saul was a matter of fact present at the stoning to death of Steven, a disciple, and facilitated his stoning. (Acts 8:1). On the road enroute to Damascus to persecute more Christians, suddenly a bright light blinded Saul and knocked him to his knees. Blinded, he heard a voice saying, **“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Saul answered, 'who are you?’** The voice said, **“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But, rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared unto you for this purpose; to make you a minister and a witness of both the things you have seen and the things which I will yet reveal unto you.”** Jesus told Saul to go into Damascus and find one named Aninias. His friends that traveled with him led him there blind. Aninias removed Saul's blindness and commanded him to call upon the name of the Lord and be baptized for the remission of sin. Acts 22: 6-16 describes these events.

Remember when men had a direct encounter with God their name was typically changed. Remember Abram was renamed Abraham, and Jacob to Israel. Saul, after his baptism, was renamed by God, “Paul”. After Christ left us, his new covenant Church, those that chose a personal relationship with Christ were given the name “Christian”, first at Antioch (Syria). (Acts 11: 26) It's a name we should be ready to defend and be proud to wear. Some prefer to call themselves Baptist or Episcopalian, Catholic, etc. Please, wear the name Christian first and foremost. Some will say, “what's in a name”... there is a lot in a name... call a child by any other name than his given and see if he/she does not correct you in a flash and Christ said, such as these (children) are the Kingdom of Heaven. Lets list now some of the key issues the Corinthians were having in their congregation. We will find many of them remain issues in many of our Churches today.

1. I Cor. 1:10,13 “Now I plead with you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same things and that there be no

divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.... is Christ divided?" What a plea against denominationalism! One has to wonder and question, is it possible to have no divisions over our thoughts and interpretations of scripture? Is it wishful thinking? For immortal sinful men it is asking a lot and is probably wishful thinking. The best we can hope for probably is prayerful thinking that hopefully is better than wishful thinking. Let us know for certain, however, that it is God's will that we have no divisions among us or **no denominations among us**. It is a sinful state to be divided against our Lord. When some ask you what denomination are you, hopefully you can answer truthfully and quickly; I am of no denomination but am simply a "Christian" seeking the church of our Lord. That is a noble enough goal and you can be assured if you in Prayer are truly seeking His Church, you will find it and finding it will be as finding a treasure. Believe it, the Church of our Lord is not on every street corner. It is perfectly described in New Testament Scripture. **Search for it and don't settle for the biggest parking lot filled with cars, the one with the best band or most activities, the one with raised hands in unison swaying (maybe dancing) with the musical instrument.** Get a grip, that's not what it's all about, sorry.

2. I Cor. 3:1-3. "And I brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal people, as to babes in Christ. I fed you milk and not solid food, for until now you were not able to receive it and even now are still not able; for you are still carnal..." We all start out as babes in Christ. Fortunately all we need is the milk of God's word to be saved. That milk is simply, as we have stated and repeated over and again, **believe, confess Him, repent and be baptized into Christ. Get this right and it is all you need for salvation. Hopefully the meat of God's word at some point you will be able and wish to incorporate and it will add to your Godly relationship, your happiness and productiveness in God's Kingdom.**
3. It's very clear that this Corinthian congregation had many new converts in it which were not well grounded in the truths of the Gospel as taught by the first disciples of Christ. Many were of Jewish background and probably did understand completely the Old Scriptures but much less Christ New Way. To become a Christian one does not have to understand every detail written as the Gospel of Christ. They only must understand and believe with obedient faith in the Christ as Savior and as the promised

Messiah, Confess Him as Lord, repent of ones sinful nature, and be baptized into Christ. This is ones milk. Other knowledge of the scriptures follow as meat and help the Christian to grow in knowledge, understanding of God's will. As the scripture and Paul implies, to feed new converts meat before they are ready would not be appropriate. However it is clear that new converts must be watched and fed appropriately, meat of the Gospel as they mature in the faith. To not do so means new converts may stray off on tangents counter to the will of God. Many may subvert the will of God as they revert back to Old law or perhaps Pagan traditions. Our leaders, Church Elders, Presbyters, Bishops, or Pastors have the responsibility of **overseeing** as Shepards the growth of our newly converted Christian babes. The point is we convert and build on the foundation of Christ but we must continue to build with substance to get to a finished product. The Corinthians clearly needed to grow lest they fall back to their old ways. I Cor. 3: 15-17; "If any ones work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet as through fire. This scripture tells us that the consequences of sin burn you, hurts you, but even as a sinner we will be saved because of the blood sacrifice of Christ. Now that is a great blessing for the one in Christ and a blessing that we should honor in our worship of a our God, our dedication and complete love of the Father, His Son and His Holy Spirit. **Have you heard it said by non-Christians that they do not want to be members of "that church" because of the sin they see in the lives of its members. Well that is unfortunate that one can readily see such sin in members of the Lords body.** "We are bad to the bone", that is reality. Christians are sinners just as non- Christians. The only difference is that those in Christ by virtue of their belief and obedient faith of confession that Christ is **Lord and savior, repentance of their sinful nature, and baptism, are saved by the blood sacrifice of Christ.** To further quote the previous scripture, ". Do you not know that you (Christians) are the Temple of God and that the spirit of God lives within you?" Also I Cor. 6:19; "You are not your own, you are bought with a price"(the blood of Christ) When one understands that he/she is the Temple of God and that the Holy Spirit lives within them, one should become reverent and humble in every way and shun anything which defiles the body. We should not neglect to feed our spiritual body with that spiritual food and "Living Water" which is the word of God. Look back at how the tabernacle, which they followed during their wilderness journey's and the Temple which was finally built in Jerusalem, how it was protected in very particular ways in order to prevent impurities from entering and adulterating the place of God. We must take

every bit as much care that our bodies, the Temple of God, is kept from the impurities of this carnal world. **Let's strive to stop abusing our bodies, the Temple.** We fail just as the Israelites did over and over, but that does not mean we give up in our efforts and it does not mean we lose our salvation unless we indeed give up and leave our Lord. When one outside of Christ looks at our lives, he/she will see hopefully a child of God redeemed of our sins. There must be some visible evidence to our friends that we are different than a sinner lost without hope and it is unfortunate when they can not see the difference.

4. 1 Cor. 1-10. Paul writing to the Corinthian Church, “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you...with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? While I wrote to you not to keep company with sexually immoral people, yet I certainly did not mean with sexually immoral people of the world...since then you would not be able to go out of the world.” A lot is at work here so bear with me. There remained in this Church an element, which was still influenced by some of the Pagan rituals of worship prevalent in religious worship of Idols, the Sun, Moon, and **even sexual acts of worship that was common in some Pagan circles. The sexual act of worship, immoral as it was, apparently remained a part of some in this congregation of the Church of Christ/God in Corinth.** Paul is instructing them, if you allow these members to continue this in your midst, eventually you will accept it as normal and right and will probably begin to practice it as well. This is a call by Paul to dis-fellowship those Christians (yes Christians) among you who practice Sin continually, and are unrepentant; those who are slaves to Sin whatever it may be. As Christians we are not to issue final judgments on anyone. Final Judgment is God's business. We are given however through Christ authority the responsibility of making **judgments** or decisions regarding God's Will and we are on solid ground in doing so, as long as we act on the truth of His word and in His name. As Christians and leaders in the Church (Elders, Bishops, Pastors, Presbyters) we are called upon to, if necessary to dis-fellowship in love, and prayerfully, those Christians who in unrepentance, sin continually and habitually. Paul instructs us to lovingly bring the errant Christian back from sin and into a repentant state, back into fellowship with the Saints. It sounds harsh and **many will say “who are we to judge?”** It is our God given responsibility to nurture and feed His flock

and when one has fallen, we are admonished to lovingly pick one up and restore him/her to the flock if possible. If we don't like the idea of making judgments then call it what you will but we certainly have to make judgment calls every day. **Our judgment calls are not final but God does honor our judgments when they are in accordance with his will.** Look at Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 6:2,3; "Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" How much more, things that pertain to this life?" It is important also to note that Paul is quick to say that not fellowshipping with those who are sexually immoral among you does not mean that we should **not** actively engage and mix with those who are nonbelievers **outside** the Church. Indeed we are called to witness to them the truths regarding their sinful conduct and to do this we often must be able to approach them socially even in their own environment. It does not mean we are to condone or, God forbid, participate in their immoral acts. Another way of saying this is that we are called to **hate sin but love the sinner.** Otherwise, how can we be a personal witness to those outside of Christ? How can we hope to win them to Christ if we do not witness and engage them socially and otherwise? Caution is appropriate. If we commit to them socially without engaging them in their sin we may stand condemned in condoning their sin. The world has come to regard our confronting sinful actions as "**evangelical**" in a negative way, favoring a philosophy that we should not challenge another's belief or interpretation of God's truth. So what do we do with Christ "Great Commission" to all Christians? Do we ignore it? Certainly not! We must lovingly engage the unrepentant sinner and their sin wherever we find him/her. That is our commission from Christ Himself.

5. In our society today where close to 50 % of all marriages fail, our young Christians and unbelievers as well need to understand Paul's command to married people. It should be a heads up message to every young person proposing marriage. We have already discussed how God defines marriage between a man and a woman; that is when they have sex (are joined together) God considers them to have consummated the act of marriage or to be one flesh. Once this sweet act is consummated, Paul gives us God's plan in I Cor. 7:10,11. A wife/husband are not to depart (divorce) from the other **unless** for adultery, But even if they do divorce, let them remain unmarried or be reconciled again as husband and wife. In Mark 9 we learn that those who divorce for reasons "**other than adultery**", are considered still husband and wife in God's eye and are

bound together. Consider what has been said here now. There is plenty of people today and in the past, which have had sex with perhaps several women/men before they finally go to a Court house, get man's license to marry in accordance with man's law which God approves and ordains to be obeyed; yet God no where in His word require or even describe such a procedure or marriage ceremony by a preacher or any other official. We are given a story of a wedding party or celebration where Jesus made wine for the party but **there is no wedding ceremony witnessed in God's word**; Just the act **of joining oneself to the other as one flesh**. It says a lot about keeping ones virginity for a one and only, one husband one wife for life. Not many have or seemingly can abide by this Godly will and as we all are sinners, many fall short. There are many, perhaps a majority, of **even Christians and Christian leaders today, which should face the truth of God's word and acknowledge their sin of adultery in sexual encounters**. This is a pretty meaty subject and is certainly not milk. It does require an honest insight, which few choose to indulge. God's truth is that divorce is not in God's will unless one partner adulterates the marriage by engaging in sex outside of the current marriage, i.e. taking on as one flesh another wife beside the first. Lets look at one mistake many make today that is reeking havoc with many religious bodies including the Church of our Lord. The problem of divorce and remarriage is rampant and is looked at quite critically as a problem in some religious sects, accepted as normal in some, and ignored as a problem in others. There is little consistency. Some churches will not fellowship those in their congregations who are divorced for reasons other than adultery. Let's state this up front; Divorce for reasons other than adultery is definitely a sin against God's will, no doubt. Matt 19: 9 The question is; **is it an unforgivable sin** if one is aware of his/her sin and is repentant of that sin. The answer has to be that **this sin if repented of, is forgivable**. But, lets not forget that one must remain one flesh with the **one wrongfully divorced** and neither can marry another without sinning as an adulteress according to a literal reading of scripture. God Considers them one flesh (married) even though they have complied with mans law in his courts. Matt 19: 4-6 So they must remain **one** in God's eyes and can at anytime resume their cohabitation as they remain one flesh (married) although under mans law they would have to get another marriage license and go through a marriage ceremony by a licensed authority to be recognized married in our legal system. But what if one of them has sexual relations with another while apart from the original party, divorced under man's law, which is likely to happen. Simple; **the party which had sex with another outside the original relationship, has**

consummated another marriage in God's eye and adulterated the one and only marriage God had ordained in the first place. Adultery has taken place against the first marriage, and the Party that has remained faithful. The innocent party has a scriptural right to divorce the other party under divorce for reasons of sexual immorality. Matt 19: 9 Remarriage within the Church of the innocent party should be scripturally allowed when and if they so choose. She/he no longer can be considered an adulteress in a remarriage condition. Remember now, a spiritual divorce does not mean she/he can go back to man's court and file for another divorce. There is no way that can be done. One would be dismissed from court, perhaps in laughter, attempting to get a second divorce from the same partner through man's court. There simply is no provision for it. Some religious groups do not want to understand the divorce/remarriage problem in this spiritual way, preferring to **lean on man's definition of marriage, divorce, remarriage and adultery and neglects God's view and intent on the matter.** Some church leaders will say that a divorcee is to remain unmarried forever even if their original partner subsequently abandons them committing adultery by remarrying another and if they do remarry, then they themselves and the one who marries her/him will also be considered an adulteress and dis-fellowshipped . So we have people, Christian people, being falsely accused of being adulterers and dis-fellowshipped from the church assembly by Church leadership. One has to quickly fall back and ask as Jesus did of those standing around asking him to condemn the accused Adulteress woman in front of Him; "Any here not guilty, throw the first stone." (John 8: 7) When he turned around they had all left. One might want to ask any one including perhaps church elders accusing one of adultery; **How many wives have you had, or better, "Do you have" and will acknowledge.** It reminds one of the conversations Jesus had with the woman at the well, Matt. 4:16-18. He told her to call her Husband to help draw the water. She said "I have no husband." Christ told her, "You are right you have no husband but you **have had five husbands and the one you live with now is not your husband.**" We can speculate about what exactly did he mean by this discourse and it is just as likely that Christ knew something about the sexual life of this lady, in fact she marveled at the idea that Christ could have known about such a private matter of her life. Could it be that she had had a sexual relation with five men in her life time (married five men, been joined (sexually) to five men) and was presently living with one man that she perhaps had not had sex with, are consummated a marriage with? Most likely this is the scenario and if so, it further clarifies how God looks at the

sexual act as a marriage. Young and old, if you have ears, hear the truth; if you have eyes see the truth and know that this business of picking carefully whom you will consummate a marriage with in the sexual act is not a casual occasion or a recreational act. It is deadly serious spiritual business. Many of us have made mistakes and sinned in this decision. God will forgive us as Christians in these mistakes as long as we are repentant but that will not take away the pain others nor the pain we face for a lifetime in this carnal world. Sin, even forgiven, hurts. Choose your partner carefully and prayerfully for it is a lifetime decision. Leaders and overseers of the Churches, consider carefully your understanding of God's definition of marriage, divorce and remarriage, sin forgiven and un-forgiven. These issues can tear a Christians heart and if in your knowledge you wrongfully make decisions, pray for your forgiveness, as we all pray for our overseers. You have a grave responsibility. Our prayers are with you on this matter. I am sorry for once again covering this subject that has caused others and me no small amount of heartache within the Church of our Lord. Perhaps I added some understanding in covering it a second time.

Not to confuse the issue, we will mention here briefly that there is one other view on this matter that has gained credibility although it does not rely or confirm the writers understanding of God's definition of marriage as the consensual sexual act. **Rather it recognizes man's marriage ceremony as the marriage moment and not defined as the sexual moment. It defines a marriage adulterated not only as sex outside the marriage but any act which desecrates the trust of either parties vows to the other. This could include for example physical and emotional abuse of either party.** Their rationale relies on scripture which points to God considering the Israelites lack of faith and their turn toward idols of Canaan as an act of adultery. See Jeremiah 3: 1 God in effect divorced Israel you might say until they turned in repentance. The proponents of this argument also conclude that yes God hates divorce and it is a sin but forgivable as any sin repented of. They also conclude that God's Word emphasizes that a couple should not dissolve their marriage or enter into remarriage if divorced for reasons other than adultery; It is not God's intent that a couple should dissolve any marriage. On the other hand divorce is not prohibited for reasons of adultery. One divorced for reasons other than adultery should remain unmarried **but red lettered scripture acknowledges also that not everyone can remain free of sexual sin without reentering a marriage thus remarriage can be allowed in those cases, even after a failed marriage. The writer can accept much**

of this proposal but remains convinced of the earlier proposal regarding God's intent that the sexual act of joining with another is marriage. A common thread of both is that divorce is not in God's will and is sin outside of any act that adulterates (makes impure) the union. God's word allows that divorce and remarriage can happen under adulterous circumstances and should be accepted by the Church. If one has entered into a divorce wrongfully (absence of adultery) he/she has sinned the sin of Adultery. Recognizing this and repenting of the sin publicly however, one should be restored to the Church and not rejected by a congregation of God's Church as an adulterer or forbidden to remarry if they must do so to avoid the sin of lust after another sexually. Christ Himself states that one divorced for reasons other than sexual immorality should remain unmarried but not all are able to accept this. That is, not all and in fact few, are eunuchs and can withstand the temptation of sexual immorality. Matt 19: 10-11 Therefore the implication is that one should enter into marriage rather than commit the sin of fornication.

6. Paul addresses several practices, which had crept into the Corinthian congregation worship service, and Paul attempts to correct their errors. There was a dispute over whether a woman should have her head covered in the worship of God. Many said that she was to have her head covered while men must be uncovered in respect to God. It's ironic that this remains a question with some congregations of the Lord's people. I Cor. 11: 4,5,13-16; "It is said, every man praying or prophesying with his head covered dishonors his head, but every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered, dishonors her head for that is as if her head were shaved." Paul goes on to say in Verse 15 that; "But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her as a covering. But if anyone is contentious over this point, let it be known that we have no such custom nor do the Churches of God." Paul's instruction seems to be, let your conscience be your guide, for there is no command on this issue one way or the other. It certainly remains today a theocratically enforced custom strictly enforced in middle eastern Muslim cultures for the woman to cover herself literally from head to toe and while there may have been an old custom during the Mosaic age for some head covering for women, there is no

direct command for it in the New Testament Scriptures nor is there any instruction against it. Certainly if a woman feels more respectful while wearing a head covering in worship, then there should be nothing odd about it. I know of no worshipful man for example, who would enter into prayer with a hat on his head so we should not be surprised to see a woman preferring her head covered in worship. Still, Paul reminds the Corinthians, there is no command to cover the woman's head and certainly no need for a dispute.

7. Concerning the eating of the Lord's Supper which Christ Himself sanctified as an item of worship and was strictly observed by the Apostles/disciples and each congregations of the Lord's Church **on the first day of each week**; it seems that some saw the ceremony as a meal. It is easy to see how we as mere men could get this confused since Christ gave them this special way to remember His sacrifice on the cross and the reason for His sacrifice during the Passover celebration meal of the Jews. While this Passover meal had the specific intent of being a spiritual reflection meal, it too had become to many just another big meal to satisfy their stomachs after a long fast. Christ however made a special effort to separate His commemoration supper from the physical act of satisfying ones physical need for food. He sanctified it as a spiritual act of recognition of His sacrifice for the sins of men. Paul then says at 1 Cor. 11: 33,34, "Therefore my brethren, when you come together to eat this commemoration supper, **wait for one another**. But if any one is hungry, let him eat at home lest you come together for judgment..." Paul it seems is saying, listen this is a special commemoration ceremony not a meal. **Take the time** to reflect on each item of the meal for what it means, the bread representing Christ broken body and fruit of the vine, His blood shed. Some have interpreted this to mean that all should eat the bread and drink the cup at the same time. The larger point is it is a respectful reflective ceremony' which should be approached in the Spirit of worship and not as an opportunity to eat a meal.

- One discourse, which Paul had with the Corinthians is misused today to justify the divisions/denominationalism we have in the churches we see around the world and discussed at length earlier. 1 Cor. 12: 12,13; "for as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, so also is Christ. For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and all have been made to drink of one Spirit. The message and its context tells us that Paul is not advocating different theologies or faiths of different religious entities all

being part of one Church or body or one spirit; far from it. He is saying that we all have different talents and different callings but we are all part of one body, one Church with many members. One cannot tie Paul's discussion to an advocacy of divisions within God's Church if for no other reason than the numerous times that the Apostolic writings admonish us to all speak the same things concerning our faith and to remain faithful to those things they first taught. The denominated theological world maintains that it is virtually impossible for there to be agreement on Bible truths. No two can be in complete agreement on anything is their position. If it is true, and it often appears that way, we must never settle for that as the perfect will of God.

- 1 Cor. 13, Paul defines love. This is the most used series of scripture in the bible, used in marriage ceremonies over and over. It should be read often even after the marriage as it describes our more excellent gift. The last verse of 1 Cor 13:13, “. And now abide Faith, Hope, Love, these three, but the greatest of these is Love. Love is the most sought after emotion man enjoys and constantly seeks yet it is so simply defined. **God is Love**. But there is one problem. Both Love and Hate are so alike in that they are both strong emotions emanating from the same area of the brain and so it's easy for we humans to confuse one for the other. Notice in Duet 1: 27 where the Israelites complained, “Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the Land of Egypt...” Now it's clear that God brought them out of captivity because they were His chosen Nation and **Loved** Nation yet here are the Israelites interpreting God's Love as **hate**. How easy are the two to confuse. Be careful how you interpret these two very close emotions Love and Hate. “They are two peas in a pod.”(Authors view)
- Paul admonishes the Church at Corinth to do all things in an orderly manner in their worship and to look to the men of the congregation to lead. His instruction in this regard is clear. Except where certain items of worship are clearly delineated, the order of worship and or items that are used or added for the sake of orderliness is permitted. In his writings to Timothy later, he emphasizes that their women should remain silent in the Church. 1 Cor. 14: 33, “ ..for God is not the author of confusion for the saints. Women **of the world** have a little problem with Paul's instructions here even to the point of dismissing many of Paul's works. He explains the position in this manner; in God's overall plan at creation, the woman was

created of a man and not man of a woman (Gen 3:16). To the woman Eve, whom had deceived Adam into Sin, God said, “ I will multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.” The books of Titus and Timothy further describes the leadership of the Church as the domain of men and that women shall be silent in the Church. Certainly we must assume that the writers were directing women’s silence in the Church’s leadership and not in service to the Church. Many will point to examples rightfully, that indicate that women served the churches needs even as a deaconess (Phoebe) in one example at Romans 16:1. Women were instrumental in serving Jesus and His apostles during their ministry. These are true examples. Serving and assisting the leadership is wonderful work of women, deacons and any member of the congregation. We are all called to be servants of our leaders. Remember that the appointed leadership of the Church is the Elders. Their assigned helpers were appointed as deacons first in Acts 6. Appointing leaders and helpers was the orderly thing to do but it should never be that every member’s assistance is not appreciated and welcomed by the Churches leadership and that includes women. Women as helpers, even teachers of the children and other women were very important to God’s Church and they were not silent in this regard. Their silence was expected in points of leadership reserved for the Elders but there is no evidence that they were totally silent in their bible study/teaching, social interaction or any other service related endeavor. As a matter of fact, except for men of the congregation having input to the leading Elders as they make their leadership decisions, men too should remain silent also after a decision is made and support the Elder's decision. Women have input to the Elders through their Husband or in the case of widows, any man whom they entrust to represent them. So women are not meant to have sealed lips in the Church, but should after their input to their intermediary, remain silent in the making of decisions and after the decision is made, support the Eldership as we all should. This is God's orderly way of doing business within His Church. We should all, men and women respect God's orderly intent. We, and God, count on the men Elders entrusted to oversee our congregations, to never abuse their relationship, accept their leadership role humbly, confidently, prayerfully, in wisdom and with love. Concerning silence of women; one commentator said, Women have 8000 words per day that they must express. Men only have 4000 words per day. Now how can we men expect to keep our women silent! For the religious world today, we, and women in particular, should be happy and honored with the fact that Christ and His way

brought honor and a great respect of Women's service in ministering unto the Saints. Old Testament culture and tradition and in many religions today, especially of the Middle East, do not honor their women's participation as Christianity does. Christianity, in reality, should be seen as very liberating for women.

