

THE TEMPLE AND ITS SACRIFICES

Five hundred years after Moses and the children of Israel built this special tent to house the Presence of the LORD, God directed King Solomon to replace the *portable tabernacle* with a more *permanent temple*. The layout of this new structure in Jerusalem was similar to that of the tabernacle, though it was much larger and even more beautiful. Solomon's Temple became one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world.

Just as the glory of God had descended from heaven to fill the Holiest Place in the tabernacle on the day of its inauguration, so the glorious, uncreated light of God's Presence came down and filled the temple.

*“When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and **the glory of the LORD filled the temple**. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house.”* (2 Chronicles 7:1-2)

The temple was built on the same mountain ridge where, a thousand years earlier, Abraham had sacrificed a ram in place of his son.²⁰⁰ To dedicate this special temple to God, King Solomon ordered that 120,000 sheep and 22,000 bulls be sacrificed.²⁰¹ This extravagance symbolized the incalculable worth of the precious blood to be shed a millennium later on a nearby hill.

Thus, from the time of Adam, Abel, Abraham, and onward, millions of symbolic blood sacrifices were offered on altars to cover sin, year after wearying year...

Then the Messiah came.



“God is love.” (1 John 4:8)

“God is great.” (Job 36:28)

The God who is *love* desires a close relationship with His people. The theme of God's social-relational nature is revealed in the first chapter of His Book.

God created Adam and Eve *“in His own image”* so that He might enjoy fellowship with them (Genesis 1:27). This same *“God with us”* theme²⁰² carries through to the last chapter of the Bible, when His redeemed people *“shall see His face”* and be with Him forever (Revelation 22:4). Anyone who fails to see this has missed the central theme of God's Book.

The God who is *great* can do anything He wants to do.

“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?” (Jeremiah 32:27)

No genuine monotheist can claim that God could not become man if He wanted to. If there were something the Almighty could not do (apart from contradicting Himself), then He would be less than God.

The question is not: *Can* God become man?

The question is: Did God *choose* to become man?

GOD'S TRUE TABERNACLE

One thousand five hundred years after God commanded the Israelites to construct a unique tabernacle-tent so that He might “*dwell among them*” (Exodus 25:8), the Scriptures declare:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1,14 NIV)

The phrase translated “*made his dwelling*” comes from a Greek word meaning *to set up a tent or tabernacle*. It can be translated literally: *He set up His tent among us*. The Scriptures describe a person’s body as the *tent* or *temple* in which his or her soul and spirit dwell.²⁰³ As we learned in chapter 16, the eternal Son of God was born as a baby boy. His human body was the tent in which He chose to dwell.

In Moses’ day, the tabernacle structure in which God placed the glorious, uncreated light of His Presence was covered with *animal skins*. But in the Person of Jesus, God’s glorious, uncreated light and Presence had come to dwell in *human skin*. Thus, His disciples could say, “*We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father!*”

The Scripture declares that Jesus was “*the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.*” (Hebrews 8:2)

In Old Testament times, the tabernacle, and later the temple, was a place where sinners could present animal sacrifices to cover their sin. When Jesus was a boy and as He grew into manhood, He visited the temple in Jerusalem on many occasions, but we never read of Him offering a sacrifice for sin. Why not? He had no sin. Jesus had “*appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*” (Hebrews 9:26) He would become the offering and a Roman cross would become the altar.

Jesus was the reality behind the symbols.

“God was manifested in the flesh.” (1 Timothy 3:16)

On one occasion, Jesus was standing near the great temple in Jerusalem and told a group of men:

*“‘Destroy **this temple**, and in three days I will raise it up.’*

Then the Jews said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’

***But He was speaking of the temple of His body.** Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”* (John 2:19-22)

The Jews did not understand that “*the temple*” of which Jesus spoke was His body. They thought He was talking about the magnificent temple in Jerusalem. But the light and glory of God’s Presence was no longer in the Holiest Place of that man-made temple.

It was now in the “*temple*” of Jesus’ body.

Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus allowed three of His disciples to witness this glorious outshining of God.

*“Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. **His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.***

*And behold... **a bright cloud overshadowed them;** and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying,*

‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Hear Him!’” (Matthew 17:1-5)

The blazing, dazzling, pure light of God that causes angels in heaven to cover their faces was *in Jesus*. The same glorious Presence that had resided in the Holiest Place of the tabernacle and temple was dwelling *in Jesus*.



The brilliant cloud that had once shone over the tabernacle now shone over the place where Jesus stood.

Jesus was God's visible Presence on earth.

This radiant outshining of the glory of the Son of God was accompanied by the Father speaking from heaven:

*“This is **My beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased. **Hear Him!**”*

God is serious about this.

A thousand years before the Son of God became the Son of Man, the prophet David wrote, *“**Kiss the Son**, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him!”* (Psalm 2:12)

“Kiss the Son,” means **honor the Son**.

From time to time, I see people kissing the heads and hands of religious leaders, men who are helpless sinners like themselves. I see those devotees making pilgrimages to honor men whose flesh has returned to dust. Meanwhile, God has announced to the world *“that **all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father**. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him... for **the Father loves the Son**.”* (John 5:23,20)

THE FORERUNNER

Isaiah was one of two prophets who wrote of a specially chosen herald who would *“prepare the way of the LORD.”* (Isaiah 40:3) That forerunner was the prophet John, son of Zacharias.²⁰⁴ While previous prophets proclaimed, *“God will send the Messiah into the world,”* the prophet John had the distinct honor of announcing, *“The promised Messiah, the LORD Himself, is here!”*

*“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!**’ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: **“Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.”**’”* (Matthew 3:1-3)

REPENTANCE

To prepare people for the LORD's arrival, John's message to the people was simple.

“Repent!”

The word *repent* comes from the Greek word *metanoeo*. It has two parts: *meta* and *noeo*. The first part means *movement* or *change*. The second part refers to the thoughts of the mind. Therefore the basic meaning of *repent* is to have a *change of mind*; to replace your wrong thinking with right thinking.

To put the term *repent* into an everyday context, suppose I want to travel by bus from one city to another, perhaps from Beirut to Amman. I climb on what I believe to be the correct bus and settle into my seat for a nap. Some time later, as the bus is speeding along the highway, I discover that it is not heading south to Amman, but north to Istanbul! What should I do?

I have two choices:

Being too proud to admit my error, I can *remain* on that bus and end up at the wrong destination.

Or, I can humble myself and *repent*, that is, have a change of mind, admitting that I chose the wrong bus. The sincerity of my

repentance becomes evident when I get off at the next stop and get on the proper bus.

True repentance leads a person to *turn from falsehood* and *trust the truth*.

Repentance can be compared to one side of a coin.

One side says: **REPENT!**

The other side says: **BELIEVE!**

The two sides are part of the same truth:

“...repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:21)

Repentance means to have a change of mind about what you are trusting for salvation. *Faith* means to trust in God’s provision of salvation.

There is no true faith apart from repentance.

Accordingly, the prophet John’s message went something like this: “Repent of your wrong thinking! Admit that you cannot save yourselves, and welcome the promised Messiah-King from Heaven! He has come to deliver you from your worst enemies, if you will stop trusting in yourselves and start trusting in Him!”

Those who admitted their sinful condition before God were baptized by John in the river. That is why John became known as *John the Baptizer*. Being baptized in water could not and cannot wash away sin. Being immersed in the river was a way for people to express *outwardly* that they had embraced *inwardly* God’s message about the Messiah who was coming to cleanse repentant, believing sinners from their defiled condition.

THE CHOSEN ONE

At the start of His earthly ministry, Jesus came to John to be baptized in the Jordan River. The sinless Messiah did not need to repent of anything, but by being baptized He identified Himself with the fallen human race He had come to deliver.

What followed Jesus’ baptism is a scene never to be forgotten. It gives us another glimpse of the one true God in His complex oneness and majesty.

“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” (Matthew 3:16-17)

As on the first day of creation, this narrative reveals the Presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, at this key moment in history, God was revealing His plural oneness with greater clarity. In our journey through the Scriptures, this is one of those spots where each traveler needs to stop, take some pictures, and reflect.

Here is the scene. Under a dramatic and radiant sky, *the Son of God* (*the Word* by whom heaven and earth were created) walks up out of the river. At the same moment, *the Spirit of God* (*the Spirit* who was hovering over the face of the waters on the first day of creation) descends from heaven, hovering over and settling on Jesus in the form of a dove. And, finally, the voice of *God the Father* resounds from heaven: *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

Throughout the previous thirty years, Jesus had lived behind the scenes in a poor family in the modest town of Nazareth. Though He was out of the public eye, the Father in Heaven had His eye on His beloved Son all those years. And now we hear God’s verdict on Jesus’ life: *“I am well pleased.”*

God could not say this of any other human ever born. Only Jesus pleased Him in every detail—inwardly and outwardly. As the Son from Heaven, He was holy, undefiled, and qualified to do what He came to do. He was the Messiah, *the Anointed One*, God’s Chosen One. God anointed Him, not with oil (as was done for priest and kings²⁰⁵), but with the Holy Spirit Himself.

