



DAD'S WORDS

DAILY STUDIES BASED ON DR. KEITH FIDLER'S
ANCIENT WORDS OF WISDOM

ABSTRACT

This is a collection of thoughtful, well-researched studies covering topics from the creation of the universe to the present day. Relying heavily on the ancient words of the Old and New Testaments, Keith helps us uncover spiritual truths to help us live better lives, emphasizing the central theme of having a right relationship with God through the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ. If you read one lesson a day, you will complete these studies in one year. Then you will be ready to start again. You can start at any lesson and even read lessons out of sequence to gain valuable insights into God, humankind, and truth.

DR. KEITH FIDLER

COMPILED AND EDITED BY WESLEY FIDLER

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INTRODUCTION

Keith Fidler, my dad, wrote a series of lessons for the Asbury Free Methodist Church in Perth, Ontario. In his usual humble way, he constructed a title that carefully diverted any credit from him and gave it to others. He might have called them “Doctor Keith’s Prescription for Learning,” or “Keith’s Kernels of Truth.” Even when he settled on “Words of Wisdom,” he focused on his strong reverence for the Bible to call them “Ancient Words of Wisdom.”

Dad debated whether to go into medicine or the ministry, but once he graduated from Roberts Wesleyan College, the Lord led him to medicine. Dad and Mom went to the mission field in India and the Free Methodist Church ordained Dad as a deacon, which allowed him to serve as a preacher and doctor. He faithfully read and studied the Bible for personal devotions and developed a passion for learning and teaching about God.

When I was a teenager, Dad taught our church youth group a weekly Bible Study. I remember pulling out a stack of red hard-covered Bibles, Revised Standard Version, to distribute to the teens. I learned the lessons of the Bible from my dad, as he prodded us to read and understand what we read. Diane will agree, and likely roll her eyes, as she recalls watching Dad patiently wait for the boys to quiet down and read their passage to the group. Later, he taught an adult Sunday School class for many years, and I learned more from his relaxed and nonjudgmental teaching style than from years of lectures in school. He taught me never to fear the truth. His confidence in God, his saviour, was unshakeable, and he knew whatever he discovered emanated from the Creator.

His love of learning led to an impressive accumulation of books, filling bookshelves in every room in the house, none more impressive than the ceiling-to-floor bookshelves in the den. If books were nuts, a squirrel could have learned a thing or two from Dad. As my siblings will attest, to our family, a treasure hunt was a visit to a second-hand bookstore.

Passion for learning was married to a desire to pass the lessons he learned to others. Watching his blue eyes light up when describing a new insight he had gained was like glimpsing the northern lights. Sometimes what he discussed was so far beyond me, it was just as mysterious.

Of all his interests, few exceeded his passion for Bible study. His children know this well. Diane, Wesley, Debbie, and Dwight sat across from him or beside him as he poured over a passage in the Bible or a commentary and scratched notes in his chaotic, barely decipherable scrawl. He loved God and served his Lord Jesus Christ with his whole being. When he studied the Bible, it was like he was videoconferencing with the Father, chatting with Jesus, and meditating with the Holy Spirit. Now he has these meetings in person. “Jesus, bring me a coffee too,” he must be saying.

When Dad and Mom became too unwell to visit church each week, he continued to teach by providing his weekly lessons for the bulletin of the Asbury Free Methodist Church where he had served for so many decades. It did not replace his engaging and informative classes, but it gave churchgoers a taste of what God was teaching him.

Dad had compiled collections of letters to his family twice before, in 1995 and in 2010, to share his wisdom with his children. Then, near the end of his life, he planned to organize and extend his *Ancient Words of Wisdom* to produce a devotional with one lesson per day. Mom had saved many of his efforts on her laptop, but she had not expected Dad’s desire to compile all these lessons, so finding all the digital files became like an Easter egg hunt.

DAD'S WORDS:
DAILY STUDIES BASED ON DR. KEITH FIDLER'S ANCIENT WORDS OF WISDOM

As Dad's health failed, his energy and mental resources waned. Though he worked on it, with Mom's help, most days, the task seemed impossible, the barriers insurmountable. He engaged our help to work on some of his last studies. His children, Diane, Wesley, Debbie, and Dwight, and of course, his faithful wife, Gloria. When it became obvious, he would not finish, his clock wound down too quickly, he asked me to do it for him.

Though I planned to do this, the empty despair brought on by Dad's death on December 29, 2021, put it on hold. It took me a year of wallowing in a swamp of despair before I bobbed to the surface and realized in my heart that I could forgive myself and forgive God. Yes, I understand God does nothing wrong, but I was angry and disappointed in him, anyway. Finally, I was ready to do it.

Finding all the studies was the first challenge. Mom found several digital files, but there were vast gaps. Dwight had hard copies of some of the missing ones. Fortunately, the Asbury Church had copies of his Ancient Words from 2017 to 2020, which I digitized.

Dad realized he did not have enough studies to get to 365, one per day for a year. When he accepted he could not produce enough new studies, he planned to use hymns and add his *Dear Children* letters from 1995 and 2010 to meet his desired number of lessons.

Once I had collected them, the editing began. Dad had a conversational style with free shifts in tense. It reminded me of some of Paul the Apostle's letters. While it made me smile with affection, I thought a more polished version would be best for this collection. So, I did my best, with the help of an editing program; tidying up grammar, eliminating repetition, and smoothing the jumps from past to present. As much as possible, I tried to imagine myself in my dad's mind, determining what he was saying.

This journey, compiling and editing *Dad's Words*, has been a blessing. It was like expecting a textbook written in Sanskrit and discovering a poetic masterpiece. I connected to Dad powerfully, often sensing his comforting hand on my shoulder, his soft laugh when I changed his sentence structure. His lessons taught me a lot and, from his obvious confidence in God, I could revitalize my faith. Certainly, Dad hoped his words would connect or reconnect the reader to God.

All scripture quotations were from the King James Version (KJV) or the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise specified. I chose not to specify between those two, as you can usually tell by the "thee, thou, ye, and -eth." If you cannot tell, look it up. It would have pleased Dad if his writings prodded you to read the Bible more.

I added every hymn Dad had on his list, but distributed some throughout the work, so when you reach the hymn section, it is not so overwhelming. Most of the notes and scripture references for the hymns are mine. For his *Dear Children* letters, I included most of them, excluding some that were confusing and repetitive. I am confident Dad would have agreed with my choices. You will notice editor notes I added for clarification.

God's Spirit will be with you as you read. Imagine Dad is reading each paragraph to you. Remember his pause when you challenge him, how his face would still. Hear the imaginary wheels turning as he considered your perspective. Listen to the carefully crafted response.

ANCIENT WORDS OF WISDOM

1. Biblical Word: Love

F. M. Lehman

A man, said to be demented, penciled the last stanza of this song on the wall of a narrow room in an insane asylum. They found the profound words when they laid him in his coffin.

The Love of God is greater far, than tongue or pen can ever tell
It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell.
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His only son to win
His erring child, He reconciled, and pardoned from his sin.
Oh, love of God, how rich and pure! How, marvelous and strong!
It shall forevermore endure----the saints and angels' song!

When hoary time shall pass away and earthly kings and kingdoms fall,
When men who here refuse to pray, On rocks and hills and mountains call;
God's love so sure, shall still endure, all measureless and strong;
Redeeming grace to Adam's race---the saints and angels song.
Oh, love of God, how rich ad pure! How, marvelous and strong!
It shall forevermore endure---the saints and angels' song!

Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.
Oh, love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure---the saints and angels' song!

The great love chapter (I Cor 13) concluded with the words "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love." (NKJV)

What were these words describing? They have been called Christian Virtues and so they were. They were also words that helped explain the relationship between individuals, but especially between a person and our Lord.

The greatest of these relationship ideas is that of love. To love someone means to commit to, wish, and work toward their highest good. Yes, love is an emotion and an attachment, but this *agape* love is also a principle of conduct whereby we look to the loved one's highest good. God's love for us is like that. He is always interested in and working toward our highest good.

2. Biblical Word: Faith

John H. Yates

Faith is the Victory! Faith is the Victory! Oh, glorious victory, that overcomes the world!

Encamped along the hills of light, ye Christian soldiers rise,

And press the battle ere the night shall veil the glowing skies,
Against the foe in vales below, let all our strength be hurled
Faith is the victory, we know, that overcomes the world.

Faith is the victory! Faith is the victory!
Oh, glorious victory, that overcomes the world

His banner over us is love, our sword the word of God,
We tread the road the saints above, with shouts of triumph trod.
By faith, they like a whirlwind's breath, swept on oe'r every field,
The faith by which they conquered death, is still our shining shield.

Faith is the victory! Faith is the victory! Oh, glorious victory,
That overcomes the world.

To him that overcomes the foe, white rai-met shall be given,
Before the angels' he shall know his name confessed in heaven,
Then onward from the hills of light, our hearts with love aflame,
We'll vanquish all the hosts of night. In Jesus conquering name.

Faith is the victory! Faith is the victory!
Oh, glorious victory, that overcomes the world!

Faith is one of the great Christian Virtues. We relate several English words to 'faith,' such as belief, trust, entrust, and so on. When we read that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him will not perish but have eternal life," (John 3:16) the belief is more than just an acknowledgement that Jesus exists, there is also the idea that we trust in Him. But the meaning does not end there, for the term also carries the idea of a deep trust. Entrust can express this.

An example was often told of the tight-rope walker who set up a rope across Niagara Falls. He walked across and then took a wheelbarrow across. He then asked if the crowd thought he could carry a person across in the wheelbarrow. Many said they thought he could. He then asked one of them to get into the wheelbarrow. That person would be an example of the trust we should have in the Lord!

3. Biblical Word: Hope

Norman J. Clayton

My hope is in the Lord, who gave himself for me,
And paid the price of all my sin at Calvary.
For me He died, for me He lives,
And everlasting life and light He freely gives.

No merit of my own, His anger to suppress,
My only hope is found in Jesus' righteousness.
For me He died, for me He lives,

And everlasting life and light He freely gives.

And now for me he stands, before the Father's throne
He shows His wounded hands and claims me for His own.
For me He died, for me He lives,
And everlasting life and light He freely gives.

His grace has planned it all, 'Tis mine but to believe,
And recognize His work of love and Christ receive.
For me He died, for me He lives,
And everlasting life and light He freely gives.

The apostle Paul included hope as one of the Christian virtues. At first glance, it does not seem to be a relationship word. When hope joins with faith and love, God enters the picture and they become one. We may use the term hope as, "Well, I hope so," but this instills more doubt than hope. Peter described the hope that is in God in I Peter 1:3 as "a living hope." The verses say, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you". (I Peter 1:3))

Hope describes our relationship to our all-powerful God, who loves us and asks that we entrust ourselves to Him.

4. Theological Word: Deism

Deism was a very common theology over one hundred years ago. As opposed to atheism, it accepted that there was a God who created all things but taught that God then allowed the creation to manage itself.

But scripture portrays that God was involved with his creation and encouraged a close relationship between himself and us humans that he created.

"Are not one sparrow sold for ten farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?" (Luke 12:6)

We start out our recitation with "Our Father..."

Hosea chapter 11 tells us that God called his chosen people Israel, His son. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." (Hosea 11:1) He says, "I loved him", (vs.1) and "I drew him with cords of a man, with bands of love." (Hosea 11:4)

Our God is involved in the world he has created. He is concerned about us.

5. Theological Word: Abba

The Apostle Paul, in his speech to the Athenians, showed their own (pagan) poets taught all people are relations (kin) of God, "For we are also his offspring." (Acts 17:28)

There is a difference between a relation and a relationship. We could have some relations that we have never met or even known about and there would be no relationship between us. So, God could be in the relationship of Father because He is our creator, but

scripture taught us repeatedly that God is interested in having a special relationship with the people of His creation.

Of the nation of Israel, the Lord said, "Israel is my son,..." (Ex. 4:22) Abraham was called, "the friend of God." (James 2:23) We can call God 'Father' but even more intimately we can call him 'Abba' a term used by children around the home. God is our eternal dad.

Scripture also portrayed God's intimate concerns for us as that of a shepherd for his sheep. "The Lord is my shepherd..." (Psalm 23:1) Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." (John 10:11).

God wants a close relationship with us. What is our desire?

6. Charles Wesley Hymns: And Can I Yet Delay

This is a less well-known hymn by Charles Wesley. Perhaps the greatest hymn writer of all time, Charles Wesley, was the youngest son of Samuel and Susanna Wesley and younger brother to John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Historians credit him with at least 6500 hymns, many of which rise to the highest degree of excellence. This hymn could be a response to Proverbs 27:26: "My son, give me your heart and let your eyes delight in my ways..." (website: www.hymnary.org)

1
And can I yet delay my little all to give?
To tear my soul from earth away for Jesus to receive?

2
Nay, but I yield, I yield; I can hold out no more;
I sink, by dying love compelled, and own thee conqueror.

3
Tho' late, I all forsake, my friends, my all, resign:
Gracious Redeemer, take, O take, and seal me ever thine.

4
Come, and possess me whole, nor hence again remove;
Settle and fix my wav'ring soul with all thy weight of love.

5
My one desire be this, thy only love to know,
To seek and taste no other bliss, no other good below.

6
My life, my portion thou; Thou all-sufficient art;
My hope, my heavenly treasure, now enter and keep my heart.

To "tear my soul from earth away for Jesus to receive" speaks of Jesus' willingness to always accept us. In John 6:37 he said, "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." The final stanza attests to the Father's all sufficiency. As written in I Peter, "God of all grace... will himself restore you..." (I Pet 5:10)

7. Biblical Term: Freedom (part 1)

The 8th chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans has been called the classic account of a spirit-filled life. The great deception of sin was that if you give your life to follow the Lord Jesus, you will imprison yourself and lose all your freedom. Paul started this chapter showing that life in the Spirit was a life of freedom.

The first 'freedom' he mentioned is the 'freedom from condemnation.' Verse 1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) Sin always brought condemnation. Scripture taught this lesson from the events in the Garden of Eden onwards. Not only was there the burden of guilt, but it told us that the result of sin is death. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." (Ezekiel 18:4) "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life." (Romans 6:23)

Paul told us that in living the Spirit-filled life, there was freedom from condemnation or penalty. He had expressed the thought earlier with the words, "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, he has your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life". (Romans 6:22)

8. Biblical Term: Freedom (part 2)

Paul, in Romans 8, showed us that life in the spirit was a life of freedom. Verse 1 shows us that there was freedom from condemnation. In verse 2, the law was easier to understand if we see it as used in such terms as the 'law of gravity.' Its meaning was the same as 'principle.'

So, it is the principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that gives us freedom from the principle of sin, which leads to death.

In verse 3, the law referred to the Jewish or the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament and shows that it probably could not handle the sin problem. "For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh..." (Romans 8:3)

There is even greater freedom expressed in these verses 1-4 than freedom from condemnation and domination by sin. There was freedom to accomplish something not possible through the Old Testament laws. This was freedom to fulfill the righteous requirement of the Old Testament laws. God resolved the sin problem when He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, who gave His life as a sacrifice for our sin. This allowed us to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law.

The three freedoms available to those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom 8:1) are: 1. freedom from condemnation, 2. freedom from domination, 3. freedom to fulfill the righteousness of the (Mosaic) law.

9. Biblical Word: Groan

In the classic chapter on life in the Spirit (Romans 8), there is an interesting section where the word groan keeps appearing.

In verse 22: '... the whole creation groaneth...'

In verse 23: '... We ourselves groan...'

In verse 26: '... The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groaning...'

Paul, in verse 22, sees the whole creation is under the bondage of evil. It will be free in the future. In verse 26, we ourselves groan under this evil or sin—bondage. Freedom will come with our redemption, "into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Rom 8:21). 21 In verse 26, the Spirit groans and prays in our place when we have reached a time in our prayer life when

we do not know what to pray for. For instance, should we pray for is this difficulty to be taken away or should we pray for the strength to endure it?

In these cases, the Spirit will pray in our stead with inexpressible groaning. The Spirit always offers prayers "according to the will of God". (vs. 27)

It is an awe-inspiring fact that the Spirit is present with us when we pray.

10. Biblical Name: Melchizedek (part 1)

About four thousand years ago, Abraham returned after rescuing his nephew, Lot, from the enemy invaders under Chedorlaomer, who had taken Lot and others as captives. (Genesis 14) On the way back from an exciting nighttime rescue, Abraham met a priest of the most high God (Gen 14:18-20). The priest's name was Melchizedek (*melek* = king, *zedek* = righteousness). The king brought out refreshments for what must have been a tired and hungry band of travelers.

Melchizedek was the king of Salem (*salem* = Peace, possibly Jerusalem). He blessed Abraham, and Abraham responded by giving tithes of the spoils received from the enemy. This shows that Abraham accepted the priestly authority of Melchizedek, who was righteous, a king of peace and a priest of the most high God.

Abraham and his family were not the only ones to serve the true God during this time.

11. Biblical Name: Melchizedek (part 2)

About three thousand years ago, David wrote a Messianic Psalm, which is Psalm 110. A Messianic Psalm contains prophesies relating to a coming Messiah. This person who was to come will be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, who appeared briefly, in three verses, in Genesis (Gen 14:18-20).

About two thousand years ago, the name Melchizedek appears again in scripture. From the two Old Testament references (Genesis 14:18-20, Psalm 110) the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews shows that Jesus, the Messiah, is a priest of a different and higher order than the Jewish Priesthood of the tribe of Levi, (Hebrews 5:6 and vs 10).

In Hebrews chapter 7, the writer shows how the Lord Jesus is of a higher level of High Priests. See especially (7:26 & 27) and Hebrews 5:9, "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal Salvation unto all them that obey Him." As our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus provides eternal salvation to those who trust and entrust themselves to Him in obedience to Him.

12. Biblical Term: High Priest (part 1)

The author of the New Testament book Hebrews wrote to a group of Jewish people who had become Christians. From the book itself, we learn that they had suffered persecution in the past and now it looked like they were expecting another persecution. Some were becoming discouraged and considered going back to their Old Testament religion, forsaking Jesus as the Messiah.

The writer encouraged the group to be faithful to Jesus and showed the group that following Christ was much better than their old system of religion. He showed that according to

the old system; the priest made daily sacrifices that, in themselves, could not take away sin (Hebrews 10:11). Christ, the perfect High Priest (Hebrews 7:22-24) continues forever. He entered "once into the Holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us," (Hebrews 9:12).

We see the greatness of Jesus not only as the great high priest but also because he himself is also the effective sacrifice that can handle the sin problem in the world. "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14). Christ appeared "... to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

This better high priest, by the better sacrifice of himself, resulted in a better covenant, for he (Christ) was the "mediator of the new testament,... by means of death." (Hebrews 9:15)—we can translate testament as covenant, and the death was Christ's death. In this new and better covenant, the Spirit placed the laws into believers' hearts and wrote it in their minds (Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16 and Jeremiah 31:33).

Christ has a better sanctuary, for he entered God's presence in heaven. What need was there of an earthly tabernacle or temple? All this gave you and me a better hope. "For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing of a better hope did; by which we draw nigh unto God." (Hebrews 7:19)

13. Biblical Name: Enoch

"Enoch walked with God, and he was not for God took him." (Genesis 5:24). The writer of Hebrews interprets "walked with God" as "... he pleased God." (Hebrews 11:5).

The serious Christian wishes to be pleasing to God. The basis for pleasing God is believing in Him, which starts by believing He exists. (Hebrews 11:6)

It is not uncommon today for people to struggle with the idea of God. Some fine Christians had their faith destroyed by popular teachings. It had left them with a great void in their lives. The space that God would occupy in their personality was empty.

The apostle Paul helped us to know where to turn if we have this struggle. Romans 1:20 tells us that though God is invisible, we can understand His eternal power and His divine nature through the things He has made.

Did you know that the Tiger Moth can block sonar signals sent out by bats, thus confusing the bat and allowing the moth to escape? I wonder who created that!

14. Biblical Books: Psalms (part 1)

Psalm 1

"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night." (Psalm 1:1-2) Psalm 1 showed a contrast between a person who delighted in meditating on the word (or law) of the Lord and the wicked person who rejected God's law. Verses 1-3 described the person who walked with God as blessed, fruitful, and prosperous. Verses 4 and 5 described the wicked as like chaff and unable to stand with the righteous.

This contrast could be an introduction to the book of Psalms, where the authors said much of the righteous and of the wicked. The words explained the destiny of both groups. "For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish". (Psalm 1:6)

15. Biblical Book: Psalms (part 2)

Psalm 8

Psalm 8 is one of the 'nature Psalms' in which God's glory was revealed by the nature that He created. Other Psalms of this type are 19, 29, 65, and 104, which showed nature reflecting God's glory. Psalm 8 showed the dignity of humanity as part of God's creation.

There are varied translations the statement, "Oh LORD, our Lord." (Psalm 8:1) Traditionally, the Jewish people did not speak God's name, Yahweh, because they considered it too holy to say out loud. The translators of Scripture respected this and so used the term 'LORD' all in capital letters. The term 'Lord' with capital 'L' also referred to God, but the original Hebrew word meant something like 'master.'

Verse 1 said, "How majestic is your name in all the earth." (Psalm 8:1) The author followed this with: "Who has set thy glory above the heavens." This claimed his glory was great. "Out of the mouth of babes..." (Psalm 8:2) was a claim that children praised God. The rest of the psalm proclaimed: nature is so great, and you have made people rule over your works.

16. Biblical Book: Psalms (part 3)

Psalm 13

Psalm 13 was a lament. It described an individual who yearned for help from God. Most Christians will have times when they feel empty of the presence of God and this psalm might help. "How long will you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 13:2) Verses 3 and 4 were an earnest petition for God's return. "Look on me and answer, LORD my God." (Psalm 13:3)

The Psalm ended with an expression of trust in God's faithfulness. The psalmist's had hope restored and their heart rejoices.

"But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation, I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me." (Psalm 13:5, 6)

17. Biblical Book: Psalms (part 4)

Psalm 19

Psalm 19 showed witnesses to God. How can we human beings understand what God is like? The first way presented is that nature declared the glory of God. The daytime heavens, the night sky and the course of the sun proclaim God to everyone. (Psalm 19:1-6).

God also spoke to us through the precepts and laws that He gave. "... In keeping them is great reward". (Psalm 19:11). Later, Jesus himself showed the value of keeping God's word. In John 8:51, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

The Psalm ended with a look at our inner life. Perhaps it looked to the coming of the Holy Spirit to live within His people to help direct the meditation of our hearts. "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, who, the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things..." (John 14:26).

18. Biblical Book: Psalms (part 5)

Psalm 32

"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." (Psalm 32:1) In the beginning of Psalm 32, the psalmist affirmed the value of being forgiven. Verses 3 and 4 described the consequences of a person who was unwilling to confess and repent of their sins, "my bones wasted away... my strength was sapped". (Psalm 32:3-4)

Verse 5 showed a change of heart, a decision to confess transgressions to the LORD. The result, "... and you forgave the guilt of my sin". (Psalm 32:5)

The psalmist wanted others to have the experience of forgiveness. In verse 6 he said, "Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found..." (Psalm 32:6) Verse 7 ended with the phrase, "... and surround me with songs of deliverance." (Psalm 32:7)

"The LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him." (Psalm 32:10)

19. Biblical Book: Psalms (part 6)

Psalm 34

Psalm 34 was a beautiful poem praising and glorifying the Lord. "Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together." (Psalm 34:3) "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him." (Psalm 34:8) But it was more than that. It showed several important points.

Point 1: The heading to this psalm identified the writer, David, and the circumstances of its writing, "When he pretended to be insane before Abimelek, who drove him away, and he left." (I Samuel 21:10-15)

Point 2: It is an acrostic poem. Each verse started with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet in their usual order. (*aleph, beth, gimmel, dalet*, etc. equivalent to the English a, b, c, d, etc.).

Point 3: The acrostic is not perfect in this version of the psalm. There is no 6th letter *vav* and there is an extra verse after the last letter *taw* of the alphabet.

Point 4: The name in the psalm's heading, Abimelek, means: my father, king. It is the throne name for a Philistine king whose name on this occasion was Achish (I Samuel 21:10-15). (Note: the name of the priest at Nob recorded in the first part of I Samuel, chapter 21, was Ahimelech not Abimelech).

"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in Spirit." (Psalm 34:18).

20. Charles Wesley Hymns: Depth of Mercy! Can There Be

DAD'S WORDS:
DAILY STUDIES BASED ON DR. KEITH FIDLER'S ANCIENT WORDS OF WISDOM

This was another hymn by the great Methodist hymn writer, Charles Wesley. It was first published in 1740 and initially entitled *After a Relapse into Sin*. In 1780, it was shortened and included in the Wesleyan Hymn Book. Later, there is a much-repeated story, “an interesting and pathetic account of an actress and her change of life through the instrumentality of the hymn.” (John Julian, Dictionary of Hymnology, 1907, on website: hymnary.org)

1

Depth of mercy! Can there be
Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God his wrath forbear?
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?

2

I have long withstood His grace,
Long provoked Him to His face,
Would not hearken to His calls,
Grieved by Him by a thousand falls.

3

Now incline me to repent,
Let me now my sins lament,
Now my foul revolt deplore,
Weep, believe and sin no more

4

Kindled his relentings are,
Me He now delights to spare,
Cries, “How shall I give thee up?”
He lets the lifted thunder drop.

5

There for me the Saviour stands,
Shows his wounds and spreads his hands:
God is love I know, I feel;
Jesus weeps and loves me still.

Verse four was not in many of the hymn books but contains the curious phrase: “lets the lifted thunder drop.” God, through Jesus, relented, and did not deliver wrath, the “thunder”, on the repentant sinner. The message was one of our longings for mercy. “Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.” (Psalm 4:1) Many times the psalmist cries to God. (Psalm 51:1), in repentance (Psalm 51:17). The climax is the final stanza: “There for me the Saviour stands...” (Luke 19:10, John 20:26-29, Eph. 2:6-8, I Tim. 1:15-16).

21. Vision: in Ezekiel (part 1)

Visions recorded in scripture make fertile ground for artists to produce fantastic pictures. Ezekiel saw an awe-inspiring sight of living creatures and a chariot with wheels within wheels. The Lord used this vision to commission Ezekiel for the work God has for him. “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has...” (Ezekiel 2:3)

The Apostle John, exiled because of his testimony about the Lord Jesus, said, "On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard a loud voice like a trumpet,..." (Revelation 1:10)

In Revelation, chapter 4, John saw a door open to heaven. John seemed to enter through the door and see a throne. It was a glorious sight with someone sitting on the throne surrounded by the other thrones and living creatures with dazzling sights and thunder and lightning. There were seven lamps blazing, which were the seven Spirits of God. What were these spirits? Possibly the number seven showed perfection or completion, which would certainly describe the Holy Spirit. However, there was a section in Isaiah, chapter 11, which started with a reference to Jesse, a reference to the ancestor of the coming Christ. On this Christ the Spirit of the Lord will rest. This Spirit had seven aspects: wisdom, understanding, counsel, power and knowledge and fear of the LORD. Six spirits plus the Spirit of the Lord = seven.

22. Vision: in Ezekiel (part 2)

Ezekiel's vision of 'wheel within wheel' with the living creatures with four faces seemed to be a kind of chariot or carriage carrying the one sitting on the throne. The chariot was carrying the presence or glory of God. In Ezekiel chapter 10, we read that the glory of the Lord rose above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. (Ezekiel 10:4).

In the temple complex, there was an outer court, an inner court, a holy place that priests could enter and a most holy place, the Holy of Holies. In this most holy place was the Ark of the Covenant, with a lid called the Mercy Seat, and on that lid were two cherubim facing each other. The presence of the Lord dwelt between the cherubim.

What was happening was the Presence or Glory of the Lord had figuratively risen from the Mercy Seat and moved out of the Holy of Holies to the threshold of the Temple. The glory of the Lord then departed from the threshold (Ezekiel 10:18) to pause at the east gate of the Lord's house.

God was leaving His temple. Why? The Lord's people, even their leaders, plotted evil. (Ezekiel 11:1). Why were they at the eastern gate? Perhaps they had become Sun-worshippers. Some of God's people had become idolaters, some false prophets. Judgment was inescapable. (Ezekiel 11:23).

23. Vision: in Ezekiel (part 3)

Ezekiel's vision of the wheels, living creatures, and glory of the Lord leaving the temple and Jerusalem signified the punishment God will visit on His rebellious people. Leviticus chapter 26 summarized the old covenant the people had broken.

There were some similarities between Ezekiel's vision and that of the Apostle John (when he was on the Isle of Patmos). There was a throne with someone on it, four living creatures, and a brilliant display. In Ezekiel's vision, there were wheels. They formed a kind of chariot or carriage that carried the Presence or Glory of God out of the sanctuary of the temple and out of Jerusalem.

The people who rebelled against the Lord still had a temple building, but it was not a sanctuary, for God had left it (Nebuchadnezzar will later destroy it.)

In John's vision, there were no wheels. God was not going anywhere. Will God provide a sanctuary for His people under the New Covenant? Oh, yes! "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? (I Corinthians 3:16)

24. Vision: in John (part 1)

This vision that John the Apostle saw started with a door standing open in heaven (Revelation 4:1). It showed a lamb looking as if it had been slain, but obviously was alive.

Brothers Hubert and Jan Van Eyck painted a large altarpiece, dedicated in 1432. It was in Ghent, Belgium, in a Church now called the Cathedral of St. Bavo. Altarpieces became necessary because the Church changed the liturgy in the 13th Century so that the priest now turned his back on the congregation and so lost the attention of his audience. The altarpiece gave the congregation something to look at and think about during the communion.

This altarpiece showed twenty-four scenes, with a large central scene showing a lamb standing and alive with blood flowing from its neck into a chalice. The lamb, of course, represented Jesus, who gave His life to make salvation possible for the entire world.

The picture showed angels and many types of saints, from judges and clergy to warriors and peasants, coming to the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

25. Vision: in John (part 2)

In John the Apostle's vision of heaven, he saw a scroll sealed with seven seals in the hand of the one sitting on the throne. What did the scroll contain? Why did John weep because no one was worthy to open the seals and scroll?

One interpretation that seems to fit this situation is that the scroll is the title deed to the whole earth and that a kinsman-redeemer is necessary to open the scroll. When Jeremiah buys a field from a cousin, a deed is signed, sealed, then he pays for the land. (Jer 21:9-12) A kinsman-redeemer is a relative who is willing to buy a parcel of land and pays the price for it. To be worthy, a person must: be willing to buy, qualify as a relative and pay the price.

The scroll in John's Vision is the title deed to the earth. God granted dominion to the humans He had created in His image (Genesis 1:28). They lost this dominion when they sinned. Now, by opening the scroll, dominion was restored. John wept because they found none worthy to open the scroll.

But wait! The lamb was, "worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God..." (Revelation 5:9).

26. Biblical Name: Daniel

The Past

Daniel was a pivotal book in the Old Testament. It gave us a glimpse of the past, informed us of Daniel's present, and looked into the future.

In chapter 9, Daniel prayed to the Lord God (Daniel 9:4). His prayer was a confession of the rebellious attitude and sins of the children of God. In verses 11 and 12, Daniel referred to the covenant of the Law of Moses. His reference might well be to Deut. 29 or Lev. 26:1-13 showed

the rewards which God will grant for obedience. Crops will grow (Daniel 9:4), the land will be at peace (vs. 6), enemies will be defeated (Daniel 9:7-8).

But if his people rejected the Lord's decrees: sudden terror (vs. 16), and other terrible curses will come until in vs. 33 we read, "I will scatter you among the nations." (Daniel 9:33) Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Judah and Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and took many people into exile to Babylonia.

Daniel knew the loving character of God and the promises after the list of curses in Lev. 26. He pled with God to, "... look with favor on your desolate sanctuary." (Dan. 9:17)

The promise: "I will remember my covenant with Jacob..." (Lev. 26:42) and "yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them nor abhor them so as to destroy them completely..." (Lev. 26:44)

It was usual to see punishment as a righteous act of justice. We could easily skip verse 17 of chapter 9 of Daniel's prayer. It was, in fact, a righteous act to turn away from wrath.

So, for God's chosen people, the path was a long history of rebellion against His covenant, but because of God's loving mercy and His righteous act of turning away wrath, there was hope for the future.

27. Biblical Name: Daniel

His Present

Daniel recounted events starting about six hundred years before Christ. Ezekiel had his vision of the living creatures and the wheels within wheels during this period of distress and personal anguish for the Jews. Ezekiel's vision showed the glory of God departing from Jerusalem. God's protection was gone. As God had promised, this rebellious and idolatrous people would be exiled because they behaved in disobedience (Lev. 26:33)

Terrible was the suffering and distress. But there was some light in the darkness. There was Daniel and his three Jewish friends. These young men, taken captive early in the war, showed integrity and great courage during their exile in Babylon. They determined to follow the dietary food laws God had commanded. (Dan. Ch. 1) The three friends would not bow down and worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol. God rescued them from the fiery furnace. (Dan. Ch. 3). Daniel continued to pray to the Lord even though the authorities prohibited it and threw him into a den of hungry lions. God kept the lions quiet (Dan. Ch. 6) They are fine examples of obedience to God's will. What courage. What protection God gave, a remarkable contrast to the punishment of defeat in battle and exile they had to endure.

28. Biblical Name: Daniel

The Future (part 1)

God's exiled people would experience tremendous hope and encouragement as they heard about the events in Daniel's life. The book of Daniel predicted the future by dreams and visions. Daniel himself was involved. It was he who interpreted the dreams of kings, or he himself had the dream or vision. Daniel gave credit to God, "... No wise man, enchanter, magician, or diviner can explain to the King the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries." (Daniel 2:27 & 28)

The meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 4 told Nebuchadnezzar's future rather than the distant future. In chapter 2, Daniel interpreted the king's dream: There was an enormous statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

A rock not formed by human hands destroyed the statue with no trace of it left and the rock filled the whole earth. (Dan. 2:35)

Daniel described the meaning: starting from Nebuchadnezzar, who is the head of gold. Different metals and clay represented other kingdoms to follow, but in the end, God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. It will crush all the other kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.

The meaning seems quite clear. Human beings will set up kingdoms. These will be destroyed. Finally, God's eternal kingdom will emerge.

29. Biblical Name: Daniel

The Future (part 2): the Kingdom of God

The statue and rock not made by human hands of Nebuchadnezzar's dream provided us with a template for interpreting the future. Starting from the Babylonian empire, kingdoms would rise and fall until the final kingdom, which was the everlasting kingdom, not founded by humans, would come. It was the kingdom of God.

Further dreams and visions in the book of Daniel gave many details of the future. The writer interpreted some for us, e.g., the two horned rams represent the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. The goat was the King of Greece, probably Alexander the Great or at least his kingdom (Dan. 8:20-21) Many other details were more difficult to interpret, and scholars puzzle over them. In Chapter 7, the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7: 9) represents God and the "one like a son of man" (Daniel 7:13) is Christ. He was from the clouds of heaven and receives authority, glory, and power. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion... that will never be destroyed." (Dan. 7:13-14)

When Jesus started his ministry, some of his first words were, "The kingdom of God is near." (Matt 4:17) In Luke 11:2 Jesus said, "But if I drive out demons with the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you." Where is the kingdom now? "The kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21)

It might be wise for his followers to follow instructions given to Daniel recorded in the last verse of that book. "As for you go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance." (Daniel 12:13)

30. Biblical Term: Prophets (part 1)

We know of many prophets recorded in the Old Testament. One scholar has found forty-nine prophets and prophetesses. Samuel was both a judge of Israel and a prophet. In his time, there were schools or colleges of prophets. In the books of I and II Kings, Elijah and Elisha play a prominent role.

There were sixteen writing prophets who wrote the last seventeen books of the Old Testament (If we accept Jeremiah as the author of Lamentations and Jeremiah). When the Israelites entered the promised land of Canaan, the Lord instructed how they should behave in

this land. The people pleaded that God not speak to them directly as he did on Mount Sinai (Horeb) because they were afraid of His voice and the fire that went with it. “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see the great fire anymore, or we will die.” (Deut. 18:16)

In Deuteronomy 18:14-22, the writer outlined God's instructions concerning prophets. God said, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him... But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.” (Deuteronomy 18:18,20) “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken.” (Deuteronomy 18:22)

So, God would speak to his people through His prophets. One future prophet was special. He would be like Moses, more than a prophet. He would be an administrator and lawgiver as well. The Jews awaited this prophet.

It is about this prophet that they asked John the Baptist, “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” The prophet who was more than a prophet was the Lord Jesus.

31. Biblical Term: Prophets (part 2)

The Lord spoke through His prophets. His chosen people, fearful of the message directly from God, begged God not to speak to them directly. So, God agreed to speak through a prophet. (Deuteronomy 18:16) The Lord made a Covenant with His chosen people. He would be their God and His people would bring blessing to the world.

His commandment was for the people to ‘love Him.’ (Deuteronomy 6:1-5) Repeatedly, the prophets faithfully spoke the word of the Lord to a rebellious, idol worshipping, and sinful people. This sinfulness resulted in the exile of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to Assyria in 722 B. C. and the Southern Kingdom of Judah to Babylonia from about 605 to 586 B. C. The Lord said, “See, I will refine and test them, for what else can I do because of the sin of my people?” (Jer 9:7) Only after testing could he use them to bless the world.

32. Biblical Name: Isaiah (part 1)

The name Isaiah means Yahweh (the Lord) saves. While it is true the Lord judges and destroys, the final expression of his will is to save. The question of the book of Isaiah is how can God use His chosen people to provide this salvation and so be a blessing to all peoples?

God wants a servant. This brings us to Isaiah's commission in chapter six. Isaiah had a vision of the holy God. In verse 8, the Lord says, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Isaiah answers, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8) Chapter six tells of the coming exile of God's people because of their disobedience but, as cut-down trees leave a stump, “so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.” (Is. 6:13) The nation will grow again.

God's purpose is to provide salvation and He will accomplish His purpose.

33. Biblical Name: Isaiah (part 2)

The writing prophets started with Isaiah. The structure of the book is interesting because there were two main sections in a book of sixty-six chapters. The first section had thirty-nine chapters, and the second had twenty-seven. Just like the Bible, which had thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament.

One might expect the call of God to Isaiah to be his prophet would be at the beginning of the book, but the call did not come until chapter six. This gave the author five chapters to introduce the book and gave reasons for the need of a prophet.

When God called Abraham and told him he had chosen his descendants to be a special holy people, it was his purpose to bless the entire world through him and his descendants. "... and all the people on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen. 12:3)

But now, about the year 740 B. C. the nation that descended from Abraham was not at all able to carry God's blessing to the world.

"Ah, sinful nation,
A people loaded with guilt,
A brood of evil doers,
Children given to corruption!

They have forsaken the Lord;
They have spurned the Holy One of Israel
And turned their back on him." (Isaiah 1:4)

But the LORD had an answer and a plan. The essential question was: How is the Lord going to make this rebellious, idolatrous, sinful people fit to carry God's blessing to the people of the world?

34. Biblical Name: Isaiah (part 3)

Predictions of Jesus

It is amazing that some seven hundred years before Jesus was born, Isaiah the prophet recorded his suffering and death so accurately. Whip marks had disfigured his appearance. Crown of thorns caused bleeding over his face. "... many were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured..." (Is. 52:14) Luke 23:20 tells us that the crowd cried, 'Crucify him, crucify him.' "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not." (Isaiah 53:3) Deut. 21:23 tells us that a person hung on a tree was cursed by God. "... we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted." (Is. 53:4) Jesus went through his suffering and death but did not oppose his tormentors. "... he was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before his shearers is silent so he did not open his mouth." (Is. 53:7) Isaiah even mentioned his tomb, which probably belonged to the rich man Joseph of Arimathea and possibly in a cemetery setting where even wicked people were buried. "He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death." (Is. 53:9) In this fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, seven hundred years before the death of the Lord Jesus, we had the gospel message. "The Lord made his life a guilt offering." (Isaiah 53:10) "My righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities." (Isaiah 53:11) "For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (Isaiah 53:12)

35. Biblical Name: Isaiah (part 4)

Prophecies

Over the long course of Isaiah's ministry, there are many prophecies recorded about many leaders of different countries. Isaiah was called to be a prophet in the year that King Uzziah dies (about 739 B. C.). Isaiah prophesied for about fifty years.

Decision magazine is published by Billy Graham Evangelistic Association of Canada. In a recent issue (February 2017), Walter C. Kaiser Jr wrote about archeology and the Bible. For years secular historians ridiculed Isaiah 20:1. It identified Sargon, king of Assyria. Historians found no sign of a King Sargon in excavations of Nineveh. Later, in 1843, they found writings that described Sargon moving the capital to another city before his son moved it back to Nineveh. The ancient book of Isaiah was right all along.

Isaiah prophesied against Israel and Judah and forecasted the exile of the descendants of Israel. He also prophesied against Babylon, the Philistines, the Moabites, Egypt, and others. God's people were to put their trust in Him. They were not to trust in the power of other nations or have contracts and agreements with them.

In Isaiah 30:1-3, the Lord declared those who go down to Egypt and look to Pharaoh for protection will be disgraced. What was it the Lord wants His people to do? "Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you, to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for Him!" (Is. 30:18)

36. Biblical Name: Isaiah (part 5)

The Servant

When God asked for a servant who would be a messenger, or prophet, to His people, Isaiah responded: "Here am I. Send me." But He needed another servant. Isaiah described the servant in chapter 42 of Isaiah: "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations." (Is. 42:1)

In Isaiah 42:6, the Lord himself has called His servant and will have a close handholding relationship with Him. The Lord will make this servant to be a covenant for the people and a light to the gentiles. God's covenant of love will act through the servant, bringing blessing to all peoples of the world.

Throughout the second section of Isaiah, chapters 40 to 66, the idea of servanthood is prominent. Sometimes it seems to refer to the nation of Israel or Judah, and sometimes to an individual. In Isaiah 49:3, we read: "He said to me, 'you are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.'" But the Christian Church has accepted the picture of the suffering servant, of Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12, as the Lord Jesus Christ whose suffering and death offers salvation to all people. It is Christ who is "my righteous servant who will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities." (Is. 53:11) "For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressions." (Is. 53:12)

37. Biblical Name: Jeremiah (part 1)

Being the LORD's witness to an unsympathetic and rebellious audience was a demanding and discouraging task. An author, James Gray, says that Jeremiah was between two fires: "the fire of persecution without and that with the Holy Spirit within, the latter being the better of the two." Jeremiah complains, "So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak anymore in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in indeed I cannot." (Jer. 20:8-9)

The Lord provided security for his people in Babylon. Jeremiah knew this was part of God's plan, but Jeremiah's neighbours branded him a traitor for preaching that it was the Lord's will for them to commit to Nebuchadnezzar. They mocked and threatened him. They beat, starved, and cursed him and, on one occasion, put him in an empty cistern. Poor Jeremiah sank into the mud. He would have died if a kindly foreigner, a Cushite named Ebed-Melech had not rescued him. (Jer. 38:1-13) Surely, of all God's people, he deserved the promise to Daniel, "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance." (Daniel 12:13)

The symbolic action followed the 'potter and the clay'. The vessel represented God's chosen people of Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah was to take the pottery pot to the 'garbage gate' and smash it to represent the disaster that will come.

The passage gave the reason for the Lord's action. The people had forsaken the Lord and sacrificed to other gods, even burning their children as offerings to Baal (Jer. 19:3-5) To reinforce the promise that the Jews would return to rebuild their land, God instructed Jeremiah to buy a field near his hometown. They undertook a legal transaction, and a title deed written on a scroll which was sealed to be replaced in a clay jar so it would keep a long time. (Jer. 32:13-15)

38. Biblical Name: Jeremiah (part 2)

The Weeping Prophet

Democritus, the 'laughing philosopher,' was an ancient Greek teacher. He was the first to posit that there were tiny building blocks, called 'atoms,' that comprised all natural materials. Rembrandt, the famous Dutch artist, painted a self-portrait of himself laughing and named it *Democritus*.

Though we do not know why Democritus was called the 'laughing philosopher,' we know why Jeremiah is called the 'weeping prophet.' Many tragic events affected Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple during Jeremiah's long ministry. After the Assyrian Empire crumbled, Egypt assumed control over Judah. Then, Nebuchadnezzar defeated Neco, the Egyptian, and controlled Judah.

God informed Jeremiah it was His will to punish His chosen people by sending them into exile in Babylon. The Jewish king and many of the people would not accept this and struggled against Babylonia. Nebuchadnezzar deported more and more people to Babylon. Daniel and his friends were probably deported shortly after the defeat of Pharaoh Neco in 605 BC. Ezekiel was also deported. Unlike his fellow prophets, it was Jeremiah's lot to stay in Jerusalem to prophesy the Lord's word to the remnant left in Judah. Jeremiah says: "Oh that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people." (Jer. 9:1).

The Lord declares: "They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me," (Jer. 9:3) and "See, I will refine and test them, for what else can I do because of the sin of my people." (Jer. 9:7)

39. Biblical Name: Jeremiah (part 3)

God Speaks to the Prophet

Because the people feared the consequences if God spoke to them directly (Deut. 18:16) God agreed to speak through a prophet. (Deut. 18:17-22)

Consider how this would happen. Two communications are necessary: from God to the prophet, and from the prophet to the people. God uses a vision in Jer. 1:13 then asks Jeremiah, "What do you see?" Jeremiah answers, "I see a boiling pot, tilted toward the north." The meaning was disaster will come from the north.

Often, the writings use the phrase 'the word of the Lord came to me' or 'the Lord said to me.' Perhaps the words were audible or perhaps God spoke them to the prophet's spirit like a hearing vision rather than a seeing vision. The prophet then took the word of God and communicated, in various ways, to the people. Jeremiah used several methods: repeating God's words, describing visions God showed him, speaking in sermons, and acting out object lessons.

40. Jeremiah's Sermons (part 1)

The Temple Sermon

Jeremiah recorded the Temple Sermon in Jeremiah 7:1-15. The Lord instructed Jeremiah to stand at the gate of the temple and proclaim this message: "Reform your ways and your actions and I will let you live in this place." (Jer. 7:3) He urged them not to trust deceptive words but to say: "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." God says: "My temple was built for my people not for a rebellious and idolatrous people. If you continue in your ways then I will thrust you from my presence just as I did all your brothers, the people of Ephraim." (Jer. 7:15) The Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel, here referred to as Ephraim, in 722 BC.

41. Jeremiah's Sermons (part 2)

The Covenant Sermon

Jeremiah recorded the Covenant Sermon in Jeremiah 11:1-8. "Listen to the terms of the covenant and tell them to the people of Judah and to those who live in Jerusalem," (Jer. 11:2) declared the Lord to Jeremiah. The Lord told them to obey and do everything He commanded, "and you will be my people and I will be your God." (Jer. 11:4) The Lord continued, "From the time I brought your forefathers up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, 'Obey me,' but they did not listen..." (Jer. 11:7) and so the curses of the covenant came upon the people God had chosen. God's problem was how to make this rebellious people a nation that will bring a blessing to the world, as he had promised Abraham.

42. Jeremiah's Sermons (part 3)

The Sabbath Sermon

Jeremiah recorded the Sabbath Sermon in Jeremiah 17:17, 19-27. God commanded Jeremiah to go to the gates of the city of Jerusalem and declare this message to the kings of Jerusalem and to the people. "Hear the word of the Lord, oh kings of Judah and all people of Judah and everyone living in Jerusalem... Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem." (Jer. 17:21) "If you are careful to obey me... and bring no load through the gates of the city on the Sabbath... then kings who sit on David's throne... they and their officials will come riding on chariots and on horses... and this city will be inhabited forever." (Jer. 17:24-25) "But if you do not obey me by keeping the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses." (Jer. 17:27)

It was clear the Lord will indeed bring tragedy to His people if they did not change their ways. They must change so through them He could bring a Saviour to the world.

43. Charles Wesley Hymns: In Hope, Against all Human Hope

"A new heart also I will give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgements, and do them... and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God." (Ezekiel 36:26-28) The inspiring promise to the people of God during their exile in Babylon showed a God that longs to redeem them.

This little-known Wesley hymn was a reassuring song to the people of God. Jesus' life and sacrificial death brought salvation to us, a sinful people beyond hope. The hope that: "laughs at impossibilities" led to faith, "mighty faith the promise sees," that will "perfect me in love." As in I Corinthians, we see faith, hope, and love strung together. (I Cor 13:13)

1

In hope, against all human hope,
Self-desp'rate, I believe;
Thy quick'ning word shall raise me up;
Thou with thy Spirit give.

2

The thing surpasses all my tho't,
But faithful is my Lord;
Thro' unbelief I stagger not,
For God hath spoke the word.

3

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, "It shall be done!"

4

To thee the glory of Thy power
And faithfulness I give;
I shall in Christ at that glad hour,
And Christ in me shall live.

5

Obedient faith, that waits on thee,
Thou never wilt reprove;
But thou wilt form thy Son in me,
And perfect me in love.

44. Jeremiah's Symbols (part 1)

The Linen Belt

Jeremiah acted out symbols to get God's word to the people of Judah. Jeremiah recorded his event in Jeremiah 13:1-11.

The Lord told Jeremiah to buy and wear a linen belt. He wore it for a while and then was told to take the belt to Perath and place it in the cleft of a rock. The Hebrew word 'perath' means either 'to the Euphrates' or refers to Perath, a town four miles northeast of Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown. The Euphrates River is 350 miles from Jerusalem. In either case, the clean linen belt represents what God wanted Judah to be, "to be my people for my renown and praise and honor..." (Jer. 13:11)

The name 'Judah' encompasses the idea of confessing God's goodness and praising Him for it. But he was to take the linen belt to Perath, bury it in the ground. When Jeremiah dug it up, it was not clean but marred and not profitable for anything. It was corrupt and abominable and now represented the Jewish nation. God's purpose for Judah to be a people that would glorify and praise Him was marred and corrupted for "... they have not listened." (Jer. 13:11)

45. Jeremiah's Sermons (part 2)

Celibacy

Jeremiah described this event in Jeremiah 16:1-9. God instructed Jeremiah not to take a wife or have children. The reason was horrible disasters were to come to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. "They will die of deadly diseases... They will perish by the sword and famine." (Jer. 16:4) Why? "... It is because your fathers forsook me," declares the Lord, "and followed other gods and served and worshiped them."

