

What Christians Want To Know

Volume One

Fifteen Questions That Christians Want to Know

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Introduction

What We Believe

We are an interdenominational ministry for Christians who want to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. We all may vary about smaller issues but Christians generally agree with the below statements about God and the Bible. We may disagree but not be disagreeable. As Philip Schaff once wrote, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.” Here are the essentials:

We believe that Jesus was literally conceived and born of a virgin named Mary (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:26-33).

We believe that Jesus lived a sinless life (1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5).

We believe that salvation is in none other than through the name, person, work, and grace of Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6; Jn. 3:16; Rom.5:8).

We believe that all 66 books of the Bible are the “only” inspired word of God to the world. We do not acknowledge the Apocrypha, Psuedopigrapha, or the Gnostic Gospels, to be “inspired scripture” (Tim. 3:16).

We believe that God is the creator of all things, is all-powerful, all-knowing, and in control to do as He wills (14:15; Jer. 32:17; Eph. 3:20; Psa.139:1-4; 1 Sam.2:6-9; Psa. 24:1).

We believe that all of humanity has fallen short of God’s glory and is in need of salvation; hence the reason Jesus came to the earth (Rom. 3:23; Rom. 6:23; Rom. 5:8; Jn. 14:6).

We believe that God is one, but reveals Himself thorough the persons of the Trinity as The Father, The Son as Jesus, and The Holy Spirit. Furthermore, we believe that each Person of this Trinity is God (1 Cor. 8:6 6:44; Rom. 1:7; Isa. 9:6; Jn. 1:1 Acts 5:3; Heb 9:14; Jn. 4:24).

We believe that those who die without salvation go to a literal place called Hell (Psa. 9:17; Psa.73:12-19; Luke 16:23.26; Jn. 12:48).

We believe that those who belong to Christ will inherit eternal life in a literal Kingdom of Heaven (Isaiah 65; Zech. 14).

We believe that Jesus will return to gather His people, as well as the resurrection of the dead in Christ at His return (1 Cor. 15:21-23).

We believe in the water baptism of believers in Christ (Acts 2:38-41; Acts 22:16).

We believe that Christ is the Head of the church, which should be governed by Him and that ministers are simply under-shepherds (Eph.5:23).

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Chapter One

Five Tips for Picking the Best Bible Translation

There are dozens of Bible translations. The King James, the New King James, the English Standard Version, the New International Version, the New American Standard, the 21st Century King James Version, the New Living Translation, and many others. Which is the best Bible translation for you to read? Which is closer to the original text? What translations use the original Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew? Is there one single version of the Bible that theologians, pastors, or churches prefer?

The Languages of the Bible

First of all, the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Much of the Old Testament Hebrew was translated into Greek called the Septuagint. I received a wonderful gift once. It was a Bible that had four different translations in one edition. This is an exceptional Bible study tool that allows the reader to look at each different translation to extract meaning out of each and every verse you read. I recommend that you own or buy more than one Bible translation and do not depend upon any one single version because different Bibles bring out different areas that can differ in interpretation. I also prefer the Bibles with margins and footnotes where the original Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic is given.

Which is the Best Bible Translation?

There is no simple answer to this. Some of this has to do with which part of the Bible you want to read. The Bible is the Word of God, God-breathed and God inspired (2 Tim 3:16). It is described as living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword since it can penetrate human thoughts and motives (Heb 4:12). The Word is the very power of God (Isaiah 55:11). Which translation is best? I will answer this question but first, there are five tips that I would recommend before you pick the “best”.

Tip Number One: Popular Doesn’t Mean Accurate

The most popular translations are not always the best translation. For example the Living Bible, the Message, or the Amplified Bible are very popular today but they tend to paraphrase a too much. This leaves too much room for personal interpretation and the Bible is not for private interpretation (2 Pet. 1:20). When authors try to translate the Bible into the modern day vernacular, they take too much license in the wording and as has been said: Take text out of context and it makes it a pretext. This is exactly what modern day translations like the Amplified Bible or the Message do. They take the verses and put them into a story form. These translations paraphrase too much and this makes extracting the meaning even more difficult or gives a meaning that can be misleading. They may be the most popular, but that does not mean they are the most accurate.

Tip Number Two: Modern Translations Can Become Mistranslations

An example of this can be found in Matthew (28:20) when Jesus was departing this world and the disciples for heaven and giving them instructions regarding the Great Commission. Read how these different translations differ in only one verse.

The Common English Bible, “teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

The New Century Version, "Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, and I will be with you always, even until the end of this age."

The Message, "Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."

The New International Version (NIV) is the best rendering with the original meaning, "and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The NIV is better than The Message because where The Message version says to "Go out and train everyone you meet..." but the NIV simply says "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." This is a big difference. It would be hard to go out and "train everyone you meet" (The Message) when it specifically means to teach only those that you "make disciples" (v. 19 of Matthew 28). Plus The Message uses 78 words in translating one verse while the NIV uses only 24 words in the same verse (v. 20 Matthew 28).

Also The Message puts quotations around Jesus inferred meaning. That is dangerous theological ground when you are quoting Jesus and He didn't exactly say those specific words. The margin of error skyrockets when the author adds several words. You can be sure that there were not that many words in the original Greek text so the meaning is effectually changed.

Tip Number Three: Buy a Study Bible

If you are going to spend good money on buying a Bible, you might as well invest in a good one. Whatever Bible translation you use, get a Study Bible or one that has footnotes and side margins. These Bibles will tell you when some manuscripts were added and not in the original text while noting that other manuscripts are omitted and not in the original texts. A good example is what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. It reads, "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. The New International Version correctly states that some late manuscripts read, "for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." I am always cautious when I read "some later manuscripts read" because these were added by non-apostles. In this case, this verse was added by the Catholic Church at a much later date than the original manuscripts were written. These should be red flags for the readers that they are not inspired by the original author and thus are not considered scriptural. Also, some Bibles use italics and this is for an important reason. Anytime you see italics used in scripture, customarily these means that the words or sentences were not in the original text and have been inserted by a later, non-apostolic or non-original author. It can also mean that they were not found in the original manuscripts or that they were found in some later manuscripts. .

Incidentally, the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 is not in actuality the "Lord's Prayer". It is an example or arch-type of how to pray that Jesus Himself gave. The key is where He said, "This, then, is

how you should pray” (v 9). The actual Lord’s Prayer is really found in John 17:1-26 and it is called the “High Priestly Prayer” because it is where Jesus actually prays. He is not just giving an example on how to pray as in Matthew chapter six. A good Study Bible will point this important difference out.

Tip Number Four: Research Your Bible Translation

Even before you buy a Bible, research the translation. Do your homework. For example I researched the New Jerusalem Bible because I actually considered buying one. The word “Jerusalem” made me think that it might be a closer rendering of the original Greek. I could not have been more wrong. The New Jerusalem Bible that was revised in 1985 was a French translation and is more poetic than prescriptive. That is to say that it was sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church and Catholic scholars and was translated from a traditional point of view. It’s more reflective of modern day, liberal thought. If I wanted a book on poetry, I would buy a book of poetry. I would not buy a Bible just because it was written in a more poetic nature.

You could also ask a pastor, a Sunday school teacher, or an elder or deacon which translation that they use or that they like. And what translation does your church use? This was a decision that the church made as a whole and was not taken lightly. You can rest assured that the church counseled together long before making a decision on buying these Bibles for the church. This was likely not a snap decision. Much forethought must have gone into the process of purchasing them.

Tip Number Five: The Best Translation

The “best” is subjective. There is no one single translation of the Bible that stands head and shoulders above the rest. There is one version of the Bible that is used by more seminaries, more churches, and quoted more often by Christian websites. If you Google verses of the Bible, the chances are high that it will return a Bible Gateway link (<http://www.biblegateway.com/>) and that translation will be the New International Version (2011). The NIV as it is called, is the most often used, the most reliable, and the most often quoted of any of the major translations that are used today.

If I were to personally recommend a Bible translation, the NIV or the English Standard Version (ESV) would be it. The ESV Study Bible is the one that I use and with the margins and footnotes, I can easily reference the original work in Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew. The New King James (NKJ) Study Bible is also a fine translation. As I said before, I have several translations and I use more than one. But a Study Bible always gives you more and better information on the scriptures and it gives you associated scriptural references from elsewhere in the Bible that have to do with the same subject, topic, or person. An example is in my ESV Study Bible, John 19:25 the Roman soldier’s caste lots for Jesus seamless tunic which fulfilled the prophecy of Him in Psalm 22:18.

Only you can decide which translation is best. I have only given you the three that I think are the most accurate and the best for Bible study. You ultimately will have to make your own decision. I have more than one translation myself. Whichever one you choose, a good Study Bible will never disappoint and the English Standard Version, the New International Version or the New King James Study Bibles will be something that you will get years and years of satisfaction from. There is so much enjoyment in studying the Word of God. And if you have all three Study Bibles, then you’ve won the Triple Crown. And then you can teach me a thing or two about the Bible I am sure.

Chapter Two

What Is Speaking in Tongues?

Many years ago I visited a church while out of town. At the time I was unaware that it was a charismatic church. When the church services started, it was quite clear that they believed in the gift of tongues. I was urged to speak in tongues and to “give it up” to the Spirit. I needed to speak in tongues to be “baptized with the Holy Ghost.” As I prayed over this and pondered whether I should try and speak in tongues, nothing happened. I even contemplated faking it. I felt somewhat ostracized because I actually never did speak in tongues. I was praying at the time that, “God, if you want me to speak in tongues, please enable me by the Spirit to do so.” Nothing ever came out and I felt completely inadequate compared to the other believers who were speaking in tongues that I didn’t understand. There were several speaking at the same time as they were dancing and jumping up and down. To me, it was a little frightening and confusing.