“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power....” (Acts 10:38)

Jesus was the One about whom all the prophets had written.

THE LAMB OF GOD

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29)

The prophet John’s announcement is loaded with meaning.

- *“Behold! The Lamb of God...”*
John’s audience understood to some extent the meaning of *the lamb*. Ever since sin’s entrance, people had been bringing lambs as sin offerings. Over fifteen long centuries, lambs had been sacrificed morning and evening on the bronze altar. And now *God’s own Lamb* was on the scene! Two millennia earlier, Abraham had told his son, *“God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”* (Genesis 22:8) God did indeed provide a substitute to die instead of Abraham’s son, but it was not *“the lamb.”* It was *“a ram.”* (Genesis 22:13) *“The lamb”* in Abraham’s prophecy was the Messiah Himself. Abraham was pointing forward to Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus said, *“Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”* (John 8:56)
- *“...who takes away the sin...”*
Since the time of Adam, innocent animal blood had symbolically *covered* the sin of those who trusted in God and His plan, but what Jesus came to do would be different. He would *take away sin*, completely and forever.
- *“...of the world!”*
In the past, blood sacrifices for sin had been offered on behalf of a *person, a family, or a nation*. But the blood of Jesus would make available a full and final payment for the past, present, and future sin debt of the *entire world*.

Does the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world mean that every person ever born is automatically forgiven by God? No. From the day sin entered the human race God has always required personal faith in Him and His provision.²⁰⁶

“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” (John 1:11-12)



SHADOWS AND SYMBOLS

In bygone years, each innocent, spotless lamb sacrificed for sin was *“a shadow of the good things to come.”* (Hebrews 10:1)

A shadow is not to be confused with the object that casts the shadow. If you are looking down at the ground as a friend walks in your direction, you may see his shadow before you see him, but once he is standing before you, will you not look at your friend and speak with him instead of to his shadow?

Old Testament sacrifices were God-designed *shadows* that outlined and announced the coming Messiah. God expects us to look and listen to Him.

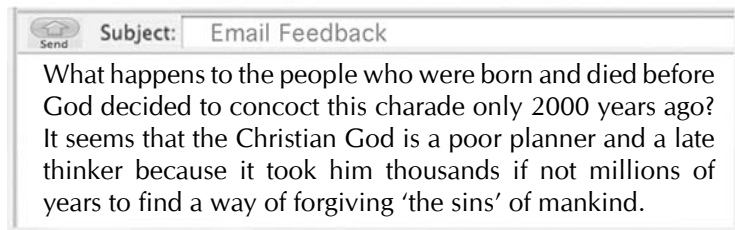
*“For it is **not possible** that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when **He** [Messiah] came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, **but a body You have prepared for Me**. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I [Messiah] said, ‘Behold, **I have come**—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.’... He takes away the first [animal sacrifices] that He may establish the second [His own sacrifice]. By that will we have been sanctified [made holy] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all.**”* (Hebrews 10:4-7,9-10)

Animal-blood sacrifices were mere *symbols* of what God would ultimately require. Animals were not created in God’s image. The value of a lamb is not equal to the value of a man. Just as you cannot take a toy model car to a car dealer and offer it as payment for a real car, so the blood of a lamb could not pay man’s sin debt. A sacrifice of equal or greater value was required.

Jesus the Lamb of God came to provide that sacrifice.

A POOR PLANNER?

A couple of years ago, I corresponded with a doctor of philosophy. In response to the declaration that Jesus came to “*take away the sin of the world,*” he wrote:



It seems that this man, who has since passed away, failed to recognize the meaning behind the millions of sacrificed lambs and the hundreds of prophecies which all pointed to the day when the Messiah would endure the penalty for the sins of mankind—past, present, and future. From the beginning, God’s rescue plan included paying for “*the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness.*” (Romans 3:25-26)

God forgave sinners before the time of Christ on the same basis He forgives sinners today—by faith in the promises and provision of God.

Of course, there was a difference.

Believers who lived before the time of Jesus Christ had their sins *covered*. It would be only after Jesus had shed His blood and overcome death that a sinner’s debt could be forever *canceled* from the record books.

Before Jesus the Lamb of God came to earth, a man offering an animal sacrifice on an altar was somewhat like a struggling businessman who takes out a loan at the bank.

A wealthy friend agrees to cosign the loan, promising to pay off the debt if the businessman fails to reimburse the borrowed money. With each passing year, the businessman fails to pay back the loan, going deeper and deeper in debt. And each year his rich friend signs another note at the bank to cover the struggling man’s debt. What keeps the failing businessman from going bankrupt and to jail? His debts are covered by the notes of guarantee from his wealthy, trustworthy friend.

Old Testament animal sacrifices were a sinner’s “notes of guarantee,” temporarily accepted by God. The Record Keeper of the universe, who has a flawless history of respecting His contracts and balancing His books, promised to accept the blood of blemish-free animals as a *covering* for sin. But animal blood could not *cancel* man’s accumulated sin debt. It only served as “*a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.*” (Hebrews 10:3-4)

Sin is a serious problem that only the shedding of the blood of God’s eternal Son could resolve. Jesus, the Lamb of God, came to pay off the sin debt of mankind.

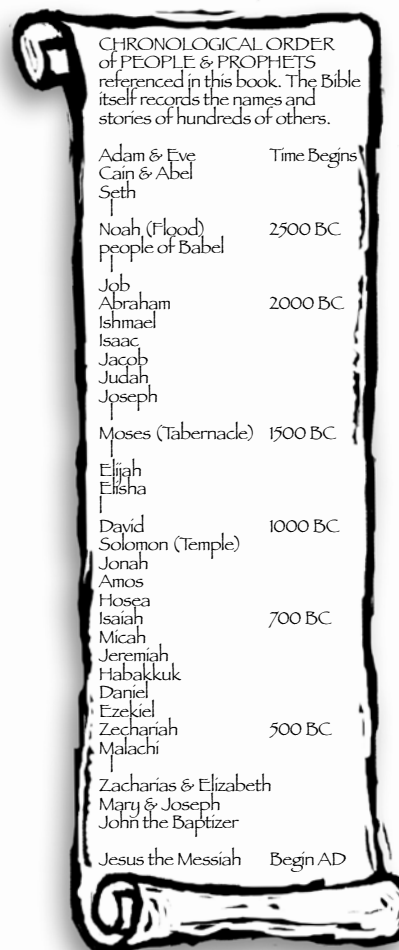
What do *you* think?

Is God “a poor planner and a late thinker”? Or did the prophet John and his followers have good reason for identifying Jesus of Nazareth as “*the Messiah... of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote,*” and as “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*”? (John 1)

Our Creator, the Best of Planners, never had any other plan for dealing with man’s sin problem. From His timeless perspective, His beloved Son always was, is, and shall evermore be:

“...*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*”

(Revelation 13:8)





“A promise is a cloud; fulfillment is rain.”
— Arab proverb

For thousands of years the prophets told of God’s promise to send a Savior to earth, *“but when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son.”* (Galatians 4:4)

God’s prophets provided *clouds of promise*.

Jesus of Nazareth was God’s *rain of fulfillment*.

The Creator’s plan was no afterthought. It is *“the gospel of God, which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ....”* (Romans 1:2-3)

The Scriptures are the clouds; the Messiah is the rain.

ENTERING JERUSALEM ON A DONKEY

The Messiah knew His mission. Five hundred years earlier, the prophet Zechariah had written about one of the many events that would lead up to His crucifixion.

“Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
(Zechariah 9:9)

Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. All four Gospel records report this event. Matthew, an eyewitness and disciple of Jesus, wrote:

“Now when they drew near Jerusalem... Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, ‘Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.’ All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” (Matthew 21:1-5)

Thus, Jesus offered Himself to the nation as their King only to be rejected—just as the prophets had foretold.²⁰⁷

The Gospels record in detail what happened after Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey. He went into the temple and drove out all who were using it to make money. Then Jesus said to the startled sellers, *“‘It is written [in the Scriptures], ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves!’”* Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.” (Matthew 21:13-14)

Over the next few days, Jesus sat in the temple and taught the people the true sayings of God. The religious leaders tried to trick Him into saying something whereby they could accuse Him and have Him put to death. They failed. Jesus handled their questions with heavenly wisdom, so that everyone marveled.²⁰⁸

Then it was time.

THE HOUR HAD COME

Jesus is the only Person who knew precisely:
when He would die,
where He would die,
how He would die,
and *why* He would die.

“Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, that He said to His disciples, ‘You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.’

Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him. But they said, ‘Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.’” (Matthew 26:1-5)

The self-serving religious leaders were desperate. On several occasions they had *“sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.”* (John 7:30)

Then they got the break they wanted.