Remember that God's purpose is to bless all peoples through Abraham's descendants, so He must refine these descendants so they will change their rebellious ways. The punishment, exile, is God's plan to bring his people back to the covenant, "what else can I do because of the sin of my people?" (Jer. 9:7)

Jeremiah, living an unmarried life, symbolizes the saving of the next generation from disaster.

46. Jeremiah's Symbols (part 3)

A Letter

Jeremiah recorded this event in Jeremiah 29 as a counterpoint to the Lord's ominous advice to Jeremiah not to marry in Judah. He instructed Jeremiah to send a letter to Babylon, writing to the exiles a word of hope. The prophet is to write: "Build houses and settle down, plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters..." (Jer. 29:6) and "also seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it..." God has provided a haven for the people.

47. Jeremiah's Symbols (part 4)

The Potter and the Clay

Jeremiah recorded this story in Jeremiah 18:1-17. The action in this 'parable of the potter' took place during Jehoiakim's reign about ten years before Judah's fall. The potter and his wheel were a familiar sight. The potter's wheel comprised two round stones connected so the potter could turn the double wheel with his feet and have both hands free to manipulate the clay.

In the parable, the clay represented the house of Israel. The potter represented the Lord. He can make the clay (Israel) into what he wishes. The pot being fashioned by the potter is marred in his hands, so he remakes the clay into a different pot. (Jer. 8:4)

In like manner, the Lord could uproot His nation and destroy it, and later shape a new nation of the clay of the old. But He hoped the nation would repent, which would make the pot salvageable. If they did, God would mold the clay and not inflict the disaster He had planned. (Jer. 18:8)

48. Jeremiah's Symbols (part 5)

The Broken Pot and the Field

This symbolic action was found in Jeremiah 19:1-13. This event followed the story of the potter and the clay. The vessel again represented God's chosen people of Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah took the pot to the 'garbage gate' and smashed it to demonstrate the disaster that will come. The Lord clearly stated the reason for His action. The people have forsaken the Lord and sacrificed to other gods, even burning their children as offerings to Baal. (Jer. 19:3-5)

Jeremiah recounted the story of the field in Jeremiah 32:6-44. To reinforce the promise that the Jews would return to rebuild their land, God instructed Jeremiah to buy a field near his hometown at Anathoth. He made a legal transaction, and a title deed written on a scroll which was sealed and placed in a clay pot. The pot would preserve the documents for a time when the people would return to the land.

49. Biblical Term: Prophets (part 3)

The Lord spoke through his prophets to a people who feared a direct message from God. (Deuteronomy 18:16) The Lord made a covenant with His chosen people. He would be their God and his people would bring blessing to the world. The people were to keep his commandments and to love Him. (Deut. 6:1, 5) Over and over the prophets transmitted the word of the Lord to a rebellious, idol-worshipping, sinful people. This resulted in exile of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria in 722 BC and the Southern Kingdom of Judah to Babylonia from 605 BC to 586 BC.

To use these sinful people to bless the world, the Lord says, "See I will refine and test them, for what else can I do because of the sin of my people." (Jer. 9:7) But the Lord accomplished his word as spoken by the prophet Jeremiah for Judah, "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place." (Jer. 29:10) This happened under a king of Persia predicted by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah names the king—Cyrus. (Isaiah 44:28)

Over five hundred years later Matthew wrote about the birth of Jesus: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him 'Immanuel' which means, 'God with us.'" (Matt. 1:22-23, Is. 7:14) Jesus is the great blessing the word received through Abraham.

50. Biblical Word: Kingdom

I summarized this information from the book, *Christian Theology*, by H. Orton Wiley (volume I pp. 470-472; published by Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, MO. The kingdom is at once a present possession and a future hope. There is an inner redemptive experience of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. (Rom. 14:17) and at the appearance of the Lord in glory, he shall usher in the kingdom as the full realization of man's highest ethical and spiritual ideals,...

There are three main historical interpretations of the 'Kingdom of God.'

1. The Millennial Theory: The Kingdom of God is a sudden transformation of the present order when Christ returns to start the millennium.
2. The Ecclesiastical Theory: This theory identifies the Kingdom of God with the visible Church. Augustine believed it was the Roman Catholic Church.
3. The Individualistic Concept of the Kingdom: The rule of Christ over His people is through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. This is the Protestant view.

51. Biblical Word: Kingdom

In Matthew (part 1)

In Matt. 7:21 Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven." In the Lord's prayer, we were to pray, 'thy kingdom come.'

It was the common characteristic of Hebrew style to use a technique known as 'parallelism.' It was a way of emphasizing something by saying things twice. The speaker or writer made a statement, then repeated it with amplification or explanation in the second line. Many verses in the Psalms were like this. For example: "The Lord of hosts is with us—The God

of Jacob is our refuge. (Psalm 46:7) So, in the Lord's Prayer, the statement, 'your kingdom come' was followed by the second line, 'your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matt. 6:10)

Doing the will of God was central to the Kingdom of God, which comprised those who have committed their lives to doing the will of God. So, "many will come from the east and west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 8:11) It showed that the kingdom of God is open to everyone who does the will of God. "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

52. Biblical Word: Kingdom

In Matthew (part 2): Kingdom Parables

The sower sowed good wheat seeds in his field. An enemy snuck in and sowed weed (tares) seeds on his field. It became apparent there were two types of seed growing in the field. The farmer knew an enemy had sown the bad seeds but uprooting the weeds would also uproot the wheat plants. The farmer allowed them to grow together until harvest.

The sower of the good seed was the Son of Man. The field was the world. The good plants stood for the sons of the Kingdom. The weeds were the sons of the Evil One. The enemy was the Devil. The harvest was the end of the age. The harvesters were angels. (Matt 13:37-39)

In Daniel chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the future is represented by a statue and Daniel interpreted the kingdoms that followed one another. A rock not made by human hands finally crushed the kingdoms. The God of heaven established the resulting kingdom.

Jesus clarified the process of the kingdoms. The kingdom of God (which is in the hearts of believers) proceeds along with the kingdoms of the world until the end of the ages. It is in this overlapping of the ages that we live today.

53. Biblical Word: Kingdom

In Matthew (part 3): Kingdom Parables from Matthew 25

The Kingdom Parables of Chapter 25 had an emphasis on the end of the age. "Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour... And throw the worthless servant outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 25:13) "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory." (Matt. 25:31) The Son of Man will then separate the righteous from the wicked as a shepherd separates his sheep and goats. Then they will go to either punishment or, for the righteous, eternal life. (Matt. 25:46)

When Jesus was before Pilate at his trial, the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered, "Yes, it is as you say." (Matt. 27:11)

The book of Matthew ended with the great commission given to his followers by the risen Christ. "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

54. Biblical Word: Kingdom

In Matthew (part 4): Other Parables

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt. 13:31-32)—the kingdom had a small beginning but grew rapidly in the world.

The Parable of the Yeast (Matt. 13:33)—the kingdom started in a small area and spread throughout the world.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl (Matt. 13:44-46)—to obtain the kingdom was worth any effort.

The Parable of the Net of Fish (Matt. 13:47-50)—like in the parable of the good seed and weeds, referenced was to the end of the age. It will be then that sorting takes place. “The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous...” (Matt. 13:49)

Matthew recorded for us the teaching of Jesus about his return and the end of the age in chapter 24. He advised his followers to keep watch, “because you do not know on what day your Lord will come... because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” (Matt. 24:42-44)

55. Biblical Word: Gospel (part 1)

Matthew

Matthew and Mark and Luke presented three similar Gospels. They arranged the material collected about Jesus' life in a synoptic way. ‘Synoptic’ is a word that combined two Greek words that mean ‘able to be seen together.’

Matthew, however, was an educated person who was a Jewish tax collector. He was called by Jesus to be a disciple. (Matt. 9:9-13) Matthew, in his Gospel, is especially interested in teaching the gospel message to the Jews.

Matthew presented to the Jews the prophecies of the Old Testament that are fulfilled in Jesus. He reported the phrase, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet,” with slight variations. (Matt 1:22, Matt. 2:15, Matt. 2:17) The phrase occurred sixteen times in Matthew.

Matthew used the term ‘The Kingdom of Heaven’ instead of the ‘Kingdom of God.’ John the Baptist began preaching in the desert of Judea saying, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near”. He was preparing the way for the Lord, (Matt. 3:1-2) Jesus then started His ministry. He called His disciples and went throughout Galilee teaching and preaching the good news (gospel) of the kingdom. (Matt. 4:23)

Matthew, early in his book, gave us the three chapters that we know as the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (Matt. 5-7). Here, Jesus showed the difference between interpreting the old covenant laws and traditions and the rules of proper attitudes and behavior in the kingdom of God.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘love your neighbor and hate your enemy’. But I tell you; Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” (Matt. 5:43 & 44)

56. Biblical Word: Gospel (part 2)

Mark

Mark was likely the first of the four Gospels to be written, though it is the second Gospel in our Bibles. It emphasized the things that Jesus did during the thirty-two years of his life. Mark described these events straightforwardly, often from an eyewitness' point of view.

Mark was a young man at the time of Jesus' ministry. He was a son of a well-to-do lady in Jerusalem named Mary, whose home was the centre for all Christians there. (Acts. 12:12) An early Church Father named Papias writes, "Mark, who was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollected of what Christ had said or done." Mark's gospel gave details which support the writing as a record of Peter's remembrances. Both Matthew and Mark told of Jesus taking the little child and setting him in the midst (Mark 18:2) Mark added to this, "and taking him in his arms," (Mark 9:36) showing the tenderness of Jesus to the children. Mark told the story of the stilling of the storm and added a sentence that other Gospel writers do not have. "Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion." (Mark 14:38) This detail must have come from an eyewitness.

Mark recorded a scene, likely from his own memory, in Mark 14:51-52. When the soldiers arrested Jesus, Mark wrote, "Then everyone deserted him and fled." (Mark 14:50) He added, "A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind." It is likely the young man was Mark.

57. Biblical Word: Gospel (part 3)

Luke

In the three synoptic Gospels Matthew wrote from the Jewish perspective, Mark wrote a straightforward, fast-moving gospel of what Jesus did and what he said, Luke wrote to the Gentiles. Luke was the only non-Jewish writer in the New Testament. He wrote to a Gentile, most excellent Theophilus. The title indicated a prominent official in the Roman Government. As Matthew wrote with Jews in mind, Luke wrote with Gentiles in mind. Luke began his dating from the reigning Roman Emperor and the current Roman Governor. He carried the lineage of Jesus back to Adam himself, the founder of humanity, not just to Abraham, the founder of the Jewish race.

All four Gospels included a quote from Isaiah 40 when they gave the message of John the Baptist; Matt. 3:3, Mark 1:3, John 1:23.

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for him" (selection from Mark 1:3). Only Luke includes, "And all mankind will see God's salvation." (Luke 3:6)

Almost two hundred years ago, Frederick Faber wrote:

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's kindness in his justice,
Which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader

Than the measures of man's mind;
And the heart of the eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

Luke showed the all-inclusiveness of God's love.

58. Biblical Word: Gospel (part 4)

John

Often on stained glass windows there were images representing the four Gospels. A man, a lion, and an ox were common, often standing for Mark, Matthew and Luke. An eagle and its penetrating gaze often represented the gospel of John. John investigated the eternal mysteries and saw and understood the great truths that came from the mind of God.

In the gospels, we came across John as a young man, a son of Zebedee, working in the family fishing business in Galilee. People knew him in Jerusalem, and he follows Jesus after his arrest to the courtyard of the high priest. Many considered him to be the 'other disciple' recorded in John 18:15-16, who got Peter into the courtyard with him.

He was one of Jesus' friends and relatives standing around the cross. Jesus gave him the responsibility of looking after Mary, his mother. (John 19:26 & 27).

John wrote an eyewitness account about Jesus' ministry, adding much that is not present in the synoptic gospels. (John 21:24)

59. Charles Wesley Hymns: Come let us, who in Christ Believe

Many Wesleyan and Methodist hymnbooks in Great Britain and America have this hymn of Charles Wesley.

1

Come let us, who in Christ believe, our common Saviour praise,
To Him with joyful voices give, the glory of His grace.

2

He now stands knocking at the door of every sinner's heart;
The worst need keep Him out no more, or force Him to depart.

3

Through grace we hearken to Thy voice, yield to be saved from sin;
In sure and certain hope rejoice that Thou wilt enter in.

4

Come quickly in, Thou heavenly Guest, nor ever hence remove;
But sup with us, and let the feast be everlasting love.

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him." (Rev. 2:20) As it states in the second stanza, Jesus knocks and if we open the door, the fourth verse tells us our Lord will eat with us. The meal will be a feast and the food will be everlasting love.

60. Biblical Concept: Shepherd

Shepherds and sheep provided the background motif for several scriptural lessons. 'The Shepherd's Psalm' envisions the Lord as a shepherd caring for His people (Psalm 23) "The Lord is my shepherd..." (Psalm 23:1)

By the time of the Babylonian exile, Ezekiel used the shepherd/sheep motif differently. The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel. In chapter 34, he writes of unworthy shepherds. The shepherds represented the leaders of Israel and Judah, who used the sheep but do not care for them. "You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So, they were scattered because there is no shepherd..." (Ezekiel 34:4-5)

In Luke 15 we found a shepherd who not only cares for the sheep around him but, actively sought for one sheep that was lost and rejoiced when he found it, signifying the great love of God who will not only forgive and restore but seeks the lost.

The Gospel of John presented Jesus as the 'good shepherd.' Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11) "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:16) He is the good shepherd for all people.

61. Biblical Concept: Shepherd (part 2)

Unworthy Shepherds

God was angry with His people. He exiled them, for He must refine them so that they might change their sinful and idolatrous ways. He said, "What else can I do?"

God will do what needs to be done to accomplish His purpose, which is to bless all the peoples of the earth through His chosen people. But even at the time of the exile, He declared, "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place." (Jer. 29:10)

God's ultimate purpose was to restore, redeem, and save. Like the father of the wayward son, The Father in heaven waited to accept, forgive, and restore the penitent child.

But God described some of his people as unworthy shepherds, not behaving as God would have them behave. Unworthy shepherds were unlike the shepherds in Luke 15, John 10, and Psalm 23.

62. Biblical Word: Parables

From Luke 15 (part 1)

The New Testament Scholar, William Barclay, wrote, "There is no chapter of the New Testament as well known and so dearly loved as the fifteenth chapter of Luke's gospel." It contained three parables of Jesus where something which was lost was found. In each case, there was great concern for that which was lost and great rejoicing when it was found. In two cases,

Jesus told of rejoicing in heaven when a person lost in sin repented. The return of the lost son caused great joy to the compassionate father, who represented God Himself.

63. Biblical Word: Parables

From Luke 15 (part 2)

Luke 15:8-10 described the parable of the lost coin. The coin that the woman lost was one of ten silver drachmas that were worn by married women in their hair. The woman lost a coin in a home where the only daylight came through one small window. Rushes covered the earthen floor which the occupants changed as needed.

The woman lit a lamp and searched diligently, sweeping the floor, hoping to glimpse the bright silver coin to restore to her marriage headdress.

The woman represented God, and the coin was the sinner. Luke 15:10 ends with Jesus' statement, "There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The Pharisees never dreamed of a God who actually searched for sinners. They might have admitted that God would forgive a person who came crawling towards God in self-abasement. But Jesus showed us One who came to seek and to save that which was lost.

64. Biblical Concept: Christ is Risen

Luke 24

A study of Luke 24 showed there were two related key verses. The first was verse 6: "He is not here, but he is risen." The second was verse 34: "The Lord is risen indeed!" These verses became a mantra for the early church, underlining the pivotal place the resurrection held in the consciousness of the early believers, and holds for us now.

On the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus, two disciples discussed the shocking news. The disciples had found the tomb of Jesus empty. A man joined them. "They stood still, their faces downcast." (Luke 24:17) They clearly did not understand the implications of the empty tomb and did not recognize Jesus. Only when Jesus broke bread with them did they recognize him. "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scripture?" (Luke 24:32)

65. Biblical Name: John (part 1)

The Evangelist

John the disciple, son of Zebedee and brother of James, became a leader in the Church. At first, the church at Jerusalem was the centre for the Christians. Soon, the faith spread to the Gentiles and large churches in Antioch (Syria), Alexandria (Egypt), Ephesus (Asia), and Rome (Italy) became important.

Beyond the New Testament information about John's later ministry, early Church historians, such as Eusebius, wrote of traditions and fragmentary stories about John. There was a hint that John went east and preached in Parthia. Jews revolted against Rome in 66 A.D., and maybe during this time John took Mary to a more secure area near the city of Ephesus in the

province of Asia. Tradition gave two places for the burial of Mary. One is in Jerusalem and one in Ephesus.

John became a leader in the Asian Church and during the time of Domitian the Romans exiled John to the penal colony on Patmos. There, John wrote the book of Revelation. When the Roman Senate overthrew the tyrant Domitian, they executed him and annulled his acts. They freed John, and he returned to Ephesus, where he wrote his Gospel.

John's approach to his Gospel was reminiscent of the first words in Genesis. They showed the eternal nature of the Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." (John 1:1-2)

66. Biblical Name: John (part 2)

Old Age

When John left his exile on the island, Patmos, he returned to the Ephesus area as a primary leader of the church there. The bishops and others encouraged him to write a gospel of his own. The leaders had a time of fasting and prayer, and John agreed. He wrote his gospel account.

John had read Matthew, Mark and Luke and felt that they had left out aspects of the ministry of Jesus to which he himself has been an eyewitness. Likely, the raising of Lazarus was one of these events he felt should not fade from memory. But there were other reasons John wrote his Gospel.

The earliest Christians were Jewish, but the ministry of Paul and others, including John's own evangelistic work among Gentiles changed the composition of the Church. Most Christians, by the time of John's writing, were Gentiles. New ideas, some of them false, crept into the Christian Church.

John felt he must tell the truth. And the aged disciple must tell it before he died. He ended his Gospel with remarks the risen Christ made to Peter about John, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is it to you?" (John 21:22) Then John wrote, "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true." (John 21:24)

67. Biblical Name: John (part 3)

Clear Vision of Spiritual Truth

In Revelation 4:7, John saw four living creatures around the throne. They were like a lion, an ox, a creature with a face like a man, and a fourth like a flying eagle. It became common to give these four symbols to the four written Gospels on manuscripts and on stained glass windows. The eagle stood for John, for John had the most penetrating gaze into the eternal truth of all the writers.

Jesus was God, and he was in the beginning with God. (John 1:1)

Jesus was the sacrifice for sin. (John 1:29)

God sent Jesus to give eternal life through faith in him. (John 3:16)

In his talk with the Samaritan woman, Jesus offered spiritual water that "springs up to eternal life." (John 4:14)

Speaking to the 'Jews' Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, he has crossed over from death to life.: (John 5:24)

"To the Jews who believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" (John 8:31-32)

At the raising of Lazarus, Jesus stated, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25)

68. Biblical Name: John (part 4)

Maintaining the Truth

As the first century closed, the Christian Church attracted large numbers of Gentiles. Some brought pagan and philosophical ideas that were inconsistent with the truth that John had known from his contact with Jesus.

Some rejected the idea that Jesus had existed before the foundation of the world and maintained that he first existed from Mary's pregnancy. John rejects this idea. "He was with God in the beginning." (John 1:2)

While nowadays some had trouble believing that Jesus, a human being, was and is also God, some attracted to the early Church easily accepted that Jesus was God but had trouble believing that he was also human. To explain him, they promoted the philosophy of Docetism, which taught that Jesus only seemed to be human. They said that when Jesus walked on the seashore; he left no footprints on the sand. John wrote, "That which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched... this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." (1 John 1:1) The eternal one, the Word of life became a human being who people saw and touched.

A very popular false teaching was 'Gnosticism.' *Gnosis* is a Greek word meaning knowledge. It claimed that salvation comes to the person who has this secret knowledge. It claimed that spiritual things were good, but anything material was evil. Therefore, a good spiritual god could not have created a material world.

Also, the church faced other pagan and mystical religions that led some astray and tried to bring false ideas into the Church. John's writings are most helpful in establishing the truth. Especially in his letter, the book we call I John, he gave succinct statements of advice that helped his readers to experience the truth.

"If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God." (I John 4:15) "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9) "See, that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you." (I John 2:24)

69. Biblical Name: John (part 5)

Presenting Jesus' Valedictory Address

In chapters 14 through 17, John recorded some of the last words of Jesus to his disciples. Jesus comforted his disciples, knowing that shortly the Romans will crucify him. "Do not let

your hearts be troubled.” (John 14:1) “... I am going there to prepare a place for you.” John (14:2) There is a place for you in our Father’s house.

We learned much about the Holy Spirit. He was a Counselor. He was the Spirit of Truth who was with his disciples and will be within the disciples (John 14:16-17). The Holy Spirit will teach and remind the disciples of what Jesus had said. (John 14:26)

The work of the Holy Spirit was to teach and convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment. Yes, there was such a thing as sin, which stemmed from not believing in Christ. Yes, there was righteousness, as shown by the righteous Son who was acceptable to the Father because of his right relationship of love and obedience in Him. Yes, there was judgment, for God judged and condemned the prince of the world. (John 16:5-11)

Jesus finally told His disciples, “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But, take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

In John chapter 17, Jesus prayed for himself, for his disciples and for all believers. “My prayer is not for them (the disciples) alone. I pray for all those who believe in me through their messages.” (John 17:20)

70. Biblical Name: James (part 1)

Matthew and Mark wrote Gospels. Luke wrote a Gospel and the book of Acts. John wrote a Gospel and three letters and the book of Revelation. Paul wrote the thirteen New Testament letters (epistles) from Romans to Philemon.

James also wrote an epistle. During the early years of the Church, some did not accept this letter as scripture. Martin Luther did not appreciate the book as scripture and called it an “epistle full of straw, because it contains nothing evangelical.”

The book contained a lot of good teaching. He wrote it as a letter from a Jewish leader to his followers. It was the type of letter a Jewish Christian would write to a Jewish section of the Christian Church. James 1:1 says, “James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.”

In the New Testament, there are five known candidates as the author of this book.

James the father of the person called Judas, not Iscariot. (Luke 6:16)

James the son of Alphaeus, one of the Twelve. (Luke 6:15)

James the younger, possibly the same as James, the son of Alphaeus. (Mark 15:40)

James the brother of John and the son of Zebedee, one of the Twelve. (Luke 6:14, Matt. 4:21) He was assassinated under orders of Herod Agrippa in the year AD 44. The Spanish Church has claimed him as the author of the letter.

James the Lord’s brother. Paul visited Jerusalem and said, “I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lords’ brother.” (Galatians 1:19) This James is favoured as the author of this epistle.

71. Biblical Name: James (part 2)

In the Bible, we had James the father (of Judas), James the son of Alphaeus, James the younger, James the brother of John, and James the Just. When considering the author of the New

Testament book, we might wonder which James is James. There was considerable disagreement, but the consensus was the author was James the Just, the brother of Jesus.

Jesus had a brother, James. "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James..." (Mark 6:3) While Jesus' brothers had trouble accepting Jesus as Messiah prior to his death they were in the upper room awaiting the Holy Spirit with their mother Mary and the disciples. "... along with Mary, the mother of Jesus and with his brothers," (Acts 1:14) Following his resurrection, Jesus appeared to James, "Then he appeared to James..." (I Corinthians 15:7)

The early Christians recognized James as the leader of the Jerusalem Church. He spoke for the group at the Council at Jerusalem. "... It is my judgment therefore that..." (Acts 15:13-21)

The letter of James corresponded to the type of letter a Jewish leader would send to his disciples. True, it was not the evangelical message from first to last but there is, "James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." (James 1:1) and "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth..." (James 1:18) and "... humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you..." (James 1:21) and, "my brother as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ..." (James 2:1)

In this epistle, James gave much practical advice. "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life..." (James 3:13)

72. Biblical Name: Simon Peter

We had the inspired words of Peter both in the book of Acts and the letters written by Peter. A scholar named C. H. Dodd had organized Peter's main thoughts of his sermons in Acts and his writings in I Peter. A summary of these main thoughts had been called the *Kerugma* which means 'proclamation' (alternate spelling *Kerygma*)

Acts 2:17: In the sermon Peter preaches on the Day of Pentecost, he says, "In the last days God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people.'"

I Peter 1:3-4: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade... kept in heaven for you."

Peter preaches that a new age has begun and tells what it is like.

73. Early Church Term: Kerugma (part 1)

Kerugma was a proclamation of a Herald. The term was used to express the proclamation of the truths about Jesus and the new age. Both the book of Acts and the writings of Peter presented five points of the Kerugma. The first point was: the new age has begun.

In Simon Peter's sermon recorded in Acts, he proclaimed, "but God raised him (Jesus) from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen." (Acts 10:40) The new age had begun. "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Acts 10:43) This new age involved a new method of forgiveness.

The second part of the Kerugma was the proclamation of fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. "He was chosen before the foundation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and

glorified him and so your faith and hope are in God.” (I Peter 1:20-12) The new age had come about through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this was God’s plan.

The first two parts of the five-part Kerugma are: A new age has begun, and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was God’s plan described in Old Testament prophecy.

74. Early Church Term: Kerugma (part 2)

The Apostle Peter proclaimed five major truths in his sermon quoted in the book of Acts and in his first letter that we know as I Peter. The first truth was: a new age has come. The second truth was: Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection has brought in the new age. The third point of the Kerugma was God exalted Jesus as the messianic head of the Church. “The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins for Israel.” (Acts 5:30-31) “Through him (Christ) you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”

The third point in the Kerugma was that because of the resurrection, God exalted Jesus to His right hand as the messianic head of the Church.

75. Early Church Term: Kerugma (part 3)

The Apostle Peter proclaimed five major truths in his sermon quoted in the book of Acts and in his first letter that we know as I Peter. The first truth was: A new age has come. The second truth was: Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection has brought the new age. The third truth was: God exalted Jesus to the right hand of God as messianic head of the Church. The fourth truth was: in the last days, Christ will return in glory and judgment.

“He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.” (Acts 3:21) “Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” (I Peter 1:3-5)

In the last days, Christ will return in glory and judgment.

76. Early Church Term: Kerugma (part 4)

Essential truths of the new age brought in by Jesus’ life, death and resurrection included his exultation to a place of honour at the right hand of God as the head of the Kingdom of God. Jesus will return and there will be a judgment of the living and the dead. Peter gave point five of this Kerugma or proclamation in his sermon in Acts and in his letter, we know as I Peter.

“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’” (Acts: 2:38-39) “As obedient children, do not conform to evil desires you had when you lived in

ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written, "be holy because I am holy." "... but the word of the Lords stands forever." (I Peter 1:14-16, 25)

We have studied the dominant facts preached by Peter in the early Chapters of Acts which are emphasized in the letter of I Peter. What Jesus did was the basis for a call for individual repentance and living a holy life with the help of the Holy Spirit.

77. Early Church Term: Kerugma (part 5)

The New Age prophesied by Old Testament prophets had begun. Jesus' life, death and resurrection brought it in. God exalted Jesus to His right hand in heaven and has become the messianic head of the kingdom. Jesus will return in glory and will judge the living and the dead. These facts are the basis for an appeal for repentance and the offer of forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, and of eternal life.

I Peter repeated this early Kerugma. This letter was one of the first books added to the New Testament. Even though Jesus told his disciples that, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority," it was not surprising that the early Church expected Jesus to return soon. Two thousand years have passed. Scripture indicated he may return at any time. "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief." (II Peter 3:10)

The Bible ends with the words "Amen. Come, Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen." (Revelation 21:20-21)

78. Charles Wesley Hymns: Jesus, Plant and Root in Me

Though the titles of most hymns are the first line, this Wesley hymn is more often referred to by the title: The Mind that was in Christ. "Then came his disciples, and said unto them, 'Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?' But he answered and said, 'Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.'" (Matt. 15:13-14) So, what about plants the Father has planted? Charles Wesley pled with Jesus to "plant and root in me" to open the hymn. The mind was a central theme of this hymn: quiet, noble, loving, thankful, constant, and perfect mind.

1

Jesus, plant and root in me
All the mind that was in Thee;
Settled peace I then shall find;
Jesus' is a quiet mind.

2

When 'tis deeply rooted here,
Perfect love shall cast out fear;
Fear doth servile spirits bind;
Jesus' is a noble mind.

3

I shall nothing know beside
Jesus, and Him crucified:
Perfectly to Him be joined;
Jesus' is a loving mind.

4

I shall triumph evermore;
Gratefully my God adore—
God so good, so true, so kind;
Jesus' is a thankful mind.

5

Lowly, loving, meek, and pure,
I shall to the end endure;
Be no more to sin inclined;
Jesus' is a constant mind.

6

I shall fully be restored
To the image of my Lord,
Witnessing to all mankind,
Jesus' is a perfect mind.

79. Biblical Book: Genesis—Beginning

Genesis means 'beginning.' The first eleven chapters described the creation of the universe, with special attention to Earth, through the time of Noah's flood until the scattering of peoples and nations over the earth.

The focus suddenly narrowed as God calls Abram to be the founder of special people dedicated to the Lord (Yahweh).

We met God in the first statement of the Bible: "In the beginning God created..." So, it was that by his almighty power what God wanted to happen, happened. "Let there be light," God said, "and there was light."

It is interesting to note that of all the things God formed in this first chapter of Genesis the writer used the term 'created,' only three times. Verse 1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Verse 21, "So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind." Verse 27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female he created them."

By His almighty power, God created a universe with light, chemical elements, biological systems, and massive stars all working together and giving curious ancient philosophers and modern scientists an ingrained desire to explore nature—to find out how it all works.

80. Biblical Word: Creation

One use of the word 'create' involved human beings, male and female, created in the image of God. There was something godlike in human beings that was not present in other creatures. It was difficult for us to realize the deep meaning this 'image of God' had for each one of us.

In Psalm 139 David praised God for the wonder of His creation.

"For you created my inmost being;
You knit me together in my mother's womb,

I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made,
Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” (Psalm 139:13-14)

We might marvel at the usefulness of the human thumb or the complexity of the human eye. Recently, a researcher from Stanford University declared that the results of their studies showed a single human brain has “more information processing units than all the computers, routers, and internet connections on earth.” (Sept. 2017 issue of *Acts and Facts* article *The human Brain is Beyond Belief* page 11)

Not only is the physical frame a marvelous creation, but it could also house the Spirit of God, reflecting God’s image. “The Spirit of truth... you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” (John 14:17)

81. Biblical Word: Disobedience

The Creator God created human beings in ‘His own image.’ Sin tarnished that image. Satan, as a serpent, tempted Adam and Eve. Satan tempted them to distrust what God had said, and they disobeyed His word. “For God knows that should you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God,” said the evil one. So, Adam and Eve thought, “We cannot trust God. He is withholding from us what we really want, what we really need.” So, they disobeyed and ate the fruit.

As distrust and disobedience were a sin so, trust and obedience were necessary to lead to redemption and obedience.

But sin led to death. What was to be done? Someone worthy to die as a substitute must be found if human beings could have the life God wanted them to have—eternal life. So, in the fullness of time, Jesus was born. He absolutely trusted God the Father and was obedient to death on a cross (Philippians 2:8)

John 3:16 clarified that Christ’s death was an effective substitute for all, not just those under the old Covenant. “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.”

82. Sayings of Jesus (part 1)

The Work of the Holy Spirit in Believers

The Gospel of John recorded Jesus’ sayings on the night before his crucifixion. They were words of and comfort, telling his disciples he must go away but he would “not leave them orphans” (John 14:18). The Holy Spirit would come to them and would be a helper, counselor, and instructor.

The Holy Spirit was the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). He will be in you. He “will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26) “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth, who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” (John 15:26).

When the Spirit of the truth comes, “he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me... because the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you. (John 16:13-16).

So, in this manner, the Holy Spirit in believers, guided, instructed, and illuminated. We can find other examples of the Spirit's work in scriptures. Peter spoke to the lame man said in and through the power of the Spirit, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." He (the lame man) jumped to his feet. (Acts 3:6, 8)

"The Spirit helps us in our weakness." (Romans 8:26) "because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." (Romans 8:27). "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Romans 8:16).

There were many examples in scripture of God's Holy Spirit working in and through the lives of believers.

83. Sayings of Jesus (part 2)

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the World

The Holy Spirit did not limit His work to believers. He also worked in the world. Jesus explained, "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment; in regard to sin, because men do not believe on me, in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgement because of the world stands condemned." (John 16:8-11)

Regarding the guilt of sin, the Holy Spirit will work with the unbelieving person to convince and convict them of sin. This influence of the Holy Spirit worked through the spirit and mind and conscience of the unbelieving person.

Jesus gave his disciples the commission to go into all the world and to preach the good news of the gospel, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matt 28:19) The Christian was to spread the gospel. The Holy Spirit was to convict people of sin and convince them of the reality of Jesus' righteousness and his ability to save them. Because of Jesus' right relationship with the Father, he sat in heaven in a place of honour and authority.

The prince of the world was judged and condemned by Jesus' victory over death. The devil still worked in the world, but he was already conquered.

84. Sayings of Jesus (part 3)

Life

Christ was the mediator of the new Covenant (Heb 9:15). Christ was the Word that was God, that made all things (John 1:1-5). We might understand Him as the Word or Expression of God or even as the bodily Expression of God. And life was in this expression of God, in Christ.

Jesus said of His own life, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." (John 10:18)

So, the Creator of life, even eternal life, died on the cross as a Substitute for us and we, by believing in Him, can have eternal life. (John 3:16)

The apostle Paul told us, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: The old has gone, the New has come!" (II Corinthians 5:17) and "to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:24)

At creation, life came into the world. Because of sin, death followed. God sent his one and only Son into the world. He took on our sin and death on the cross. By believing in Him, we could become a new creation with eternal life.

After Lazarus died, Jesus spoke to Martha. "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" (John 11:25-26) This question is also for us: do you believe this?

85. Sayings of Jesus (part 4)

The Snake: In Numbers

We could find the story of the snakes in Numbers 21:4-9. God's chosen people, wandered through the desert, left Mount Hor, and were on their way to the Red Sea. God had provided Manna for them to eat, but they remembered the fish they ate in Egypt., and melons, and the cucumbers, and onions and garlic. About the Manna they said, "We detest this food." God sent poisonous snakes among them, and many died.

This rabble of people realized their sin and pled with Moses to pray that God would remove the snakes.

God instructed Moses to make a snake and put it on a pole and set it up. Anyone bitten would only have to look at the bronze snake on the pole and they would live.

It was during his discussion with Nicodemus about being born again, born of the Spirit, that Jesus used the event from the Old Testament of the snake set up on a pole. Anyone who wished could look at it and anyone bitten by a snake, who looked at the snake on the pole, would live. Using this event to make a point, Jesus said, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:14-15)

I can make several points:

Jesus used the Old Testament scriptures to make his point.

Whoever looked at the snake did not die. Whoever. Anyone who believes in Jesus, the Son of God, will have eternal life.

"The Son of Man must be lifted up," probably referred to Jesus being lifted upon the cross during his crucifixion.

John 3:16 followed this example of the snake set up on a pole, saving lives. The verse showed how much God loves us. John 3:17 assured us God sent the Son into the world not to condemn it, but to save it.

86. Sayings of Jesus (part 5)

Judgement

The seventh chapter of Matthew's Gospel continued Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The topic was 'judgment.' The word in the original Greek language and in the English had shades of

meaning. It might mean sitting in judgment over someone or even condemning them and so Jesus said, "Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way that you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Matt. 7:1-2)

Jesus talked about the person with the enormous piece of wood in his eye who tried to take out a speck of wood from another person's eye. "You hypocrite," Jesus said, "first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matt 7:5)

But Jesus had not finished this part of his discourse but continued: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; Do not throw pearls to pigs." (Matt 7:6) Here Jesus was adding to what he had just said, perhaps even showing, in this matter of making judgments, we should not belittle or be overcritical of others lest we ourselves fall short. But we should make judgments that show discrimination about what we should or should not do.

Do not put expensive pearls for pigs to admire. They cannot eat them, so they grind them in the mud. Dogs will not see a piece of meat from a sacrifice as different from a piece of grizzle. Use some discrimination!

When Jesus' captors led him to Herod Antipas during his trial, Jesus knew that Herod just wanted to see a miracle, "but Jesus gave him no answer." (Luke 23:9) He would not give pearls to Herod.

87. Sayings of Jesus (part 6)

Sin: The Unpardonable Sin (part 1)

John the Baptist looked at Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." John 3:16 said, "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."

There was in literature mention of people who have felt that they have committed the unpardonable sin, sometimes with great despair and hopelessness and anguish of spirit by the person who felt they have committed this sin. F. F. Bruce was a great New Testament scholar who has written many books about the New Testament. In his book *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, he wrote on this subject. He offered the gospel assurance of forgiveness for every sin and would remind those in spiritual distress that "the blood of Jesus... cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7) and stated, "that the very fact of (their) concern over having committed it (the unforgiveable sin) proves that they have not committed it."

88. Sayings of Jesus (part 7)

Sin: The Unpardonable Sin (part 2)

The unpardonable sin. Scripture preserved the saying of Jesus in two contexts: (1) In a narrative account that explained why Jesus said this (Mark 3:28-30) and (2) in a series of sayings of Jesus. (Matt. 12:31-32) (Luke 12:10).

In Mark chapter 3, teachers of the Jewish law accused Jesus of driving out demons by the prince of demons. (Mark 3:22) Jesus argued that this cannot be so and makes this statement in Mark 3: 28-29, "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, he is guilty of an eternal sin."

Mark explained in vs. 30, "He said this because they were saying, 'He has an evil spirit.'" (Mark 3:30) In fact, those who criticized Jesus blasphemed the Holy Spirit, who was the power behind Jesus' ministry.

Luke, in his Gospel, stated, "And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven." (Luke 12:10) Luke sandwiched this ominous proclamation between other statements by Jesus. Before this statement, Jesus said, "whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God." (Luke 12:8) After the statement about the unpardonable sin, was a statement about how believers should defend themselves to the authorities: "do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." (Luke 12:11-12)

89. Sayings of Jesus (part 8)

Sin: The Unpardonable Sin (part 3)

Matthew described the healing of a blind, mute, demon-possessed man. (Matt 12:22-50) Jesus drew several lessons from being accused of using the power of the prince of demons to drive out demons. The statement about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was Matthew 12:31-32. In Mark, the discussion was Mark 3:28-30.

William Barclay wrote a study of Mark and in his commentary, he wrote that when people met Jesus the first time, their first reaction was to see their own unworthiness. Peter's reaction was to say, "depart from me for I am a sinful man." (Luke 5:18). Barclay said that the sense of this unworthiness a heartfelt penitence and "penitence is the only condition of forgiveness." Barclay ended this section with the following paragraph: "There is only one condition for forgiveness and that is penitence. So long as a man sees loveliness in Christ, so long as he hates his sin even if he cannot leave it, even if he is in the mud and mire, he can still be forgiven. But if a man, by repeated refusals of God's guidance has lost the ability to recognize the goodness when he sees it, if he has got his moral values inverted until evil to him is good and good to him is evil, then even when he is confronted by Jesus, he is conscious of no sin; he cannot repent and therefore he can never be forgiven. This is the sin against the Holy Spirit."

Barclay used the term 'man' in the generic sense, so all of us, men, women, boys, and girls, "If we confess our sins he is faithful; and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

90. Biblical Word: Fear (part 1)

"Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Proverbs 9:10) Fear was a common word used throughout scripture. How great a relief when encountering a divine presence to hear the words, "do not be afraid" as Abram did (Gen 15:1) or as the terrified shepherds did on the fields around Bethlehem. (Luke 2: 9-10)

In the Bible, fear had several related meanings. It could mean a person's religion, a feeling of reverence, worship, or even absolute terror. The meaning was best determined by the context. One's religion could be determined by what god was 'feared.' Isaac followed the same God as Abraham, Yahweh, and in Genesis 31:42, God was called the "fear of Isaac."

Fear could be so severe as to cause anguish and trembling. (Psalm 55: 4-5) But consistently in the Bible, the fear of the Lord was a good thing. "Praise the Lord. Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in His commands." (Psalm 112:1) "Teach me thy way O Lord and I will walk in your truth; give me an understanding heart that I may fear your name." (Psalm 86:11) "And he said to man, the fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding." (Job 28:28)

Adam Clarke, in his commentary, discussed the 'fear of the Lord,' found in Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Clarke wrote, "The fear of the Lord signifies that religious reverence which every intelligent being owes to his creator; and is often used to express the whole of religion..."

As God's chosen people prepared to cross the Jordan River and enter the promised land, God gave them instructions about how they should live. In Deuteronomy we read, follow the ten commandments (Deuteronomy 5), fear any disobedience, and above all, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deut. 6:5)

91. Biblical Word: Fear (part 2)

"Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Proverbs 9:10) Scholars discussed the meaning of beginning in this statement. Some believed it meant fear was the first part of wisdom, the first step taken to achieve wisdom. Others looked at fear of the Lord as being the essential part from which wisdom flowed. It seems likely both meanings were true.

Luke 2:52 told us that during his growing years "... Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men." Wisdom is like many good qualities of our personality. There is always room for improvement. We start out fearing the Lord, trusting Him, and loving Him. We are, even then, just beginners.

Proverbs 3:7 said, "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil." Also, a wise person was also a humble person. Moses, who led the nation of Israel out of Egypt, "was a humble man." (Numbers 12:3) Jesus, speaking of himself, said, "for I am gentle and humble in heart." (Matthew 11:29) As wise men like Moses and Jesus were humble, it suggests humility might be a part of fearing God and thus coming into wisdom.

92. Biblical Word: Fear (part 3)

"Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Proverbs 9:10) To summarize the old covenant view, we saw that in Deuteronomy 5, God gave commands telling his people how He expected them to live. They were to fear (with reverential fear) to break his commands and the greatest commandment was to, "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength." (Deut. 6:5) In I Corinthians 12:31, Paul wrote, "And now I will show you the most excellent way." Chapter 13 told us what that way is. It was the way of "faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (I Cor 13:13)

In I John, chapter 4, John stated our relationship with God in a new covenant context. "Love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence in the day of judgement," "there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment." "We love because he first loved us." (I John 4:16-19)

John Wesley's translation of Zinzendorf's hymn, *Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness*, into English. stanza 2 read:

“Bold shall I stand in thy great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved thro' these I am, from sin and fear, from guild and shame.”

93. Biblical Word: Fear (part 4)

“Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Proverbs 9:10) The fear of the Lord was the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom. (Proverbs 1:7, Proverbs 9:10) In the realm of knowledge, there is truth and other knowledge. Other knowledge may include false knowledge, unsubstantiated opinions, untrue sayings, and so on.

What God said is truth. Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge properly.

Being afraid to disobey God's commands while we seek God's guidance helps us live a life of love with God and our neighbours and to think and act from good motives.

Deeds done from a good motive and done wisely would most often lead to a good result. A person who kept the law of God acts out of love for their neighbour and seeks and works for their neighbour's highest good. Fear of the Lord puts a person's selfish desires—pride, greed, seeking fame—in second place. God comes first and we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. It is a mistake to leave God out of our thinking.

In the realm of knowledge, it is easy to be led astray by other's opinions, supposed authorities. Our own desires can lead us down the wrong path. Think how different the teaching of science is now from a hundred years ago. In psychology, students studied Freud's theories as fact. Now, his thoughts are of historic interest only. But God is the same: past, present, and future.

Scripture showed true wisdom. Sometimes writers personified wisdom. This was a technique to get certain ideas across. Referring to wisdom, the author of Proverbs said, “The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old.” (Proverbs 8:22) “... and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at his side.” (Proverbs 8:29-30) “I, wisdom dwell together with prudence. I possess knowledge and discretion.” (Proverbs 8:12)

Gaining wisdom is a worthy aim.

94. Biblical Book: Hebrews

They often named the books that make up the library that we call the New Testament for the writer of the book or the audience. The exceptions were Acts (a sequel to Luke) and Revelation (written by John). For the book of Hebrews, the simple title, *To Hebrews*, appeared in ancient manuscripts, but it was unknown when this first appeared. When early Christians collected the letters written by Paul, they sometimes circulated Hebrews with them. However, many doubt Paul wrote or dictated it. These were the reasons:

In Hebrews, the author wrote, “This salvation which was first announced by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard him.” (Heb. 2:3) Paul said that Jesus revealed the gospel to him (Gal. 1:11-12).

The author of Hebrews had a different style than Paul. Paul dictated quickly with much on his mind, sometimes starting a sentence with one thought and ending it with another. The author of

Hebrews wrote with well-considered Greek phrases and in a style like a Greek orator. For instance, the first three verses of the book were an example of beautiful Greek writing. In each of Paul's thirteen letters, he named himself and put greetings at the beginning. Hebrews started with the subject: "In the past God spoke..." (Heb 1:1).

Who wrote the book of Hebrews? People suggested many authors over the years: Barnabas, Apollos, Priscilla, and others. Even after all these years of study, the statement of the early church father Origen remains true: "Who wrote the epistle, in truth God alone knows!"

95. Consider Jesus: in Hebrews (part 1)

From the New Testament book of Hebrews, we learned much of how the Old Testament Law and rituals contributed to our understanding of how Jesus the Son of God provided salvation for those who believed in Him. *Consider Jesus* is an appropriate topic title for the book, which compared Jesus to Old Testament figures and rituals. *Consider Jesus* also summarized the exhortations in the book such as, "fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess," (Heb. 3:1) and "Consider him (Jesus) who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:3). "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scoring its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2).

Not many years ago, members of a Free Methodist church who were qualified to preach in a local church were awarded a Local Preacher's licence. Members who were not ready to preach but were recognized as gave a Local Preacher's licence to certain members, showing they were qualified to preach in the local church. Exhorter's licences were awarded to members who were permitted to plead with the congregation (lead public prayers, evangelize, lead meetings) but were not yet ready to be preachers.

What better exhortation could one give than to 'consider Jesus?'

96. Consider Jesus: in Hebrews (part 2)

Greater than Prophets

The writer of Hebrews introduced, one after another, Old Testament characters and institutions and then presented Jesus Christ, showing how superior he was to any of these. He started in the first verse by stating: in the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets. Then, immediately, he compares the prophets to Jesus. (Heb 1:1-2)

Back in the book of Deuteronomy, God consented to raise up prophets to communicate with his people because the people were afraid to hear God's voice directly. (Deuteronomy 18:15-16) So God instructed his people through the prophets. Before the books of the writing prophets (Isaiah to Malachi), there were other prophets.

Consider Elijah and Elisha. I Kings 17 told the story of how the Lord fed the prophet Elijah through a time of famine. Chapter 18 told of Elijah's contest against Ahab and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

In II Kings, Elisha took over from Elijah as the main prophet of the Lord. It happened like this. Elisha knew Elijah would leave him and asked that a double portion of Elijah's spirit

would dwell upon him. Elisha insisted on going with Elijah and they crossed the Jordan River together after Elijah had taken his mantle and struck the waters of the Jordan with it. The water parted, and they walked across on dry land.

There, a chariot of fire took Elijah to heaven. Elisha saw this. He picked up Elijah's mantle, struck the waters of the Jordan River with it, and walked back across the dry riverbed. II Kings, chapter 2 described this event and is well worth reading.

The prophets predicted and accomplished amazing things by word and action. But Jesus is greater than the prophets.

97. Consider Jesus: in Hebrews (part 3)

Greater than Angels

After the writer of Hebrews showed that Jesus Christ is greater than the prophets, he showed Jesus is greater than the angels. The angels were not called the Lord's son (Heb. 1:5). The angels were to worship the son (Heb 1:6) and were only ministering spirits to serve those who would inherit salvation. (Heb 1:14)

The Son (Jesus) is told, "Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever... therefore God, your God has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." (Heb. 1:8-9) The Son, in fact, is the creator of the earth and the heavens. (Heb 1:10)

Footnote: Hebrews 2:2, "The message spoken by the angels was binding and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment," indicated that God gave the law through angels. In the books of the Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) God gave the law to the nation of Israel. The only indication of angel activity was in the words of Moses when he gave his final blessing to the nation just before his death. Moses said:

"The Lord came from Sinai
And dawned over them from Seir;
He shone forth from Mount Paran.
He came with myriads of holy ones
From the south, from his mountain slopes" (Deuteronomy 33:2)

We may not understand how angels were involved in giving of the Law to Israel, but we do not want to miss the writer's point, which is that the law has punishment for every act of disobedience. The salvation Jesus has provided is so much greater and more important, "how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (Heb. 2:3)

98. Consider Jesus: in Hebrews (part 4)

Jesus and Salvation

By his suffering and death, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for everyone. (Heb 2:9) Not only was he the sacrifice, but he was also the merciful and faithful high priest. (Heb. 2:17) The high priest conducted the ritual on the Day of Atonement. He took the blood from the sacrifice into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat and the Ark of the Covenant to atone

for the sins of the people. But because the high priests of the line of Aaron were sinful human beings, then first have to buy a bull with their own resources, sacrifice it on the altar and enter the Holy of Holies to sprinkle blood on the Mercy Seat to atone for their own sins and those of their family.