The tongues I heard that night were completely unintelligible and it was an exercise in futility for me to try and understand what was being said. And no one was interpreting the tongues either which made it even worse. The whole assembly, minus me, was in a near frenzy and they were completely lost in their actions.

I can remember reading about tongues in Old Testament times where foreign tongues were not a good sign for Israel at all (Walvoord and Zuck 1984, 539). Foreign tongues were usually a warning to the nation. When I looked at the New Testament, what I found was that tongues are not a babbling of words, but that of a known language. This language was intelligible to those who spoke that language and understood by them.

Speaking in Tongues in the New Testament

The first place that speaking in tongues occur in the New Testament was in Acts 2:1-4: “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” The word tongues has a literal translation in the Greek of “languages”. This means that the tongues that were being spoken were those of a known language. The tongues were words with specific meaning and not just babbling. This is clarified in Acts 2:7-11, “Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome, (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

So those who heard these tongues or languages were languages that were known and that the believers may not have known how to speak. That was a miracle but the miracle was not for the believers benefit but were a sign for the unbelievers (I Cor. 14:22). These verses were a sign that God used to signify that the Gentiles were receiving salvation to those who did not believe (Walvoord and Zuck 1984, 382).

So clearly, speaking in tongues in the New Testament church were tongues of known languages and not unknown languages or unintelligible sounds. Since many in Judea were bilingual and some even trilingual, it’s not really that surprising that there were many languages being spoken (Walvoord and Zuck 1984, 357). They were praising God in different tongues or languages to give evidence for

unbelievers that God was at work in more ethnic groups than just the Jews. This validated the fulfillment of Joel chapter two to the Jews as well (Walvoord and Zuck 1984, 408).

Speaking in Tongues and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Acts 10:44-46 also has a reference to tongues: “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues (literally, languages) and praising God.” Notice that the Holy Spirit was poured out and they were not baptized into the Holy Spirit or received a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Speaking in tongues is a sign for unbelievers and not what some charismatic churches claim as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in the New Testament is it written that they spoke in tongues and were baptized in the Holy Spirit. For believers, the receiving of the Holy Spirit is a one time event and it is not a sign of being filled up by the Spirit or being baptized into the Holy Spirit. It is precisely for the reason of validating God’s acceptance of the Gentiles to the Jews and this acceptance by God for all people was at a specific time in history (Walvoord and Zuck 1984, 408).

Tongues: A Sign for Unbelievers

Biblical scholars agree that in Acts 19:1-7 and elsewhere that these verses clearly indicate that tongues were intended “to overcome unbelief” (Walvoord and Zuck 1984, 409). They were specifically for unbelievers and to validate Paul’s message and to overcome the listener’s unbelief (Walvoord and Zuck 1984, 408, 409).

Even at the risk of offending some, this reminds me of snake handlers. Some churches take one text out of context and make it a pretext and sadly, the worship is more centered on the gift of tongues or the handling of snakes than it is with Christ being the center of worship. Jesus Christ should always be the center of all worship services and never any gift since Paul tells us not to exalt in any gifts of the Spirit since they come from God anyway.

Taking Text out of Context

Here is a personal note on the gift of tongues and the twisting of scriptures. Sadly, many denominations or churches do not take problematic scriptures and place them against *all* the scriptures relating to a particular subject to discover the proper context to see whether it is biblically sound or not. This is what is meant by “rightly dividing the Word of God” (II Tim 2:15) and “scripture is of no private interpretation” (II Pet. 1:2). A sound principle is that if there is a problematic scripture or verse; take all the other scriptures that relate to this subject and place them all against the one scripture or scriptures to bring clarity to the subject. If we still can not decide its meaning, then this might be God’s prerogative alone to know about and we have no business trying to inject or infer meaning when God is not clear on the subject. If God has not plainly revealed its meaning in scripture or it is not clarified by other scripture, then this is not revelation from God intended for us and should not be taken as such. Revelation from men is highly questionable and not like the inerrant Word which is infallible. If God had wanted us to fully understand it, He would have revealed it. Some things that are not clear must be for Him alone to know and we have no business trying to decode such enigmatic scriptures into a meaning that we were never intended to know in the first place.

It is apparent that there is sufficient evidence about tongues that they are clearly a sign for unbelievers, Jews or otherwise. They are also a sign that God is at work. The earliest church historians never mention that speaking in tongues continued to occur in the church after all the apostles were gone. Speaking in tongues is a rather recent movement in the 19th century. I speak Spanish and I feel that some people are gifted at learning other languages. My former pastor picked up several African languages at the time he was on mission trips. He had a gift for it. But it was a known language. I can speak in “other” tongues, like English, Spanish, and even some Greek but what sounds like gibberish to those who don’t know them, it is a known language. But these are known languages and I am not just “letting myself go”.

I have been told that I have never been “filled by the Holy Spirit” or been “truly baptized into the Holy Spirit” unless I have spoken in tongues. That is not biblical nor should someone feel less “spiritual” if they don’t speak in tongues. By the way, tongues are the last gift mentioned of all the gifts of the Spirit and love is over and above all other things. In my humble opinion, charismatic’s too often take it to the extreme and belittle those who do not speak in tongues and incorrectly associate their not being filled with the Spirit when this is actually a one-time event at the moment a believer receives the Holy Spirit at conversion. You can not have any more of the Holy Spirit, nor can you have any less of Him. You either have the Holy Spirit or you don’t.

1. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, trans., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary - New Testament*. (Colorado Springs, CO.: David C Cook, Publisher, 1984).

Chapter Three

Is Smoking A Sin?

If a Christian who has been born again be lost if they don't stop smoking? Is it sin for a Christian to smoke? If a Christian smokes, does it mean they really aren't saved? Is smoking and being a Christian incompatible?

The Definition of Sin

The Bible gives us the proper definition of sin. It does not come from human beings or human opinions. If you watch today's talk shows, you can see just how far human opinions can deviate from the Word of God; therefore a biblical definition of sin is accurate since it is a definition from God Himself.

In First John 3:4, the apostle gives us the proper definition of sin, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." This means that every human that has ever lived has sins and continues to sin. So we are all in big trouble since we all have and will continue to sin in this life. Jesus is the only human who never sinned. He was both man and God and lived a perfect life. Consequently, this is why Jesus made the perfect sacrifice because He was without blemish and the only perfect One that ever lived. His death reconciled humans to God. But only those who believe in Him are the ones reconciled to God (Acts 16:30-31).

Sin leads to death as James says in 1:15, "Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." The wages or what we earn from sin is death (Romans 6:23). But whoever believes in Jesus Christ is saved from the penalty of sin (John 3:16). Since all have sinned and fallen short of God's standard, every human is in big trouble (Romans 3:23).

What Saves us from Sin?

Humans are unable to save themselves. Paul quotes Isaiah when he tells us about human efforts to save themselves by works, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away" (Isaiah 64:6). Paul clarifies it in Romans 11:6, "And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace." Any attempt to save ourselves by works is self-righteousness and God will not accept our own works because they are not sufficient. It is only those who believe in Jesus Christ that are saved from the penalty of sin (John 3:16).

Our best efforts to overcome will never save us. Holiness is not the way to Jesus; Jesus is the way to holiness. There is only one way to salvation that is only in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

Famous Christians Who Smoked

There is a veritable who's who list of Christians who smoked. One of the greatest preachers and evangelists of the 19th century loved his cigars. He was Charles Spurgeon. Other famous Christians who smoked or still do are J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Chuck Colson, Johann Sebastian Bach, Billy Graham, and Jerry Farwell (although the last two quit in their latter years). This article has addressed all types of tobacco: cigarettes, pipe, cigar, snuff, and chewing tobacco.

The same questions could be asked about drinking beer, or wine, or eating pork, or...the list goes on. The fact remains that moderation in all things is a Godly attribute. Smoking is obviously not healthy and the believer should be diligent in their efforts to quit but what is there in this world that isn't good for you. I love to go to fast food restaurants but don't go very often because I know the menu carries high fat volumes in their foods. The fact is that it is a fallen world and that there are no perfect Christians. None are perfect but they are forgiven.

What Saves Believers?

Jesus was more concerned with what came out of the mouth (in words) than what was going into it saying in Matthew 15:11, "What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them." It is what comes out of the mouth that defiles believers; it is by our words that our heart is revealed.

Yes, you can still be a Christian and smoke. Is it God's will that you would quit? Of course because God tells us we are to be perfect and to abstain from every appearance of evil and He desires that we live a happy, healthy, prosperous, and long life. But at the same time, we shouldn't judge those who do smoke or those who we see are not perfect. If I cast the first stone, it would have to be aimed at myself. We should be concerned about our own sins and repent daily and come to the cross of Christ for daily cleansing. We will still sin and fall short of the glory of God, but whoever believes in Jesus Christ remains his possession forever and He will never leave you, forsake you, or have you snatched from His hand or the hand of God the Father (John 6:37, 10:28-29).

Chapter Four

Does God Answer Prayers of the Unsaved or Unbelievers?

Does God hear the prayers of the unbelievers? Will He answer prayer requests of the unsaved? If someone is not a Christian, will God still answer their prayer? Is there any hope for God answering prayers for those who don't believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior?

Praying in God's Will

It is clear from scripture that God not only hears prayers of His saints, but that He also answers their prayers. God says to Christians that He will listen to your prayers. He will also answer your prayers. In fact, God tells the believer that they can come to His heavenly throne boldly and ask Him for help (Hebrews 4:16). But our prayers must be in alliance with God's own, perfect will (Matt. 26:39). Sometimes the answer is no, at other times the answer is different from what we ask for because He knows what we need better than we do. What we want and what we need is not the same thing.