Judas, a disciple of Jesus outwardly but not inwardly, went to the temple priests and offered to betray Jesus into their hands. The priests agreed to pay Judas thirty silver coins. This act of treachery fulfilled several more Old Testament prophecies.²⁰⁹

Thus, the day arrived when Jesus told His disciples, *“The hour has come.”* (John 12:23)

It was time for God’s Lamb to die.

PASSOVER WEEK

Jerusalem’s narrow streets were teeming with locals and foreigners. The bleating of sheep and bellowing of bullocks filled the air. Buyers haggled with merchants over the price of a proper lamb. It was Passover week.

Passover was part of a week-long celebration established by God fifteen centuries earlier. It was an occasion for His people to *look back* and remember how the LORD had delivered His “nation of communication” from slavery and death on that fateful night when their ancestors had applied lamb’s blood to the doorposts of their homes. From God’s perspective, it was also an occasion to *look forward* to the day when the Messiah would fulfill the deeper meaning of the Passover.

However, few, if any, understood that Jesus of Nazareth was about to shed His blood as the final Passover Lamb and fulfill the

symbolism of all the lambs that had been sacrificed annually since the time of Moses. In contrast to Moses’ mission of delivering people from the *physical tyranny* of human taskmasters, the Messiah’s mission was to deliver people from the *spiritual tyranny* of Satan, sin, and death.

Interestingly, the religious leaders determined to kill Jesus, but *“not during the feast lest there be an uproar among the people.”* (Matthew 26:5) Yet it was during that very feast that Jesus planned to die! The Lamb of God must be slain during the Passover celebration.²¹⁰ Everything would happen just as God planned it.

Ironically, the very ones who rejected God’s plan would play a major role in fulfilling it! Little did Satan realize that by inciting the religious leaders to kill Jesus, he was arranging his own doom! The Scripture calls this twist of events: *“...the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages... which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”* (1 Corinthians 2:7-8)

THE BREAD AND THE CUP

On the appointed evening, Jesus and His disciples gathered in a private upstairs room for the Passover. After sharing a meal of lamb and bitter herbs, the Lord took some bread, gave thanks, broke it, passed it out, and told them to eat it, saying, *“Do this in remembrance of Me.”* (Luke 22:19)



The broken bread symbolized His body about to be bruised and punished for them.

Next, He passed around a cup containing the wine of crushed grapes. *“This cup,”* He told His disciples, is the *“blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”* (Matthew 26:28)

The cup represented the blood Jesus was about to shed to inaugurate the promised new covenant.

These two simple symbols point to the central message of God’s prophets: that our Creator would take on human flesh in order to suffer and shed His blood for Adam’s sinful race.

After comforting His disciples with many incomparably wonderful promises and truths,²¹¹ Jesus led them to a nearby garden called Gethsemane. Prostrating Himself on the ground, in profuse sweat and intense agony of soul, He prayed, “*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*” (Matthew 26:39)

What was “*this cup*” that Jesus dreaded so? It was the cup of suffering for sin—the unprecedented separation from His Father that He was about to endure, and the concentrated horror of hell He would suffer for you and for me.

After voicing this same prayer three times, the Son willingly submitted to His Father’s will. As the prophet David had predicted, the Messiah would restore that which He did not take. “*Though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it.*” (Psalm 69:4)

Jesus would become the full and final Sacrifice for sin.

THE ARREST

Just as Jesus finished speaking with His Father, into the garden marched a detachment of soldiers sent by the chief priests, scribes and elders. With their torches, clubs and swords they had come to arrest the One who had calmed storms, cast out demons, and raised the dead back to life.

“Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, ‘Whom are you seeking?’

They answered Him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’

Jesus said to them, ‘I am He.’ ...Now when He said to them, ‘I am He,’ they drew back and fell to the ground. Then He asked them again, ‘Whom are you seeking?’

And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’

Jesus answered, ‘I have told you that I am He.’”

(John 18:4-8)

To those who came to arrest Him, Jesus identified Himself with God’s own name, “*I AM.*”²¹² Clearly, if Jesus was to go with them, it would be because He chose to do so.

As the soldiers closed in, the disciple Peter drew his sword, but only managed to cut off the ear of the chief priest’s servant. Jesus graciously healed the man’s ear and then said to Peter,

*“Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? **How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?**”*

(Matthew 26:52-54)

What a refreshing contrast Jesus provides to all who use violence in the name of religion. Though Jesus knew that these men intended to mock, torture, and kill Him, He showed them patience and kindness rather than hatred and revenge.

FORETOLD BY THE PROPHETS

Then, to those who had come to arrest Him, Jesus said, “*Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me.*” And the Scripture adds this commentary:

*“But all this was done **that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.***

Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

*And those who had laid hold of Him **led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.**”* (Matthew 26:55-57)

Why did the One who controlled the wind and the waves allow Himself to be arrested, bound, and led away?

He did it out of love and obedience to His Father.

He did it to save you and me from everlasting judgment.

He did it “*that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.*”

Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Isaiah had written, “*He was **led as a lamb to the slaughter.**”* (Isaiah 53:7)

The prophet Abraham had declared, “*God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.*” (Genesis 22:8)

And the prophet Moses had written, “*The priest shall take one male lamb and offer it... Then he shall kill the lamb in the place where he kills the sin offering.*” (Leviticus 14:12-13)

Don’t miss the irony.

The priests, responsible for killing and burning lambs on the bronze altar of the temple, were the very ones who had arrested Jesus in order to have Him killed. Yet they had no clue they were about to sacrifice **The Lamb** of whom all the prophets had written.

CONDEMNED BY RELIGIOUS LEADERS

“*And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes.*” (Mark 14:53)

The religious leaders of the Jews had organized an illegal nighttime trial.

“*Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree...*”

And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, ‘Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?’

But He kept silent and answered nothing.

Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, ‘Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’

Jesus said, ‘I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy!’” (Mark 14:55-56,60-63)

Why did the high priest become enraged, tear his clothes, and accuse Jesus of blasphemy? He did so because Jesus had declared Himself to be the Son of God and the Son of Man, the Messiah of whom all the prophets had written. Jesus had also called Himself by God’s own personal name, “*I AM!*” And by speaking of “*the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven,*” Jesus was quoting from the Scriptures of the prophets and declaring Himself to be the Judge of all the earth.²¹³ That is why “*the high priest tore his clothes and said,*

‘What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?’

And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.

Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, ‘Prophesy!’ And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.”

(Mark 14:63-65)

Seven hundred years earlier, the prophet Isaiah foretold the Messiah’s willing sufferings: “*I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.*” (Isaiah 50:6)

CONDEMNED BY POLITICAL LEADERS

At daybreak, the priests and religious leaders led Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. The religious leaders demanded that Pilate sentence Jesus to death by crucifixion. At that time in history, the Jews were under the rule of Rome’s Empire and did not have authority to sentence a criminal to death.

Three times during the trial Pilate declared, “*I find no fault in Him,*” but the mob, incited by the priests, who were incited by the devil, only cried out the louder, “*Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*”²¹⁴

Pilate gave in to the pressure of the religious leaders and sentenced Jesus to the extreme penalty of Roman law: a brutal, bone-exposing flogging, followed by crucifixion.

*“And when he had **scourged** Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.*

*Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered **the whole garrison around Him**. And they **stripped Him** and **put a scarlet robe on Him**. When they had **twisted a crown of thorns**, they **put it on His head**, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and **mocked Him**, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’*

*Then they **spat on Him**, and took the reed and **struck Him on the head**. And when they had **mocked Him**, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and **led Him away to be crucified.**” (Matthew 27:26-31)*

THE MOUNT OF THE LORD

Thus, the Lord of glory—His holy body now a bloody mass of shredded flesh, His head bearing a crown of twisted thorns, and on His back a heavy wooden cross—was led outside the city and up the same mountain ridge where, nearly two thousand years earlier, Abraham had prophesied:

*“**God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.... In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided.**” (Genesis 22:8,14)*

All the elements had converged: the people, the proceedings, the Person, the place. Everything was happening just as the prophets had foretold.

It was time for the transaction of the ages.



Crucifixion is the cruelest state-sponsored method of execution ever devised. The Roman Empire reserved it for the most treacherous criminals.

Execution by crucifixion is what we, the human race, chose for our Creator when He came to visit us.²¹⁵

“There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. And when they had come to the place called Calvary,²¹⁶ there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.” (Luke 23:32-33)

CRUCIFIED!

Crucifixion was designed to inflict upon a victim the most excruciating agony and the greatest possible indignity.

I have never seen, nor would I want to see, an artist’s painting or a movie which adequately portrays the shame and pain Jesus endured while hanging on the cross. For instance, artists and screenwriters always put a piece of clothing on Him, but the historical reality is that the Roman soldiers would strip condemned criminals naked before sadistically slamming them against a tree or a cross and driving spikes through their wrists and heels.