For the sins of the people of Israel, the priests chose two goats. They sacrificed one, and the people brought the other to the high priest, who confessed his own sins and the sins of the people over this scapegoat while laying his hands on the goat's head. They then took the goat out of the camp to the wilderness.*

But Jesus was a greater high priest than the men who had gone before. Many high priests had come and gone because death prevented them from continuing. "But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he can save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy and blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." (Heb. 7:24-27)

Jesus was both the perfect high priest and the perfect sacrifice who tasted death for everyone. (Heb. 2:9)

*We find the ritual for the Day of Atonement in Lev. 16

99. Consider Jesus: in Hebrews (part 5)

Greater than Moses

Moses was a faithful servant of God. Moses led the nation of Israel out of Egypt. As the nation travelled through the wilderness, they stopped at Mount Sinai and there they received the Law from God for the nation. Moses brought the ten commandments written by 'the finger of God' on the tablets of stone down to the people.

The author of Hebrews found Moses faithful as a servant of the house. He counted Christ as a son, worthy of more glory than Moses.

Jesus was the apostle and high priest of those who are partakers of the heavenly calling. God sent Jesus out as a messenger to the world, and apostle (one who is sent). As the high priest, he stood between man and God to intercede for humankind. It was in Jesus that God was revealed finally and completely. He also was the perfect human being who showed a perfect trust in and obedience to God.

Yes, Moses was a great servant of God and deserved great honour, but Jesus deserved the greater honour as the architect and builder of a house deserved more honour than the house. (Heb. 3:1-6)

100. Consider Jesus: in Hebrews (part 6)

The Perfect High Priest

We saw that Jesus is greater than the prophets, angels, and Moses. He was also the perfect high priest. (Heb. 5:9) The author of Hebrews looked back to the time of the wilderness tabernacle; to Aaron and those high priests following him. In later history, under the Greeks and

Romans, the high priest became a political position, and the Greek and Roman rulers appointed the high priest.

Some of these later high priests were corrupt, taking bribes and bribing the Greek kings and Roman authorities for their position. This was a far cry from the high priestly character assumed by the writer of Hebrews.

The writer said: "they are to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins." (Heb. 5:1) They were able, because they were men like those they served, "to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness." Because of this weakness, he offered sacrifices for his own sins and for the sins of the people. (Heb. 5:2-3)

But Jesus was the perfect high priest. The writer quoted from Psalm 110:4: "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind. You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." (Heb. 7:12)

The writer concluded they chose ordinary high priests under the law, but God chose Jesus by a sworn oath, "LORD has sworn..." (Psalm 110:4). Jesus was a priest forever. He "serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the LORD not by a mere human being." (Heb. 8:2) He sits at the right hand of God in heaven.

101. Consider Jesus: in Hebrews (part 7)

King of Righteousness (as in Genesis 14)

Abram was in for an adventure. He rose early, met with his servants, had a breakfast of cold mutton and bread dipped in date-honey and sat under one of the oak trees at his campsite in Mamre. He saw a young man running toward him up the slope from the direction of the Jordan River.

Gasping for breath, the runner stopped before Abram and bowed to him. "Sir, there's been a tremendous battle down below. Soldiers under Kedorlaomer, king of Elam, have attacked Sodom and the other cities in the valley, looted them and taken prisoners. Sir, they have captured Lot as well and are returning north."

A servant brought refreshment for the messenger and Abram gathered 318 trained men from his household and tracked the soldiers north to the area of Dan. There, by a daring night raid, Abram's force defeated the surprised army, gathered up the loot and freed the captives. On their return, tired and hungry, they encountered a remarkable priest of the Most High God. His name expressed his position and his character, Melchizedek (King of Righteousness). This priest-king brought bread and wine to refresh the weary band and Abram gave to him a tithe of the loot they had recovered. The episode showed there were high priests of God who were not of the order of Aaron of Israel.

About a thousand years later, David wrote a messianic psalm which looks forward to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ:

"The LORD has sworn
And will not change his mind:
You are a priest forever,
In the order of Melchizedek." (Psalm 110:4)

Then, about one thousand years after David, the writer of the Hebrews used the idea of a special order of priest to refer to Jesus as a greater high priest than that of the order of Aaron. (Heb. 7:15-17)

102. Consider Jesus: in Hebrews (part 8)

The Final Sacrifice

As the great high priest, Christ did not enter a manmade sanctuary, but entered heaven itself and appeared for us in God's presence. He did not bring the blood of animals, but his own blood resulting from his own sacrifice on the cross. He appeared once for all and the end of ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Heb. 9:24-26)

Under the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament, a person who sinned took an animal to the priest who sacrificed the animal. Every year, the high priest sacrificed an animal for himself and another for the sins of the people. They did this on the Day of Atonement and repeated it, year after year.

But this was not the true cleansing from sin, but only a shadow of that reality. (Heb 10:1) Animal sacrifices and Day of Atonement sacrifices were shadows of what was to come. Now, Jesus has come and so God set aside these sacrifices to establish the second or 'real' sacrifice. Jesus came to do the will of God and by the will of God, we are holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Heb 10:9-10)

Jesus, greater than prophets, angels, and Moses, the perfect high priest, was also the one sacrifice for sins that need not be repeated. (Heb. 10:12-14)

103. Consider Jesus: in Hebrews (part 9)

Mediator of the New Covenant

According to the old covenant, the people built a tabernacle (or temple), and God's presence was in the room called the Holy of Holies. In this room was the Ark of the Covenant covered with a lid with two cherubim (angels) with wings outstretched, facing each other. The invisible presence of God dwelt between the cherubim on the lid called the Mercy Seat. It was here the high priest on the Day of Atonement sprinkled blood of the sacrifice, first for himself, and then for the nation of Israel.

But Jesus entered the true sanctuary in heaven in the presence of God, offering his holy blood as a once for all sacrifice for sins. "But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to the old one and is founded on better promises." (Heb. 8:6) Jesus, the perfect high priest, offered himself as an effective, once for all, sacrifice for sins. His shed blood obtained for us an eternal redemption. (Heb 9:12)

"How much more, (more than the blood of goats and bulls) then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Heb. 9:14-15)

For this reason, Christ was the mediator of a new covenant. (Heb. 9:14-15)

104. A Word of Exhortation: In Hebrews (part 1)

The book of Hebrews ended like a letter (epistle). It was strange that it does not have the usual greetings at the beginning. But here at the end, the writer asked the readers to bear with his word of exhortation.

We studied how carefully the writer showed how Jesus fulfilled the ritual of the old covenant (testament). The author used the Old Testament and the good news of Jesus to issue exhortations and warnings throughout the book:

“We must pay more careful attention therefore to what we have heard so we do not drift away.” (Heb. 2:1)

“Therefore, holy brothers who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus the apostle and high priest whom we confess.” (Heb. 3:1)

“See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage on another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (Heb. 3:12-13)

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess... let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Heb. 4:14, 16)

“Therefore, let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.” (Heb. 6:1)

“We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” (Heb. 6:12)

*Also see that great chapter 11, which showed the life of those great heroes of faith.

105. A Word of Exhortation: in Hebrews (part 2)

Hebrews 13:22 said, “Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.” After reviewing the ritual of sacrifice of animals and the sprinkling of blood to take away sins and cleanse the sinner outwardly, the writer showed how all-sufficient the ‘once for all’ sacrifice of Jesus was. “Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain that is his body... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith... let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess... and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together... but let us encourage one another.” (Heb. 10:19-25)

“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light... So, do not throw away your confidence, it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” (Heb. 10:32, 35-36) The writer, in chapter 11, gave us the names of great historical figures who lived their lives trusting in God. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” (Heb. 12:1-2)

106. Charles Wesley Hymns: O for a Heart to Praise my God

“Create in me a pure heart, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10) (The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section))

1

O for a heart to praise my God,
a heart from sin set free;
a heart that's sprinkled with the blood
so freely shed for me:

2

A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
my great Redeemer's throne;
where only Christ is heard to speak,
where Jesus reigns alone:

3

A humble, lowly, contrite heart,
believing, true, and clean,
which neither life nor death can part
from him that dwells within:

4

A heart in every thought renewed,
and full of love divine;
perfect and right and pure and good —
a copy, Lord, of thine.

5

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart,
come quickly from above;
write thy new name upon my heart,
thy new best name of Love

The heart was the focus of this hymn. In the Old Testament, Moses sprinkled blood on the altar, then on the people to seal the covenant with the Lord. The people agreed to do all the Lord commanded. (Ex 24:3, 6, 8) “I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart;” (Psalm 9:1) said David. Heart is the core of the person, the source of desire. Wesley showed a heart of praise, a humble heart (Psalm 51:17, Matt 11:29), and full of love. As we become new creations in Christ, he wrote a new name on our heart... love. (Eph 3:17)

107. God, the Prophets, and Biblical Time

The word “God” was a title. The name of God in Hebrew was called the tetragrammaton, Greek, for ‘four letters.’ The Jews considered the name too holy to pronounce and used the term ‘Adonai’ which means Lord. When the tetragrammaton appeared in scripture, the reader said, “Adonai” (Lord). In respect for this belief, the King James Version (KJV) of the Old Testament

translated the name of God as "LORD" with all letters capitalized. The term LORD God used name and title. "LORD God" translated "Master God".

The Old Testament was in the Hebrew Bible. After the first eleven chapters of Genesis, it told how God established and dealt with His chosen people, the children of Jacob (Israel). God gave the nation their laws and communicated to them through prophets.

About one third of the Old Testament books reflected the sayings and teachings of the prophets, who passed the word of the Lord to the people of Israel. There were prophets to the nation before the writing prophets, whose works were in the Old Testament. The books Isaiah to Daniel are called the 'Major Prophets,' and from Hosea to Malachi, the 'Minor Prophets.' These prophets wrote after the time of Saul, David, and Solomon and after the split of the nation (931 B.C.) to the Northern Kingdom (Israel or Ephraim), and the Southern Kingdom (Judah).

Three Minor Prophets prophesied to Israel (the Northern Kingdom): Jonah, Amos, and Hosea. Six are prophets to Judah: Obadiah, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk. Three, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, were post-exilic prophets.

All events in the Old Testament events took place before Christ, shortened to B.C. Nowadays because some disapprove of the word Christ in the designation, they use B.C.E. that refers to "before the Common Era." An example is the time that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. or B.C.E. Events occurring since zero time, the birth of Christ, are called A.D., "Anno Domini," Latin for "the year of our Lord." Those who object use C.E. meaning Common Era.

108. Minor Prophets: Jonah (part 1)

Jonah was one of the "Minor Prophets". Minor, in this context, means the book written was short. The Hebrew Bible put twelve short books by prophets together and called this collection 'the Twelve.' Scholars thought these books together originally would fit on one scroll.

Jonah was likely written about a time about 780 years B.C., just before Amos. The Lord instructed Jonah, "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness had come up before me." (Jonah 1:2) These orders were unusual. Prophets made most prophecies to the nations of Israel or Judah.

Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, a powerful and warlike nation. It was expanding its empire and using very cruel methods of subjugating their enemies. So, Jonah was to go to this nation that was preparing to conquer the world. About sixty years later, Assyria defeated Israel and exiled many of its people to Mesopotamia, the home territory of the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Jonah not only feared the Assyrians, but he also seemed to despise them. He did not welcome these instructions from God, and we know Jonah tried to escape his orders. He sailed toward Tarshish, encountered a storm, and the sailors threw him overboard. Then, a large fish swallowed him, then vomited him up on a shore. Jonah ended up prophesying against Nineveh as the Lord had commanded.

The king of Nineveh repented and ordered his people to give up their evil ways and show their sincerity by wearing sackcloth. "When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust." (Jonah 3:6)

109. Minor Prophets: Jonah (part 2)

After Jonah's ordeal with the big fish, he saw that disobedience to God was not his wisest move. He still did not seem happy with his duty to preach to the people of Nineveh and likely was surprised people repented; even the king repented. With his mission accomplished, Jonah went to a safe distance east of the city, built a temporary shelter and settled down to observe the destruction of the city... which did not happen!

There were several remarkable occurrences in the book of Jonah that gave us a deep insight into what God was like. There was the storm at sea and Jonah was kept alive inside an enormous fish. God had power over the weather. He arranged for Jonah to be kept alive after being thrown overboard, and later deposited on land. Behind this was His concern for Jonah. Surely it would have been logical for God to abandon the reluctant prophet and arrange for another to go to Nineveh. But God worked with obstreperous Jonah to teach him lessons along the way.

It took courage for Jonah to walk into Nineveh and report his message on the streets. This was the chief city of the Assyrians who were notoriously cruel and terrorized captive people. They had much from which to repent. The author mentioned their violence (Jonah 3:8). God protected Jonah.

In scripture, we learned there comes a time when the level of sin or evil reaches a level of no return. God waited until the sin of the Amorites reached its full measure, then gave Canaan to the Israelites (Gen 15:16). The violence of the people at the time of the flood was another example (Gen 6:5-7).

Though Jonah sat in his shelter outside the city to watch the destruction of Nineveh, God had other plans. God showed his concern and mercy by pardoning these repentant people. God patiently explained to Jonah how important His creation was to him, especially people, but even animals. "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle." (Jonah 4:11) Though the expression, "cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand," puzzled scholars, most would agree it referred to their spiritual ignorance.

110. Minor Prophets: Amos (part 1)

"I sing for I cannot be silent, His love is the theme of my song." (Fanny Crosby)

"His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in indeed, I cannot." (Jer 20:8-9) The word of God in the heart of his servant exploded from the servant's soul and so it was after a very short introduction the prophet Amos delivered "Thus saith the LORD." (Amos 1:3) This common introduction to the prophet's words was to let the reader (or hearer) know the Lord was the author of the message. We know Amos as one book of the 'Minor Prophets'.

The message of the Lord was that the sins of the nations were due for punishment. The formula, "for three sins of ___ even for four," indicated multiple sins of the nearby nations: Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. All these nations have sinned against God and were due to feel his wrath.

But what of God's chosen nation? In Exodus 4:22, the Lord told Moses to tell Pharaoh, "Israel is my firstborn son," and it was for them the Lord delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Surely, now, this nation, after many years of seeing God's power working on their behalf, would set an example of trust and obedience to the Lord.

At the time of this prophetic message, it was over two hundred years since King David died; about seven hundred and sixty years before Christ was born (760 B.C.). The chosen people had divided into two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom, which kept the name of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It was tragic to find they have both rejected the Lord and worshiped false gods. (Amos 2:4, 5:26)

111. Minor Prophets: Amos (part 2)

In the rugged hills and valleys of the wilderness south of Bethlehem, Amos laboured as a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore fig trees (Amos 1:1, 7:14) He had a menial job. What did a dresser of figs do? Just four days before the harvest, while the fruit was still on the tree, he would make a cut in each piece of fruit. This aided in ripening and improved the flavour of the fig. Workers like Amos were low on the social scale. Who was his father? We do not know. Judeans likely considered his family unimportant, and he lived in the insignificant village of Tekoa in Judah.

God chose this 'insignificant' shepherd to proclaim His message to the nations, especially to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Gilgal and Bethel were two prominent cities in Israel. Amaziah, who was a priest at Bethel, denounced Amos to Jeroboam, the King of Israel. The priest ordered Amos to, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel..." (Amos 7:12-13) In the next verses Amos told us a bit about himself, "... I was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit..." (Amos 7:14) but to Lord took him to prophesy to Israel.

It was amazing how God used the ordinary and even the weak to serve Him, if they were willing. About eight hundred years later, the Apostle Paul learned this lesson. In a vision from God, Paul was told, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (II Cor 12:9)

112. Minor Prophets: Hosea (part 1)

The Lord used the prophets in various ways to communicate the message to the people. One way was for the prophet to act out an object lesson in front of the people Ezekiel described such a lesson. God instructed Ezekiel to lie on his left side as a sign he was bearing a burden, the sins of the people. One day on his side represented one burden-year of sin—three hundred and ninety days for three hundred and ninety years of the sin of Israel. Then, he was to turn to his right side for forty days to represent forty years for the sin of Judah. (Ezekiel 4:4-6)

The Lord gave Hosea a more personal duty than Ezekiel. His object lesson represented God's love for his people and their rejection of Him. God instructed Hosea to marry a woman who was a prostitute and have a family with her. Hosea loved his wife, Gomer, as God loved Israel. Three children were born to Gomer and Hosea. The Lord gave each child a name to show the relationship of the nation of Israel to God. The first child was a boy, and his name was *Jezreel*, for God would allow the people to be defeated in the Valley of Jezreel. (Hos. 1:4-5) The

next child was a girl. She was called *Lo-Ru humah* with means 'not loved.' This showed the Lord would no longer show his tender love to Israel. The third child was another boy and Hosea named him *Lo-Ammi* (not my people) for God considered his people 'not my people.' (Hos. 1:9)

The immediate future involved punishment and exile for the people but Hosea, whose name means 'salvation,' proclaimed the word from God that the time of punishment would end and those called 'not my people' would be called 'sons of the living God.' (Hos. 1:10) God would provide salvation for His people.

113. Minor Prophets: Hosea (part 2)

If you were opening the book of Hosea and reading random verses, you would probably find a verse describing the faithlessness and sin of the people of Israel or the resulting wrath of God to be outpoured against Israel. "Hear the word of the LORD, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land." (Hos. 4:1) "They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood." (Hos. 4:12) "Woe to them because they have strayed from me! Destruction to them because they have rebelled against me!" (Hos 7:13) Yet, even here, amongst the harsh words, we had a note of God's unfailing love in the following phrase, "I long to redeem them," (Hos 7:13)

Judges ruled the children of Israel in the land of Canaan. They demanded a king like the surrounding nations. Saul, David, and Solomon ruled a united kingdom, but after Solomon's reign, the kingdom split (931 B.C.) into the Northern Kingdom (Israel or Ephraim) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). The time when Hosea prophesied was a period of great prosperity in Israel but also anarchy. Israel was like a wayward wife who was unfaithful to her husband. Israel rejected the Lord and served other gods. They were a backslidden people who did not heed the warnings God gave through His prophet Hosea.

God used Hosea's marriage to a prostitute as an object lesson to show the people of Israel their unfaithfulness, but also His love for them. (Hos 11:1-8)

114. Minor Prophets: Obadiah

The book of Obadiah was the shortest book in the Old Testament. Obadiah was a prophet of the Kingdom of Judah, and his prophecy was mainly against the nearby nation of Edom. Edom was the nation that descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob (Israel). Although the brothers had their differences, even antagonism, to each other, they reconciled. "And Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept." (Genesis 33:4) But the nations of Israel and Edom were enemies.

Edom was between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. It was a wild and mountainous land with steep cliffs. The site of Petra, a modern tourist attraction, was in this area. Israel, after wandering in the wilderness for forty years, left the Sinai Peninsula heading for Canaan, the Promised Land. They would approach the land from the east and cross the Jordan River to reach their destination. Their route led through the land of Edom.

The Israelites, led by Moses, politely applied to the leaders of Edom, seeking permission to pass through their land. They agreed to stay on the main road and even pay for water from the wells. But the leaders of the Edomites refused them entry into Edom. (Numbers 20:14-21) The

Israelites went around Edom and, under Joshua's leadership, crossed the Jordan River and settled in their promised land. Years later, after 840 B.C., Obadiah wrote about Edom. Edom showed no sign of repentance but continued to show their independence of God and continued their evil ways. Obadiah warned them, "As you have done, it will be done to you: your deeds will return upon your own head." (Ob. 15)

The people of Nineveh repented after Jonah's warning and God withheld his judgement. The Edomites did not repent.

115. Minor Prophets: Joel (part 1)

Desolation of the Land

In Deuteronomy, chapter 11, Moses instructed the nation of Israel: "Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws, and his commands always." (Deuteronomy 11:1) Moses told his people to remember their children who had not seen the earlier signs God had performed at the time of their departure from Egypt. He instructed the people that the promised land was a land of hills and valleys, not watered by irrigation like the land in Egypt, but watered by rain. (Deuteronomy 11:10-11) If they loved and served the Lord, He would send rain on the land in its season, so there would be good crops and grass in the fields. (Deuteronomy 11:13-15). If they served other gods, "the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you." (Deuteronomy 11:16-17)

The time came when the nation had lived in the land for many years. The Lord punished his people for their idolatry and evil ways, as he promised through Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 11. The devastation was so severe, Joel reminded the people that there was coming the "Day of the Lord". "Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty." (Joel 1:15) The Day of the Lord was near. It came from the Almighty. "... The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful." (Joel 2:11)

Joel issued a call for repentance because he knew the desolation was because of the evil and false worship of the people. The Lord had warned of this in the time of Moses and now "the streams have dried up..." (Joel 1:20) There was hope. "'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'" (Joel 2:12)

What was 'the day of the LORD?' The Believer's Bible Commentary states: "This expression refers to anytime when God steps forth in Judgement, putting down evil and rebellion, and triumphing gloriously." Joel, the seer, viewed the future.

116. Minor Prophets: Joel (part 2)

The Future

Joel meant 'the Lord is God.' His father is Pethual (Joel 1:1) and as a son of Pethual he had status in society. Joel preached about the devastation of the land caused by an army of locusts (Joel 1:2-7) and lack of water (Joel 1:10-12). Judgement and "the day of the LORD" were at hand. (Joel 1:15)

The prophet's job was to communicate the word of God to the people. This involved 'forth telling,' that was, preaching to the people what God said, and 'foretelling' which was

telling the people the future revealed by God. Scholars have looked carefully at foretelling, and many see it as if a person would look over a mountain range where, at some distances, only the tops of the mountains would be visible. The prophet looked into the future and saw significant events but had little idea of the timing of the events. So, Joel saw a time of judgement, 'the day of the Lord,' and 'the Valley of Jehoshaphat,' (Joel 3:2) and a time of restoration.

The desolation of the land, God's judgement and punishment for the people's sin made it seem 'the day of the LORD' was at hand, "Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand..." (Joel 2:1) To resolve the problem, the people must repent. "Even now, declares the LORD, return to me with all your heart," (Joel 2:12) and though there would be judgement, there was also hope.

"I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehosophat. There I will put them on trial for what they did..." (Joel 3:2) Jehosophat meant 'Jehovah Judges'.

Joel, looking far into the future, saw another mountaintop of prophecy. "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly... were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them... Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd... 'This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: In the last days, God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people... and everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."' (Acts 2:17-21, Joel 3:28-32)

Jesus told his disciples, "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away the Counselor will not come to you but if I go, I will send him to you..." (John 16:7) God sent the Spirit not only to Israel, but to all people. And God would save everyone who called on the name of the Lord.

117. Minor Prophets: Micah (part 1)

The name Micah meant 'he who is like the Lord.' Micah's home was in a small hamlet called Moresheth in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He prophesied during the period from 740 B.C. to about 700 B.C. Assyria captured Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Isaiah, one of the Major Prophets, and the Minor Prophet, Micah, prophesied about the same time. The book of Micah has seven chapters. The book of Isaiah has sixty-six chapters. It was interesting to compare the two books and to compare these with the whole Bible. Micah, chapters one and three, spoke of judgement on evil doers. A similar message was in Isaiah chapters 1-39.

The themes of Micah 4 and 5 were forgiveness and restoration, similar themes to Isaiah 40 to 66. It was interesting to compare the 39 and 27 chapters in Isaiah to the 39 Old Testament books and the 27 New Testament books. In the restoration section of Micah was the famous prophecy: "But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times." (Micah 5:2) This prophecy led the wise men to the baby Jesus. (Matt 2:5-6) And so, God might lead us all to the one who fulfilled prophecies from the Old Testament. "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matt 1:21)

118. Minor Prophets: Micah (part 2)

In Micah chapter six, the Lord called his people to court. Witnesses were the hills and mountains and the everlasting foundations of the earth. God reviewed all the good things he had done for his people. He recalled to their remembrances how Balaam answered Balak, king of Moab, when he was told to curse the children of Israel. Balaam said, "How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the LORD has not denounced?" (Numbers 22:8)

In Micah 6:6, the people seemed to accept their wickedness and wondered what they could do to expiate their guilt. What sacrifice was sufficient, burnt offerings—year-old calves, thousands of rams, rivers of oil, firstborn child? "The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul." (Micah 6:7) All these methods were insufficient. The sinner needed to change their life. The Lord spoke through Hosea, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6) In Micah, "With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God?" (Micah 6:6) the answer was "He has shown you O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

119. Minor Prophets: Micah (part 3)

Micah chapter seven summarized God's message through his prophets. Of course, sin was the problem, and the root cause is that many were breaking the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (Ex 20:3) This led to misery and hardship in Israel and Judah. There was not enough food. People murdered. Apparently, some became proficient with a net they threw over their victim. The victim must struggle to get free, and the aggressor had both hands free to slay the victim. (Micah 7:2-3) Judges who should impart justice took bribes. People could trust no one.

In verse seven, Micah said, there was hope. "I watch in hope for the LORD. I wait for God my saviour." (Micah 7:7) Starting at verse eight, the nation of Israel spoke, "when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me." (Micah 7:8) Israel would repent and God would appeal Israel's case (Micah 7:9) and bring them into the light, and Israel's enemies would be ashamed (Micah 7:10) and God would restore Israel. The nations would come to Israel, to worship the true God. The land around Israel had become desolate, "Notwithstanding the land shall be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings." (Micah 7:13) When the Ethiopian eunuch met with Philip in Gaza (Acts 8:26-39), the man, a representative of 'the nations' came to worship God, it fulfilled this prophecy by Micah.

The chosen people of God committed idolatry and evil had taken over the nation. Both nations, Israel and Judah, endured the wrath of God and went into exile. They repented, and the Lord showed mercy and pardoned them. A remnant of the people returned to the Promised Land. (Micah 7:18) Thus, the prophet told us what happened, why it happened, and what the future held. There was a promise of a coming ruler: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2)

120. Minor Prophets: Nahum

The time of Nahum the prophet was about 650 B.C. to 620 B.C. This was between the captivity of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. and the end of the Assyrian empire in 612 B.C. The book showed God would punish Assyria for its wickedness, violence, and cruelty, especially toward its captive people. Near the beginning of the book, the writer introduced the wrath of God. "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power: the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished." (Nahum 1:3) His wrath was against wickedness and sin. "The LORD is good, a rescue in time of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but, with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness." (Nahum 1:7-8) Because of the wickedness and unrepentive attitude of Assyria, they face God's wrath.

The Southern Kingdom, Judah, was still a part of God's chosen people. They deserved and received punishment from the Lord. Hezekiah became king of Judah at twenty-five years of age and reigned for twenty-five years. "He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; He kept the commands of the LORD had given Moses." (II Kings 18:6) In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign the Assyrians threatened Jerusalem but the Lord miraculously saved Jerusalem (II Kings 19:35). In 612 B.C., Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians demolished Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. This was a great relief to the people of Judah. Nahum's prophecy was accurate. The good news was their cruel enemy was destroyed. "Look there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!" (Nahum 1:15) Now Judah could return to normal and celebrate their festivities.

121. Minor Prophets: Zephaniah

Zephaniah was a prophet with a royal background. He was the great, great grandson of the good King Hezekiah. This prophecy might have contributed to the reforms of Josiah, a king of Judah, led a small group of Judeans to serve the Lord. God said, "But I will leave within you the weak and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD." (Zeph. 3:12)

The 'Day of the Lord' would be an appropriate title for this book. The Believer's Bible Commentary defined the day of the Lord: "This expression refers to any time when God steps forth in judgement, putting down evil and rebellion, and triumphing gloriously." There was also the idea of a remnant, a group of people 'left over.' There were in Judah and Jerusalem those who worshipped Baal. God would, "... cut off from this place every remnant of Baal." And those who, "... worship the starry host." (Zeph. 1:4-5)

"The great day of the LORD is near... that day is a day of wrath... the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy..." (Zeph. 1:14-18) God gave the people time to repent of their sins. "Seek the LORD all ye humble of the land... perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger." (Zeph. 2:3) The book expressed God's wrath, which caused desolation to the idolatrous nations in the region: Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush, and Assyria. (Zeph 2:4-15) The land of Cush would be affected by the Lord's wrath. (Zeph. 2:12) Those who, "call on the name of the LORD," (Zeph. 3:9) even those who are beyond the rivers of Cush (Zeph. 3:10) would bring offerings to the Lord.

The Jews suffered destruction of their land and the city of Jerusalem. They spent about seventy years in exile in Babylon. God protected them there, and they flourished. Also, they gave up their idols to worship only the Lord. A remnant of believers returned to their land after receiving permission from Cyrus the Persian king. They re-established temple service.

Jesus was born centuries later. People came from great distances to worship at the temple. The Ethiopian eunuch was a believer who met Philip when returning to Ethiopia (Cush) after

worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem. “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus... And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’” (Acts 8:35, 37)

122. Minor Prophets: Habakkuk (part 1)

Some scholars classified Habakkuk as the last of the Minor Prophets of Judah. Three more prophets wrote after the exile in Babylon. Habakkuk might have served in the temple as a musician. (Hab. 3:19) Habakkuk started his prophecy questioning God’s non-action. In the Kingdom of Judah, he saw injustices, violence, and strife. He asked God, “Why do you tolerate wrong?” (Hab. 1:3)

The Lord answered, starting in verse 5, “Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own.” (Hab. 1:5-6) “Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand.” (Hab. 1:9) They are, “guilty people, whose own strength is their god.” (Hab. 1:11)

Habakkuk was not pleased with this answer. His complaint was that a just God, who cannot tolerate evil, used an evil nation to punish His people. The Babylonians were like fishermen who gathered people as captives with their net (their army) and then worship their net as a god. (Hab. 1:14-17) There were probably many times in a prophet’s life when they felt they needed an answer from God. They might have had a special place to station themselves as they waited for God’s message. Perhaps Habakkuk had a special place on the wall of the city of Jerusalem. Chapter two started with the prophet taking his place to await God’s answer. He was eager to know how he will respond to the people, for he knew the people would make the complaint he expressed. (Hab 2:1) The essential question to God was, “How can a righteous God use an evil nation to punish his chosen people?”

The Lord’s answer included this important statement, “The righteous will live by his faithfulness.” (Hab. 2:4) The proud and cruel Babylonians would endure the woes of Habakkuk (Hab. 2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19). We read of Babylonia’s destruction (Dan. 5:30). But the righteous remnant of Judah, those who kept their faith in the Lord, returned to their land from exile and the nation saw the birth of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, in Bethlehem of Judea. (Matt. 2:1)

123. Minor Prophets: Habakkuk (part 2)

Habakkuk took his station at the watchtower he used to await the Lord’s answer. (Hab. 2:1) How could a righteous God use an overtly evil nation to punish his chosen people for their sins? God’s answer reverberated down through the years. Write it down, said the Lord, “And the LORD answered me and said, write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.” (Hab. 2:2) “For the vision is yet for an appointed time... wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” (Hab. 2:3) There were two groups of people, then enemy and the righteous. “... the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright... he is greedy as the grave... and takes captive all the peoples.” (Hab. 2:4a, 5b) “But the just shall live by his faith.” (Hab. 2:4 KJV), also translated, “but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness.” (Hab. 2:4 NIV)

Paul brought this statement by the Lord God into the New Testament. “For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—righteousness that is by faith from first to last.” (Rom. 1:17) “Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because ‘the righteous will live by faith.’” (Gal 3:11). The writer of Hebrews also quoted this important principle. “But the righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back. But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.” (Heb 10:38-39)

Two other scripture passages helped clarify the meaning of the statement. Genesis 15:6 said, “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” And in Gospels, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.” (John 3:36) Ever practical, Paul told his jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved—you and your household.” (Acts 16:31)

“The righteous will live by his faith.” This statement brought together three concepts: righteousness, faith, and life.

Righteousness. The essential meaning of this word involved giving to each what is owed. A righteous or just judge would award the petitioner what they should have. A righteous judge proclaimed the innocent, innocent. A human owed God steadfast trust. A person who had faith in God was in a right relationship with God and was righteous. A righteous man proclaimed God was God. This was the same as with Abram, who was righteous when he believed what God told him. (Gen 15:6)

124. Minor Prophets: Habakkuk (part 3)

After Habakkuk’s question-and-answer discussion with God (Hab. 1, 2), Habakkuk broke out in a lofty and beautiful hymn of praise, a prayer on *shigionoth* (Hab. 3:1). The term came from the Hebrew word ‘to wander’ and might refer to a type of hymn that wandered. It also carried the idea of powerful emotion. The hymn started by mentioning God’s deeds for Israel and asked that they be renewed for the present day. It asked that God remember mercy for those deserving wrath.

The writer then reviewed the great deeds God had done for Israel. Habakkuk praised God for the wonderful deeds the Lord had done at Teman, the capital city of Idumea, when the people of Israel approached the promised land. From there he describes, “the mountains crumbled, the age-old hills collapsed... did you rage against the sea when you rode your horses and your glorious chariots.” (Hab. 3:6,8) Perhaps he referred to Moses and the people of Israel crossing the Red Sea. “Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high.” (Hab. 3:10)

Then the author’s mind wandered to God’s deeds in the land of Canaan. “Sun and moon stood still in the heavens.” (Hab. 3:11) This might refer to the time God gave Joshua time to finish his battle against the Amorites. (Joshua 10:13)

Though there was desolation all around Habakkuk, he trusted God to provide victory. He wrote, “Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us... ‘yet, I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.’ (Hab 3:16-18) He ended his book with instructions for the director of music.

125. Minor Prophets: Haggai (part 1)

Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem. They took captives to Babylonia. They took Daniel with a group in 605 B.C. Another attack in 597 B.C. took another group of captives, with Ezekiel among them. The city of Jerusalem fell, and the Babylonians destroyed the temple in 586 B.C. (B.C. are the number of years before Christ, smaller numbers, more recent)

Jeremiah prophesied that the captivity in Babylon would last seventy years. (Jer. 25:11-12) Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon and the Judean captives came under his control in 539 B.C. The first group to return to Judah and Jerusalem was under the governorship of Zerubbabel starting in 536 B.C. The Jews started to rebuild the temple, but the local inhabitants objected so they stopped construction. The work laid idle for fourteen years.

The Lord spoke through Haggai the prophet, saying it was time to think about God and His house. The year was the second year of Darius, sixth month, first day (520 B.C.). The people settled in Judah. They built beautiful, panelled houses for themselves. They were not concerned about God's house, the temple, or for the proper worship of God. Through Haggai, the Lord told the people they were not prospering because they had neglected the temple. (Haggai 1:9-10)

The people obeyed the message and built the temple and so repaired their relationship with God. (Haggai 1:12) God promises, "I am with you." (Haggai 1:13)

126. Minor Prophets: Haggai (part 2)

Haggai was the only Biblical book with two chapters. The book of Haggai covered a period of less than three months. For about seventy years, the people lived in Babylon. Although they missed their home and the city of Jerusalem, they had settled into a secure life in Babylon. Now, Cyrus, the king, allowed, even encouraged, them to return. They started to rebuild the temple, but opposition developed and for fourteen years, the work remained idle. People became more interested in building fine houses for themselves, less in worship of the Lord.

At the end of chapter one, they started to rebuild the temple. The people noticed this temple would not be as magnificent as Solomon's now-destroyed temple. The Lord, knowing what the people were concerned about, told them to be strong, for He would "fill this house with glory." (Haggai 2:7) He promised, "And in this place I will grant peace." (Haggai 2:9) This statement might be a reference to the coming Messiah.

A day came two hundred and fifty years later when a righteous man, Simeon, moved by the Holy Spirit, went into the temple, and saw the baby Jesus. Simeon took the baby into his arms and praised God, and said, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation." (Luke 2:25-40)

Following the Lord's instruction, Haggai asked the priests, "If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil, or other food, does it become consecrated?" The answer was no. But defilement was different. If a defiled person touched food, did it become defiled? The answer was yes. (Haggai 2:11-13) These questions indicated the people were careless of their obedience to God and had defiled one another. They did not care about the temple and proper worship of God. (Haggai 2:14) Therefore, the people had not prospered. (Haggai 2:15-19) But now the people built a temple. God would bless them. (Haggai 2:19)

The last few verses of chapter two were a message to Zerubbabel, governor of restored Judah. God would make him like a signet ring, for God chose him. A signet ring with a seal on it was pressed into clay tablets to signify ownership. Zerubbabel in God's hand and represented God. As Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David and an ancestor of Jesus, he might also stand as a representative of Lord Jesus, the coming Messiah.

127. Minor Prophets: Zechariah (part 1)

Zechariah, with fourteen chapters, was the longest of the Minor Prophet books. Though long for a Minor Prophet's writing, it was relatively short when compared to many of the other books of the Bible. Despite its relative brevity, New Testament authors quoted or alluded to it seventy-one times. (William B. Nelson Jr. in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at website: faithconnector.s3@amazonaws.com) The book was obscure in places but had interesting references to the coming Messiah. Zechariah wrote about five hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

The people of Judah had lived in Babylonia for seventy years when Cyrus, the Persian king, who ruled an empire that included Babylon, permitted some people to return home. A remnant returned and started to build the temple in Jerusalem. They stopped because of opposition from the people nearby. Zechariah joined with Haggai to encourage the people to continue the work of construction on the temple. (Ezra 5:1)

In Zechariah 1:7 to 6:8, the prophet related eight visions from the Lord. "I will return to Jerusalem with mercy and there my house will be rebuilt..." (Zech. 1:16) The eight visions all related to the rebuilding of the temple and re-establishing proper worship of the Lord. In Chapter three, the fourth vision showed Joshua (Yeshua) the high priest given clean clothes appropriate to his station. This typified the cleansing of the high priestly position so those who held this place can, from then on, do the work of the original high priest. The Lord said, "If you walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts." (Zech. 3:7) The next verse told us men standing in the vision were symbols of things to come, then ended with a promise that God will send a branch, "I am going to bring my servant, the Branch." (Zech. 3:8) This pointed to a time of redemption for Jerusalem and the land. "In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel." (Is 4:2) This referred to the Messiah, Jesus.

We could translate the term translated 'branch' as 'sprout.' Thus, the Lord would cause the Branch to sprout. Joshua, the high priest, purified with his clean priestly clothes, was a type (symbol, foreshadowing, representation) of the coming Messiah.

High Priest Joshua was to be crowned, making him both High Priest and King. (Zech. 6:9-15) "Here is a man whose name is the Branch..." (Zech 6:12) who was to be both king and high priest referred to the coming Christ.

128. Minor Prophets: Zechariah (part 2)

In the second year of Darius the king, Zechariah had received eight visions from the Lord. In chapter seven, Zechariah wrote about events two years later when Jewish leaders came from Bethel to ask the priests of the house of the Lord about certain days of fasting. They

instituted the fast days to mourn for the capture of Jerusalem and the resulting captivity in Babylon. They were to commemorate:

the siege of Jerusalem beginning—tenth month (II Kings 25:1)

when Jerusalem was taken—fourth month (II Kings 25:3-4)

when the city was burned—fifth month (II Kings 25:8-9)

when Gedaliah was slain—seventh month (II Kings 25:25)

Now that the captivity was over, and Cyrus allowed the Judeans to return to Judea, was it necessary to continue to fast on these days? The Lord answered at length, telling his people how they should live. He told them to turn these sad days into days of joy with happy festivals, and to “love truth and peace.” (Zech. 8:19) In Zechariah chapter eight, the Lord promised to bless Jerusalem (Zion) and dwell there. “I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.” (Zech. 8:8) God encouraged them with these words, “Let your hands be strong so that the temple may be built.” (Zech. 8:9)

God announced the time of fasting to mourn the destruction of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the temple was over. God wants the people to get to work with a joyful heart and rebuild. “These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the LORD.” (Zech 8: 16-17)

129. Minor Prophets: Zechariah (part 3)

In studying the last chapters of Zechariah, it is especially important to remember the prophets were looking into the future as if it were a distant mountain range. They saw the tops of the mountains as events God revealed to them, but the time (distance) between events was not clear. So, it is with chapters nine to eleven.

Zechariah gave the prophecy five hundred years before Jesus was born. Two hundred years after the prophecy, Alexander the Great conquered the same cities listed in Zechariah 9:1-8: Damascus, Hamath, Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod. The city of Tyre was on an island and extremely well fortified. (Zech. 9:3) He gave another prophecy in verse eight: “But I will encamp at my temple to guard it against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch.” (Zech. 9:8) At the time of Alexander the Great, some Jewish priests went to meet the great conqueror to plead with him to save their city, Jerusalem. Alexander consented, as Zechariah predicted in the first part of the verse. God had not yet fulfilled the second part, “Never again will an oppressor overrun my people.”

Then, a prophecy fulfilled by Jesus Christ: “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zech. 9:9) This event we know of as the Triumphant Entry. Matthew’s gospel told us of the event predicted in Zechariah. “The crowds went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, ‘Hosanna in the highest heaven!’” (Matt. 21:9)

130. Minor Prophets: Zechariah (part 4)

Zechariah forecasted the triumphal (celebration of a great victory) entry of Christ into Jerusalem (Zech. 9:9). Zechariah predicted, “the LORD will appear over them... will march in the storms of the south, and the LORD Almighty will shield them. They will destroy and

overcome with slingstones... The LORD their God will save his people on that day.” (Zech. 9:14-16)

Chapter ten showed God's care of his people, providing rain for adequate harvest. The worship of idols deceived the people. Leaders had been like shepherds that did not care for their sheep. But God would provide. Someone would come from Judah, “From Judah will come the cornerstone...” (Zech. 10:4) The chief stone, the cornerstone (called capstone in Zech. 4:7), would be the Messiah. Paul extended the idea of Christ as the cornerstone, a foundation of God's household, uniting Jews, and Gentiles, “... you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household... with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. He holds the entire building together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” (Eph. 2:19-22)

Immediately after writing of the cornerstone, Zechariah wrote of a tent peg. This might refer to a peg or nail that protrudes from a tent pole. People could hang a bag of valuables on the peg. The person described as a ‘cornerstone’ and a ‘tent peg’ is next referred to as a ‘battle bow’ who would defend Judah against its enemies. (Zech. 10:4) The last statement in verse four referred to rulers, “... from him every ruler.” This seemed to suggest all rulers will come from Judah, but the Hebrew word for ‘ruler’ used here is better interpreted ‘oppressor.’ The KJV Bible Commentary translated this statement: “... everyone who oppresses or exacts tribute from Israel will be removed completely.” This would fit with “... I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of the army, because of him that passes by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them anymore: for now, I have seen with mine eyes.” (Zech. 9:8)

The Lord continued to encourage the people of Judah. They would fight and overthrow the horsemen (those who fight against them).

Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom, sometimes referred to by the name of its most populous and influential tribe—Ephraim. The people were exiled over one hundred years before Babylonia conquered Judah. Zechariah writes, “And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their hearts shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD.” (Zech. 10:7) Based on this verse, it seemed the exiled people of the Northern Kingdom would come back and join the Judeans to unite the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. As we learned from Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:19-22, Jesus Christ unites Jew and Gentile, all of God's people in one kingdom: “... you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” (Eph. 2:19-20)

131. Minor Prophets: Zechariah (part 5)

Zechariah, the next-to-last book in the Old Testament, written about five hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ, was an amazing book of prophecy. The prophetic book concerned a background of past events. Zechariah wrote of events of his time, events from his future to the birth of Christ, then events that will take place after the birth of Christ, and into our future. Many scholars considered the sequence of these events. Opinions differed among them.

Zechariah wrote of great truths, though some are difficult to understand.

The last three chapters of Zechariah described another burden the prophet must bear. “The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD...” (Zech 12:1) It was a grievous burden for the prophet to speak the prophecy as it involved the wrath of God. God, who stretched out the heavens, who laid the foundations of the earth, and who formed the spirit of man within him, spoke through the prophet. In chapter twelve, God protected the people of Judah and saved their dwellings. The people of Judah mourned for the one they pierced (Zech. 12:10) in holy repentance.

Chapter thirteen started, “On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. On that day, I will banish the name of idols from the land and they will be remembered no more.” (Zech. 13:1-2) This resulted from the people’s change of heart.

In chapter fourteen, the prophet shared: a day of the Lord is coming. There would be a battle. The Lord’s feet would stand on the Mount of Olives. The mount would split in two and living water would flow from Jerusalem. (Zech. 14:8, Rev. 22:1) “On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the LORD. When evening comes there will be no light.” (Zech. 14:6-7)

Revelation 22:5 records, “There will be no night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the LORD God will give them light.”

132. Minor Prophets: Malachi (part 1)

Malachi was the last of the Minor Prophets and the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi meant ‘my messenger.’ It followed the books of Haggai and Zephaniah by about one hundred years. Malachi lived at the time of Nehemiah. It was during this time the Jewish people rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. Temple services and sacrifices resumed. But the first wave of enthusiasm for serving the Lord had passed and the people, even the priests, became careless in worship and sinful—as had so often happened in the past.

Through Malachi, the Lord first assures the people of Israel and Judah he has loved them and loves them still. He chose them over Edom as he chose Jacob (Israel) over Esau. God accused the priests of not giving him the honour and fear (respect) he deserved. They placed defiled food on his altar and brought defective animals to sacrifice. Instead of bringing their best to God, they brought animals they could not use for themselves. (Mal. 1:8) They did not so much as shut the temple door at night. They expected a fee for doing this. (Mal. 1:10) The tribe of Levi had provided the priests for the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the past. The Lord said the covenant with Levi was a covenant of life and peace. (Mal. 2:5) So, Levi received this covenant and Levi revered God, stood in awe of his name. (Mal. 2:6) “For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge and from his mouth men should seek instruction because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty.” But... the priests violated this covenant by not following the law and by showing partiality in matters of the law. (Mal. 2:9)

The prophecy turned to the people of Judah. It became common for Jewish men to divorce their Jewish wives and marry women who were serving idols. They committed violent acts, not providing justice, and even called evil, good. (Mal. 2:17) Isaiah listed many woes and judgments. He wrote, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.” (Is. 5:20) This was what the priests of Judah were doing in Malachi’s time and the people were following their ways.

133. Minor Prophets: Malachi (part 2)

Malachi—my messenger. The first messenger mentioned in Malachi was not doing his job. “For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth he should seek instruction—because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty. But you have turned away from the by and by your teaching have caused many to stumble.” (Mal. 2:7-8)

Malachi started chapter three by telling the reader a messenger would come to prepare the way: “‘Then suddenly the LORD you are seeking will come to this temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,’ says the LORD Almighty.” (Mal. 3:1) He mentioned two messengers. One prepared the way, and another who was a messenger of the covenant. At the time of fulfillment of this prophecy, John the Baptist answered the priests and Levites when asked “Who are you?” He answered, “I am the voice of the one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” (John 1:23, quoting from Isaiah 40:3) Four hundred years before Jesus was born, Malachi stated there would be a messenger who would come to prepare the way for a second messenger, a messenger of the covenant. Jesus, by his death for the sins of humanity, ushered in the new covenant (testament), the fulfilling the old covenant (testament).

The last two verses of Malachi read, “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with destruction.” (Mal. 4:5-6) The Lord promised to send the prophet Elijah to bring harmony to the chosen people. Many repented and John baptized them. This work of John the Baptist started the process of harmony among God’s people. Yet, when Jewish leaders asked John if he was Elijah the prophet, he denies it. (John 1:21)

Though John is not the person Elijah who lived in the time of Ahab, the King of Israel, there was reason to believe he may be the ‘Elijah’ referred to in Malachi. Zechariah, John’s father, was told by the angel, Gabriel, that John would, “... go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Luke 1:17) Jesus explained this to his disciples, and to us, after the Transfiguration, when Elijah and Moses stood and spoke with him on a mountain, “‘To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way, the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.” (Matt. 17:11-13)

John the Baptist knew his place was as a forerunner, to prepare the people for the coming Messiah. God’s promise to Abraham was that through his descendants (Hebrews/Jews), “all peoples on earth will be blessed...” (Gen. 12:3) What a blessing the Lord Jesus was to the world!

134. Charles Wesley Hymns: Being of Beings, God of Love

Charles Wesley cannot help but praise God. His hymns show an unparalleled reverence for God, whose very character was love. The hymn opened with praise. Then, recognizing the many believers who “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God...,” (Rom 12:1) he implored God to receive the offering. In the final verse, singers asked the “Holy Ghost” to “shed in our hearts” the “Saviour’s love,” seeming to reference Romans 5:5: “... because

God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

1

Being of beings, God of love!
To Thee our hearts we raise;
Thine all-nourishing power we prove,
And gladly sing Thy praise.

2

Thine, only Thine, we pant to be;
Our sacrifice receive;
Made, and preserved, and saved by Thee,
To Thee ourselves we give.

3

Heavenward our every wish aspires:
For all Thy mercies' store,
The sole return Thy love requires
Is that we ask for more.

4

For more we ask; we open then
Our hearts to embrace Thy will;
Turn, and revive us, Lord, again,
With all Thy fulness fill.

5

Come, Holy Ghost, the Saviour's love
Shed in our hearts abroad!
So shall we ever live, and move,
And be, with Christ in God.

135. What Ties the Old Testament to the New? (Part 1)

The early Church Fathers had a decision to make. Should they abandon the Old Testament and only use the written Gospels, writings of Paul, and other valued writings about Jesus and his sayings? They concluded the Old Testament was also Christian scripture.

What were some links between the two covenants: the Old Testament and the New Testament? (O.T. will represent the Old Testament, N.T. the New Testament and I will use the King James Version of the Bible in these writings)? The O.T. showed God created the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. He put humankind in the Garden of Eden. There he placed trees, including the tree of life, and a river to water the garden. (Gen. 2:8-9) In the N.T. the last book, written by John, there is a "... pure river of water of life... and on either side of the river, was there a tree of life..." (Rev. 22:1-2) At creation there was a river and a tree of life and in the coming Kingdom of God there was a river of water of life and a tree of life. The leaves of the tree were for "the healing of the nations." (Rev. 22:2)

A strange light was seen by the O.T. prophet Zechariah. "And it shall come to pass that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark. But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light." (Zech. 14:6-7) In Revelation, John wrote of the future, "And there shall be no night there; and they need

no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever.” (Rev. 22:5)

136. What Ties the Old Testament to the New? (Part 2)

The Apocrypha

The Apocrypha was a group of writings located between the O.T. and N.T. in some Bibles. The word means: ‘to hide away’. It was sometimes used to refer to writings that had hidden meaning.