God Hears and Answers the Believers

Luke 11:9-10 says that if it is His will we can "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." Further, in Psalm 34:17 He says "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles." In fact God tells His people to pour out our hearts to him, for God is our refuge (Psalm 62:8).

When God Doesn't Answer a Christian's Prayer

God will not answer the prayers of believers if they are living in unrepentant sin or fail to forgive others. Matthew 6:12, 14-15 makes it plain that even a Christian's prayer may not be heard as Jesus testifies by saying that we are to "...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Therefore, a believer that is living in sin or fails to forgive others has their prayers blocked since they are out of fellowship with the Father. They will never lose their relationships but continual sin can affect their fellowship. If my children continue to be willfully disobedient, they must understand that I am not going to grant their requests since they are not doing what I ask them to do. God will never answer the prayer of a Christian while they are regarding sin in their heart (Psalm 66:18).

Does God Hear Unbeliever's Prayers?

Now let's answer the question as to whether it does any good for someone who is not a Christian to pray to God and expect Him to hear and answer their prayers. The Bible clearly says that God will not answer prayer requests of those who are not saved nor will He even listen to their prayers (John 9:31). Believers have had their sins forgiven but those who are not Christian are separated from God by their sin (Isaiah 59:2). I Peter 3:12 plainly says that God will hear a believer's prayer but not those of the unsaved: "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Proverbs 1:26-29 speaks to everyone who does not believe in Him and gives a warning for those who don't that "...when disaster strikes you; I will mock when calamity overtakes you— when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble

overwhelm you. Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me, since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD.”

How Can You Be Heard By God Today?

With all the natural disasters in the world today, He is asking you today to come to Him and accept Jesus Christ as Lord. Then He will hear and answer your prayer. You can know for sure that your prayers make it to His ears and that He will answer you. Psalm 17:6 gives you all the reassurance you need if you become a child of His that He will hear and He will answer your prayers: “I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer.” It is my hope and prayer that you will become a child of His today.

Chapter Five

What Does the Bible Say What Satan, the Devil, and Demons Look Like?

Have you ever wondered what Satan or the Devil looks like? What about demons? What are their appearances? Does the Bible say what Satan or the demons look like? Are demons fallen angels? Is so, why did they fall away and did they become demons?

What Satan Does Not Look Like

First of all, the images of Satan or the Devil with horns and a pitchfork are inaccurate according to the Bible. If we use the Bible as our authority, then the Devil looks nothing like we can imagine that he looks like. His name originally was Lucifer and he was described like a bright morning star. Satan was the greatest of all of God's creation. The greatest of all the angels and the most powerful being that God has ever created, including any human being ever made. When he was created by God, there was nothing like him in the entire universe and in all of God's creation.

In Hebrew, the name Satan means "the accuser". And the Bible describes him as the accuser of the brethren or the saints of God in Revelation 12:10, "For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night." The Devil is sometimes, shockingly, behind a pulpit and spewing forth false gospels as he appears as an angel of light, yet he is the father of lies (II Cor. 11:14).

Satan's Created in Power and Beauty

In Ezekiel 28:12-18 you will find God describing him: "Thus says the Lord GOD, You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The ruby, the topaz, and the diamond; The beryl, the onyx, and the jasper; The lapis lazuli, the turquoise, and the emerald; And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created. Until unrighteousness was found in you."

So Satan was created a cherub and he the one that originally was "the anointed cherub that covered" the very throne of God. He was perfect and "blameless". Reading God's description in Ezekiel, you see all the precious stones that have ever been created are a covering of his; gold, emeralds, jasper, and so on. He was "full of wisdom and beauty" but his pride lifted up his self-worth and he became "unrighteousness" before God.

Satan's Power and Rank

Satan was of the highest rank of all angels created. Greater in power and rank than Michael and Gabriel. But Satan's pride caused his downfall and he managed to convince about 1/3rd of the angels to rebel with him and these rebellious angels became demons. This is explained in Revelation where "... another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth (Rev. 12:3-4). They too are powerful but not as powerful as Satan or as Michael or Gabriel. Satan also convinced Eve to take from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Regardless of what you have read or heard, it was not an apple nor was it even mentioned that it was

fruit. We really don't know what it was on that tree but the fact was they disobeyed God and were cast out of the Garden of Eden, just like Satan was cast out of heaven.

What Satan and Demons Look Like

So Satan is a cherub angel. What do cherubs look like? If you could actually see an angel, they would frighten you. They are not the chubby little angelic and winged baby-looking creatures you see pictured so often. In fact, not all angels have wings. But a cherub, in particular Satan, is enormous in size, power, and strength. Every cubit is 1.5 feet (18 inches) and so I have formulated the cubits per feet in measuring just how big these demons and Satan are. Satan himself and all other cherubs stand 18 feet tall! However Satan is the most powerful of all beings that God ever created in the universe. Satan and likely, a number of his demons, have wing spans of 8 feet long and under each of their four wings there were what looked like the hands of a man (Ezek. 10:8). They had not only four wings but they had four faces too (Ezek. 10:21)! Imagine how frightened Ezekiel was when he was recording this in Ezekiel chapter ten.

Satan and likely most of the demons entire body, including their back, their hands, and their wings were completely full of eyes, including the four wheels they had (Ezek.10:12). Their four faces were faces of a cherub, a man, an eagle, and a lion (Ezek. 10:14). Similar creatures or angels that may have become fallen were likely those that were over the Most Holy. These had six wings and one looked like an ox, another like a lion, one like a man, and another like that of an eagle (Rev. 4:6-8). Satan and these fallen angels are spirit beings and so, thankfully, they can not be seen because they would be terrifying to anyone. Even so, Satan and his demons are subject to God's sovereignty and can do nothing over and against the will of God and are not allowed to take human lives (Job chapter one and two).

Satan Deceives and Blinds the Whole World

Satan has deceived the whole world and much of the world doesn't even know he exists (Rev. 12:9). In fact he has blinded the eyes of those who are lost so that they can not see the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). If you don't know Christ as Saviour and Lord, as far as God is concerned, you are blind too. Here's how you can have the scales removed. Mark 10:46-52 tells us how:

"Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."

I too was once blind and a poor beggar and could not see the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, but God gave me the free gift of faith and now I can see. And like the blind man who could now see and received my sight, I "...followed Jesus along the road." Will you follow Him too? I pray you will.

Chapter Six

What Do Christians Believe About Dinosaurs?

When Christians are asked by non-believers to reconcile dinosaurs and the account of creation in Genesis, many questions arise. Is the Bible silent about dinosaurs? Why are dinosaurs apparently never mentioned in scriptures? Did dinosaurs live before or during the time of Adam and Eve and mankind?

The Origin of the Word Dinosaur

The word dinosaur is not actually found in the Bible for one reason. The word dinosaur, which means terrible lizard, is a relatively new word that was first used in 1842 and was coined by scientist Richard Owen. This is the reason that the word dinosaur doesn't appear in the Bible which was written well before the 1800's.

The Ancient Book of Job

There may actually be mentions of dinosaurs in the Bible but not specifically by this name. In the Book of Job and elsewhere, dinosaur-like creatures are mentioned and so they appear to have existed at the same time that Adam and Eve and their descendants existed. Job is an ancient book. If this book were placed in its true chronological order in the Bible, it would reside within the Book of Genesis since Job lived over 4,000 years ago.

Dinosaurs in the Bible?

Job describes what sounds very much like a dinosaur. Read Job 40:15-24:

15 "Look at Behemoth, which I made along with you and which feeds on grass like an ox.
16 What strength it has in its loins, what power in the muscles of its belly!
17 Its tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of its thighs are close-knit.
18 Its bones are tubes of bronze, its limbs like rods of iron.
19 It ranks first among the works of God, yet its Maker can approach it with his sword.
20 The hills bring it their produce, and all the wild animals play nearby.
21 Under the lotus plants it lies, hidden among the reeds in the marsh.
22 The lotuses conceal it in their shadow; the poplars by the stream surround it.
23 A raging river does not alarm it; it is secure, though the Jordan should surge against its mouth.
24 Can anyone capture it by the eyes, or trap it and pierce its nose?"

Some of the translations say that the word "Behemoth" is an elephant or hippo, but there has never been a hippo or elephant that has a tail like a "cedar" (v 17) which is taken from the cedars of Lebanon. The cedars of Lebanon were valued above all timbers in ancient antiquity. They were 130 feet tall and their stout trunks could be over 8 feet in diameter. What elephant or hippo has a tail that size!? Many ancient dinosaurs were up to 150 feet in length like the Brachiosaurus.

Verse 19 says that this enormous creature ranked first in all of God's works (v 19). Its size allows it to be unfazed by a "raging river" (v 23). It also appears to be irresistible even to humans or other animals that try to "trap it" (v 24).

Elsewhere Job (41:1-34) describes a creature that inhabits the seas that some translations have mistakenly translated into the word whale. But any Bible with margins that gives the original

translation of the word clearly indicates it is not a whale. What whale has razor sharp teeth like iron that can swallow its prey whole (v 14)? Has anyone ever seen a whale or fossil remains of a whale where the weapons of man can not penetrate (v 26-29)? What whale can destroy by simply passing over their prey (v 30) and has no fear whatsoever of anything (v 31-34)? In 2008 the Natural History Museum in Oslo, Norway revealed one of the largest dinosaur sea predator ever found. It is a *Pliosaurus Kronosaurus* which is estimated to be over 50 feet long. The teeth that remain today are still sharp enough to cut wood.