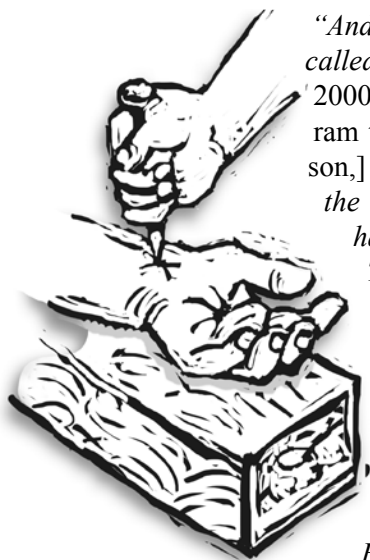
Death by crucifixion was shameful, painful, and slow.

Jesus willingly endured this penalty—the shame and the pain—for you, for me, and for Adam’s entire race. The intense torment that was heaped on Jesus is meant to help us understand the severe penalty our sin deserves.

Centuries before the Romans even invented crucifixion, the prophet David described the Messiah’s sufferings on the cross:

*“The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. **They pierced My hands and My feet**; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots. ...They shake the head, saying, ‘He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!’”* (Psalm 22:16-18,8) And the prophet Isaiah foretold: *“He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”* (Isaiah 53:12)

In the following excerpt from the gospel record, see how many fulfillments you can identify based on the prophecies we just read.



“And when they had come to the place called Calvary, [the region where, 2000 years earlier, God provided a ram to die in the place of Abraham’s son,] there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’ And they divided His garments and cast lots. And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.’ The soldiers also mocked Him.

Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’

But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’

And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’

Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened....” (Luke 23:33-36,39-45)

THE TRANSACTION

Over the centuries countless victims have endured the agonies of crucifixion. Before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, the Roman soldiers were crucifying five hundred Jews a day.²¹⁷ Some victims languished on the cross for days before expiring. Jesus suffered on the cross for a relatively shorter period of six hours before He died. So what made His sufferings unique?

One significant difference is that the prophets foretold Jesus’ sufferings and death. Another distinction is that, though many have shed their blood while impaled on a cross, only the Lord Jesus shed perfect blood. And the narrative we just read reveals another utterly unique dimension of Jesus’ death.

*“Now it was about the sixth hour, and **there was darkness over all the earth** until the ninth hour.”* (Luke 23:44)²¹⁸

Jesus was nailed to the cross at nine o’clock in the morning. From noon until three o’clock, the whole earth was covered in darkness. Why? During those three hours, hidden from the view of the world, the most significant transaction of all time was taking place. God was dealing with our sin in time so that we might not have to deal with it in eternity.

During those hours of supernatural darkness, God in heaven dumped on His beloved, righteous Son the concentrated, everlasting punishment our sins require. It was for that purpose the Son of God had taken on a body of flesh and blood.

“He Himself is the propitiation [sufficient sin-offering that absorbed God’s wrath] for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.” (1 John 2:2)

Seven centuries earlier, the prophet Isaiah had already described this transaction of the ages:

“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed... the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. ...He was led as a lamb to the slaughter... it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin... He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.”
(Isaiah 53:5-7,10-11)

During those hours on the cross, as the planet was enveloped in darkness, the LORD laid on His willing, sinless Son the contamination and condemnation of our sins. What actually transpired between the Father and Son we may never comprehend, but one thing is sure: It was the greatest transaction of all time.

ALONE!

As the thick darkness covered the earth, *“Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’”* (Matthew 27:46)

Why did Jesus utter this gut-wrenching cry from the cross? He cried out thus because God had left Him to pay sin’s penalty...

alone.

On the behalf of all, Jesus suffered the three levels of separation caused by sin:

- He experienced *spiritual death*. God in heaven turned away His holy face from His Son on whom He had loaded the sins of the human race.
- He went through *physical death*. The moment Jesus died, His spirit and soul left His body.
- He also tasted *the second death*. He suffered the agony of hell for you and for me.

Hell is a God-forsaken place of darkness and isolation; a place devoid of all that is good; a place of separation from the presence and love of the heavenly Father. While on the cross, for the first and last time in eternity, the eternal Son was separated from His eternal Father. Jesus endured that horrific separation, so that we might never experience it.

The holy Lamb of God became our Sin-Bearer: our Substitute. He bore the full weight of sin’s curse, accepting the shame, the pain, the thorns, and the nails. On the altar of the cross, Jesus became the full and final *“burnt offering”* for sin.²¹⁹

HELL IN A FEW HOURS?

Jesus took our hell.

How could one Man pay the penalty for the entire human race? How could Jesus suffer an eternity of punishment in a few hours of time?

He could do it because of who He is.

It is because of who He is that He did not need to go on paying for our sins throughout eternity as we would have to do. As the Eternal Son and Word of God He had no sin debt of His own to pay, nor was He bound by time as we are.

It is because of who He is that He was able to *“taste death for everyone”* (Hebrews 2:9) in a finite amount of time.

Just as the Lord God did not need any particular amount of time to create our complex world (though He chose to do it in *six days*), neither did He need any certain amount of time on the cross to redeem mankind (though He chose to do it in *six hours*).

With God, time is as nothing.

“From everlasting to everlasting, You are God! ... For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch [a few hours of guard duty] in the night.” (Psalm 90:2,4)

“IT IS FINISHED!”

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’ Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.” (John 19:28-30)

Just before Jesus died, He made a proclamation:

“It is finished!”

This statement is translated from a single Greek word, *Tetelestai*. This was a common term in the Roman business world. It was used to indicate that a debt had been completely paid. Ancient receipts have been found with “*Tetelestai*” written across them, meaning:

“Paid in full.”

The term *Tetelestai* was also used to announce the completion of a task. In reporting back to the one who had sent him on a mission, a servant could say, “*Tetelestai*,” which meant:

“Mission accomplished.”

The other Gospel writers all report that “*Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.*” (Mark 15:37)

It was a shout of triumph!

The prophecies and symbols which pointed to God’s sacrificial Lamb had been fulfilled.

Jesus had dealt decisively with the cause of the curse: **sin**. He had paid the required ransom to God to redeem the defiled, defiant, damned descendants of Adam. God’s righteous nature and wrath against sin were fully satisfied. His laws had been enforced.

It is finished. Paid in full. Mission accomplished!

*“You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times **for you.**”* (1 Peter 1:18-20)

Down through the centuries, blood had flowed from millions of blemish-free sacrificed animals. But now Jesus’ own blood had flowed from His sin-free body. The infinitely “*precious blood of Christ*” would not just temporarily *cover* sin; it would forever *remove it* from the record.

This is what God’s first covenant had foretold.

“‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant. ... I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’” (Jeremiah 31:31,34)

The New Testament Scriptures then explain: “*In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first **obsolete.***” (Hebrews 8:13) No more sin offerings would be needed. Animal sacrifices on an altar had been abolished by the Messiah’s death on a cross.

Just as the LORD God performed *the first* blood sacrifice (on the day Adam and Eve sinned), so He has provided *the final* acceptable blood sacrifice.

As Abraham prophesied, God has provided “*for Himself the Lamb for the sacrifice.*” (Genesis 22:8) While God did spare Abraham’s son, He “*did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.*” (Romans 8:32)

Jesus’ shed blood satisfied *the law of sin and death* and fulfilled *the law of the sacrifice.*

It’s no wonder He shouted, ***“It is finished!”***

THE TORN VEIL

So what happened after Jesus shouted, “*It is finished*”?

“And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” (Mark 15:37-38)

One ancient historian described the temple veil as being as thick as the palm of a hand and so heavy that it needed 300 men to maneuver it.²²⁰

What caused this massive curtain to be ripped in two?

Back in chapter 21, we learned that God had instructed His people to hang this special curtain in the tabernacle and later in the temple. The veil shut man out from the Holiest Place, that inner sanctuary where God had once placed the blinding light of His Presence. This veil, embroidered with colors of blue, purple and red, symbolized God’s own Son who would come from heaven to earth. It also served to remind sinners of their separation from their holy Creator. Only those that met God’s standard of perfect righteousness would be granted entrance into God’s eternal dwelling place.

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the specially anointed high priest would be permitted to go past the veil and enter the Holiest Place. The only way to enter into God’s presence without being annihilated was for the high priest to take a bowl of the blood of a sacrificed goat (symbolizing Christ’s shed blood). The priest also had to be clothed in a pure linen tunic (symbolizing Christ’s righteousness). Once inside the Holiest Place, the high priest would sprinkle the blood seven times (symbolizing completeness) in front of and on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark contained God’s Law, which condemned all sinners to death. But God showed His mercy to sinners by allowing an innocent animal to die in their stead.