There were several fantastical works from the intertestamental times and from the first few centuries A.D. which were ‘apocryphal’ (having hidden meaning) which are sometimes confused with the Apocrypha. The books of the Apocrypha were sometimes called deuterocanonical book to indicate they are of secondary (deuteron) value behind those which are canon (O.T., N.T.) and this more accurately described how the church viewed them. Christians separated some of these works from the many ‘apocryphal’ writings of the intertestamental times that are pure fantasy.

After the campaign of Alexander the Great, the Greeks ruled much of the known world. During this time, seventy-two scholars met in Alexandria, in Egypt, and translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek. We knew the translation as the Septuagint, named for the Greek word for seventy. They did this work in approximately 200 B.C. This translation contained O.T. plus the Apocrypha. The Latin translation of the bible, by Jerome, completed in about 400 A.D. included the O.T., Apocrypha, and the N.T. Jerome’s translation provided the basis for the Roman Catholic Bible and thus these contained the Apocrypha. Most Protestant denominations do not accept the Apocrypha as inspired scripture but saw these writings as valuable ancient writings, but not to be used to form doctrine. Some of these writings, such as I Maccabees and II Maccabees, contain a history of the intertestamental times. There were additions to the Biblical books of Esther and Daniel. Daniel was the hero of Bel and the Dragon, a short story.

There were also writings in the N.T. era that are not considered as inspired scripture. Many anonymous writers wrote tales of Jesus much later than in the N.T. era. The Gospel of Peter gave a legendary account of the resurrection of Jesus. An ancient manuscript of the Gospel of Thomas was found in Egypt in 1945 and has engendered much controversy. Publishers sometimes included these writings in a ‘New Testament Apocrypha.’ A few, such as Shepherd of Hermas, Christians considered valuable for study, though not scripture.

The Apocrypha gave information about the time between the O.T. and the N.T. and helped us link them.

How should we deal with questions about scripture? Paul gave us some guidance in his letter to Timothy, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15) The NIV translates the last part, “correctly handles the word of truth.”

137. What Ties the Old Testament to the New? (Part 3)

John the Baptist

John the Baptist, a messenger from God, was a link between the O.T. and the N.T. He came in “the power and spirit of Elijah.” (Luke 1:17) Elijah heard and spoke the word of the Lord. During a great drought, ravens, sent by God, supplied him with food. God multiplied a widow’s food stores so she could feed herself and him, and when the widow’s son became ill, and stopped breathing, God, through Elijah, raised the son from death to life. (I Kings 17) The test on Mount Carmel where the prophets of Baal strove to call fire from their god highlighted the power of the Lord when Elijah called on Him. The fire “consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.” (I Kings 18:38) Read I Kings 17-19 and II Kings 2 to read about the time of Elijah.

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to, “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” (Is. 40:3) Through Zechariah the Lord promised, “I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” (Zech. 4:5) This statement continued into the last verse of the O.T.

No matter which Gospel you read—Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John—near the beginning, you would find the story of John the Baptist. John knew his commission. Jewish leaders asked him, “Who art thou?” He answered, “I am the voice crying in the wilderness, ‘make straight the way of the Lord as said by the prophet.’” (John 1:22-23, Is 40:3). They asked by what authority he baptized. He answered, “I baptize with water: but here standeth among you, whom ye know not; He it is who coming after me is preferred before me whose shoe’s latchet I am unworthy to unloose.” (John 1:26-27)

There was a connection between the prophets of the O.T. and the prophet John the Baptist that was highlighted by Jesus himself. John had success encouraging the people to confess their sins, repent, and be baptized. Jesus told the multitude John was a prophet. He was predicted by the prophets of the O.T. He was to prepare the way for the Messiah. (Is. 40:3, Mal. 4:5-6)

Though John was great, greater than all who went before him. Yet the person who was least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. “Truly I tell you, among those of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” (Matt. 11:11, Luke 7:28)

138. Biblical Concept: The Curse (part 1)

The last word in the entire Old Testament is ‘curse.’ (Mal. 4:6) There were over two hundred uses of the term ‘curse’ in the Bible.

Joshua, the leader of the people of Israel, once they entered the promised land, read to the people all the words of the law given through Moses. “There is not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel...” (Joshua 8:35) Joshua read all the blessings and curses of the law.

In Deuteronomy, Moses told the people to go to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. These were close together with a valley between them. From Mount Gerizim, they were to proclaim the blessings, and from Mount Ebal curses were to be pronounced. The chapter ended with the statement, “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of the law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.” (Deuteronomy 27:26) This presented a dramatic picture: the whole nation of Israel standing on either mountain, facing one another, six tribes on one side, and six on the other, shouting ‘amen’ after the Levites read the law of blessings for the obedient and curses for disobedience to the law. (Lev. 26, Deuteronomy 27, 28)

Another curse was “for he that is hanged is cursed of God.” (Deuteronomy 21:23) The law instructed them to bury a hanged person on the same day. They understood that breaking the Mosaic law brought a curse on the person. Jesus hanged on a cross, the wood of a tree. How did Paul address how the curse of hanging applied to Jesus? “Christ had redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree...” (Gal. 3:13)

139. Biblical Concept: The Curse (part 2)

The Greeks knew Saul of Tarsus as Paul and we know him best as Paul the Apostle. He must have had a difficult time coming to grips with his conversion on the road to Damascus. He was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, likely named for Saul, the first king of Israel. He was a Hebrew-speaking Jew and trained as a Pharisee. He endeavoured to keep the Law of Moses. He agreed a person hanged on a tree was accursed. He agreed with the stoning of Stephen for the remarks he made in his speech recorded in Acts 7. Stephen said, “Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands as saith the prophet.” (Acts 7:48) This statement would have offended Paul.

Paul set out to persecute and eliminate the followers of the Jesus Way. What a dramatic encounter! What a life change! Luke, the author of Acts, outlined details of his conversion three times in Acts (chapter 9, 22 26). He was on the road approaching the city of Damascus when a light suddenly shone from heaven around Paul. The effect was so powerful he fell to the ground. A voice from heaven called to him saying, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4)

This astonishing confrontation changed Saul to, perhaps, the most committed follower of Jesus the world has ever seen. (Acts 9:1-22) Saul, the dedicated follower of the Old Testament law of Moses, became the most prolific Christian writer of the New Testament time.

Acts, chapter 13, began with a list of Christian leaders in Antioch. Saul was one of these. Church leaders chose Barnabas and Saul for a travelling ministry. (Acts 13:1-3) They set out to a largely Greek-speaking world. “Then Saul (who is also called Paul)...” (Acts 13:9) This identified Saul as the Paul we continued to read about in the New Testament.

The meeting with Christ drastically altered Paul’s theology. He had learned the Law of Moses from childhood. Paul was a member of the strictest order of teachers of the law, the Pharisees. He was doubtless proud of his ability to keep the law and knew anyone who broke the law was under a curse. Anyone hanged on a tree was cursed.

Jesus redeemed us by taking the curse upon himself. As he paid the price for all our sins, he became a symbol of the curse. The curse of hanging represented all the sinfulness of the world. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” (Gal 3:13) This statement followed a lengthy preamble, reminding the Galatians that belief in Jesus saved them, not keeping the law. The law brings a curse, hanging on a tree, and “no man is justified by the law in the sight of God. It is evident: for The just shall live by faith.” (Gal 3:11)

140. Biblical Concept: The Curse (part 3)

One connection between the O.T. and N.T. was the theology of the Apostle Paul. “For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse...” (Gal. 3:10, Deuteronomy 27:26) but “Christ had redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” (Gal. 3:13,

Deuteronomy 21:23) That happened when Jesus hung on the cross and there he died as a sacrifice for all the people in the world who believe in him. (Gal. 3:22)

We read in Revelation, "And there shall be no more curse." (Rev. 22:3:) In Romans chapter seven, Paul wrote, "And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." (Rom. 7:10) In the next chapter, Paul gave the classic account of the Spirit-filled life. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (Rom. 8:1-2) In this context, law meant principle. Then, in verse three Paul spoke of law, not as principle (as the law of gravity) but as the Mosaic law of the O.T. "For what the law could not do," referred to the law of Moses, "in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." (Rom. 8:3) This told us the reason the law cannot help us is that we were weak because of our sinful nature.

In the previous chapter in Romans, Paul discussed the law of Moses saying, "For we know the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." (Rom 7:14)

In summary, the law brought a curse and death, not because the law was bad, but because human nature was sinful. Jesus Christ, dying on the cross for us brought life and freedom. Paul outlined three freedoms in Romans:

- Freedom from condemnation,
- Freedom from dominion by sin,
- Freedom to live a righteous (or sanctified) life.

(Rom. 8:1-4)

141. What Ties the Old Testament to the New? (Part 4)

Prophecy

Matthew wrote his Gospel with Jewish readers in mind. He was especially interested in showing how Jesus fulfilled O.T. prophecy. The statements, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet" or "that the scriptures must be fulfilled" occurred frequently.

Jesus' birth was prophesied by Micah (Micah 5:2) that he would be born in Bethlehem of Judah. (Matt. 2:5-6) Herod tried to have Jesus killed and the angel of the Lord told Joseph to take the young child and his mother to Egypt. Matthew saw this as fulfilling the prophecy of Hosea 11:1, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son.'" (Matt. 2:15) Matthew brought passages from the O.T. and showed their link to the N.T.

Luke described how Jesus returned home to Galilee after being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. There, he taught in the synagogues of the area and finally came to his hometown of Nazareth. There, on the sabbath day, the synagogue leaders gave him the book of the prophet Esaias (Isaiah). Jesus stood up and read from chapter sixty-one of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he had sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus gave back the scroll and sat down to speak and the people wondered at his gracious words. He began by saying, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." (Luke 4:16-22) As

Jesus continued to speak the people felt insulted and decided to throw Jesus off the cliff on which Nazareth was built, but Jesus walked away. (Luke 4:28-30)

Jesus himself was the fulfillment of this ancient prophecy from Isaiah. At the beginning of his ministry, we saw the people amazed at his gracious words at one moment, yet were ready to kill him before the end of the day.

From early in the O.T., writers foretold the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The seed of women would bruise the serpent's head. (Gen. 3:15) God would raise a prophet who would speak the word which God commanded. (Deuteronomy 18:18) Jesus quoted from Isaiah and said he was the fulfillment of that prophecy. (Is. 61:1-2)

142. What Ties the Old Testament to the New? (part 5)

Other Links

We saw how the O.T. provided the basis for our thinking about and interpretation of the N.T. Other links could be found, many more, like the book of Hebrews, which showed how Jesus was better than the animal sacrifices of the O.T. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." (Heb 10:4) But "... we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Heb 10:10) Though required by the O.T. law, the will of God set aside animal sacrifice was set aside as, by God's will, Jesus died on the cross, replacing the old sacrifice by the new. Once for all.

One could see similarities between a vision of Ezekiel and a vision of John in Revelation. In Ezekiel chapter one, Ezekiel had a vision, "And I looked, and, behold a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also, out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures." (Ezekiel 1:4-5a)

"And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." (Ezekiel 1:26) "Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the heads of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne... And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had." (Ezekiel 10:1, 12)

In John's vision, "... behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow around the throne, in sight like unto an emerald... And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices... and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind." (Rev 4:2, 5a, 6b)

In both visions, there was a throne and someone (God) sitting on the throne. There were many eyes involved. There was the 'glory of God'. There were colours like a rainbow. These similarities could demonstrate the N.T. writer is copying the O.T. writer, or the Spirit was the source of both. The differences in the visions included Ezekiel's vision following the O.T. practice of imagining God's invisible presence in the Holy of Holies in the temple at Jerusalem between the two cherubim on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. The cherubim were likely represented by the four living creatures and wheels moved the presence of God out of Jerusalem. The four beasts were also in John's vision (also translated by some as 'living

creatures') but there were no wheels. God ruled on his throne, but wheels were not necessary because he was not going anywhere.

Psalms provided a link between O.T. and N.T. Many Psalms directly related to Jesus the coming Messiah. Psalm 22:1 "My God, my God, why hath thou forsaken me?" Jesus quoted this on the cross. (Matt 27:46) Psalm 45, by longstanding tradition in both synagogue and church, discussed the king Messiah and his bride. "So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: For he is thy Lord; and worship thou him." (Psalm 45:11) In Hebrews, the author quoted this passage, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever..." (Psalm 45:6) Psalm 110 spoke of the messianic priest-king. The N.T. writers quoted this Psalm more than any other Psalm. "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 'What think you about the Messiah? Whose son is he?' 'The son of David,' they replied. He said to them, 'How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him "Lord"?' For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make your enemies under you feet?"'" (Matt 22:41-44) Jesus then asked, "'If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?'" (Matt 22:45) This answer was conclusive, and the Pharisees stopped questioning him and "... neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions." (Matt 22:46b)

143. Biblical Term: Gospel

The word 'gospel' is an old English word meaning 'good news' (from good and *spel*). The word *spel* meant 'news' or 'story.' The original Greek version used the term *evangelion*. The prefix *eu* is related to the verb *angello* meaning, 'to bring a message.' Latin changed the word slightly to *evangelium* from which we get our terms 'evangelism' and 'evangelist.' We do not find the term 'gospel' in the KJV of the Old Testament. Christians connected gospel with the coming of Jesus. The musical, *Godspell*, released in 1971, had a clever title combining God and gospel. This movie was based on the Gospel of Matthew.

The coming of Jesus was good news for the world. The angels announced to the shepherds, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people..." (Luke 2:10)

At Jesus' presentation at the temple in Jerusalem, Simeon took Jesus into his arms and praised God and said, "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to you people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)

Jesus travelled through Judea and Galilee preaching 'good news' to the people. He often referred to the Kingdom of God. "After this Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God." (Luke 8:1) He often used parables to explain what the Kingdom of God was like for it seemed to be mysterious to his listeners. (Matt 18:11) When God was king, and His kingdom served Him as their king, it was a time of great joy. "Clap you hands all ye nations; shout to God with cries of joy. How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth!" (Psalm 47:1-2)

144. Biblical Concept: The Kingdom (part 1)

Gospel of the Kingdom

Jesus started his ministry, travelling from place to place, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. A kingdom was a nation ruled by a king. It was not a republic, not a democracy. All citizens owed allegiance to the king. As king of the kingdom of God, members owed him allegiance.

Jesus' teaching did not limit the kingdom of God to those who accepted Jesus as Messiah during his short lifetime on earth. Those who served the Lord God in the B. C. time are members. "Many will come to sit down at the feast in the kingdom of heaven with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." (Matt. 8:11) Children might become members. In fact, they had an advantage. "Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 18:4)

The Kingdom of God was available to all who accept and acknowledge Christ as their king. A teacher of the Jewish law asked Jesus, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jesus answered it was the one that said that the Lord was one and we were to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The teacher agreed with Jesus, who then said to the man, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." (Mark 12:34)

Luke told us Jesus sent his twelve disciples out into surrounding villages to preach about the kingdom of God and heal the sick. (Luke 9:1-6) The gospels related many parables explaining what the kingdom of God was like. In Daniel, God, the Ancient of Days, gave the kingdom to the 'Son of Man,' or to be exact, "one like a son of man." Jesus called himself the 'Son of Man.' He was the king of the kingdom that was everlasting. (Dan. 7:13-14)

In Luke, Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21) The seventeenth chapter then described what it will be like when the Son of Man returns. The king is coming.

145. Biblical Concept: The Kingdom (part 2)

Joy

The message of the kingdom of God was good news, the gospel. God blessed members of the kingdom of God. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:3) "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." (Matt. 5:8) The terms good news, glad tidings, blessed people, rejoice, and joy described this kingdom.

Could we expect to live a life of euphoria as members of the Kingdom of God which is within us? The writer of Hebrews wrote, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:2)

Jesus, probably speaking of his death, told his disciples, "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy." (John 16:20) Joy. Jesus also told his disciples, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Whatever trouble the world might bring, members of the Kingdom of God have a king who was greater than all. They had joy that was deep within and provided a peace that was an everlasting atmosphere for the soul. Members sang praise to their king; they rejoiced in his presence. The king had come. The king promised to return. "Even so, come Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:20b KJV)

146. The Bible (part 1)

An English-speaking person unfamiliar with the Bible might wonder at the title 'Bible.' Why did we call it the Bible? Ancient scribes often wrote on papyrus scrolls. Another name for papyrus was *byblus*. Biblos was the name of a city in ancient Phoenicia that produced and sold scrolls or books. In the Greek language, *biblicon* was, at first, used to refer to a small book, but in time it came to mean any book or scroll. In Greek, the plural of *biblion* is *biblia*. Latin-speaking Christians took the term *biblia* for the collection of Old Testament and New Testament books, but in Latin *biblia* was singular. A term, which in Greek meant books, became, in Latin, a book. In English, this became The Bible.

For books, the Greeks used *biblia* but for parchments they used the term *membranas*. *Biblio* were scrolls made of papyrus. Parchments were scrolls made of the skin of animals and were more durable. Parchment made from calfskin, called vellum, was good for writing. They wrote the books of the Hebrew scriptures on parchment.

The apostle Paul was a prisoner when he wrote II Timothy. He carried a chain which showed his status and hindered his movement. (II Tim. 1:16) Paul sent this letter to Timothy, his young helper in the gospel's spread. Timothy planned to visit him. Paul gave instructions for Timothy's trip. "When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments." (II Tim. 4:13) The parchments were likely Paul's copies of Hebrew scriptures. He wished to have these writings to strengthen and support him as he contemplated his likely death. The cloak was a garment with a hole for a person's head and it went down to the feet, a covering to keep Paul warm. He said, "Do your best to get here before winter." (II Tim. 4:21a)

He wrote, "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day—and not only me, but to all who have longed for the appearing." (II Tim. 4:6-8)

147. The Bible (part 2)

One who was not raised in the church might wonder why it has two parts called Testaments—the Old Testament, and the New Testament. Testament was not a word in common use today. When one considered the distribution of their wealth upon death, they produced a last will and testament. Could this be the meaning here? Was this the last will and testament of a famous person?

Testament came from Latin. The original word would be more aptly translated 'covenant.' "Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'this is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'" (Ex 24:8)

The author of Exodus described a dramatic scene where the entire nation of Israel stood on the twin mountains of Gerizim and Ebal. Six tribes stood on one mountain, and six stood on the other one. The leaders read laws of the covenant aloud and after they read each law, the people agreed, saying Amen. They made a sacrifice, and the leaders sprinkled the people with the blood of the sacrifice, confirming their membership in the covenant, with its requirements (blessings, and curses). This was the old covenant. The Old Testament told the story from

creation to the establishment of the covenant with Abraham, Moses, and David until the return of God's people from exile in Babylon to their promised land.

But now, Jesus had come. He is the author of a new covenant. "You have come to God, . . . to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." (Heb 12:23-24) Hebrews told us more about the new covenant made by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. "By calling the covenant 'new' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear." (Heb 8:13) The New Testament was for everyone who believed in Jesus Christ, Jew and Gentile.

148. The Bible (part 3)

When we referred to scriptures, we referred to the words the Bible contains. God inspired these special words. God used scripture to speak to the people of the world in various languages. Ancient languages from which English versions are based are Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin.

The Old Testament authors wrote in Hebrew with small sections in Aramaic. New Testament authors wrote in Greek. Some scholars found evidence other languages might have been involved, though our earliest manuscripts were in Greek.

The first five books of the Old Testament were called the *Torah* in Hebrew and the *Pentateuch* in Greek (Pentateuch means five books). Torah referred to the Jewish law God gave to the Israelites through Moses on Mount Sinai. It was also called the 'Law of Moses' (Genesis to Deuteronomy). There followed the historical books (Joshua to Esther). In these books, God spoke through history, for he is a God who revealed Himself in history and might overrule providence to accomplish His will. Five books of poetry and ethics followed (Job to Song of Songs). Lamentations was also in this genre but is located after Jeremiah because it refers to the fall of Jerusalem, in the time of Jeremiah. The Old Testament ended with the books of the prophets (Isaiah to Malachi) where we read of God's direct word through the pronouncements of the prophets.

Throughout the Bible, God revealed Himself in various ways: through prophets, history, poetry, and direct commands. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:4)

149. The Bible (part 4)

The New Testament fulfilled many of the prophecies of the Old Testament and continued to present to us the word of God in different literary genres. John in his gospel called Jesus the Word of God, for he was God's expression.

The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were called Gospels. They each expressed the simple good news that Jesus, the Son of God, brought the Kingdom of God and provided all people of the world with the opportunity for salvation.

Following the Gospels, the book of Acts gave us a history of the early Church. The next section comprised letters sent to various churches and individuals. Of the letters (epistles), Paul dictated or wrote thirteen. The editors of the Bible named each epistle either for the writer or the

receiver of the letter. Revelation was a singular work of the revelation of God to John on the Isle of Patmos.

In the New Testament, the Word of God came to us through different individuals and genres of literature. The various genres included Gospels (Matthew to John), history (Acts), letters/epistles (Romans to Jude), and apocalyptic (Revelation). Apocalypse/apocalyptic literature carried hidden meaning and typically referred to what will happen in the end times.

The book of Hebrews started with this statement, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son..." (Heb 1:1-2)

God speaks to us, now, in various ways. He is God and could speak to us however he chooses. We are fortunate that Bibles are freely available for us to read. Through the words of the Bible, we may hear His voice.

Statistics from The Bible Society from 2017 showed: the complete Bible was available in 670 languages, New Testament in 1,521 languages. One recent estimate was there were over five billion Bibles in the world.

150. The Bible (part 5)

What did Jesus think of the authority of the Old Testament? The Old Testament, also known as the Hebrew Bible, was an ancient book. Scholars had developed modern theories as to its composition, but many remained only theories.

Jesus referred, during his ministry, to passages or themes of these ancient scriptures. When the disciples asked Jesus about divorce, Jesus said, "But it was not this way in the beginning." (Matt 19:8) Thus, Jesus gave authority to the early chapters of Genesis, the events on or after creation of the world. Jesus accepted the authority of scripture about the days of Noah and the days before the flood. (Matt 24:37-39) Jesus also looked back at the people described in the Old Testament, especially the prophets, who opponents persecuted and killed. He accepted the events as authentic. (Matt 23:33-36)

Abraham Firkovich, a Russian adventurer, found a complete copy of the Hebrew scriptures in 1863, which scholars dated to 1008-1009 A.D. It was the oldest complete copy that existed and was the authority for many modern Bible versions. It was called the Leningrad Codex A (codex is a book rather than a scroll) and was kept in the Russian National Library.

In 1947, a young shepherd lad was tending goats near the Dead Sea, near Jericho. A goat wandered into one of the many caves in this wilderness area. The boy threw a stone into the cave to frighten the goat out and heard a crash, so went to investigate. He found a treasure! There were seven clay jars containing scrolls. And so, he found the Dead Sea Scrolls. Further exploration revealed 230 remnants of Old Testament books written between 250 B.C. to 50 A.D. They found one magnificent copy of the book of Isaiah. The *Shrine of the Book* in the Israel Museum displays this document presently.

The manuscript accuracies impressed scholars. This was partly because of a group of Jewish scholars called 'Massorites' who even counted the Hebrew letters in each book to eliminate errors. God was preserving his word.

151. The Bible (part 6)

The original texts of the New Testament were probably all written in Greek. The original documents were likely all written on scrolls. Writings the length of Matthew, Luke, John, or Acts were manageable as scrolls, but longer documents became difficult to handle.

Early in the second century, the codex, a book with pages on leaves, became popular. The Christian Church used codices from then on. As time went on, the Church collected the New Testament books in groups. The four gospels made up one group. The epistles (letters) of Paul made up another collection. A solitary book like Hebrews might be in the Paul group, although most scholars believed Paul did not author Hebrews.

Finally, Christian leaders brought the important books together and adopted them as scripture. At first, they debated which books the Spirit had inspired. It was unlikely Paul, writing his letters to resolve problems in local churches, thought he was writing scripture. The truth of what he wrote impressed the church leaders, and they included his writings.

A man named Marcion came to Rome from Asia Minor about 140 A.D. He founded a sect that felt the Old Testament was not up to the standard of the New Testament. He also limited the New Testament to one Gospel and some letters from Paul. His canon of scripture was the edited Gospel of Luke and ten of the epistles of Paul.

One of the dictionary meanings of canon is: "the books of the Bible recognized as the divinely inspired rule of faith and practice." (Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary) The early Church Councils accepted the books of our Bible, but we should not see them as being authoritative because the councils accepted them, but that because Christians recognized their authority, the councils accepted them. One reason Christians accepted them was an apostle, or a close contact with an apostle, wrote them.

Christians recognized inspired scriptures; they did not choose them. The most important reason for inclusion was that a writing's ultimate author was God. They considered three main reasons. Did a recognized spokesperson of God write the book? Did the book agree with the revealed nature, character, and works of God? Did the people of God embrace the book as the Word of God and subject themselves to its authority?

John wrote, Jesus was the Word. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." (I John 1:1) "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true." (John 21:24)

152. The Bible (part 7)

In New Testament times, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were well-developed alphabetic languages while the northern European languages were being written as scratch marks (runes) on a stick. The primitive state of the written English language when English-speaking people received the New Testament complicated the translation of the Bible into English.

In time, English translators translated the Latin Vulgate into 'Old English.' The Wessex Gospels were a full translation of the four Gospels into a West Saxon dialect of Old English. They produced it about 990 A.D. from a Greek text. A scholar called Venerable Bede began a translation into Old English near the end of the 600s A.D.

When 'Middle English' was in common use, the theologian, John Wycliffe, helped to develop what we know as the Wycliffe Bible. It is not clear how much of the Bible is his own

work. There was considerable opposition to having any Bible but the Latin Vulgate version, but courageous scholars continued to work into the era of 'Modern English.'

William Tyndale was the biggest hero of modern Bible translators. He worked under constant threat of assassination. With no support in London, England, he moved to the European continent, translating the Bible while moving from place to place. He was the first translator to use the printing press, which was invented in the mid-1400s. He published the first New Testament in 1526 and he distributed several thousand copies throughout England.

His enemies arrested Tyndale in Antwerp while he worked on the translation of the Old Testament. On October 6, 1536, they tied him to a stake, strangled, and burned him. He cried his last prayer out with a loud voice, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

153. Charles Wesley Hymns: Forever Here my Rest shall be

1

Forever here my rest shall be,
Close to Thy bleeding side.
This all my hope, and all my plea.
"For me the Saviour died."

2

My dying Saviour, and my God,
Fountain for guilt and sin,
Sprinkle me ever with Thy blood,
And cleanse, and keep me clean.

3

Wash me, and make me thus Thine own;
Wash me, and mine Thou art;
Wash me, but not my feet alone—
My hands, my head, my heart.

4

The atonement of Thy blood apply,
Till faith to sight improve;
Till hope in full fruition die,
And all my soul be love.

"Wash me," was the plea, as Peter said, "Lord not my feet only, but also my hands and head." (John 13:9) Blood is the carrier of life. It could be controversial to sprinkle blood, but blood linked the old and new covenants where the shed blood of Jesus replaced the blood of animals. The symbolism of sprinkling us with the Saviour's blood stood for transferring Jesus' life to us. This permits our soul to be love.

154. John: The Inner Circle

John wrote the Gospel of John. He started the book at the beginning, so when we read it we think of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." He introduced the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, as the Word of God.

John the Baptist prepared the people of Israel for the coming Messiah. The Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God to his disciples. (John 1:35-36) These disciples followed Jesus and spent the day with him. (John 1:37-39) Of the two disciples that followed Jesus that day, one was Andrew. John, son of Zebedee, seemed reluctant to name the other disciple. He gave vivid details of this encounter with Jesus, but left it to his readers to connect to the obvious answer. John was the other disciple.

John wrote this book, but he never wrote his name or the name of his brother, James. According to the other Gospels, Peter, James, and John were an inner circle of the twelve disciples (the Twelve). Jesus chose them to accompany him on certain special occasions. The three entered the inner room with Jesus, where he raised the daughter of Jairus. (Mark 5:21-43) "He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James." (Mark 5:37) Matthew recorded the transfiguration of Jesus in chapter 17. It started, "After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them." (Matt 17:1-2)

155. John the Eyewitness (part 1)

Scholars inferred from the list of names of women that followed Jesus, to care for him, that Salome was the wife of Zebedee and sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Thus, James and John were cousins of Jesus. This might explain the close relationship between John, 'the disciple Jesus loved,' and Jesus. It also explained the detailed reporting (by John) of the events that occurred at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Members of the family would have gathered for the event. John recorded what he observed. "On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.'" (John 2:1-3)

In John's first letter, he wrote about Jesus, the Word of life, "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched... we have seen and testify to it..." (I John 1:1-2)

At the marriage feast in Cana, a celebration that went on for days, Mary's role might have been arranging provisions for the gathering. The wedding organizers, possibly the mother of the bride, approached her with an embarrassing problem. They were running out of wine. Mary looked to her son, Jesus, for help.

When tempted in the desert, Jesus refused to turn stones to bread to satisfy his hunger. (Luke 4:1-4) But for this celebration at the beginning of his ministry, he miraculously changed the water in six large pots, each containing twenty to thirty gallons, into the best wine at the feast. "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him." (John 2:11)

156. John the Eyewitness (part 2)

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

All the gospel writers told of the 'cleansing of the temple.' The first three gospels placed this event on the Monday after the triumphal procession when an adoring crowd greeted Jesus.

They had shouted, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (Matt. 21:9, Mark 11:9-10) Luke rendered the second part, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38b) The Monday of the cleansing of the temple was called, by scholars, the ‘Day of Wrath’ for on that day Jesus cursed the fig tree, cast out the buyers and sellers of the sacrificial animals, and overturned the tables of the money changers.

The temple priests made a rule that the temple tax, which each adult Jewish male was to pay, must be paid in coins minted in Tyre. Those with other currency had to change the money. The money changers charged a fee for the exchange, as happens today in our banks.

John placed the story of the temple cleansing as one of the first events in Jesus’ ministry. Many studied and debated whether John’s timing was wrong, and he should have placed the event, as the other Gospel writers have done, in the last week of Jesus’ life. Others claimed John was correct and the synoptic Gospel writers were wrong. However, there was no reason Jesus might not have cleansed the temple twice.

John’s version said, “So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle...” (John 2:15) and “To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here!’” (John 2:16) The additions of these details showed John’s intimate knowledge of the event and the foresight to understand a deeper meaning of the cleansing of the temple. John foresaw a time when people no longer sacrificed of animals. John knew the Lord Jesus would sacrifice himself for all who would believe in his name. (John 2:12-19) John also described the whip Jesus used to drive out the animals, “So he made a whip out of cords...” (John 2:15 NIV) Such detail supported John as an eyewitness to the event.

157. John: His Early Life

From the fragmentary biographical stories of John, the disciple of Jesus, we knew certain facts and some traditions. From the Bible, we knew he was the son of Zebedee and the brother of James. We surmised his mother was Salome, the sister of Mary. He was one of the first disciples of Jesus and, with Peter and James, he had a privileged position among the Twelve. The inner circle of Peter, James, and John witnessed the raising of Jairus’ daughter and the transfiguration. (Mark 5:37, Matt. 17) Most Bible scholars supported the position that John was the ‘disciple that Jesus loved.’ (John 13:13, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20)

In Jerusalem, the family of the high priest knew John. He may have been a representative of his father Zebedee in the fishing business and had a residence in Jerusalem. Jesus likely stayed with him at this residence, and it was likely to this home Nicodemus came one night.

Nicodemus spoke with Jesus saying, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God...” Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.’” (John 3:2-3) This was a puzzle to Nicodemus, for he wondered how this could happen. Jesus revealed there was a spiritual birth that must take place. It was like the unseen wind that comes and goes. There was an unseen spiritual force which produced this rebirth.

During the wilderness wanderings of the Hebrews, because of their rebelliousness, God sent poisonous snakes among them. God told Moses to set up a likeness of a snake and everyone who looked at the snake would be healed and not die (Numbers 21:8). Jesus used this event to explain He would be lifted up (on the cross) and, “everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

158. John, and John the Baptist

John, the disciple, provided interesting details about Jesus, supporting the view he was an eyewitness to the events. Though he told us the situation of John the Baptist and the controversy over Jesus' group baptizing many, he stated, "although, it was not Jesus who baptized but his disciples." (John 4:2)

The Baptist was not distressed by Jesus' popularity. He acknowledged he was the forerunner to prepare people for the coming of the Christ. (John 3:28) At a wedding, the bridegroom was the most important man. The best man (the bridegroom's best friend) was full of joy when the bridegroom comes. So, when Christ came, it delighted John the Baptist. The Baptist considered himself an earthly person while Jesus was a heavenly one. Jesus was the Christ who came from God and spoke the words of God. God placed everything in the hand of his son.

The New Testament scholar, William Barclay, commented that in ancient times, if a man wished to give his approval of an agreement or document, he would affix his seal to the foot of it. The person who accepted the witness of Jesus sets their seal on his words. Barclay also stated that in Hebrew thought God gave to the prophets a measure of the Spirit. They might understand the words they were to speak, but not the full significance of them. To the Son, God gave the Spirit without limit. "For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands." (John 3:34-35) Jesus' words were true.

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36)

159. Sermons from John (part 1): Jacob's Well

Jesus left Judea with his disciples to go to Galilee. "Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee." (John 4:1-2)

They would save two or three days by going through Samaria rather than travelling on the east side of the Jordan River and then crossing west into Galilee. When Jews of the north country (Galilee) wished to go to Jerusalem (in Judea) they would normally take the longer trans-Jordan route to avoid the hated Samaritans.

Hatred between Jews and Samaritans stemmed from the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) in 722 B.C. The Assyrians exiled many of the Israelites to Mesopotamia and brought other people groups into the region of the Northern Kingdom. After the Babylonians conquered Judah, the Southern Kingdom, in 586 B.C., the Jews (people of Judah or Judea) spent about seventy years in Babylon. Then Cyrus of Persia allowed them to return to their homeland and rebuild Jerusalem. They believed they were God's only chosen people, and the people of the north (Samaritans) were a mixed and adulterated race who had tried to stop them from rebuilding the temple and the city of Jerusalem in the 400s B.C.

Through the years, hatred bred more hatred. If Jews from Galilee passed to and from Jerusalem's festivals through Samaria expected insult, or worse, if they traveled through Samaria. It astonished everyone that Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well to offer her

the gift of spiritual water—eternal life. (John 4:7-10) The well where Jesus met the woman was Jacob's well.

160. Sermons from John (part 2): Living Water

John, in chapters three and four of his gospel, showed one way Jesus taught spiritual truth. Talking to Nicodemus in chapter three, Jesus spoke of a birth, something familiar, then shows how a person must also have a spiritual birth. The spiritual birth came when a person believed in the Son of Man. "Everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:15)

At Jacob's well in chapter four, Jesus started his discussion with the Samaritan woman by asking for a drink of water. The surprised woman could not fathom the thought that a Jew would even speak to a Samaritan woman, let alone drink from her water pot. Old English versions translated figuratively, "for Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." (John 4:9b) Jews and Samaritans did not use vessels in common. Newer versions placed the comment in parentheses, an explanation by the narrator, not a statement by the woman. "(For Jews do not associate with Samaritans)." (John 4:9b)

Either way, we got the point. Jews and Samaritans did not get along, but Jesus and the woman spoke freely to each other, and Jesus showed her a deeper spiritual meaning. Spiritual birth, as described by Jesus to Nicodemus, was the start of a new life in a right relationship with God. Jews had a long history of using thirst to represent a desire for God, and water to symbolize the means of satisfying that desire. Isaiah wrote of a promise that the chosen people would draw water with joy from the wells of salvation. (Is. 12:3) In a vision, Ezekiel saw the river of life. (Ezekiel 47:1-12) Jesus' claim to be the one who gave the water of life pointed to him as the Christ (Messiah).

In the Psalms, we found a couple of statements about how the Old Testament viewed the thirst for water as a symbol of a soul thirsting for the living God. "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." (Psalm 42:2) "For with you is the fountain of life." (Psalm 36:9)

Augustine wrote an article called *Confessions*. He wrote, "O Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in You."

161. Sermons from John (part 3): Where Should we Worship?

Somehow, the Samaritan woman's thoughts turned to worship. Some suggested Jesus' request that the woman should get her husband reminded her of her past life and she felt the need to ask God for help. She asked Jesus, who she now recognized as a prophet, where should one worship. The tradition of the Samaritans was Mount Gerizim was the proper site of worship. This mountain was visible from the well where she met Jesus. Jews worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem.

The Assyrians who had conquered and exiled the people of Israel from the Northern Kingdom to Assyria and brought other exiled people to Samaria, where they settled in colonies. Each nation brought their own gods and traditions, so soon Samaria became a melting pot of various people groups. There was a scourge of lions in the area that killed many people. The king of Assyria ordered a priest of the Jews to be sent to Samaria to teach the people how to worship the God of the land (the Lord God). He surmised improper worship must have led to the attack of

the lions. (II Kings 17) "They worshiped the LORD, but they also appointed all sorts of their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high places." (II Kings 17:32)

With this background, one could understand the woman's her curiosity, "I can see you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." (John 4:19-20)

Charlotte Elliott was raised in a Christian family and went through a period of sickness and loneliness. She felt she needed a personal saviour but wanted to cleanse her life before becoming a Christian. A pastor, Dr. Ceser Molan, was visiting her father, and she asked him what she should do to prepare herself to come to Christ. He answered, "Come just as you are." She committed her life to Christ that day and wrote the hymn 'Just as I am', one of over one hundred hymns she wrote.

The question in the Samaritan woman's mind was like that of Charlotte Elliot. Where can I worship God? Jesus' answer was incorporated into a hymn by William Cowper:

Where're thy people meet,
There they behold thy mercy seat;
Where're they seek thee, thou shalt be found.
And every place is hallowed ground.

Jesus declared, "... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth... God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4:21-24)

162. Jesus Heals (part 1): Healing at a Distance

After meeting the woman at the well and spending two days with the Samaritans, Jesus entered the region of the Sea of Galilee. Most of the Galileans welcomed him, but he went to Cana rather than to his hometown of Nazareth. Jesus had said, "a prophet has no honour in his own country." (John 4:44) While Jesus was in Cana, a nobleman came all the way from Capernaum to implore Jesus to come and heal his son, who was at the point of death. It was unusual for an important person to make such a journey when he could send a servant or a slave. The journey of fifteen miles would have taken several hours. Yet this man came himself to beg Jesus for healing. Unexpectedly, Jesus seemed to rebuke the man, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders... you will never believe." (John 4:48)

Whether Jesus spoke mainly to the crowd around him or to the nobleman, or both, was uncertain. The man had only one concern, "Please come down before my child dies." (John 4:49) Jesus told him, "You may go. Your son will live." (John 4:50)

John used his story to show two spiritual truths. One truth was Jesus' power was not limited by distance (space). Ordinarily, a healer would be present with the one to be healed. The Son of God had power that overcame time and space. Another truth was that some people believed in Jesus because of signs and wonders, but there was a better faith. One who believed in Jesus because of who he was and the words he spoke has a superior faith.

The nobleman (royal official) believed Jesus' word and returned home to find his son started to improve the moment Jesus had said, "Your son will live."

Prior to his death, Jesus comforted his disciples by telling them, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves." (John 14:11) Believing Jesus was in the Father because of the words he spoke was a

grander faith than believing in him because of signs and wonders. But most important was to believe in him—his character and his nature.

163. Jesus Heals (part 2): Healing on the Sabbath

“Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.” (Ex 20:8-10) “... that thy manservant nor thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.” (Deuteronomy 5:14)

The people were to remember they had been slaves in Egypt. They had no choice but to work when told to work when slaves. Now, under God’s direction, there was freedom to rest and think about what God had done for them.

John described Jesus going to Jerusalem for a feast. “After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” (John 5:1) We do not know what feast was being celebrated. If it was the Passover feast, one would expect John to specify it. One authority purposed the Jewish New Year Feast of Trumpets.

Jesus appeared at the pool in Jerusalem called Bethsaida, where invalids gathered, hoping to be healed. An infirm man, unable to move to the water at the appropriate time had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. Jesus asked him, “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6) The man responds, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred.” (John 5:7) Jesus heals the man and tells him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” (John 5:11) The man did this. But the Jewish leaders objected to the man carrying his mat on the Sabbath.

164. God is Working on the Sabbath

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had developed rules and regulations of Sabbath observance that missed the mark. Sabbath celebration was a time to experience joy in the Lord and to rest after a week of toil. After creation was complete and needed no further work, God rested. Though no more creation was required, certain works of God did not stop. It was the responsibility of the Son of God to continue His work. “Jesus said, ‘My Father is always at work to this very day, and I too am working’.” (John 5:17) The work of the Son, Jesus, is the same type of work that the Father does. “... whatever the Father does the Son also does.” (John 5:19)

There started, beginning in the late Middle Ages, a religious philosophy called Deism. The word came from the Latin word for God, *Deus*. The core of the philosophy was that God created the universe and life, then set it in motion like a machine that would run itself. Scientists had discovered how planets revolved around the sun and were understanding the mechanisms of nature. They assumed people could find truth by reasoning it.

In John, Jesus told us something different. The Father continued to work in the world and His relationship with the Son, a relationship of love, was so close the Son followed the example of the Father, even to giving life... raising the dead. “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.” (John 5:21) “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24)

165. Is Jesus for Real?

“My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” (John 5:17) In calling God his own father, Jesus made himself equal with God. This statement angered the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Later in the chapter, John used the words of Jesus to show there were several witnesses that testify to the truth of Jesus' identity. Jesus could testify himself, but Jesus knew one witness was not valid in a court. He needed at least two witnesses. “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.” (John 5:31)

John the Baptist was a witness to who Jesus was. “I have seen and testify that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:34) Jesus' work, miracles, and teachings testify the Father sent him. (John 5:36) The scriptures testified about Jesus, who gave life to those who came to him. (John 5:39-40) Jesus mentioned they have never heard the voice of God nor seen his form. (John 5:38) Jesus spoke with the voice of God and represented God's form. Moses wrote of Jesus as the prophet who would come. “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him... and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.” (Deuteronomy 18:15, 17) Jesus told the Jewish leaders, “Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?” (John 5:45-47)

The prophets in the Old Testament scriptures were, “trying to find out the time and circumstance to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” (I Peter 1:11)

166. What is it?

The Lord promised that the children of Israel would have food to eat. In the morning, they rose and looked at the wilderness where they had camped and saw a layer of dew on the ground. The NIV expresses it this way, “... in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, ‘What is it?’ for they did not know what it was.” (Ex. 16:13-15)

“What is it?” This was the English translation of the word *manna*. Exodus 16:31, that appeared in its untranslated form in the NIV. With manna, God's chosen people survived their wilderness travel. This was their food for forty years. (Ex 16:35) The people could grind the manna and cook it in a pot or make it into cakes. “It tasted like wafers made with honey.” (Ex. 16:31) and “tasted like something made with olive oil.” (Num. 11:7-9)

If they kept the manna for the next day, it developed worms and stank... except on the Sabbath. Miraculously, the people could collect twice as much manna on the day before the Sabbath and the meal remained edible. Thus, no gathering was necessary on the Sabbath. This was food, bread, sent by the Lord from heaven to sustain the lives of His people.

167. More Sermons from John (part 1): Bread

All four Gospels recorded the feeding of the five thousand. John described the feeding of five thousand men in his sixth chapter. Following the previous study about manna, the bread of heaven, we turn to miraculous bread from the one who came down from heaven.

It was spring, near the time of Passover. Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee to the eastern side. Jesus and his disciples went up the side of a mountain and Jesus sat down. Looking out, he saw a large group of people coming toward him.

The ground east of the Sea of Galilee rose sharply to the area known now as the Golan Heights. Jesus sat and watched the crowd approach. They had followed him "because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick." (John 6:2) They saw Jesus as a powerful wonderworker who might become a political force but did not appreciate the deep spiritual significance of his ministry. Later, they wanted to make him king.

John, an eyewitness, pointed out two disciples who spoke to Jesus about the crowd. Jesus asked Philip, who was from the nearby town of Bethsaida (John 1:44), where they might buy bread for the multitude. Andrew brought to Jesus's attention a boy with a lunch of five barley cakes and two small fish. John the writer uses a different Greek word for the fish than the other three Gospels. *Ichthys* would be the ordinary word for fish, but John uses *ospario* which means small fish that were used as a relish to eat with the barley cakes. The fish might have been very small.

Jesus took the small lunch, gave thanks, possibly the Jewish thanksgiving: "Blessed art thou, Oh Lord our God, king of the universe, who bringeth forth bread from the earth." He distributed the barley cakes and fish to the disciples, who handed it to the crowd. When everyone had eaten enough, the disciples filled twelve baskets with leftovers. The men, hunger satisfied, decided Jesus would make an excellent king. (John 6:15)

168. More Sermons from John (part 2): Believe

"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:29) Jesus escaped from the people who wanted to make him king. They saw him multiply the bread and with such a king, their bellies would always be full. They did not fully understand who Jesus was or his spiritual message. He went up a mountain to be by himself. The disciples waited until evening, then got into a boat and sailed toward Capernaum.

Darkness fell, and a strong wind blew across the water. The disciples caught sight of a figure coming toward them over the water. They were terrified. It was Jesus who said, "It is I; don't be afraid." (John 6:20) Jesus got into the boat, and they all landed at their destination.

The Next day, the crowd had crossed to the area where Jesus was and found him. He told them they searched for him because he had fed them and only wanted him to continue to provide them with food. Despite this, Jesus used the occasion to present spiritual truth, that life was in him who came down from heaven and gave life to the world. (John 6:33) Reflecting on the time and effort they had spent finding him, he told them they are working for the wrong food. He offered them the food that endured to eternal life. (John 6:27) The crowd asked, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:29)

Guide me now thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but though art mighty,
Hold me with thy powerful hand;

Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
Feed me till I want no more,
Feed me till I want no more.

By William Williams 1748 Translated by Peter Williams 1771

169. Nature of God (part 1): I Am

It is not surprising when God spoke to Moses and told him, “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt...” (Ex. 3:10) Moses asked the name of the God who they were to follow. The people of Egypt had many gods, and the Hebrew slaves will know of many of them and maybe this God who spoke to Moses would have a name like Horus or Osiris. God answers Moses, saying, “‘I AM WHO I AM.’ This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Ex 3:14)

This is a good passage to start a discussion of I AM. The relationship of these words in the Hebrew language to the present name of God was an interesting and enlightening study. The Jewish people do not pronounce the name of God out of reverence for his name. It was unclear what the proper pronunciation should be. They wrote it YHWH but when a Jewish person read the scripture, they would insert the Hebrew word ‘my Lord.’ Yet the name YHWH carried a deep meaning, for it expressed the thought that ‘I AM’ was a self-existent God. He had life in Himself. He was not derived from any other being or power. Jesus said, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.” (John 5:35)

Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own authority, but that I speak these things as the Father has taught me.” (John 8:28) William Barclay translated this verse, “When you lift up the Son of Man then you will know that I am who I am...” In John 8:23 Jesus said, “I am from above. You are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins. If you do not believe me that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.”

170. Nature of God (part 2): God Provides

The Feast of Tabernacles was at hand, and Jesus’ brothers prepared to go up to Jerusalem to celebrate. Jesus, intent on following his Father’s direction, planned to remain a little longer in Galilee. After the festival started, Jesus went secretly to Jerusalem.

The ‘tabernacles’ referred to the temporary booths that families set up around the temple in Jerusalem or other open areas. Sometimes these structures were in garden’s or on the flat roofs of people’s homes. The people were to live in these places for a week to commemorate the wilderness journey of their ancestors. As water was a vital commodity in the desert, so the festival was used to thank God for providing water for His people.

Each morning, the priest would take a sacred golden pitcher to the pool of Siloam and gather a portion of water. The people were to look back in history and think of the time when their ancestors, only three days after escaping Egypt, in the desert called Shur, ran out of drinking water. They became very thirsty. The water in a nearby pool was too bitter to drink. They grumbled against Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?” (Ex. 15:24)

Moses cried out to the Lord and God showed them wood from a certain tree and told them to throw the wood into the pool. When they obeyed, the water became fit to drink. They called the place Marah (bitter) and travelled on to Elim, where there were springs of water and camped there.

As God provided water for His people in the dry wilderness, so God assured his people He will provide for them when they reached Canaan. Deuteronomy chapter eleven explains the Lord would provide water, "there will be water in that land to water the fields." It would not be a land needing irrigation like Egypt. The Lord would provide rain in its season, "then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains." (Deuteronomy 11:14)

As God cared for the land that provided for His people, so He showed His care for His people. We could be sure as we sought His will for our lives that He cared for us as well. "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." (I Peter 5:7)

171. Water

The annual Feast of Tabernacles was to remember the suffering of their Israelite forefathers in the wilderness. Those celebrating the feast lived in makeshift booths called tabernacles, to recall the hardship of living in temporary structures. The experience of the festival also underlined valuable spiritual lessons. Each day, a parade of people followed the priest to the pool of Siloam, where he took a portion of water in a sacred golden vessel and returned through the Water Gate to the temple in Jerusalem.

The people who followed, waving willow and palm branches, sang the *Hallel*, Psalm 113 to 118. Near the end of Psalm 118, we read, "With boughs in hand, join in the festival procession up to the horns of the altar." (Psalm 118:27) The choir singing these songs gave thanks to the Lord for the spiritual gift of salvation. (Psalm 118:21) They rejoice for, "This is the day which the LORD hath made." (Psalm 118:24a) They sing of one who comes in the name of the LORD. (Psalm 118:26) This is appropriate for soon the one will give his message.

Salvation is mentioned, "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD." (Psalm 116:13)

These verses are from the *Hallel*, which comes from the term 'to praise.' "Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, you his servants; praise the name of the LORD." (Psalm 113:1) The verses moved from the provision of physical water, "Tremble, earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool, the hard rock into springs of water..." (Psalm 114:7-8), to the water of salvation. "I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation." (Psalm 118:21)

172. Charles Wesley Hymns: I know that my Redeemer Lives

This hymn by Charles Wesley was first published in *Hymns & Sacred Poems* in 1742. The original version had twenty-three four-line stanzas and was entitled *Rejoicing in Hope* (website: hymnary.org). "... at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen; ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (I Peter 1:7b-9). The hymn is normally sung to a tune written by composer George Frederic Handel, the composer of *Messiah*.