Scriptural Evidence of Dinosaurs?

The Bible is full of scriptures that appear to describe dinosaur-like creatures. In Psalm 74:13 it says, “It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters.” Isaiah 43:20 read, “The beast of the field shall honor me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen” and he also writes about a monster (51:9).

Dinosaurs, Fossilization and Extinction

There are hundreds of early British and French explorers and trappers and American explorers and settlers that wrote down reports of sightings of giant mastodon bones still lying on the ground. Many of the Indians they spoke with mentioned them as being in recent memory. The fact is that fossilization does not take millions of years since under the right conditions a bone, an old boot, and even wood can become filled with minerals fairly quickly. Necessary ingredients for fossilization, even in a few thousand years are these; a quick burial under very deep water or volcanic ash.

Before the Great Flood of Noah’s time would have provided excellent conditions for fossilization of plants and animals. There would have been a rapid burial by millions of tons of water and sediment. The fact is that today there are many dinosaur remains that are still not completely turned in to rock and that have not been fossilized. Millions of these have been found as bone. Even today they are finding fish fossils that still have a fishy smell to them. The flood may have been the reason that many of the dinosaurs died out. Even the sea creatures would have died since many of their prey could have perished in the flood.

The more we read the Bible, the more we find that dinosaurs are not inconsistent with the scriptures. They could have died from disease, the flood, or in some cases, hunted into extinction. Regardless, it is obvious that the dinosaurs did roam the earth at one time. It is also clear that the Bible makes mention of some creatures that fit their description. Therefore, Christians belief in the Bible and the knowledge of the existence of dinosaurs, are not incompatible. In fact, they are completely compatible with God being the Creator of all life; plants, animals, insects, and mankind.

Chapter Seven

Do Pets and Animals Go To Heaven?

Almost everyone has lost a beloved pet. They become part of the family and many couples who are childless consider their pets as their own children. So what happens to pets after they die? Do they go to heaven? Will we ever see our dearly departed pets again? What is their fate? What does the Bible say about animals after they die? These precious loved animals include dogs, cats, horses, and even a few unorthodox pets that families have grown to love and grieve after they are gone. Let's see what the Word of God says whether animals or pets go to heaven?

Pets Are Part of the Family

This may seem like a trivial question for some people but for those who have pets, this is a question that has been asked particularly after the death of their pets. The Bible is clear that babies, young children, infants, or toddlers that die before they are able to accept Jesus Christ as Lord go directly into the presence of the Lord. When a parent loses a child, they can be comforted with this fact, but this does not mean that they will not grieve them. I can remember losing pets and losing them is painful too and our family has grieved these who were lost too. They are part of the family. They are treated as a child and I have had a few pets that thought that they were human too in the way they acted.

I know of several couples that were unable to have children and so they were especially close to their pets and loved them as they would their very own children if they were able to bear them. Many elderly couples and those who have had a spouse die are left only with their pets and animal's companionship has sustained them through the many lonely days and long nights. A pet's love is so very often completely unconditional. They don't care what your day was like, what went wrong at work, what your mood is when you come home. They are always ready to jump up into your lap and are so full of joy at seeing you that they display this love in their actions. How often I have come home from a hard day at work only to see my beloved dogs or cats run with joy to greet me. Their sheer joy at seeing me often makes me forget what a difficult day I had because they are there to meet with eager expectation.

Famous Christians Who Believe Pets Go To Heaven

Randy Alcorn in his book called "Heaven" believes that animals will be present in the Kingdom of Heaven. Famous Christian authors who believe that pets go to heaven include: C. S. Lewis, Nathan E. Jones, Peter Kreeft, Sylvia Brown, Niki Behrikis Shanahan, James Herriot, and dozens and dozens of others. The list of Christian pastors, theologians, and clergy is too long to list here. Suffice it to say that a lot of Christians believe that pets do go to heaven and that there will be animals in heaven.

What the Bible Says About Animals

Let's take a look at the scriptures that relate to animals and what is said of them:

Ecclesiastes 3:18-21: "As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath (literally "spirit"); humans have no advantage over

animals. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?"

Job 12:10 "In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath (literally "spirit") of all mankind."

Gen. 9:9-10 "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you 10 and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth."

Gen. 9:16 "Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

Gen. 6:19-22 "You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them." Noah did everything just as God commanded him."

Gen. 1:30 "And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food."

Hosea 2:18 "In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety."

Luke 12:6 "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God."

Animals in Heaven

The Bible indicates that animals will exist after His return and the beginning of the Kingdom as Isaiah 11:6-9 reads, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." Here is the Word of God declaring that animals will still exist in the future, after Christ's reign begins. Ecclesiastes mentions that there is a "spirit" in man but also in animals in (3:19, 21) but this does not necessarily mean that it is an eternal spirit.

Revelation 19:11-14 indicates for example that Jesus returns to the earth with His army of saints on white horses, "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean."

The Conclusion

From the scripture evidence we can neither conclude that our pets will be in heaven or that they will not be in heaven. We just don't have biblical support to say this with certainty, however it does appear that animals will exist in the Kingdom of heaven (e.g., Isaiah 11:6-9) but if our pets will be resurrected or not, we just can not say for sure. A more important question is if you, the reader, will be in heaven. It is pointless to ponder the question of whether your pet goes to heaven if you yourself are not there. The only way to be sure is to make certain you can go there. Decide today to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and have the full assurance that you can go to heaven and receive eternal life. As for your pets being in heaven or not, the only way to find out is to go there yourself. That is my prayer for you.

Chapter Eight

*What Do Christians Say About 2012 and
the Mayan Calendar End of the World Prophecy?*

By now you probably have heard about the Mayan Calendar and the prediction or prophecy of the end of the world on December 21st, 2012. Many others have seen the movie 2012 which predicts the end of the world as we know it. What do most Christians think of this prediction? What do most non-believers think of it? What do the Mayans themselves believe about it? Is there any shred of truth to the prediction or prophecy of the end of the world according to the Mayan Calendar? Should we be stockpiling supplies in advance of this alleged prophecy?

The Mayan Calendar

This issue has been a frequent “water cooler” topic of conversation for many of my co-workers. Of those that spoke about the movie 2012, the majority were less concerned about the movie than they were with the prediction of the Mayan Calendar. The calendar, contrary to popular belief, is somewhat like the calendar that we use today. Our calendar runs out on December 31st every year but no one sees it as a prediction of the end of the world. The Mayan Calendar is cyclical too. The ancient Mayan Calendar was no different from any calendar. It was good for only a set period of time. It was simply based upon a set of days and was intended to keep a record of a collection of days for each year.

The way the ancient Mayans measured time are much different than the way that we do today. They used centuries instead of years but their intent was not to match the end of their calendar with the end of time as they knew it. Much of what the movie 2012 is based upon is not anything about the Mayans’ beliefs at all, but is a fictitious scenario constructed from Western imaginations. The Mayans’ descendants do not use the ancient calendar anymore. They use the same calendar that most of the world uses and like the one that we use today. The Mayan Calendar started in 3135 B.C., *their time*, and it was not calibrated with the present calendar we use today, called the Gregorian calendar.

What Do the Mayans Themselves Say?

Modern day ancestors of the Mayans, when interviewed about December 21st, 2012, had no clue about any significance of that date. When local reporters went to the modern day descendants of the Mayans and asked them what they thought of that date or the Mayan Calendar prediction of doom for 2012, they didn’t have a clue about it. In fact, they could not have cared less. The only thing that they were concerned about was having enough rain this year for their crops.

The Mayans are not concerned and know nothing about nor are concerned in any way about some alleged prediction of the end of the world. No archeological evidence has ever been unearthed to validate this myth of the Mayan Calendar’s prediction doom on December 21st, 2012. If you bring up the end-of-the-world topic of the Mayans’ 2012 calendar with the local Mayan elder, Chile Pixtun, he is completely puzzled by it. So too are the local indigenous tribes of the Guatemalan Apoloinaria who are the direct descendants of the Mayan Indians. Mayor Pixtun will be the first to say that these doomsday myths are not from his own culture but must be from Western imaginations.

Is The Earth Doomed?

This reminds me somewhat of the 2YK scare where everyone thought that the world’s computers would not be able to handle all the “zeroes” when the calendar turned to the year two thousand. They believed that since computers were necessary for the Stock Exchange, airlines, businesses, banks, and industries that all the computers crashing would produce wide-spread chaos and food shortages. That

concern caused many to buy tons of dry goods, water purifiers, and 55-gallon drums for storage of their supplies. They were stocking up on clothing, firewood, and many other every day staples. It turned out to be absolutely nothing at all.

No one knows the day when Christ will return (Matt. 24:43, Luke 12:39). Not the Mayan Calendar, not any preacher or pastor who claims to know but only the Father in heaven. If someone predicts the coming of Christ, you can know for a fact that you are listening to a false profit. Mark 13:32 says, “*No one* knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Even the Bible says nothing about the end of the world. It describes an end of the age and a new heaven and a new earth but Ecclesiastes 1:4 says “Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.” Revelation 1:2 tells us that the Holy City, Jerusalem, will descend out of heaven and comes down to the earth.

The Importance of 2012

Anyone that has or ever will ask me about 2012 is an opportunity to show them the real 2012 to be concerned about that is neither legend nor myth. If there is any 2012 that I would tell them to think about in a serious manner it would be, ironically, Revelation 20:12 which says, “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” Revelation 20:12 speaks of the Great White Throne Judgment in which those who are not Jesus Christ’s own will be judged for eternity.