For fifteen centuries the veil testified to God’s absolute holiness and that, apart from the shed blood of Christ, there could be no permanent atonement for sin. Only God’s sinless *Chosen One*, whom the veil represented, could pay the price for sin.

That is why, when the time was right, God sent His own Son to live a life of perfect obedience to God’s laws, and then to pay willingly, with His own blood, the full penalty for the law-breaking descendants of Adam.

So who tore the veil in two from top to bottom? God did. This act was the Father’s “*Amen!*” to the Son’s “*It is finished!*”²²¹

God was satisfied.

NO MORE SIN SACRIFICES

By Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, full atonement (forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God) had been accomplished. The Perfect Substitute had willingly shed His blood for the sin of the world.

No longer would God’s people be burdened with yearly sacrifices for sin.

No longer would God require temple rituals or high priests.

The once-for-all Sacrifice had been made. The Reality behind the shadows and symbols had spoken. “*It is finished!*”

To all who believe, God Himself says:

“Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” (Hebrews 10:17-22)

DEAD

The moment Jesus died, not only was the temple veil torn in two, but the earth quaked and the terrified crowd scattered.

“So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 27:54)

Later, to assure that He was truly dead, a Roman soldier drove a spear into Jesus' side. Blood and water flowed out, providing medical proof that He was dead. The soldier's action fulfilled yet more prophecies.²²²

BURIED

“Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed.”
(Matthew 27:57-60)

The prophet Isaiah had predicted that the Messiah's grave would be *“with the rich at His death.”* (Isaiah 53:9) God's plan was being fulfilled in every detail. Even so, Jesus' disciples still did not understand that plan. They had truly believed that Jesus was the Messiah who would establish His kingdom on earth, but when they saw Him die, their hopes died with Him. Their miracle-working Master and dearest friend had been executed and buried.

It was over, or so they thought.

Strangely enough, although Jesus' disciples had forgotten His promise to come back to life on the third day, the religious leaders who plotted His execution had not.

“The chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, ‘Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.’

Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.’

So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.” (Matthew 27:62-66)



The stone door to the cold tomb holding Jesus' corpse was sealed shut. Well-armed Roman soldiers stationed themselves around the burial site. It seemed that this was the way the story of Jesus of Nazareth would end.

Then came Sunday morning.



But the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead,



and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.'

So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, 'Rejoice!'

So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.'"
(Matthew 28:1-10)

Death could not hold the Messiah. Since He had no sin of His own, God raised Him from the dead. Not only had Jesus paid the penalty for the sin of the world, but He had triumphed over that penalty. He had conquered death itself!

Satan and his demons must have shuddered.

The religious leaders were frantic.

"Now while they [the women who had just seen their risen Lord] were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened.

The Scripture says of Adam, "*and he died*" (Genesis 5:5) and that is where his earthly story ends.

It was no different with Adam's descendants. The fifth chapter of Genesis records their epitaphs.

"And he died.

...and he died.

...and he died.

...and he died.

...and he died."

Such is the history of sin-infected men and women. They lived, died, and were buried; generation after generation, century after century.

But the Messiah's story doesn't end in a tomb.

THE EMPTY TOMB

"Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.

When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, ‘Tell them, “His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.” And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.’

So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.” (Matthew 28:11-15)

Jesus’ enemies knew the tomb was empty. They were desperate to cover up the truth. They did not want people to know that the Man they had killed had come back to life!

DEATH DEFEATED

In the Garden of Eden, God had warned Adam that if he disobeyed his Creator’s one rule, he would “*surely die*.” Satan had countered, “*You will **not** surely die*” and proceeded to lead Adam and the entire human race down a path of death and destruction. For thousands of years death held men, women, and children in its relentless grip. Then the Son of God challenged death, defeated it, and threw open the door to eternal life.

*“For as **in Adam all die**, even so **in Christ all shall be made alive**.” (1 Corinthians 15:22)*

Just yesterday an elderly neighbor lady told me, “The one thing I fear in life is death.” How glad I was to be able to tell her of the One who passed through death and came out alive, triumphing over that dreaded enemy.

“Since the children have flesh and blood, [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” (Hebrews 2:14-15 NIV)

Suppose Jesus had only died for our sin but had not risen from the dead. Death would still be something to fear.

By conquering death, the Lord Jesus demonstrated that He is greater than Satan’s most powerful weapon and man’s most feared enemy. Because Jesus overcame death, those who trust in Him have nothing to fear in this life or the next.

God’s message is straightforward: if you trust in His Son who suffered on the cross, went down into death, and came out alive on the third day as your Substitute, He will release you from death’s stranglehold and give you His eternal life.

That is God’s Good News for a world held hostage by sin.

*“Christ **died** for our sins **according to the Scriptures**... He was **buried**, and... He **rose again** the third day **according to the Scriptures**.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)*

To all who believe, Christ Jesus says:

“Because I live, you will live also. ...Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades [place of departed spirits] and of Death.” (John 14:19; Revelation 1:17-18)

SATAN DEFEATED

When Jesus entered death’s realm and exited three days later, in terms of warfare He took the high ground—an advantage He will never relinquish.

Satan is a defeated foe. Though he and his demons desperately fight on, they cannot win.

Do you see how God fulfilled the promise He made in the Garden of Eden the day Adam and Eve sinned? As He foretold, *the Seed of a woman* (Jesus) was wounded by *the Serpent* (Satan), and those very wounds have sealed Satan’s doom.

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8)

Through His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus triumphed over the curse of sin, which stated:

“... to **dust** you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19)

For thousands of years, Satan sneered as death’s putrefying process turned Adam’s deceased descendants back into dust. But now here was One whose body did **not** return to dust!

Why did *His* body not decay in the grave?

Death had no power over Him because He was the Sinless One. A thousand years earlier the prophet David had announced:

“You will **not**...let your Holy One see **decay**.” (Psalm 16:10 NIV)

The Holy One has conquered Satan, sin, and death for us.

THE EVIDENCE

The evidences for Jesus’ resurrection from the dead are numerous and convincing.²²³

The tomb was empty.

The corpse was nowhere to be found.

The women were the first to witness the empty tomb, hear the angel’s announcement, see Jesus alive, touch Him, and speak with Him. If the Gospel records had been invented, do you think the four men who wrote them would have given the women credit for being first in everything?!

The documented post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were many. For decades to follow, hundreds of credible witnesses would testify to having walked and talked with the risen Messiah.

The disciples had seen Jesus suffer and die. They were heartbroken. Their hopes had been dashed because they had the mistaken idea that the Messiah could never die. They had returned to their homes disheartened and afraid. Then something happened. They saw Jesus alive. Suddenly they remembered how Jesus had told them He would be crucified and rise again the third day.²²⁴ At last they understood the words of the prophets.

These former cowards became Christ’s bold witnesses.

Not long after Jesus rose from the dead, Peter, who had been confused and fearful, was in the hostile streets of Jerusalem fearlessly declaring to those who had plotted Jesus’ crucifixion:

*“You disowned the Holy and Righteous One... **You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.** We are witnesses of this. ...Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. **But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.**”* (Acts 3:14-19 NIV)

For Peter and the other disciples, no hardship would be too great to endure for the One who had given them eternal life.

Christ’s disciples (also called *Christians*²²⁵) were ridiculed, imprisoned and flogged, and many were executed because of their bold witness for the Lord Jesus. Peter himself was persecuted and, according to secular history, was eventually crucified—upside down. Yet Peter and the other disciples joyfully accepted such persecution since they *knew* that their Savior and Lord had conquered death and hell.²²⁶ They *knew* that God had given them forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life. Death no longer terrified them since they *knew* that the instant their physical bodies died their eternal souls and spirits would “*be present with the Lord*” in heaven. (2 Corinthians 5:8)

Nothing could frighten them now. They had a message for the world, a message that meant more to them than life itself!

Here is how one of Christ’s followers concluded his message to a skeptical, mocking crowd in the ancient city of Athens:

*“God is now declaring to men that **all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.**”* (Acts 17:30-31 NAS)

His conclusion was plain and simple: *Repent!* Stop thinking you can save yourself from God's certain judgment. Instead, rely completely on the Savior who shed His blood for your sins and rose from the dead.

POSITIVE PROOF

How can you and I be sure that Jesus is the Savior and Judge of the world? We just read the answer. *God has "furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."*

What more evidence is needed that Jesus is the one and only Savior? Why would we entrust our eternal destiny to anyone else? Tragically, people around the world venerate *dead men* who contradicted God's story and message while they were alive. Why would anyone choose to place their trust in some man who was unable to conquer death and who contradicted God's Word, when God's *Chosen One* overcame death and fulfilled the words of the prophets?

Just as fulfilled prophecy is God's way of providing indisputable proof that the Bible is the Word of God, so Jesus' resurrection on the third day is God's indisputable proof that He alone can save us from eternal death and give us eternal life.