- Some were asking, "How are the dead raised up and with what body." 1 Cor. 15:35. Questions not unlike many of us have about what it will be like on the last day. At verse 36, Paul tells them, " Foolish one, what you see is not made alive unless it dies. The seed of corn is not seed which can restore life unless it first be dead and dry. The seed when planted then looks nothing like the living corn stalk that emerges and so it is with flesh." 1Cor.15: 38-47 goes on, "...but God gives it a body as he pleases and to each seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh but there is one kind of flesh of man and a flesh for animals, fish, and birds... so also in the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption and raised in incorruption. It is sown in carnal weakness, it is raised a spiritual incorrupt body. **There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body.** The First man Adam was **formed a living being** after being **created a spiritual being.** In like manner the last Adam (Christ) became a living spirit (after having lived as flesh of man and crucified)" The First man Adam was of this earth made of dust and he brought to mankind Sin and spiritual death; In similar fashion, Christ, a manifestation of God the Father brought mankind spiritual rebirth or spiritual life. Paul told the Corinthians at I Cor 15: 52 "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." No one including Paul knows how or if we will have a physically visible body but does know that we will have a body that is changed, different than the physical manifestation, will be incorruptible and immortal. We may just have to wait to find out all answers such as this but we can use our imaginations. Often not knowing some things is more exciting than knowing, is it not? Use a little common sense and imagine that if we were created in God's spiritual image then that image is what we should expect at our resurrection, whatever God's image is. In the mean time, be satisfied with your imaginations image. It can't be much worse than what we have to look at every morning in the mirror and remember that we said much earlier, **our physical image is a figment of our imaginations, so why can't our spiritual image be the same; a physical imagination. So, using your imagination to see your spiritual image should be nothing new. "Keep on trucking"**

II Corinthians

After a rather strong letter of I Cor., Paul writes another epistle, II Cor., as a follow-up with a more cordial tone. Some had accused Paul of being a little too strong in his first letter. Because of a growing challenge to Paul's authority in the Church, he decided to visit the Corinthian Church. Remember, Paul's leadership was questioned from the beginning, seeing how he had for so long persecuted the Church. But no one should have reasonably questioned his zealous and complete dedication to the Church of our lord and his leadership role given his personal encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus and his miraculous conversion to the cause of our Christ. His eventual visit to the Corinthian Church did serve to quiet things down a bit as far as his challengers, but the false prophets continued to spread their false doctrine and challenge Paul's authority. The author has heard even in the last two weeks of two women questioning the Authority of Paul's writings calling them disrespectfully "Pauline Writings." 2 Cor. 2:1, 12-14, 21, 13: 1-2. Paul told the Corinthian Church of the Jerusalem Congregation and its need of financial support, 2 Cor. 9:7. He encouraged them stating, "Everyone give as he purposed in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." Giving in fact has always been an act of worship as was the act of tithing (giving 10 % of all you made or owned in the Old Mosaic law). No one ever was able to obey perfectly this old law. It was another of God's laws that specifically showed the Israelites that they could never satisfy the law without Christ. Under the New Covenant with God through Christ, all of our worship, including giving, is an act of the heart not a physical percentage requirement. Yet, look around our religious world today and you will find preachers, pleading from their pulpits for a tithe as of the Old law. Indeed there then are many members of denominational congregations who are whipped with quilt from these pulpits to tithe. To those who lay this demand on their congregants it should be said, Shame! If you look closely you will find these flocks so flogged with quilt, yet there preachers, often have a diamond on each hand, their church buildings are what the writer prefers to call, "White Castles", many have Gymnasiums, some even have taken to establishing "Night Clubs/Social Clubs" in their basements, Praise the Lord!!!

Some of the larger congregations have a contribution on any given Sunday, in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. They have to hire the best qualified of money managers to manage the money. In most cases the churches have become moneymakers and one might imagine our Christ as he strolls down their corridors suddenly overturning their money tables. Again, let's be clear; there is nothing wrong with giving whatever amount that the heart leads one to contribute, but let it be from love and ones Heart and not from mishandling God's Word to the point of instilling guilt.

Galatians

Paul is here writing to several churches in a rather large province of Turkey called Galatia. The Churches of Galatia established during Paul's missionary journeys consisted largely of Gentiles (non-Jewish people). However, what remnant of Jews that were in the congregations did invariably, try to reinstate some of the old Jewish customs and Old Laws within the Church, especially circumcision. Paul writes to this element in Gal. 4: 21-26. " Tell me, you who desire to be under the Law (of Moses) do you really desire to be under the Law of Moses; do you not hear the law?" "..It is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bond woman (a servant) the other by a free woman (his wife Sarai). He who was born of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh (Not in God's way). He which was born of the free woman (Abraham's wife) was born through promise, which things are symbolic for these are the two Covenants (promises of God); the one from Mt Sinai (the old law of Moses) which is given to bondage such as Hagar and Jerusalem (which at that time was under bondage), but the Jerusalem that is of above, that is the Church which is the **new Jerusalem** that is of heaven above, is free and the mother of us all." **(Parenthetical inserts by Author for clarity)**This is the lesson that Galatians needed as it was allowing its Jews to influence it by insisting that the Gentile Christians submit to the Old Jewish laws requiring circumcision among other things. We have no less a problem today as our denominated Churches continually reach back to the Old Law covenant and try to impose its requirements on its members. Many do this in a subtle way while others are

more blatant. For example, a subtle way may include calling their meeting places sanctuaries versus auditoriums or their podiums, Altars. This may not seem like a big deal, and it may not be, except that when they do this you will also likely find more blatant efforts to invoke the Old law because the use of these old terms is often indicative of there **misunderstanding of the New Covenant through Christ**. If one is living a life under Christ Covenant he/she will have understood that God no longer has a need for a manmade sanctuary. Christ is our Sabbath, day of rest and our spiritual sanctuary (place of rest). Hebrews 4. Under the old law, the altar was where sacrifices of animals and birds were offered to God. There were no more sacrificial offers at an altar since at least 70 AD when the last temple was destroyed in Jerusalem by the Romans. The act of coming to a place designated as an altar and prostrating oneself there in prayer reeks for sure as a complete misunderstanding of God's intent for an altar. There is nothing wrong in prostrating oneself in prayer anywhere unless it is done for the wrong reasons as in a public display. As humans it is easy to see where mankind has a predisposed need to worship before some object. Look at what Moses had to contend with after coming down from the mountain; the people had built a golden calf image to bow down to which displeased God and made Moses angry. **In prostrating oneself before any manmade object, even a supposed Altar, we come dangerously close to misunderstanding our relationship with our Lord.** To perhaps most, these simple traditions will not seem to be indicative of error but look closer and you will find numerous problems in understanding God's word in any Church congregation which misuse the Old scriptures in a New Testament setting. The Theology of congregations where these practices are encouraged, in most cases, are counter to God's will and word. You will come face to face with such theologies as Pre-millennialism, Tithing, neglecting the taking of communion on the first day of the week, dancing as an expression of worship, handclapping as a form of worship, and instrumental music as a form of worship versus singing and making melody with the heart (Eph 5:19). Watch how popular these assemblies are. Their parking lots are packed and why shouldn't they be; **it has to be very “entertaining”** and yes emotionally heart warming for the average human who naturally migrates to a physical act of worship versus God's intended spiritual worship. But some will say “but is it not better to get as many people as one can, for what ever reason they come, to expose them to God's will?” Getting great numbers of people exposed to God's will is great, but lets expose them to worshipping God for **Who he is (a spirit)** and not **What he is (what implying a physical being)**. **Spiritual worship** versus **physical manifestations of worship** is God's will. May God forgive when we fail in this. There is a lot of difference

in God's view and way. “..My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my way..” Is 55:8,9

Lets spend a little more time on the subject of music in God's Church. Singing is certainly an act of worship that God expects of us. It is an act of praise and teaching which comes natural to man. Ephesians 5:19 says, “**Speaking** to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Speaking implies to most that this act of singing is certainly a teaching act. It is just as likely in early history that while some may have sung, others may have chanted the words to a song. Today we often **pride** ourselves in the beautiful three or four part harmony which we are able to make with our canella voices and while this sound may intrigue men, **we can't even be sure** that God appreciates our prideful efforts to make melody with **the instrument of our vocal chords versus our heart (yet hopefully they are connected and are God given)**. In our study of the New Testament we find no mention of musical instruments being used in the making of melodies of worship in the Church. In the Old Testament we do find David, in particular, using the harp in his worship of God and at one point as he escorts the Arch of the Covenant back to Jerusalem, we find him dancing, scantily dressed, as well. Of course we find that one witnessing his charade criticized his arrogance. There is one writing, of Amos the prophet, that called David’s efforts with his harp “**noise**” and well it may have been since during that period, harps probably had no more than ten strings versus modern ones with considerably more. Originally, New Testament Church music was definitely Acapella and if you have ever heard the Muslims call to prayer in the Middle East, you may imagine that middle Eastern Christian worship with songs and hymns would probably have been more like the chanting of Modern Muslims call to prayer; half musical and half chanting. The Roman Catholic Church, its Eastern Orthodox Church, nor early Protestant Denominations used the instrument of music in their worship services for 100’s of years. Not until much later in our History do we finally find differing congregations adopting musical instruments in worship and now most could not imagine singing without an instrument leading them. It was John Wesley in his earlier years leading the Methodist Church who said, “I have no objections to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen.”(Clarke’s Commentary, Vol. IV, pg. 686) ¹⁵ John Calvin, one of the founders of the Presbyterian Church said in His Commentary on Thirty- third Psalm said, “Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, the restoration of the Old law. The Papists, therefore have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things from the Jews.”¹⁵ Martin Luther called the Organ “...an instrument of Baal.”¹⁶ (McClintock & Strong’s Encyclopedia, Music, Vol.

I, pg. 762) Charles H. Spurgeon, recognized as the greatest Baptist preacher that ever lived did not have instrumental music in his services at Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle, London England.¹⁷ (M.C. Kurfees, instrumental Music in the worship, pg.196) The sad fact is that denominations over the years have allowed the instrument creep into our worship of God and to come dangerously close to causing our services to be entertainment versus worship from the heart. Look around a congregation singing with an instrument and see the number who are merely listening versus actively participating with their heart. Any act of worship, it would seem, including singing, should be participated in by all in the assembly and not by a select few, even that of a choir. In most cases the musical instruments are so loud, especially with our new sound systems, one cannot hear himself or his neighbor next to him speaking to him in songs and Hymns as the scripture suggest. Your neighbor next to you should be teaching, admonishing, and encouraging his fellow Christians by... “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your **Heart** to the Lord.” Eph 5:19 In reference to sound systems; someone may ask are these wrong as well? The answer is probably not. There is nothing mentioned about the use of any devise, microphones, power point presentations, speaker systems which enhance our ability to hear better the word of our Lord. They do not represent specifically, items of worship but are merely items adding order to worship and we have specific instructions to do all things in an orderly fashion (I Cor. 14:40). To add a man made devise on the other-hand, (an instrument) which makes **melody mechanically versus with the human heart**, seems to fly in the face of God’s Word in which the heart is specifically mentioned as the desired mode of making melody and is thus **most likely** more acceptable to God . Then you ask, “Where does one come up with such logic to so boldly assume **that God may not accept our outside instrument in His worship?**” Well, we know that Christ coming fulfilled the Old law but we are told that the Old Testament writings remain as a schoolmaster and are for our learning (Gal 3:24). So Look to Joshua 8:31 and learn. As Moses, the servant of God commanded the children of Israel, “as it is written in the book of law of Moses, **make an altar of whole stones over which no man hath lifted up any iron and they offered there burnt offerings unto the Lord and peace offerings.**” The implication is that God wished them to use **a natural stone, one that no man had tried to make more presentable by carving it with an outside instrument.** The New Testament’s explicit directions to make melody with the heart and the complete absence or mention of using any manmade device seems to be, shall we say, a “handwriting on the wall” which all it seems, should be able to see. Do you suppose that we need a Daniel to be brought forth to interpret or can we depend on our intellect, our heart, to read, see and understand

Gods Will in this and other matters? How many times in God's word do we find the statement, Let he that hath ears hear and he that hath eyes see. Truth is man is always more likely to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to any thought, which he has not proudly originated.

Now, having made such statements, this writer is not so bold as to think this interpretation can be used to make final judgments on anyone who interprets differently God's Will on this or any other subject. Final Judgment is God's but as said before, as Christians God expects us to search the scriptures and work out our salvation. (Phil 2:12) Many are encouraged by Mk 9:41 where Jesus says to the Apostles when they reported that some were baptizing in His name across the Jordan. "**... for he that is not against us is on our part, for whosoever shall give you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ, verily I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.**" There are many who are true lovers of the Lord's way and are seeking to please Him as they understand His Will and Word. We have to believe then that even those who use instruments of worship or in our eyes or in God's eyes fail in some point of worship, they do not lose their reward. So please God, help us to love all those who are seeking God's will and an eternal home with our Lord and pray that we all attain a home in heaven as brothers and Sisters with the same faith in one Lord. May God in His infinite wisdom be our Just and Loving judge in all these matters? That's another way of saying to you who believe otherwise than the Author, **Bless your heart**". Amen.

Ephesians

The Church at Ephesus was on the Southwest coast of what is now the country of Turkey. The letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, written by Paul and Philemon are Epistles (letters) written by Paul from a Roman prison. He was imprisoned for preaching the Gospel of Christ which most of the Jewish people considered counter to their Old Law. Of course the teachings of Paul and all the Apostles were far from being counter to the Old Covenant but indeed a fulfillment of the entire Old covenant. We have to remember however that while the Old Scriptures were written down and available over many years as the

recorded Will of God, New Covenant promises were not yet in written form as is our New Testament Scriptures today, rather, the promises of Christ redemption was passed verbally and in the form of letters (epistles) of instruction by those men who walked and or talked with Christ himself. These Epistles were written to the different congregations, which accepted Christ as The Messiah, Son of God and redeemer of man. They were letters of encouragement, and correction and were passed from one congregation to the other and read in their assemblies. When we read in the New Testament a writer referring to “scripture”, the writer we must assume is referring to Old Jewish scripture. These letters were not considered scripture in those days. Later these same epistles, actually copies of them, were recorded and became a part of God's Holy word reflecting his promises or New Covenant through His son, The Christ. We today claim the Old Testament and the Gospel writings as Holy Spirit inspired scripture. There were most likely many more letters written during this period of time but only these few copies were saved and recorded and included in our New Testament of Christ. We are blest to have them and should study and accept them as Holy inspired Word of God. Remember that Christ told Peter and the Apostles with him, “ whatsoever you shall bound on earth, I will bound in heaven and whatever you shall loose (allow) on earth, I shall loose in Heaven. (Mathew 18:18) I am sorry but I find it necessary to repeat myself on some issues. This is one; because so many try to pick and choose which apostles and disciples writings they will accept and is the source of much divisions in differing congregations. Christ told the Apostles before his crucifixion that he would send to them a Holy Comforter (The Holy Spirit) to give them a ready recollection of all that he had taught them. So, we must pay very close attention to what these special men write and speak. Make no mistake, it carries the same importance and authority as the red lettered words of Christ.

Let's look at some of the key thoughts of Ephesians:

1. Eph 1: 4,7. “Just as he chose us that are in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be Holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ. Christ to Him according to the good pleasure of His will. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace... **that in the fullness of time** He might gather together in one all things in Christ both which are in heaven and which are on earth **in Him.**”

2. We talked earlier about God's foreknowledge of our decisions and the direction we would take our lives. Remember, we were all created with a free will, a choice in our decisions, and the scriptures tell us that from before we were in our Mothers womb, He knew what our choices were to be. **Be careful now. Again this is not the same as some would say, we are predestined to either be Godly people or not. The only predestination we have in God is that God predestined us all to be His people, that is for us to accept Him as our Father and redeemer, Eph 1:3.** Whether we do accept him as our Father and redeemer as a matter of choice, **he knows beforehand but does not predestine that outcome.** It's strictly up to us as individual beings. Put another way; God does not randomly pull names out of a hat and say, you will be mine or you will be lost as a matter of His choice or "predestination". That would be indeed predestination and that is not the way God does business with us. God's plan of Salvation through Christ was predestined for all mankind but they (mankind) not God have to do the accepting. Got it! In Eph 1: 10, we read of "**the fullness of time**". In the fullness of time (**just on time**) God will use His predestined plan of salvation to gather those who have accepted His plan of salvation to gather the dead and alive in Christ, together into one place, Heaven. What a gift our God has provided, yet many refuse to accept this wonderful gift. Some accept it but never open the gift and that is a shame. Some accept it then calmly throw it away.
3. Some will say, "**Christ yes, the Church no.**" Those who maintain this principal have begun to call themselves **spiritualist**, rejecting any body calling itself "The Church". If you ask them if they are Christian you are apt to hear no, but I am spiritual. That is not an earth shattering confession. We are all created as a spiritual person. The important question that begs an answer is, "**in what spirit do you exist?**" Do they not understand that Christ died that His body would become a sacrifice for our sins and that His Body would become "The Church", a sanctuary for our spirits. Eph 1:22-23, "... and He (God) put all things under His (Christ) feet and gave Him (Christ) to be head over all things of the Church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all, in all." To accept Christ we must accept His Church and not neglect the assembling our selves with it. Hebrews 10: 25 After Christ ascended into Heaven to sit at the right hand of God as King of His Kingdom, the Church, He had promised the Apostles that if they would tarry in Jerusalem during Pentecost, He would send them a Holy Comforter (Holy Spirit), which would guide and strengthen the

Apostles in forming assemblies/congregations of His Church/Kingdom. The Holy Spirit was to give them a recollection of all that Christ had taught them. Christ Church was put in place to guide and protect us from the Devil until the end Day, the return of Christ to receive His faithful. The Church, which Christ leaves on this earth for a time, is referred to as "His Betrothed". In other words, He is engaged to the Church, His bride, to be wed upon His second and last return to this Earth. Upon Christ return, the picture is painted in God's word that there will be a wedding feast and all are invited to the wedding of Christ and His Church/bride. But listen to the story of those who came to a real wedding in Matt 22: 11. They came but in the wrong clothes. The reason and lesson from this story is; we must be properly dressed in wedding clothes for Christ wedding or be turned away. **What are those clothes?** It is those clothes which place us "**in Christ**"; those which mark you as the faithful of Christ, those that mark you as the redeemed of Christ, those who are saved through Christ and God's plan; Those who have **heard Him, believed Him, confessed Him as Lord, repented of their sinful nature and been buried in Baptism into His Name.** Gal 3:27 says "**as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**" When you have been baptized into Christ you have put on the appropriate wedding garment and will be admitted to the wedding feast and His Church. **Christ yes, Church no? You are kidding yourself if you believe this.** This philosophy simply does not hold water in light of the scriptures. You cannot have one without the other. Now, we perhaps all have seen some who have rejected the assembly of God's people for what may to them be a very valid reason and on close inspection, we may all have empathy with their position. **First**, they may reject an assembly because assemblies are conducting themselves in ways **contrary** to the ways taught by the first century Apostles who were empowered by the Holy Spirit to teach those things Christ taught them. This would be a valid reason not to assemble with a certain congregation. **Secondly**, some look to who they see in these assemblies and notice that these people are sinners, perhaps worse than they. **Unfortunately such an observation is wrought with error in understanding God's plan. They fail to understand that, yes, the Church is full of sinners and by design. The Church is for sinners.** The sinless have no need to assemble as a Church. Truth is however, there has only been one sinless and that is our Christ. **Thirdly**, and this is indeed a very unfortunate occurrence which we have discussed before, leadership (Elder's) of the Church reject wrongfully some who they consider as living in sin and unrepentant. If an eldership has determined correctly that this is the case and has made every

effort to bring the party to repentance before God, then such an action is scripturally based and therefore correct. However, Elder's can and do make mistakes and disfellowship what they consider as one living unrepentant in sin when in fact the party may be repentant and living not "in Sin" but reaping the results of Sin. One thing that many, including our leadership may ignore is that even when Sin is repented of and forgiven, we are most likely left with the scars of sin for our lifetime. The last thing one who is living with a deep scar of sin needs is to be rejected by fellow Christians. He/she of all people needs the encouragement of their fellow Christian sinners. That is one reason for assembling in the first place. **For the one who rejects assembling with those who reject him or her, Christ may say, Dust off your feet and find another assembly but don't neglect the assembling of yourselves together. God takes the repentant sinner back as redeemed, and we should have the same love and empathy in us and for sure the leadership of the Church.** We cannot expect one to undo the consequences of sin. Once it's done it's done, but God's redemptive powers through Jesus' sacrifice, can and does remove sin from God's view making the sinner righteous. If it can be removed from God's view then Elders of the Church must have faith and remove it from theirs. Many Elders self-righteously don't however and leave the errant one to wallow in the consequences of their sin. To the one who has sinned and has sought forgiveness of the Father; you must have faith enough to accept the fact that you are forgiven and then don't allow others **or yourself** to keep you down in the consequences of that sin. **Have faith in the power of God to forgive dust off your feet and continue in Christ.**

The only caution here in one leaving one assembly for another is that too often we accept an assembly of people who themselves have failed to instruct (Study) God's word and learn God's will. Because of our failing in this regard we end up assembling with people who are far from God's will in their worship of Him. They are merely another denomination of the Catholic Church of Old. We must know God's truths and follow His Will first and foremost and not that which is the most popular with man. Don't fall for any "ole assembly" that are doing what makes them "**feel good**" versus what is truth from God's word. If you are positive you understand God's will and the pattern of worship of the first Century Church established by those Apostles who walked and talked with Christ, then you might establish your own assembly and follow Biblical truths. In so doing you may establish or restore another assembly of Christ/God's Church. If you do this remember that you have taken on a great responsibility.

Do not find your self, guilty of establishing or **reforming the Roman Catholic Church as our denominated world has done. Rather be sure you are restoring the Church Christ died for.**

It appears from New Testament examples, the First Century Church assembled each first day of the week **first in homes** and it could be your home, and:

1. Prayed,
2. Taught, singing hymns and spiritual songs making melody in their heart (not with musical instruments)
3. Gave of their means cheerfully as they had prospered, and planned (again, this is not an Old Law of Tithe)
4. Preached and/or taught God's word and
5. Partook of the bread and fruit of the vine of Communion.

Avoid any other assembly, which may add any other element, which does not meet the described First Century examples. Man has added many things to His worship of God which **He feels** God would like, when in fact, if he acknowledged honestly, it is **for his own satisfaction**. What is taught in our assemblies must be garnered from the Sum of God's word. It is perhaps impossible to find the perfect assembly of people but, don't let that discourage you from seeking the perfect Will of God and His perfect Church, His perfect body of Christ. Eph 4:10-15 says, " He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all heavens, that he might fill all things for the equipping of the Saints (Christians) for the work of the ministry, for the edifying (building up) of the body of Christ (the Church), till all come to **the unity of the faith** and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. **That we should no longer be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting but speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into Him who is the head- Christ.**" Emphasis added by author.