If you were to die today and are not found written in the book of life, then truly you do have something to worry about; and for all eternity. “Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him” (Rev. 20:6). Revelation 3:5 is where your name, this very day, can be written down in the book of life and here is what will be said of you, “The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.” I pray this is so.

Chapter Nine

Where is the Best Place for a New Believer to Start Reading the Bible?

The Bible is composed of 66 books written by 40 authors. So where does a new Christian begin when they start to read the Bible? Do they read it from Genesis to Revelation? What do pastors, theologians, Sunday school teachers, and even seminary professors recommend a new believer to start reading the Bible? Are there better places to start than others and some books to be avoided at first?

Where Not To Start

I have actually had non-believers ask me this more than new Christians and this is a great question. The Bible is not strictly written in chronological order. For example the book of Job belongs in the time frame of the book of Genesis. Some have tried to start at Genesis and begin through the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, then Deuteronomy, but when they get to certain sections of the Old Testament they can get bogged down in the lengthy genealogies. A good example is found in I Chronicles 9:11-12: “Azariah son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the official in charge of the house of God; Adaiah son of Jeroham, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malkijah; and Maasai son of Adiel, the son of Jahzerah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Meshillemith, the son of Immer.” You get the idea.

Where to Start

Since the Old Testament foreshadows Jesus Christ and the New Testament is sharply focused on Jesus Christ, it makes good sense for a new Christian or a non-believer to start reading the Bible with any of the four gospels. My personal preference is the Gospel of John. He emphasizes the love of God as found in Jesus Christ and if you read the first chapter and first few verses of John, you will discover that it starts God’s plan for man even before the creation in Genesis One. Even the book of Mark is a great introduction to Jesus Christ. The gospel of Matthew is slightly more technical in the beginning but would be helpful for those who are Jewish since it emphasizes the historicity and Jewish lineage of Jesus Christ. The book of Luke is also more intricate since he was a physician. But any of the four gospels would be a great beginning point for a new Christian because they focus on the centrality of Jesus Christ which the entire Bible actually points toward since He is the sole means of redemption and salvation.

So begin by reading one or all of the gospels and then I would recommend Genesis. Genesis reveals God’s dealings with the nation of Israel and shows the origins of the people of God and deals with the fall of mankind and the consequences of disobedience. In actuality, the gospel is foreshadowed in Genesis and the Old Testament. When you read the New Testament book of Hebrews and then Genesis, you can see that Melchizedek the high priest and Jesus Christ were one and the same.

A Guide for New or Non-Believers

When believers and non-believers ask me where to begin to read the Bible, my recommendation is my own personal preference. Others may give you other books to start with in reading the Bible. I would recommend that they do not start in the book of Revelation or in Genesis and start reading it through from start to finish. For a seasoned Christian, reading through the Bible is an excellent learning tool, but for a new believer, it can be cumbersome and confusing. Revelation is enigmatic so for a beginner to start out in that book is asking for confusion and mistranslation of the verses since much of it is written in symbolic language. For what its worth, here is a preferred order for a new believer or a non-Christian who wants to start to read and understand the Bible:

The Gospel of John
The Gospel of Mark
I John
II John
III John
Genesis
Ephesians
Galatians
The Gospel of Luke
The Gospel of Matthew
I Corinthians
II Corinthians
Romans
Psalms
Proverbs

Now where you go from there is your own personal preference. I would repeat the four gospels at this point because you can never go wrong with the very teaching of Jesus Christ Himself. And the book of Mark, written by John Mark, is actually what can be termed as the gospel of Peter since most theologians agree that the Gospel of Mark is actually the work of Peter. The words represent Peter's eyewitness accounts as transcribed by John Mark. Remember that John Mark was not an apostle and was never a witness to the living Christ while on earth or the resurrected Christ and that by definition is what makes one an apostle.

Where Biblical Knowledge Comes From

The most important element when reading the Bible is to not be in a hurry. Stop and meditate on the words. And pray for the Holy Spirit to open up the meanings and understanding of the Bible. It is the Father that reveals spiritual knowledge through the Holy Spirit and He reveals these truths to those whom He calls. If you are wanting to read the Bible, believer or not, this may be strong evidence that God the Father is calling you (John 6:44). Spiritual truths are not actually acquired by human thought alone but as Jesus told Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). The point is that biblical knowledge is not gained by rote memorization or from academic head knowledge but by God the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said in John 16:13, "But when he, the [Holy] Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

Chapter Ten

What Are the Gifts of the Spirit?

What are these gifts of the Spirit? How can you know that you have particular gifts of the Spirit? Can others give us an indication of what our gift is? What does the believer do with these gifts in the church? Are some gifts more important than others? Are the gifts of healing still being accessed today by believers? Is the gift of miracles still existent in the church today?

Each and every believer has been given by the Spirit of God, gifts of the Spirit. They are not gifts that they have developed my human capacities, therefore the believer has absolutely no right to brag on these gifts. If we exalt in our gifts, we are taking credit for something that we have not earned ourselves. It is like taking credit for a gift you receive on your birthday. It is just that; a gift that was not yours but given to you freely and it is given apart from any inherent capabilities that you have within you. It is not like changing the old hymn from How Great Thou Art to How Great I Am.

No believer can say that they have no gift of the Spirit from God. God has given all believers gifts; some have several but everyone has these gifts. These gifts of the Spirit are given not for the believer but for the Body of Christ. It is to make the Body complete. These gifts are intended for the church to edify it, to strengthen it, to feed it, to exhort it, to encourage it and to have the Body of Christ empowered to do the work of Christ. These gifts are always to exalt Christ, to witness of God's power, to build up the Body, and to work to enlarge the Body of Christ by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the lost. There are several biblical tools and surveys that believers can use to discover their own gifts of the Spirit. These are helpful applications to allow the Christian to see what their gifts are and therefore how they can best help the church. No believer in Christ has any gift of the Spirit.

Isaiah 11:2-3 speaks of seven different spirits or gifts: "And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. He will delight in obeying the Lord. He will not judge by appearance nor make a decision based on hearsay (called discernment)." These are important gifts and some of them are similar to but different from the gifts of the Spirit that Paul talks about in the New Testament in I Corinthians chapter twelve. There are nine gifts of the Spirit mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians chapter twelve:

- 1) Word of Wisdom
- 2) Word of Knowledge
- 3) Faith
- 4) Gifts of Healing
- 5) Working of Miracles
- 6) Prophecy
- 7) Discerning of Spirits
- 8) Divers (or different) kinds of Tongues
- 9) Interpretation of (different) Tongues

This is not an exhaustive list of the gifts of the spirit, for example some are said to have the gift of mercy which is a person who is quick to forgive and not judge others who have sinned while others are not so quick to do so. God gives these gifts as He sees best and not what we think they are for (v 11). We can not receive gifts we are not intended to receive but we can desire certain gifts, indicating that we can receive gifts of the Spirit that may fulfill the desires of our hearts while still fulfilling God's purpose for them (v 31). Let's examine what these gifts are and what is their intended use is for in the church today.

Romans chapter twelve has a similar listing of the gifts of the Spirit but I Corinthians chapter twelve is more comprehensive in nature. I Corinthians chapter twelve begin with Paul telling the Corinthian church, and for the most part, all believers in the church today. Paul wants to make these gifts crystal clear to us and so we will depend upon the inspired Word of God to reveal them to us (v 1).

Paul tells us that “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them” (v 4). No two gifts are the same and generally no two believers have exactly the same gifts but always these gifts are given for the common good of the church (v 7).

The Gift of Wisdom

The first gift Paul mentions is the gift of wisdom (v 8). It is listed first perhaps because it is foundational to the church and this is a gift that the believer can earnestly desire (v 31). Wisdom is clearly taught in the Word of God and “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding” (Psalm 11:10). This is the precious gift that Solomon asked for and received from God to be able to rightly rule God’s nation (I Kings 3:12). With this wisdom, Solomon could understand what do in difficult decisions. Wisdom is also associated with fearing the Lord. Fear is simply standing in awe of God in reverence and respect. It entails loving His Word and being obedient to what it says. There is no wisdom in disobedience. This means that if some members are revering God’s laws and statutes, including loving God and loving your neighbor, that many members in the church can have this gift. Of course, many can not have it either. This gift is of supreme importance for members in the Body of Christ for if we can love God and our neighbor, we can greatly contribute to the church and those outside of the church. This love is another way of showing unbelievers and attracting them to Christ by it (John 13:35).

The Gift of Knowledge

The next gift of the Spirit is that of knowledge (v 8). Some people have such a gift of remembering scriptures. They have knowledge of God and His ways. They seem to be able to quickly distinguish which is biblical and which is not. Some translations say it is the “Word” of knowledge while others say that it is the “utterance” of knowledge. The Word is most certainly the Word of God. The “utterance” of knowledge could indicate that those with the gift of knowledge know when to speak particular words, when not to, and what words to speak with. Both words seem to fulfill what true knowledge is. These with this gift make excellent teachers, deacons, elders, or pastors.

The Gift of Faith

The next gift of the Spirit Paul mentions is the gift of faith (v 9). Those with this gift are truly amazing in how they see things. They tend to exude confidence in all situations. For example, our church deacon has said about our church growth “when” it grows we will need more Sunday school books, while others say “if” we grow we will need additional books. I met an evangelist once that spoke about things as if they already had existed or had come to pass. He spoke about finances that God would provide while simultaneously have nothing to show for it in the church’s bank account. He would always later prove to be right. This is a person more like God. He sees things that aren’t as if they already are!