1

I know that my Redeemer lives,
And ever prays for me;
A token of His love He gives,
A pledge of liberty.

2

I find Him lifting up my head;
He brings salvation near;
His presence makes me free indeed,
And He will soon appear.

3

He wills that I should holy be,
What can withstand His will?
The counsel of His grace in me
He surely shall fulfill.

4

Jesus, I hang upon Thy word;
I steadfastly believe
Thou wilt return and claim me, Lord,
And to Thyself receive.

5

When God is mine and I am His,
Of paradise possessed,
I taste unutterable bliss
And everlasting rest.

A good summary verse was in Job after he has suffered terribly, he says,
“For I know my redeemer liveth,
And that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:
And though after my skin worms destroy this body,
Yet in my flesh shall I see God:
Whom I shall see for myself,
And mine eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19:25-27).

Each stanza in this modern version of Wesley’s hymn carried an important message of rejoicing in hope. The first is with Job’s proclamation, “I know that my redeemer liveth.” (Job 19:25). Lifting of the head was the key element in the second stanza, highlighted in the Psalms,
“Now shall my head be lifted up,
Above mine enemies round about me:
Therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy;
I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.” (Psalm 27:6)

In the third stanza was the call to holiness, “... ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.” (I Thess. 4:1-3a)

Our hope is in Jesus, and he will come to claim us. Jesus said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be

also.” The hymn concluded with the promise that we are God’s and will receive our reward, if not now amidst the suffering of the world, certainly later when we will have paradise, bliss, and everlasting rest. “... to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you...” (I Peter 1:4)

173. Jesus Is (part 1): Light

Probably in Jerusalem, at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus taught in the temple near the place people gave their offerings. Jesus stated, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12)

As he did so often, Jesus used everyday things that were easy to understand, to explain spiritual truth. Light shone so a person could see clearly. It helps us as we travel from one place to another. Jesus, as a spiritual light, helped us with our travel through life. Light overcame darkness. Darkness could represent evil, which hindered us from living as we should. As with Jesus’ parables, the familiar helped us understand the deeper meaning. John followed Jesus’ teaching of light throughout his Gospel. The early verses of John’s gospel reminded us of the early verses of Genesis. After the creation, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth....,” (Gen 1:1) God said, “Let there be light and there was light.” (Gen 1:3)

Light that humans see is a tiny part of the electromagnetic energy which travels through this universe as waves at 186,000 miles per second. Examples of waves shorter than visible light are gamma rays, x-rays, and ultraviolet light. Longer waves are infrared, microwaves, and radio waves. Light is ‘more than meets the eye!’

Jesus used light to teach about himself. His life was the light which shines in the darkness (evil) of the world. (John 1:4-5) John the Baptist was not the light. Jesus was the light to enlighten every man. (John 1:9) “Everyone who does evil hates the light..., but whoever lives by the truth comes into the light. (John 3:20-21)

174. Jesus Is (part 2): Life

Jesus, the Son of God, was life. John in his Gospel tried many ways to convey to the reader who Jesus was. He was the Word, Greek word *logos*. There was a depth of meaning in the Greek word *logos* that commentators tried to express. F. F. Bruce suggested we “may begin to do it justice” if we understand it to mean “word of action.” It was the expression of God with reason and action attached.

John said about Jesus, “In him was life...” (John 1:4) This meant more than that Jesus was alive—that was obvious. At the raising of Lazarus, Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life.” (John 11:25) To his disciples, he said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” (John 14:6) He was the creator of life, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made...” (John 1:2) and in him we had our life, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.” (John 1:4) Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has passed over from death to life.” (John 5:24)

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (John 1:14) He was born into this world as a human being. He is one of us. Though one of us, he was the special, divine Son of

God described as the one and only Son. (John 1:14) By believing in Jesus' name, "to all who did receive him... he gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12)

When John the Baptist saw Jesus passing by, he pointed him out to two of his disciples. He said, "Look, the lamb of God..." (John 1:29b) He was the sacrificial lamb who died in our place carrying the sin of the world to the cross.

175. Jesus Is (part 3): The Good Shepherd

David wrote, "The LORD is my shepherd." (Psalm 23:1) Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." (John 10:11) What did the good shepherd do? He entered the sheep pen by the gate. He called his sheep by name and led them out of the pen and went ahead of them. They followed, for they knew his voice. A good shepherd would lay down his life for the sheep. Jesus knew his people as God, his Father in heaven, knew him.

Thieves and robbers came to kill and destroy. They did not use the gate, but climbed over the wall or fence. Others might lead the sheep, but when a wolf came, they abandoned the sheep and ran away.

Jesus was the good shepherd, not only of the Jewish people but also sheep in other sheep pens, where sheep listened to his voice and followed him. "I have other sheep and my sheep know me." (John 10:14) He said he would, "bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:16)

In this parable of the good shepherd, there was a secondary parable where Jesus was the gate (or door) of the sheep pen. As He was the gate through which his sheep pass, so to was he, "the way the truth and the life." (John 14:6)

Saviour like a shepherd lead us,
Much we need thy tender care;
In thy pleasant pasture feed us,
For our use thy folds prepare:

Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus,
Thou hast bought us, thine we are:
Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus,
Thou hast bought us, thine we are.

By Dorothy Thrupp, 1836

176. Actions as Parables

Jesus often taught spiritual truth by analogy, comparing the truth to an easy-to-understand example. His parables were stories of common occurrences of daily life with a deeper spiritual meaning. By healing a blind man, Jesus made it possible for light to enter his eyes, causing him to see. So, Jesus is the light of the world. He caused people to see spiritual truth. (John 9:5)

"... he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes." (John 9:6) Though the method of healing, making mud of spittle and dust, seems somewhat disgusting to us, healers have used it throughout history. Saliva from a fasting person was supposed to be highly efficacious. Jesus used an acceptable, traditional method of healing. Jesus instructed the blind man to wash in the Pool of Siloam. John told us *siloam* means 'sent.' Was

this an important word in the story because God sent Jesus from heaven to do the work of God (John 9:3-4), or was 'sent' important because the water was sent through a tunnel from the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley?

The tunnel bringing water was an impressive feat of engineering (II Chron 32:2-8, 30, Isaiah 22:9-11, II Kings 20:20). In 1880, two boys waded in the pool and serendipitously discovered a tablet which describes the construction of the tunnel. Workers started at both ends and tunnelled through solid rock to meet in the middle. The distance was 1,200 cubits, and the tunnel was 100 cubits underground. This water saved Jerusalem during the siege of the city by the Assyrian general Sennacherib at the time of Hezekiah and Isaiah.

It was clear from the story, the man was born blind, and Jesus healed him (John 9:7). He went to the pool blind and emerged seeing. Lesson one is it is not always sin that causes apparent misfortunes. (John 9:3) Lesson two was Jesus, light of the world, did the work of his Father. (John 9:3)

177. The Big Question: What Must we Do?

“Then they asked him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’” (John 6:28-29)

Food keeps us alive. The standard Jewish prayer before meals said, ‘God bringest forth bread from the earth.’ This nourishes our physical body. We labour to get money and buy food, but God is the ultimate source.

Food could also come miraculously. God provided manna in the wilderness and Jesus fed over five thousand, then four thousand, from a few loaves and fish. Jesus spiritualized bread. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.” (John 6:35) “He who comes to me will never go hungry.” (John 6:35a) Also, he said, “For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” (John 6:33)

An average person could survive without food for three weeks, but without water for only three days. We think of food and water as daily needs to maintain life. As with bread, Jesus spiritualized water too. “... whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35b)

Jesus also said, “I am the way the truth and the life. (John 14:6) He showed us he is the way to life and life itself.

What was the Father’s will? “For it is my Father’s will that everyone who looks to the Son and believes him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:40) The work of God was belief in Jesus, reliance on his sacrificial death as our salvation and living a life following the example of our Saviour. The will of the Father was for us to have eternal life.

178. Jesus’ Words: Lazarus Come Forth

John’s record of the signs performed by Jesus during his earthy ministry reached its peak with the raising of Lazarus after being four-days dead. There was much more we would like to know about this event, especially from Lazarus himself. Tennyson’s words expressed our thoughts.

When Lazarus left his charnel-cave,
And home to Mary’s house return’d,
Was this demanded—if he yearn’d
To hear her weeping by his grave?

'Where were thou, brother, those four days?'
There lives no record of reply,
Which telling what it is to die
Had surely added praise to praise.

From every house the neighbours met,
The streets were fill'd with joyful sound,
A solemn gladness even crown'd
The purple brows of Olivet.

Behold a man raised up by Christ!
The rest remaineth unreveal'd;
He told it not; or something seal'd
The lips of that Evangelist.

A. Tennyson, In Memoriam, Canto 31

This event persuaded many friends present to put their faith in Jesus. But a few 'friends' hurried off to tell the Pharisees what Jesus had done. The Chief Priests and the Pharisees called a meeting! "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation." (John 11:48)

179. Adversaries of Jesus (part 1): The Chief Priests and Sadducees

At the time of Moses and the establishment of the nation of Israel, they selected Aaron as the High Priest and men from his descendants were to be High Priests as time went on. They kept this tradition strictly, so at the time of David, a man named Zadok of this lineage was High Priest. The country of Judah, conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, endured the rule of Babylonia, Persia, Alexander the Great, Greek Kings, and finally Rome. The High Priesthood followed the lineage of Aaron until the Greek King, Antiochus IV. This Selucid king ordered the Jews to accept Greek customs and appointed Menaleus, who was not in Aaron's line, as the High Priest in 171 B. C. Thereafter the position of High Priest was a political appointment.

Sadducees were a party of influential aristocratic Jews. The High Priest, in Jerusalem, and under him the aristocratic Chief Priests, struggled to maintain their authority under the ruling power. Like many politicians today, their primary goal was to stay in power. At the time of Jesus, Rome was the ruling power. They allowed Jews some autonomy, but the local authority was in danger of being dissolved should they not keep order among their people.

Thus, the high priest, Caiaphas and the chief priests and Sadducees were in a panic when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and more and more people were believing in and following Jesus. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation." (John 11:47-48)

The signs Jesus performed influenced the people and drew their loyalty from the Jewish leaders. More irksome to the Sadducees who did not believe in a resurrection or life after death, was his teaching about eternal life. So, we had a statement by Caiaphas to the Sanhedrin, "You know nothing at all, you do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." (John 11:49-59) John interpreted this statement of the High

Priest: "He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one." (John 11:51-52)

180. Adversaries of Jesus (part 2): The Scribes and the Pharisees

New Testament authors often linked the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes were an essential profession in ancient times, for they did the reading and writing. Their skills also included translating. They were the men who translated incoming mail for the king and wrote the letters and documents, translating them into an international language like Aramaic or Greek and sending them. When they received a document, a scribe translated it into the language of the area and informed the recipient of the message.

Some scribes became teachers of the law. Ezra of the Old Testament was a scribe and teacher of the law. But not all scribes in Judah were honest men as recorded in Jeremiah, "How can you say 'we are wise, for we have the law of the LORD,' when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely." (Jeremiah 8:8) Thus, over the years, the scribes had been building an interpretation of the Mosaic Law contrary to its spiritual principles.

The party of the Pharisees developed through the years between the Old and New Testament. The name likely comes from a Hebrew word meaning 'to separate.' So, they were the 'separated ones.' They studied the new version of the law and tried to live their lives according to its precepts. They thought that by keeping the law promoted by the scribes, it separated them from the uncleanness of the world. Jesus said of them, "They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is for men to see... they love the place of honor at banquets... and to have men call them Rabbi." (Matt. 23:4-7)

So, because many of the Pharisees had abandoned the spiritual and ethical demands of the law, rather than repent, they agreed Jesus should die.

181. Adversaries of Jesus (part 3): Judas Iscariot

Judas was one of Jesus' disciples. In the Gospels, they often referred him to as 'the one who betrayed him.' Judas objected to the waste of money when Mary used an expensive perfume to anoint Jesus' feet. At the Last Supper, we are told the devil had been at work on Judas. "The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas to betray Jesus." (John 13:2)

Jesus knew what was happening. "... Jesus knew in his spirit and testified, 'I tell you this truth, one of you is going to betray me.'" (John 13:21) The disciples did not know whom Jesus was referring to, so it was necessary for Jesus to point him out by handing Judas a piece of bread. "As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him." (John 13:27)

The political and religious leaders in Jerusalem had already decided that Jesus had to be killed. Why would Judas decide to betray his master and his friend? Yes, we know Judas skimmed money from the group treasury, but did thirty pieces of silver present such a temptation to Judas that he could not resist it? It was the price of a slave.

So, the motive for Judas's betrayal was obscure. Some would excuse Judas because they believed Judas was sure Jesus would miraculously escape from death. The devil certainly was a

factor in Judas's decision. We are told how to escape of the devil's influence by the New Testament writer James, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7) When the temple guard arrested Jesus, Judas led the group, including some chief priests and elders and pointed out Jesus by kissing him. (Luke 22:47-53)

182. Jesus Comforts and Instructs His Disciples (part 1)

Jesus knew his execution on the cross was very close. He expressed his feelings and gave important information to his disciples. Jesus showed his disciples his troubled spirit and states, "I tell you the truth, one of you shall betray me." (John 13:21) Later, he tells his disciples he is going away, and they cannot follow him now. (John 13:26) Peter picked up on Jesus' distress and asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." (John 13:17) Jesus replied, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!" (John 13:38)

There was a reason for the disciples to be troubled—Jesus had upset their traditional philosophy of what makes a person great. He did this by washing the dirty feet of the disciples. He, as their Lord, humbled himself to do the job of a lowly slave or servant. This he did as an example for them to follow. They were to serve others rather than be served. As Jesus came not to be served, "but to serve and give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

"... Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.'" (John 13:21) The disciples did not know what to think. Judas left to betray him.

And so, Jesus comforted his disciples with the words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you." (John 14:1)

183. Jesus Comforts and Instructs His Disciples (part 2)

Jesus offered his disciples a place in his Father's house. "... if it was not so I would have told you." This statement said more than 'there is a place for you.' Perhaps Jesus was saying, 'you should know me well enough now to realize that I love you and I will take care of you and I and the Father are one so whatever the father has is mine as well.' The following verses clarified this relationship and stated that, "No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father, and Jesus answered in John 14:9-14. "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me." (John 14:10) Jesus had been with his disciples for three years. He taught the truth, lived as the Son of the Father, Philip should believe in him for those reasons. "Or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves." (John 14:11)

184. Jesus Comforts and Instructs His Disciples (part 3)

Jesus said, "I will not leave you as orphans." (John 14:28) The disciples were not to be troubled because Jesus was going away, for the Father was to send them a comforter to be with them forever. The word used is the Greek word *paraclete* which means someone who is called to 'come alongside to help.' We note that this was another comforter (or counselor in NIV) for

Jesus himself is the original *paraclete* and the Holy Spirit will be 'another' *paraclete*. (John 14:16)

This *paraclete*, Jesus stated, was with them now and will be in them. He was the 'Spirit of Truth.' (John 14:17). The Father would send the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name. He would teach them. He would remind them of Jesus' words. Chapter 16 continued the thought of the *paraclete*, the Spirit of Truth, "... he will guide you into all the truth... and he will tell you what is to come" (John 16:13), he will bring glory to Jesus (John 16:14), take from Jesus and make it known to the disciples. (John 16:15).

John 16 informed the disciples about the work that the Spirit would do in the world. He would convict the world of guilt regarding sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). Chapter 16 ended with these words of Jesus to the disciples: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33).

185. John 17: Jesus Prays

In John chapter 17, Jesus prayed for himself, for his disciples, and for all who believe in him. He prayed: "Father, glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." (John 17:1) It is difficult for us to see a humiliating death on a cross as glorifying, but it was through that means that everyone could gain eternal life. Jesus stated, "this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3) They, in this verse, was people of the world.

Jesus prayed for his disciples who would remain in the world when Jesus was no longer in this world as he was before. He did not pray God would take them from the world but that, "you protect them against the evil one." (John 17:15) As the Father sent his Son into the world, so now the Son sends his disciples "into the world." (John 17:18)

In the last verses of this chapter, Jesus prayed for those who would believe in him through the disciple's messages. He desired all believers would be one as the Father and Son were one. "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one and we are one—I in them and you in me." (John 17:22-23)

186. John the Disciple

We have been following the disciple, John, as he followed Christ. We learned details that indicated John was an eyewitness to many events described in the Gospels (I John 1, 2). The historians who wrote of the Christian Church during the last years of the first century A.D. agreed John was the leader of the church in the Roman province of Asia. We also learned an eagle represented the Gospel of John because John saw the spiritual truth given by Jesus clearly.

John wrote about the last days of Jesus before his ascension to heaven. After Jesus finished his words of comfort to his disciples, he led them across the Kidron Valley, which separated Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. There, in an olive grove, the temple guards under the control of the Chief priests and Pharisees arrested Jesus. During the arrest, Peter drew his sword and cut off the right ear of the High Priest's servant. John also told us the servant's name is Malchus (John 18:10). Luke, a Gentile physician, and historian, was not with the group, but he

included the details that it was the right ear, and Jesus touched the ear to heal the servant (Luke 22:50-51)

So, they arrested Jesus and took him to the house of Annas, High Priest from 6 A.D. to 18 A.D. Annas questioned Jesus and then sent to Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas and legal High Priest (Caiaphas was High Priest for 18 years, appointed in 18 A.D.). Caiaphas had said it was better for one man to die for the people. He meant if Jesus died, the people would not cause a disturbance so the chief priests would maintain their authority and the Jewish nation would continue to exist. In fact, his statement was correct, but with a much different meaning. The sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross was how every person who believed might have eternal life. (John 18:14)

187. The Other Disciple and Peter

The temple guards who arrested Jesus first took him to Annas, a previous High Priest who was father-in-law to Caiaphas, the appointed High Priest. Matthew's Gospel told us that all the disciples left Jesus and fled. Though Jesus had tried to warn his disciples of these coming events, they were not psychologically prepared for what was happening. Even so, Peter and the other disciple, who knew the High Priest's servants, entered the inner court of the High Priest's residence. This 'other disciple' must be John himself, though he never identifies himself by name in his Gospel.

Peter, ill-prepared for these events and in unfamiliar territory, tried to make himself inconspicuous as a bystander. John saw him just outside the gate of the courtyard and asked the maidservant in charge of the gate to let him into the courtyard. As Peter entered, the maidservant asked him, "Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?" (John 18:17). We read Peter's answer, "I am not." (John 18:17) Poor confused, frightened Peter. Verses 25-27 told us that Peter stuck to his story and after his third denial of being Jesus' disciple, the rooster crowed.

They sent Jesus, in the early morning, after being questioned by Annas and Caiaphas, to the palace of the Roman procurator, Pilate. (John 18:28)

188. Jesus Reveals Himself to Pilate

The guards took Jesus to the palace of the Roman authority, Pilate. Jews did not enter the building but gathered in the courtyard. They would have been ceremonially unclean, and unable to partake in the Passover, if they went into the building.

Pilate accommodated them and came out to meet them and asked them what charge they had against Jesus. The Jews stated the prisoner was an evildoer, so Pilate told them to judge Jesus themselves according to their law. The Jews answered, "But we have no right to execute anyone." (John 18:31) Pilate went back inside the palace and summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus' answer was, "You are right in saying I am a king, in fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (John 18:37) Jesus also told Pilate what his kingdom comprised. "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." (John 18:36)

John recorded Jesus telling Pilate the ultimate source of the power that would allow his execution, "You would have no power over me if it were not given from above." (John 19: 13) Pilate handed Jesus over to the Jews to be crucified.

189. Jesus Reveals Himself from the Cross

It was Pilate who ordered a sign to be put on the cross 'Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.' These words reflected the statement of Jesus to Pilate saying he was a king and served as a statement of the crime he committed. These words so upset the chief priests that they declared, "We have no king but Caesar." (John 19:15) They wanted the words on the sign changed to: 'he claimed to be king of the Jews.' Pilate would not change the wording.

Jesus showed his concern for those who crucified him, probably including those who mocked him by saying, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) Jesus revealed his concern for the repentant criminal. Putting aside his own suffering, he reassured the man, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43) Jesus showed his concern for his mother by putting her into the hands of his beloved disciple, "When Jesus saw his mother standing there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, 'dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, Here is your mother." (John 19:26-17)

By his statement, "*Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani*" (Matt 27:46, Mark 15:34), which meant, My God, my God why have you forsaken me? Jesus quotes from Psalm 22 (Psalm 22:1a), a psalm seen as a prophecy of the Messiah's death. In his agony on the cross, Jesus displayed his humanity. His exposure to the elements, his lack of food, and especially lack of water combined to give him a terrific thirst, and he cried out, "I thirst!" (John 19:28) At the death of the sinless Son of God, sin was defeated. He accomplished the perfect sacrifice. "It is finished," said the Lord Jesus. (John 19:30)

"Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last." (Luke 23:46)

190. Jesus' Death on a Cross is Revealed by a Prophetic Psalm

Psalm 22

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1.

"But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by man and despised by people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him." (Psalm 22:6-8.

"I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint." (Psalm 22:14.

"My strength is dried up like a potshard, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death." (Psalm 22:15.

"They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." (Psalm 22:18.

"Revere him, all of you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help." (Psalm 22:24.

“Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.” (Psalm 22:30-31).

191. He is Alive

With great respect, two of the secret followers of Jesus took charge of his body, requesting Pilate's consent. Under the Jewish burial customs, they used seventy-five pounds of a mixture of aloes and myrrh and wrapped strips of linen around the body of Jesus and placed it in a new cut tomb near Golgotha. The day of preparation was quiet, but as soon as possible, early Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene made her way to the tomb. (John 38:20-21)

Mary Magdalene saw the stone rolled away from the tomb. She ran to tell Peter and John and they both ran to the tomb. There they saw the strips of linen and the cloth used to cover the head folded up by itself. John saw this and believed he had risen, although did not fully understand, that scripture insisted Jesus must rise from the dead. (John 20:1-9)

This was the place where they had buried Jesus and Mary Magdalene felt drawn to the spot. She grieved for Jesus. How kind he had been to her. Weeping, she looked into the empty tomb... but... lo; it was not empty. There sat two angels who asked her why she was crying. Turning around, she saw the gardener... but... it was not the gardener, but Jesus himself.

In the evening of the first day of the week, the confused and frightened disciples met behind locked doors and suddenly, Jesus appeared to them. “Peace be with you,” he greeted them.

Thomas was not with them that time and when told “we have seen the Lord,” he could not believe it. A week later, in the same meeting place, Jesus met his disciples again. This time Thomas was present, and his doubts vanished. Thomas said, “my Lord and my God.”

John, the disciple, who had been with Jesus during his ministry, ended this chapter with a word to us who read this gospel. “Jesus did many other miraculous signs which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30-31)

192. At the Seaside

Having read the last three sentences of chapter twenty of John's Gospel, we were ready to put the book down because it sounded like a concluding statement. Jesus told Thomas, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed.” (John 20:29) “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30-31) How could we explain chapter 21?

John lived a long life and possibly moved to the Roman province of Asia prior to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. He probably took Jesus' mother Mary to safety there. John was in Asia for many years and became a leader of the Christians there. It may have been at the urging of his fellow Christians that John wrote his Gospel, thus putting in writing the many events of Jesus' ministry that he had often repeated to his fellow Christians.

As an old man, he may have said, “there folks, take this gospel to scribes and get it copied for the churches.” The disciples of John may then have added this chapter using the words

they had heard so often from John's mouth as he had described the great catch of fish on that special morning. "Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way... they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'... They knew it was the Lord.... This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead." (John 21:1-14)

Some evidence for this explanation of chapter was in verse 24, "The disciple that Jesus loved" in mentioned in verse 20. This referred to John. Verse 24 refers to him in the last sentence of the verse: "This is the disciple who testifies to these things, who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true." (John 21:24) Note the pronoun 'we'.

193. By Hook or by Crook

Early in his ministry, Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and saw two brothers Simon, called Peter, and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men." (Matt 4:19) They left their nets and followed Jesus.

Later in his ministry, Jesus sent Peter to get money to pay the temple tax. "Go to the lake and throw out your line," he said. "... take the first fish you catch, open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours." (Matt 17:27)

Still later, after his resurrection, Jesus took Peter aside to clarify and enlarge his commission. They met in a familiar place on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus asked Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?' 'Yes Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.' Again, Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me?' He answered, "Yes Lord. You know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'take care of my sheep.' The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'feed my sheep.' (John 21:15-17)

Jesus then described to Peter some trials he might endure in the future, but ended with the statement, "Follow me." Jesus said he would make Peter a fisher of men and after his resurrection, he gave Peter the responsibility to care for his believers as a shepherd cared for his sheep—to bring people... by hook or crook. A hook symbolized a fisherman, a crook, a shepherd (the crook was a staff with a curved top). If we used this saying to describe Peter's commission, we must change it to... by hook and by crook.

194. Feed my Sheep!

We know Peter took seriously his commission given to him by Jesus, "feed my sheep." In Peter's first letter written to "God's elect, strangers in the world... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," (1 Peter 1:1-2) he then said, "to the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and on who also will share in the glory to be revealed. Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being

examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” (I Peter 5:1-4)

So it was that Peter, as a leading shepherd of a Christian group, wrote to the elders to encourage and instruct them as they led the flock under their care. Peter showed he had the authority by reminding them he was an eyewitness to Christ’s suffering. We understand Jesus’ death, meant by oppressors to be a humiliating experience, became a source of glory.

And if these elders oversaw the flock with loving care, not lording over them but being a good example to them, they, too, will receive “the crown of glory that will never fade away.” (I Peter 5:4b)

195. Early Christian Hymns: Of the Father’s Love Begotten

This ancient hymn was written in 405 CE in Spain by Aurelius Prudentius. This man was a magistrate in northern Spain who came to faith in Christ later in life. He did not produce his sacred poems intending to have them sung. He was the most prominent and prolific Latin sacred poet of his time. The following is a translation by J. M. Neale and H. W. Baker. Neale (1818-1866) was born in England was ordained in the Church of England in 1842 and, though largely ignored in his own time is lauded today for his contributions to the church. Baker (1821-1877) born in England, took Holy Orders in 1844 and was Vicar of Monkland from 1855 to his death. He wrote and translated many hymns. (website: hymnary.org)

1

Of the Father’s love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending He,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see
Evermore and evermore.

2

Oh, that birth forever blessed
When the virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bore the Saviour of our race,
And the babe, the world’s Redeemer,
First revealed his sacred face
Evermore and evermore

3

This is He whom seers and sages
Sang of old with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word.
Now He shines, the long-expected;
Let creation praise its Lord
Evermore and evermore.

4

Let the heights of heav’n adore Him,

Angel hosts his praises sing,
Pow'rs, dominions bow before Him
And extol our God and King.
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Ev'ry voice in concert ring
Evermore and evermore.

5

Christ, to Thee, with God the Father,
And, O Holy Ghost, to Thee
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving
And unending praises be,
Honor, glory and dominion
And eternal victory
Evermore and evermore.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.’” (Rev 1:8) The virgin birth (Matt 1:18), the “long-expected” Jesus is linked inextricably with the Creator (John 1:1-5). The powers bow before Christ. (Eph 1:19b-23, Phil 2:9-11)

196. Greek Philosophy and the Church

When studying the early Christian history, it might be helpful to divide the first century after Jesus into three parts. The first third was the earthly life of Jesus from his birth to his ascension to heaven. The middle third of the century was the primitive church until the Jews in Palestine revolted against the Romans from 66 to 70 A.D. At that point, the Romans conquered Jerusalem and demolished the temple. During the last third of the century, the Church grew, and we have many sources about this period from Christian and non-Christian writers.

John, the disciple of the Lord Jesus, was the author of three epistles and the Revelation in the New Testament. The difficulties facing the Christian Church in the Roman province of Asia differed greatly from the problems in Palestine, largely because of their Greek heritage.

The Greeks had a variety of philosophical ideas, and they loved to have extensive discussions about these ideas. Paul discovered this tendency during his trip to Athens as recorded in Acts 17. “All the Athenians and foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.” (Acts 17:21) So Paul spoke to them about God and Jesus and the resurrection. A few believed Paul’s words, but most either sneered at his words or wanted to discuss the new philosophy even further. (Acts 17:21, 31-34)

Philosophy was also concerned about Greek gods. For instance, they debated about the great god Zeus. Was he just another god or was he more god-like than the other gods and goddesses? Was he possibly the only god? Was he an ancestor of humanity? Paul referred to ideas such as this in his sermon in Athens. (Acts 17:28)

Many ideas crept into the Church. The simple story of Jesus did not make logical sense to some people. Ideas from Greek philosophy kept many from accepting Christ. Other ideas influenced the theology of the Church, raising questions about Jesus’ humanity and his divinity and his relationship to the Father and the Spirit.

197. Words of I John (part 1)

John the disciple followed the Lord Jesus and was an eyewitness to much that occurred during his Lord's ministry. Though John wrote his Gospel of John near the end of the first century, the events recorded took place near the end of the first third of the century and occurred in Palestine.

The location and the events of John's epistles differed from those of John's Gospel. When he wrote his epistles, John was in the Roman province of Asia, which included the western third of what is now Turkey. His audience were a mixed group of people including the original inhabitants, many Greeks, and Jews. Many Jews had emigrated from Palestine because of unrest. Jews in Palestine revolted against Rome from 66 to 70 A.D. This ended when Rome's captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Jewish temple.

The Greeks had a long history of debating philosophy (Acts 17:21) and from this background, certain ideas entered the Church that threatened the truth that Jesus and his disciples taught.

The main wrong belief system that threatened the Church was called Gnosticism. One subgroup was called Docetism. *Gnosis* in Greek means 'knowledge.' Mystery religions claimed they could give that special knowledge to the devotee during initiation rites. This special knowledge provided them with 'salvation.' This salvation saved them from the power of fate.

Other knowledge came from ancient philosophy and seekers who thought it was possible to have this special knowledge and become so pure that what might be sin to the ordinary person would not affect them. They claimed they were so mature and pure that what was sin for ordinary people was not sin for them.

So, John, in his epistle I John, said, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." I John 1:9-10)

198. Words of I John (part 2)

Gnosticism taught that in this world, there is 'spirit' and 'matter.' Spirit included God and was part of the makeup of human beings. Matter included all material things. It taught 'spirit' was entirely good and 'matter' evil.

Groups developed in the Church that tried to bring the Church 'up to date' by inserting these ideas into the basic theology of the Church. They thought the idea of God creating the world was outdated because this new philosophy taught that God as pure spirit could create nothing evil like the material universe. The theory of demiurges developed. These were angel types of creatures that were partly good and partly evil. There was a system of demiurges that started with almost all spirit but with a little material substance. A long line of these beings led to those who were mainly material and evil enough to create the world.

The Christian Church taught that God through Christ created all things. Speaking of the supremacy of Christ, Paul says in Colossians, "He is the image of the Invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and

for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col 1:15-17, see also Genesis 1:1 and John 1 1-4)

199. Docetism

One of the Gnostic religions that crept into the Church was Docetism. This was an attempt by the intellectuals to ‘upgrade’ the original teachings of the Church. If, as Greek philosophy now took for granted, that ‘spirit’ was good, but anything ‘material’ was evil, then Jesus could not have been material. Docetism taught Jesus’ body only seemed to be material. It taught that Jesus was a human body until Christ entered at Jesus’ baptism and then left him before his suffering and death on the cross.

But the first disciples of Jesus knew their master was an actual human being. Especially after his resurrection, they knew him to be as well the Son of God and their divine Lord. Thomas expressed it this way when Jesus, after his resurrection, showed him his wounds, “My Lord and my God.” (John 20:28)

So, John expressed this truth at the beginning of his epistle. “That which is from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard...” (1 John 1:1-3)

200. Jude (part 1): Sources that Jude Uses

Jude was a book showing one very serious problem facing the early Christian Church near the end of the first century A.D. It also presented many perplexing questions for the modern reader.

Who was Jude, the writer? He stated he was the brother of James. But which James? It was likely James the Just, the brother of Jesus, the leader of the early Church in Jerusalem. The people Jude was writing to would know, but modern readers cannot be sure.

Who was Jude writing to? Again, we could not be sure. He wrote to a Christian group, perhaps a congregation in a certain place or perhaps a more scattered group.

Who were the angels referred to in verse 6? We might solve this puzzle by reading an apocryphal book called I Enoch (chapters 6-10). The Christian Church did not consider this apocryphal book scripture, but some Jewish groups might have considered it authoritative. We needed to remember that Jude wrote close to the time when the Dead Sea Scrolls were being copied, studied, and written by the Essene group at Qumran. The Qumran community existed until about 68. Jude likely wrote his letter in the 60s or 70s A.D.

There was a reference to the archangel Michael disputing with the devil. “But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, ‘the Lord rebuke you.’” (Jude 1:9) Where does this come from? Church Father Origen mentioned it and told us it comes from a work called *the Assumption of Moses*. That writing was not scripture.

The Dead Sea Scrolls comprised 930 documents, of which 230 were copies of scripture, 250 were other books common to Judaism and 350 were sectarian works. The literature available

to Jude was more diffuse and less organized than our Bible. Jude was using apocryphal events only as examples of those who were once delivered or those who were later destroyed or imprisoned. In the dispute with the devil, the archangel leaves it to God to rebuke the devil (Jude 1:9).

These questions should not prevent us from understanding the major thrust of Jude's letter: godless men have secretly slipped into the Christian Church. (Jude 1:4)

201. Jude (part 2): The Main Concern

Jude's wrote this letter to challenge false teachings that entered the Church. The truth taught by the Apostles was in danger of being perverted by false believers who had wormed their way into the Church.

One of their teachings reminded us of the words of Paul, who wrote of those who might say, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (Romans 6:1) Jude verse 4 spoke of ungodly people who changed the grace of our God into a license for immorality and denied Jesus Christ our only sovereign and Lord. "The are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." (Jude 1:4)

Others in the Church are called dreamers. Apparently, some claimed to have dreams or visions and claimed to need no authority over them and were slandering celestial beings.

Some in the Church were "grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage." (Jude 1:16) "These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit." (Jude 1:19)

About those who were trying to bring evil into the Church, Jude advised the faithful, "But you dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." (Jude 1:20-21)

202. Doxology

The word 'doxology' came from the Greek word *doxologia* ('doxa' meaning 'glory' and 'logia' meaning 'word'). In the Church, it was used to express glory and praise to God.

When Jewish people prayed, they would often add statements like, "To thee be glory forever." Christians sang:

Praise God from who all blessings flow:
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The New Testament contained several doxologies:

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond all tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" (Rom 11:33-34.

"To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Gal 1:5) "To him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever! Amen." (Eph 3:21.

"To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Phil 4:20.

“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21).

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savoir be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.” (Jude 1:24-25).

203. The Human Lineage of Christ (part 1)

Of course, all of us human beings are descendants of Adam and Eve. The tragic result of our first parents not trusting the words of their creator and choosing to believe the lie of the tempter caused corruption to enter people. And death came with this corruption. So, Paul saw clearly the connection between Adam and Christ. “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” (I Cor 15:21-22)

Jesus, the Son of God, existed from the beginning. He was with God at the creation and in fact was God. (John 1:1-2) But many generations intervened between Adam and Eve and the birth of Christ. Luke chapter 3 gave the lineage from Adam, through Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, and Jared to Enoch. Genesis 5:23-24 tells us simply that “Altogether, Enoch lived 385 years. Enoch walked with God, then he was no more, because God took him away.” In the *International Bible Commentary* edited by F. F. Bruce, H. L. Ellison wrote, “the most important point for us is that in Enoch’s translation we have proof of Christ’s redemptive power in the past.” (Page 120)

Methuselah deserved mention because he achieved the greatest age of all at 969 years, then he, too, died. Lamech followed. He was the father of Noah who was to bring comfort (Hebrew word *naham*) and rest (Hebrew word *nuah*).

But as humans multiplied on the earth, so the seed of sin within them increased until, “every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” (Gen 6:5) So, the flood swept over the earth!

204. The Human Lineage of Christ (part 2)

The earth was repopulated by the families of Noah’s sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Although Japheth was the older son, the line of Christ came through Shem. (Gen 10:21, Luke 3:26) There followed Arphaxad, Cainan, Shelah, Eber, and Peleg, whose name means ‘division’. He was named Peleg because in his time, the earth was divided (Gen 10:25) (Could this be our first example of a tectonic activity of the continental divide that now separates Canada from Europe? *).

Following Peleg was his son Reu, then Serug, Nahor, and Terah the father of Abram. The family of Terah is important. With Abram God himself entered the picture, choosing a people through Abram; a land; a means of blessing the people of the world. Terah had three sons: Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran’s son was Lot and when Haran died, as a young adult, Abram becomes responsible for Lot. Haran was also the father of two girls, Milkah and Iskah. Marriages

took place inside the family. Abram married his half-sister Sarai (later Sarah). Nahor married Milkah, his niece, the daughter of Haran. Terah took Abram, Sarai, and Lot and left Ur of the Chaldeans to settle in a place called Haran on the way to Canaan. Thus, the beginning of God's chosen people was the family of Abram, later Abraham. Abraham stands as the prime ancestor of God's people. (Gen 11:27-32)

*Note: It seems well established that the continents are drifting because of tectonic activity of the upper layers of the earth. Scientists have theorized there once was one land mass that split apart. One area, in Nova Scotia, has been declared a UNESCO global geopark at the Cliffs of Fundy area. It is the place North America split from Pangea, the original land mass.

205. The Human Lineage of Christ (part 3)

In their old age, Abraham and Sarah had the miraculous child that was promised by God. They named him Isaac (laughter). God worked through an ordinary son supernaturally to accomplish his plan. Isaac married into the family of Terah, keeping this early ancestry in the same family. Rebekah was the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milkah and Nahor. Milkah was the daughter of Haran, Abraham's brother, and a son of Terah. God's plan was progressing, and God told Abraham, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." (Gen 21:12)

Rebekah and Isaac have two sons, fraternal twins, Esau, and Jacob. Jacob had an eventful life learning many spiritual lessons along the way. He had a life-changing experience wrestling with an angel of the Lord and God changed his name to *Israel*, meaning 'one who struggled with God and has prevailed.' He spent his last years in Egypt. When interviewed by Pharaoh, Jacob blessed Pharaoh and said, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of pilgrimage of my fathers." (Gen 47:9)

Judah, the fourth son of Jacob/Israel, took over as the leading son of Jacob, as we found in the story of Joseph. (Genesis chapter 37 to 50) The sordid tale of Judah and Tamar, his daughter-in-law, was in Genesis 38. From this union came twin sons, one who was Perez through whom the line of Christ comes.

206. The Human Lineage of Christ (part 4)

Following Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel, Judah, and Perez, we read of Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, and Salmon, the father of Boaz. Boaz's mother was Rahab, an innkeeper in Jericho. She had protected and advised the spies sent by Joshua into the land. She believed in the power of the Lord, and the Israelites who conquered Jericho protected her and her family. She and her family became part of the Israelite community. She married Salmon and Boaz was their son (Matt 1:5, Joshua 2:1-22, 6:17-25, Heb 11:31) Hebrews told us it was her faith that saved her.

Ruth, a Moabitess and daughter-in-law of Naomi, came to Bethlehem and married Boaz. In two generations, two of the mothers in the line of Christ were foreign women. Ruth and Boaz have a son, Obed, who became the father of Jesse, the father of David. (Matt 1:6, Luke 3:31-32)

David became the most famous king of Israel, and it was from his lineage that the Messiah (Christ) came. Matthew told us in the first verse of his Gospel that Jesus Christ was the son of David, the son of Abraham. The lineage from David to Joseph, the husband of Mary, at first seemed to present no problem to the New Testament scholars until they looked at the names

from David to Joseph recorded in Matthew and compared them with the genealogy of Jesus recorded in Luke chapter 3. It is an entirely different line!

207. The Human Lineage of Christ (part 5)

Both Matthew and Luke made it clear Joseph was not the real father of Jesus, but as the husband of Mary, he became the legal or official father. "... and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ." (Matt. 1:16) "Now Jesus was himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph," (Luke 1:23)

Abraham was the father of the nation chosen by God to bring a blessing to the world (Gen. 12:3). The greatest blessing was the Lord Jesus.

Judah, the son of Jacob/Israel was an ancestor of Jesus. According to Jacob's final prophecy about his sons, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from beneath his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his." (Gen. 49:10)

It was interesting that highly respected Judah had an event in history one would think writers would cover up as the stories passed down through many generations. The sordid event recorded in Genesis 38 resulted in a child of Judah born to his daughter-in-law Tamar. This child Perez was an ancestor of Christ (Matt 1:3, Luke 3:33). Rahab, of Jericho, and Salmon are the parents of Boaz who married Ruth, of Moab, who bore Obed the father of Jesse, father of King David. The line of Jesus, the Christ, is not pure Israelite, and certainly not composed only of morally pure people.

208. The Human Lineage of Christ (part 6)

Around 1,000 B.C., David was king of Israel. The prophet Nathan received a prophecy from the Lord and passed the message to David. David would not be the one to build the House of God, the Temple, but his son would do it. God promised he would build a house for David by raising his offspring and would establish his kingdom and throne forever (I Chronicles 17:1-15).

Isaiah prophesied about three hundred years later, "For unto us a child is born... and he shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Might God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom... from that time on and forever." (Is. 9:6-7) And so the Jews of Jesus' day were looking for the 'anointed one', Messiah, to be of the line of David.

Bethlehem, the City of David, was to be the birthplace of this famous son. "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times." (Marginal note in NIV "or from days of eternity") (Micah 5:2, Matt 2:6) Matthew starts his Gospel with the words, "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matt. 1:1)

The common people of his time recognized Jesus as the 'son of David.' The words of the angel to Joseph showed Jesus was in the line of David, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will

give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:20-21)

209. The Human Lineage of Christ (part 7)

New Testament scholars compared the genealogy of Jesus given by Matthew and by Luke. (Matt. 1:2-17, Luke 3:23-37) Matthew, who wrote the gospel with the Jewish nation in mind, started with Abraham. Luke, a Gentile, traced the genealogy to the first parents, Adam and Eve, showing Jesus the Christ as saviour for all people.

The line to David corresponded in the two Gospels, but from David to Joseph was different, coming from David through Solomon in Matthew, but through Nathan in Luke. New Testament scholars from ancient times tried to resolve this discrepancy. One idea was that one is the genealogy of Joseph, and one of Mary. Joseph, as Mary's husband, stood in for his wife. A second theory was that both genealogies are symbols and Matthew gives the royal descent and Luke the priestly descent.

A less common, though ingenious, theory was the following. Matthew has a man named Jacob as the father of Joseph. Luke has Heli as his father. Jacob married but died without a son to carry on his name. According to Jewish law, Jacob's brother was required, if possible, to marry Jacob's widow to produce a son to carry on his brother's line (the law of Levirate marriage—Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Thus, Heli must be the brother of Jacob who married the widow and sired Joseph.

Despite these theories, we do not know the answer. We knew the people of Jesus' day considered him to be a descendant of David. (Matt. 9:27, Luke 18:38) There were about twenty references in the New Testament of Jesus, son of David.

210. Charles Wesley Hymns: Father, I Stretch my Hands to Thee

Father, I stretch my hands to Thee,
No other help I know;
If Thou withdraw Thyself from me,
Ah! Wither shall I go?

What did Thine only Son endure,
Before I drew my breath?
What pain, what labour, to secure
My soul from endless death!

O Jesus, could I this believe,
I now should feel Thy power;
Now my poor soul Thou wouldst retrieve,
Nor let me wait one hour.

Author of faith, to Thee I lift
My weary, longing eyes:
O let me now receive that gift!

My soul without it dies!

Surely Thou canst not let me die;
O speak, and I shall live;
And here I will unwearied lie,
Till Thou Thy Spirit give.

How would my fainting soul rejoice,
Could I but see thy face;
Now let me hear Thy quickening voice,
And taste Thy pardoning grace.

This hymn is in many modern British and American hymnals (website: hymnary.org) and there is some controversy whether this is attributable to Charles Wesley. Poetical Works, by Dr. Osborne, 1868-72, suggested that this hymn is one that may have been, “merely selected, arranged, and more or less altered by Wesley.” This opinion seems to be based on the appearance of this hymn in a collection, Psalms & Hymns, 1741, that contained many hymns previously published by other authors. This hymn, however, may have been Wesley’s as there is no previous attribution. Its themes and style were consistent with the great Methodist hymn writer.

The image of stretching our hands was one of surrender and trust. In Job we read, “Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch your hands to him, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then, free of fault you will lift up your face; you will stand firm and without fear.” (Job 11:13-15). In the Psalms we read, “my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, Lord, every day; I spread my hands to you.” (Psalm 88:9) Spreading of hands was seen in other verses as well. (Psalm 143:6).

The fourth verse spoke of the “Author of faith,” who we know as Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2) The ‘gift’ received is salvation.

The hymn emphasized the suffering of Jesus and underlined the believer’s suffering by referring to “weary, longing eyes” and concluded with rejoicing for the “fainting soul” reminiscent of “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters... because the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.” (Isaiah 55:1a, 5b)

211. Luke: Gentile, Physician, and Historian

As the only confirmed Gentile writer in the New Testament, Luke sees the good news Jesus brought in a somewhat different perspective than Matthew, Mark, and John. Though all four Gospels saw John the Baptist as the fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3-5, only Luke added the part “and all mankind will see God’s salvation.” (Luke 3:6) Luke saw Jesus as the saviour or all people.

It is only in Luke we have the record of Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan. A man fell among thieves, they robbed him, beat him, and left him for dead. A Jewish priest came along the road and walked by on the other side. A Levite, a helper in the temple, also chose the other side of the road as he passed. But a Samaritan, despised by the Jews, treated the man’s wounds, and took him to an inn and paid for his keep. Who was the neighbour to the victim? (Luke 10:30-37)

Luke told of the time Jesus heals ten lepers. Only one returned to thank Jesus and he was a Samaritan. (Luke 17:11-19)

Jesus, early in his ministry, returned to his hometown of Nazareth. He spoke at the synagogue on the Sabbath. Reading from Isaiah he revealed he is the Anointed One sent to proclaim freedom and healing and release of the oppressed. His gracious words amazed the congregation, and they spoke well of him... until... he declared, "I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his hometown." He gives examples:

1. Elijah was kept through a famine by a Gentile woman in Zarephath,
2. Naaman, a Gentile, was healed of leprosy while none of the lepers in Israel were cleansed.

Examples of God's power shown to Gentiles rather than Jews made the congregation so angry they were going to murder Jesus by throwing him off a cliff. Though both Matthew and Mark recorded some of the event, only Luke mentioned the Gentiles. (Matt 13:54-58, Mark 5:1-6, Luke 4:16-30)

212. Luke the Historian

In the first four verses of his Gospel, Luke wrote an introduction. His Gospel recorded "things that have been fulfilled among us." (Luke 1:1) He did not claim to be an eyewitness, but he wrote about events, "just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word." (Luke 1:2)

He claimed to have investigated carefully from the beginning and so presented the following account to an official named "most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3) so that "... you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:4)

Luke's first work was on Jesus' life. His second book was the history of the early Church, Acts, or Acts of the Apostles. It began with, "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven." (Acts 1:1)

As a good historian, he gave precise dates of the main events. He dated the emergence of John the Baptist with six references: 1. Tiberius Caesar's fifteenth year, 2. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, 3. Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, 4. Herod Philip was tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, 5. Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, 6. High priesthood was held by the family of Annas and Caiaphas. (Luke 3:1-2)

We learned Luke travelled with Paul (the "we" passages) joining him in Troas (Acts 16:10), and Philippi. (Acts 20:5-6) Luke accompanied Paul on the ship that carried him as prisoner to Rome. (Acts 27:23)

Though not an eyewitness to the life of Jesus, Luke travelled with Paul. Paul taught him and Luke gained information from many early Christian leaders.

213. Luke: The Gospel that Honours Women who Serve the Lord

Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a high fever. Jesus bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. "She got up at once and began to wait on them." (Luke 4:38)

The angel Gabriel visited Mary to inform her that by the power of the Holy Spirit she would become pregnant and have a child who would be "called the Son of God." Mary's response was: "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38) Only

Luke gave us the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, who was living in the hill country of Judea. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months during Elizabeth's pregnancy.

During Jesus' ministry, as he went from place to place with his disciples, Luke showed that women often followed Jesus and provided much-needed necessities for the group. Jesus cured many women of evil spirits and diseases. Luke listed some of these and tells us they followed Jesus. There was Mary Magdalene, who Jesus cured of seven demons. There was Joanna, the wife of Cuza, who was the manager of Herod's household, and Susanna, and many others. Some of these ladies had money they used to support the ministry. (Luke 8:1-3)

After Peter's denial of Jesus, Luke did not mention the disciples until after the resurrection of Jesus. It was women who followed Jesus to the cross, weeping for him (Luke 23:49) and after his death, they followed him to the tomb. (Luke 23:55) The day after the sabbath (Saturday), at early dawn, the first followers at the tomb, according to all four Gospels, were women.

214. Joy...that the Lord Brings

I can't imagine the Christmas season without a mention of the angels that appeared to the shepherds on the field near Jerusalem. The news the angel brought was good news. It was news of great joy for all people. Thus, from the beginning of his gospel, Luke let us know this good news was to bring joy to the world.