6. On unity, No divisions (read as no Denominationalism): Eph 4:2-6 "...with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love. Endearing to keep the unity of the spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling. **One Lord, one faith, one Baptism; One God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in you all.**" Look around you and see today all of the divisive theologies. Is this what our God wants for us? No, our God

expects unity and in the end He will have it on that day of His second coming. One must expect that Church which He redeems as His, will be of one mind and practice those doctrines which were first taught as Gods way by the Apostles and Jesus Himself. Many will say that it is impossible for man to have unity of thought when it comes to Biblical interpretation of God's will and way and it would appear so. Many say that God will understand this and all Denominations who profess Christ as their Savior and follow Him to the best of their understanding, will be redeemed in the last day. We need to pray that this is so, but there is little evidence of this biblically. What does it mean at Matt. 7: 21-23 when Christ says, " Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven but he who does the Will of my Father in Heaven. **Many** will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare **to them**, 'I never knew you; depart from me, ye who practice iniquity.'" It sounds like Christ is talking about a large group of people here. Who are they? There was one occurrence however, when Jesus was teaching His way, when His Apostles came to Him and said, "Lord there are those over on the other side of the river teaching and baptizing in your name." Some try to justify the differing ways many teach Christ way, as something we should not concern ourselves with and perhaps this is true. Jesus told them basically not to worry themselves; "If they are not against us, then they are for us." (Mark 9:39) **It would be nice to know if He simply was saying that he did not condone errant teaching but if they were not teaching against His way then no one should worry about it and leave them alone. If the later is the case then perhaps errant teachers are not held responsible and are redeemed as well. How can we know? Well, if we take in the sum of God's word which surely includes the inspired Apostolic writings, we must consider all the writings of Paul and Peter as they admonish congregations and their leadership for allowing and teaching doctrine which the Apostles had not taught them from the beginning; we would have to intellectually conclude then that there is a correct and an incorrect interpretation of God's will and the Doctrine of His Church and that we should prayerfully pursue it and not doctrines which man has dreamed up on his own.** The sad truth however is that even if we find a Church that is seemingly following God's will in worship, there is always some error where man is involved. Then we are left with God's grace aren't we? May God have mercy on us all as we strive to follow our Lord and Savior that we who believe in our Lord and strive to follow Him

are redeemed by His shed Blood and Grace. This writer has bet his soul on one Theology that fits best the sum of God's Holy word; That in Hearing His word, Believing in God, the Christ and Holy Ghost, confessing Christ as My Lord and Savior, repenting of my sinful nature since Adam's sin, and following Christ in Baptism (a spiritual participation in His death, burial, and resurrection), that I, and those who follow these steps are redeemed. These are the essentials, the milk of God's plan of redemption, plain and simple. Anything after this is gravy and meat and while man will make mistakes in his partaking of the meatier things of his religion, if he has had the milk, partaken in God's plan, God forgives our Sin when we are convicted of it and repent. But therein remains a problem; how many who are participating in an errant Theology are ever convicted of following sinful error and therefore brought to repentance. We can only pray and bet our and other souls on God overlooking unintended sinful error when it comes to His Way. We cannot stand in final judgment of those who follow error but we certainly are empowered to make judgments. God can save whom He wishes. It's not up to us. Let there be no doubt however, the scriptures tell us that we can and must make intellectual judgments of what God's will is, according to his Holy word. In Fact we are told that we will judge Angels in the last day and so much the more we should be able to judge things of this present life. I Cor. 6:3. God has given us in His word all the tools we need to make appropriate judgments in accordance with His name or authority and He expects us to use it. The problem is we, in most cases, are not in God's word enough to have the confidence to judge. Many of us readily say "its not for me to judge" and perhaps that is true if you are not mature in God's word but never doubt we have the responsibility as Christians to grow toward maturity in God's word and be willing and stand ready to judge daily through His Word.

7. On Anger, kindness and evil speaking. Eph 4: 26-32; "...be angry and do not sin"; Being angry for righteous (right) reasons is not sin. Witness Christ's' anger at the moneychangers in the temple even to the point of turning over their tables and chasing them out of the temple. (John 2:14-15). We sin when we become angry for non-scriptural reasons and that anger becomes destructive to others and us when we hold on to that anger. Verse 26 of Eph 4 says, "Let not the Sun go down on your anger or wrath. Husbands and wives are very fond of that scripture and it is good advice for us all. Verse 29 says, "..Let no corrupt words proceed from out of your mouth, but words that are good for necessary edification (building

up) that it may impart grace to the hearer. And, do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking be put away from you along with all ill will. And be kind one to another even as God in Christ forgave you.”

8. Redeem the time; redeeming means to restore or save. As Christians we are familiar using the word in such thoughts as “the redeeming blood of Christ.” How we all want to and need to redeem the time we have wasted. Eph 5:5-17 “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, **redeeming the time**, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be unwise but understand what the Will of the Lord is.” Col. 4:5, “...walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, (of Christ) redeeming the time.”

These verses of scripture remind us that our time on earth is valuable and that we have made plenty of mistakes in wasting our time (God's given time) and in so doing, we sin against our God. To younger people, we that are older in looking back can advise; be careful how you use or waste the time God has given you. Adults can look back and understand that they have missed so many opportunities to do well, witness for Christ, and study to understand God's Will. We said earlier, how would God communicate with us except through His Holy inspired Word? You might hear someone today express that God “speaks to him or her”. Hearing this, you may wonder, does God “literally” speak to these people but not me? One should feel slighted by God if it were so. Instead, if you press them on the subject they confess their conscience is pricked in some way in what they may explain as a “small voice” in their mind that communicates with them. This is their only explanation. If they are truthful, instead they should know that while God in the Patriarchal/ Mosaic age talked or communicated in some verbal or spiritual fashion with the Fathers and Prophets of Men, He has not, in the Christian age, to this writers knowledge, literally spoken to man through verbal transmission of words. Instead He has chosen the recorded words of Spirit filled men; the Holy inspired Word of God (the Bible). Yes, if we are diligent in hearing His words taught (preached) and or study His words (the Bible) then our consciences are seared and in a sense through prayer and even circumstances, God can and does communicate His Will to man through mans heart or intellect. In none of this discussion do we intend to limit God's power. However, this writer has never heard the vocal voice of God and if I ever meet such a person who has, I may literally fall to my face in honor and awe before such a person. In the meantime let us caution others to be careful how we use the words “God spoke to me” less someone leads us off to a sanitarium. Some

accuse the writer of being a little too melodramatic on this point, but wait. Listen, man is very lazy and has historically looked for some miraculous manifestation of God, constantly looking for a sign from God. Christ on at least one occasion scolded the Pharisees that they were always looking for a sign. Many today neglect the study of God's Word, not realizing that this is God's chosen way to communicate His Will to us, and instead we wait on God to speak verbally to us. A word of caution; if you have not absorbed yourself in God's Holy word and you hear a small voice, beware of what spirit you hear, for it just may be the spirit of Satan and how would you know the difference except through God's recorded Words. Young people, listen. Don't wake up one day at age 60, 70, 80 or even ninety and realize that you have not availed yourself to God's Word. You sadly could realize that you have wasted many years, made many decisions that have made a mess of your life without the benefit of knowing your creators Will and Word. ***But, a good thing is that we can “redeem the time” if we start now. Don’t be a fool as the scripture said, look around you now, (walk circumspectly), be wise and start now. Young people, act now on your faith, get in His Word and stay there as your years pass on and have no regret in your last day.***

9. On Submitting; “Submit one to another in the fear of God.” Eph 5:21 Eph 5:22-27 says “ Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the Church; and He (Christ) is the savior of the body (the Church). Therefore, just as the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be subject to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave His life for her that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present her (the Church) to Himself a glorious Church (wife) not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be Holy and without blemish.” Where, oh where, could one find a more perfect picture of a perfect relationship, first for marriage between a man and woman and then, a marriage of Christ and his bride, the Church. ***Young people, can you not see how wonderfully sacred is the choosing of the one you will call your husband or wife for the rest of your life. It has to be the most important decision we can ever make. And, again please do not forget our previous discussion on how God views the marriage ceremony, not as man’s law does, rather it is our first encounter with the sexual act. That act defines our choice of a lifetime mate. Man has come up with laws concerning marriage and we are scripturally bound to obey them, but obedience and understanding of our God comes first and foremost. God has described in His word the act of Sex (joining oneself to another) as the sacred act of marriage. You must make every effort to remove***

from your thinking that the sexual act is merely an act of fulfilling your needs. It is a pleasant physical act but is a sanctified act of God signifying and nurturing marriage and for the benefit of procreation. Don't trivialize it. Believe it! When you meet what you believe to be your life mate and if they give every indication that they neither believe nor understand God and His Son's will, and if you can't convert them, never forget that you will be submitting yourself to this, a fool, an unwise person, an ungodly person for the rest of your life. It will be the biggest mistake of your life and will define your life. Consider it and back off from any such mistake. Girls, do you really wish to submit to a fool or one who lacks wisdom. So many do and it is the primary cause of our near 50% divorce rate today. Boys, do you really want to give your life for a fool? Yes I know this writer has beat this horse repeatedly and only because it is very important. You may not get much from this little book but you will remember what this writer considers important for your life.

"Bear" with me. Papa Bear has had three marriages (**manmade marriages**) with the first ending in Divorce for scriptural reason, one ending with death, and now to the last loving companion of my life time, I pledge my endearing all. Marriages in God's eye, in addition to the above, God will count. They were sins of the first order and I have begged my God's forgiveness and the forgiveness of those partners. Let it be said that Papa **has not** had 1000s of marriages as Solomon, or nearly as many as David, all Godly men. I can hear the chuckles...
It is not funny!

Philippians

Paul is again the author of this letter to the church at Philippi established on his second missionary journey through Asia and Europe. Acts 16:11-40. Philippi at the time was a Roman occupied city of Europe in the Macedonian Province. Its citizens, as all Roman citizens, had special privileges of citizenship, as do we all. Paul himself was in fact a Roman citizen and was in a Roman prison at the time writing this letter. Earlier he had been nearly beaten to death by Jewish leaders for teaching Christ Gospel. Paul uses the example of his privileges as a Roman citizenship in regard to our privileges as citizens of the Kingdom of God and as members of Christ body, The Church. Paul's relationship to this congregation

was warm and close. It was a giving church supporting the works of the church throughout Asia and Europe. It was a church consisting of Gentiles as well as converted Jews and had a few problems, as did other churches, especially with the Jews ideas of theology. The Jews continually tried to apply the Old Mosaic laws to the New Covenant Church. Paul, in his letters, continually warned them of what he called, Judaizing and the teaching **of a legalistic salvation by physical works**. Paul's teaching in these letters were right on in teaching that salvation does not come from our works, however we can expect rewards untold of our works here on this earth and in Heaven as we do the Will of our God. In other words, there will be differing rewards in Heaven and on earth related to our Good and righteous work but they cannot save us. Only the blood of Christ, our sacrifice, cleanses or saves us from our sin. But then we can't throw out the baby with dishwater here nor can we ignore all the other scripture of the New Testament that clearly describes what steps the first disciples led the new believer through in order for them to be saved or come in contact with the saving blood of Christ. They were expected to Confess Christ as Lord, repent of their sinful nature, and be baptized for the remission of Sin. Oh! But many say all of these steps and baptism is a "**works**". Certainly if it is then **it is a work of God**. In fact one could supposedly and literally call confessing and repentance a work, but a work of whom? One who has heard the word of God and has allowed it to influence their thinking or "heart" truly are the ones who are converted through God's word "**working on their heart**". Again then, one might truly say that believing, confessing, repenting and baptism are all works, but they are works of God, not of man. **Man's part in the matter of salvation is obedience and that should not be classified as our work. Obedience is a function of some outside force "working" on our conscience or heart. In the case of salvation, that force would be the power of God's Word.** Children, if Mother or Dad says to you, take out the trash. Do you expect to be paid for the obedient act of removing your trash or for obeying your parent. **Your obedient act is not a work but an act of love, respect and faith. See Acts 22:16, Acts 2:38, Mk 16:16, 1 Pet 3:21, Heb 9:22, 10:22.**

But let us emphasize that we do not condemn those who believe otherwise than what we see as truth from God's word relating to salvation. Who is saved or not is God's business. If we know God's truths and obey them, we are taught to believe that the blood of Christ saves us and cleanses us from all sins. Some scripture that point to baptism being immersion and not sprinkling follows. First the early transcribers of the Bible used the word Baptism because the original manuscripts clearly used the word "baptiso" which in the Greek means "to immerse". Secondly, there are several scriptures that point out that one being baptized goes down into water or comes up from water. These examples clearly

lead the logical thinker to conclude that the word baptism indeed meant to those baptizing “to immerse”. See; Acts 8:36-38, Rom 6:3-4, Col. 2-12, Acts 22:16, Heb 10:22. Now, a popular alternative to immersion is the sprinkling of water. Believers of this method often point to Leviticus and other Old Testament Scriptures where the High Priest once per year sprinkled many things including his garments with the blood of goats for cleansing before going into the Holy of Holies to receive forgiveness of his sin and those Israelites which he represented. Our cleansing and salvation today in the Christian world comes, yes through Christ shedding his blood as Our High Priest, but then our eternal salvation comes through our obedience from the heart by being immersed (baptized) into Christ. And Remember the High Priest of the Old law did not provide us with **eternal** forgiveness and cleansing (salvation). Instead the High Priest had to go in each year to again seek their forgiveness. With Christ as our High Priest, his blood sprinkled or shed upon the doorpost of the world, gives us **eternal salvation but his shed blood was not the end.** He also died and was resurrected. A good question would be, why would we wish to hang on to a sprinkling for yearly forgiveness when we are afforded a complete salvation being baptized into Christ. Why settle for second best! Even though we point out differences in what we believe to be the truth of God's word, let's not condemn another for following what we may understand to be error. We can only pray that we interpret correctly and that any human fallacies of interpretation will be forgiven through the grace of God. Will it? Only God knows. Paul's entire passion was to “know Christ”, Philippians 3:10. That should be our passion as well and prayer for all our fellow men, to know and correctly understand and apply God's Will.

Colossians

The city of Colossi was located in the province of Phrygia of Southern Turkey. The Church there was probably started as part of Paul's third missionary journey, not by Paul himself but one of his companions named Epaphras, a native of Colosse. As in Ephesus, the Colossian Church had the problem of heretical teachers teaching things that were counter to the Gospel originally taught them. Much of their error stemmed from teaching that they must obey much of the Old Law of Moses and some of their teachings begged to follow many of the Greeks Mythological ways. An example would have been

that they keep certain days such as Sabbath, Passover or displaying false humility, worshipping angels, self abasement (wearing sack cloth as in mourning) legalisms as in “do not handle, do not touch, do not taste or eat certain foods. Does all of this sound familiar?

Paul writes from his prison cell to the Colossians; “...as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ who declared to us your love in the spirit ... we do not cease to pray for you asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being faithful and increasing in the knowledge of God. Give thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints **in the light**. **He has delivered us from the power of darkness (Old Law) and conveyed us into the Kingdom (the New Covenant) of the Son of His love in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.**” (**Parenthetical remarks of author**)

(Remember that throughout the New Testament, the new way of Christ is described over and over as “light” while the Old Law is depicted as “darkness”) “He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation.... He is the head of the body, the Church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in all things he may have the preeminence.” Col.1:7-15. Some key lessons in this letter follow:

1. It should be our prayer that we will have a spiritual wisdom and understanding of God's Will. What we mean by this is that we pray that we will be able to look at our life and our world with a viewpoint that is God's. How often we, the world, look for what we want and not for God's wants. We seek someone else's opinion rather than God's. Paul is also emphasizing, especially to those who are trying to drag the Church back to the Old Jewish Law and traditions, that this going backward toward the old law is equated to darkness but living the Gospel of Christ is “Light”. Christ is described in several scriptures as the light of the world. He, Christ, is the head of the Church and should be given preeminence in all things. We discussed much earlier, “what's in a name”. We concluded hopefully that there is much more in a name than most realize or wish to accept. It tells who we are, what we believe, and what family of people we came from. The myriads of churches throughout this land are called by thousands of different names, many which do not hint of belonging to the family of God/Christ. The New Testament writers gave honor and glory to God/Christ in naming the early Churches. They were apparently called

Churches of Christ or Church of God by at least Paul. The point is Christ/God should be given the preeminence in naming the body which belongs to them and to which they are head. Differing names given by many denominations point directly to the division that is prominent in our world today. God is not divided! He is one God, one Christ, one faith, one Spirit, **one name**. It is time we acknowledge His preeminence, if in no other way than naming the Body of Christ.

2. On wisdom, knowledge, and empty deceit; Col. 1: 28, 2:6, "...Him (Christ) we preach warning man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect **in Christ Jesus**." We hardly ever think of ourselves as perfect and even more likely, no one else does, but those who are **in Christ Jesus**, those who have **accepted Christ**, are seen by God as perfect. How can it be? Here is how God does that. When God sees those who are in Christ he sees Christ his perfect Son; that's all he sees. You and your sin are hidden behind Christ Body. **He sees not our sin but the perfect sacrifice for our sins**. Paul tells the Colossians at 3: 3, "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Ever been so bad (" **Bad to the Bone**") you wanted to hide? **Hey man, you can become invisible if you wish, "in Christ"**". Paul is saying or preparing to say, look, you are perfect in Christ. These people who are trying to lead you backward into the darkness of the Old Law that was imperfect and equated to darkness; don't allow it. Col. 2:6, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." Verses 8-13 says, "...Because lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to traditions of men, according to the basic principals of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and you are complete **in Him** who is the head of all principalities and powers. In Him you all were circumcised with the **circumcision not made with hands (circumcision of the heart)** by putting off the body of sins of the flesh by circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism (**baptism is our cleansing circumcision**) in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God (baptism is not your work but is God's work and your obedience) who raised Him from the dead.... having wiped out the hand writing of requirements that was against us which was contrary to us; and having nailed it to the cross...let none cheat you of your rewards, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels... therefore if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations such as, do not taste, do not touch, do not handle,

which all concern things that perish with using, according to the commandments and doctrine of men. **These things have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility... but have no value against the indulgence of the flesh.** If then you were buried with Christ (**as in baptism**), seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things of this earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. therefore put to death your members which are on earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and covetousness which is idolatry... but now yourselves are to put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Don't lie one to another." (parenthetical and bold emphasis added by author)

Hey, there are plenty of things you need to do and refrain from in your walk with Christ without having to dream up ways to go back to the Old Covenant and Jewish customs which never offered anyone eternal salvation /redemption from sin. Following Christ lays the entire burden you need or can carry. His burden, he says, is light and that is certainly true compared to the Old Way.

3. Put on Love; Col. 3:12-25, "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved put on the tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But, above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection.... Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Wives, submit to your own husbands as is fitting with the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Jesus. He who does wrong will be repaid for what he or she has done and there is no partiality."

4. In your study on submitting, refer also to Proverbs 7:1-9, Eph 6, Rom. 2:14,15, Duet 21: 18-21, 2 Tim. 3:2.

I Thessalonians

Paul established the Church at Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman Province of Macedonia and lies North of Athens Greece. Paul, as was his habit, preached in the Jewish temples and had much success converting Jews and Gentiles of the area. His success made many zealous Jews jealous of his works. Each Chapter of this letter deals with the second coming of Christ on the last day when Christ returns to take home to Heaven His Church, His Bride (consisting of those who are In Christ); The dead in Christ shall be raised from the Grave first, followed by those Christians who remain alive on the Earth. You may hear the term “rapture” used to describe this great event. God's written word never uses this term but the word does fairly describe the event as a taking up from the earth into heaven those who are saved, the redeemed. The Bible does describe the event as “shall be caught up” which the word rapture indeed fits. See I Thessalonians 3:13-18; **“But I do not want you to be ignorant brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.”** (Remember, Solomon wept and prayed for his Son as he lay dieing but once he died Solomon washed him self and appeared among his friends refreshed and went on with faith that God had his son in His care; that he, Solomon, could go to him) Paul is saying here that as Christians our deaths and deaths of our love ones should not be a time of sorrow because as Christians we have a promise of eternal life with our God and while we as mortal beings certainly will miss our love ones as they die, in faith, we should not mourn as those who have no hope. “For if we believe that Jesus died, was buried and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven

with a great 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 (in Christ) shall be 'caught up together' **with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air** and thus we shall always be with thee. Therefore now, comfort one another with these words."

Please notice that there is no mention of Christ putting foot on this earth in His second coming, rather Christians will meet Him in the air, in the clouds. For those who interpret Revelations literally as it pertains to a thousand year reign by Christ on this earth, there seems to be no room in this writing of Paul that allows such a scenario. Then of course there are many who still don't trust Paul or his writings just as many old Jews in the first Century did not fully accept him. Now wouldn't we like to know when this was going to happen. How will we know? Are their signs that we can observe and decide on a when? These are questions obviously the Thessalonians had and we have today, but, listen and understand I Thes. 5:1-8; "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you on this matter." (**God does not tell what we want to know but what we need to know**) For you yourselves know perfectly well that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 2 Peter 3:10, "for when they say peace and safety, then suddenly destruction comes upon them as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. But you brethren, are not in darkness so this day should not come as a thief in the night. You all are Sons of the Light and Sons of the day. We that are of Christ are not of the night nor darkness so let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober for those who sleep, sleep in darkness at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. Therefore, let us not sleep." (Again, darkness equates to being under the Old Law, light represents the New Covenant of Christ)

Well, for Christians the previous discussion pretty much sums up the hope of our faith as we deal with the last day when Christ returns to wed His bride, the Church, and take it (us) home to be with the Lord eternally. Those not in Christ, those "left behind" are defeated and cast into a lake of fire. This Earth, and all that remains shall be burnt up. There are a couple of things we should put in memory as we study forward concerning the ending. One, Christ will not set foot on this wretched earth again as some conclude by their literal interpretation of Revelations. We meet him in the clouds or heavens above the earth. The literal interpretation of Revelations leads many to unrealistically expect Christ to come back to this earth and sit on a literal throne in Jerusalem and reign for 1000 years and subdue all our enemies. **We are going to repeat ourselves here so forgive please.** This is the very same conclusions the chosen people of God, the Israelites had in the first Century, which led many to reject Christ as their promised Messiah. Even Christ's Apostles believed this up till Christ's

resurrection. Such an errant interpretation will most likely again cause many to reject Christ until the last day, which will be too late. We referenced earlier in our writing, scripture that tells us that there will be many coming and claiming to be the Messiah and that we must test each one. **Presuming this prophesy takes place and one are several, over time, succeed in establishing themselves as “the Messiah”, becoming even powerful enough to subdue largely our enemies, perhaps making the center of their government Jerusalem or Babylon and sit on a throne there; can we imagine the people who would be drawn to and accept that false prophet and how powerful he would be?** Now, picture during this same time frame our true Savior, the true Messiah returns, not to a throne or kingdom here on this physical earth, but appears in the clouds only. It's not hard to imagine many turning away from the true Messiah saying, “Who is this coming and putting on such a show in the clouds above us, claiming to be our Messiah? Look at that. What is that? It looks like little balls of light coming up out of the ground and wow! I just saw a friend of mine rising in what looked like a ball of light toward the heavens and all his family. Someone has really come up with quite a show! *I wonder, they think, what The Christ, our Messiah who sits on his throne in Jerusalem thinks of this show.*” As many stand gazing into the clouds, suddenly all around them their belongings, homes, friends, then just as quickly as they take their last breath the whole world is consumed in fire and it is over. Yet... the ones left gazing suddenly realize; I am still alive but my God, I'm burning with fire, I am tormented by these flames and look, oh my, over there are many of my friends and they are in agony in this tormenting fire as well. Will it ever stop? Then they remember all of the Bible; not just John's apocalyptic dream in Revelations but also the writings of the other Apostles; the sum of all of God's Words. They remember that some had interpreted John's writings of his revelations to be largely apocalyptic, using symbology and numerology (a form of code) to convey a message to Christians under torment by the Roman government. Could they have been right? Could it be that Revelations was telling Christians that they are living in an indeterminate (1000yr) period of years where Christ “is sitting” “not will sit” on His throne, in His Kingdom (in Heaven) since His crucifixion, and will return in the clouds only to retrieve His faithful on the last day. Could it be that this one sitting on a throne in Jerusalem is an imposter? Certainly this, except for some people's interpretation of Revelations, would agree with other writers of the Gospels, the apostolic writings. Are we “left behind” to live with this torment? Everything around us is burning continually! We are left in this tormenting dream it seems from which we cannot awaken. My God, this cannot be so!!!

Oh, but look at those who were taken up from this fiery mess. They are living in a paradise, as in a dream from which they never ever wish to be nor will they awaken. Oh, if they could only provide us with a drop of cooling water for our tongue!! Do I not remember a similar story and scenario in the New Testament of God about a rich man in Hell looking to a friend in Heaven and seeking a drink of water. I can't believe I missed the reason for that story! Is this Hell? How Dumb!! But I read the entire "Left Behind " series of books and this is not the way the end times were described! But.. you know, yeah, they did classify those books as "fiction". But boy they were so good... good reading. You know I read Dawkins also and he had some really good points supporting Atheism but maybe... he did not have it quiet right.