THE SAVIOR FOR ALL PEOPLE

The Scripture is clear: the message about Jesus' death and resurrection is for *"all everywhere."* This must be emphasized, because some will try to tell you that Jesus came only for the Jews.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.²²⁷

While it is true that the Messiah's earthly ministry focused on the Jews, His purpose in coming to that nation was to provide salvation for the whole world. Seven hundred years earlier the prophet Isaiah had written out God's promise to His Son: *"I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth."* (Isaiah 49:6)

Christ came into the world knowing that the Jewish leaders would refuse to receive Him as their King. He also knew that it would be through that very rejection that He would pay sin's penalty and offer salvation to the world.

"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." (John 1:10-12)

Jesus Christ is the Savior for all people, but only *"those who believe in His name,"* that is, in *who He is* and in *what He has done* to save sinners, will be granted *"the right to become children of God."*

My friend, God loves you and considers you worth the life of His Son. Nevertheless, He will not force you to believe.

He leaves the choice with you.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16 NIV)

NO MORE CONFUSION

On the same day Jesus rose from the dead, He walked and talked with a couple of confused disciples who had not yet understood why it was necessary for the Messiah to shed His blood and come back to life. Jesus said to them:

"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

And beginning at Moses [the Torah/Genesis] and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Luke 24:25-27)

At last, their confusion was cleared up. How could they have been so blind? The Messiah had not come to put down temporal political enemies; He had come to gain victory over the more ruthless spiritual enemies—Satan, sin, death, and hell!

Later that day, Jesus appeared to His disciples in the upper room where they lodged in Jerusalem. He showed them His nail-pierced hands and feet, ate with them, and told them:

“*These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.*’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, ‘*Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.*’”
(Luke 24:44-48)

Jesus told His disciples that they were to be “*witnesses of these things*” to the nations. Their message was clear: The Lord from heaven has paid the penalty for sin and triumphed over death for every person. Wherever there is repentance (a change of mind) combined with faith (heart-level trust) in Christ and His redemptive work, God grants full pardon and true peace.

AN INVITATION TO REST

Think back to the seventh day of creation.

What did the Lord do on that day? He rested.

Why did He rest? He rested because His work was “*finished*. ...*God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.*” (Genesis 2:1-2)

Nothing needed to be added to God’s work of creation. *It was finished*. Likewise, nothing needs to be added to God’s work of redemption. “*It is finished!*”

Just as God rested and rejoiced in His work of creation, so He invites you and me to rest and rejoice in His finished work of salvation. “*For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.*” (Hebrews 4:10)

While ten thousand religions around the world cry out, “Nothing is finished. Do this! Do that! Try harder!” Jesus says, “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” (Matthew 11:28)

Are you resting and rejoicing in what God has done for you?

FORTY DAYS WITH THE LORD

The Lord Jesus spent time with His disciples over a forty-day period after He had risen from the dead. He taught them many things about the kingdom of God. They gazed on Him and touched His resurrected body—a permanent, glorified body unfettered by time and space—the same type of body all true believers will one day receive.

The disciples walked, talked, and ate with the Lord Jesus. He reminded them that He would soon leave them, but that the Father would send down the Holy Spirit to live inside them. His Spirit would guide them and strengthen them in their witness to the nations of the world, then one day He—Jesus—would return to earth to judge the world with perfect righteousness.

On the fortieth day after Jesus’ resurrection, He met with His disciples on the Mount of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem.

It was time to return to His “*Father’s house.*” (John 14:2)

ASCENDED

“*And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now... You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’*”

Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, **He was taken up**, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? **This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.**’” (Acts 1:4-11)

HEAVEN'S VICTORY CELEBRATION

Thus, just as the prophets had foretold, the Son of God “*ascended on high.*”²²⁸ The One who, some thirty-three years earlier, had willingly exchanged the adoration of heaven’s angels for the mockery of men was coming home! But there was something different about Him. He who had created man in His own image now bore the image of man.

The Scriptures do not reveal many details about the Son of God returning to heaven. Yet this we do know: it was a glorious event!

We can envision the innumerable host of angels and redeemed descendants of Adam holding their breath as the Lord is about to enter heaven’s gates. They knew Him well as *the Son of God and Lord of glory*, but now they would meet Him for the first time as *the Son of Man and Lamb of God*.

All of heaven is silent.

Suddenly the stillness is broken by a majestic chorus of trumpets and an angel’s booming proclamation: “*Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in!*” (Psalm 24:7)

The gates swing open wide and, to the thunderous applause of heaven, in walks the Champion, God’s own Son, the Word, the Lamb, the battle-scarred Son of Man—**Jesus!**

Through the adoring throng He walks, making His way up to the Father’s throne.

Turning, He looks out over the innumerable multitude of Adam’s redeemed race.

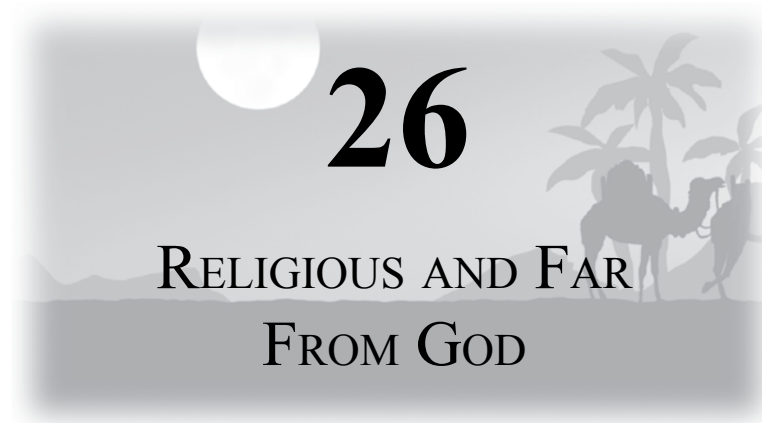
And then He sits down.²²⁹

Mission accomplished.

The host of the redeemed bow before Him and declare, as if with one voice:

“***Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!***” (Revelation 5:12)

What a celebration it must have been! What a celebration it is. It’s the celebration that will never end.



Perhaps you have heard the adage: *Hindsight is always 20/20*. The designation 20/20 is the North American optometrist’s standard for *clear vision*. If your eyesight is 20/20, you do not need glasses.

Hindsight has to do with looking back on what has already happened. Hindsight allows us to see the course of action we or someone else should have taken, but only after it is too late. Such hindsight is not very helpful.

However, when it comes to understanding the story and message revealed by God over many centuries, hindsight is tremendously helpful. It allows us to overcome major obstacles and to distinguish truth from error. That is why Jesus told His disciples:

“***Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.***”
(Matthew 13:16-17)

As those living after the Messiah’s first coming to earth, we are blessed to be able to look back into history, study the completed Scriptures, and see clearly God’s perfect plan.

With this thought in mind, and considering all we have witnessed in our journey through the Scriptures, let us return once more to *the Book of Beginnings*.

SEEING CAIN AND ABEL WITH HINDSIGHT

The fourth chapter of Genesis is clear: both Cain and Abel were born with a sin problem. As they grew into manhood, each attempted to worship God but only one was accepted by God.

“The LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.” (Genesis 4:4-5)

With biblical hindsight, having now heard the story of Jesus the Savior of sinners, it is easy to understand why, thousands of years earlier, *“The LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.”*

Abel’s slain lamb pointed forward to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who would shed His blood for sinners. Cain’s vegetables did not point to Jesus.

While Abel looked ahead to what would take place, today we look back to what Jesus accomplished for us by His death and resurrection.

“The blood of Jesus Christ...cleanses us from all sin.”
(1 John 1:7)

SAVING FAITH

God forgave Abel the same way He forgives sinners today. Whenever a sinner admits his or her unrighteousness and trusts in the LORD and His salvation, that person is forgiven and credited with God’s gift of righteousness. So it has been with all the prophets and believers of every age.

For example, as we already discovered, Abraham *“believed in the LORD, and He accounted [credited] it to him for righteousness.”* (Genesis 15:6) To say Abraham *“believed in the LORD,”* means Abraham had *confidence* that what God said was true. Abraham *trusted* God’s Word. His *faith* was in God alone.

Like the prophet Abraham, King David also believed God’s promises. With a joyful heart, David wrote, *“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him.”* (Psalm 32:1-2 NIV) David also exclaimed, *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”* (Psalm 23:6)

As with those who lived *before* Jesus came, the sin debt of people like Abel, Abraham, and David was *covered* because they placed their faith in the LORD and His plan. Then when Christ died, their sin debt was forever *canceled* from the record books.

Today, we live *after* the time of Christ. The good news of God is that if you believe in what the Lord Jesus did for you through His substitutionary death and victorious resurrection, God will erase your sin debt from His record books, credit your account with the righteousness of Christ, and guarantee you a place *“in the house of the LORD forever.”*

All this and much, much more is yours if you believe.