Luke told us Jesus sent out seventy-two messengers, two by two, to every town and place he was about to go. They were to heal the sick and tell the people, "The kingdom of God is near you." (Luke 10:9) His messengers returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." (Luke 10:17)

If we lost something, and finally found the lost object, we would feel joy. So, it was with the shepherd who searched for and found his lost sheep. A woman owned a special head covering decorated with ten silver coins. It was custom for ladies to have such a head covering as a sign of her marriage, as today a woman would wear a wedding ring. In a poor home with a dirt floor spread with rushes, it would be an arduous chore to sweep aside the rushes looking for a reflection of light from the lost coins. To search and find a lost sheep or lost coin brought great joy. Jesus ended these two parables with a statement, "There will be more rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:1-7) The parable of the prodigal son followed these two parables. That story ended with a welcome and a party.

Following his resurrection, Jesus' followers went through a period of puzzlement until they realized the truth. It might surprise us to read that after Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy. (Luke 24:52) They knew he would now, by his spirit, be with them always.

215. Ecclesiastes (part 1): Teacher

Ecclesiastes was a Bible book that belonged to the genre known as Hebrew Wisdom. The Hebrew word comes from a Greek translation of *ekklēsiastes* that means 'preacher' or 'teacher.' We could consider the book a collection of essays rather than an organized writing on a single theme.

The book was written by “the teacher,” son of David, king of Jerusalem. (Ecclesiastes 1:1) Solomon, known for his wisdom, fit the description perfectly. Among experts, there was no agreement about who wrote the book.

In the King James version, the word “vanity” was the key word in the book. The author used it five times in the second verse of the book. A more modern translation (NIV) of vanity was “meaningless.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). The writer observed much human activity and has reached the conclusion it is meaningless. He understood wisdom is better than folly (Ecclesiastes 2:13) but the same fate overtook them both. (Ecclesiastes 2:14) He saw both men and animals die and return to dust. “Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?” (Ecclesiastes 3:21) One of the writer’s chief complaints was in Ecclesiastes 8:14, “There is something else meaningless that occurs on the earth: righteous men what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.”

So, the writer recommended a person should enjoy his life, in his eating and drinking and enjoy the satisfaction of his work. (Ecclesiastes 2:24, 8:15) In all the vanity and meaninglessness of life, the writer realized some things are better than others: wisdom better than folly, and light is better than darkness. (Ecclesiastes 2:13) Though much of life was meaningless, sometimes there was a deeper meaning to life than “vanity.” The young man was to remember the Creator in the days of his youth and know in all things God brought judgment. (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 11:9)

216. Ecclesiastes (part 2): View of God

In Ecclesiastes, the author took the existence of God and a time of judgement for granted. Chapter twelve advised we remember our creator, for the time would come when the silver cord is severed, the golden bowl broken, the pitcher shattered, and the wheel broken at the well. (Ecclesiastes 12:6) The reference must be to death for the next verse said, “the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

Chapter three started with a passage that was a step above meaninglessness. It showed how the activities of humans cycled things back and forth rather than working toward a significant goal. At the end of the section, the writer asked, “what does the worker gain from his toil?” (Ecclesiastes 3:9)

But the verses that followed this section showed the depth with which the writer had thought of human life in reference to the creator God. He made everything beautiful in its time. It was a beauty that came when everything God made fitted together perfectly. He had set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they could not fathom what God had done from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

One of the easiest things to prove is there was within humans the idea of a spiritual world. We had only to look at modern day religions or study the history of societies to realize the various theologies and gods proved that within the human heart was a resonance with the eternal. And it was true we do not comprehend completely what was the beginning and the end of the plan God had for the universe and the humans within it. But with the coming to earth of Jesus, the son of God, more of God’s plan became clear. To his followers, Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:2)

When Jesus made his last departure from earth, one might think the disciples would return to Jerusalem with sorrow at losing their beloved master—but they had not lost him. He

would be with them intimately by his spirit. They returned to Jerusalem “with great joy.” (Luke 24:52)

217. Eternity

God set eternity in the hearts of men. Our forefathers thought when we went to be with the Lord in heaven, our life there would never end. Life would be everlasting. The older versions of scripture used the term ‘everlasting.’ In the King James version, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, so that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) A hymn (Amazing Grace) said, “When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’ve first begun.”

However, God existed before time began, and he exists beyond time. As God was our life (Deuteronomy 30:20), it was our relationship to him that gave us the life he had. Modern translations used the term ‘eternal life’ to indicate life the saviour, Jesus, died to give us. The New International Version interpreted John 3:16 as “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.”

The theory of General Relativity proposed by Albert Einstein in 1915 supported this view of time. It proposed that movement through space affected time. The speed of an object or particle affected the time taken to get from one place to another. To accurately predict travel of spacecraft, you must compute both speed and the force of gravity. Time was not a never changing flow as presented in an old hymn: “time like an everflowing stream bears all its sons away.”

Though we might not understand eternity, it might differ from everlasting. The important component was our relationship to God. It was the difference between life and death. Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24)

NOTE: an example of relativity of time was the difference in the passage of time in the GPS which was commonly used to pinpoint our position on earth. Most people had a GPS in their car. The pull of gravity affected the passage of time, so the closer the clock was to the centre of the earth, the slower time and clocks ran. Satellites that control the GPAS were high above the earth and had a lower force of gravity. Time and clocks ran faster in the satellite than clocks on earth by forty microseconds per day. Engineers made adjustments in the GPS software for this or the accuracy of the system would become useless in a few days.

218. Eternal Life

Jesus prayed to the Father, and said, “For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:2-3)

Jesus was and was the word, or expression, of God, “in him was life and that life was the light of men.” (John 1:4) This life eternal originated with the Father who granted it to his son, Jesus Christ, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.” (John 5:28) “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.” (John 5: 21)

So, we were told that God the Father and the Son of God had life in themselves, and they gave life to whoever they chose. Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25-26)

To believe in Jesus was not only to believe what he says and who he was. To believe in Jesus was not only to trust him but also to entrust ourselves to him. "To the Jews who had believed in him Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" (John 8:31-32)

219. Walking Together

When we see two people walking down the road holding hands, we understand there is a close relationship between them. When 'boy meets girl' and their relationship develops, 'hand holding' is an early sign of their affection. Parents hold the hand of their child on a crowded sidewalk as a sign of concern and protection so the child will not get lost or injured. But two people walking hand-in-hand tell us of more than their affection or concern. It also tells us they are moving in the same direction at the same pace.

Genesis chapter five listed descendants of Adam to Noah. Seventh from Adam was Enoch. All the other men lived a certain number of years, then died, but "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." (Gen. 5:24) Elijah was another man who did not die. Though the Bible does not tell us Elijah walked with God, his life story shows us he had a close relationship with God. The Lord let Elisha and the school of prophets know He would take Elijah from them, and they were witnesses to Elijah taken to heaven in a chariot of fire. (II Kings 2:11-12)

As Jesus, the Son of God, has said he was the way the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through him. So, Jesus' sacrificial death on a cross was the ultimate atoning sacrifice for all people, no matter when they lived. Enoch's walk with God and Elijah's trip to heaven were made possible by Jesus. Christ's supreme sacrifice made salvation possible for all people, no matter when they lived!

The author of Psalm 73, thought to be Asaph, writes, "But as for me my feet had almost slipped, I had nearly lost my foothold." (Psalm 73:2) Then in verses 23 and 24, "Yet I am always with you; you guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory." (Psalm 73:23-24)

220. Biblical Mystery (part 1): The Great Mystery

In the doxology at the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him..." (Romans 18:25-26) Paul referred to a mystery using the Greek term *musterion*. The Greeks used the word to indicate something revealed in religious rites and ceremonies practiced by secret societies. To those initiated into the society, secret knowledge was revealed to them—like how to overcome the power of fate in their lives.

Paul, writing in Greek, used the term available to describe what he called, “the mystery of Christ.” (Eph. 3:5) For the Christian Paul, the term had a somewhat different meaning. A Biblical scholar, W. E. Vine gave a scriptural meaning to the term. Divine revelation made the mystery known. In the Bible, God made the revelation in the way he wished to make it and at an appointed time. There was then the Biblical mystery Paul spoke of, referring to the church, in Colossians, “I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations; but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:25-27)

Paul spoke of how God has made possible to provide salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. God had done it through Christ in you, the hope of glory.

221. Biblical Mystery (part 2): How Many?

When Paul used the term mystery, did he refer to one mystery involving Christ or to several mysteries? There was, for example, “Great is the mystery for godliness” (I Tim 3:15) Paul wrote about marriage of a man and a woman being like Christ and the church stated, “this is a profound mystery,” (Eph. 5:32)

The scholar, W. E. Vine wrote an article titled, “the Twelve Mysteries of Scripture.” The mysteries spoken of by Paul could also be different ways of looking at one great mystery. We also find the word used for similar ideas in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke when Jesus tells his disciples they will know the mysteries of the kingdom of God (kingdom of heaven in Matthew). The Greek word used is *musterion*.

The Lord explained mysteries (secret) to those He wished to inform at a time appointed by Him. Paul wished the Ephesian church to know he came to know the mystery through revelation from God not by information from others (Eph. 3:3) God gave the revelation according to God’s eternal purpose, which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him, we might approach God with freedom and confidence. (Eph 3:11-12)

222. Biblical Mystery (part 3): Mystery of the Kingdom and the Old Testament

Saints were those who believed in God and followed the directions he had given. The plan of God included the Old Testament saints; the “... mystery of Christ.” (Eph. 3:4) The Sadducees, who did not believe in an afterlife were told by Jesus, “But about the resurrection from the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” (Matt 22:31-32) At the transfiguration, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus change; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. They saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus and they heard a voice from heaven saying, “This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matt 17:1-9) Peter, in his second letter, recalled this event. He said, “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty,” and “We ourselves heard his voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.” (II Peter 1:16-18) Here Peter, James, and John saw the kingdom of God come with power. (Mark 9:1) Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus.

Jesus said to the repentant thief on the cross, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43) There was a similar verse in John to John 3:16, "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)

The great commandment showed the way, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:5)

223. Biblical Mystery (part 4): How God Provides Salvation for the World

Paul referred to the Church as the body of Christ. Paul wrote, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head of everything for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." (Eph 1:22-23) And later Paul reminded them, "for we are members of his body." (Eph 5:30) There is only one body of Christ. "That he might gather together in one all things in Christ, whether in heaven or on earth." (Eph 1:10) And so we could picture Christ sitting on the right hand of the Father in glory as the head of the universal church made up of those who have, "Christ in you the hope of glory." (Col 1:27)

Old Testament saints trusted God and trusted that he would take care of all their spiritual needs. We look back on Christ's sacrifice. They looked ahead to it. Paul, a "Hebrew of Hebrews," (Phil 3:5) realized the appropriateness of the analogy of Christ as head of the church. The Hebrew word *rosh* meant head, but also meant beginning. In Genesis 1:1 the term 'in the beginning' contains the word and *rosh* was also used of the men chosen to be leaders, judges, or heads of the people. Moses chose them to handle smaller cases brought to court. (Numbers 18:25). Christ was the head, leader, first member, judge, and we could add king, of the universal church of Christ.

The Church was not a building, a denomination, or a list of membership. We knew from scripture that unworthy and evil people wormed their way into churches. Unfortunately, this continues to be a problem in human organizations. The true Church of Christ's body had gathered, "together in one of all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth." (Eph. 1:10)

224. Scriptural Timelines (part 1)

Timelines are common ideas. A week of seven days was a simple timeline. Housewives used to wash clothes on Monday, iron on Tuesday, and so on. We are not as organized now, but still people who work during the week anxiously wait for five o'clock on Friday to get to the weekend. We follow longer timelines when students plan for four years of university or governments develop a five-year plan.

Scriptural timelines started at the creation of the universe and conclude at the end of time. The past is history and the God's word in scripture helped direct us to understand the future. The Old Testament view of this timeline could be called 'this present evil world.' Sin entered when humans were in the Garden of Eden. Prior to the Great Flood, "the Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his head was only evil all the time." (Gen 6:5) Only Noah and his family were saved when the flood came. This did not solve the problem of evil, though the Lord promised, "Never again will I curse the

ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood.” (Gen 8:21)

They lived in an evil age. What would God do to rectify the problem of sin in the world? There were indications that someone would come at God's appointed time. The Lord sent a message through Moses, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” (Deuteronomy 18:15) Looking at the Psalms, we see several messages that point to one who is to come. Psalm 22 is a ‘passion psalm’ that tells of the suffering of the Christ, “they have pierced my hands and my feet, I count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me, they divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing” (Psalm 22:16-18) “They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.” (Psalm 22:31)

The powerful section of Isaiah, chapter 53, ended with the statement, “For he bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:31) Even the Samaritans looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, for the woman at the well stated, “I know the Messiah is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us.” (John 4:25)

225. Scriptural Timelines (part 2)

The scriptural timeline included: creation, the present evil age, messiah coming, righteous kingdom restored to Israel.

After Jesus' resurrection his disciples asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus answered, “It is not for you to know the times or the dates the Father has set by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judah and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:7-8)

The message of the good news (gospel) is membership in the ‘Kingdom of God’ for all people—to the ends of the earth. To individuals Jesus says, “The Kingdom of God does not come with careful observation nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the Kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20-21) With the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, so came the Kingdom of God. “But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.” (Luke 11:20) Also, with the coming of Jesus, the Kingdom of God became available to all who accept his good news: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

A simple scriptural timeline started with creation, then an evil present age, followed by the coming of the Messiah and the righteous age. For those who do not accept Jesus as the Messiah, we are still in the ‘evil present age’ and await the coming of the Messiah. For Christians, Jesus was the Messiah, born about two thousand years ago. He brought in the ‘age to come’ as the Kingdom of God with Jesus Christ as king. But the evil present age continues. Members of the Kingdom of God live in ages that overlap. They are members of the Kingdom of God living in this evil present age. Thus, when the timeline identified the coming of Jesus the Messiah, the Kingdom of God has come, but the evil present age continues.

226. Jesus (part 1): The Antithesis of Evil

Antithesis. This word sounds like a prehistoric insect eater. The meaning is ‘the opposite of... the absolute opposite.’ Humans have always struggled with the problem of evil—wondering why the all-powerful God allowed sin and wickedness to continue in the world. People made many suggestions. One suggestion was that humans, made in the image of God, could choose how they live. They often made the wrong choice. In the Garden of Eden, one tree was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eating from this tree would result in death. (Gen 2:17)

Though we do not know why sin and wickedness continue to occur, the New Testament gave us the sources of evil we humans struggle against. Ephesians gave three sources of evil: the way of the world, the ruler of the kingdom of the air, and the cravings of the sinful nature. (Eph 2:2-3) The ways of the world were the false imaginings and philosophies of the world. The ruler of the kingdom of the air was the Devil. The craving of our sinful nature was that spoiled image of God which each person carried with them because of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve.

God had a plan. Enoch followed the plan and walked with God. Abraham followed the plan and believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. The Lord Jesus came to sacrifice himself to provide salvation for all who would receive him. (John 1:12)

227. Jesus (part 2): The Cure for Evil

How could we overcome the evil that wishes to take over our lives?

1. The devil: Peter tells us, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.” (I Peter 5:8-9) James gives the same advice. “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7).

2. The ways and philosophies of this world: These philosophies developed early in history. “Let us make a name for ourselves,” “let us build a city reaching up to heaven,” “might is right,” “hate and destroy your enemies,” are all examples. Jesus told us how to live. We have the Sermon on the Mount for our pattern. “Love your enemies,” (Luke 6:27) “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5).

3. The sinful nature within: The exciting solution to this source of evil was Jesus may renew the spoiled image of God in us. Paul says, “You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of the Creator.” (Col 3:10).

Jesus was not only the antithesis of evil, but he was also the solution and cure for the problem. How could we accomplish this? Paul said, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” (Rom 8:1-2) Hebrews told us, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb 12:2)

228. Charles Wesley Hymns: How Oft Have I the Spirit Grieved

The first line presented the theme of grieving the Spirit. “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Eph. 4:30). Grief is a

response to loss. When we “trample on His love,” God felt the loss of our relationship and “His Spirit leaves me not alone,” but “bids me come... That I His grace may have.”

1

How oft have I the Spirit grieved,
Since first with me he strove,
How obstinately disbelieved,
And trampled on His love!
How have I sinned against the light,
Broken from his embrace,
And would not, when I freely might,
Be justified by grace!

2

But after all that I have done
To drive Him from my heart.
The Spirit leaves me not alone,
He doth not yet depart;
He will not give the sinner o'er,
Ready e'en now to save,
He bids me come as here-to-fore,
That I His grace may have.

3

I take thee at thy gracious word;
My foolishness I mourn,
And unto my redeeming Lord,
However late, I turn;
Saviour, I yield, I yield at last;
I hear thy speaking blood;
Myself, with all my sins,
I cast on my atoning God.

229. Who Carries Whom?

On a trip to India in late summer, you would find certain shops with small and large images of the Hindu god Ganapati, the elephant god. People made many of these gods from clay or plaster of Paris and for the festival they paint and decorate them. At the end of the festival the day came when people from the cities, towns and villages formed joyful processions and carried these gods to a local body of water, a lake, river, or stream, and placed the gods into the water where they disintegrated.

Hindus worshiped these gods of metal, stone, wood, clay, or plaster of Paris at times as if they could respond from this inanimate state. At other times, worshippers acknowledged they are only a representation of an unseen personality or force. They might feed the image of the god or goddess, dress it in clean clothes each day, and regularly bow to it. The Lord said, “You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3-4)

Isaiah expressed God's view of idol worship. “Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary.” (Isaiah 46:1) The Lord said, “Listen to me, oh house of Jacob, all you who

remain in the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth.” (Isaiah 46:3)

These useless gods made with human hands cannot even move themselves from place to place, but the true God knows the past and can predict the future, for it is in His hands. From conception to old age, he will carry and sustain us. “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he who will sustain you.” (Isaiah 46:4)

230. How to Make a ‘god’

In a somewhat sarcastic portion of scripture, Isaiah showed us the process of making and worshipping a ‘god.’ “Some pour out gold from their bags and weigh out silver on the scales; they hire a goldsmith to make it into a god, and they bow down and worship it. They lift it to their shoulders and carry it; they set it up in its place, and there it stands. From that spot it cannot move. Though one cries out to it, it does not answer; it cannot save him from his troubles.” (Isaiah 46:6-7)

The true God said, “Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebel... I am God and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.” (Isaiah 46:8-10)

Another section of Isaiah showed the foolishness of making and expecting help from idols. “The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint. The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of a man, of man in all his glory that it may dwell in a shrine.” (Isaiah 44:12-13) A man might select a choice log of wood from the forest and kindle a fire to warm himself or cook his meals over part of the wood and with part, “he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it.” (Isaiah 44:14-15)

The foolishness of expecting a God-like response from a block of wood had many thoughtful people trying to explain this. They said it was not the metal or clay form of Bel or Nebo or Ganapati people worship, but the real Ganapati that it represents. Some believed they worshipped the true God through the image.

In the Old Testament, God said, “Thou shall have no other gods before me.” Since Jesus came, His power and absolute righteousness convinced many he was the one and only son of God. “No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known. (John 1:18)

231. A Short History of False gods (part 1)

The first chapters of Genesis gave information about the Creator God and showed how sin entered the world, separating humans from God. Then, we read of Noah’s family in the ark landing on Mount Ararat. Noah’s descendants expanded far and wide and some proceeded down the Euphrates River, which had its source close to Mount Ararat. The descendants settled in Mesopotamia. There, they attempted to build the Tower of Babel. Genesis, chapter ten gave us a table of nations showing us where certain family groups settled. Historians called Mesopotamia the cradle of civilization.

Indo-European languages originated north of the mountainous area around Mount Ararat. It was likely some of Noah's early descendants, possibly through Japheth, moved there and spread out across the Steppes west and east toward Mongolia.

There are, in human beings, certain inherent compulsions, like the desire to stay alive, which we call self-preservation. There is also the idea that there is a higher power that influences our lives. The worship of these higher powers is universal, but when humans became separated from the true God, they made gods after their own image. But the true God "has also set eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

One of the oldest written documents was the epic poem about Gilgamesh, king of the city of Uruk in Mesopotamia. The early poems were about larger-than-life heroes. These were mortal beings, but people considered them more advanced and stronger than ordinary men. Though semi-divine, they were not immortal. They would die. The gods were divine and had some control over mortal beings. The goddess Ishtar wanted to marry Gilgamesh, a hero, but Gilgamesh refused her, and the gods pronounced that either he or his friend Enkidu had to die, and Enkidu died.

The Gods advised Gilgamesh to return to Uruk and become a good king. He did this, but because he still faced death, he sought a form of immortality by having his name imprinted on every brick used in building the walls of Uruk.

The gods were immortal. They only took on an episodic interest in humans. They might help a person through some trouble, like helping them win a fight. But they were fickle and might then leave them when their enemy later returned. The gods were capricious, with no value system except their own desires.

The true God says, "I have made you; you are my servant; O Israel, I shall not forget you." (Isaiah 44:21)

232. A Short History of False gods (part 2)

Ancient Egyptian gods were many. Worshipers believed Horus was involved in the universe's creation but also had other functions. The hierarchy of the gods mirrored the hierarchy of Egyptian society. The chief gods often had some relationship to the sun. Worshipers, rather than seeing a god as a god of the entire sun, or that there were multiple sun gods, claimed each god represented different aspects of the sun.

Horus was one of the earliest sun gods. Egyptians represented him as a falcon wearing a crown or sun disc. He was associated with the pharaoh as chief divinity. Re was the dominant solar deity and represents the divine aspect of the sun. Re also represented the sun at its zenith. Atum represented the sun when setting and ancient pictures showed him as an old man. Kheper represented the rising sun and Egyptians depicted him as a scarab or dung beetle rolling the sun across the arch of the sky.

At one-point Egyptians worshiped Amun-Re to the exclusion of the traditional gods. The goddess Isis had a consort named Osiris. Osiris, the god of fertility, provided good crops and abundance to Egypt. In legend, Set defeated him and chopped up and his parts and scattered them around Egypt. Isis went looking for his parts and found all of them except one part, put them together and gave him life. But the life was only for a time, and he spent part of the year in the underworld and rose from the dead each year to bring about the harvest. So, his annual life/death cycle provided the cycle of seasons.

Isis was an important divinity for later nations and was also involved in the mythology of the 'mother goddess' and of the 'mystery religions' of the later Greeks and Romans.

Egyptians considered Pharaoh a god. To take part in the afterlife, he needed his body, eating and drinking vessels, etc. His followers embalmed his body to preserve it and hid it in a vault to protect it from grave robbers.

The Bible told us in the beginning God made the universe through His Son who sustains all things through His powerful Word. (Hebrews 1:2-3)

233. A Short History of False gods (part 3)

All people-groups had a sense of the spiritual and most gods were supposed to have spiritual power over the humans. From time to time, the gods and goddesses would influence the humans. There was a monumental written work in the Hindu tradition called the *Mahabharata*. Part of this story was an epic poem called *Bhagavad Gita* about a hero named Arjuna, who was a military leader ready to begin a cosmic battle. His enemies included members of his family and some friends, and he doubted where his duty lay—to fight or not to fight.

The god Krishna came down and acted as his chariot-driver. In the poem he advised Arjuna. Karma was central to the advice. Karma was a Hindu law of nature: what a person does affects the cycle of births, deaths, and rebirths.

We got a glimpse of how early Greeks and Roman people perceived their gods from three epic poems: the Iliad, the Odyssey (attributed to a Greek poet, Homer) and the Roman Aeneid (written by Virgil at the request of Caesar Augustus). The Iliad and the Odyssey told the story of two heroes during the time of the Trojan War. Achilles, hero of the Iliad, was a Greek superhero who fought a Trojan superhero named Hector and won acclaim by killing him. Odysseus travelled home after the Trojan War and encountered many difficulties on his journey.

Both heroes sought a type of immortality by achieving fame for their deeds. They hoped people would remember them after their deaths. They chose to do memorable deeds, not deeds defined by ethics (doing right over wrong). The gods gave choices with no ethical basis.

Gods and goddesses were portrayed as characters in the poems. In the Odyssey, the god Apollo destroyed Odysseus' crew. Athena admired Odysseus and assisted him. Poseidon took revenge on Odysseus. They all considered Zeus the Chief god. Humans regarded the gods as supernatural chieftains with unquestioned authority.

Along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, while the Egyptians worshiped many gods, a people-group worshiped one God who had made a covenant with them and who demanded ethical behaviour centred on the ten commandments.

234. From gods to God

We looked at how some of the ancient people have viewed a spiritual realm and made false gods to worship. We did this by examining the written word that came down to us through history and archeological findings, but our sources of knowledge were quite limited.

Some of the earliest writings we had are called epic poems, which involved superhero humans, gods, and goddesses. Humans and the world continued in its wicked way.

The Bible stated that the reason for the universal flood was, "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." (Genesis 6:5) But the flood did not change the heart of man, "... even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood." (Genesis 8:21)

To deal with evil, people need a change of heart. So, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." (John 3:3)

So, God chose Abraham, whose descendants were God's chosen people, and gave the nation an ethical law code to live by. The most important law was, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:5) The ten Commandments summarized the law. They start with, "You shall have no other gods before me," and prohibit making any object to worship.

So, from this one small nation, the concept of 'one God' became clear and, later, the Lord Jesus blessed the world. God incarnated the Son so all people could see what God is like. Then people can have a change of heart by believing in Him and have eternal life through Him. (John 3:16)

235. The Bible as Literature

"I am so glad that our Father in heav'n
Tells of His love in the Book He has giv'n.
Wonderful things in the Bible I see;
This is the dearest, that Jesus loves me."

Philip P. Bliss

The ancient literature consisted of epic poems with greater-than-life heroes and capricious gods and goddesses with a few monsters thrown in. The Bible presented a new tone to this literature. It was about the relationship of the Creator God to human beings. There was an old covenant between God and His chosen nation. Then Jesus came and established a new covenant.

How could we know the Bible is true? In I Corinthians, chapter 15, Paul based his faith on the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Jesus died for our sins; he rose from the dead; he appeared to Peter, to the Twelve, to five hundred brothers, to James and all the Apostles. To Paul, Christ appeared as Paul traveled to Damascus.

Jesus' testimony as he walked on this earth showed a loving relationship with His Father. He showed a belief in the Old Testament (Covenant). He talked about the days of Noah. He spoke about marriage as it was at the beginning. He said He had come not to do away with the Law, but to fulfill the Law. He spoke of God's love for the world and that all people who believe in Him could have eternal life.

So, the New Covenant was not a set of rules and laws to establish and maintain a nation. It was a way of life that involved a change of heart. Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek," and "blessed are those who hunger and search for righteousness," and "blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (Matt 5:5, 6, 4)

The New Testament changed ancient literature. It gave common people worth. It was now acceptable to write about the deeds of common people.

"The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin;
The light of the world is Jesus;
Like sunshine at noon-day his glory shone in,

The light of the world is Jesus.”
Philip P. Bliss

236. The Ninety-First Psalm

As I write this, it is the middle of October 2020, the year of the pandemic caused by the virus COVID-19. As Christians, we know Christ is always with us, and we can trust him to take care of us. We desire to ‘beat the disease’ but we also know that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. His love and care for us does not end when he takes us to heaven. We can say with Job, “Though He slay me yet will I hope in Him;” (Job 13:15) In times like these, Psalm 91 is a great comfort. We can say, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” (Psalm 91:2)

Most appropriate is verse 3. “He will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence.” So, we do not fear the surrounding dangers, for he is faithful and will cover us with his wings. (Psalm 91:4-5) Nor will we fear the COVID-19 pestilence, this plague that would destroy us. Statistics that are available show worldwide cases 38,337,435 with over 1 million deaths. Canada reports 188,984 cases with 9,662 deaths. USA has 7,891,674 cases with 216,406 deaths. Surely this is a deadly pestilence!

While we desire to keep ourselves and others as safe as is humanly possible, we know God is with us to protect and keep us. He loves us and will do the best for us. We love God because He first loved us. This love and trust in Him makes us secure. “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. (Psalm 91:1)

Be not dismayed what-er betide;
God will take care of you.
Beneath His wings of love abide;
God will take care of you.

Civilla P. Martin

237. Biblical Words: Atonement

The word testament in the Old Testament and New Testament was the traditional way of describing the two covenants that God made with us human beings. When examining words with deeply spiritual meanings, look at both Testaments and the present meaning of the English word. The Old Testament might help us understand the concept which the New Testament adjusted in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ. The English word might be the ‘best fit’ for the idea or concept.

The English word atonement came from the idea of ‘at-**one**-ment’ when we brought two factions together so that both agreed. Harmony might describe the agreement.

The Old Testament described the Day of Atonement. In the Garden of Eden, sin entered the world when Adam and Eve disbelieved God and listened to the Devil (as a serpent) and so disobeyed the command of God by eating the forbidden fruit. Because of this, there was a separation of God from humans, for this was a sin against God. The Day of Atonement temporarily dealt with the sin, allowing the nation of Israel to be at one with God.

One week before the day the High Priest moved from his home to the sanctuary. All Israel would fast on the day, which started in the evening at sunset, as Jewish days do. In the

morning, the High Priest would arise and bathe himself and put on special holy linen garments. He would take a bullock and sacrifice it on the Altar of burnt offerings. He then took a censer with strong incense burning inside and took it into the Most Holy Place to cleanse it and the furniture inside.

At the entrance to the sanctuary, the High Priest took two goats and casted lots for them, one for the Lord and one as a scapegoat. The priests sacrificed the goat for the Lord for the sins of the people. The High Priest took blood from the sacrificial bullock into the most Holy Place and sprinkled it on and before the Atonement Cover, which covers the Ark of the Covenant. This is for his sins and those of his household. He then takes the blood from the goat and sprinkles it on and before the Atonement Cover for the sins of the people.

The High Priest then took the scapegoat and, putting his hands on its head, confessed all the sins of the nation, thus transferring them to the scapegoat who they took to a solitary place in the wilderness and freed. The two goats represented the two aspects of atonement for sin. One was that sin causes death, and the sprinkled blood showed that a death has occurred, albeit a substitute death. The second goat, the scapegoat, indicated the sin was gone. God removed the sin!

238. Biblical Words: Redemption and Ransom (part 1)

Redemption is the payment of a price to receive some value in return. In financial contracts, one might pay the price and receive full ownership of mortgaged property. In the Old Testament, redemption mainly related to the cultural life of the people. A person could pay to release a slave (Lev.25:48) or to regain a field (Lev. 25-28). The firstborn of livestock might to be given to the Lord as a sacrifice. If the owner wished, they could redeem the animal with a lamb. Firstborn sons are to be redeemed. The reason was that the Lord killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians because Pharaoh refused to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt. (Exodus 13:11-15)

In the New Testament, redemption centred around the Lord Jesus and the price paid by him when he came to earth and sacrificed himself for the sins of the world. But the idea of God redeemed man from evil starts in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for 'angel' was 'messenger.' In the Bible, some translations would use 'angel' for a 'messenger from God.' So, many thought the messenger (angel) which Jacob said redeemed him from all evil in Genesis was the Lord Jesus himself, for there followed the Hebrew word *goel* which means a kinsman-redeemer. "And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all the days of my life unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil." (Gen 48:15-16a)

239. Biblical Words: Redemption and Ransom (part 2)

A ransom is a price paid to redeem something. Boaz used the word *goel* in the book of Ruth when he advises a near kinsman of Ruth that he may pay the price and redeem the land Ruth is selling. (Ruth 4:4) The author of Leviticus also used the term in Leviticus 27:13 about redeeming an unclean beast. And Isaiah states in 59:20, "'The redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,' declares the LORD." (Isaiah 59:20)

In the New Testament, Paul said in Ephesians that through Jesus Christ, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's

grace that he lavished on us" (Eph. 1:7-8). The Lord Jesus acted as our kinsman-redeemer to redeem us from sin by paying the price through his death on the cross. He qualified as a kinsman for he came to earth as a human being. Jesus paid the ransom price to redeem us.

240. Biblical Words: Salvation

The Hebrew name Joshua is very near the word for salvation and Joshua means saviour. The Greek New Testament used the name as Jesus and so in Matthew 1:21, the angel of the Lord told Joseph to not be afraid to take Mary as his wife for, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins."

To save someone was to deliver them from some trouble or calamity, as the lifeguard on a beach might see someone struggling in the waves and rush out to deliver them from the calamity of drowning.

While the Old Testament used the term salvation in a spiritual sense, there was also the use for purely physical deliverance. In Exodus, the Israelites had packed up and left Egypt. They approached the Red Sea when Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued the people with his chariots and troops. The people were afraid and lashed out at Moses for bringing them out of Egypt. Moses, showed great faith in the Lord and said to the people, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever." (Exodus 14:13 KJV) A more modern version uses the term, 'deliverance' for 'salvation.' (NIV)

When Hannah presented her child Samuel to the Lord, she prayed, "my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation." (I Samuel 2:1 KJV) In the NIV it reads, "My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance."

Isaiah writes of the Lord's salvation as "our salvation in the time of trouble." (Isaiah 33:2)

Then Jesus came. The angels announced his birth. "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11) And in the last chapter of Luke Jesus met his disciples after his resurrection and summarized his purpose in coming to this earth. He had to suffer what he did. (Luke 24:26) Everything written of him in the Old Testament had to be fulfilled (Luke 24:44). He had to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. (24:46) Repentance and forgiveness of sins were to be preached to all nations. (24:47) God would send promised Holy Spirit as their guide (24:49) The Saviour came and now His disciples were to show all nations His Salvation.

241. Biblical Words: Other Words for Salvation

As the sin, the unbelief and disobedience of Adam and Eve separated humanity from God, so the second Adam, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to provide a redemption, a reconciliation, and a propitiation for the sin of humankind.

The term propitiation came from the *kapporeth* or mercy seat, the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. It was on and over the mercy seat that the presence of God specifically dwelt. It was on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies in the Temple that, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the bull and goat which were sacrificed; this blood, considered the

life, was to propitiate the wrath of God. The blood expiated (taken completely away) the sinner's guilt.

This 'type' in the Old Testament was a symbol for the fullness of salvation, but the blood of animals could not fully achieve salvation. The shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ completed it. "... because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Hebrews 10:4) (For a lengthy treatment of this subject, see Hebrews chapters 9 and 10)

So, the term propitiates meant to provide something that eases the wrath of God and to expiate was to provide something totally acceptable to God. But Jesus came to show us that God was a loving God. "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. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him." (John 3:16-17)

Paul wrote in Romans, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) The literature describing salvation is immense and it is easy to become confused if the meanings of words, like propitiation and expiation, become pushed too far. It is therefore helpful to list a few Biblical quotes which will help us understand. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." (Eph. 1:7) "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Eph. 4:32) "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Col. 1:13-14) "I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name." (I John 2:12)

242. Biblical Words: Prayer

Several times in the New Testament, we were told that Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray. It was important to him to have times of private communion with his Heavenly Father. We might look at this as the essence of prayer.

Prayer is not only posture or gestures or even the words we speak. It is the underlying communication with God based on a relationship with our Father in heaven.

Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching and preaching the good news. He saw the crowds were distressed and helpless and had compassion on them. He told his disciples, "Ask (pray) the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matt 9:38)

Jesus went alone to pray to His Father on the night Judas betrayed him. He asked Peter, James, and John to keep watch with him while he went a little farther to pray. On his return, he found his disciples sleeping and advised them to "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." (Matt. 26:41)

James taught us to pray for each other and anoint the sick with oil. "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." (James 5:16) We are to pray continually. (I Thes 5:17) We are to pray everywhere. (I Tim 2:8)

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus gave us advice on prayer: (Matt 5-7) pray for your enemies (Matt 5:44), do not pray to show off; that's what hypocrites do (Matt 6:5). Get alone with your unseen heavenly father to pray; he, who is unseen will see you in secret and reward you (Matt 6:6). Do not babble on and on using many words thinking that longer and more artistic prayers are better as pagans do; for your Father knows your needs before you ask (Matt. 6:7 & 8). Pray this way to our Heavenly Father:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matt 6:9-13)

Pray in Jesus' name. Jesus said, “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.” (John 14:13). Pray with the help of the Holy Spirit, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” (Romans 8:26)
Amen.

243. First Christian Preachers (part 1): Summary of the Message

The first Christian preachers were described in the New Testament. They included the twelve special disciples of Jesus (the Twelve), two of Jesus' brothers, seven deacons appointed in the time of the Acts of the Apostles, Paul and his coworkers, and others.

The Twelve, included Peter, John, James, Andrew, Matthew, Thomas, Nathaniel, Philip, Jude Thaddeus, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Canaanite, and Matthias the replacement for Judas Iscariot. There are many writings and traditions about the Twelve.

Besides the Gospels of Matthew and John, there were Gospels written by Mark and Luke. In the book of Acts, we had messages from Stephen and Philip, two of the seven deacons (the others by tradition are Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch).

After Jesus rose from the dead, two of his brothers, James the Just and Jude, wrote letters preserved in the New Testament. Paul wrote many letters. Barnabas and Silas, his travelling companions worked as missionaries. Titus, Timothy, Lydia, Priscilla, Aquila, Ananias, Epaphroditus (also known as Epaphras), Mnason, Simon Niger, Manaen (a member of Herod's court), Lucius of Cyrene, Tabitha (also known as Dorcas), and the four daughters of Philip were workers with Paul.

The early Christian preachers had a common message that had several points, summarized by the theologian C. D. Dodd:

1. The new age has begun,
2. The new age has come through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah (Christ),
3. Jesus ascended to heaven where he sits on the right hand of God and is the head of the new Israel,
4. Christ will soon return in glory and judgement,
5. The preceding four points are grounds for an appeal for repentance, the offer of forgiveness, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal life.

244. The First Christian Preachers (part 2): Peter, John, Matthew

Of Jesus' twelve disciples, Simon Peter, John, and Matthew (Levi), wrote books that were included in the New Testament. For Christians, of all ancient records, the Bible was the most authoritative, for it was the inspired Word of God. But there were other writings that provide information on past events. Archeology was another means of investigating the past.

Archeology presents physical evidence in stone, brick, pottery, and written records. However, we depend on careful interpretation of findings to discover truth about the past. Some ancient scholars, such as Hippocrates and Josephus, left us precious books, but might have been inaccurate. Traditions were common but were not consistently reliable. Even less dependable were legends though they might have an element of truth.

The four Gospels are central to understanding the life of Jesus, who the heavenly Father sent to bring good news to the world. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were the synoptic gospels because they told the life of Jesus from the same point of view. Scholars felt that Mark was written first and Matthew and Luke used Mark's Gospel and added portions of their own. Either that, or they all three used the same source. Mark was mainly telling us what Jesus did in his ministry. Besides having information unique to Matthew and to Luke, these two Gospels have some sections that seemed to come from a different source known as 'Q' which told us what Jesus taught. The Gospel of John was written with greater emphasis on Jesus' ministry in Judea and Jerusalem. It was likely that John wrote to fill in important omissions not included in the synoptic Gospels.

245. The First Christian Preachers (part 3): Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

Matthew wrote his Gospel primarily to the Jewish people. He looks back on the Old Testament to show that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah. Sixteen times Matthew points out, "This was fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet." For instance, when asked why he spoke in parables, Jesus' answer was to quote from Isaiah, "you will be hearing, but never understanding; you will be ever hearing but never perceiving." Matthew's comment is, "In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah." (Matt. 13:14)

Most scholars agreed the Gospel of Mark was the first Gospel written. It was likely written by John Mark, a young man who lived in Jerusalem with his mother named Mary during the time of Jesus' ministry. (Acts 12:12) So, it is likely that Mark was the young man who had followed Jesus and who lost his linen garment when the crowd, sent by the chief priests, arrested Jesus. Mark includes this embarrassing incident in his Gospel. (Mark 14:51-52) A real eyewitness!

Mark spent some time with Paul and Barnabas as they traveled (in Asia Minor, now Turkey). He later was an associate of Peter and scholars think that much of his information came from Peter.

Though not one of the Twelve, Luke was a well-educated Gentile, a physician, and an expert historian. His Gospel has been called the best 'life of Christ' ever written. Luke wrote his book to 'most Excellent Theophilus.' The man's title is the normal title for a prominent official in the Roman government. In his introduction to Luke in his Daily Study Bible Series, William Barclay writes, "It has been said, that a minister sees men at their best; a lawyer sees men at their worst; and a doctor sees men as they are." Luke shows a sympathy for Jesus and for those that

Jesus encountered during his ministry. Luke presents the gospel as good news to everyone. The good news is for Samaritans and Gentiles too. Women have a special place in his writings, and he quotes Jesus' statement from Isaiah, "and the good news is preached to the poor" (Luke 7:22)

John, a younger cousin of Jesus' becomes a disciple and gives eyewitness accounts of Jesus' ministry. Long after Jesus' ascension into heaven, as an old man, John, in exile on the Isle of Patmos, recounted his experience of a vision of the living God. How could this fisherman from Galilee end up on a lonely island in Greece? While on the cross, Jesus asked John to care for his mother Mary. In Christian tradition, during the Jewish revolt in Judea, John took Mary to the much safer Roman province of Asia. John lived a long life and became a leader in the Church. John had a keen sense of the spiritual aspects of Jesus' message. It is John who quotes Jesus saying, "I tell you the truth, No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again." (John 3:3) Also, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." (John 3:6)

246. The First Christian Preachers (part 4): Peter

Fishermen of Peter's time were hardworking men with hot tempers who spoke vulgar language, who were uneducated but had practical skills. Peter fit the profile perfectly. The Gospels portrayed him as impulsive in word and act, and though loyal, he was paradoxically best known for his betrayal of Jesus. Despite his flaws, he was part of the inner circle of Jesus' closest companions and often the spokesperson for the Twelve. The beauty and harmony of the expressions used in the first chapter of I Peter might surprise us. After all, Peter was a Galilean fisherman who spoke the Aramaic language. He often seemed unthinking and rash in his decisions, yet it was Peter who perceptively answered Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15) Peter responded, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:16)

On the day of Pentecost, it was Peter who addressed the crowd, telling them that the new age prophesied in the Old Testament had begun. "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel, 'In the last days God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people."'" (Acts 2:16, 17).

In I Peter he writes, "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade... kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." (I Peter 1:3-5)

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached, "Repent and be baptized. Every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off... for all whom the Lord our God will call," and he added, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." (Acts 2:38-40)

Further to the forgiveness of sins, Peter wrote, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy." (I Peter 1:13-16)

Peter, as portrayed in the Gospels, was a man of somewhat unstable and impulsive character. His monumental failure was his denial of the Lord, after which he went out and wept bitterly. Of the early Christians, though Paul and John were influential leaders, Peter was preeminent. At the end of I Peter he sent a greeting from 'she' and Mark, who are in 'Babylon.'

(I Peter 5:13) Bible scholars debated whether 'Babylon' was a code name for Rome. Tradition told us that Peter travelled widely as leader of the Christian group and there was some historical and even archeological evidence that Peter was buried in Rome. The tradition was he was martyred by being crucified in an upside-down position. The position was his choice because he did not feel worthy to be crucified in the same position as his Lord.

247. The First Christian Preachers (part 5): Matthew, James, and James

Matthew Gospel we have listed first in the New Testament. It was one of the three synoptic Gospels. It was written with Jewish readers in mind.

There were a considerable number of traditions and legends about Matthew. One tradition was Church leaders assigned him to evangelize in Ethiopia. It is unclear whether it was Ethiopia near Egypt or the Asiatic Ethiopia, a country of that day located south of the Caspian Sea in Persia. Early Church writings claimed a Gospel of Matthew was in India as part of Thomas' missionary work in the first century. The remains of St. Matthew, by tradition, were in a crypt, surrounded by a two-fronted altar, in the Cathedral in Salerno, Italy.

If the Alphaeus of Mark 2:14 was the same as the father of James (the less) then this James must be the brother of Matthew. James, the son of Alphaeus, also known as James, the less (or younger), was a native of Capernaum and possibly the brother of Matthew (Levi). In tradition, writers sometimes confused him with James, the greater (or elder) who was the brother of John (Peter, James, John), and with James (the just) who was the brother of Jesus.

One early Christian tradition is James, son of Alphaeus became the first bishop of the Syrian Church. His body was brought from Constantinople to Rome in the year 572, so his followers must have first buried him in Constantinople.

There was scriptural authority for deaths of only two of the Twelve, Judas Iscariot and James, son of Zebedee, also known as James, the greater (or elder). Herod Agrippa I, wanting to persecute the Church, had James killed. "It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the Church, intending to persecute them. He had James the brother of John put to death with the sword." (Act 12:1-2) This was in 44 A.D.

There were legends about St. James. James and Peter are supposed to have taken a missionary journey to India. It was recorded in a book, 'The Acts of St. James in India.' Eusebius (a church historian) recorded that James was led to the judgment seat in Jerusalem by one who heard his testimony and, after hearing his testimony, confessed to being a Christian. The legend said the Jewish authorities beheaded both James and his convert. Tradition and legend showed a close relationship between James, the son of Zebedee, and Spain. As James lived for about fourteen years after Jesus' crucifixion, he might well have done some missionary work in Spain during these years. A local tradition said that the Virgin Mary appeared, on a pillar, to James as he preached in Spain. They preserved the pillar in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragoza, Spain.

Following James's death, legend says, angels took his body and sailed in a rudderless boat to Spain where the bones now lay at Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain, where a shrine to James became the most famous pilgrimage site in the Christian world.

248. The First Christian Preachers (part 6): John

John was one of the most intimate disciples of Jesus. With Peter and his brother James, he was present at the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37), at the transfiguration (Matt. 17), and in the Garden of Gethsemane close to Jesus in his agony (Matt. 26:36-45). John recorded in his Gospel, "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home." (John 19:25-27)

Tradition, probably historically true, said before the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) John took Mary, Jesus' mother, to safety and settled in Ephesus. John lived a long life and became a recognized leader of the Christian Church. The Roman authorities exiled him on the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation.

John had a disciple named Polycarp. A Christian writer named Irenaeus knew Polycarp. Irenaeus wrote of the teaching of John in Asia. There was an apocryphal document written years after the time of John titled *Travels and Miracles of St. John the Theologian, Apostle and Evangelist*. It was written by a disciple of John named Procorus.

Church history told of John travelling to cities and appointing leaders for the churches. One writer recorded a humorous incident between John and a noted heretic named Cerinthus. John entered a bathhouse to wash but when he found out that Cerinthus was inside John rushed outside saying, "Let us flee lest this bath fall in, as long as Cerinthus, the enemy of truth is within." (Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History P. 114 from: *The Search for the Twelve Apostles* by McBirnie)

249. The First Christian Preachers (part 7): Andrew

As we know Peter for his great sermons to large numbers of people, so we know Andrew as one who brought individuals to Christ. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached to the crowd in Jerusalem. Three thousand repented and were baptized. (Acts 2:41) But it was Andrew who brought Peter to Jesus. "The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon (Peter) and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is the Christ) And he brought him to Jesus". (John 1:41-42)

It was Andrew that found a small boy with a lunch of five small barley loaves and two small fish and brought him to Jesus saying, "but how far will they go among so many?" (John 6:8-9) This small lunch fed about five thousand people. At the Passover Feast at Jerusalem, some Greek men wished to see Jesus. The men approached Philip, who told Andrew and they went to Jesus to let him know. (John 12:20-22) The last mention of Andrew in the New Testament is Acts 1:13, where he is one of the Eleven (the Twelve, minus Judas).

We did not know when Andrew left Jerusalem, but there are some traditions which might be historical about his missionary work. Eusebius, who lived for about eighty years between the years 260-340 A.D. wrote a work called, *Ecclesiastical History*, was called the 'Father of Church History.' He recorded writings from earlier sources. He wrote Andrew went to Scythia in Southern Russia. For a time, Russians considered him their patron saint.

In a work called *The Acts of St. Andrew and St. Bartholomew*, there were stories of their work among the Parthians. There were, also, some writings that told of his ministry in Greece and in Ephesus (Asia Minor) where he was involved with John in the writing of his gospel.

Tradition told us Andrew's life ended in Petrus in Greece. His enemies scourged and tied him to a cross with ropes. They did not nail him to prolong his agony, which lasted two to three

days. The proconsul of Achaia, Aegaas, who urged Andrew to give up his religion and not lose his life, ordered this. Andrew urged Aegaas not to lose his soul. Roman Catholic tradition has kept track of Andrew's relics—some were in Rome.

250. The First Christian Preachers (part 8): Philip the Apostle

Philip was a Greek name meaning 'lover of horses.' The father of Alexander the Great was Philip of Macedon. Jesus' disciple, Philip, was a Jew whose home was in Bethsaida, the town of Simon Peter and Andrew. This area, Iturea and Traconitis, was ruled by the Tetrarch, Herod Philip the son of Herod the Great and brother of Herod Antipas.

Jesus appointed Philip, one of the Twelve. (Mark 3:13-19) It was Philip who found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote... Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." He then invited Nathanael to come and see Jesus. (John 1:44-46)

Jesus asked Philip where they could buy bread for the enormous crowd of people who had followed Jesus to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. Philip answered, "Eight months wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" (John 6:7) Andrew found a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish and Jesus used it to feed the multitude.

It was the weekend of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and Jesus was comforting his disciples. He told them he was going away to his Father's house to prepare a place for them. Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:5) "Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 4:6) Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." (John 14:8) Jesus replied, "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me?" (John 14:10)

There was another Philip in the New Testament who the Twelve appointed as a deacon. He became known as Philip the Evangelist as opposed to Philip the Apostle, who was Jesus' disciple. (Acts 6:5) The early Church Fathers writing the history and traditions appeared to have confused the two Philips, so it is uncertain which one is being referred to in the legends that developed after the New Testament.

However, Luke, the careful historian of the book of Acts, made clear who was being referred to in Acts. At the great persecutions of Christians in Jerusalem, Luke clarified that the apostles were not scattered throughout Judea and Samaria so it must have been Philip the Evangelist that went to Samaria. (Acts 8:1) The deacon, Philip was called Philip the Evangelist, one of the Seven, in Acts 21:8.