Now, granted some liberties have been taken to emphasize a point. Revelations is a wonderful work of the Holy inspired Apostle John and has a beautiful message for the Christian of the first Century and of today and it is not advertised as fiction. It describes the marvelous gift of our Savior who gave his life that we may live an eternal life in relationship with our Father and creator. Of a Messiah who ushered in a period of time whereby we as Christians will be tested over and over again by Satan. But, we are reminded that Christ in His death burial and resurrection has over come Satan. He, Satan, is bound (doesn't mean he is not at work on us and in the world) but God has control of him and even uses him. The beauty of the story is that we on the last day are taken up to live with Christ in his kingdom forever, leaving behind those not in Christ who are cast into a "lake of Fire and Brimstone" to live eternally without the God of creation but with the entity of their dreams, Satan. In short, **the good guys win**. Well, excuse these imaginings, but they do come from a significant, **although minority interpretation**, of the sum of God's word on this matter of the last days (the Christian era) and the last day of this world as we know it. It will be up to you individually to prayerfully interpret and understand God's plan for this earth and his creation. For those who believe the more popular interpretation you may live your life believing that you can reject the first coming of your Messiah and wait to witness a Messiah who will return to this earth and establish an earthly Kingdom, subdue all evil, and give you one last chance to finally recognize Christ as your savior. As said, it's the same attitude the Jews had in the 1st Century which led them to reject him and crucify him. More than likely, those with this view would not recognize The Messiah today anymore than in the 1st Century. May God help us to see and know our Savior when He returns.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-21, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks for this is the Will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

II Thessalonians

Another letter of Paul and Timothy to the Church at Thessalonica continues the theme of the end Day as we had in the first letter describing the end of time for those not in Christ, the unsaved, those that rejected Christ as the Messiah. The Church, those that were Christians were being tormented, killed, by the Romans for holding the beliefs that they had. II Thessalonians 6-10, “ Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulations those that trouble/persecute you and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord is revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the Glory of His power when He comes in that day to be glorified in His Saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you were believed.” Then, consider I Thes. 2: 3-12 where it says, “Let no one deceive you by any means; For that day (the Last day) will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition (destruction, utter loss of soul) who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped so that he sits, as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” **Now, this goes along with our imaginings a few paragraphs back, does it not? Here we have Paul telling fellow Christians regarding the last day; look around you people. The last day will not come until the world has been thoroughly deceived by one pretending to be God and your savior and who literally sets himself up as God on a throne perhaps even in Old Jerusalem itself and even on the Old Temple mount where currently sits the Moslem Dome of the Rock. Paul goes on to say, “ Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you of these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in His own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who restrains (the Holy Spirit) will do so until He**

is taken out of the way and then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth (His Holy Spirit) (Through out the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is described as “the breath of God”.) and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the Lawless one is according to the work of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders and with all unrighteousness, deception among those who perish because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved and for this reason, God will send them a strong delusion that they shall believe a lie, that they will be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (Parenthetical and bold emphasis added for clarity)

If this does not confirm our imaginings above, nothing does. Even scripture reveals that the Holy Spirit will restrain the lawless one until the Holy Spirit is taken out of the world on the last day. Then the lawless one (Satin) will have free reign...? Nooo, not so quick my friend! **The Holy Spirit will consume the lawless one with “the breath of His Mouth” destroying with the “Brightness of His coming”.** What could possibly be so “bright” as to destroy? Maybe a Nuclear explosion is all we are aware of... but here it says “the breath of God” Wow! When Christ comes in that last day and takes His own to Heaven, what's left will be consumed in the blink of an eye. Forget another 1000 years. Stop dwelling on the symbology and look to the message it brings. We are plodding along now in your 1000 years and who knows the true time frame of God's 1000 years or a day for that matter. **Get a grip! A golfing friend has a saying with a slight southern accent, “Get a Holt on it”! Save your soul. Stop playing with God's Word on this matter.**

We must seek the truth of God's word and will find that truth by considering the **sum of Gods words and promises**. To do this we must earnestly and prayerfully **study the whole of God's word and rightfully divide His truths**. By rightfully dividing, we mean to say, understand the intent of God's Old covenant and that end mission of his New Covenant that we are under in this present age (**The last Days**). **To many times we live under the Laws of his Old Covenant and neglect His New Promise, which leads to error.** Remember the old law of God was fulfilled with Christ Sacrifice. It (The Old law) is still good for our learning more completely the intent of God's New Covenant and we must correctly apply it to our New Promise from God. **In summary then lets not believe a lie but depend on the Sum of God's word and promise.** Christ has come once as a sacrifice for our Sins, to redeem and cover our sins if we believe (accept, Confess) Him as our Lord, repent of our sins, and are baptized into His name. **That same Christ will return in the clouds when many are being deceived and He will gather those Christians who are asleep in their grave first, followed by**

those in Christ who remain alive, and restore them in His Heavenly Kingdom. Quickly following, those who have been deceived along with their Satan, will be, destroyed cast into an eternally tormenting lake of fire. Now, that's it in a nutshell!

To our Jewish friends and to those tourist who flock to what we hear referred to as the Nation of Israel, Jerusalem, and “The Holy Land”, we must remind all that with Christ sacrifice, a new Jerusalem (the Church), a new Israel (Christians), a new Mt Zion (Heaven) emerged, and was and is, rejected in this age by many. The Church of our Lord and members of its Body became and is the new Israel, new Jerusalem, and Its King is the Christ that was crucified but now lives and sits on the throne of a new Kingdom at Its own Mt Zion in Heaven. Look, at what now sits on what was earthly Mt Zion! Sitting on Mt Zion today is the Dome of the Rock occupied by Moslems who reject Christ as Lord and they will not allow modern day Jews or Christians near it. Solomon’s Temple of God, which sat on this very spot, was destroyed and so has every manmade temple ever built on this site. Christ said himself that he would tear down this manmade temple and restore a temple **not made with hands in three days** and so He did. (Acts 17:24) Christ dying on the cross, shedding His blood for “The Church” built it. The lineage of Jacob, whom God called, Israel, were the chosen lineage through which God brought the world its Messiah, Christ, God's son. The Israelites, who were called later by their Babylonian captors, Jews (short for people of Judah) should rightfully be proud that God used their lineage as he did. But, they then should be just as proud to accept and follow their Messiah whom God gave them through “their lineage”. Many did and still can turn to Christ today. But too many will not accept Christ. **The Jews of today need to “get a life”, crawl out of their shell of darkness and go to the light of Jesus.** We can and should support earthly Israel politically as a democratic ally, but we must not blindly support their every move on the basis that they were God’s Holy chosen people or because we consider their territory as God's **Holy land**. **As a Christian nation, let's realize that God is not in the real estate business.** **God's promised land even to the Jews is His Church and not a piece of real estate.** It would indeed be an interesting proposition if Jewish Christians instead of Jews occupied today the Nation of Israel. Would it be more peaceful and adaptive toward the Moslem people. Perhaps so, but not necessarily. Certainly, this would be God's Will because we know that the Christ was brought forth first for the Jew and then also for the Greek Gentile and both were to be as one in Christ. One of the reasons that the Jew and their Moslem neighbors have such troubles living together is because the Israelites did not obey God's command to them fully. God commanded them through Moses and Joshua to completely subdue the whole region, destroying totally, peoples and their families, animals

and all. Instead, Israel subdued a small portion of the territory and mixed with the remaining cultures, which diluted their strength as a Nation of God's choosing. Israel's current mess is a result of not fully obeying God's command initially and mixing with and worshiping a strange nations gods rather than their own God of Heaven. Again we may say, **"get a Life you Jews", and follow your Christ, your God, get the life you were promised. It is still there for your taking. You had the opportunity once and you blew it. You have one more chance. Don't blow it again! This very day on the evening news, Helen Thomas, long time White House news correspondent nearing 90 years of age was forced into retirement for her comment on Israel's status. She reportedly said to Israel, "Go home Israel. You are occupiers."** Except that following WWII the Jews were politically given an area in Palestine to settle in, which was militarily and politically held by a British alliance, the Jew's need to understand a biblical truth. This land that they settled in and the additional areas they have won in war, are not the "Holy Promised Lands" God had in mind for the Israelites, modern Jews or Christians. The only Promised Land given by God to anyone is a home in Heaven as Christians. From a biblical standpoint, Helen Thomas was right although she and few others probably would not understand or care for the biblical nature of her truth. Politically speaking, Helen probably "stepped in it", thus her retirement.

I Timothy

The Books of Timothy are often referred to as pastoral epistles in that they are letters of instruction from Paul to the overseers or Elders (pastors), specifically Timothy, but also all the Elders or Pastors of Churches of our Lord then and now. Paul's letters were meant to be read to any and all congregations of the Church in the area they were sent. Timothy was a faithful Christian leader and was from Lystra, a city of the Province of Galatia. He was the son of a mixed marriage, his father a Greek Gentile and his Mother, Jewish. See Acts 16:1. He had been taught well the Old Scriptures by his Jewish mother and grandmother mentioned in

II Tim 5. Paul had mentioned Timothy in some of his other letters as a co-author of his letters. Paul had some infirmity many believe to have been a vision

problem and probably dictated many of his writings to Timothy for writing. Timothy had been with Paul during Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem and on some of Paul's missionary journeys. Timothy was, from all indications, a very timid person and Paul here admonishes and encourages Timothy to be more aggressive and bold in insisting that the congregants of the church continue to follow the way of Christ as he had taught them. There were apparently those who were continually trying to drag the Church back toward obeying Old Covenant Laws and traditions that now had no part in the way that the Christian was to worship God. Paul in his letter to Timothy addresses how to properly worship God, appointing Elders who were to oversee the souls of the Church and deacons to assist the Elders. He addresses the qualification of these Leaders of the Church. Paul discusses the place of women regarding leadership in the church. He writes concerning the dangers of materialism.

Paul writes at 1Tim. 1:3-15, "I urge you; remain in Ephesus that you may change some that they may teach no other doctrine. Don't listen to fables and endless genealogies"(the old Jewish converts loved to prove their anointed and favored status as the chosen of God by their genealogies) Remember how Matthew begins his Gospel with the complete Genealogy of Christ. He did this because he was addressing his gospel primarily to Jews and he knew the only way they would ever accept Christ as their Messiah was to prove to them that Christ came through the very same Genealogy as they and the genealogy, which had been prophesied, from the beginning. Many Jews were converted just because of Christ genealogy. Continuing, "(these endless genealogies) cause disputes among you...some have turned to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the (old) Law, understanding neither what they say nor are the things they say true. But, we know that the Law is good if one uses it lawfully or as it was intended." The old laws intent, to repeat, was to show men that there was no way they were going to obey the Law perfectly and in so knowing, they (we) would "**in God's time**" realize that only through Christ could we be saved from sinful selves. Paul says, "know this; the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners.... This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, (**Paul says**) of whom I am chief." Paul says he is the worst of sinners, (Bad to the Bone perhaps) but look, "God has used me to show you that He (God) is longsuffering and offers me (Paul) as a pattern. The Gospel (the good News) the law of God is for sinners like me and you. Paul has said to all of us, if you are not a sinner then you don't need God or at least you don't feel that you need God, being a fool and all (only a fool says there is no God. Psalms 14:1. In that case, then you can face God on your own terms. Then from the sum of God's word lets not forget scripture, which says "**all have sinned and**

fallen short of the Glory of God, and “Face God with fear and trembling”. If we think we are sinless and do not need God, Think again. **WE ARE FULL OF IT!** Have you ever heard people say, “ I would never attend that church because they are hypocrites and sinners and I’m better than they!”? Really, do they not realize that we are all touched by sin, especially Christians. The Church, Christ body is the sanctuary for sinners. **Get a Grip! To those we might lovingly add;** **Its good as an unbeliever that you are so much a better person than we Christians because you know, you may indeed have a greater award than we while on this earth but the after life is the reward we strive for. Your reward is for a very short time you inhabit this earth and ours is for eternity. For you the un-believer, un-repentant, un-baptized, this is it for you so it is good that you are better than we. Keep it up till your last day, which is by the way, any day now. We love you but hate the un-repentant sin you find so rewarding. Oh yes, there are times when we temporarily allow Satin to clutter our mind and we are a little envious but that thought is fleeting most of the time. Fact is from a worldly or carnal viewpoint, Satin’s way is pretty cool and fun for a short carnal experience but it does not last. Satins way is often fun but fun is fleeting. What the Christian enjoys is an almost indescribable Joy and it is for eternity.** The good news is God/ Christ understands our weakness for this world because he has lived the physical life as we.

Now, in regard to Women in the church; Paul writes, let the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but that which is proper for women professing godliness and good works. I Tim 2: 9-15. Now it is very easy to go overboard with this statement of Paul's and it's unnecessary. As in any of our Bible Study and application one can take the word of God or any writing, and fail to consider the context of the occasion in applying said writing or statement. This can lead to error in applying the meaning of any statement and cause divisions and hard feelings. We all know and respect Scripture, which tells us that God does not change. Its true God does not change, but there are changes in our society, which take place from one age to another and from one culture or locale to another over time. To adapt to these changes over time is a normal occurrence with man and while we live for Christ we remain human and must live in a carnal world at the same time until the last day or our last day. You can be sure that in Paul's day dress or what was appropriate for men and women was substantially different from our current styles in America. We all as Christians should seek to glorify our Heavenly Father in all our actions including how we adorn ourselves physically and spiritually in any period of time. At the same time, there is no need to lay upon

anyone rules that suggest that we cannot live comfortably in our own skin or with clothes that are in tune with our social norms as long as it does not detract from our representation of God's spiritual nature. We must feel comfortable in realizing that these physical norms do change but God's spiritual nature that we must represent does not. Paul goes on to say concerning women in the Church, "let a woman learn in silence with all submission and do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but to be in silence. Why Paul? 1Tim 13,14 says, "..for Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Well, as we said earlier, we know that his Mother and Grandmother taught Timothy the scriptures, probably in their homes. Paul here, it seems is teaching us that it is God's will that men take the leadership in the Church and Women are to maintain a submissive role as far as leadership of the Church. The fact that Timothy was taught by women and other Scripture which instructs women to teach their young women, we can safely conclude that Women can teach their young male and female children God's will but should not teach, preach or otherwise lead mature men of the church. Then we will have some say that, now you have said times and cultures change over time, so how about women's liberation which we have experienced? Unlike changing styles of clothing and adornment like jewelry, the facts of Genesis, the beginning of man and woman's role in the deception of man, and God's assignment of order between the man and woman from the beginning, this order, it would seem, is the will of God to be maintained throughout the ages and is reaffirmed by Paul's teaching here. Again, let us not overreact in this matter when it comes to a woman participating in normal discourse within the Church to include Bible study and discussion or in teaching Bible study to our young children. There are substantial ways in which women may and should serve within the Church which do not interrupt God's intended role of men as leaders. Sadly, men bear much of the blame for us seeing more and more evidence of women taking the leadership role in the home and Church. When men fail to provide leadership in the home, or the Church, women will feel compelled to step in to fill the vacuum and will succeed in driving an organization forward in most cases, but it is in the long run, against God's will to be so. Another malady of our congregations is **when the preacher becomes a one-man show**. Preachers, evangelist in many congregations, are notorious for doing everything in the church worship service. Men we must not sit back and let the preacher select a few to participate in the worship of our Lord. It is all of our responsibilities to participate. Count it a blessing when someone ask you to pray with the Church or lead singing or teach a class. As Christians, remember God sees us as Saints, Priest, Kings and as such, we all have responsibilities (see Acts 26:10 and Revelations) How many times have you heard yourself and other Christians say, "I'm no Saint! Well,

sorry, but if you are in Christ, you are a Saint. Now of course what we are really saying when we say we are not a Saint, is that we are indeed sinners and that is true, but never forget, we are sinners who have Christ. We must know that we “in Christ”, to God are Saints, priest and even kings. It would be almost funny if it were not such a serious error of the Roman Catholic Church, that they make such a to-do over ceremonially declaring one particularly devout and sacrificial individual as “a Saint.” Being a Saint is a blessing and we must know **that all Christians are special in God's eye and are indeed Saints and never doubt it. We have no need to be declared a Saint by any man. Thank God!**

On the organization and Governance of the Church. I Tim 3: 1-7; “This is a faithful saying; if a man desires the position of a Bishop, he desires a good work.” In different translations, the word Bishop is translated as Elder, or Presbyter, or Pastor. All have the common meaning in the Greek or Hebrew of “overseer” or “protector” of the faith and souls of the redeemed, those in the Body, the church of Christ. Paul and other missionaries as they established church congregations of Christians over Asia, Middle East, and Europe, left men of God in charge as overseers of the flock and generally called them Elders implying that they had the more mature qualities of an overseer of the people. The intent was that these elders would ensure that the way of Christ would continue to be taught and lived by the congregants. The term “Elder” was never meant to be a title but a label designating a special responsibility as a servant of God and His people. Paul in His writings to Timothy spelled out the Qualifications of Elders and of Deacons to include their wives. Below is His list of Qualifications of Elders.

1. They must desire the position.
2. Must be found blameless (among their peers and community).
3. The Husband of one wife. This is in keeping with all other discussions we have had on the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage and should, it seems be interpreted that an Elder should have had but one wife unless a wife was put away for adultery or had died in which case other scripture allows a remarriage to be considered ones single wife.
4. Be temperate, sober minded, good behavior, hospitable, and able to teach.
5. Not given to wine, not violent, or greedy for money.
6. Gentle and not quarrelsome.
7. Not Covetousness.
8. Rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence. If a man cannot rule his own house, how can he rule the

household of God. Some will insist that an Elder then should have children under his control and be Christians, if they are of accountable age. This requirement does follow logic.

9. Not a novice, lest he be puffed up with pride and fall into the same trap as the devil. Any person, especially one immature, can easily become prideful when given power over another. The more mature Elder then should be less apt to fall to the sin of pride.

Well, these are tall orders and there are certainly few who meet these criteria. When one is appointed as an overseer of men's souls, he has taken on a grave responsibility and deserves great respect from the led, especially if he executes his responsibilities earnestly, effectively and in accordance with God's will . When he errs we should pray for His guidance but never fail to follow his guidance with all respect. You will not have to look far in the denominational religious world to find a complete breakdown of men/churches failing to follow God's will in Church leadership. A major failure is in understanding who in the congregation is to lead and who qualifies for that role as Paul has laid it out. Churches hire what they call "Pastors" and lay on him duties as a "Pastor" without any consideration of what a Pastor is (an Elder) or without any consideration for qualifications of a Pastor/Elder/Bishop/Presbyter as described by Paul's writings. How many denominations call their young man, just hired out of the seminary, their so-called Pastor when few that are hired meet the qualifications of Pastor. Instead the new one hired to bring God's message should more humbly be referred to as simply a disciple, minister or preacher. Never should anybody within Church leadership be referred to as Reverend or father in that no one is reverent or our Heavenly Father but God himself. Matt. 23: 8-10. The new hire preacher is often still wet behind the ears so to speak, maybe single, no children or young children or, married with no believing children. How does one know if he can lead a church as a Pastor if there is no evidence he can lead his own family as said by the scriptures. On the other hand, if your new hire Preacher does meet the qualifications laid out in Timothy and Titus, certainly he can be one of the chosen Pastors and referred to as such if he desires that responsibility. The gravity of their error in so appointing the scripturally unqualified as "Pastor" is manifested in many ways. There is a complete disregard of God's Holy will and intent for the Body of Christ, when we appoint the unqualified as our overseer. May God help the world to know his will for the organization of His Holy Body. There is plenty of room in our pulpits for young preachers/ evangelist who are studied men of God and certainly valued and needed for our congregants, but let us not lay on them the

burden of Pastor or Elder unless they are indeed qualified and desire the responsibility. If they are evangelist as well as qualified Pastors then we again should select and respect them as preachers and our Elder/Pastor, **but only if they desire the work and are qualified.** There is one other observation that will be made here regarding the leadership of Elders. There service should be a loving and kindhearted oversight of their Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Notice we say “oversight”. The Body of Christ, His church, is not meant to be democratically led. It was never intended to be ruled by vote or majority. Decisions of the Elder’s leadership after considering input from other men of the congregation and God’s Will, must be by final consensus of the Eldership and respected by the congregants at large. They should be firm in maintaining God’s Will and when we as Christians separate from God’s Will we should respect the redirection of our Elders as a father might lovingly bring his child back into the family’s good grace. Let it never be dismissed also that an Eldership can lose its way and make errors. When it is deemed so, we must prayerfully seek the Elderships correction and if we no longer can abide by their **known error**, then we must seek the truth to follow and Pray that God will guide us in that decision for **if it is our failure** and we fail to follow that leadership which is right, we risk our soul’s salvation. One other point on Elders; There are several denominations who do not formally recognize or appoint Elders as the scriptures describe them. These congregations in most cases depend on their preacher as the overseer of the souls of their congregation with no regard for qualifications spelled out in Timothy or Titus for overseers of souls. Further their preferred mode of decision making on each decision of the congregation is normally a democratic vote on the issue, which we have stated before, can be and often is divisive. It is not the way the Lord’s church was to be led. It was interesting recently in my family with my brother’s diagnosed cancer problem when a preacher of my brothers denominational Church brought to my and brother’s attention James 5:14 where it says, “ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the Elders of the Church and let them pray over him and anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” My immediate thought and response was “but you don’t have Elders appointed in your Church do you? The response was, “ well what we mean are the men or deacons of the Church.” Well of course verse 16 of Jas 5 says “.. the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man (Christian) avails much.” So any sincere Christian’s prayer could be effective in petitioning God to heal one of sickness and we should have faith and ask for those prayers. The scripture says though to call on the Elders presumably because, they being more mature in faith, have perhaps more persuasive powers before God. At any rate a question remains. Why do some ignore the scriptures description of how the first Churches of our Lord were organized and led and until someone is sick they never attempt to

appoint or think of calling an Elders but do appoint Deacons. Elders were appointed first in the first century churches and not until the Elders began to need help in taking care of widows did any of them appoint Deacons. Deacons were meant to be helpers for Elders. You have no Elders? Why do you need Deacons?

So let's discuss further the issue of deacons. As said above, as the work of the Lord grew, Elders advised the Apostles that they were being overwhelmed especially in taking care of the menial jobs such as the needs of the widows. The Apostles upon hearing these concerns instructed the Elders to appoint Deacons to help in the work and Paul in his letter to Timothy also laid out the Qualifications of these deacons so appointed. It is interesting that qualifications are nearly the same as the Elders qualification except in a couple of points which suggest that the deacon may be slightly less mature in his faith than his Elder. Men of the Church, as we look at qualifications of Elders or Deacons, let us strive in our Christian walk, to grow and mature in our faith to the point we may meet these qualifications for we as Christians are constantly looked at by the world for leadership whether we be Elders or not. Our walk with Christ as Christian men should rightly strive toward a level of maturity befitting that of the Elder leader, keeping spotless and as blameless as possible from worldly aspirations. Be careful that we do not interpret "blameless" as one without sin. We never will reach that perfection in this old Human body. Amen.