The Gift of Healing

The gift of healing has been a controversial one (v 9). Some “faith healers” claim to have this gift yet have often been exposed to be frauds by undercover reporters. Many of those “healed” have been interviewed prior to their supposed healing. Some tap the power of positive thinking to convince them that they are healed. Others have even used “scam artists” or actors to portray someone that has been healed from an infirmity that they never actually had. This gift was more prominent in the New Testament church to confirm that Jesus Christ’s name had power and that God was working in the church. I am not saying that people are still not healed today but the days of having someone’s shadow passing over them and they are instantly healed is over. The gift of healing may be in relations to the power of prayer and we know that the effectual prayer of a righteous man or woman can accomplish miracles (James 5:16). In any event, we must attribute any healing that is done is “...by that one Spirit“ and not by humans (v 9).

The Gift of Miracles

The gift of “miraculous powers“ is another gift of the Spirit that appears to be unique to the New Testament church (10). This may also be associated with faith healers who claim that that have the gift of miraculous powers but they must remember that any gift or its results are always credited to the spirit and not to humans. It could also be attributed to those who are prayer warriors. There is an elderly lady that I know I want her praying for me. I have had some pretty interesting results when this lady has prayed for me. I would call some of the things that have happened miraculous in some ways. The greatest miracles that occur today are, for the most part, the miracle of human conversion. I see this as the greatest miracle of all since only the Spirit of God can illuminate the Word of God and reveal to us Who Jesus Christ is (John 6:44, Matt 16:17).

The Gift of Prophecy (Speaking)

The next gift is that of prophecy (v 10). Prophecy has several different interpretations and it is clear that in this context, within the church at Corinth, prophecy is the gift of teaching and/or speaking. The literal translation here is that it is “publicly speaking” or “speaking forth” the Word of God. This gift is associated with those who are teachers or pastors since God would not gift someone in the church to teach or preach without having an ability to do so. It is not inferring that they know the future or know what is to come since only a sovereign God alone knows the future.

The Gift of Discernment

The gift of “distinguishing between spirits” is having the gift of discernment. It is able to discern scriptures and their application to believers in the church. It is also being able to tell whether someone is earnest and sincere, or they appear to have an agenda. Peter displayed this in Acts chapter five when Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property and kept back part of the money and brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet but lied saying they had given it all to the church (Acts 5:1-10). Those with this gift of discernment or “distinguishing between spirits” may be able to know whether the church should or should not do particular things.

The Gift of Tongues

The next gift is the ability to speak in different tongues (v 10). This has been one of the most controversial and most misunderstood gifts of all. When the original outpouring of the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, there were many speaking in tongues. Paul wrote about tongues extensively in 1 Corinthians, chapters twelve through fourteen, but he was reproving the Corinthians for misusing the gift. It's very difficult out of this passage to get any kind of mandate to speak in tongues, to get any kind of affirmation that this is something to be sought, because what you have here are primarily corrective orders given to the Corinthians. They had actually prostituted the gift of tongues into something pagan that wasn't even representative of the work of the Spirit. All you need to do is to go back to Acts 2 and read verse 4, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other languages". The literal translation in Greek is "glossa" and means tongues. This same word "glossa" (language) is used again in Acts 2:11. This means it is a known language not some unknown tongue. Then it says (in Acts 2:5-11) that there were unbelievers present at Pentecost and were hearing God's message in their own "dialektos" dialects or language: "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues" (dialektos or dialects)! So there were unbelievers present at Pentecost hearing God's message in their own languages and their own local dialects, not ecstatic gibberish.

The Gift of Interpretation of Tongues

The next gift Paul mentions is the gift of interpretation of tongues (v 10). This gift is someone who is able to interpret another tongue or language. I am bilingual and can speak English and Spanish but I would not say that I have this gift necessarily. Some have a natural gift or ability to learn a foreign language. It was not natural nor did it come easy for me. For those who this is easy, then they may be imbued with such a gift. If anyone was speaking in tongues in the church, there absolutely had to be someone there to interpret or they were to be silent. And no more than one person was to speak in tongues because there is only one interpreter available to translate at a time. If several were speaking in tongues at the same time, there would be confusion and God is not the author of confusion, but He is the God of order (1 Cor 14:33). It would not be edifying the church to have several speaking in tongues at the same time and with no one to interpret. Tongues are a sign for unbelievers and not for the church. Paul writes, "In the Law it is written: 'With other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.' Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers" (1 Cor. 14: 21-22). Isaiah 28:11-12 is where Paul quotes Isaiah the prophet, "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, 'This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.'" This clearly indicates that the gift of tongues (Greek for languages) and the interpretation of them is that of a known language as a witness to unbelievers.

Paul wants to make clear that we should not elevate one gift over another but esteem each and necessary for the completeness of the Body of Christ as Paul says in I Corinthians 12:12-23, "Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason

stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor.”

Other Gifts of the Spirit

Romans 12:7-8 also speaks of additional gifts; “if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” This shows that some are gifted at teaching, some at showing mercy, some in giving to the work of the Lord, and some who show an unusual amount of forgiveness (called mercy).

Ephesians 4:11 reveals yet more gifts as Paul indicates there are, “...apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.” Again teachers are mentioned, evangelists are those who are unusually gifted at sharing the gospel with the lost, pastors and prophets (again, this is those who proclaim the gospel). Apostles can no longer exist because by definition, they would be those church leaders who have been commissioned by the risen Christ and having been done so in His presence. Those who call themselves apostles have no such authority given by God and they are self-designated only, thusly disqualifying themselves as a true apostle.

Many Gifts, Many Members, One Body

Each and every church member is clearly a part of “... the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles (no longer in this church age), second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts“(I Cor. 12:28-31). I pray you not only seek and discover your gifts but that you utilize them to the strengthening of the Body of Christ, for which you are a part. If you are not, then today is the time to become part of Christ’s church because members of this body will live on into eternity.

Chapter Eleven

What is the Unforgivable or Unparndonable Sin?

An old friend of mine called me up and wanted to talk with me. He was troubled in his spirit. He had doubts about his salvation and whether he had fallen away from the faith. In his mind, he had committed the unforgivable or unpardonable sin. Can someone sin a sin so great that God would not forgive? Is there a sin that God's grace and mercy can not cover? Jesus spoke of the unpardonable sin to the religious leaders of His day. What is this sin that is unforgivable?

What is Unforgivable Sin?

The very fact that he had concerns about committing such a sin was a clear indication that he had not committed it. Let me explain. If we come to God and ask for forgiveness, He will forgive us. I John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." People have read the scripture of Mark chapter three and Matthew chapter nine. Mark 3:22-30 states, "And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin." He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit." The Pharisees said the very same thing in Matthew 9:34.

What Was Blaspheme of the Holy Spirit?

Why did Jesus tell these religious leaders that they could not be forgiven for their blaspheming the Holy Spirit? First of all, they knew the scriptures. They had seen Jesus fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament. They saw and heard of the many miracles that clearly had to be from God alone. They refused to acknowledge Him as God and thus they were inferring Jesus' miracles were attributable to Satan. That was blaspheme because they were eye witnesses and so they had no excuse for saying these miracles were from the Devil. They were guilty of blaspheme, even according to the Old Testament laws, and these men were the only ones who have committed the unpardonable sin.

Today the only sin that is unpardonable is that of not receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When you reject Jesus, you reject your only possible means of forgiveness and the only way to gain entrance into heaven. Your fate is sealed. There is no forgiveness if Jesus is not your Lord and Savior. Humans do not have the power to save themselves or to have their own sins forgiven. Jesus alone is the only acceptable means to salvation

The Unpardonable Sin

(Acts 4:12). Not accepting Jesus and rejecting belief in Him is truly the only unpardonable and unforgivable sin that people can commit today. The very fact that my friend was worried about committing the unpardonable sin told me that he had not committed it. The fact is that he *would* commit this sin if he refused to believe on Jesus Christ before he died (Acts 16:30-31). But since he was worried about it, I said that this shows me that you haven't committed it. Jesus died for *all* sins so he, you, and me can have eternal life and escape the Judgment on the Great Day (Rev. 20:12).

Mark 3 and Matthew 12 involve Jesus Christ's repeated and widespread public defeat of Satan and his demons. Many readers and theologians have been confused about the true nature of this sin and many have needlessly worried about their salvation due to a great sin that they have committed. Bear in mind that part of the purpose of Jesus Christ's ministry was to directly confront the powers of darkness with the light of truth and to do so in a public battle of pure good versus pure evil. The only being in the universe that is more powerful than the Evil One, is God. He is the only One with enough power to bind Satan and forcibly dispossess him. At Calvary, Satan's fate was completely and irrevocably sealed.

Jesus' impressive miracles were freely given in pure kindness and love to release people from obvious suffering and the oppression of horrible evil and frequently of demon possession. However, the Pharisees had so firmly set their hearts against accepting Jesus as the Messiah that they rejected the obvious truth set before them and perversely twisted it to influence the crowds. They publicly credited the most ultimately evil being in the universe with the very power of God. What they had done, in effect, was to call the precious and Holy Spirit of God, the unclean spirit of Satan. Thus they had charged Jesus Christ with sorcery and of being in league with Satan. These charges are not only appalling and absurd, but extremely serious.

Clearly, the Pharisees, Scribes and religious leaders knew better since the Messiah is clearly revealed in the Old Testament writings, but their own hate for Him blinded them so much that they refused to believe what they must have known, inwardly, was true. Certainly, they didn't want to share their religious power with anyone, even the Son of God. So when they rejected Jesus, they were without excuse since they knew better. They rejected Him Whom they had seen in person and this was deemed unpardonable or unforgivable.