251. The First Christian Preachers (part 9): Bartholemew/Nathanael

Bartholemew and Nathanael were likely the same person. Bar was the Aramaic word 'son of' making Bar-Tolomai 'the son of Tolomai.' Nathanael means 'God's gift.'

If we studied the list of the disciples in the Gospels, we would note that writers of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) paired Philip and Bartholemew, and John paired Philip and Nathanael. The synoptic gospel writers never used Nathanael and John never mentioned Bartholemew. In the lists of disciples, occasionally one name seemed out of place. There were groups of four disciples that go together. For instance, Andrew, who usually went

with Simon Peter, came after John in the list in Mark but remained in the group of four. (Lists of the Twelve: Matt.10:2-4 Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16 and Acts 1:13, John 1:45-49).

Most traditions for Bartholomew were in the eastern Church. He went to Armenia and the Armenian Church claimed him as their founder. He might have worked there with Thaddaeus. Bartholomew, by tradition, travelled to the borders of India, where he left a Gospel of Matthew written in Hebrew. He apparently spent some time in the Roman Province of Asia at the church in Hierapolis, which was near the cities of Laodicea and Colossae. There, he worked with Philip. The proconsul in Hierapolis ordered Philip and Bartholomew to be crucified. Somehow, Bartholomew escaped and went to Armenia.

The traditions of the journeys of Bartholomew, his martyrdom, and the journeys of his relics were very confusing. Some of his alleged relics were in the Church of St. Bartholomew, Rome.

252. The First Christian Preachers (part 10): Jude Thaddeus and Simon the Zealot

Jude was likely a common name for someone living in Judah and/or of the tribe of Judah. Lists of the apostles clarified that this person was not Judas Iscariot. There was a record of a question that Jude asked Jesus: "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied it was those who loved him that would follow his teaching (John 14:23-24).

After the resurrection, by tradition, Jude Thaddeus evangelized the area around Edessa in Armenia, perhaps with Bartholomew and Thomas. He also likely worked in Syria and Persia where finally he died. He was originally buried at a place called Kara Kelesia, but his body was moved because of the threat of a Mongol invasion.

Jude was also closely associated with the disciple, Simon Zelotes (or Simon the Canaanite) and their relics are kept at the Vatican.

Simon the Canaanite, also called Simon Zelotes or Simon the Zealot, had a remarkable number of legends that portrayed his ministry. In summary, he evangelized in Egypt and then crossed north Africa. He spent time in Carthage and then moved on to Mauritania, a country in northwest Africa. From here it was a short boat ride to Spain, and it was possible for St. Simon to leave from the ancient Port of Tarshish on Spain's west coast and arrive in Londinium in Britain (Ezekiel 27:25 and Jonah 1:3).

St. Simon's first arrival in Britain was proposed to be in A.D. 60 during the Boadicean War. He evangelized there until Caius Decianus arrested and crucified him. They buried him in Caistor, Lincolnshire about May 10th, A.D. 81. We might find many other legends of Simon the Zealot in histories of Britain.

253. The First Christian Preachers (part 11): Thomas

In the New Testament, Thomas questioned Jesus, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:5) When Jesus decided to go back to Bethany in Judea, Thomas said to the other disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (John 11:16) After Jesus' resurrection, Thomas, who had not seen him, doubted that he was alive. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my

hand into his side, I will not believe it.” (John 20:25) When Jesus appeared again and Thomas saw him, he said immediately, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus responded to Thomas with words which apply to us all, “Because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)

Tradition told us that Peter, Thomas, Thaddeus, and Mari (one of the Seventy) founded The Church of the East. Its official name is The Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church of the East.

To understand travel in those days, we must understand the different routes of the Silk Road caravans were well under way between China and the Roman Empire. A navigator named Eudoxus of Cyzicus and a skipper named Hippolus showed the monsoon winds could power sailing ships from the west to the coast of India. And when the monsoon winds reversed later in the year, the winds brought the ships back to the west. There was active sea travel to India and Sri Lanka and beyond.

The Christian Church of South India, according to traditional history, began with the Apostle Thomas, who landed on the coast of Malabar, south India in 52 A.D. and founded several Christian churches. The Romans often used the sea route to south India for the pepper trade. Archeologists discovered Roman gold and silver coins in the Malabariense soil, so it was possible for Thomas to have sailed to India.

According to Eusebius, the ancient church historian, Pantaenius was the first principal of the Alexandrine School of Alexandria. Eusebius recorded Pantaenius visited India and found a thriving Christian community that had preserved the writings of Matthew. Gregory of Tours (594 A.D.) wrote about a monastery of St. Thomas in India. He based this account on a report he had from a monk named Theodor, who had visited the monastery. Thome Lopes, who had accompanied Vasco da Gama on his second journey to India in 1503 A.D., said the Christians who came to meet Da Gama talked about the Apostle Thomas who had performed many miracles.

To commemorate a visit to India by a patriarch of the Church of the East, they published a souvenir volume stating that the Apostle Thomas came to India and established churches. It also mentioned the persecution he endured, and that he was martyred for his faith. There was a hill near Madras (Chennai) that commemorated the spot where the Apostle Thomas was martyred.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten son... For God brought not his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.” (John 3:16-17)

254. Charles Wesley Hymns: Father, I Stretch my Hands to Thee

Father, I stretch my hands to Thee,
No other help I know;
If Thou withdraw Thyself from me,
Ah! Wither shall I go?

What did Thine only Son endure,
Before I drew my breath?
What pain, what labour, to secure
My soul from endless death!

O Jesus, could I this believe,
I now should feel Thy power;
Now my poor soul Thou wouldst retrieve,
Nor let me wait one hour.

Author of faith, to Thee I lift
My weary, longing eyes:
O let me now receive that gift!
My soul without it dies!

Surely Thou canst not let me die;
O speak, and I shall live;
And here I will unwearied lie,
Till Thou Thy Spirit give.

How would my fainting soul rejoice,
Could I but see thy face;
Now let me hear Thy quickening voice,
And taste Thy pardoning grace.

This hymn is in many modern British and American hymnals (website: hymnary.org) and there is some controversy whether this is attributable to Charles Wesley. Poetical Works, by Dr. Osborne, 1868-72, suggested that this hymn is one that may have been, “merely selected, arranged, and more or less altered by Wesley.” This opinion seems to be based on the appearance of this hymn in a collection, Psalms & Hymns, 1741, that contained many hymns previously published by other authors. This hymn, however, may have been Wesley’s as there is no previous attribution. Its themes and style were consistent with the great Methodist hymn writer.

The image of stretching our hands was one of surrender and trust. In Job we read, “Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch your hands to him, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then, free of fault you will lift up your face; you will stand firm and without fear.” (Job 11:13-15). In the Psalms we read, “my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, Lord, every day; I spread my hands to you.” (Psalm 88:9) Spreading of hands was seen in other verses as well. (Psalm 143:6).

The fourth verse spoke of the “Author of faith,” who we know as Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2) The ‘gift’ received is salvation.

The hymn underlined the believer’s suffering by referring to “weary, longing eyes” and concluded with rejoicing for the “fainting soul” reminiscent of “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters... because the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.” (Isaiah 55:1a, 5b)

255. The First Christian Preachers (part 12): Stephen

Stephen was one of the seven deacons selected by the early Church in Jerusalem to look after the fair distribution of food to the needy widows among the great number of people who

had become followers of Jesus. He was a man full of God's grace and power (Acts 6:5) who did great wonders and miraculous signs. (Acts 6:8)

Members of the Synagogue of Freedmen opposed Stephen. They were a large group who brought him before the Sanhedrin, where they produced false witnesses who testified that he had said Jesus of Nazareth would destroy this holy place and change the customs of Moses. The High Priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?" (Acts 7:1) Acts recorded Stephen's reply (Acts 7:1-60). The charges against Stephen were remarkably like those against Jesus recorded in Mark 14—Jesus would destroy the temple and he said he was the Christ. Stephen's reply to the Sanhedrin was not an attempt to explain away what he had said to procure an acquittal, but a defence of his teaching. He explained the way God had dealt with the Hebrew nation in the past and how the reaction of people was one of rebellion against God and His messengers.

Stephen showed from their history that God had never confined His presence to one place only and that the people of Israel had over and over rebelled against God and persecuted His prophets. God was with Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees. He led Abraham's family to Haran and then Abraham and Sarah to the Promised Land. He was with Joseph in Egypt and provided for His people in that place. God chose Moses as their leader to free His people from the slavery of Egypt, but the people rebelled against Moses and wanted a golden calf to worship. Under Joshua, God drove out the nations from Canaan and Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem. Stephen said, "However, the Most High does not live-in houses made by men. As the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?' Says the Lord. 'Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?'" (Isaiah 66:1-2, Acts 7:49-50)

Stephen now pointed out the basic problem. Their fathers had not purposed to follow God's way. They resisted the Holy Spirit and persecuted the prophets. They killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One, the Messiah. And Stephen now directly accused the Sanhedrin, "And now you have betrayed and murdered him." (Acts 7:51-52) This witness of the truth made the members of the prosecution furious, so they dragged Stephen out of the city and stoned him. The first Christian martyr!

256. The First Christian Preachers (part 13): Philip the Evangelist

Philip was one of the seven men chosen to care for the needy widows of the early Church. It was the widows of the Grecian Jews who were being neglected and all the seven deacons chosen were Grecian Jews if we can go by their names. Besides Stephen and Philip, the New Testament did not mention again the other deacons.

After the stoning of Stephen, there was a great persecution of the Church. They forced many Christians to leave Jerusalem and Philip went to Samaria, where he spread the good news about Christ Jesus. Philip influenced the Samaritans and performed many miraculous signs. (Acts 8:6) The apostles at Jerusalem heard Samaria had accepted the testimony of Philip, so they sent Peter and John to oversee the situation. When Peter and John saw the converts had truly accepted the word of God, they prayed for them so they might receive the Holy Spirit. After laying hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit.

Another event of importance happened while the apostles while the apostles were in Samaria. Simon Magnus saw the apostles lay hands on converts, and they received the Holy Spirit. He offered money for the ability to give the Holy Spirit to whoever he laid hands on. Peter

showed him that this was a wicked thought and that he should repent and seek forgiveness for it. Peter and John spoke in many Samaritan villages on their way back to Jerusalem. (Acts 8:18-25)

An angel instructed Philip to go south to the desert road. The Spirit told Philip to approach a certain chariot. The Ethiopian eunuch was reading the section of the book of Isaiah. "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation... etc." (Isaiah 53:7-8) Using this passage, Philip told the eunuch the good news about Jesus. Philip baptized the eunuch who went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:26-40) The apostle Paul near the end of his missionary journey stopped in to visit Philip's family in Caesarea. Here, Paul may have met Philip's four unmarried daughters who prophesied. (Acts 21:8-9)

The real meaning of Biblical prophecy is not the telling of the future but of expressing a message from God. Sometimes this message may inform about the future, but it is likely that the daughters of Philip were following their father and preaching the message of the good news about Jesus.

257. The First Christian Preachers (part 14): Paul and the Evil World

Paul was the greatest preacher of the Apostolic Age. He considered himself an apostle, for he had an encounter with the Lord Jesus himself on the road to Damascus. Authors wrote many volumes about Paul's life and his theology. He founded many churches and wrote or dictated thirteen of the books of the New Testament.

We might get a summary of Paul's theology from the Book of Romans. He travelled widely and faced many dangers in his three missionary journeys but had not visited Rome. So, in his letter, after introducing himself, he let the Christians in Rome understand his thoughts about the gospel, for he stated, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentiles. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: the righteous shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:16-17)

Paul showed why people need salvation. It was human's fault that evil is so prevalent in the world for, "God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities... his eternal power and divine nature... have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." (Rom. 1:19-23) "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator... who is forever praised. Amen." (Rom. 1:25)

So, God sent His Son into the world so that He might save the world through Him.

258. The First Christian Preachers (part 15): Paul and the Law of Moses

It was Paul's contention that the Mosaic Law was righteous and provided a template for how we could live a righteous life. But "when Gentiles who do not have the law, do by nature

things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts,” (Rom. 2:14-15)

Thus, Paul showed God was at work in the lives of both Jew and Gentile but in fact, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through his redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 3:23-24) God presented him (Christ) as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood (Rom.3:25).

Using Abraham as an example, Paul showed God counted a person righteous if they had faith and trust in God. When God told Abraham that he would have a son and descendants uncountable as the stars, “Abraham believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” (Gen. 15:6) (Rom. 4:3) So Paul used this relationship of faith in God and righteousness to show that a right relationship with God came from trusting Him. The Old Testament again showed the relationship in Habakkuk, “but the righteous will live by his faith.” (Hab. 2:4) “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ,” (Rom. 5:1) Paul showed why the Jews did not achieve this right relationship with God. The Gentiles obtained it by faith in God, but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not obtained it because they pursued it by works and not by faith (Rom. 9:30-33).

Paul showed the Romans his view of salvation. He also added his view of judgment. God’s judgment was based on truth. (Rom. 2:2) God will give to each person according to what he has done. Rom. 2:6) Though God was kind and patient and tolerant leading toward repentance, there would be a day of judgment leading some to eternal life and to others who followed evil there would be wrath and anger (Rom. 2:1-11).

259. The First Christian Preachers (part 16): Paul and Life in the Spirit

In the eighth chapter of Romans, Paul wrote the classic chapter describing the spirit-filled life. His first point was that it was a life of freedom. There was a common misconception that being able to do whatever our passion, drives, and instincts suggested to us and not being accountable for our actions was freedom. If we desired something that belonged to someone else, this type of freedom suggested that we take it for ourselves. Countries make laws to prevent this type of freedom. The best laws were those based on the ten commandments like, “Thou shalt not steal.” (Ex 20:15)

Paul talked about a deeper type of freedom—freedom that leads to integrity and peace, freedom of the soul. The first freedom mentioned is freedom from condemnation. Paul saw two principles which are here called laws, the principle of ‘sin and death’ and the principle of the ‘spirit of life’ which comes through Christ Jesus. In verse three, the word law referred to the Mosaic law, which is powerless to change man’s sinful nature. But, because Jesus presented himself as a sin-offering to take away sin, the spirit-filled life gave us freedom from the domination of sin. The result was that if the Holy Spirit controlled a person’s life, they could keep the righteous requirement of the law. The mind controlled “... by the Spirit is life and peace.” (Rom 8:6) Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Rom. 8:1-8).

By the Spirit of Christ, Christ lived within the person who belonged to Him. And the Spirit of God who raised Christ from the dead was living in them, “He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.” (Rom. 8:11)

In Christ we were children of God and could call him Abba*. We were his heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, we who shared in his sufferings and his glory.

*Aramaic was the language commonly spoken by Jesus and his disciples. 'Abba' was an Aramaic word meaning 'father' but also used by children as we might use the word 'daddy.' Adoption was common in Roman times. Even the emperor Augustus Caesar adopted a son to be his heir. This adopted son died before Augustus and so he adopted Tiberius, who became the Caesar in the year 14 A.D.

260. The First Christian Preachers (part 17): Paul and Persecution

Paul experienced many kinds of intolerance and suffering, but his view was that suffering did not compare to the glory God will reveal. He saw the whole creation as suffering from a bondage to decay. God would redeem our bodies, and our bondage would cease. (Rom. 8:23) Paul teaches the resurrection of the body.

Paul believed the Spirit of God helped us as we pray to the Father. We did not know what to pray for in certain situations. At these times, the Spirit helps us or even prays for us. "The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." (Rom. 8:27)

To those who God declared righteous (justified), Paul stated, God would glorify them. They would be like His son, who was the firstborn among many. To those called for God's purpose who loved God, He worked for their good (Rom. 8:28-30).

Because of what God had done for us, we could be, "more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Rom. 8:37) There was nothing in all creation that could separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord (Rom. 8:39).

Paul urged the saints to live a life of sacrificial love for each other and even for their enemies. We should consider our bodies as a 'living sacrifice,' "holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." (Rom 12:1)

Paul looked on the governing authorities as God's servants, who we should obey. (Rom. 13:1-7) He believed love was the fulfilling of the law, for love did no harm to a neighbour. (Rom. 13:8-10) Remember, it was Paul that wrote the 'Love Chapter' of I Corinthians chapter 13. Though a person had many spiritual gifts, if they do not have love, they gain nothing. Paul described this *agape* love: which is kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not rude, is not easily angered and does not delight in evil but rejoiced in the truth and always trusts. Agape love is the love that God has for the world (I Cor 13).

Those who were strong in faith should not condemn a person who did certain disputable things because his faith was weak. Accept each other as fellow servants of God. (Rom. 15:1)

261. The First Christian Preachers (part 18): Paul the Evangelist to the Gentiles

The 15th Chapter of Acts described the meeting of the Church council under James, the brother of Jesus, at Jerusalem. This council decided Gentile believers did not have to follow the Jewish Law to be considered a Christian. Peter made the chief argument. Peter went to the house

of the Gentile Cornelius, at the Holy Spirit's urging. God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles who believed. The Gentiles, without recourse to the Mosaic Law, received the Spirit.

In his ministry Paul came to see himself as a special evangelist to the Gentiles, "because of the grace God gave to me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 15:15-16) Originally, the apostles had considered that as God's chosen people, Jews would be the ones for whom Christ came. By the leading of God, they came to see that Christ came for everyone. This presented a problem for Paul. He recognized now it made no difference between Jew and Gentile, both would receive salvation by belief in Jesus Christ, but Paul wondered about and wrote about his views on the Jewish nation. (Rom. 10:1-11:35)

Paul often wrote brief letters to resolve a local problem in a certain church. In these letters were statements of Paul's message. In Corinthians, he looked forward to a day of judgment, "as you eagerly await for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed, he will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 1:7-8) God is a God of comfort. He comforted us so that we can comfort those in trouble. (II Cor. 1:4) In Galatians, he wrote about the purpose of the law, "So, the (Mosaic) law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law." (Gal. 3:24-25) Paul compared the acts of the sinful nature and the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:19-26) In Ephesians, Paul summarized salvation this way. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast." (Eph. 2:8-9) The Roman soldier's battle equipment provided an analogy for our struggle against evil. (Eph. 6:10-18). In Philippians, he instructed his readers to imitate Christ Jesus in his humility. (Phil. 2:5-8)

We end this look at the ministry and message of Paul with a quote from his charge to Timothy. "You however know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings — what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them." (II Tim. 3:10-11)

262. The First Christian Preachers (part 19): Barnabas

Barnabas meant 'son of encouragement' (or exhortation). His first name was Joseph, and he was from Cyprus. Acts 4:37 told us he sold a field and gave the money to the apostles.

Saul (Paul) had his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul became a believer in Jesus and preached in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God. But when he returned to Jerusalem, the disciples there were afraid of him because of his previous persecution of Christians. It was Barnabas who took Paul to the apostles to explain the changes in his beliefs and ministry. Paul talked to and debated with Grecian Jews. His life was in danger—so the brothers sent him home to Tarsus. (Acts 9:29-30)

Because of persecution in Jerusalem, witnesses spread across the land and the gospel became known in Antioch in Syria, where even Greeks were believing in Jesus. When the apostles heard of this, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to investigate. Barnabas encouraged them to remain true to the Lord and, seeing the need for Paul in this situation, Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Paul back to Antioch with him. Paul and Barnabas spent a year in Antioch witnessing and teaching many new believers. It was here in Antioch that the disciples of Jesus

were first called Christians. Luke recorded these events in Acts, chapter 11. The chapter ended with Barnabas and Paul going to Jerusalem with a gift for the famine-stricken brothers there.

When Barnabas and Saul (Paul) had finished their mission, they returned to Antioch (Acts 12:25), taking John Mark with them. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Paul went as missionaries. Taking Mark with them, they went to Cyprus to continue what we know as Paul's first missionary journey. (Acts 13) In the book of Acts, Barnabas and Saul became Paul and Barnabas. They attended the Church council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) and return to Antioch with a letter from the apostles and elders. On his second missionary journey, Barnabas took John Mark, who was his cousin (Col. 4:10) and Silas accompanied Paul. (Acts 15:39-40)

Legend has it that Barnabas died and was buried on the Island of Cyprus. His relics were discovered in between 474 -491 A.D. along with a copy of Mark's gospel in the handwriting of Barnabas.

263. The First Christian Preachers (part 20): Silas

Paul chose Silas to travel with him on a journey through Syria and Cilicia to visit the churches established on Paul's first Missionary Journey. When they came to Lystra, a young man impressed Paul. This young man, Timothy, whose father was a Greek and his mother was a Jewess. Paul wanted to take this young man, Timothy, with them, and so Timothy joined Paul and Silas on their journey.

Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, also called in Acts the 'Spirit of Jesus,' (Acts 16:7) the missionaries went on to Troas where Paul saw, in a vision, a man from Macedonia begging him to come to Macedonia. There Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, joined them (see the 'we' in Acts 16:10). So, the group, including Silas, came to Philippi. Outside the city gate, the group encountered some women who were worshipping by the river. Paul gave his message about Jesus and a leading lady, Lydia, and others became believers. In Philippi, the authorities arrested Paul and Silas, stripped, and beat them, and put in prison with their feet in stocks. The Lord delivered them by a great earthquake and the jailer, and his family, became believers.

It alarmed the magistrates when they found out that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and pled with them to leave the city. Silas was also called Silvanus, the Latin form of his name. He was like Paul, a Hebrew, and a Roman citizen. (Acts 16:37) So, Paul and Silas left Philippi and moved on to Thessalonica, where Paul attended their synagogue on three sabbath days, reasoning with them and explaining that Jesus was the Messiah. Many believed, including Jews and God-fearing Gentiles and some women. The Jews of Thessalonica were jealous and started a riot against Paul and Silas. That night, the Christians sent Paul and Silas away and they went to Berea. These Jews of Thessalonica followed them, causing trouble, and so the believers sent Paul away from there. Paul went on to Athens and then Corinth, while Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth, and then Silas and Timothy spent some time spreading the Gospel news in Achaia, the southern area of Greece.

We encountered Silas again in the New Testament. He was the scribe who wrote I Peter for Peter. The Greek of I Peter is a beautiful that reminds one of classical Greek. Silas took the words of Peter, the uneducated, Aramaic speaking fisherman, and expressed them in lovely terms that remain impressive even when translated into other languages. Ending the letter of I Peter are the words, "With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it." (I Peter 5:12)

264. The First Christian Preachers (part 21): Timothy

Paul left Antioch with Silas on his second missionary journey. He crossed through Syria and Cilicia, visiting Churches established on his first missionary journey. When they came to Lystra, they met a young man who was a disciple named Timothy. Timothy's mother, Eunice, was a Jewess and his grandmother, Lois, too. They both had what Paul referred to as a "sincere faith" that was also present in Timothy. (II Tim. 1:5) Timothy's father was a Greek who apparently had little to do with his spiritual development.

Paul wanted Timothy as a companion on his journey. Paul circumcised him. So, the three men travelled across the high tableland of Asia Minor and came to Troas, where Luke joined them. They sailed across to Neapolis and came to Philippi.

Following the episode of Paul and Silas being flogged by the magistrates, put in prison with their feet in stocks, and their release by an earthquake, Paul and Silas left Philippi. The evangelistic group worked their way from Macedonia in the north of Greece to Achaia in the south. Certain antagonistic Jews frequently gave Paul trouble, so they kept moving. Timothy became an essential messenger between members of the group.

But Timothy was more than a messenger. In the later books known as I, II Timothy, Paul gives us vital information about this young man. When Paul chose Timothy, he and the body of elders laid their hands on him, and he received a gift from God that came through some prophetic message. (I Tim. 4:14) Paul encouraged Timothy to remember this gift and throughout the two Timothy letters, Paul advised him to use this gift in his ministry. "For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a Spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." (II Tim. 1:6-7)

When Nero was Emperor of Rome and was persecuting the Christians, there were some piecemeal references to Timothy. "I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you." (Heb. 13:23) They released Paul from his first imprisonment in Rome. Timothy oversaw the Church in Ephesus. "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrine any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies." (I Tim. 1:3-4)

Timothy was with Paul in Rome when he wrote Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. (Col. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, Phm.1)

When Paul was facing his death, wherever Timothy was, he was free to come to Paul. "For, I am already being poured out like a drink offering and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith... Do your best to come to come to me quickly." (II Tim. 4:6-7, 9)

265. The First Christian Preachers (part 22): Titus

Titus was a very dear friend and helper of Paul. Probably he was one of Paul's converts as Paul referred to him as, "my true son in our common faith:" (Titus 1:4) Paul and Barnabas took Titus, an example of a Gentile Christian, to Jerusalem to meet with the leaders of the Church. (Gal. 2:1-2)

Paul sent Titus to Corinth to help solve the problems there and to raise money for Paul and the brothers to take as a gift for the famine-stricken Christians in the Jerusalem area. Titus did a magnificent job in Corinth, and the Corinthian Christians became very attached to him. He might have visited Corinth on three occasions. (II Cor. 8:16-17)

Later, as Paul instructed Timothy to supervise the work in Ephesus, so he instructed Titus to organize the Church in Crete. This, Paul knew, would be a difficult task for, as Paul quoted from one of their own prophets, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." (Titus 1:12) Paul instructed Titus in what he should teach, "you must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine." (Titus 2:1) In II Tim. 4:10 we read Titus was in Dalmatia.

266. The First Christian Preachers (part 23): Apollos, Prisca/Priscilla, and Aquilla

Apollos was a learned Jew from Alexandria. He knew about Jesus through the teaching of John the Baptist and had accurate knowledge of the Way. In Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquilla heard his eloquent preaching but recognized that his knowledge of the Way was accurate but incomplete, so they invited him to their home and explained the full gospel. It was likely that Apollos had not heard of Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

There was a group of Christians in Corinth who especially favoured Apollos (I Cor. 1:12) Paul sees him as another servant of God. (I Cor. 3:5-7) Apollos planned to go to Crete later. (Titus 3:13)

The name Prisca belongs to a noble Roman family the, gens Prisca. Because of her status or because she was the more dominant of the couple, the author referred to her first. They were a Jewish couple in the tent-making occupation who lived in Rome. They became Christians and left Rome when, in the year 49 A.D., the Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome. They moved to Corinth, where they met Paul, who joined them in the business because this was also Paul's trade. They went with Paul to Ephesus and set up a branch of the business.

In Ephesus, they met Apollos who they invited to their home and imparted information about the 'Way' he did not know. They returned to Rome for a while, then went back to Ephesus. (II Tim. 4:19)

When Paul wrote Romans, he greeted Priscilla and Aquilla and referred to them as fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for him, and they used their house as the church. They had a significant influence among the Gentiles. (Rom. 16:3-5)

267. The First Christian Preachers (part 24): The Daughters of Philip, Ananias, Tabitha/Dorcas, Epaphras

When Paul and his company were returning to Jerusalem, they stopped to visit at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. Acts 21:9 told us that Philip had four daughters who prophesied. Prophecy was passing on of the message from God. It was only prediction of the future if that was God's message. The daughters would be preachers or teachers in the Church.

The Lord spoke to Ananias, telling him to go to Saul (Paul) to restore his sight, for he was blind since the encounter with Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. Because Paul had been

persecuting Christians, Ananias, at first, thought this was a bad idea, but the Lord explained Paul was His chosen instrument to carry the gospel message to the Gentiles.

Ananias went to Paul and placed his hands on him saying, "Brother Saul, the Lord... Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here... has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." God healed Paul; Ananias baptized him. (Acts 9:1-19)

In Joppa lived a disciple name Tabitha, also known as Dorcas. She was always doing good and helping the poor. She got sick and died and they laid her out in an upper room. As Peter was nearby, he was called. He went up to the room and said, "'Tabitha get up.' She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet... and many people believed in the Lord." (Acts 9: 36-42)

While Epaphras was a shortened form of the name Epaphroditus, it was uncertain that the Epaphras referred to in Col. 1:7 was the same person as Epaphroditus of Philippians 2:25-30. Paul considered Epaphras as a fellow servant and, in his letter to Philemon, called him his fellow prisoner. (Philemon 23)

When Paul was in Ephesus, much of the Roman Province of Asia heard the good news about Jesus. It was Epaphras who laid the foundation for the Church in Colosse, and he also seems to have been the overseer of the other nearby Churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis. (Col. 4:13) These three wealthy cities were along the valley of the Lycus River and were within twelve miles of each other.

268. The First Cristian Preachers (part 25): Others with Paul

When the Church at Philippi heard that Paul was imprisoned in Rome, they sent Epaphroditus to Paul with a gift, intending Epaphroditus to stay with Paul as his servant. But Epaphroditus became ill and almost died. He recovered and Paul wanted to send him back to Philippi, probably carrying the letter to the Church. Paul was careful to show how helpful Epaphroditus had been to him so they would not look upon him as a failure. "So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me." (Phil. 2:29-30)

Lydia was a businesswoman from Thyatira involved in the purple dying trade. She lived in Philippi and listened to Paul speak of the good news about Jesus and she became a Christian. She provided a home as a place for the evangelists to stay.

Paul sends greetings to those in Rome. "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives_who have been in prison with me. They were outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. (Rom. 16:7)

The Romans compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross of Jesus and there was an allusion to Alexander and Rufus, sons of Simon, as known in the Christian community. We assume they were Christians.

Simon Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen were prophets and teachers in the early Church in Antioch. (Acts 13:1)

269. Important Biblical Words: Shiloh

In Genesis Chapter 49, Jacob gave his dying blessing to his twelve sons. He said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days." (Gen. 49:1) Verse 10 read, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until *Shiloh* come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." (Gen. 49:10) Both the genealogy of Matthew and Luke showed Jesus as a descendent of Judah. (Matt 1:2-3, Luke 3:33)

It was tempting to see the word *Shiloh* as an ancient word somehow pointing to Jesus the Messiah. But such an interpretation was not at all easy to prove. The following discussion largely depends on the section of Genesis 49:10 in the International Bible Commentary, edited by F. F. Bruce, the section written by D. F. Payne.

There was a glorious future in store for the tribe of Judah. It was to have the power and dignity of a lion and the tribe would receive praise, which was a wordplay on the meaning of Judah (praise). The literal translation of Judah was praise.

The Hebrew word used as 'lawgiver' has the meaning of the ruler's staff, the symbol of a person with authority to make laws. The term lawgiver could also apply to Christ.

The gathering of the people seemed to show not only the Jewish tribes but also the Gentile nations.

D. F. Payne stated that, "the difficulty of interpreting v. 10 is compounded by the obscurity and textual uncertainty of the Hebrew." Did it mean, until Shiloh comes, or, until Judah came to Shiloh? Shiloh was the name of a sanctuary in Ephraim, but it was difficult to find any connection with this sanctuary. There was an early interpretation in Jewish literature of the word *Shiloh* as Messiah (a targum = a paraphrase) but there was no apparent Hebrew basis for this.

An intriguing alternate interpretation saw Shi-loh as two words which would mean 'tribute to him' making the reading, "until he comes to whom tribute belongs" instead of, "until Shiloh come."

270. Important Biblical Words: Creation

The Old Testament authors wrote in the Hebrew Language. Dr. Michael Carasik is a Hebrew scholar who taught one of the *Great Courses* entitled *Learning a Sacred Language*. He made significant comments, especially on the first five verses of Genesis.

Tohu vabohu (without form and void) meant a state of perfect entropy. To the scientist, entropy was the amount of disorganization of a system. In this state, the organization of the created stuff was a complete chaos. The stuff of creation was then differentiated or organized. God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." (Gen 1:3) The 'let' is a translation of a verbal form called *jussive*. It does not mean that light was prohibited from being but could now be. It was a Hebrew verbal form of intention, as we might say, "Let George do it," meaning my intention was that George should do it. In the same way, the 'let' of 'let there be light' meant that God's intention was that light should exist.

In the phrase, "... and darkness was upon the deep," "the deep" translated a word that came from the Babylonian creation epic, *Enumma Elish*. The word is *tiamat* and was the name of one of the heathen gods, the sea god and the earth god that fought each other and so creation occurred according to the epic. Its use here was a polemic against the heathen idea of creation.

In verse 6, God created the firmament, Hebrew *ruach*, to separate the water above and below. Verse 2 said the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. Some translations used a suggested it meant 'a mighty wind.' Perhaps a translation like, 'the invisible force of God' might be acceptable.

We might look at the question many people have about the creation of light. They wondered how God could make light before the sun, moon, and stars which were sources of the light in our physical world? Science showed us that visible light was only a small group of wavelengths our human eye interpreted as light, while it was likely God at this stage created the whole electromagnetic wave system from the larger radio waves to the very tiny gamma rays. A more appropriate question might be, “how could God put shining lights in the sky if there as yet was no such thing as light?”

271. Important Biblical Words: Hallelujah

In Hebrew, the basic building blocks of verbs are three consonants. The building blocks for praise are H, L, L. This forms the first part of Hallelujah. *Hallelu* is the command form, and the command form is followed by *jah* which is the short form of Jehovah/Yaweh. So, the word means, ‘praise Jehovah.’ But Jehovah is not a Hebrew word, nor is J a Hebrew letter. The Hebrew letter is Y. So read, ‘Hall-e-lu-ya.’

The *yah* was a short form of the Hebrew name of God YHWH (the Tetragramaton—meaning four letters), which today the Jews never pronounce. But the *yah* or *jah* forms part of many Hebrew names, like *Jeremiah*, *Zechariah*, and *Hezekiah*.

Instead of using the Tetragramaton when Hebrew scripture was read, the speaker substituted the word that meant ‘my Lord.’ English translators used the word LORD in capital letters or sometimes GOD in capital letters. We could find this in the King James Version of the Bible. (See these two translations in Isaiah 17:6 “LORD God” and Ezekiel 12:10 “Lord GOD” KJV). The NIV margin gives us a transliteration of the word in Psalm 150 verses 1 and 6 “*Hallelu Yah*” meaning “Praise the LORD.”

So, when we sing the chorus, “Praise ye the Lord, Hallelujah,” we are repeating the English thought in Hebrew.

The word *Hallelujah* has joined other words that people shouted if the Spirit touched them during a worship service. This word joined words or phrases like amen, Abba, or thank the Lord.

A related word is *Hallel*. They are a group of psalms that are sung on special occasions. Jews often sang Psalms 113 to 118 in their homes during Passover. Psalms 136 or 135 and 136 praise God for rain and for food. Psalms 120 to 136 is the Great Hallel.

Praise ye the Lord, hallelujah.

272. Important Biblical Words: Blessed

The simple meaning of blessed is happy. It is not an ideal synonym because we relate happy to happen. Blessed also contains joy that comes with no genuine cause. Blessed is a deeper word than happy.

The Gospel translators used ‘blessed’ in the English translation of the Sermon on the Mount. The Greek term was *makarios*. Greeks used *makarios* to describe the type of joy that the gods were supposed to have. It was joy that was not dependent on circumstances. The island of Cyprus was called Makaria. They believed the island was so lovely and so fertile, with such a perfect climate that a person could find happiness without leaving its shores. So, Matthew

translated Jesus' Aramaic words into Greek thought. By Following Jesus, there was a blessedness that was not dependent on circumstances.

If happy is too superficial a word to express blessedness, perhaps joy would be a better expression. Certainly, the "joy of the Lord" would infuse a blessed person. But the words bless, blessing, and blessed have a multitude of related meanings that the alternatives have trouble fully capturing.

After God created the first man and woman, He blessed them, telling them to be fruitful and to increase in numbers, and gave them dominion over the animals. He also gave them the seed-bearing plants for food. (Gen. 1:28-30) God promised Abram, he would bless him, and make his name great, and make him a blessing to all peoples on earth. (Gen. 12:1-3) The wedding psalm, Psalm 45, had a long tradition in both synagogue and church. Most Christians and Jews believed the Psalm referred to the Messiah and his bride. Referring then to Christ the psalmist said, "You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever." (Psalm 45:2) See also Hebrews 1:9, which also referred to Christ, "you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." (Heb 1:9)

273. Important Biblical Words: Bless

There was a sense in which humankind blessed God. The King James Version read, "Bless the LORD, O my Soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name... and forget not his benefits." (Psalm 103:1-2) When man blessed God, he praised Him for his benefits. In fact, a more modern translation used the term 'praise'. "Praise the LORD, O my soul, all my inmost being, praise his holy name (Psalm 103:1)

Humans also blessed each other. A father might bless his sons, or a leader or priest might bless his people. "This is the blessing that Moses the man of God pronounced on the Israelites before his death. He said: 'The LORD came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir...'" (Deuteronomy 33:1-2a)

When Jacob was about to die, he gathered his sons to listen to his prophecy about their future. Vs. 28 said, "All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him." (Gen. 49:28) Shortly after this blessing, "he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people." (Gen. 49:33)

Aaron, after he sacrificed to the Lord, "lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them". (Lev. 9:22) There was the High Priestly blessing recorded in Numbers. "'The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.'" (Numbers 6:24-26)

From ancient times, the Jews had said a prayer of thanksgiving before eating a meal. When Jesus took the small lunch of five small loaves and two small fish, he gave thanks before feeding the five thousand. (Luke 9:16) The usual prayer before meals was, "Blessed art thou Lord God, King of the World, who causeth bread to come forth from the earth." At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and gave it to his disciples. Then he took the cup and again gave thanks and told them all to drink from it. We understood that this represented the broken body and Jesus' blood of the new covenant. (Matt. 26:26-29)

Christians had, instructed by Jesus, celebrated the Last Supper, and also most said a "blessing" before meals as a thanksgiving for the food.

274. Important Biblical Words: Holy

In Isaiah, chapter 6, Isaiah described his vision of God in the temple. Angels were calling to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD almighty, the whole earth is full of is glory." (Isaiah 6:3) Faced with God's holiness, Isaiah felt his sinfulness, and cried out, "Woe to me..." One seraphim took a coal from the fire and touched Isaiah's mouth with it and told him his guilt was taken away and his sin atoned for. (Is. 6:7) We could describe holiness as a state of being entirely separated from evil. The second part of holiness was to be joined to God (separated to God). Evil had no part in holiness and was absolutely separated from it. "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those that fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:11-12)

Habakkuk 1:13 said, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, you cannot tolerate wrong." God's holiness was free from moral evil and was moral perfection. But man was sinful. It was after the flood that God said, "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood." (Gen. 8:21)

How could man participate in God's holiness? In the Old Testament, there were those who took a Nazarite vow. The Nazarite's intent was to be totally separated from evil and given to the Lord. His or her life was to be given totally to the Lord. His or her life was to be an example of ceremonial holiness. (Numbers 6:1-21) A righteous, holy God required complete separation from sin and conformity to God's moral standard. The moral standard was not an external list of rules that God kept but was the essential character of God. And it was possible for people to achieve a right relationship with God. In Psalms we read, "But from everlasting to everlasting, the LORD'S love is with those who fear him." (Psalm 103:17) The connection of man with God was possible through God's love. He loved us so much that He sent His son to be the sacrifice for our redemption. (John 3:16) Through the Old Testament the fear of God explained the relationship of man to God. However, the Old Testament authors also emphasized God's love so that, "you your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees that I give you... love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your strength." (Deut.6:2, 5)

For the Israelite in the Old Testament and for the Christian, the aim of their life was to be conformed to the will of God. Our response to the holiness of God should be gratitude to Him.

275. Important Biblical Words: Omni

The words omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience described the God of the Bible, though the actual words might not appear. Omnipotence referred to God's unlimited power. We could translate the Old Testament *El Shaddai* as almighty God. "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.'" (Gen. 17:1) Psalm 24 tells us who the King of glory was. "Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty... he is the King of glory..." (Psalm 24:10)

Omnipresence referred to God's presence everywhere. This was not pantheism, which means everything was God. Psalm 139 was the Biblical chapter that told us where God was. God knew "When I sit and when I rise," (Psalm 139:2) "you are familiar with all my ways." (Psalm 139:3) "Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; If I make my bed in the depths, you are there." (Psalm 139:7-8) "This is what the LORD says; 'Heaven is

my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me?" (Isaiah 66:1) Paul spoke to the Athenians telling them, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live-in temples made by hands." (Acts 17:24)

Omniscience told us God had complete knowledge of all things. He knows what actually happens. He knows when the sparrow falls. (Matt. 10:29) God also knows what could have been, "If only you had paid attention to my command, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea, your descendants would have been like sand, your children like its numberless grains..." (Isaiah 48:18-19)

The Bible taught God was all powerful, was present everywhere, and knew all things.

276. Important Biblical Words: Trinity

There had been many attempts to explain the Trinity. The hymn expressed it as God in three persons, blessed Trinity. Some thought the three persons were like a tree with roots, trunk, and leaves. There were three parts and only one tree. Clover has three leaflets on one stem. Trinitrotoluene (TNT) is a powerful explosive, with three nitro groups on one base. But none of these three adequately explained God.

Was it necessary to find an example of the things God had made to understand God? God was who He was. We did not find the word trinity in the Bible and the early Church struggled over the question, "who is Jesus?" Was Jesus Christ a man, an angel, or God? If he was God, were there two Gods? Beginning in the 300's A.D. a man named Arius claimed Jesus was a created angel, but at the Church Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. they rejected this interpretation. The argument went on with Arius on one side and Athanasius on the other side. The Church adopted the Nicene Creed which said the Son was one in substance with the Father. So, Jesus Christ was not just like the Father, but was of the same substance as the Father. In Isaiah, in a prophecy of the coming Messiah (Christ) he was Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Is. 9:6)

For evidence that Jesus Christ was of one substance with the Father, Christians looked at the first verses of the Gospel of John. In Greek, to point out or designate a person or object they use the article, but when they pointed out the nature or inherent quality of a person or object, they left out the article. (Wycliffe Bible Dictionary, pg. 1746) A literal translation of John 1:1 is, "and the word was of the very nature or quality of God." Hebrews, chapter one, gave information of the relationship of Father and Son. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being... when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,... But, about the Son he says, Your throne, O God will last forever and ever." God called his son God. The Son was one in substance with the Father. So, Jesus Christ was not just like the Father, but was of the same substance as the Father.

277. Charles Wesley Hymns: Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

This Charles Wesley Hymn highlighted the Trinity. The following version is representative.

Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
One in Three and Three in One,
As by the celestial host,

Let Thy will on earth be done!
Praise by all to Thee be giv'n,
Gracious Lord of earth and heav'n.

Take my soul and body's pow'rs,
Take my mem'ry, mind, and will,
All my goods and all my hours,
All I know and all I feel;
All I think, or speak, or do,
Take my heart, but make it new!

Now, O God, Thine own I am;
Now I give Thee back Thine own;
Freedom, friends and health and fame,
Consecrate to Thee alone;
Thine I live, thrice happy I!
Happier still if Thine I die.

One of the many versions included the following verse:

Soon as our pardoned hearts believe
That Thou art pure, essential love,
The proof we in ourselves receive
Of the three witnesses above;
Sure, as the saints around Thy throne,
That Father, Word, and Spirit are one.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20)

278. Important Biblical Words: Sacrifice (part 1—Overview)

But when the perfect priest (Jesus) “had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down on the right hand of God”. (Heb. 10:12)

The English word ‘sacrifice’ came from the Latin for priest *sacer dos*, which derived from *sacer* meaning holy. A sacrifice was an offering made to a deity and, as a verb, it was the process of making that offering.

Throughout the pagan world, the proper way of approaching a deity was to give them a gift that influenced them to look favourably upon the giver. Large, expensive offerings were more likely to win over the deity. They sometimes made gifts of utmost importance to the person offering the gift, including the offering of their own child. Early in scripture, the writers of the Old Testament preserved rules designed to prevent the Israelites from sacrificing to false gods—

wasting blood. These rules preserved the sanctity of the sacrificial blood for atonement for sins against God. "For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." (Lev. 17:11)

Consider two important points emphasized in scripture: The Israelites must (1) only worship the Lord and (2) consider the blood as the life that is used to provide 'atonement.'

We now understand the final and real forgiveness of sins came only because of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. We could follow adjustments to the sacrificial system till in the fullness of time Jesus came.

The story of Cain and Abel showed us that death is necessary to approach God. Abel's sacrifice of the firstborn of his flock pleased God (Gen. 4:4), whereas Cain's fruits of the soil did not. Everyone was sinful. God told Noah, "Never Again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood." (Gen. 8:21) Paul wrote in the New Testament, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23)

It seemed only blood was efficacious in atoning for sin, and not just any blood; it needed to be the blood of clean animals. Noah's sacrifices of clean animals and birds were holy and pleasing to God. (Gen. 8:20-21)

279. Important Biblical Words: Sacrifice (part 2—Patriarchs)

The Old Testament told of further revelations about sacrifice. They recorded about sacrifices in the time of the Patriarchs. A family of shepherds, Terah and his two sons, Abram and Nahor, lived in Ur of the Chaldees. Abram married Sarai and Nahor, Milcah. Terah took Abram, his grandson Lot and Sarai and they set out for Canaan and made it as far as Haran, where Terah died. From there, God called Abram and told him to travel to a land that God would show him. So, from there, Abram's family set out for Canaan.

As Abram travelled, he built altars to worship the Lord. The Lord promised him he would have descendants. And "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." (Gen 15:6)

To assure Abram that this would happen, God instructed Abram to make a covenant sacrifice. Abram took, at God's command, a heifer, a goat, and a ram, a dove, and a young pigeon. Abram cut the animals in half, laying the two halves opposite each other. That night a smoking fire pot and a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces and God confirmed his covenant that he would give Abram's descendants the promised land. (Gen. 15)

Later, Isaac was born, and the Lord promised He would establish His covenant through Abram's son Isaac. (Gen 17:19) To the reader's surprise, God then instructed Abram to take his son, Isaac and sacrifice him on a certain mountain. "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." (Gen 22:2)

The Genesis account drew the reader in a stepwise direction through the steps of the tale. Abram chopped wood for the burnt offering, took Isaac and two servants and a donkey to the mountain, bound Isaac to the altar, but as Abram took a knife to kill his son, an angel intervened to stop the deadly stroke. We learned two lessons about sacrifice: 1. It was not the death of the sacrificial victim but the willingness, by faith in God, to follow His will that was important and 2. Aside from the sacrifice of Jesus, there was no place for human sacrifice.

It was as he travelled from place to place that Abram's grandson Jacob also had experiences with the Lord. On his trip from Beersheba to Haran Jacob stopped for a night at a

certain place, put a stone under his head for a pillow, slept, and had a dream of a stairway leading from earth to heaven with angels (messengers from God) going up and down the stairs. The Lord stood at the top and assured Jacob that he would be with him. In the morning Jacob realized the awesomeness of this place, set up the stone he had used as a pillow and poured oil on it, probably doing his best to make it into an altar and the place the house of God, naming it Bethel (house of God) (Gen. 28:10-22).

Later, when Jacob returned to the promised land, at the ford of Jabbok, after sending his family across, Jacob wrestled with a man who was an angel or the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus. At Jacob's insistence, the messenger blessed him, and his name changed to Israel (he struggles with God). The name of this place was called Peniel (Face of God) (Gen. 32:22-32).

280. Important Biblical Words: Sacrifice (part 3—Mosaic Code)

The book of Genesis ended with the children of Israel in Egypt and Jacob's son, Joseph, as the saviour of the Egyptians. As time went on, a new ruler in Egypt, "who knew not Joseph" (Ex. 1:8) arose and the entire nation of Israel became slaves to the Egyptians. The time came for the Israelites to leave Egypt and go to the land that God had promised the descendants of Israel. But the Pharaoh would not let them leave.

God chose Moses to confront Pharaoh, and he led the Israelites out of Egypt. It was only a short distance to the land of Canaan, but lack of faith in God and fear of the Canaanites caused the Israelites to wander through the desert for forty years. During this time, Moses led the nation and conveyed to the people the words and law of the Lord. These rules and laws became known as the Mosaic Code. They built a tabernacle that was a portable place of worship that they moved from place to place with them. At Mount Sinai, Moses, God's spokesperson, gave certain laws to the people, including the ten commandments.

Ordinances concerning clean and unclean food were a good example of the laws. The laws permitted the eating of only certain animals. They might eat the ox, the sheep, the goat, the antelope, or any animal that has a split hoof and that chews the cud. They were not to eat the camel or the pig. The laws were very specific.

A complex priestly system developed with Aaron, and his successors, as the High Priest. The law specified what the priests should wear and how they should conduct the rituals of worship. This included an intricate sacrificial system that mainly took place at the tabernacle or later at the Temple.

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy gave details about legal code, including the sacrificial system. Jews still observe some of these laws today.

The prophets recorded further revelations of the meaning of sacrifice.

281. Important Biblical Words: Sacrifice (part 4—Prophets)

We studied sacrifice in early scriptures through the time of the patriarchs, then during the time of the priestly system. This brought us to the time of the prophets. Isaiah showed us two figures of the coming Messiah (Christ). "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it and upholding it with

justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7) Isaiah also prophesied the sacrificial death of the Messiah (Christ) in Chapter 53. Some verses gave the description of the sacrifice. “He was despised and rejected by man, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering.” (Is 53:3) “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed by our iniquities... and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Is 53:4-6) “... and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days,” (Is 53:10) “... for he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Is 53:12)

Micah expressed a further revelation: “With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:6-8)

John the Baptist spanned the time between the Old and New Testaments. “There was a man who was sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.” (John 1:6, 7) John testifies of Jesus, “I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God” (John 2:34) and John pointed out Jesus saying, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

282. Important Biblical Words: Sacrifice (part 5—Jesus)

In the fields around Bethlehem, shepherds were watching over their sheep when an angel appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. The angel brought them news that would be for all people. In the town of David, a Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord, had been born; a babe wrapped in clothes lying in a manger. A host of angels then appeared praising God, and the shepherds checked out the information and found Mary, Joseph and the baby who was lying in a manger! (Luke 2:1-21)

It was in the book of Hebrews where we found the climax to the meaning of sacrifice. The great faith chapter started out “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain. Of what we do not see.” (Heb. 11:1) The author then listed many faith heroes. These were men and women who trusted God. This included Moses who “regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ...” the coming Messiah he awaited, “... as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.” (Heb. 11:26)

The writer of Hebrews showed us how Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. He was “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” (Heb. 1:3) Jesus made one sacrifice to replace all the sacrifices of creatures that could never take away sins. “But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.” (Heb. 10:12) But now, Jesus appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. The author of Hebrews wrote, “so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” (Heb. 9:28) So, Christ sitting at the right hand of God was the new Adam representing humans. He was a holy and perfect sacrifice. “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” (Heb. 10:14)

So, we may trust that we would receive forgiveness and atonement for our sin, believing, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

283. God in Christ, Christ in You

Paul the Apostle told us in his letter to the Colossians that the fullness of God dwelled in Christ. (Col 1:19) Thus, we were reconciled to God through Christ's death on the cross. (Col 1:20) Paul said God commissioned him to present a mystery to the Gentile people that was hidden through the previous centuries. The mystery? "Christ in you the hope of glory." (Col 1:26-27)

What could we make of statements in scriptures such as, "Christ in you the hope of glory" or "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30)? Though hard to explain, we realized the reference was to the closest of relationships between persons, a uniquely close relationship. John wrote of many statements to characterize this relationship.