Qualifications of Deacons:

1. Be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to "**much**" wine, and not greedy for money. (Note the difference in partaking of wine between the Elder and the Deacon, the Deacon does not partake of "much" wine and the Elder apparently abstains.) The highest level of maturity as a Christian obviously then is to abstain. There is plenty of scripture that indicates strongly that over indulgence and habitual dependence **on any substance** is sinful and especially when it comes to being drunk from strong drink or wine. However, wine in moderation, Paul advises Timothy to "drink no more water, but use a little wine for thou stomach sake and thou other infirmities." I Tim. 5: 23
2. Holds the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

3. Let them first be tested in these things; then let them serve as deacons, having been found blameless. Now this cannot for a minute mean sinless for all are guilty of sin. It has to mean not a slave to any sinful conduct. This also suggest that there should be some open period of time where they are observed or for anyone to bring accusation which may disqualify one from serving **before they are appointed by the Elders**. Please notice that there is never an occasion where there is a voting process. For this reason there probably is no justification for a vote to be taken. The Churches organization and administration has no scriptural basis for being a democratic body guided by democratically administered processes. In fact, if one honestly considers the democratic act of voting, one quickly should see that **a vote is usually divisive** and counter to the Church being a unified body under Christ leadership. We only have to look at our own Nation, America in the 21st Century and we will quickly realize that we are more divided than we have ever been in our History and have forever have been.
4. Let the deacons be the husband of one wife ruling their children and households well.
5. Let their wives be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

So how do we appoint Elders or Deacons if we don't vote on them? The only answer would have to be; in any orderly manner other than a divisive vote. In the absence of a designated overseer of the congregation, it would befall the congregation to propose the appointment of Elders soliciting congregational input from all members. After some reasonable period, individuals names submitted could be proposed to the congregation publicly, giving the congregation a specified time to give any **scriptural reasons** one should not be considered. Notice we say "scriptural reason" here and this could include a person's overall reputation within a community at large when ones sin has readily been observed and adversely influenced others even outside the Church with **unrepentant** sin. Addressing such an issue is necessary because we can never find one qualified based on no sin in their life. The best we will ever be able to do is select those who are repentant sinners and have generally a good report and respect from others in the Church and the community at large. The Men of the congregation then must by total consensus appoint and confirm the Elder's so recommended. If Elders are already in place and additional Elders are being appointed then the sitting Elders will make the final decision and confirm their choice. Any one person or persons, who determines to establish a

congregation or assembly of people who will establish themselves according to the pattern laid out by the original apostles and disciples of Christ, described best in their New Testament writings and the teachings of Christ himself, may rightfully establish themselves as an assembly of The church of Christ/God. Having done so without Leaders other than the initial founders, they may operate without elders for as long as they cannot find qualified Elders. Some of the original Churches in the first Century operate without Elders for some time. Where there are disputes on matters of scripture we should pray that they would come to a correct consensus by prayerful study and agreement on Biblical truths. In the absence of consensus, they could invite advice from another congregation's eldership. One example of this in scripture is when there was dispute at Antioch over whether New Gentile Christian converts must be circumcised as the Old Law called for the Jews to be circumcised. This resulted in a council meeting in the Jerusalem Church where they decided that the Gentile Christian had no need to be circumcised and this instruction was dispersed to all the congregations of the region. This was a meeting of leaders of two separate autonomous congregations leadership to determine the best scripturally based answer to an important question. It was not, as some have suggested, the first indication that the initial churches considered the Jerusalem Church to be the **Churches central controlling authority**. This thinking led some to believe that there had to be a controlling central authority over individual congregations rather than each congregation being autonomous with its central leadership being its own appointed Eldership. This sense of organization, **counter to the Churches original autonomous organization**, fit perfectly with Rome's own idea of a central leadership of its Church. Of course most **denominational divisions** of the Catholic Church since has had some form of central organization at least in some sense. A few denominations will declare themselves independent and proceed to govern themselves, most without Elders, preferring a democratic form of governance within. This despite clear scriptural evidence that the early Apostles that established the first congregations intended that each congregation be autonomously led with only Christ as its Head and Elders as overseers with final authority in decisions. Hopefully eventually each new congregation looks exclusively to God's word and Christ as their central authority and can develop or find qualified leaders/elders to guide their flock. The democratic option we again say leads invariably to division within the Church. There are many occasions when congregations go for years without a qualified Eldership, many successfully as long as Men of the Church can agree on the Word of God for leadership. Many do fail or continue to operate as the Lords church when in reality they may have strayed far from God's Will from lack of good leadership and understanding and become churches of their own

design, not of God. Be very careful in joining yourselves to these bodies for they will lead you down a path of untruths and error. When all is said and done though, it would be better to operate without Elders if no one is qualified in accordance with the scriptures. There is one other problem closely related to efforts of central control of leadership as opposed to autonomous control that led many of our religious groups to form controls of what theology to teach. They formed central boards and publishing organizations that control and publish material such as Sunday school teaching material put together by theologians who may or may not agree or be congruent with God's Word. This unfortunately sustains today much of the error and syncretism we find in the religious world of Catholicism and its denominationalism. Its very easy for men to make the argument that organization is good in that it allows for more efficient action and that is true, but be careful to notice that in God's business, it becomes likely that men given such control quickly place themselves in very powerful positions over peoples lives and this power is addictive and easily abused. We need to have faith that the way congregations were organized in the first Century was God's/Christ's plan for his Church and we should honor that way. We are not privy to every instruction Christ gave to His Apostles/disciples so as we see how **they did things such as organizing the Church and how they assembled and worshipped God, we must have faith that the Holy Spirit or Christ directly gave them understanding on such important matters. It should not be our place to overrule those efforts of the original Church body.**

Lets look at some of the apparent errors within the early Church. I Tim.4: 1-5 “.. Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times, some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy.... forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from food which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. **For every creature of God is good and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.**” One can see, at least in the Roman Catholic Church, where in the early Church and today, the requirement that their Priest not marry and forbidding the eating of meats on Friday except for fish are continued to this day and of course the Jewish religion continues many of their old Mosaic prohibitions in their diet as well and all counter to God's Will in his New Covenant with man. Is there any wonder given these missteps regarding Celibacy, that the Catholics have had such problems with their Priests' activities. The next to last sentence of Paul's letter says to Timothy; “ Oh Timothy, guard what was committed to your trust, avoid idle babblings, the profane and contradictions for what is falsely called knowledge.” **Let this be our own warning in our efforts to guard and protect God's Will in all matters before us. There are plenty of opportunities when**

men get directly involved in God's business of His Church to mess up God's Will so lets not think it a small matter to honor that Christ and God's Word is the head and final authority in all Church matters. The sole duty of men overseers (Elders) in their leadership of the Church is administering God's Will in accordance to His scripture. Amen.

II Timothy

Paul writes a second letter to his beloved friend in Christ, Timothy. Apparently Timothy was a quiet person and not a particularly aggressive leader, prone at times to look at the negative side of issues. (Papa has this same problem) Paul here admonishes Timothy to lead with the power bestowed upon him through the authority of Christ. II Tim 1:7-10, “**For God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and love and of a sound mind...** who has saved us and called us with a Holy calling, not according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus **Before time Began** but has now been revealed by **the appearing of our savior, Jesus Christ...**” II Tim 2:11, Paul tells Timothy, “ This is a faithful saying”;

1. “If we died (to our sin) with Him (Christ), we shall also live with Him.”
2. “If we endure, we shall also reign with him.” (remember, we are not only Saints and Priest but as “kings” we also reign with Christ.)
3. “If we deny Him, He will also deny us.”
4. “If we are faithless, He will remain the faithful one and will forgive our unfaithfulness **if we will return to Him and restore our faith in Him.**” (Emphasis added)

To refresh our memories, Paul is in a Roman prison writing this letter and Nero, the Roman Emperor, is about to take Paul's life as he had done to so many other Christians who failed to worship him as a deity, a god. Our time line here is about 67 AD (about 63 years after Christ death. II Tim 3:1-17 And 4:2-4. “in the last days perilous times will come for men will become lovers of themselves (homosexuals), lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to

parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God. **They will have a form of godliness, but denying its power;** from such people turn away. For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captive gullible women loaded with sins, led away by various lust, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.... But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”(Emphasis added)

Well, I don't know about you but I'd say **we have been in the last days for a very long time, and it just keeps on getting worse and worse as Paul said.** Now Paul speaking directly to II Timothy 3: 14-17 “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures”(Old Testament Scriptures Paul refers to here because no New Testament Scriptures existed at this point). The New Testament Scriptures came from the writings of Holy inspired Apostles and disciples of Christ, who had received Christ personal teachings during His ministry. *We have no original transcripts of any of the apostolic writings, however, copies were later transcribed, and again by Holy inspired men of God, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* II Tim 3:16-17

2 Tim 4: 2-4“Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they (the world) will not endure sound doctrine, **but according to their own desires, they will heap up for themselves, teachers, and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside by fables (stories).**” (Emphasis added) It was happening in the days of Timothy and Paul and it is happening today, preachers telling stories to prove their points rather than using God's Word.

Some use their own testimony rather than God's word to exhort and convince. Listen, there is no substitute for God's Holy inspired Word. Eph 6: 17, refers to God's word as “the sword of the spirit.” Heb 4: 12 says “the word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword.” If we rely on anything else, we can never be certain of what Spirit it originates. There are other Spirits beside the Holy Spirit of God and those Spirits can and do imitate the Spirit of God well. Remember that Satan knows God and Believes in Him and will imitate Him when it is convenient. Then we must rely on God's complete Word in order to be perfectly equipped to repel the devil and his angels. Personal testimony is a good thing in our everyday life but from our pulpits emphasis should be on God's Word.

Titus

Paul writes this letter to Titus, a Gentile convert of Paul's whom he left on the Island of Crete, a rather large island in the Mediterranean Sea just South of Athens Greece. Crete was an island of people who were of very low moral standards. In fact, a common phrase of the day was, "To Cretenize", which meant "to lie". Paul writes to Titus, probably from Nicopolis, Macedonia around the time frame of 63-67 AD.

He gives Titus, instructions much as he did to Timothy, concerning qualifications of Elders and Deacons. Ti 2:1-7, "But as for you, speak the things which are proper and of sound doctrine; that the older (Elder) men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older woman likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things- that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste (clean), homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God not be blasphemed. Likewise exhort the young men to be sober minded, in all things, zealous for good works." Tit 3:1 "Remind them to be subject to rules and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work. To speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lust and pleasures, living in malice and envy and hating one another. But, when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by our works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying then...that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to me. But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self condemned."

Philemon

This is a personal letter from Paul to a friend and fellow Christian, Philemon, of the church in Colossi, in whose house the congregation met. Paul again is in a Roman prison writing this letter. The Occasion is that one of Philemon's slaves named Onesimus has run away after stealing from his master. He was subsequently captured in Rome and placed in the prison with Paul. Paul has befriended him and has converted Onesimus to Christianity. Paul then writes to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus; "I appeal to you for my son Onesimus whom I have begotten while in my chains, which once was unprofitable to you but now is profitable to you and me. I am sending him back to you. Please receive him that is in my heart." Philemon 10-12 Paul explains that he desired to keep Onesimus with him so that he could help him who was in chains but thought that unfair without Philemon's consent. Paul says that he is sending Onesimus back not as a slave but more than a slave. Paul pleads with his friend to receive Onesimus even as he would receive him. Roman law allowed a slaves master to kill a slave who stole from him and or escaped, "If Onesimus owes you anything then put it on my account," verse 18 Paul said in essence, we are all servants to our Master and Lord just as Christ was a servant to us. Many outside of Christianity and within have questioned why we as Christians and for that matter, Christ, did not speak out boldly against slavery, indeed many Christians over history have employed slaves on their farms. Until this occasion, we never hear of any Apostle or Christ address a slavery issue except Christ reiterating that a servant should serve his master faithfully. Slavery in these years of antiquity were indeed a fairly normal state of affairs and for the most part were not in all cases especially grievous states to be in. In fact many servants and or slaves were treated with great regard and respect. Some were in fact placed in charge of a masters or rulers estate. For example, many of the Babylonian captives of Judah including Daniel were given control of many of the ruler's venues. Mordecai, Esther's Uncle and a captive Jew, was honored with great responsibilities within the Persian Empire of Babylonia. Joseph, in Egypt, was sold as a slave to the Pharaoh but latter was assigned as Governor of the Pharaoh's estates with much power. Even so, people rightfully question why slavery was not a Christian issue. The answer lies in the mission of God, and Christ his son. Christ was destined in His short ministry to show mankind God in the flesh, to die on the cross **as a servant of mankind**, a sacrifice for the sins of mankind and to resurrect to life, establishing His Church Body and taking the

right hand seat beside His/our Father. Neither Christ nor Paul had time to attack all the ills of their present society except in completing the mission that God had set before them. To have launched out after all of societies ills, can you imagine how complicated it would have been to fight all of man's problem issues; the short of it Christ sacrifice of becoming our servant was plenty to tackle all of mans ills without creating a dogfight on every corner. When you think about it, even today in many pulpits, preachers spend entirely too much of their sermon railing against this or that political issue which never solves anything but to divide and antagonize one brother against another. They should merely rely on God's word and teach, exhort or admonish. Let the power of God's Word work and avoid sticking your nose where it does not belong. That is not to say that as Christians and even as evangelist we should not have and express political opinions and even work in a political setting, however the Pastor, evangelist or Elder should be careful as to not use his podium as a bully pulpit for political gain or purpose. If Christ or the Apostles had stirred up those who had slaves and condemned them outright, they probably would have been killed much earlier than they were and would have never accomplished their mission. There are simply some issues Christians must have faith that God will handle in His own way and in His good time. It is not for us, the Church to condemn every little thing we see or to stir up hatred against the Church. Again we need to stand up for God's truth and teach that which is right, but we can do that without creating a dogfight against Christ and His Body. Another issue of slavery in Ancient times; Much of it was not slavery as much as servant hood to a Master who held an indebtedness against a person or family. Much of Christ life and teachings showed how to honor both the Master's function and that of the servant. Much has been said against Christians for not standing up more forcefully against Hitler and His treatment of the Jews during WWII and with some justifications but it is also true that had some groups been so open in their condemnation of the Germans, much work that was done to save a not insignificant few, could never have occurred behind the scenes were it not for their restraint. Presenting them selves, as religious martyrs would not have helped those who were contributing a service behind the scenes. Some other scriptures concerning Slavery may be useful to review or read on your on. Look to; 1 Cor. 7:22, Gal 3:28, Eph 6:5-9, Col. 3:22-24, and of course Philemon chap 16 -17.

Hebrews

The Author of Hebrews letter is unknown. It was written to Jewish Christians probably of Jerusalem or maybe even Rome around the time line of 67-70 AD. The letter called on them to stand firm in the Gospel they had been taught and not be persuaded by other Jews to come back to their old Jewish Laws. In 13:22, the author refers to his writings and exhortations as a letter of encouragement. It is reemphasized that the Old law's (covenant) purpose was to pave the way for the "new", which supercedes and replaces the Old. ¹⁸ (The essential Bible Companion, 2006, pp 115)

Key Lessons from Hebrews:

Heb 1:1-2 "God, who at various times and in various ways, spoke, in times past to the fathers by the prophets (this of course we have called the Patriarchal period or age, Patriarchs meaning "Fathers") has in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom he also made the worlds. These first two verses of the letter to the Hebrews (Jewish Christians) was to remind them that their Old Scriptures was given to them by their Fathers through the Prophets of God. Now, however, they are given through Christ, a manifestation of God, who communicates with them through His words, the writings of Christ Apostles and disciples, and the Holy Spirit of the Lord. Hebrews 1:2,3; "For if the Word spoken through Angels proved steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, walked and talked with him."

Here again, we can remind the reader of the scriptures which point to the fact that all scripture given is of the Holy inspiration of God whether spoken or written by God's direction, His prophets of Old, or those Apostles who walked and talked with Christ in his ministry. They all bear equal weight. Remember, Christ told Peter and those disciples with Him at the time; "what ever you allow on earth, I will allow in Heaven and what ever you bind on earth will be bound (disallowed) in Heaven. For both he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified is one." (they are one and the same) Matt. 16:19 Why is this important to say? (Again!) Because so many will give more credence to one Prophet, Apostle, disciple than another preferring even Christ's words over those of His Holy inspired disciples when under the Holy Spirits influence, they "**are one**" and the same. **Get a grip! As my golfing friend says, "Get a hold on it!"**

Look at history and today how many reject what they often label “Pauline writings”. One denomination’s sermons will for example, more often than not, be based on John’s writings versus others, supposedly for the simple reason that He emphasizes **believing as the Key to salvation**. The World loves it. John 3: 16 runs their religious world and it is a great and true scripture that is inspired and true if you understand what it means. Many twist its meaning and at the same time ignore its meaning.

The Jewish Christians in Heb 2:17 are reminded that Christ is our merciful and faithful high Priest in things pertaining to God. The High Priest had a special meaning to the Jew in that only through the High Priest, such as was Aaron, could they have direct contact with God and once per year could they, through the High Priests’ going into the Temple’s Holy of Holies, get their sins forgiven or rolled forward for another year. For those faithful Jews who died under the Old Law and before Christ, Christ came and died to give them everlasting forgiveness for sins, which had been rolled forward before Christ sacrifice.

Remember, one of the happenings on the day that Christ died on the cross was that the Temple curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the outer temple was split from top to bottom. The significance of this happening was that once and for all, with Christ death, Christ became our sacrifice for Sin eternally and our direct connection with God through Christ. This is also true for all the Old Prophets and Godly men of the Old Testament. That is why we today can go and speak in prayer to our God through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. When we pray we end or begin our prayer by saying, “In the name of (or by the power and authority of) Jesus Christ”. Christ told His disciples, **us**, that what ever we ask **“In His name”** would be granted. When we pray, we should pray that God's Will be done and those things which we ask for are asked for in accordance with Christ authority. Understand that when someone gives you authority to act on their behalf, they fully intend and have faith that you will not abuse the authority given you and that you will only make decisions or demands that they themselves would make. It's quite a responsibility to act on another's behalf. So we approach God directly only under Christ authority. The common Jew understood that to enter the Holy of Holies would have meant certain death. We should have no less knowledge of our God than to know that to approach God under any other authority than Jesus will mean certain “spiritual” death yet how many times have we heard one invoking God's name directly and in vane or for no reason; that is as profanity. Friend, we have no authority to be so bold! Concerning the keeping of the Sabbath (seventh day, Saturday) Holy, a day of rest; This certainly was one of God's commands for the Israelites given to Moses as part of the Ten Commandments and many Jewish Christians continued to observe this command of God, and we to this day have many who abide by the

idea of a day of rest although most now observe the 1st day of the week as their chosen day of rest. The writer of Hebrew addresses how the Christian should now look upon this idea of the Sabbath rest, which God introduced to them in the Mosaic Law. The Old law we are told remains for our learning but under Christ, items of law, items of worship, and other principals including a day of rest, **were changed to reflect a more spiritual and heart felt relationship with our God and rather than a physical day of rest the New way places emphasis on spiritual rest versus physical.** (That is not to say that we should not seek physical rest for our bodies) Hebrews 4: 1-11 “Therefore, since a promise remains of **entering His rest**, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it (in disobedience). For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as them...for we who have believed, **do enter that rest**, as he has said; So I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter My rest (speaking of those who reject Christ)...those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience...**there remains therefore, a rest for the people of God, for he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his work as God did from His.** Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.” Heb 4: 1-11 All we need to do is look around at society today and see that mankind is in a mad rush looking for something that they cannot seem to find. What is it that man wants, what does he need? Where can he find it, **whatever it is. “It” is rest**, which men need and many cannot seem to find. Why? Because they are looking for rest in all the wrong places. Some think they will find it on their couch watching football with a beer in hand. Many think that they can find it within themselves calling it “self actualization”. Academians love this term. But in truth, **the only true rest one will find which is enduring and meaningful is in Christ Jesus. He and He alone is the Christian’s Sabbath and that was God's intent from day one.** His Old Law and the day called Sabbath was just a lead in (as was all of the Old Covenant) for mankind to understand the concept of true rest, which was to be and is “in Christ Jesus our Lord”. **The ultimate concept of a Sabbath was/is, not “One day”, instead it is “every day in Christ”.** Isn't that wonderful? **Hey, take a load off, take a rest, and get a life folks!** Its funny how the world has come to understand that this Sabbath day rest thing is literally a day off from menial work, a day to kick back. Does the world think or see any evidence that God took a day off from doing his work. God has never stopped “working his plan” and neither shall the Christian, but in so doing, **it is rest to be about working God's plan. God did rest in that He was satisfied with His creation. That's exactly the rest we should expect no less and no more.** Working on the farm with my dad as a teenager, I ask him several times, “Dad (Papaw to the grandkids) why don't we ever take a vacation, take a rest from this farm work?”

Every time His answer was the same. “**Son, are you not rested (sometimes he would say, are you not having fun)? Every day doing this work is a vacation to me and I feel at rest doing it. You gotta love your work**”, he’d say. Well, he finally began taking us to the Gulf coast nearly every year but probably not for his rest. Dad found out how much he liked to eat seafood (bless his heart). If you asked any of Dad’s friends they would tell you he never rested even when he ate but he was satisfied. Dad had a certain rest in his knowledge and understanding that Christ was his savior also. May we all seek that rest. Heb 4:11 and 14: 5-10; “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall in disobedience... seeing then that we have a High Priest who has passed through the Heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for man in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifice for Sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray since he is also subject to weakness. Because of this, he is required, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins and no man takes this honor for his own benefit, but he who is called by God as Aaron was. So, also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest but it was He (God) who said to Him 'you are my Son', Today I have begotten you;... You are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchisedek” Psalms 110:4 “Though Christ was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things he suffered and having been perfected, became the author of eternal life, our Salvation to those who obey him, called by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchisedek.”

A lesson on milk versus meat: Heb 5; 13-16. “For everyone who partakes of only milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.” You know being a babe is great, you can have all the milk you want and all your needs are met and its free to you but we all know “it don’t last forever”. Sooner more likely than later we are going to have to face reality. We are all expected to eat solid food, get a job and take care of our selves and life around us. Solid food belongs to those who are of full age that is those who by reason of use have exercised their senses and have discerned good and evil. To the Jewish converts, the writer of Hebrews is and will say (and it will be largely here paraphrased); don’t go backwards to John’s baptism for repentance, from dead works and of faith **toward God**. There is that word again “**toward**”. Remember way back in this writing we discussed the acts taken to become a Christian, where the scriptures stated that we believed after hearing of Christ, then we confessed him as Lord, and repented of our Sinful nature, all of these acts were stated to be “**toward**” salvation. If you recall, **baptism placed you “Into Christ,”** that is to say, you have arrived at Salvation with baptism. In Hebrews we see “dead works” used in the same sentence with **faith “toward” God**. Many brush right

over this and are a little confused perhaps that faith without action could be dead works. What? Again, we must understand that compared to our faith in God through Christ, His Son, that faith that Abraham had, that all the prophets had, the faith of repentance in John's baptism, was dead compared to the faith we have through Christ Jesus, which is alive. Get past even the doctrine of John's baptism of repentance, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead. Move on to the meat of the Gospel. Those earlier doctrines were milk leading you **"toward"** the meatier Gospel of Christ. Now, the writer says, if one falls away and begins to crucify the Lord again we may have to go back and feed him milk again in order to make him bear fruit and be useful. "But beloved, we are confident of better things from you. Yes, things that attests to your maturity and salvation." Heb 5:13-14, Heb 6: 1-9 Are you ready for some meat? Here is a refresher of earlier Old Testament History. If you are not ready for this you may want to go to back for milk. Certainly the writer of Hebrews knew that his audience here, converted Jews, was well versed in Old History and should be ready for meat.

Christ, a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek; Lets first reflect a bit to the account of Jacob's (who was renamed, **Israel** by God) children there were eleven of them who would become head of 11 of the 12 tribes of Israel/children of Jacob. Actually, Jacob had 12 sons, the 12th being Levi. It was God's plan that the 12th son of Jacob, Levi, be the head of the Priestly tribe, the tribe responsible for the Priestly duties of the Tabernacle and later Temple. They would not occupy territory of the Promised Land of Canaan but would be totally supported and provided for by the 11 other tribes and given cities within the other Tribes territory. All future priest of Israel would be from the tribe of Levi including the High Priest of Salem (Jerusalem) mentioned in Hebrews 7:4 as Melchizedek. Now consider how great a man this Melchizedek must have been to whom even Abraham (the father of all Hebrews) gave a tenth of all he had and also those sons of Levi were powerful who were commanded to receive tithes of their brothers, the descendants of Abraham, according to the law. God had blessed Abraham as you remember with being the father of the Hebrew Nation through which Christ would be ushered into this world as its Messiah. Heb 7:7 Even so, Christ as our High Priest in this Christian period, his lineage not from the priestly tribe of Levi, rather he came through the tribe of Judah and this had been prophesied all along in the Old Testament. It all seems a contradiction except for this prophecy that the better Christ blesses the lesser Abraham. Here on this earth mortal men (the Levitical priesthood) receive tithes, but there (in Heaven) He, Christ receives them... Heb 7:9; When you think about it, even Levi who on earth received tithes; because in Levi's time Christ had not yet come but was yet in the loins of Abraham, therefore perfection was not through the earthly

Levitical Priesthood, for under it, the people received the law which itself was imperfect. So what need was there for another priest as of from the lineage of Aaron and the tribe of Levi. In Christ, the priesthood was changed (made more perfect) and of necessity, there is also change of the law. For He (Christ) of whom these things are spoken, belong to another tribe from which no man has come officiating at the Altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose **from the tribe of Judah** of which Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. Gen 49:1-10; Moses did however speak to the fact that **the tribe of Judah would eventually be praised and bowed down to**, implying strongly that Judah's lineage would bring our ultimate High Priest (Christ). See also Is 1:1, 11:1, Mi 5:2. Continuing at Heb 7:15- "And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come not according to the fleshly law (Old Testament) but according to the power of an endless life... for on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect. On the other hand, there is the bringing in a better hope through which we draw near to God (our hope in Jesus Christ). Those Levitical Priest of old, were priest **not of oath** but were appointed **simply because they were “of the Levitical Tribe”**. They were, shall we say, **automatic Priest** and not because of there perfection. Christ and Melchizedek on the other hand was by oath and from God who said, " The Lord has sworn and will not relent; you are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. By so much more authority Jesus became a surety (guarantee) of a better covenant. The Old Levitical Priest were prevented from continuing by death, but Christ, our High Priest, continues forever and is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him."