Have You Committed the Unpardonable Sin?

If someone is worried about having committed the unpardonable sin, that is the very evidence that they have not committed it. The only unpardonable sin that we must worry about today is rejecting Jesus Christ as our own personal Lord and Savior. The consequences of this are eternal separation from God, which is hell in itself. This is irreversible...unpardonable. This is the only unpardonable, unforgivable sin that there is. But this is one that you can wipe away with repentance, and belief and acceptance of Jesus Christ (John 3:16). If you have believed in Him, then there is absolutely no need for you to worry about committing the unpardonable sin. You are already His possession and He will not ever cast you away (John 6:37). Once you are His, no one can snatch you out of the Father's hand or out of Jesus' hand (John 10:28-29). If you want this eternal security right now, just read the following scriptures and place your eternal future in His secure hands:

Admit that you are a sinner and in need of a Savior (Rom 6:23),

Abandon self effort and realize you can not be saved by your works or efforts (Acts 16:31),

Accept freely Christ's payment for my sins, required of the Father. (John 3:16),

And acknowledge Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior (Acts 4:12).

If you have just received Jesus, you have now received God's inheritance rights as a son or daughter of His and can never be lost again and live forever (John 10:28-29). Plus you'll never have to worry about committing an unpardonable or unforgivable sin again! This is exactly why it's called the Good News. Now you can find and join a Bible-believing church, or you may call 1-888-NeedHim (888-633-3446) for follow up questions about salvation that is only available through Jesus Christ or contact us here at [What Christians Want to Know](#) and we can tell you more. Now, if you have accepted Him as Lord and Savior, congratulations! Now if there is anything that's irreversible, this is it!

Chapter Twelve

Are Guardian Angels Biblical?

Are Guardian Angels biblical? What is angel's chief duty for the believer? Do unbelievers have Guardian Angels? Does each believer have their own angel or more than one? Are angels dispensed only in emergencies or are they ever present with Christians? What does the Bible say about angels?

Do Believers Have Angels?

It might surprise Christians but each and every believer in Christ Jesus has their own angel. Jesus had a multitude of angels (Luke 22:43). We may have even encountered angels and not even known about it and so the writer of Hebrews tells us to, "Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it"(13:1-2).

Not only do believers have angels, the Body of Christ in general (the church) has multiple thousands of angels watching over it (Heb 12:22-23). Angels are our protectors and are under God's sovereign hand and so you could conclude that Christians have Guardian Angels. The fact is that angels are commanded by God to "encamp all around us" and keep us from falling or getting hurt and they have been with us and will be with us "...from this time forth and forever [will] be with us"... and even strengthen us, and "minister to us" (Heb 1:7,14, Psalm 34:7, 91:10-13, 103:21).

There is scriptural evidence that children, before and after they become believers, also have their own angels that are assigned specifically to them and these same angels communicate to the Father on their behalf (Matthew 18:10).

What Do Angels Look Like?

The little chubby angels that look like infants with angel wings are not biblical. For example, not all angels have wings. Most do not. And if we could actually see an angel, we would probably pass out from fear. But they are most certainly nothing to fear for believers for they are messengers of God and they are protectors of those who are Christ's (Luke 1:19-26).

The angels are extremely powerful. The prophet Isaiah had the great privilege of seeing them and wrote, *"The Lord sitting on the high extolled throne, the hems of His vestments filling the whole temple. Surrounding Him were the Seraphim, each having six wings; with two they covered His face, with two they covered His feet, and they flew with the other two. And they called to each other and said: Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord Sabaoth! The whole world is filled with His Glory"*(Isaiah 6:1-4). Ezekiel chapter 10:9-20 gives a vivid description of them that is hard to imagine. Certain angels were solely created for the purpose of giving continuous praise and worship to God Almighty as found in Isaiah chapter 6.

What About Demons or Fallen Angels?

There are also fallen angels (Luke 8:31). These are angels that have rebelled against God Almighty and have followed Satan, the most powerful created being that God has ever created. These angels are wicked spirits and seek to harass and cause the destruction and fall of believers (Ephesians 6:11-12, 1 Peter 5:8).

Luke 16:22 indicates that when the believer dies, their own angels bring their spirit to heaven in the presence of God. The word angels is plural so this gives some evidence that believers may have more

than one angel as was also indicated about children having their angels (plural) watching over them (Matt. 18:10). Angels are actually commanded by God to "encamp all around us" and keep us from falling, getting hurt, who have been with us and will be with us "...from this time forth and forever to be with us"... and even strengthen us, and minister to us (Psalm 34:7, 91:10-13, 103:21). The angels are also messengers of ours to God and sometimes from God to us (Dan 10, Matt 18:10). And there are particular angels for particular churches or church ages too (Rev. 1:20).

The Strength of Angels

Angels are no weaklings either (Rev 18:21). In fact, angels have been known to carry out a death penalty for God on a king (Acts 12:20-25). And Peter's own angel freed him from prison (Acts 12). So take comfort in the fact that angels do exist. They serve both God and us. They are real and it is no stretch of the imagination to say that each and every believer and each child before they reach the age of accountability, whatever that age is, has at least one angel assigned to them. It appears that there may be even more than one. And they are watching over God's children (Matt 4:6. Psalm 91:11, 12). If you are not a believer in Christ Jesus then you have no angels watching over you, nor can your prayers be heard by God. Why not come to faith in Christ today and come under His divine protection and have Him grant you eternal life?

Chapter Thirteen

What Are the Biblical Signs of Jesus' Second Coming?

Jesus Christ

When Jesus Christ's disciples asked Him about His return and the "end of the world" their focus was not on the physical end of the earth and its civilization per se. They had in mind the end of the age of man's rule (the Greek word translated "world" is *aion*, meaning "age") and the commencement of a different age ruled by Jesus Christ as king, a reign identified elsewhere in Scripture as the kingdom of God.

In His reply, Christ described the many and varied conditions that would precede His return. They included such things as deception, wars, famines, disease epidemics, earthquakes and religious persecution, all culminating in an unprecedented time of worldwide calamity. We have already experienced in the disastrous 20th and 21st centuries many harbingers of just such a calamity. The earthquake in Japan and ensuing tsunami is a good example. But if we are to believe the prophecies of Scripture, there are many worse events yet to come. (Matt. 24: 3-29)

Just before Jesus' return He continued by say, 'Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. And there shall be signs in the sun and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.'" (Luke 21 v.10-11, 25-26)

The Apostle Paul

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. According to this, a communication gap is not the problem. The cause of increasing immorality is simply an increase in pride and sinfulness; a decrease in desire for true godliness. (2 Timothy 3:1-7)

The Apostle Paul accurately predicted, "The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3, 4). It is understood, the "desires" which some will try to "suit" are sinful! Could it be that doctrinal mythology, such as eternal security (or "perseverance of the saints"), is the result of people with "itching ears" turning to "a great number of teachers" who will say what itching ears with sinful desires want to hear?

Without Natural Affection - One of the most basic Judeo Christian principles has been the natural and beautiful attraction between the sexes. The love of a mother and father for their children, the love of the extended family for each other, and the love of one's country were similarly considered "natural."

Today we are living in a depraved Romans chapter one world that many fear God has given or will give up to "vile passions" that reverse the normal order of things. (Roman 1 v.26-27)

The Apostle Peter

It is fascinating to note that almost 2000 years ago the apostle Peter, an untrained Galilean fisherman, predicted the exact thinking patterns that would characterize these scoffers. He prophesied that ... "Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men." (2 Peter 3 v.3-7)

Why does Peter say that the scoffers are so blind? He provides us with 2 reasons why: The first is found in 2 Peter 3 v5, "For this they willfully forget." The unregenerate minds of unbelievers resist the idea of the intervention of God in human affairs. Their problem is spiritual, a matter of the will, and the unbeliever remains deliberately ignorant of the truth. Peter mentions a second reason for the scoffer's intellectual blindness in verse 3. He was told that "the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."

The Prophet Daniel

"Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly" But Daniel was told that the remaining prophecies are sealed until the last days and that "the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end." (Dan. 12 v.9)

The Apostle John

The Top 7 Sins of the Tribulation - Rev. 9: 20 lists the top 7 sins of the Tribulation:

Rebellion against God ("They did not repent").

Worship of Demons

Idolatry

Murders

Sorceries ("Phar-mak-voos", from pharmaco for drugs)

Sexual Immorality

Thefts

Why not accept the Lord as Savior today and cleanse all sin from your life and your entry into heaven is secure. Jesus sacrifice renders you blameless before God in the Great Day of Judgment (Rev. 20:12). You can be in front of two different Judgment Seats. The Beam Seat of Christ, where the saved are given their eternal rewards, and with it, eternal life or at the Great White Throne Judgment, where the only judgment is to be separated from Jesus Christ for eternity. No one know the day Christ will return. The end your chance to be saved can come anytime because no one has any guarantee that they will live beyond tomorrow. Die without Christ and the end is now. Here's how to make certain you are ready at any time:

HOW TO RECEIVE & KNOW YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

Admit - that you are a sinner and in need of a Savior (Rom 6:23)

Abandon - self-effort and realize that you can not be saved by your works or your own efforts (Acts 16:31)

Accept freely Christ's payment for your sins, required of the Father (John 3:16)

Acknowledge Jesus Christ as your personal lord and Savior (Acts 4:12)

Now you can never be lost again and can live forever (John 10:28-29). As I said, no one has any guarantee that they will live beyond tomorrow and if you die without Christ, for you, the end is now; and for all eternity. Make the decision today, right now. His return has never been closer than it is today. No one knows exactly when He returns but Hebrews 3:7-15 and II Corinthians 6:2 says that, *Today* is the accepted day of salvation, and *now* is the day of salvation. Tomorrow may never come. I beg you to come today, while it is still today.