To believe in the Lord Jesus is to place your total faith in Him and in what He has done for you. To better understand the meaning of faith, imagine yourself walking into a room with many chairs. Some are obviously broken. Others are flimsy and about to break. Some look pretty good, but upon closer inspection you find that they too have weak points and cannot be trusted. Just when you think there is not a sturdy chair in the room, your eye falls on one that is clearly solid and well-constructed. You walk over to it and sit down. You put your faith in it. You rest on it. You know it will hold you and not let you down.

Jesus Christ will never disappoint those who rest on Him and His finished work.

DEADLY FAITH

Our faith is only as good as *the object* in which it is placed. Everyone has faith, but not all have the same object of faith.

Abel placed his faith in God and His way of forgiveness and righteousness.

Cain placed his faith in his own ideas and self-efforts.

Cain and anyone who refuses God's diagnosis and remedy for their sin problem can be compared to a snake charmer I saw on television. The man was bitten by a huge cobra, but refused the anti-venom injection that could have saved his life. He thought he was strong enough to withstand the serpent's venom.

This man had faith, *strong* faith, *worthless* faith. He had placed his faith in himself instead of in the doctor's remedy.

His choice cost him his life.

The Scriptures are clear. To place our faith in our own efforts, instead of in God's salvation, is to go "*the way of Cain*" and face "*the blackness of darkness forever.*" (Jude 1:11,13) Cain's idea, that a person can earn his or her way into God's favor by self-effort, has always been in opposition to God's plan of redemption.

Yet to this day most people cling to "*the way of Cain.*"

MAN'S SCALE

One day some religious Jews asked Jesus, "*What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?*" Jesus answered and said to them, "*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.*" (John 6:28-29) These inquirers wanted to "*work.*" Jesus told them to "*believe in Him.*"

The confusion expressed by these Jews is widespread.

My sister and her husband live in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. They help isolated tribal people in practical ways and teach them about the one true God and His message of eternal life. Here is a note from one of their colleagues, who tells of a conversation he had with a man who has been listening to "God's Talk" (as Papuans call the Bible):

"After hearing the teaching about Jesus as '*the Bread of Life,*' [the man] said, 'It's just too easy, I have worked all my life to try and earn my way to heaven and to be clean in God's eyes, and here you are telling us that all we have to do is believe in Jesus?'

I told him to listen again to what Jesus said, '*I am the Bread of Life.*' (John 6:35) Then I had him reread John 6:29: '*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him*

He sent.' He also read John 3:16: '*Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*' I asked him if God needed our help, as if God wasn't strong enough to save us.

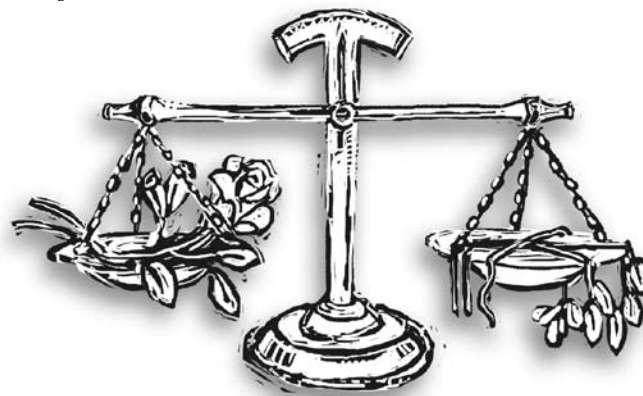
He laughed, 'Of course not! God doesn't need our help.'

'So then, according to God's Word, does God need your works to help get you to heaven?'

The man shook his head and left deep in thought."

Despite the clarity of God's message, people around the world, from isolated tribal folk to cultured members of synagogues, churches, and mosques, cling to the concept that on the Day of Judgment, God is going to place their good and bad deeds on a huge weigh scale. They imagine that if they come out with at least 51% on the good-deeds side of the scale, they will be welcomed into Paradise, but if the scales reveal 51% or more on the bad-deeds-side, they will be sent to hell.

Such a system of good works outweighing bad works is never used in man's earthly courtrooms. Neither will it be used in God's heavenly courtroom.



Think it through.

Do you really want your eternal destiny to be based on your own goodness and commitment? You can be thankful that this *scales theory* is **not** found in the Bible

GOD'S STANDARD

God requires perfection.

Only those who receive God's gift of righteousness can dwell with Him. If even a speck of sin is found on your record on Judgment Day, you will not enter Paradise. God demands perfect righteousness.

As we considered earlier, sin is as disgusting to God as a decaying pig carcass in our house would be to us. Would spraying perfume on the decaying carcass remove the defilement and stench? Neither can any amount of religious rituals remove our defilement and make us acceptable to God.

A single sin is as intolerable to God as a drop of poison in our tea would be to us. Would adding more water to the poisoned tea remove its lethal quality? Neither can any amount of good works purify us and save us from eternal judgment.

When it comes to getting rid of our sin debt or making ourselves right before God, we are *helpless*. But thank the Lord we are not *hopeless*. He has provided all we need to live forever in His pure and perfect presence.

FAITH AND WORKS

To all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who fully paid sin's penalty, God says: "*For by grace [undeserved kindness] you have been saved through faith [trusting in what Christ has done for you], and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*" (Ephesians 2:8-9)

There will be no bragging in heaven.

Salvation is "*by grace.*" Salvation is "*the gift of God.*" It is an undeserved gift to be gratefully received, not a medal to be earned, "*lest anyone should boast.*" Yet, tragically, most religious people remain confused on this issue, like this correspondent in the Middle East:

Send	Subject: Email Feedback
The most important things in faith are belief in one true God, doing good, avoiding evil acts. These are our salvation.	

If salvation from eternal judgment and the right to dwell with God depended on our own efforts, how could we ever know if we had done enough good or sufficiently avoided evil to merit a place in Paradise? Never could we be assured of salvation.

Nearly three millennia ago, the prophet Jonah declared: "*Salvation comes from the LORD.*" (Jonah 2:9 NIV)

Praise God for that!

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

God's Word is clear: To trust in our own works to save us from sin's penalty is to reject God's gift of salvation.

So where do avoiding sin and doing good works fit in? The next verse tells us:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

The distinction is clear: We are *not* saved *by* good works. We are saved *for* good works.

"Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ... gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." (Titus 2:13-14)

The prologue of this book began with a village elder's comments to my friend: "For the good works you've done, you deserve to go to paradise...."

The Word of God exposes the error of this man's thinking.

No one "deserves to go to paradise" based on his or her own "good works." However, those who have received God's great gift of eternal life will *want* to avoid evil and do good for the glory of God and the blessing of others.

THE FRUIT IS NOT THE ROOT

Good works have never been a **requirement** for salvation, but they should always be a **result** of salvation. For example, Jesus taught His disciples:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

Is loving and caring for people the way Jesus loved and cared for people a *precondition* for salvation? No. If it were, none of us could enter Paradise since Jesus is the only One who ever loved others perfectly and constantly.

Should loving and caring for people be a *characteristic* in the lives of true believers? Absolutely. *“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

God’s people *show* their faith by the way they live.²³⁰

It is critical to distinguish *the root* of salvation from *the fruit* of salvation. Believers in Christ should express their thankfulness to the Lord for His gift of salvation (the root) by leading holy, loving, selfless, and disciplined lives (the fruit).

God’s people don’t do good works to earn His favor; they do good works because He has granted them undeserved favor.

FALSE RELIGION

Cain is the founder of the first “do-it-yourself” religion. Instead of approaching God on the basis of the blood of a sacrificial lamb, he came with his own ideas and efforts. Thus, Cain’s prayers were offensive and disgusting to God.

“One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.” (Proverbs 28:9)

God’s law required the shed blood of a lamb or other suitable sacrifice to cover sin. Since Cain did not come to God as required, *“even his prayer [was] an abomination [a detestable*

act, defilement].” Cain had religion, but it was false religion. His offering did not point to the promised Savior and His death on the cross. Consequently:

“The LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?’” (Genesis 4:4-7)

The LORD mercifully spoke with Cain, giving him time to repent, to turn from his unrighteous works and submit to God’s righteous plan.

Cain only got angry. He was not about to trade his beautiful religion of self-effort for the ghastly blood of a lamb. In the name of God, he would do things his own way!

And just where did that way lead him?

HOSTILE RELIGION

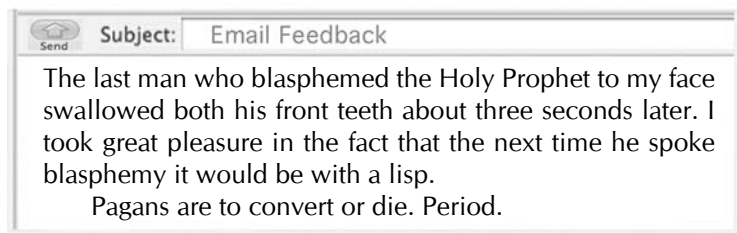
“Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.” (Genesis 4:8)

Cain, who was too proud to kill a lamb as a sin offering, was not too proud to kill his own brother.