Read the balance of Hebrew. Now you are probably saying, well yes that was indeed, not milk but meat and so it was, but it was so very important to those Jewish Christians who were continually trying to hang on to the Old Jewish laws and to mix it with the new way of Christ. In so many ways it is no different today with many different religious doctrines continually mixing the Old Laws of Moses with the new of Christ. It remains hard for people to understand that Christ's sacrifice fulfilled all that the Old law meant to do and we still study it, **but the new covenant with God is our standard**. We are under a more perfect Priesthood. What a deal !

So, Jesus is now and forevermore our Priest, the only Priest given by oath from God Himself to all mankind, to the Jew first then to the Gentile (rest of mankind). For what purpose? Here is more meat... Under the Old Covenant (Promise of God) there were laws given to guide nearly every activity of man when it came to his relationship with his God and creator. There was a law for what to eat and not eat, how to follow God, how to worship God, when to

worship God, How to build and decorate the Sanctuary of God, how to cleanse oneself before God, how to approach God; it was never ending and practically impossible to perfectly abide by. In fact the whole plan of God it seems in giving man all these parameters to live by, was to show that man was incapable of reaching a stage of righteousness sufficient to approach God, to live with Him and be in perfect relationship with Him. We mentioned much earlier that some might ask; if it was God's plan to send mankind Christ to save him from his sins, why did he not do it much earlier? The answer is still, that God new man would not realize or accept that he needed a savior. For example, one might have thought that man would have known that he needed God after God destroyed all the world except for Noah and his family and certainly Noah and his family would have decided to follow God perfectly after the water receded and all were saved. What happened however was that after getting off the boat, Noah got drunk and sin began anew. **Listen, one will hardly accept Christ today until they have tasted sin totally and been convicted by the blood of our savior.** Look at how many times you have witnessed a convicted prisoner who turns to Christ only after they are convicted. People can get religion fast after a conviction. But first they have to be judged and convicted sometimes over and over until "three strikes and your out". When we are given Christ as a standard to compare ourselves to, it's easier to stand convicted but it don't happen right away. One has to be shown by the Judge who he has become. Jesus as our High Priest shows us our God who lives behind the second veil of the temple and seeing the wonders of God through Jesus, we finally (just may) accept our savior for who He is **and see ourselves for who we are.** Before Christ, the high priest went into the Holy of Holies, behind the veil to approach God on his and all the Israelites behalf to petition God to once again roll forward another year all their sins. Heb 9: 8, The Holy Spirit had not yet made known the way into the Holiest of all while the first tabernacle was standing. In other words, under the earthly Tabernacle, they were temporarily cleansed of their sins for another year by the High Priest's intervention. The more perfect way of removing sin through Christ had not been revealed. It took Christ coming as our High Priest and introducing a Tabernacle not made with human hands to show us what was behind the veil. Christ today then is our new Tabernacle and again don't forget what happened on that day as Christ died on the cross namely; rolling thunder, 3 hours of darkness in the middle of the day, the veil in the old Jerusalem Temple split from bottom to top signifying an access to God himself through Christ as our intermediary. Christ is offered as a once and for all sacrifice for all mankind for all of our sin. No longer does the Old Law require a once per year appearance of an earthly High Priest to ask God to roll our sins forward for another year, No our sacrifice has been offered once and for all in Christ. All of the Old Law then

was a mere image of what was to come in Christ. Heb 10:1, “For the law, having been a shadow of the good things, can never be perfect....” So, we have to ask the Hebrew (Jewish people); why do you rather live under a shadow than the real thing? An even better question is for the nonbeliever in God and His son; what advantage is there in a non-belief position. The God of creation created all with a free choice to believe or not to believe. If one exercises his option to not believe, he/she is merely exercising their God given choice. It does not negate the existence of God and it does not mean that anyone needs to convince you of the existence of God. I would not advise any one to do that. God has the power to convince you without anyone else’s help and if God can’t do it then anyone else’s chance is remote indeed. Once an atheist relative decided it would be interesting to debate me on the existence of God. My position was simple. If you have decided there is no God, then I have already lost the debate. I did not announce him as a winner but there is no useful reason debating one who has come to the determination there is no God. He/she has arrived at his/her end, and that is the end of that, unless God intervenes. If one has questions about God or why I have faith in the God of Heaven as my creator and Spiritual Father, then sit a spell. The only thing I ask in return is that you also tell me how you have come to depend on a faith that there is no God of creation or a heavenly and spiritual realm.

Now let’s consider the assembling ourselves together as Christians. Some conveniently refer to this as “Church attendance or going to Church”. Church attendance is a misleading at best phrase. What does it mean? How do you attend Church. I am not sure how you attend the body Christ died for in a physical way by “attending church” and merely sitting on a bench. Christ Church is much more than a building or a pew. Attending the Body of Christ is as Mary Madeline and the other women did when they went to the tomb on Sunday morning with spices and mueir to anoint the body of Christ. It is our service to the Body of Christ that counts as attending the Church of our Lord. Showing up and sitting on a bench or pew and participating in worship can only be a form of attending the body of Christ when we consider it a form of sacrifice and worship which we present to the Body of Christ, His Church. Don’t you think we may have more who wake on Sunday mornings, the resurrection day of our Christ, thinking, “This is our day to attend to Christ Body” if they thought of attending Church in this manner?

Many have said, you know, I really have given up on “organized religion”. You got to know where they are coming from to understand how they reached this position. They have more than likely grown to understand that the majority who faithfully come each Sunday and sit on a pew of what “they call a Church” are

not really attending the body of Christ at all but they are attending to their own self interest, and that folks is counter productive! Get over attending Church services and understand that we are supposed to be assembling ourselves with fellow Christians for the purpose of attending to our Lord's Body (His Church). Again I call on my close friend Elder and preacher Wayne Dunaway who is fond of saying that he has three "Fs" for those who rebel against God's Will, including assembling ourselves.

He generally applies these thoughts and statements in his response to any person's religious inquiry.

- 1. Feel (I know how you feel)**
- 2. Felt (I've felt that way before)**
- 3. Found (But I have found) ¹⁹**

What he is saying is that we all can often say honestly that at some point in our life we have had similar feelings about a situation as another has on a subject. It is very effective in disarming someone over their strongly held feelings on a subject if one can honestly display a feeling of understanding the other person's feelings. But even, having had those same feelings, we often change our understanding and thus our feelings after a period of education or study. This can especially be true regarding matters of understanding the Bible and God's Will. Most everyone learns something new every time they open the Word of God and that's good. We have a personal responsibility to grow in knowledge of Gods Word and Will. As Christ told John in revelations; "**eat the book**". We need to also "study (eat the book) to show ourselves approved". II Tim 2:15,Rev 10: 9 That's the only way we can recognize Christ's Church when we see it, and the only way to know that we are assembling with that group of people or congregation who are truthfully **attending the Body of Christ or His Church**. It's the only way we can be assured that our assembling is truly **attending** to Christ Church, His Body. We can truly sympathize with those who have become disillusioned with formal Church attendance. In disgust they often stop attending/assembling. **We have "felt" that way also. But in our quest for the truth of God's Will "we have found" that many so called churches have lost their way and or no longer attending to the Body of Christ as Mary and Martha were doing on the way to the tomb. Many are attending to their self-needs in "Attending Church" services that more often than not are more entertainment than they are true worship.** Even the preachers are more entertaining sometimes than they are teachers of God's Will. Songs of praise that

we raise up to God as worship, we can't be sure are truly appreciated by God as worship. Many of our worship services music are merely loud sounding cymbals with trumpet and drum rolls that would wake up the dead and while it may set us to swaying and wake us up on Sunday morning, one has to ask, does God accept this as worship? We know for example that the Music of the Church in the first century was without instruments. It was rather more of a chant or acapella singing. Look up the word acapella in the dictionary and it will state "**Music of the Church**" or "**Chapel Music**". In fact not until the 18th century did churches allow an instrument of music in a worship service. But the point is there are plenty of reasons many today forsake organized religion and we must bring them back, but back to a scriptural based Body and a scriptural based Worship. One that is consistent to God's Will and not man's ideas. When you find this, then feel confident that God is in the midst of such an assembly. When you walk in and find that an assembly does not resemble the first Century assembly, then you have every right to say, as the Mississippi comedian, Jerry Clower said, "**where do you want your new door**" because he was leaving the church in a hurry and so should you. Heb 10: 24-25, .."and let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the custom of some, but exhorting (encouraging) one another; and so much the more as you see the day approaching." We are given examples over and over in Acts of fellow Christians meeting in their homes, having meals and fellowship together and celebrating the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus with the Lords supper, most often referred to in short as, "breaking bread". This was the only act of worship which Christ himself sanctified and commanded they do in His remembrance. Today we find **most church assemblies** neglecting this one sanctified act of worship preferring to do it quarterly or on some other convenient schedule. This despite the fact that Bible examples clearly indicate that the disciples met on the first day of the week (Sunday) to break bread in addition to praying, preaching/teaching, giving of their means, and singing psalms. If you are looking for Christ body and a people who espouse God's Will in an assembly of the Body of Christ, The Church, and you don't see these items of worship, **ask where they want the door**. But even if you find an assembly, which seems to follow the New Testament pattern of worship, seek out its leadership, its Elders and ask some key questions before you settle in. How do they treat sin and sinners. Look at the sin of adultery, homosexuality and remarriage. How do they treat sin in the Church. It will tell you a lot about their scriptural correctness and if they indeed represent Christ Body. Speaking of homosexuality that has become a huge issue in our world and in the church. How should the Church deal with this sin? We simply deal with it as we do all sin. We hate the sin and love the sinner, pray for him/or her and seek to draw

them away from any sinful addiction. In the end if one cannot be restored, the Church cannot fellowship the unrepentant sinner or his/Her sin. Remember we have said the Church is for sinners who have accepted Christ and that means they have also repented and are no longer slaves to their sin. You will be surprised how many church leaders/elders have lost sight of this fact. If they fail these inquiries, look for the door or make one for yourself. Pray for them on the way out. If you have to, go home and worship God there in accordance with His will. The only caution is that when you do this you take on a tremendous responsibility and you miss the encouragement of fellow Christians. Make sure you **restore** “the Lords Church”, the one described in the New Testament and that you, once again, don’t, as most of the denominational world has done, **reform** another church. That’s the last thing the world needs is another reformed church. What the world needs is the **restored Church of our Lord**.

Another point to be made on assembling with the Church; ask the question, “what is your understanding on assembling and what are the teachings of the Elders or leaders of the congregation” you have chosen to attend. There are some who contend that every member of their group has to or must try to attend every time the doors are open or a Church activity is happening. It is true that we as Christians should not neglect the assembling of ourselves together as is stated in Heb: 4, however there is no other scripture which suggest or requires our assembly for worship other than the examples shown where Christians assembled on the **first day of the week and worshiped**, usually in someone’s home initially. Whether they met in the morning and or evening does not seem relevant. Whether they met once or twice on Sunday and perhaps on Wednesday evening, again is not mentioned. We often find churches that plan something nearly every night of the week and from the pulpit make its members carry a load of guilt for not attending. There is nothing in the scripture, which supports one being made to feel guilty for not attending each and every function of the Church, and in fact some may even overdo their attendance to the deprivation of other meaningful family activity. The only thing we know for sure is that first century Christians met on the first day of the week for the reason of “breaking bread” or partaking of the Lord’s Supper. They apparently chose the first day of the week (Sunday) to honor the day, which Christ arose from the grave. This suggest that, as a minimum, we should assemble for that purpose even if that is the only act of worship conducted. Paul specifically on one occasion told a congregation that he would delay his visit so as to be there on the first day of the week when they **“broke bread”**. It seems very clear this was an act of worship versus a regular meal. As mentioned earlier however, other acts of worship routinely conducted were praying, singing, giving of their means, and preaching or teaching. Other scripture also guides us in regard to assembling in that if we

are avoiding an assembly with the saints, preferring an assembly or socializing with nonbelievers, we should examine our motives for preferring an assembly with unbelievers. Unlike the Old Mosaic laws of the Jews which guided worshippers of God with strict Laws, God does not want our worship which we bring grudgingly to an assembly we don't wish to be in. Bottom line is attend and worship God on the first day of the week as a minimum and worship God with a truly worshipful attitude when ever you assemble to worship.

Hebrews on Faith: Heb 11: 6- “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

We have written much about faith because it is central to our life in Christ even as it was to the Godly men and women of the Old Covenant. Look at Noah again, being divinely warned of things to come which he had not seen, namely God's promise that he would destroy the world with a flood when in fact there had been no rain on earth to that point, having faith in God's promise, he obeyed His instructions to build a huge boat. Noah's belief led to an obedient action. All that laughed at Noah's actions, died leaving Noah and His family to replenish the earth, thus fathering the new world. Noah's descendant Abram was equally faithful to God's command to leave with his family, his home in Ur (what is now the area around Baghdad, Iraq) and travel toward the land of Canaan via Syria, which God promised to give his descendants. Because of his Faithful obedience, Abram, later renamed by God, Abraham, was given a promise or covenant that he (Abraham) would father a Great (Hebrew) Nation, (Israel), through which God would bring His Son Jesus to redeem man from the sins which Adam had placed him under from the beginning. Abraham then is the recognized father of all peoples who claim Jehovah/Allah/God; Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Later we find a very old Abraham and Sarah, his wife, without a blood heir. Finally, God by Sarah's faith, allows a son, Isaac to be born to them. The offspring of Isaac were Jacob and Esau with Jacob chosen to lead God's chosen Hebrew Nation.

Moses, another one of little faith in himself, finally gives God the lead in his life and allows his faith in God to give him the wisdom and fortitude to lead all of the descendants of Abraham, and Jacob (Jacob renamed by God as Israel) out of a captive state in Egypt to the promised lands of Canaan, long promised to Abraham. He and the Israelites or brought to the Red or Reed Sea with Pharaoh's army in hot pursuit. God gave Moses his marching orders to cross the sea as the seas rolled back leaving dry land to cross over. Moses and the reluctant Israelites obeyed exactly God's instructions to Moses. Throughout Heb 11 these acts of Faith are depicted. And notice we said, “**acts**” of faith. In each

case **action** or **obedience** was part and parcel with **faith**. “Words are cheap”, so says an old axiom based on many different scriptures. Our salvation in Christ is free and by grace are we saved, but nowhere is it to be understood that salvation had or has no call for action and where there is action there is implied a cost. No one can say that Christ’s suffering on the cross was not a cost in his obedience to the will of the father. When we follow Christ in our action of faith, repentance, confessing Him as Lord and then baptism, we will realize a cost. Salvation is a gift freely given but when you choose to accept it and open it, there is a cost. If you have ever cruised the internet and seen an offer of some item free and clicked on it, you quickly see, most likely, that the site ask for a credit card number for shipping cost as a minimum and look further for the small print stating that if you do not tell the site that you are not satisfied with their service or product, they can charge you monthly for continued service until you take action to cancel in writing. There is always a hidden cost. Christ gave His life freely but it cost him much suffering. Our salvation is free, but our cost is the loss of a carnal spirit worth nothing to the spiritual minded but valued by the natural man. But, our gain is a spiritual life “In Christ” worth everything including our carnal person. The problem is there is continually a struggle between this new Christian spirit and the last carnal spirit led by the devil. It never quite gives up on restoring the Devil’s place in our lives. **This struggle is certainly felt as a cost to most.** The good news is that your obedient faith in Christ power to save your newfound spirit, will win over the old carnal spirit cultivated by Satan. This is why the Hebrew letter encourages us to not neglect the assembling of ourselves for the purpose of exhorting (encouraging) each other and to prefer the company of our fellow Christians. In so doing we do cling to the body of Christ, His Church and assembly. The Church of our Lord is indeed our Holy Promised land, our Israel, our Jerusalem, and our Solomon’s temple that sat on the very site of Mt Zion, where the current Muslim Dome of the Rock sits looming over Old Jerusalem. It is our Mount Zion. Heb 12:22,23 “But you have come to Mt Zion and to the city of the living God, **the Heavenly Jerusalem**, to an innumerable company of Angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first born who are registered in Heaven, to God, the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect; to Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel’s sacrifice. See that you do not refuse Him who speaks, for if they do escape who refused Him (Jesus) who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from Heaven (God).”

Can we see what the biblical writer is trying to impress upon these Christian Jews. He is saying, **listen folks, you have been shown a New Jerusalem, a new and better Temple; you have been shown a new Holy land, the Church,**

the body of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. Don't try to go backwards toward the Old Covenant. God has given you a New Covenant and a better one through Christ Church. Listen, this message is just as appropriate today as it was thousands of years ago. We still have Jews and Gentile alike trying to deny our Savior and His Body/ Church. In some cases they accept Christ but try to recapture the parts of the Old Covenant and law, which **they feel**, should remain. This mixing of the Old with the New want work in pleasing God any better than the mixing of new wine with old wineskins or new cloth with old. The benediction of Hebrews, so to speak, is Heb 13: 20/21; “Now may the God of Peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, making you complete in every good work to do His Will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen. This ending should teach us to be careful not to take credit for our actions and good works when in fact it is God working with us. Heb 13:21

James

The author of this epistle is James, a half brother of Jesus. Mary and Joseph had four sons and two daughters after Jesus was born.(Mk 6:3; Matt 13:55) It was written to Jewish Christians in or about 45-50 AD and was a concise writing on faith and works, showing partiality, riches and poverty and the deadly tongue. “James, like his other brothers, did not believe in Jesus as the Christ /Messiah until after the resurrection when Jesus appeared to them.” ²⁰(John 7:5, I Cor. 15: 7) Can you imagine the arguments between His half brothers concerning Jesus’ status as the Christ? After witnessing the resurrection, James became a believer and leader of the first church at Jerusalem. His letter is of a Pastoral nature teaching Christians how to live the Christian life, on the subject of faith and works, showing partiality, and the deadly tongue, we have covered these well except for the following few verses in James.

James 1: 22-24. “But be **you doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves**. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror, for he observes himself, goes away and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.” This pretty much was also summarized in Heb 2: 14,18,19,20, “What does it profit my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? **Can faith save him?** (Good question for the “Believe only crowd”) We will also look at 1 Pet 3:21, Heb 2:18-22, “But someone will say, You have faith and I have works, show me your faith without your works and I will show my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God, You do well, and **even the Demons believe and tremble!** But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead.” Then James 2:24 “**Man is justified by works and not faith only.**” (Emphasis added).

And yet some, indeed most of our religious world, teach a theology today of Faith/believe only Salvation. They believe that the scriptures teach that our obedience to other items mentioned as part of salvation, such as confessing, repentance and their biggest hang-up, baptism, are not required for salvation, just believing. Have these theologians ever read James or Peter’s writing on this subject or do they perhaps completely discount James or Peter’s writings as divinely inspired? Believing is espoused several times in scripture as what one must do to be saved, especially in the Gospels of John but as we have said before, John is talking to Christians mainly, and **not describing all that needs to be done on the way to salvation.** John’s audience did not need to hear the whole spill on salvation again. Besides this, one must presume or apply logic that if one believes he/she is certain to obey all that God ask us to do which otherwise is described in several different scriptures and examples concerning salvation such as, **hear the word, believe it, confess the Christ as Lord, repent of our sinful nature and be baptized (otherwise defined as immersed in water).** Its easy to see why the religious world enjoys their theology of believe only. Think about it; it’s easy to get someone to say, “**I believe in Jesus as my savior**”. **What was the scripture we quoted earlier? “It is good that you believe, the demons also believe and tremble!”** Also consider how successful our TV preachers and others can claim to be. They don’t have to go to the trouble or spend time and budget baptizing. Hey, it cost money to keep a baptistery’s water warm. Make them say “I believe” and the job is done. Baptism is a real inconvenience and pretty humiliating is it not? **What did we say earlier, “words or cheap”.** They are indeed! We should hope and pray that those who have simply believed have gone on to complete their salvation in accordance with God’s Will. Who we should really pray for are those evangelist or teachers who have missed applied God’s word in their teaching on this subject

and others. James 3:1-2 “**Brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing we shall receive a stricter judgment.** For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body.” Psalms 34:13, “....Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceit.” In James 1: 19,26; 3: 1-12, 4; 1-12, He admonishes those who teach to be careful what you say and teach as a Child of God. “**Teach the truth with wisdom from above and not from our so-called earthly wisdom, which is not wisdom at all.**” James 3:14-17, “ If you have bitter envy and self seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above but is earthly, sensual, demonic,.... But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” Summarizing, if you teach, ***teach the truth in all God’s wisdom; teach the sum of his words, the truth of his words.***

From James how can we know that God is near to us? James 3: 7-8, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the Devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.”

How can we cover our sins and others sins? James 5: 19-20, “Brethren if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from error of his way, will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

What is Sin? James 4:17, “**To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.**” Be careful with this scripture for it **does not say** that the one who has never heard of God’s word or has never studied and understood His word is without sin. That person is in a stupor, sins, and is ignorant of his sin with little hope of salvation through Christ unless he is taught. For one to have the blessing of knowing God and understanding his sinful state, he is in a better position to seek God’s forgiveness and **near to salvation**. Now there always has been and always will be the one who ask, what about the one who has never heard God’s words or who is mentally deprived or challenged to the point of remaining incapable of making a choice for salvation through Christ? Scripture supports the one who is mentally beyond making an informed choice for salvation to be as a child, of which Christ said, “Such is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Matt 13: 14 If there truly is a person left on this Earth who has not been taught Christ crucified, we will have to leave it to God to know (have foreknowledge) whether or not that spiritual person would have accepted Christ had He/she heard. And then there are those who plainly and so boldly speak to

their confirmed belief that one is so easily lost who has not heard. May God be the Judge? Amen.

What is your life? Well, this certainly may be answered in many words. Some would say it is an adventure, or life is great, or life is a barrel of laughs, or maybe life is a pain to some. All, fairly shallow statements. James 4: 13-15 says, “.. You who say, today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there then buy and sell and make a profit; where as you do not know what will happen tomorrow. **For what is your life? It is a vapor that appears for a little time and then it vanishes away.** Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’” It kind of reinforces what we said much earlier. Our physical selves could be thought of as a figure of our imagination when really it is our spiritual selves that are created in God’s image, for “God is a spirit.” Certainly God has given our spirits a body to move around and accomplish His Will on earth, using our God given free will. But lets keep our physical life in perspective. It is a vapor, will vanish on a schedule we cannot know, *leaving a Spirit that God will claim as his or a spirit that He cannot relate to, reaping a future of misery in what scripture describes as a “lake of fire”*.

Are you sick? “.. Let him call the Elders of the Church and let them pray over Him anointing with oil in the name of the Lord.” “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man (All Christians are deemed righteous by God) avails much.” James 5:14,16. (Parenthetical statements by author for clarity)

Finally, James at 1: 9-11, 5: 1-12 warns us to not treat the poor with contempt, show no partiality between the rich and poor or oppressed. God loves a humble heart and dishonors the haughty spirit. **And the family of Papa Bear says in unison; God help Papa Bear. Amen**

The Jewish Historian, Josephus records the stoning of James in Jerusalem somewhere around 63 AD. We must never forget the cruel deaths that all of Christ Apostles (except John) experienced as a result of their ministry.²¹ They were each heroes of faith weren’t they? Amen.