Chapter Fourteen

Who and What is the Parable of the Prodigal Son is About?

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a story about God's redemptive grace and mercy. It is a story of His unconditional love and forgiveness. It is about God seeking sinners. In Luke 15, Jesus tells about the youngest son coming to his father to ask for his inheritance ahead of time. The youngest son would only receive one-third of the father's inheritance in accord to the Old Testament laws in Deuteronomy 21:17. He then took the inheritance and ran away to spend it all on having a good time. He had plenty of "friends" to help him spend it but quickly ran out of his inheritance funds. Then he was reduced to working in a pig pen and the pigs ate better than he. For a Jew, to tend to pigs was the height of humiliation since they were deemed unclean according to the Old Testament dietary laws. He thought of his father's servants who were at least fed well and had shelter at night. The young son had reached the end of his rope. The older son was outraged. He was angry that his father had allowed him to return and no less with a robe, a ring, and a pair of sandals. Plus the father threw a feast with the choicest of the fattened calves.

Why Did Jesus Give This Parable?

Why would Jesus tell this parable with the religious leaders and the Jewish crowd there? What would their reaction have been? What would the Jewish leaders have done to the son when he came back home? Why did Jesus feel the need to tell this parable to the Jewish leaders?

When the young son came to his father to ask for his inheritance, in the Jewish culture of that day, it was like he was saying, "I wish you were dead!" This was highly unconventional and was insulting of the father. This is what the Jewish leaders understood and in their minds, they would not have received the young son back into the family. In fact he would have been disinherited or even stoned as was done in the ancient Jewish culture in the Old Testament. He would have been disowned and he would not have been allowed to return at part of the father's family.

Who Do The Older Son Represent?

Who do the older brother, the young son, and the father represent? The youngest son represents all of those who have been called by God and for whatever reason; they have placed one foot in the world and one foot in the church. When God chastises those Who He has redeemed, as any loving father would, He brings them to their knees and they see their need for repentance and return to God and ask for His forgiveness. This can not be a picture of the lost because they would never have been a child of the father in the first place. Unbelievers are children of the devil as Jesus said in John 8:42-44, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. "To the Father's own, does He give "the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

Who Does the Father Represent?

The father represents God the Father for He gladly receives His son as part of His family. The young son returning is a good picture of what repentance is. He made a change of direction, which is the root meaning of the word repentance. He returned to the father begging for his forgiveness and acknowledging his sin. He comes back with nothing to offer, yet the father receives him with joy and celebration. The son felt unworthy and was remorseful. The son had come to the end of himself and was in desperate need.

The father, as God the Father does, shows His love is unconditional He accepts him back into the family. In fact the father had been watching and waiting for his son to return. When the father sees the son approaching, indicating that he had been watching for him, he runs to him and embraces him with open arms. The Jews considered this highly undignified in their culture. The patriarch never ran or never made the first move in such a situation. Yet this shows that God the Father sought us and called us and that we never initiate our own calling into the Kingdom of Heaven (John 6:44).

Here the Father gives the son what he does not deserve (called grace) and withholds what he actually did deserve (called mercy). The Father celebrates as he tells the eldest son, "...this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32). The older brother is filled with anger saying in Luke 15:29-30, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"

Who Does The Prodigal Son Represent?

The eldest son represents the Jewish leaders. The religious leaders saw their rewards due to their works. They didn't understand that they can bring nothing to the plan of salvation and if they try to earn it, they do not understand how God saves and that it is Jesus' righteousness alone that accounts them worthy. No human works can ever earn salvation. The youngest son had nothing to bring, no good works, and came back with barely the shabby cloths on his back. This may be why the father provided a robe for him and sandals for his feet.

In Luke 15:31-32, the father tells the oldest son why he is rejoicing: "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.'" But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

The Parable of the Lost Coin is in the same chapter in Luke 15:8-10 is similar in nature in how the Father seeks those who are lose: "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:8-10).

The Hounds of Heaven Pursue Us

The pursuit is relentless, it is effectual, and it is with great intensity that God the Father seeks those to whom will be His children for now and for eternity. And God never gives up this pursuit. The Bible emphasizes that there is no one who seeks God (Romans 3:11) and that our "Salvation does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Romans 9:16). John 10:29 shows where "Jesus tells them plainly that, "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." Ephesians 1:4-6 is where Paul says, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."

Perhaps He is pursuing you now. If you are reading this, He has either sought you and bought you or He is seeking you now, you who are lost. It is time to come to the Father through Jesus Christ today as John 14:6 says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Will you come today?

Chapter Fifteen

Can Christians Suffer From Depression?

Everyone goes through depression from time to time. It is absolutely normal, even for Christians. However it becomes a problem when you remain in a state of depression of an extended period of time. What can a Christian do when they encounter depression? What advice can we find in the pages of scripture?

Is Depression Normal?

First of all, there is nothing wrong with being depressed. It is natural for all people to experience times of depression. When you are unable to break loose from a prolonged state of depression, you can seek counseling from a licensed Christian counselor or therapist. They are trained in how to deal with depression and they hold to biblical principles and values so you can find God's perspective and receive the help you need. Aside from seeing a counselor or therapist, what particular Bible verses or stories can help a person break free from such a state?

Famous Biblical Characters Who Endured Depression

There are several people in the Bible who endured depression and to such an extent where they contemplated suicide. Of course suicide is never an answer. It never solves anything. We can read of others who went through severe depression and they are a veritable "who's who" of the Bible: Job (Book of Job), Abraham (Gen. 15), Jeremiah (Book of Jeremiah), Jonah (chapter 4), King Saul (I Sam 16), Elijah (I Kings 19), and even the greatest king that Israel ever had, King David (Book of Psalms).

Sometimes depression has a physical cause and not an emotional cause. I used to work as a Mental Health Case Manager and there are brain chemical imbalances that can cause severe depression. These are treatable. At other times depression can be caused by emotional upheavals. It's important to realize that our emotions can not change our state of salvation. We might have doubts and fears but God's Word is certain and sure. We can depend upon God's unchanging nature. Our emotions can change from day to day, but God never changes (Heb 13:8, Malachi 3:6). His Word gives a believer so much hope and has real power in it to encourage us.

Bible Verses Full of Hope

God loved you so much that He sent His only Son to die for you and me (John 3:16). Why? Because God loves you unconditionally. The Psalms are one of the greatest books in the Bible that can help us realize just how much God watches over us and is protecting us. The Word of God is so full of the reassurance of God's love. Read these verses to see exactly what He thinks of you:

Zechariah, 2:8: "For this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye.'"

Deut 32:10: "In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye."

Psalms 17:8: "Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me under the shadow of your wings"

Psalm 27:5: "For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock."

Psalm 36:7: “How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings.”

Psalm 63:7: “Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.”

Psalm 91:1: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

Psalm 91:4: “He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart (a fortification, a means of protection or defense).”

Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Joshua 1:5: “No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Hebrews 13:5b has a similar saying, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

Depression is a Common Thread for Humanity

Of course when a person loses a spouse, a child, a close friend or relative, it is natural to go into a state of depression. This is a fallen world and things go wrong, but a great way to beat depression is to give thanks to God. This is how King David came out of his depression. David did not write all of the Psalms, but when you read the Psalms that he did write, you’ll find that they often start out with David being in sheer agony, hopelessness, and even in a state of depression. But keep reading. David usually ends his Psalms by giving thanks to God: for His salvation, for His faithfulness, for His certain deliverance, for His protection. We have a hope and a future that the world doesn’t have. I often feel empathy for those in the world who are not saved. They have no security in their tomorrows. They don’t know where their deliverance will come from. They do not have a God that is watching their back.

When I have experienced depression from time to time, I have sought the advice of others. One thing that is helpful is to volunteer to help others. It has harder to be depressed when we are helping others. Also, find a trusted friend, family member, or a fellow Christian in whom you can confide in and talk with. Sometimes just talking about your depression can help you identify what the root causes are. Why not try writing out on a piece of paper the many things that you have to be thankful for (I Thess. 5:18). These may include having a family, a home, a job, food on your table. Even the poorest Americans are far richer than the vast majority of the world. They can not always lay their head down at night safely on a pillow, inside a home, or know where their next meal is coming from. It is hard to be depressed when we are giving thanks.

Get Help If You Need It

Disclaimer: This is not professional advice. If you remain in an extended period of depression, seek medical help, see your doctor, or seek a qualified counselor or therapist. Depression can be caused by a variety of reasons such as a chemical imbalance in the brain, hormonal changes, brain irregularities or other causes that may be undiagnosed. If you feel suicidal, seek immediate help. This article is not intended to treat or be used to diagnose Clinical Depression.

About the author

[Jack Wellman](#) is a Christian author, freelance writer, and pastor at the Mulvane (KS) Brethren church in Mulvane, Kansas who raises money for the homeless, prison ministry, etc. through three Amazon books of his. Jack is presently attending seminary at Southern California Seminary completing a Masters in Religious Studies. His three books are inexpensive paperbacks that are theological in nature: “[Teaching Children The Gospel/How to Raise Godly Children](#)“, “[Do Babies Go To Heaven?/Why Does God Allow Suffering?](#)“, and “[Blind Chance or Intelligent Design?, Empirical Methodologies & the Bible](#)“. Book proceeds support my missionary work. Jack is a father and grandfather who has a BA in history, one in education, and one in science and is currently completing a Master's Degree in Biblical Studies at Southern California Seminary.

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