Cain set the stage for future religious and political systems that would ridicule, persecute, and even execute those who refuse to submit to the dictates of their laws and traditions.

Like Cain, many religious people around the world today use aggression and murder to defend their religion. By their actions, they are announcing to the world how insecure they are in their faith and how little confidence they have in their Creator-Owner to work things out.

A man living in the United States, with whom I have had extensive e-mail correspondence, wrote:



This man's words and actions stand in sharp contrast to the Lord Jesus who said, *"But I tell you who hear me: **Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.**"* (Luke 6:27-28 NIV) And on the cross, Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him, *"**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do!**"* (Luke 23:34)²³¹

UNREPENTANT CAIN

Getting back to Cain's story, after he killed his brother, God gave Cain a chance to repent of his wrong thinking and evil ways.

"Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?'"

He said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?'"

And He said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground! So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.'"
(Genesis 4:9-11)²³²

Cain refused to admit his sin and humbly approach God with the blood of a lamb. Instead, *"Cain went out from the presence of the LORD."* (Genesis 4:16)

Cain never repented. Instead of submitting to God's way, he continued to follow his own ideas. Cain founded a thriving civilization, but it was a society devoid of true submission to the Creator God.²³³ Like Cain, his descendants rushed down a self-destructive path of self-centered living.

The fourth chapter of Genesis also records the story of Lamech, a sixth-generation descendant of Cain. Like his ancestor, Lamech was a man of conceit, lust, revenge, and murder. His sons developed many of the sciences and arts. They had great knowledge about many things, but did not know God.

Not only had people turned away from *God's way of salvation*; they had turned away from *God's way of living*.

UNREPENTANT MANKIND

Just nine generations after Cain, the LORD would give this evaluation of the human race:

*"The wickedness of man was great in the earth, and... every intent of the thoughts of his heart was **only evil continually.**"* (Genesis 6:5)

By the time of the prophet Noah, he and his family were the only people on earth who still trusted their Creator-Owner. Man's obstinate refusal to do God's will brought on the universal flood. In His grace, God provided a way of escape, but only eight people availed themselves of it. Noah and his wife, and their sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, along with their wives, were the only ones who believed God's message (Genesis 6-8).

*"**By faith** Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. **By his faith** he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes **by faith.**"* (Hebrews 11:7 NIV)

While many scientists today mock the biblical record of the universal flood,²³⁴ none deny that much of today's dry land was once covered with water and that millions of marine fossils have been unearthed in the world's great deserts and mountain ranges. Neither can any deny the presence of the rainbow following a rainstorm, though they may scoff at its significance as a sign of God's promise never again to destroy the entire world with a flood.

REBELLIOUS AND CONFUSED

Even when blessed with a fresh start following the judgment of the flood, within a few generations, people would again rebel against their Creator-Owner and follow their own ideas. For example, God had told mankind to spread out and “*fill the earth.*” (Genesis 1:28; 9:1) So what did people determine to do? They chose the exact opposite.

“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” (Genesis 11:4)

Notice the self-centeredness and rebellion of their plans. Instead of following God’s good and perfect will for them, they made plans to follow their own wisdom and magnify their own name. Perhaps they thought that by building “*a tower whose top is in the heavens*” they would be safe in case of another flood. They were like many religious people today who hope to escape God’s judgment by their own hard work.

God put a stop to man’s plan to live together in one place. The LORD knew that such a plan would have led to the rapid corruption and ruin of the human race. Keeping in mind that up to this period in history “*the whole earth had one language and one speech*” (Genesis 11:1), let’s see what God did.

“The LORD said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’

*So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called **Babel**, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.”* (Genesis 11:6-9)

Unable to communicate with one another, the people, leaving their tower unfinished, spread out around the world, just as God had intended for them to do in the first place. “*Therefore its name is called **Babel.***”

Babel means “confusion.”

Rejection of God’s blueprint always leads to confusion.

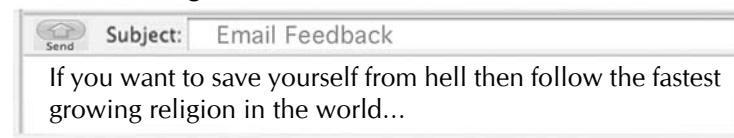
THE MISTAKEN MAJORITY

One lesson to be learned from the people of Noah’s day and from those who tried to build the tower of Babel is this:

The majority was wrong.

Though sinners took comfort in the fact that millions of others shared their worldview, God’s judgment came upon them nonetheless. To this day, many people think their concept of God and His message must be true since so many others believe the same thing.

A man living in Britain sent this note:



If rapid growth or sheer numbers could prove truth, then the descendants of Cain, the people of Noah’s day, and the inhabitants of Babel were right too. But they were wrong—dead wrong.

*“Enter through the narrow gate. For **wide** is the gate and **broad** is the road that leads to destruction, and **many** enter through it. But **small** is the gate and **narrow** the road that leads to life, and only a **few** find it.”* (Matthew 7:13-14 NIV)

GOD’S UNSTOPPABLE PLAN

Returning to the narrative about the first family, we learn what happened after Cain killed Abel.

*“Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him **Seth**, ‘For **God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel**, whom Cain killed.’ And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the **LORD**.”*

(Genesis 4:25-26)

God’s desire and design to have a people who trusted in Him would not be thwarted.

The name *Seth* means “appointed in the place of.” Eve understood that God had appointed “another seed” for her in the place of Abel, whom Cain killed. It would be through Seth’s line that the promised *Seed of a woman* would be born. Mary, the virgin maiden who became the mother of Jesus, was a descendant of Seth. She was also a descendant of Abraham and David, just as God had promised.

No matter how hard Satan tried to spoil God’s agenda, the plan ordained by the LORD God “before the foundation of the world” kept rolling forward.

Nothing and no one could stop it.

THE NAME OF THE LORD

Like Abel, Seth trusted in God and His way of forgiveness, calling “on the name of the **LORD**.” (Genesis 4:26) Down through the ages, in a world populated with those who, like the people of Babel, try to make for themselves a name, there have always been those who, like Abel and Seth, have believed in and called on the name of the **LORD**.

Some of my friends tell me that God has one hundred names, but they only know ninety-nine of them. Could the missing name from their list be the one that means “the **LORD saves**”?

Which name is that?

Yes, it is **Jesus**.

To *not* trust in that name—in *who He is* and *what He has done*—is to be *not* submitted to God.

Let’s listen to the apostle Paul’s prayer for his religious and rebellious Jewish countrymen:

*“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes...If you confess with your mouth the **Lord Jesus** and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ...For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes **on Him** will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon **Him**. For **‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’**”*

(Romans 10:1-4,9,11-13 [Joel 2:32])

WORTHLESS OR WORTHY?

Suppose I were to write out to you a bank check (or cheque) for a million dollars. The check would look wonderful, but it would be worthless. Why?

I don’t have that amount of money in my bank account!

Now, what if the richest man on earth were to write out a check to you for a million dollars?

No problem. It would be worth the full amount.

The same bank that rejects the check presented in my name will honor the check bearing the name of the wealthy man.

Our world is filled with people who are attempting to approach God through many names but, in the sight of the holy God who sent His Son to pay man’s sin debt, they are worthless, sin-tainted names.

Just as the bank will not honor a \$1,000,000 check in my name, so God will not grant forgiveness and life through any name but the name of **Jesus**.

*“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12)

Would you like to have your sin debt erased from God's record book and be credited with the wealth of His righteousness? Do you want to triumph over the curse of sin and enjoy a close relationship with your Creator for time and eternity?

Then only one name will do.

*"Whoever calls on **the name of the LORD** shall be saved."*

(Joel 2:32)

*"Believe on **the Lord Jesus Christ**, and you will be saved, you and your household."* (Acts 16:31)

Do you believe in your heart that the Lord Jesus Christ suffered, died, and rose again to cancel your sin-penalty? Then *"you will be saved."*

ONLY TWO RELIGIONS

We began this journey with the observation that our world today has more than *ten thousand* religious systems.

Really, there are only *two*.



- There is the system of *human achievement* that tells you to **save yourself**.

- There is the system of *divine accomplishment* that says **you need a Savior**.

As long as you are trying to save yourself, any religion or name will do; but once you recognize your need for a Savior, only one name will do.

That name is **Jesus**.

*"To **Him** all the prophets witness that, **through His name**, whoever believes **in Him** will receive remission of sins."*

(Acts 10:43)

PART III JOURNEY'S END

REVERSING THE CURSE



27 - Stage 1: God's Past Program

28 - Stage 2: God's Present Program

29 - Stage 3: God's Future Program

30 - A Preview of Paradise

Epilogue

Endnotes

Reflecting on the Journey