I Peter

This letter written by the apostle Peter to the churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia (Turkey), and Asia (Minor), encouraging them to stand firm in their belief, live a life of holiness and submission to God. History tells us that about three years after this letter, 63 AD, Peter was crucified by the Roman Emperor, Nero, by some accounts upside down, for of course teaching the Gospel of Christ and against the idea that Emperors were due the respect of deity(gods). Remember, it was, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, fishermen both, who were first called by Christ to be Apostles and His disciples at Mark 1: 16-18. At Mt 16: 13-20 Christ with his chosen Apostles/disciples present said, “Who do men say I am?” This is a scripture we have used several times. Impetuous Peter immediately responded with several names that others had called Him, such as Elijah, and other prophets. Christ then asks his disciples, “**Who do you say I am?**” Again Peter answers with his most precious confession stating rightly, “You are the Christ, Son of the living God.” Jesus responded, “ Bless you Simon Peter for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but the Father in Heaven.” Christ tells Peter, “as your name Peter means ‘rock’, so shall I build my house (my Church) upon your (**rock firm**) confession, and I will give you the keys of heaven”(**or the way to heaven**). (Emphasis added) Who is Christ talking to, just Peter? He is directing himself toward Peter perhaps because Peter is the one who answered him but the context of this entire scripture implies that he is conversing with all His disciples present and not just Peter. The reason we discuss this in detail is because the Roman Catholic Church has now forever claimed that Peter was the first Pope of their organization. To conclude such has to be erroneous since there is no indication that in the first churches there was any such organizational structure allowing or calling for such a **position** as “**The Pope**”. Not until such time as the Roman Emperor Constantine established the Roman Church, which occurred much later than this conversation between Christ and His Disciples, was there a Roman Church sanctioned by the Roman governing body. What structural organization the first Churches of God/Christ had was limited to Christ as its head, with Elders, Bishops, or Pastors as overseers and deacons as their helpers and Christian saints under their leadership (congregants). These congregants were the very same that previous Roman Emperors massacred over and over. If the leaders of the Catholic church claim

that Peter was the first Pope, then where do they justify demanding their Pope and their Priest be unmarried or celibate for indeed Peter was a married man. (see Mk 12: 9-30, Mt 8:14-15, Luke 38:39. Peter's confession that Christ is the Son of the Living God, **Christ says He will build His Church upon this truth, the firmness (like a rock) of this confession.** It will form the cornerstone of Christ Church and that is all it says or needs to say. For any group, including the Roman Catholic Church, to make anything else out of it is a sacrilege. For anyone to “reform” **the original church that Christ was crucified for (again by the Romans we might add),** is a blasphemy against God himself pure and simple. **Writer’s opinion;** Yes, and may God forgive them. From the error of the Roman Catholic Church, we have today over 700,000 of erroneous theologies and divisions (denominations) reformed from that Roman Catholic Church, itself being the “first reformed Church”. **From a historical point of view it is simple to see how easy it was to “reform” what Christ had died for and remake it into a body that fit the Roman leadership’s agenda; The original Church, referred to in Paul and Peter’s writings as churches of Christ and church of God, had been torn to pieces by one Roman Emperor after another as they tried to destroy congregations of the Church established throughout Asia and Europe, burning Christians on stakes used to light walkways and gardens of Nero, observing their deaths in arenas with lions tearing them apart, crucifying them as they did Christ, Peter and others. What was left of “Christ Church” was easy to take over and so it was, by Emperor Constantine.** Constantine, convinced by his mother to accept the Christian Way was supposedly converted to Christianity, some would say as a matter of convenience. Constantine might have said, “if other emperors have not succeeded in getting these Christians to honor them as Deity, then lets join them or better yet, lets create or form our own Church with some similarities to these other Churches, then perhaps they will honor and bow down to our leaders; and so we have “The Roman Catholic (Universal) Church”. This Body has in effect become the worlds universally recognized Christian Church. How convenient. How utterly ignorant of world history for the world today to so designate the Roman Catholic Church as the **Church that our Lord and Christ died for.** All the other **Protesting** churches of the world are in fact denominations of the Roman Church and appropriately called **Protestants.** Any effort to reform another denomination is futile for they again will be built on **not the rock of Peter’s confession but on the error of the Roman experiment.** How a world of so-called intelligent people have bought into this idea is totally unbelievable yet it has happened. The only hope to regain Christ Church is to look at the original plan. Build on the cornerstone that Christ is the Son of the Living God, the rock, the firmness

of Peter's confession. Then, only with Christ as its foundation and head (not a Pope) can we hope to restore the Church of our Lord. Believe it; when Christ returns on the last day to get His Church He will recognize it while many on this earth will not. I don't know about you but I'm risking my soul on His Church looking very much like the first century Church and congregations that the Apostles and disciples established around Asia Minor, Rome, Greece, Jerusalem and surrounding areas. We should pray that Christ would accept all of these bodies, which really think there Church is Christ's. But it just does not seem to square with the scriptures that any church man dreams up will fill the bill. **Sorry but that is again writers opinion and this page will stand still for this or any opinion and so there you have it again.**

"It's hard to cope when you have no hope"; a catchy phrase used by a friend, Bro. Wayne Dunaway.²² 1 Peter 1:3-4; "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, to an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in Heaven." You got to like those two verses if for no other reason than the **hope** it gives us as Christians.

You that are God's children are special and don't ever forget it! Have you ever thought of Christians as a Nation. The Israelites knew they were a Nation of people because they were the chosen ones of God from Abraham. The chosen ones under the **New Covenant** were those in Christ beginning from Abraham. **Christians consisting of Jewish Christians first but also Gentile Christians are equally God's Nation of Israel today.** What is a Nation but a body of people holding common leaders, ideals, laws, and customs. We of course call America, Germany, Israel, Egypt, all Nations and they each have their leader and hold allegiance to their government. The foundation cornerstone and leader of our Nation of Christians is Christ. He is our head, our leader, and master, our Lord. We are His precious children, His special subjects. I Peter 2: 7-9 "Therefore to you who believe, He is precious; but those who are disobedient, the stone which the builders rejected (Christ) has become the chief cornerstone and, a stumbling (block) and rock of offence. Well, this scripture can be aptly applied also to the earlier discussion above on the Roman Catholic Church can it not? What else can we say other than the Catholics certainly have taken Peter's confession and Christ response as their personal stumbling block and neglected to understand and use the right foundation corner stone for the body they call the Roman Catholic Church. I Peter 2: 8 Continues; "They stumble, being disobedient to the word to which they also were appointed (have a

responsibility).” As Peter concludes at verse 9-11(paraphrased), You who are obedient, a **chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a Holy Nation**... beloved, I beg you to abstain from fleshly lust...”

Hey! We are what as Christians?

1. **A Holy Nation (Israel)**
2. **A Royal Priesthood; and we can add**
3. **Saints, Matthew 27:52, Acts 9:13, 26:10, Romans 1:7, 8:27(and you thought some Roman Catholic council had to declare one a Saint. No Way.)**
4. **Kings; James 2:5, Rev 5:10**

Now, hold on. We must not use these designations and go about boasting. Remember, Christ said the greatest shall be least in his Kingdom and the least greatest, right? It is an honor to carry such names, but **God gives us those titles expecting us to live lives deserving of the title and that's a tall order.** Probably the best we can achieve is **to live as though we deserved** to hold all these titles. So how can we inter into this Holy Nation, become a priest, a saint and a king? Where is the Key?

We have used 1 Peter 3:20,21 earlier but will once again quote them here offering one

of those Keys to Heaven and salvation which Christ promised to give to His disciples/Apostles. “Who were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, in which few, that is eight souls, were **saved by water, the like figure unto which Baptism doth also now save us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.** And the Chorus joins in, “Here he goes again”. “Why keep beating the same old drum on baptism!!!” Because the world of religious theology has most likely, stumbled on this one core element in God’s plan for man’s salvation and it is, according to God’s word, an act, **a key**, and places us in touch with the saving blood of Christ. Is one saved before being baptized or simply when he believes and without baptism? Not without baptism according to a complete reading of God’s Holy Word. At the same time God is sovereign which means He can save whomever he wishes, how and when He wishes. So let’s just say perhaps it’s not our call but as for this writer, the soul is too important and unless I fail to understand, baptism seals our salvation and places us **“in Christ”**. If hell is without God, this writer will try to baptize anyone confessing Christ and repenting of his or her sins, to complete God’s Will for man’s redemption. If we can’t get him/her dunked before death; we will, on

faith, rely on God's understanding and foreknowledge that if the deceased had had the opportunity, they would have submitted themselves to a death to sin and burial in water no less than Christ submitted to a physical death, burial and resurrection. Is our faith sustained that God would save without baptism? Only God Knows and as far as can be told, **His word leads, at least this writer, to understand that God requires one submit or at least commit to baptism by immersion.** So, we should not encourage anyone to delay their submittal to Baptism until they lie at deaths door. Some would ask one who is so convinced that Baptism is required; well, what do you say about one dieing on the Battlefield who confesses His faith in Christ, much as the thief on the cross did. Christ saved him. **Listen, before Christ death burial and resurrection, burial in baptism had nothing to do with salvation in the name of Christ. Christ could save whom he wanted certainly without baptism before His death experience but after He experienced death, Burial and resurrection, the act of Baptism following confession of Faith and repentance was the act, which seals ones salvation**, by all scriptural evidence. Yet, again we know that God has foreknowledge whether such a one dieing on the Battle field or death bed would choose to submit to an act of baptism were he able to be moved to such a location to accommodate the act. That is a call that we must let God answer in His time. There is no need for a mere mortal sticking his foot in his mouth or assuming to know God's final Judgment on that question. The question must go without an answer from this writer. It's higher than my pay grade, as the saying goes in the military. Sorry.

II Peter

We borrow again from a wonderful friend and Elder, Wayne Dunaway of Ohatchie, Al church of Christ, a catchy phrase perfectly describing what this letter is all about; "**Things to know in order to grow.**" Brother Dunaway

presents a good lesson on “Mints” or more accurately, “Ments”. Here are his three “Ments”:²³

1. **Encouragement**
2. **Commitment**
3. **Excitement**

This a second letter from Peter written from Rome and prison around 65-68 AD, near His crucifixion by Emperor Nero. He writes concerning problems of the churches of Asia but not just their problems for he offered them the “ments” we listed above. He tried **Encouragement** as he sought their earnest **commitment** to Christ and His church. And lastly he tried **excitement** in their service. These are certainly “ments” every one of Christ Saints should enjoy and needs today. We often need admonishing also for wrongdoing, but let us never fail to offer positive reinforcement to our congregants. Peter says at II Peter 1:2-9, “ Grace and peace be multiplied unto you in the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruptions that is in the world through lust. But also for this reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance, godliness, to godliness, brotherly kindness, to brotherly kindness, love. If these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted even to blindness.” From this scripture, we and those who received this letter, received their first two “Ments” **encouragement and commitment**. From II Peter 1: 1-12 we get the third “Ment”, excitement. “Be diligent to make your election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble. For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of those things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it right, as long as I am in this tent (a temporary house for the spirit) to stir you up (**excite you**) by reminding you, knowing shortly I must put off my tent (body) just as our Lord showed me. Moreover, I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after I (Peter) decease (die).” It is perhaps ironic that Peter’s mission here is the same as the writers; to leave a reminder to a family (my family and yours) of what wonderful blessings, what an inheritance we have in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our goal should be to stay in the folds of His arms by holding on to His robe, being **encouraged, committed and excited in His service.**

Let us emphasize here however, that just growing in Christ while it is wonderful and adds to our happiness in Him, knowing Christ and accepting Him by our obedient faith is what initially saves us. Salvation in Christ merely requires the Milk of His word and our acceptance of it by confession of Him as the Lord, repenting of our sinful nature and being baptized into His name. Growing comes with continuing in the meat of His word and gains us further awards of serving Him, ensuring that we remain grounded in Him and remain secure from all that is evil, which can draw us away. Once you have touched the saving blood of Christ, the only way you can lose that salvation is to fall away and deny Christ as Lord of your life. And yes, it can happen easily if you don't continue to grow. You will need to "stick with your Lord" and that is no small feat because there is plenty in this world to draw you away. Life after salvation is a battle and a race to the end when we all will meet our master and creator and what a glorious day that will be for those in Christ. Peter gives a glimpse of what awaits the one in Christ who finishes the race and wins the battle against Satan. As in any race, only one comes in first and wins the top prize, whatever that may be, but all who finish get rewarded for effort, so never stop running. So what are our rewards? 2 Peter 3: 7-13, "But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved (preserved after the flood never to be destroyed again by water (Gen 7:11,12, 21-23), by the same word, are reserved for fire until the "day of judgment" for ungodly men. (The earth and heavens, God promises, will be burned up and the ungodly (those who have rejected God/Christ) will be cast into a lake of fiery brimstones." Listen carefully; those in Christ are not at the judgment, but are taken away or taken up, to meet the Lord in the sky. The Bible tells us that Christians will give an account of our selves and will receive different levels of awards but we will not be judged on that final day. Judgment day is nothing for the Christian to worry about. Now this accounting will certainly be a time of embarrassment for most as we give an accounting of our deeds or lack thereof but you will not lose your salvation as long as you remained in the race seeking the Lord and walking/running the race, in Him. Peter says, "But beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promises as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us (he will put up with a lot from us) not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Lets not forget that God made man with a free will. We make choices every day and **any day now you can choose to not follow Christ. Totally reject Him.** There is an atheist on every corner that will try their best to convince you that they are the **bright one**, the smart one and your acceptance of a God of creation and an eternal life for the soul of man, is your unreasonable expectation; that you are ignorant of reality and maybe a little dumb. It's your choice then. Will you

continue in Christ or will you follow the crowd who are intimidated by the Atheist smart one. Really! The Atheists have even started to commonly refer to themselves and others have picked it up, as “**The Brights**”. Such arrogance! Staying the course with Christ is not easy with this pressure but you must if you wish to have a ringside seat on Judgment day. Peter goes on to say, “But the day of the Lord (the last day of the heavens and earth as we know it) will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements (yes, those very elements you learned about in High school chemistry) will melt away with fervent heat..(if you hated Chemistry you are probably saying, good riddance, burn them up)both the earth and all the elements which make up the heavens will be burned up.” Now, Peter asks a very deep question and it is worthy of your answer. **2 Peter 3:11, “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of person ought you to be in Holy conduct and godliness?”** Well, what is our answer? Remember we said much earlier, your physical body is a temporary tent, which goes away as a vapor in the end. In fact we implied that our body just may be a figment of our imagination. But, because it houses the very precious God given spirit, which is the only thing that is permanent, real, or has any meaning, God expects us to nurture and care for our body. We need to exercise it, feed it reasonably and not to excess, and never destroy it willfully (suicide). **2 Peter 3:14, Therefore beloved, looking forward to these things (here we go, take a close look at your spirit in the mirror or reflective glass of God’s Word, the Bible)** (James 1:23 and II Cor. 3:18) What do you see? You should see God’s image for that is the image he created in you to be:

- (1)Diligent to be found by him in peace,**
- (2)Without spot or blemish/blameless.**

Well you say, that leaves me out! **I’m no Saint!** Lets say it again, never let that statement pass your lips again if you are in Christ. If you have placed your faith in Christ promises, that is, confessed Him as Lord and savior, repented of your sinful self, and been baptized into Christ death burial and resurrection then, **say it one more time**, I am a:

- 1. Saint**
- 2. Holy Priest**
- 3. King**
- 4. Member of a Holy Nation without blemish(perfect)**

You nor your friends, especially those non- Christian buds that hang out with you, may think so, but God has a label on you so get over it and live up to the image God has given you. Not only that but 2 Peter 3:14 says, you are blameless and spotless. So, when this old earth is gone, burned up, where is this new heaven and new earth going to be in which righteousness prevails? In Heaven that has existed from the beginning, that's where! 1 Peter 1:3, John 14:2-3, Col. 3:1 and 22. Our promise land is not this terra firma, its not rocks and grass or real estate that the present day Israel and Palestine fight over; it is our Spiritual Heaven. Peter says, listen, "Paul, according to the wisdom given unto him, has written to you as also in all his letters, speaking in them of all these things, in which some are hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as do they all the scriptures. But you brothers, since you know the truth, beware lest you also fall away, being the error of the wicked. Now, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." My, how this has application today, even more so as every variation and interpretation of the apostles teachings imaginable is being preached from the pulpits of the world. What is really sad is that you that are on the receiving end often accept their error and neglect your own study and understanding of what the Word of God teaches so clearly. "God is not the author of confusion", Man and his Satan is. I Cor 14: 33 Get in the word with a real study. It is **your** responsibility to discern the truth of the scriptures.

First Epistle of John

John was a fisherman of Galilee, the brother of James, and son of Zebedee (Mark 1: 19-20) He was the youngest of all the apostles and the only apostle to die a natural death at an old age. Being the youngest, naturally as one might expect, He was the apostle who contributed the last of the letter of the New Testament, Revelations. Revelations was written 85-90 AD. After the death of Paul and Peter and the last destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem by the

Romans (around 70 AD), John writes his very short epistles, First and second John to who he considers his spiritual children. His writings are to those who had accepted Christ so any reference to salvation in his writings does not require him to spell out steps one must take to be saved. **He generally refers to believing, depending on his audience of already converted Christians to understand that believing encompasses repentance, confession and baptism as taught in other scripture.** Unfortunately, the religious world today takes John's epistles and builds their theology around his words that mention "**only belief**". We get then a "Belief only theology" which is mighty attractive for the majority of people that will always look for the easy way to anything, especially salvation. It is a complete distortion of the sum of God's Will and Word. John's letters were meant as letters of encouragement, not a treatise on how one is saved. The belief only idea fits perfectly with the TV evangelist teachings. Just think of all the souls one can claim if all you have to do is stir up their emotions on Sunday morning and ask only that they pray and or touch the TV screen, and oh yes, send us your dollars and we will send you this little publication for free. It is no wonder we have so many today that admit to being spiritual but have given up on "organized religion". It's perfectly understandable! John writes in 1st John 8:32, to Christians who are beginning to forsake the true gospel originally taught them when he said, "I have not written you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and no lie is in the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? One who denies the Christ is anti-Christ and denies the Father and the Son.... Therefore let that abide in you, which you heard from the beginning. If that which you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and the Father.... These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you." (1st John 2:21-25) Look around you and see the anti-Christ today teaching any number of erroneous doctrines and claiming to be teachers of God's word. Do we follow them blindly or do we go back to the root and restore the teachings of Christ and His apostles. Some will say, well times have changed and we have to adapt to change and that may be true when it comes to how we live in this world but it cannot apply to the teachings of God's Word and the way we are to relate to God for we know that God does not change. (Jeremiah 2:11 and Rom 1:25) If John could only know how the religious world has distorted the Gospel as Christ, His apostles and his own writings, originally taught it. It would be interesting to hear His response and one day we can perhaps ask him.

2nd and 3rd John

We will combine here these two very short letters of John. They both appear to be addressing a problem with traveling preachers going about teaching a form of Gnosticism. The word Gnosis means “knowledge” and their appears to have been a cult which believed that one was not saved by faith in Jesus Christ but only by a specific knowledge available only through the initiation into the Gnostic Cult of the day. How convenient for them! Basically Gnosticism was syncretistic. (Remember, syncretism is putting together a combination of different theologies and traditions such as paganisms, Judaism and Christianity to come up with one new theology) Gnostics of the day taught that the material world was basically evil and only the spiritual world was good. This led them to also teach that because of this so called fact, God would never have allowed His Son to become a carnal/human man, thus they rejected Christ as the Messiah and His dieing on the cross for man’s remission of sin. Some taught that Christ may have appeared as a Man but was in fact only a spiritual apparition (a Ghost). All of this combined to lead many Christians who had been taught otherwise to follow the way of Gnostic preachers. Syncretism, if not Gnosticism is still very much a part of our religious world today and is manifested throughout the Catholic Church and every denomination of it, i.e., all of our denominational world. The only hope of finding **the Church**, which Christ died for, is to find or restore a Body, which reflects the Body described by the New Testament scriptures unadulterated by men set on devising their own god and ways of worship. Is it possible to find or restore this true Church? We must believe it so. Paul taught Timothy, “Study to show thou self approved of God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Much of our syncretism today comes from wrongly mixing/dividing the Old Mosaic laws of the Old Testament with that of the New Testament of God. There is a scripturally correct way to use the Old scriptures for our learning and understanding of the New Testament scriptures. The Old Law is commonly referred to in the New Testament as Darkness and the New Testament as Light and following darkness or preferring it will lead to error in following God today. There was a dividing of these two Testaments on the cross when the scriptures say that the veil in the temple separating the outer chambers from the Holy of Hollies was split from top to bottom as Christ died hanging on the cross. It is our jobs then today to understand and properly administer this dividing and we must do it with care

and prayer. Well, certainly we have learned two new words, Syncretism and Gnosticism. Be careful with words is a lesson in itself.

Jude

Another half brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55, Mk 6:3) writes concerning false teachers, much as John in his three gospels. Jude cautions believers that some in the church are saying that since Christ died for sins, they can continue the practice abusing their addictions and habits of sinful behavior. Jude then stresses that Christians cannot continue **the habit of sin or being a slave to sin**. We will sin certainly, but he says we must not sin willfully and habitually. In other words **Christians need to get out of the business of sinning**. To continue the habit of sinning will have consequences, spiritual and even physical. All one has to do is listen to the deep coughing and wheezy breathing of the smoker to realize the affects of this terrible and sinful addiction. Yes, we do continue to sin and as Christians, we will feel the guilt and should be quick to ask forgiveness of those sins. Through Christ, God is quick to forgive us of sin repented of. So where do we come up with a smoking addiction being a sin. The only addiction we need as Christian is an addiction to Godliness. We are told that our bodies are the temple of God and as such we must keep our bodies pure and in subjection. Addictions to worldly things of any nature make our bodies and our service to the Lord unholy, polluting the very temple of God. Flee then all carnal habits to remain in service to the Lord. Jude verses 1-16 give Christians a caution. Verses 17-25 provide a challenge to all believers. “ But you beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ; how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their ungodly lust. These are sensual persons who cause divisions, not having the Spirit of Christ. (Where there is love and the Spirit of Christ, there will be no divisions) But you beloved, building yourselves up on your most Holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some,

have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you faultless before the presence of His Glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior...is glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.” Amen.

In summary of Jude, it can be said, and I call once again on my friend and Brother in Christ, Wayne Dunaway, Pastor/Elder of Ohatchie, Al church of Christ for his one liner introduction to Jude:

“Faith extended must be defended”

- 1. Faith is an extended invitation to all and it must be defended to the end.**
- 2. Christ our Lord and Savior is able to save and to keep you from stumbling.**
- 3. Not any old teaching will do; but the message; that doctrine first taught by the apostles who walked and talked with Jesus must be protected and defended and followed.**

Revelations

You might think that this being the last book in our Bible as Genesis was the first and, as we said Genesis means “the Beginning”; Revelations must mean the end, correct? Well it does mark the end of our written Bible and it does in symbolic and apocalyptic language describe **the end day and times**, the end time of this earth and its heavens. But far from being an end for the Christian, its greater theme describes the victory awaiting all the dead in Christ and those Christians remaining alive on the day of the Lord’s return. To those Christians, Revelation is “a new beginning”. It will be the end of the Christian era that began with Jesus’ birth and then death on the cross. It will however be a beginning that is of infinity or eternity with no end. The time which will have elapsed from Christ’s’ death till he returns is what John and other writers have variously referred to as **“the end times”**. In other words, we have been and are

now in the end times, waiting “**the day of the Lords return**. On that glorious day we have been given a glimpse of what will transpire by previous Gospel writings which include first a taking up from the grave of all the dead “In Christ” in water and earthly graves followed by those Christians remaining alive on earth. John, the writer of Revelations, as we have said was the youngest of all the Apostles and at the time of writing this letter to the seven Churches of Asia, was imprisoned on the Island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea South of Ephesus, Turkey. He was exiled to the small Greek volcanic Island for teaching the Gospel of Christ and as most Christians of the day, failing to acknowledge the Roman Emperors as Deity(gods). John was by this time (65-95 AD) becoming quite old. You can ask anyone who has been imprisoned and often in isolation, what it is like and they will tell you that they spend a lot of time dreaming about home, their life, their children and loved ones, even being held by their Mother. Its easy to get spiritual in a hurry and many a prisoner atheist when imprisoned, get religion before they have been there very long. As a flyer in the US Air Force I had several friends who had been Prisoners of War (POWs) during Vietnam. They on several occasions would talk of their ordeal in the prisons and how they relied on dreams of home and family and depended heavily on their spiritual experiences to carry on. We read that John writes much of his narrative while deep in the Spirit and being in the Spirit one reflects as did Paul on much of the basis of his experiences especially as it relates to his very intense exposure and knowledge of the Prophets of old and their scriptures describing heavenly realms. Much of John’s Revelations parallel in many details the Heavenly, spiritual descriptions of Daniel and Ezekiel. John’s writings in the apocalyptic style rely heavily on the use of symbolic language and numerology. One may be able to surmise that John’s letters to the Churches could have been subject to interception by his captors and some of his words could have been used against him within the prison setting thus perhaps requiring the codifying of some of the more sensitive material within the letter. Many religious readers today have taken much of John’s letter and interpreting some of his words perhaps too literal, as a result have misapplied his intent. Theological errors abound, particularly in regards to Christ returning to this old earth, “rapturing” those in Christ, establishing an earthly throne in Jerusalem, reigning 1000 years, giving those remaining one last chance to convert to Christ before an ultimate Battle of Armageddon.

All of this interpretation flies in the face of all that the Apostles previously wrote concerning this subject. If they insist on literally interpreting Revelations in this manner they certainly have a problem reconciling the earlier scriptures. The reader of John’s Revelation would best be served by understanding that John is indeed “**in the spirit of the Lord**” and is describing the current dilemma of the

1st Century Christians and the Battles that have raged around the Christians throughout this Christian era and in even in our present time. Any thousand years reign of Christ which John refers to, surely refers to Christ reign over his Church, His Kingdom from his heavenly throne at the right hand of God the father for a 1000 years (which **from a numerology standpoint stands for an undefined period of completeness**, undefined from the standpoint that a thousand years to the Lord is as a day and or a day as a thousand years) Any referenced battle of Armageddon has been raging for years and so has any tribulation mentioned. The good news and the real Revelation of John is that on the day that Christ returns and before any final big battle of Armageddon begins, (because again the Battle has been raging since Christ death on the cross), Satan, his angels, the ungodly are defeated and cast into a Lake of fire and Brimstone. **The battle is won before any one single last battle is even started and that concludes the whole matter.** The evil is destroyed, not this time by water as in Noah's time, **but by fire as promised by God.** And Christians will be born up out of the fire and above the death and destruction, in the clouds with Christ (the clouds being a form of water). Witness the symmetry of God's way. Man is once again born safely from harm through a medium of water (on a cloud). thank god for His living water). We witness once more and the last time, that the Godly are saved through the median of water much as Noah, children of Israel at the Red Sea and Joshua at the river Jordan and the act of Baptism beginning with John the Baptist and the disciples of Christ. Christians will have a ringside seat looking down on God's judgment of the ungodly from Heaven. A place, this Heaven, John describes as a very beautiful place with streets lined with gold. Wow what a beautiful place! Streets of Gold, you say...Come on! Hey, you know how dreams are; they can get pretty graphic even unbelievable at times. So what, let them!

The Beginning of Revelations is explicitly a letter to the seven churches of Asia which lie principally in the current country of Turkey (Asia Minor) and each of these Churches had attributes apparently much like any one church of our present time. Some are zealous and hard working, another is cold and dead, another runs hot and cold much as the hot and cold springs that is abundant in the Area of these Churches. Paul addresses many of the atrocities being carried out by the Roman Emperor Domitian against the Christians of these Churches. Instead of accusing Rome of wrong doing, John talks in "near code" referring to Rome as a "Babylon" in place of directly accusing Rome of Evil. His efforts to codify his writing style again, is perhaps to ensure his letters will pass inspection of his Roman captors if intercepted and will eventually get to the seven churches as encouragement and admonishment. He possibly understands that if he is too direct in his letter, he could be further persecuted, held longer, or even those of

the seven churches may suffer further maltreatment. Given all this as we alluded to before, there is plenty of room for the casual reader to misinterpret John's words. As a further example, many in the religious world have gone to great lengths to identify who in our modern age or perhaps in the future will be the Anti- Christ when in fact there have been many Anti-Christ in history and will continue into the future until the last day. The number 144,000 is used describing the number that will be saved of the remnant. Is this a literal number or does it once again, as numerology suggest, simply represents an **indeterminate number signifying a level of completeness**. Again, religious people who interpret crucial subjects of Revelations literally without giving due consideration to John's Spiritual, dream like state and his apocalyptic, symbolic style of writing and liberal use of numerology in expressing himself, will miss the mark and miss completely the beautiful message of John. In so misinterpreting they fall for John's trap set for his Roman guards as he knew they would read his letters. If you have ever truly analyzed your dreams, you realize that any thing can happen or seem to happen in a dream. Dreams will stand still for any illogical or fanciful outcome. No timeline or sequence is forthcoming. The dream can take any shape or form. What we do know is that John and all the disciples had been driven by the promise of Christ to send them the Holy Spirit (comforter) to bring them a remembrance of all that Christ had taught them during his short ministry on earth. Here in Revelations, John gets a personal tour of Heaven and the last days by the Holy Spirit, a glimpse of the victory that is won by every person In Christ and what a tour it is! To those though that run with the literalist view there is one very important caution. Never forget that it was the Jews, the very chosen ones of God to bring the Messiah through, **which mistakenly rejected Christ in the first century because he did not establish a kingdom here on earth and conquer all their enemies as they expected their promised Messiah to do**. If the Premillennialist fully expect Christ to set foot on this earth and come and reign on an earthly throne for a 1000 years before he finally destroys Satan and his angels in a battle, **there is an almost certainty that they will, just as the Jews did earlier, reject and not recognize the true Christ upon his return in the clouds above the earth**. Let us once again set a stage at this point.

Christ warned on one occasion that there would come many in His name claiming to be the Christ and Christians must prove them, whether they be of Christ or the Anti-Christ. Assume for a moment that one has come claiming to be the Christ as many expect, especially the Jew's and Premillennialist and they in their own convoluted mind have proven Him to be authentic in that he has over come all enemies and established a throne even in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount where the Moslems also had there Dome of the Rock. Perhaps the "so

called" Christ is even now planning to establish his world Kingdom in old Babylon. Prophesy in action, wow!! Things are peaceful and just as the Jews and Premillenialist had expected. Now Picture this, a replay of an earlier scenario; the 1000-year reign folks stand around on "**the day of the Lord**" gazing into the clouds. (Authors added Quotes) "There, look over there what is that? It looks like an image being projected into the clouds of a man in white on a.... is that a white Horse? I wonder who is doing that... pretty neat.. What are those lights coming up from the ground going into the clouds? I wonder what the Christ over in Jerusalem thinks of this? I'm sure he will put a stop to whatever it is, for he will never stand for such a display...what's on TV tonight? And off they go into their homes thinking some one is simply playing around.... But then "**All Hell breaks loose!!! Oh, my goodness. You gotta be kidding! It's a sad outcome.**

That's the essence of Revelations. There is a great gathering for a battle against a Christ who returns, not to earth but in the clouds, catches up (some call it a rapture; so be it) all those in Christ, dead and alive, and then commences to destroy the earth, its heavens Satan, His angels and all those whose names were not written in **His book of life** to a spiritual eternity in what can only be described as a living hell of fire and brimstone, a spiritual dream life that one may imagine is much like a nightmare from which **you can never awaken**. **There is no God, no Christ, and no Holy Spirit there to comfort you**, wake you up, or give you a drink of cooling water. On the other hand; those who are taken up into the clouds and born away into Heaven, experience a spiritual existence eternally which can perhaps be described as **like a sweet beautiful dream from which one would never ever wish to awaken from and want**. It's a promised land for God's elect.

Now here you have been given a personal picture of Heaven and Hell and what John has described as our victory in Christ, and with a complete understanding of Revelations 22: 19 where we are told not to add or take away from the words of this book, I do Beg of my Lord to allow my feeble mind to personalize this one beautiful story of triumph over evil and that eternal home with the Lord. May God bless us all through Jesus Christ our Lord.

May the Lord forgive any errors or liberties I have taken in interpreting His will and defeat me where I err. I would pray also that God's Grace be with us all and guide us into a complete understanding of His Word. Amen.

AFTER THOUGHTS

There is absolutely no doubt that some of the thoughts put forth in this writing will be rejected by surely ninety eight percent of men and women of my acquaintance, perhaps all of my family, every preacher of the denominational world and of course all Catholics, Jews, Muslims, etc. Of My Family there may be possibly four exceptions and I will leave that to your imagination to wonder who that might be. As a population, **a Nation unto itself**, I can only presume that The Church of our Christ and God alone will endorse critical conclusions drawn regarding the one question that answers, ***“What must I do to be “Saved” from my sinful nature (to become Christian, perfect in God’s eye, a Saint, a***

king, a priest, a disciple) and placed into Christ Body, His one and only Church. In regard to “one Church” I speak of Christ Universal Church and not any one congregation of people who may or may not represent Christ’s Church. *Our mission, if we decide to accept it, is to assemble with the closest we can find to Christ Universal Body, being careful indeed in whom we associate. Then assemble, we must.* There is a church on every corner and you will not find perfection in any assembly this side of Christ return for His Church. But you must continue to seek perfection based on your close study of God’s Word. Never stop searching nor having faith in God’s ability to save. If you have believed in Christ, confessed Him as yours, repented of your sinful self and very important, been Baptized, that is, immersed in water “for the remission of Sin”, know then that you are saved or “In Christ”. Please let no one convince you that baptism is not required to reach God’s shed blood and redeeming grace and a required confirmation of your faith. For those who reject baptism because it is a work; baptism is not your work but the work of God on your heart, which leads you to this sealing act of faith. It is God’s truth. I beg of you not to neglect it. I beg not that I am so worried for the one taught that Salvation can be had without baptism, for God can save whom he wishes, no; I am more concerned for the soul of the one who teaches such error. For the one who follows this error we can point to one story after another, starting with Adam and Eve’s error in the Garden, to see the results of following error. **Then you must decide if following or teaching error is ok with God and you are willing to risk your very soul's salvation.**

Why write something that few will agree with? I have simply determined that I will no longer let a religious world continue to take God’s Holy Inspired Word and turn it, twist it, reshape it totally into their own manmade idol or to allow any preacher to misrepresent God’s Gospel truth. I have for several years refused to walk out of a religious service and not challenge, respectfully and lovingly, a speaker’s failure to teach God’s plan for man’s Salvation or any other known error in accordance with complete Gospel truths. Each one so confronted is offended rightfully and looks around searching for someone who knows “**that masked man**”. They look rather puzzled normally wondering I suppose, “who would dare challenge their words”; to them, God’s Word.

God Bless my Mother and wife, they also run to the car in embarrassment, neither completely agreeing most of the time with my studied conclusions and excitement for the truth.

To all so embarrassed, I do apologize, but am not ashamed. **Thank God that physical crucifixion no longer seems to be a popular option for those so offended, otherwise this body would be nailed to a tree. I do however look**

over my shoulder from time to time. I am reminded of Christ's saying at Matt. 10: 34-36; “..I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his Father, a daughter against her Mother ..and a man's enemies will be from his own household.” How true. If one stands up for Christ/God's sword of His Word/Spirit, he can often count on those he loves most to abandon him. What follows is a sad commentary and I may regret saying it. **I have found that the world prefers to live a lie than to deal with the truth. Most can not deal with the truth despite God's scripture telling us that, “..Thy word is truth” John 17: 17 and John 8: 32, “.. Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”** Most and I do mean “most”, are not free but remain slaves to a lie in a religious divided stupor and prefer it that way. *May God help us all and as granddaughter Hannah prays and has taught me to pray,, “especially me Lord”. God bless you Emily, Hannah and Peyton and Sons Casey and Cyrus.. Amen.*

Papa Bear

Basic Bible References By: John M. Hunt²⁴

Apostasy: (to follow error or reject Bible Truths)

A child of God can “die”(spiritually) Romans 8:12-13; also can be “disinherited”. Numbers 14:11-12, James 5: 19-20 I Timothy 4: 1-3, Galatians 5:4 & 6: 7-8, I Corinthians 10:12 & 9:27, II Timothy 2: 17-18, Hebrews 3: 12, I John 1: 7-10, II Peter 2: 20-21, II Peter 3:17, Revelations 2: 4-5, Rev. 3: 1-5, Hebrews 10:26- 30, Matthew 13: 40-42, Ezekiel 18:24 Eternal life already given like, Joshua 6:1-2. To lose salvation is hard but it can occur by rejection of the Godhead and that's not merely a verbal rejection. It can be how you live, that is your living testimony.

Attendance: (assembly)

Psalms 122:1, Isaiah 54:7, Hebrews 10:25-26, Matthew 6:33, Titus 3:1.

Authority of the Bible:

Deuteronomy 4:2 & 18:20, II Timothy 3:16, Numbers 24:12-13, Luke 16:15, Proverbs 14:12, Revelation 22:18-19, the final revelation- Galatians 1: 8-9, John 16:13, II Peter 1:3

Baptism:

Purpose: Acts 2:38, 22:16, & Acts 10:48, Mark 16:15-16, I Peter 3:20-21, John 3:5, Luke 7:30, Read together II Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 1:8-9.

Call to action- Romans 6:3-5, Acts 8:36-38, Mark 1:9-10, John 3: 23.

Candidates- those taught Christ- Matthew 28:19, Acts 8:26-39 (See also Isaiah 28:9)

Believers- Mark 16:15-16, Acts 8:36-37. Believers must **Repent-** Acts 2:38, Must **Confess Faith in Christ-** Acts 8:36-39, Matthew 10:32-33.

Infants not required baptism: Matthew 18:3, 19:14, Mark 10:13-15, Romans 14:12, and Ezekiel 18:20

Holy Spirit Baptism: See “Holy Spirit” (separate listing)

Being Saved (see also Obedience and conversion):

Hear: Romans 10:17, Matthew 7:24-27.

Believe: Hebrews 11:6, Mark 16:15-16, (**Not Faith only**—See James 2:24, John 12:42

Repent: Acts 2:38, 17:30, Luke 13:3.

Confess: Matthew 10:32-33, Acts 8:36-37.

Be Baptized-see baptism

Remain faithful: Revelation 2:10

Church

Matthew 16:18, Ephesians (Eph.) 5:23-27, Acts 20:28. **The Church is “the Body of Christ”, Eph. 1:22-23, Colossians 1:18 &24, There is “one Body” not many-** Ephesians –4: 4-6, I Corinthians 12:12-13, Colossians 3:15, called **“Churches of Christ”**-Romans 16:16. **Saved “added by the Lord”- “not voted in”-Acts 2:47, II John 1:9-10. Religious division is sinful, see **“Divisions”**; for Name of Church, see **“Name”****

Conversion, Examples of:

1. Pentecost- Acts 2:22 & 36-37
2. Samaria- Acts 8: 4-13
3. Ethiopian Eunuch – Acts 8:26-39
4. Paul (Saul) Acts 9:1-20, 22:6-16.
5. Cornelius- Acts 10:1-48 (does not describe infants being baptized here)
See “Baptism” on infant baptism.
6. Lydia- Acts 16:13-15
7. Philippian jailor- Acts 16:22-34
8. Corinthians- Acts 18:8

Division

Sinful—I Corinthians 10:13, 12:13(see “Church”), John 17:20-21- **only one body**- Ephesians 4:4 & 1:22-23, **to support false teachers, teachers of error, is Sin**- II John 1: 10-11, Isaiah 5:20, Proverbs 17:15.

Divorce

Matthew 19: 8-9 & 5: 31-32, I Corinthians 7:10-11, Luke 16: 18, Romans 7:1-3, Mark 6: 16-18, Mark 10:2-12, Ezra 10: 1-3. **Refer also to “Marriage”**

Elders and Deacons-Organization of Church

Titus 1:5-9, I Timothy 3: 1-13 & 5:17, Acts 20:28, Hebrews 13:17. **Christ is the only Head.**

Eternal Punishment

Matthew 13: 40-42, 25: 41-46, 10:28, Mark 9:43-48. Luke 16:19-31, Revelation 14: 9-11 & 21:8, **Punishment worse than death:** Matthew 18:6 & 26: 24, Hebrews 10:28-29, **Wicked raised for this:** John 5: 28-29, Acts 24: 14-15, Daniel 12: 2. **Wicked at future Judgment:** Matthew 10:15, Luke 11:31-32

Faith Only

James 2:24,26, John 12:42, **see works and obedience**

False Teachers

2nd Cor. 11: 13-15, II Tim. 4:2-4, I Tim. 4:1-3,

Matt. 24: 24, Acts 20:28-30, Galatians 1:7-9, Duet. 18:21-22, **to support is sinful**, II John 1:10-11.

Grace

Justified by grace- Romans 3:23-24, But not by grace only- Titus 2:11 and Matthew 7:13-14; see “Obedience”.

Holy Spirit

Member of the Godhead- Matthew 28:19, I John 5:7-8, “He”- John 16:13 & 14:16-17, Acts 8: 29, Gave us God’s word- II Peter 1:21, “Sword of Spirit” is “Word”- Ephesians 6: 17, **Holy Spirit baptism**-occurred twice:

1. On Pentecost- to give power to the Apostles- Acts 1: 8 & 2:1-4
2. At Cornelius’ house to show that Gentiles accepted- Acts 11: 15-18 & 15:7-8.
3. Paul later wrote that there is now only **“one baptism”** – Ephesians 4: 4

4. Baptism in the name of Christ is water (immersion) Baptism- Acts 10: 47-48 and Acts 2: 38. It is commanded of everyone- Matthew 28:19, Mark 15: 16

Homosexuality (added by author not attributed to Mr. Hunt)

1. See Lot's Angels visitors confront Sodomites, Gen 19:5
2. Forbidden relationships; Leviticus 18: 22-23, 20:13
- 3.Examples of Homosexual conduct: Judges 19:22-24; Unnatural passion and desires: Romans 1:24-27
- 4.Homosexuality condemned. I Cor. 6:8-10

Inspiration

II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:21, I Corinthians 14:37, I Thessalonians 2: 13, Galatians 1:11-12, Matthew 10: 19-20, Luke 1:68-70, Galatians 1: 8-9

Judgment

Hebrews 9:27, Acts 17: 30-31. Matthew 25: 31-46, Luke 11: 31-32, II Peter 2: 9, II Corinthians 5: 10-11 See “Eternal Punishment”

Kingdom

“At Hand”- Matthew 3:2, to come in first century with “Power”- Mark 9:1, But “power” to come with Holy Ghost- Acts 1:8. This happened on the day of Pentecost–Acts 2:1-4, The Kingdom was in existence in Paul’s day- Colossians 1: 13, It is the Church- Matthew 16: 18-19.

The Lord’s Supper

Matthew 26: 26-28, I Corinthians 11: 23-29, “Upon the first day of the week”, (our day of worship and rest)- Act 20: 7, Note: This is the same wording used for the weekly contribution- I Corinthians 16: 1-2 and for the Sabbath, (the old testament day of worship and rest)- Exodus 20: 8. (Parenthetical notes added by author for clarity not attributed to Mr. Hunt)

Marriage (added by author not attributed to J. M. Hunt)

Consider: There is no reference in the Bible to a marriage **ceremony** by a preacher or any other official. Wedding party; yes, where the wine flows. God’s word equates the (presumably consensual) **“Joining”** (as in the sexual act.) as

marriage. Genesis 2: 24, The Egyptian Pharaoh might easily have taken Abram's Sarai as wife (supposedly in the sexual act). Gen 12:19, also at Gen. 20, Isaac's marriage to Rebekah, Gen. 24: 67, Jacob's inadvertent marriage by unknowingly having sex with Leah before finally going in and lying with Rachel, Gen.29: 23-30. "**Joined**" with a Harlot you are one flesh (married) I Cor. 6:16. "**Joined**" is not "**Holding hands or Kissing**". Yet, God ordains man's law and abiding by man's law with a ceremony is good as long as we understand **God's intent in marriage**. Making scriptural decisions on marriage and divorce based on man's law alone without considering God's Will opens us up to many points of error in the church on the issue of divorce and remarriage.

Re-marriage (Added by Author not attributed to J. M. Hunt)

See Marriage above (God's definition, not man's). Marriage remains valid with God, separation, "legal" divorce certificate or not. Remarriage of one divorced in man's court, separated legally or otherwise is only sanctioned scripturally with death of a partner **or sexual infidelity** (adultery) to the original marriage party. Sexual immorality/Adultery against original marriage **includes** one separated party **remarrying** (remember God's definition of marriage) another while the other party is alive and **unmarried**. In this case, remarriage of the one remaining unmarried to another not in an adulterous state themselves, is viable scripturally and spiritually. Why? Because **the first party remarrying has adulterated an otherwise scriptural marriage leaving the other party free to remarry because of adultery**. See "Marriage and Divorce" also Mk 10:5-12 specifically.

Music

New Testament Church used only vocal music- Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, Matthew 26:30. It is sinful to add to or take away from God's word- Revelations 22: 18-19. Deuteronomy 4:2. See "Authority". Vain Worship- Matthew 15:9. Reference to David's music see, Amos 5:23, 6:5.

Name

Romans 16:16, Acts 4:12, Matthew 16: 18, Philippians 2: 9-10, Isaiah 62:2, Colossians 3:17.

Obedience

Matthew 7:21, Acts 10: 34-35, II Thessalonians 1: 7-9, John 14: 15 & 23, I Peter 1: 22-23, Hebrews 5: 8-9, I John 2:4 & 5:3, Romans 6:16, James 2: 24, also see "Works".

Old Testament (Law)

For our learning- Romans 15:4, Changed – Hebrews 7:12 & 8:7, 8 & 13 & 10:9, & Ephesians 2: 13-15, Colossians 2:14, Ended as our law at the Death of Christ- Hebrews 9:15-17. Galatians 3:19 & 16 & 24-25, Galatians 5:4 & 18- Sabbath to Jews- Deuteronomy 5:2-3, 15. Made known at Sinai- Nehemiah 9: 13-14.

Once Saved Always Saved

See “Apostasy” and “Disobedience”

Sin

What is Sin? – I John 3:4, James 4:17. “All have sinned” - Romans 3:23. Sin is not inherited- Ezekiel 18:20, Matthew 18:3, Mark 10: 13-15, Romans 14:12.

Sincerity (Not Enough to Save)

Paul was- Acts 23:1 & 26: 9-11, I Timothy 1: 12-16, Acts 7:58-60 & 8:1. Cornelius was - Acts 10:1-2 & 11:13-14. See also Proverbs 14:12, Luke 16: 15, Isaiah 55: 8-9.

Works

James 2: 14-17, 19, 24,26, John 12:42, Galatians 5: 6, Acts 10: 34-35, Matthew 7:21, Hebrews 5:9. **Kinds of works:**

1. Works of the flesh – Galatians 5: 19-21
2. Our own works- Acts 7:14,11, II Timothy 1:9
3. Works of the law of Moses- Galatians 2:16.
4. Works of obedience- Acts 10:34, 35, Luke 6:46, John 6:29, See also “Obedience”²⁴

Notes

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3. Wayne Dunaway, Pastor, Ohatchee, Al church of Christ, Feb. 2010, Bible lesson/lecture.
4. Richard Dawkins, "The God Delusion", 2006, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, New York, pg 321
5. Wayne Dunaway, Pastor, Ohatchee, Al church of Christ, Feb 2010, Bible lesson/lecture.
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7. Ibid, pg. 45.
8. John H. Walton, Mark L. Strauss, Theodore Cooper Jr., "The Essential Bible Companion", Zondervan, Grand Rapids Mi., 2006, pg. 44,45.
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12. Wikipedia, "The Free Encyclopedia", the Internet, circa Jan 2010.
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14. Ibid.
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16. McClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia of Music, Vol. I, pg. 762.

- 17.M.C. Kurfee's, "Instrumental Music in the Worship", pg. 196.
- 18.John H. Walton, Mark L. Strauss, Theodore Cooper Jr., "The Essential Bible Companion", Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Mi., 2006, pg. 115.
- 19.Wayne Dunaway, Pastor, Ohatchee, Al church of Christ, circa Dec 2008, Sermon outline.
- 20.John H Walton, Mark L. Strauss, Theodore Cooper Jr., "The Essential Bible Companion", Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Mi., 2006, pg. 117.
- 21.Paul L. Maier, Commentator, William Whiston, translator, "The New Complete Works of Josephus", Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Mi., pg 208.
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- 23.Ibid.
- 24.John M. Hunt, "Basic Bible References", A Book Mark, Order from Hurt Publications, P.O. Box, 126, Smyrna Tennessee, 37167