Examples of these statements follow:

1) The prayer of Jesus to the Father: "Protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one." (John 17:11)

2) Jesus' prayers for all believers: "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:21) Jesus said, "... that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know..." (John 17:22-23)

3) Jesus prays for the gift of the Spirit, "The Spirit of truth... for he lives with you and will be in you." (John 14:17)

4) "On that day, you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." (John 14:20-21)

The rope that binds the Father, Son, Spirit, and all believers is the rope of love. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." (Eph 3:17)

284. Important Biblical Words: Passover

"On the day of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb," (Mark 14:12) Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare the Passover. (Luke 22:8) Once at the meal, Jesus said to them "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me." (Mark 14:20) This was an especially terrible thing to do to Jesus, because Jesus was taking this meal of the Passover and turning it into a covenant-meal. Scripture had examples of covenant-meals that were a common way of making a covenant.

Eating and drinking together had the significance of a covenant-meal. Abimelech, Phicol, and Ahuzzah wanted to make a covenant with Isaac. They said to Isaac, "We saw clearly that the Lord was with you so we said, 'There ought to be a sworn agreement between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you that you will do us no harm just as we did not molest you but always treated you well and sent you away in peace. And now you are blessed by the Lord.' Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other." (Gen 26:28-31)

Jacob and Laban made a covenant as Jacob left from his home with Laban. "Now, therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be a witness between me and the... Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar..." Jacob took an oath and made a sacrifice, and they had a meal together. (Gen 31:44-54)

Jesus took the Passover feast as a covenant-meal. "In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" (I Cor. 11:25) It was an especially treacherous thing for Judas to dip his bread with Jesus into the common bowl for by doing this he said that he was part of the new covenant while his plan was to betray Jesus. (Mark 14:20)

285. Hannukah

When Alexander the Great died in 323 B.C., his Greek officers divided his extensive territories and ruled as kings. Palestine was part of the territory ceded to the General Seleucus. One descendant of this man was Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who ruled over the region that included Palestine, where the descendants of the Israelites, lived.

The Jews rebelled. Judah Maccabeus, their leader, was victorious in battle over the Seleucid king. They rededicated the temple in Jerusalem in 167 B.C. The Hannukah festival celebrates the rededication and lasted for eight days. On each day, a candle was lit. *Hannukah* means 'to dedicate.' I Maccabees, one of the deuterocanonical books in the Apocrypha, recorded the eight-day festival. Hannukah was also called the festival of lights. Jews celebrate it in December, close to Christmas time.

Two hundred years after the rededication of the temple, Jesus went to Jerusalem and walked in Solomon's Colonnade. This was part of the temple precincts. It had a roof for protection and was a great place to meet ordinary people. It was also a place where Jesus' enemies could come to question him. Often their questions intended to trap him into statements they could interpret as blasphemy or insurrection.

Blasphemy, acting or speaking in a sacrilegious way about God, was a charge brought to the Jewish council. The Roman governor dealt with insurrection, a violent uprising.

Jesus, during one visit, the Jewish crowd asked who he was. "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." (John 10:24) If he admitted he was the Messiah, it would make him a potential political threat to the Romans. What he said was even more shocking. "... I and the Father are one." (John 10:30)

286. The Lord's Supper

It is important to understand the covenant-meal, the Last Supper, connected with the Passover. Jesus was the Passover lamb. Though there would have been much discussion about that special feast, Paul said he received instructions from the Lord himself to pass a message to the Church. "For I received from the Lord what I passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup saying, 'this cup is the New Covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup' you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (I Cor. 11:23-26)

So, the Christian churches celebrated the Lord's Supper. During the Apostolic Age, they referred to it as: 1. The Eucharist—meaning to give thanks. 2. Eulogises—meaning to bless. 3. The Communion—a fellowship meeting emphasizing the oneness of the fellowship participants (they included all in the one chunk of bread). 4. A Memorial Feast—but to the early Christians, Christ was not dead. 5. A Sacrifice—in the sense that it was a 'sacrifice of praise' (Heb. 13:15), a thanksgiving.

During the Lord's Supper, participants ate from the one loaf of bread and thereby had communion with Christ and with the other participants. The Lord's Supper commemorated the sacrificial death of Christ. By participating believers figuratively signed the acceptance of the new covenant. To participate, they were to love the Lord and their fellow participants.

287. Important Biblical Words: Glory

The transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain is an excellent introduction to a discussion of the glory of the Lord. Jesus took Peter, John, and James onto the mountain to pray. As they prayed, Jesus' features changed and his clothes became full of light, as strong as a flash of lightning. In this glorious splendour, Moses and Elijah appeared, talking to Jesus about events to take place in Jerusalem and about Jesus' departure.

Jesus' disciples were very sleepy, but they saw and knew Moses and Elijah. Peter decided that something had to be done about this and recommended that they should build three shelters. This was an occasion that the three disciples saw not only Moses and Elijah but also the glory of God that surrounded them and Jesus. And the Father spoke from heaven, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." (Luke 9:35) This event shows a manifestation of the glory of the Lord.

Isaiah saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne in the temple. The angels declared God was holy, and His glory filled the whole earth. The train of the robe God wore filled the temple. The train here means the skirt or hem of the robe. The train may have veiled the tremendous glory which otherwise Isaiah could not endure. (Isaiah 6:1)

David writes, "The heavens declare the glory of God." (Psalm 19:1) The idea of glory derives from weight or heaviness, meaning awesome. We can find the same meaning in Psalm 63:2, "I have seen you in your sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory." The next verse shows the proper response to the Glory of the Lord. "Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you". (Psalm 63:3)

The New Testament shows a close connection of glory with the Lord Jesus. At his birth the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests. (Luke 2:14) The response of the shepherds was appropriate: "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told." (Luke 2:20) The glory of Jesus, aside from the transfiguration, was veiled, but the writer of Hebrews says of Christ, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory." (Heb. 1:3)

The person who believes in the Lord Jesus and follows His Way shares in this glory, "And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified he also glorified." (Rom. 8:30)

288. Important Biblical Words: Nation

What does the Bible mean when it refers to nations? Nations are groups of people united by common history. Understanding what the writers of the Bible meant has many levels of complexity. One major concern is translation.

What was the language of original sources? Hebrew was the written language of the Israelites. Aramaic was the common language of those who lived in Palestine at the time of Jesus. Greek was the language common for much of the civilized world. Latin became a dominant language with the rise of the Roman Empire. Translation of the Bible to English required a knowledge of many languages.

Translating from one language to another was a challenge, but an additional challenge was the tendency of language to change. If we use the original King James Bible (KJV) as a standard English translation, there have been many words with meanings that have changed over the past four hundred years since that version was first produced. Revelation 7:9 is an example. The passage describes a great multitude of people who stood before the throne in front of the lamb. The KJV translates the Greek as “nations, kindreds, people, and tongues.” The more modern NIV uses “nation, tribe, people, and languages.”

When the Bible talked of all nations of the world, it is quite clear that they extended far beyond the land of Canaan and the Jewish lands. When the Jews talked of nations when living in a land of Jewish people, they often refer to the Gentile nations as distinct from the Jewish nation. It is usually clear whether the reference is to all nations or just Gentile nations, but it is best to interpret it section by section.

289. Important Biblical Words: Family

The family has been a great help to me and deserves a mention in this discussion of Biblical wisdom. My wife had done a tremendous amount of typing to complete these Ancient Words. I am very grateful to my oldest son for his help with Ancient Words of Wisdom. He took some of my rather clumsy attempts to explain sacrifices, to include Biblical quotations, and beautifully smoothed them to make them say what they were meant to say. My oldest daughter helps to hold the family together under Christian values. Our youngest son provides the technical background needed for the studies. My youngest daughter has a musical bent, and she's provided musical and lyrical support for chorus and hymn that has become a part of Ancient Words of Wisdom.

*Editor's note: I am not sure Dad meant this as a stand-alone study or only as a recognition of his immediate family. I have added below a brief discussion of family in the Bible.

“Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12) This was fifth of the ten commandments God gave Moses for His people, and the first commandment with a promise.

Old Testament scripture was full of wisdom for families. Family started with the relationship among the Trinity. Then, in Genesis, we had the start of the first human family “Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.’ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:22-24) “Blessed are all who fear the

LORD who walk in obedience to him... Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table.” (Psalm 128:1, 3) “Start children off in the way they should go and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

In the New Testament, we read of obedient children (Colossians 3:20), submissive wives (I Peter 3:1), weaker partners (I Peter 3:7), submissive children (I Tim. 3:4). If we got caught up in the cultural norms of that day, some statements about family might be controversial but we would miss the message. How important was family? “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (I Tim. 5:8) Harsh words for those who, in any culture, fail to love their family by their actions.

I will leave this as a last word on family: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.” (I Peter 4:8)

290. Hymn by Keith Fidler: My Great Redeemer (previously entitled: My Prayer)

1

I now come before you, Lord forgive my sins,
Take away all evil, make me pure within;
Fill me with you Spirit, fill me with your love;
Give me your holy presence, claim me as your own.

CHORUS

Oh, my Great Redeemer, claim me as your own,
Humbly Lord I come to bow before your throne.

2

Saviour now I praise you for all you've done for me,
Redemption you have offered through death upon that tree.
But death could not hold you, You are risen indeed;
You have made provision for my every need.

CHORUS

Oh, my Great Redeemer, claim me as your own,
Humbly Lord I come to bow before your throne.

3

Jesus stay beside me as I live each day;
May your Spirit guide me, walking on life's way.
When my journey's over, and the race is won.
Bear me gently Saviour to my heavenly throne.

CHORUS

Oh, my Great Redeemer, claim me as your own,
Humbly Lord I come to bow before your throne

Keith Fidler 1993

May be sung to the tune of 'Like a River Glorious'

291. Hymn by Keith Fidler: Behold the Lamb (2020)

1

Behold the Lamb of God
Who, dying, paid the price,
And shed His holy cleansing
Blood Th'eternal sacrifice.

2

Oh, Righteous Lamb of God
Of man and God the Son
We praise your faultless holiness
Oh, spotless perfect One.

3

Oh, Living Lamb of God
Alive though you were slain,
Adored by your created host,
Forevermore the same.

4

Behold the Lamb of God
The Sacrifice Divine,
God-giv'n salvation from all sin
Atones for even mine.

*Editor's note: This version was on a printed sheet of paper together with 'My Prayer' and 'What a Wonderful Saviour is He' below the Ancient Words of Wisdom study entitled 'Family' (289). I assume this was the version updated in 2020. An older version of this hymn is in *Dear Children*, Dad's collection of letters compiled in May 2010. The version in that included two other verses and verse two was different.

2.

Oh, Righteous Lamb of God,
So undefiled and pure,
You who were never marred by sin,
Made our redemption sure.

3.

Oh, Loving Lamb of God
We live by faith in You,
Your love sent you to Calvary,
And proved God's promise true.

4.

Oh, Holy Lamb of God,
Of man and God the Son,
We praise your faultless holiness;
Oh, spotless perfect one.

5.

Oh, Living Lamb of God...

6.

Behold the Lamb of God...

Keith Fidler 1995

292. Hymn by Keith Fidler: Oh, What a Wonderful Saviour is He

1

Oh, what a wonderful Saviour is He.
Like a good shepherd, He sought after me.
Lost and confused, to his side I did flee
Oh, what a wonderful Saviour is He.

2

Oh, what a wonderful Saviour is He.
He took my punishment, nailed to that tree.
There by his death, He bought freedom for me.
Oh, what a wonderful Saviour is He.

3

Oh, what a wonderful Saviour is He,
Cleansing my heart, He now lives in me.
Some day in heaven, His face I will see.
Oh, what a wonderful Saviour is He.

*Editor's Note:

HYMNS

Dad loved hymns, both the message and the music. Dad chose these hymns. I have a list of hymns and for a few, *Be Thou My Vision*, *Master of the Universe*, he had made comments that I have reproduced. Not knowing exactly what he had in mind, aside from relaying the powerful messages imbedded in the words, I have added my own comments and attached scripture passages from which the hymn writers drew inspiration. I think he also wanted to highlight some controversies that certain hymns had caused, and I included this when possible. To avoid a huge clustering of hymns, I dispersed some Charles Wesley hymns throughout the previous studies. Some tunes I do not know but I would suggest, if you know the tune for a hymn, sing it aloud first, then read the study. If you do not know the tune, either make one up, or read the hymn aloud to appreciate the poetry.

293. Early Christian Hymns: Oxyrhynchus Hymn

The Oxyrhynchus hymn was the earliest known manuscript of a Christian Greek hymn written on papyrus, which dated from the end of the 3rd century CE. It was discovered in 1918 in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. Only a fragment of the hymn remains. The translation by M. L. West is as follows:

Let it be silent. Let the luminous stars not shine,

Let the winds and all the noisy rivers die down;
And as we hymn the Father and Son and Holy Spirit,
Let all the powers add "Amen, amen,
Empire, praise always, and glory to God,
The sole giver of all good things, Amen, amen."

(website: earlychurchhistory.org)

294. Early Christian Hymns: Shepherd of Tender Youth

Clement of Alexandria was born about 170 CE in Athens, Greece. In Alexandria he embraced Christianity and became head of the school in that famous city of scholars. We know little about his life, but he left behind several books and two poems, dated about 200 CE, one of which is translated: "shepherd of tender youth." It was first translated to English by Henry Dexter, born 1821 in Massachusetts, USA, and was used as a hymn in Great Britain and America. (website: hymnary.org)

1

Shepherd of tender youth,
guiding in love and truth
through devious ways,
Christ, our triumphant King,
we come your name to sing
and here our children bring
to join your praise.

2

You are our holy Lord,
Christ, the incarnate Word,
healer of strife.
You did yourself abase
That from sin's deep disgrace
you might now save our race,
and give us life.

3

You are the great High Priest,
you have prepared the feast
of holy love;
and in our mortal pain
none calls on you in vain;
our plea do not disdain;
help from above.

4

O ever be our guide,
our shepherd and our pride,
our staff and song.
Jesus, O Christ of God,
by your enduring Word
lead us where you have trod;

make our faith strong.

5

So now and till we die
sound we your praises high
and joyful sing:
infants and all the throng
who to your Church belong,
unite to swell the song
to Christ, our King!

“He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.” (Is 40:11) In the final verse, “infants and all the throng,” sing to Christ as in Matthew, “But the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ they were indignant. ‘Do you hear what these children are saying?’ they asked him. ‘Yes,’ replied Jesus, ‘have you ever read, “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise”?’” (Matt 21:15-16. This is a quotation from Psalm 8:2).

295. Early Christian Hymns: O Splendor of God's Glory Bright

Ambrose of Milan (339-397 CE) was an early Italian Christian who combated heresy (Arianism). He expressed his beliefs in song. He wrote this hymn in Latin. He asked Christ to provide divine guidance. Physician Robert Bridges translated the hymn to English during the Victorian era. It is still played today, with different musical accompaniment depending on the church or musician who performs it.

1

O Splendor of God's glory bright,
O Thou that bringest light from light,
O Light of Light, light's living spring,
O Day, all days illumining:
Alleluia!

2

Come, very Sun of truth and love;
Pour down Thy radiance from above
And shed the Holy Spirit's ray
On all we think or do or say.
Alleluia!

3

With prayer the Father we implore:
O Father, glorious evermore,
We plead with Thee for grace and pow'r
To conquer in temptation's hour,
Alleluia!

4

To guide whate'er we nobly do,
With love all envy to subdue,

To give us grace our wrongs to bear,
To make ill fortune turn to fair.
Alleluia!

5

On Christ, the true bread, let us feed;
Let Him to us be drink indeed;
And let us taste with joyfulness
The Holy Spirit's plenteousness.
Alleluia!

6

All laud to God the Father be;
All praise, eternal Son, to Thee;
All glory to the Spirit raise
In equal and unending praise.
Alleluia!

“... his Son, whom he had appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of Majesty on high.” (Heb 1:2-3). “And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35)

296. Early Christian (or Jewish) Hymns: Master of the Universe

Adon Alom was a Hebrew liturgical poem often attributed to 11th century poet and philosopher Shloma ibn Gabirol (although some dispute this). *Adon Alom* translates to ‘Eternal Lord’ and the lyrics celebrated God’s power and creation. While Gabirol may not have intended it as a song in its original construction, Adon Alom has been given various musical compositions. Jewish worshipers perform this, either spoken or sung, throughout the Jewish service.

1

The Lord of the Universe who reigned before anything was created
When all was made by his will, He was acknowledged as King.

2

And when all shall end, He still all alone shall reign.
He was, He is, and He shall be in glory.

3

And He is one, and there’s no other, to compare or join Him.
Without beginning, without end and to Him belongs dominion and power.

4

And He is my God, my living God. To Him I flee in times of grief,
And He is my miracle and my refuge, who answers the day I shall call.

5

To Him I commit my spirit, in the time of sleep and awakening,
Even if my spirit leaves, I shall not fear.

297. Enduring Christian Hymns: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

First known as O Emmanuel, now sung as O Come, O Come, Emmanuel this was part of a group of hymns sung by early Christians around Christmas. The text was originally in Latin, with origins in the 8th century in monasteries. John M. Neale (stanzas 1, 2) translated this to English first, then Henry S. Coffin (stanzas 3, 4). "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." (Is 7:14) (The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section))

1

O come, O come Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.

CHORUS

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

2

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.

CHORUS

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

3

O come, Though Dayspring, from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.

CHORUS

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

4

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.

CHORUS

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

5

O come, Adonai, Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.

CHORUS

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

298. Enduring Christian Hymns: Be Thou my Vision

Be Thou My Vision was a traditional Irish Catholic hymn originally written in Gaelic and later translated to English by Mary Byne in the early 20th Century. Later, Eleanor Hill versified the poem for musical purposes, solidifying its role as a hymn. Many of the descriptions God, in the hymn, drew directly from Irish cultural practices. This informed us about beliefs held at that time. The modern tune is based on an Irish folk melody arranged by David Allen. "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." (Phil 3:7) (The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section))

1

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou are;
Though my best Thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

2

Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

3

Be Thou my battle Shield, Sword for the fight;
Be Thou my Dignity, Thou my Delight;
Thou my soul's Shelter, Though my high Tow'r:
Raise Thou me heav'nward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.

4

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou my inheritance, now and always.
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven my Treasure Thou art.

5

High King of Heaven, my victory won,

May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heav'n's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whate'er befall,
Sill be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

The names of God are a popular theme among Christians when considering the nature of our Lord. Now, reread the Hymn and pick out how the hymn writer referred to God. A clue is the capitalized words. My vision, best thought, were the names in the first stanza, underlining how God worked from within the believer. Vision was how you see the world. My wisdom, true word, great Father were the highlights of the second stanza... our ideal father who provided us wisdom in the spoken and written word. Battle shield, sword, dignity, delight, shelter, tower, and power represented God's strength and protection. God was also our inheritance and the only treasure of ultimate value.

299. Charles Wesley Hymns: Arise my Soul Arise

Charles Wesley, one founder of Methodism, wrote the words of this classic Christian hymn in 1742. The music is by Lewis Edson, composed in 1782. "Arise, and be not afraid," (Matt 17:7) Jesus says after Peter, James, and John have witnessed his glorification in the company of Moses and Elijah on the high mountain, the Transfiguration. "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." (Heb 7:25) (The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section))

1

Arise my soul a-rise, Shake thy guilty fears.
The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears
Before the throne my surety stands, Before the throne my surety stands
My name is written on his hands.

2

He ever lives above, for me to intercede.
His all-redeeming love, The precious blood to plead.
His blood atoned for all our race. His blood atoned for all our race.
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

3

Five bleeding wounds he bears, received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers. They strongly plead for me
"Forgive him, Oh, forgive," they cry, "Forgive him, Oh, forgive," they cry
"Nor let that ransomed sinner die!"

4

The Father hears him pray, His dear anointed one,
He cannot turn away, the presence of his son,
His spirit answers to the blood, His spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.

5

My God is reconciled, His pard'ning voice I hear,
He owns me for his child, I can no longer fear:
With confidence I now draw nigh, With confidence I now draw nigh,

And, "Father, Abba Father," cry.

A group of theologians objected to the use of 'reconcile' in the final stanza of Charles Wesley's hymn. Their objection was that God is not reconciled to man, but man is reconciled to God. This classical and beautiful hymn suffered from the objection. The question remains, was the objection valid? To find this objectionable phrase, we must go through four very meaningful stanzas. It was only in the fifth stanza where we find this somewhat questionable objection. Surely if God is being reconciled to man, man is being reconciled to God. It must work both ways to produce a real reconciliation.

300. Charles Wesley Hymns: O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing

This was another of Charles Wesley's hymns; one of the most popular. He wrote this hymn specially, in 1739, to celebrate the first anniversary of his conversion, starting a personal tradition of writing hymns for each of his subsequent spiritual anniversaries. The opening line of the hymn might be drawn from a remark once spoken to Wesley by Peter Boehler, a Moravian bishop, influential in the lives of the Wesleys: "Had I a thousand tongues, I would praise Him with them all."

1

O for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemers praise,
The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace!

2

My gracious master and my God, assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad, the honors of Thy name.

3

Jesus! The name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease—
'Tis music in the sinner's ears, 'Tis life, and health, and peace.

4

He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can wash the foulest clean, His blood availed for me.

5

He speaks and listening to his voice, new life the dead receive,
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe.

6

Glory to God, and praise and love be ever, ever giv'n,
By saints below and saints above, the church in earth and heav'n.

Charles lay abed during a serious illness, May 21, 1738. John Wesley and some friends came to him and sang a hymn, then he prayed alone for a time. In his journal, Charles wrote: "I was composing myself to sleep in quietness and peace when I heard one come in and say, 'in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise, and believe, and thou shalt be healed of all thine infirmities.' Words struck me to the heart. I lay musing and trembling." (website: reasonabletheology.org)

"My tongue will proclaim your righteousness, your praises all day long." (Psalm 35:28)
(The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section))

The third stanza says, "Jesus! The name that charms our fears." In the next verse, we learn "His blood availed for me," a personal message to all who sang and sing this song through the centuries.

301. Charles Wesley Hymns: Love Divine All Loves Excelling (part 1)

This was one of the most popular and well-known hymns the master hymn writer composed. Many consider this his finest. However, even this excellent hymn was not without controversy. In the second stanza: "take away the love of sinning," also written "bent" or "power of sinning." Some hymn books exclude the second verse just to remove the concern. In Romans, however, Paul expressed a similar concern about sin, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." (Rom. 7:19-20)

English composer Henry Purcell (1659-1695) wrote a play, *King Arthur*, in 1691 and the first line was "Fairest isles, all isles excelling," which many people believe is the inspiration for the first line of this hymn. The theme was praise and adoration, finishing with a prayer for sanctification, underlining the Wesleyan focus on holy living, the doctrine of perfection. In April 2011, British Prince William, married Kate Middleton, and millions watched from around the world. This hymn was included in the ceremony. (website: hymnary.org) Marriage can reflect the greatest love of all.

Jesus Christ, the 'joy of heaven' came to earth and now, in the person of the Holy Spirit can so influence our lives that we can properly bear the image of God. "This is how God showed his love among us; He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." (I John 4:9) (The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section))

1

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heav'n, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art.
Visit us with thy salvation;
enter ev'ry trembling heart.

2

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into ev'ry troubled breast.
Let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be.
End of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty

302. Charles Wesley Hymns: Love Divine All Loves Excelling (part 2)

This hymn expressed the common belief that Jesus may “enter ev’ry trembling heart” and we became the dwelling place of Jesus. This modern understanding of salvation as “accepting Jesus into your heart” presented some problems theologically but made a beautiful symbol of a life completely committed to our Lord. “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God,” (I John 4:15) and “he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” (I John 4:16) “... Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” (Eph. 3:17) And if we are the temple in which God’s Spirit may dwell (I Cor. 3:16-17), you may note Wesley asks God to stay with us forever.

2

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into ev’ry troubled breast.
Let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be.
End of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty

3

Come, Almighty, to deliver,
let us all thy life receive.
Suddenly return, and never,
nevermore thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

4

Finish, then, thy new creation;
true and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav’n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise

The “Alpha and Omega” (Rev. 22:13, 21:6-7, 1:8) frees us from bondage (of sin) and in heaven we reap our reward. Paul’s command to “pray without ceasing,” (I Thess. 5:17) appears in the third stanza as “pray, and praise thee without ceasing,” adding the endless praise of those in heaven. The elders in Revelation provide the example, “cast their crowns before the throne,” (Rev. 4:10-11), for us to give all glory to God.

303. Charles Wesley Hymns: Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild

1

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee.

2

Lamb of God, I look to Thee;
Thou shalt my example be:
Thou art gentle, meek and mild;
Thou wast once a little child.

3

Fain I would be as Thou art;
Give me Thine obedient heart:
Thou art pitiful and kind;
Let me have Thy loving mind.

4

Loving Jesus, gentle Lamb,
In Thy gracious hands I am;
Make me, Saviour, what Thou art,
Live Thyself within my heart.
Amen

The first verse of this hymn was a common children's nighttime prayer. When I was a child more commonly, I prayed, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." But sometimes, for a change I prayed the other childhood prayer, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child; pity my simplicity, suffer me to come to thee." The second was certainly less scary, lacking the reference to death.

Was Jesus meek? Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matt. 11:28-29) Certainly, Jesus called children to him, and loved them. "And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said to them, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.'" (Mark 10:13-14)

304. Charles Wesley Hymns: Hark the Herald Angels Sing (part 1)

Charles Wesley wrote this popular Christmas song (1739) within a year of his conversion. By simply describing Christ, Wesley told the entire gospel story. The tune was from famous composer Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1840) who declared that the tune would "never do sacred words," and that "the words must express something gay and popular as the music tries to do."

Disregarding the composer's wishes, William Cummings adapted the tune for Wesley's hymn in 1856. (website: hymnary.org)

1

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King:
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with th'angelic hosts proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

Refrain:

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King"

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:13-14) (The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section)) The angels expressed the joy of Jesus' birth and the hope of God being reconciled with humans. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." (II Cor. 5:19)

305. Charles Wesley Hymns: Hark the Herald Angels Sing (part 2)

George Whitefield (1714-1770) who, with the Wesley brothers, was instrumental in the revival of England in the late 1700s, published a modified version of the hymn in 1758, using the current title. The original first line was, "Hark! How all the Welkin rings." 'Welkin,' meant 'sky' or 'heaven.' He also added the repetition of the first two lines of the hymn as a refrain as we sing it today. Though largely forgotten today, he was probably the most famous religious figure of the eighteenth century. Many knew him as a powerful orator, entralling audiences with drama, religious rhetoric, and patriotism. He preached about 18, 000 times to over 10 million hearers in his life. (website: christianitytoday.com) Though less famous in their own time, John Wesley, through his writings, and Charles Wesley, through his hymns, have left a more enduring mark on history.

"But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Gal. 4:4-5). "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

2

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of the Virgin's womb:
veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail th'incarnate Deity,

pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.

Refrain:
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King"

3

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.

Refrain:
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King"

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty god, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings," (Mal. 4:2) "And being found in fashion a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:8)

306. Charles Wesley Hymns: And Can it Be

*Editors Note: This Charles Wesley hymn was not chosen by Dad but given its popularity and its imbedded theology, I included it.

"God raised us up with Christ... in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:6-7) (The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section))

1

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

Refrain:
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!

2

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me. [Refrain]

3

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee. [Refrain]

4

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own. [Refrain]
Amen.

The chains falling off recalled the imprisonment of Peter in Acts, "And behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off his hands." (Acts 12:7) The redemption was available to us through God's infinite grace. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1) In Romans, Paul reminded us Christ died for us, "while we were yet sinners," and "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Jesus Christ, the Word, was with God in the beginning, participated in creation. (John 1:1-3) Thus, the creator, through Jesus, died for us.

307. Enduring Christian Hymns: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

Isaac Watts, born July 17, 1674, in Southampton, England, was the son of a schoolmaster. He became a minister in an independent church and published many hymns. The English erected a statue in Westminster Abbey, London, England as a monument to this man. In *Memorials of Westminster Abbey*, one of his orthodox Anglican opponents wrote, "Happy will be that reader whose mine is disposed, by his verse or his prose, to imitate him in all but his nonconformity, to copy his benevolence to men, and his reverence to God."

One Sunday, young Isaac Watts was complaining of the deplorable hymns that were sung at church. A cantor intoned metered renditions of the Psalms that the congregation repeated. His

father, the pastor of the church, rebuked him with, "I'd like to see you write something better." Isaac retired to his room and emerged several hours later with his first hymn. The congregation received it enthusiastically that evening.

With over 600 hymns to his credit, he is called, by some, the father of Christian hymnody. (website: hymnary.org)

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."
(Galatians 6:14) When I Survey the Wondrous Cross may be Isaac Watts' crowning achievement.

1

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

2

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.

3

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

4

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

"... 'they will look on the one they have pierced.'" (John 19:37 quoting Zech 12:10) (The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section))

308. Enduring Christian Hymns: At the Cross (part 1)

Famed hymn writer Isaac Watts (1674-1748) wrote the lyrics of this hymn. It was called *Alas, and did my Saviour Bleed*. He called the hymn *Godly sorrow arising from the suffering of Christ* when he published it in 1707 as part of a collection named *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. "And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* Which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 15:33-34) The profound paradox of God the creator dying for sin of human creatures, as described in Charles Wesley's great hymn, *And Can it Be*, was found in the third stanza. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:7-8)

1

Alas! and did my Savior bleed,
and did my Sovereign die!
Would he devote that sacred head
for such a worm as I?

2

Was it for crimes that I have done,
he groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!

3

Well might the sun in darkness hide,
and shut its glories in,
when God, the mighty maker, died
for his own creature's sin.

4

Thus might I hide my blushing face
while his dear cross appears;
dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
and melt mine eyes to tears.

5

But drops of tears can ne'er repay
the debt of love I owe.
Here, Lord, I give myself away;
'tis all that I can do

309. Enduring Christian Hymns: At the Cross (part 2)

Raphe E. Hudson (1843-1901) an American music composer wrote the tune for this hymn. He also wrote the catchy chorus from which the title of the hymn is drawn. He used the lyrics provided by Isaac Watts from his hymn *Alas and did my Saviour Bleed*. Hudson was born in Napoleon, Ohio, served three years in the Union Army during the American Civil War. As a music teacher, then composer, he provided music for many hymns. (website: bereanbibleheritage.org)

1

Alas! and did my Savior bleed,
and did my Sovereign die!
Would he devote that sacred head
for such a worm as I?

CHORUS

At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away —
It was by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day.

2

Was it for crimes that I have done,
he groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!

CHORUS

At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away—
It was by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day.

“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (I Cor. 1:18) (The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section))

310. Enduring Christian Hymns: Joy to the World

Isaac Watts wrote one of the most recognizable Christmas songs in 1719. Watts was a ‘nonconformist,’ not part of the Anglican orthodoxy in the England of his time. His opponents criticized his hymns as not being based sufficiently on scripture, but there were plenty of scripture upon which to base the joy of these lyrics. This wonderful song was based on the excitement expressed in the Psalms at the coming of the Lord. “O sing unto the LORD a new song; For he hath done marvelous things... The LORD had made known his salvation... all the end of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: Make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.” (Psalm 98:1-4) In the second stanza, the earth rejoices, “The world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands: Let the hills be joyful together before the LORD.” (Psalm 98:7-9) “Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful and all that is therein: Then shall the trees of the wood rejoice.” (Psalm 96:11-12)

1

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let ev'ry heart prepare him room
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

2

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

3

No more let sins and sorrows grow
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.

4

He rules the world with truth and grace
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

Including “far as the curse is found” made some uncomfortable, and this verse was removed from some hymnals, or the line revised. “And unto Adam he said, Because thou has hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shall it bring forth to thee... for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:17-19) In defense of Watts, the gloom of the curse set up the powerful last verse: He rules the world. “... the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever.” (Rev. 11:15) Overcoming the curse of Adam, struggling that leads to death, was the very reason for the coming of Jesus. And when he arrived, “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:13-14)

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” (Micah 5:2) (The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section))

311. Enduring Christian Hymns: Still, Still with Thee

Harriet Beecher Stowe was the daughter of Rev. Lyman and Roxanna (Foote) Beecher. She was born in Lichfield Connecticut June 14, 1811. She married Rev. Calvin E. Stowe, a theology professor at Lane Seminary, of Cincinnati, Ohio, where her father was the president. She was an author who published more than thirty books, but it was her best-selling anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in 1853, that catapulted her to international celebrity and secured her place in history. She also wrote countless short stories, poems, articles, and hymns. (website: harrietbeecherstowecenter.org)

1

Still, still with Thee, when purple morning breaketh,
When the bird waketh, and the shadows flee;
Fairer than morning, lovelier than daylight,
Dawns the sweet consciousness I am with Thee.

2

Alone with Thee amid the mystic shadows,
The solemn hush of nature newly born;

Alone with Thee in breathless adoration,
In the calm dew and freshness of the morn.

3

Still, still with Thee! as to each newborn morning
A fresh and solemn splendor still is given,
So does this blessed consciousness, awaking,
Breathe each day nearness unto Thee and heaven.

4

When sinks the soul, subdued by toil, to slumber,
Its closing eyes look up to Thee in prayer;
Sweet the repose beneath Thy wings o'ershading,
But sweeter still, to wake and find Thee there.

5

So shall it be at last, in that bright morning,
When the soul waketh, and life's shadows flee;
O in that hour, fairer than daylight dawning,
Shall rise the glorious thought, I am with Thee.
Amen.

The emphasis on the morning hearkened to some of the Psalms. "... I will be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Psalm 17:15) "But I will sing of thy power; Yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: For thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble." (Psalm 59:16)

312. Enduring Christian Hymns: Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me (part 1)

Augustus Toplady, son of a British army officer and a pious mother, was converted on a trip to Ireland when he was sixteen years old during a service in a barn. Ephesians 2:13 was the text of the sermon: "but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." He is quoted as saying: "Strange that I, who had so long sat under the means of grace in England, should be brought nigh unto God in an obscure part of Ireland, amidst a handful of God's people met together in a barn, and under the ministry of one who could hardly spell his name. Surely this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous."

He was contemporary with John and Charles Wesley, but his extreme Calvinist beliefs led to conflict with the Methodists. He was ordained to the ministry in the Church of England. He published *Rock of Ages* in 1776. Each stanza elaborates on a truth about salvation. (website: www.hymnary.org)

1

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy wounded side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure;
save from wrath and make me pure.

2

Not the labors of my hands
can fulfill thy law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.

The first stanza highlighted the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross as represented by the water and the blood. "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water." (John 19:34) Both water and blood were cleansing in this sense. Water could represent baptism, the Spirit, and a means of cleansing. Blood can represent life, salvation, and a means of cleansing. "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only but by water and blood." (I John 5:6) As Jesus told the woman at the well, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14)

"... they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." (I Cor. 10:4) (The Hymnal: for Worship & Celebration, Hymnal of the Free Methodist Church, Word Music, Irving, Texas, USA, 1986, 1989 (added section))

313. Enduring Christian Hymns: Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me (part 2)

3

Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.

4

While I draw this fleeting breath,
when mine eyes shall close in death,
when I soar to worlds unknown,
see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee.

When Moses climbed the mountain to meet with God, he asked to see His glory. "And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will show mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen." (Ex. 33:18-23) Toplady melded the protection God offered Moses in the rock's cleft and the concept

of God as the rock itself. "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in him will I trust." (II Sam 22:2-3)

In the third stanza, he emphasized our helplessness, like Job after he lost everything. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked it shall return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD had taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21) Zechariah described the cleansing fountain, "There shall be a fountain opened in the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." (Zech 13:1) Who is this fountain but Jesus, his water providing cleansing for the world. "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." (Eph 2:13)

314. Enduring Christian Hymns: I know that my Redeemer Lives, Glory, Hallelujah!

Samuel Medley penned this hymn. He was born on June 23, 1738, in Chestnut Herts in England. After being injured in a battle, he retired from active service in the Royal Navy. Around this time, he was converted and joined a Baptist Church, taught for a time, then became a preacher. His hymns appeared on leaflets and in magazines before being published in book. His hymns have been popular in Baptist and other Calvinist churches. Their popularity is due more to their warmth than their poetry. (www.hymnary.org)

1 I know that my Redeemer lives, glory, hallelujah!
What comfort this sweet sentence gives, glory, hallelujah!

Refrain:
Shout on, pray on, we're gaining ground, glory, hallelujah!
The dead's alive and the lost is found, glory, hallelujah!

2 He lives to crush the pow'rs of hell, glory, hallelujah!
He lives, within my heart to dwell, glory, hallelujah! [Refrain]

3 He lives, my hungry soul to feed, glory, hallelujah!
He lives to help in time of need, glory, hallelujah! [Refrain]

4 He lives, all glory to his name, glory, hallelujah!
He lives, my Savior, still the same, glory, hallelujah! [Refrain]

5 He lives, triumphant from the grave;
he lives, eternally to save! [Refrain]

6 He lives to heal and make me whole;
he lives to guard my troubled soul. [Refrain]

7 He lives and grants me daily breath;
he lives, and I shall conquer death! [Refrain]

The representative version of this hymn did not include the refrain of the more modern version above. Other choruses are used, often with frequent repetition of 'He lives!' Like Charles Wesley's hymn of the same title, he starts with a quote from Job, "I know that my redeemer lives," (Job 19:25). Jesus crushed the powers, "... so that by his death he might break the power of 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." (Heb 2:14b-15) He fed hungry souls as he was, "... the bread of life." (John 6:35) Jesus rose from the grave to save us and we rejoice. (I Pet 1:3-9)

*Editor's Note. This concludes the collection of all the digital and paper studies and the hymns Dad wrote or listed as ones he wanted to include. In May 1995, Dad wrote a collection of letters to his children, titled *Dear Children*. Each letter started with 'Dear Children' and concluded simply with 'Dad.' I have edited and included these below. In May 2010, he produced an updated collection of letters also titled *Dear Children*. Each letter started with 'Dear Children:' and concluded with 'Love, Dad.'

Part of his plan, as he approached the end of his life and realized he would not have time to produce 365 studies as *Ancient Words of Wisdom*, was to add some, or all, of these. I have identified these as 'Dear Children 1995,' or 'Dear Children 2010.' I added a title to each, as I thought appropriate. I edited them but did not change the meaning. I tried to limit repetition by combining some letters and dividing others. The 2010 version also contained the 1995 lessons with revisions. I have used the corrected versions.

DEAR CHILDREN

315. Dear Children, 1995: Introduction

Dear Children, 1995

If "truth" is really true, then the truth must fit together in a reasonable way. Because we reason imperfectly, we may not always see the "fit." The following letters were written quickly, and your mother has spent hours processing them. Though written quickly, there is behind them many hours of thought, including some sleepless night hours that I have spent trying to make the truths fit together.

Some authors, such as C. S. Lewis, William Barclay, and A. C. Cushman have been a great help to me but there are some relationships between truths, such as the relationship among faith, hope, and love, that I do not remember getting from someone else.

I hope these thoughts may be of some benefit to you, but that you will not see them as complete as they are. May they be a stimulus to you to immerse yourself in truth so that your thoughts and meditations may be acceptable to our Creator.

Dad

316. Dear Children, 1995: Higher Mind

During the Renaissance, people looked carefully at things to see how they worked, and they experimented. Someone tried to prove a human had a soul by weighing them before and after death*. They dissected bodies to find the place where the soul lived in during life? Did they not examine the ventricles of the heart and brain for this purpose?

Anyway, we have always been interested in our life before and after death and whether we exist after death and whether there is consciousness apart from our brain.

Dr. Wilder Penfield showed there was a higher mind above our brain. In operating on persons with epilepsy, he would probe the surface of the brain. This would bring distinct movements, sensations, memories, etc. to the person. But always the person realized it was something Dr. Penfield was doing to their brain and not something they willed. They retained a level of consciousness above the brain.

Our mind controls a limited and limiting body. It is especially so when we are sick. Brain disease is especially limiting, causing loss of memory and confusion. There are better things in store for the one who is raised to “newness of life.”

*Editor's Note: this refers to an experiment in 1907 by Duncan MacDougall—not during the Renaissance but the point stands.

317. Dear Children, 1995: Time

The hymn writer says:

“Time like an everflowing stream,
Bears all its sons away.”

This is our common perception of time; that it flows on at a constant rate. We feel, under some circumstances, it goes more quickly; then, when we are bored, it slows down. It also goes faster for us as we get older. We still think that it is our own psychology that is changing and that time, being a physical reality, is constant.

Einstein postulated according to his theories time does not flow at a constant rate but depends on the acceleration or speed travelled through space. If time is not as constant as we used to think, it reinforces the idea that time is part of the physical universe which God created and God Himself is not dependent on time. We can more easily conceive of God as eternal (outside of the limits of time) rather than everlasting (going on forever).

This led me to several conclusions. One, this explains the foreknowledge of God as He is not dependent on time. He knows the future and the past. Two, with death we enter immediately into the eternal, where there is no time; there is no “time” between death and the resurrection. We all go together to be with the Lord. In John 11, Martha says, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” She is saying she knows when (or at what time) her brother will rise. Jesus, the eternal one, says, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

318. Dear Children, 1995: Time-Space-Matter

It is best to see the “heavens and the earth” of Genesis 1:1 as including the time-space-matter continuum. Apparently, there is a link between these three realities so you cannot have one without the other. Time, then, has no meaning without space and matter—the same for space

without time and matter, or for matter without time and space. For proof of this, see the works of Einstein.

Our universe, including time and space, was created by God. This means God is not dependent on and is not part of time and space. Therefore, pantheism is wrong. We should not worship the power of the universe, trees, crystals, or any part of the physical time-space-matter universe. So, materialism is also wrong.

In the first and second verse of Genesis, I visualize the creation as made up of diffuse matter, perhaps atoms all scattered throughout space with no connections between them.

The Spirit of God energized the atoms, which then created the basic energy of the physical world. And light appeared as that energy, or at least accompanying that energy. The firmament sorts out space and atoms and then God gave form and life to the universe. "In the beginning" (of time) "God" (plural of Majesty) "created" (singular verb indicating one God) "the heavens" (and space for it) "and the earth" (matter).

The first chaotic stuff of the universe may not have been atoms but the tiny particles that make up the atoms.

319. Dear Children, 1995: Isaiah

The book of Isaiah was about trusting God. In the first part of the book, the King of Israel rejected God and put his trust in the powerful nation of Assyria. This led to disaster. In the second part of the book (see Isaiah chapter 36-37) another king trusted the Lord. The result was salvation for Jerusalem. The way to shame was trusting in anything but God. The way to salvation was to trust God.

Isaiah 28:16 (Amplified Version): "Therefore thus says the Lord God. Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation, a Stone, a tested Stone, a precious Cornerstone of Sure foundation: he who believes—trusts in, relies on and adheres to that Stone—will not be ashamed or give way or make haste (in sudden panic).

Trust is not a thing; it is a relationship word. It makes sense when the verb has an object. Believe in 'the LORD.' Have faith 'in God.' Trust in 'the LORD' with all your heart.

"Surely the God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.' With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." (Isaiah 12:2-3)

320. Dear Children, 1995: Kinsman-Redeemer

It is difficult to understand the symbolism of the book of Revelation, for instance: What did the scroll with seven seals represent? It was likely that it represented the title-deed to the earth, something like the title-deed that Jeremiah had put in a clay jar (Jer. 32:14). These title-deeds contained the deed wording on the inside and on the outside, the instructions necessary to redeem the land. From the sale of Elimelech's land to Boaz (Ruth 3-4) we learned it was the nearest kinsman that had a right to the land.

To open a title-deed and redeem a piece of land, the person must be worthy. They must be: 1. Willing, 2. A kinsman, 3. Pay the price for the land. Jesus qualified to be the kinsman-redeemer for the earth. He was: 1. Willing to redeem it, 2. Became a human being and so is a kinsman to us, 3. Paid the price of his own blood.

Not only was our kinsman-redeemer worthy to redeem the earth, but he could also redeem persons who have sold themselves to sin. (Lev. 24:47-48) Revelation 5:9-10: "You were slain and have redeemed us to God by your blood and have made us kings and priests to our God and we shall reign on the earth."

321. Dear Children, 1995: The Fall

It would have taken someone with tremendous insight to invent the story of Adam and Eve. The Fall explained the way human beings act; perfectly created but spoiled by the Fall. This explained a person's good side and bad side.

You can look at the Fall from at least three points of view and they all make sense.

1 An act of disobedience: God said, "do not eat of it." They ate of it.

2 An attitude of distrust: God said, "in the day you eat of it dying you will die." They believed that the day they ate of the tree they would be as gods, so they ate from the tree and mortality began.

3 A rejection of God's love: God wanted what was best for human beings because he loved us. He knew it would be best for Adam and Eve to choose to trust Him; to trust His plan was best for them. In short, their disobedience demonstrated a belief that God withheld the best from them. The fruit was right in front of them. It was the item God refused them. They could reach out and take it for themselves.

The essence of sin appears to be distrusting and disobeying God on the premise that God does not love us and withholds from us the best. It is the belief we can, by our own will and strength, take the best for ourselves. Salvation is the re-establishment of a loving and trusting relationship with Him.

322. Dear Children, 1995: Behold the Lamb

On the cover of Francis Schaeffer's book *How Should We Then Live?* was the painting by Jan van Eyck of the *Adoration of the Lamb*. Schaeffer said, "almost certainly he had Jesus' own words in mind as Christ speaks of the Apocalypse, the last book of the Bible: 'I am the living one that became dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen: I have the keys of death and Hades.'" (pg. 66)

For though the lamb had a mortal wound, he stood alive, receiving the adoration of all classes of people. John the Baptist must have been thinking along this line when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

Behold the Lamb of God
Who dying paid the price,
And shed his holy cleansing blood,
The eternal sacrifice.

Keith Fidler

323. Dear Children, 1995: Trust

I struggled with the use of the word “law” in the book of Romans. Sometimes Paul used the word in its metaphorical sense as in the eighth chapter vs. 2. “For the law” (substitute principle or power for law) “of the Spirit of live in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.”

“They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.” (Rom. 2:15) Having the law “written on” our hearts would be the instinctive knowledge of right and wrong (the inherent moral law).

Even when Paul referred to the Jewish law (Torah) the meanings could be: 1. The first five books of the Bible, 2. The Hebrew Scriptures (O.T.), 3. All the teachings of God.

Martin Luther distinguished between fulfilling the Law and keeping the works of the law.

God gave people the Jewish law to show people how to live. Some rules were universal, and others were only for the Jewish nation.

The attitude toward the law was the important thing. An attitude of trust in God brought a desire to please Him by obeying His law. Trust and obedience were the spiritual side of the law. So, by trusting God, we were in a right relationship with Him. This included a trust in the provision that He made for us: sending His son to die as our substitute.

The foundation of truth was trust in God. When we have this trust in God, we extend this trust to the provision of our salvation and obey God in confidence of his love for us. He will reward us with eternal life.

324. Dear Children, 1995: Blood

It may be uncouth to talk about blood. The scientific facts are available for you to look up in a physiology textbook. The Bible said the life of the flesh in the blood, and we know it is necessary to sustain life. To the Hebrews, blood symbolized life. To the Christian, blood symbolized death.

But the blood of Jesus symbolized his substitutionary death. The actual blood that fell from His body during His death is not the point. Blood was the symbol of His death is the point. He died as a substitute death. But we needed to accept it. The death of animals provided skins to cover Adam and Eve after their sin. Cain did not avail himself of the opportunity to bring a blood sacrifice. God did not accept his offering. Then, there was the Passover lamb and the substitute sacrifice prescribed by the law. And there is Jesus.

And so, Christians sing:

“There is a fountain filled with blood.”

“Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?”

“I gave my life for thee, my precious blood I shed.”

Nikolas Zinzendorf (1700-1760) was the founder of the Moravians, and a prolific German hymn writer. He was an enormous influence on the Wesleys. John Wesley translated Zinzendorf's hymn to English:

“I thirst thou wounded lamb of God,
To wash me in thy cleansing blood.”

325. Dear Children, 1995: Explaining Truth

John 3:16 expressed the good news. It is simple and easily understood. "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) Paul explained the gospel to the intellectual satisfaction of Jews and Gentiles but, it seemed to me, he had a difficult time trying to express these spiritual truths.

I am not suggesting that he should not have done this or that another person could have done it better. I suggest that the expression of some spiritual truths puts a great deal of pressure on a language that is used to expressing more concrete truths.

To get his ideas across, Paul used the same word to express different aspects of the truth. For example, Paul used the word 'flesh' or the word 'law' in different ways.

Paul also used metaphors which we should not carry too far in our thinking. For instance, we should not carry the idea of a 'mind of the flesh' any further than the meaning we give when we say a 'double-minded person.' The person does not really have two minds, but they behaved as if they do. Also, each person has a nature we refer to as 'human nature,' as a dog has a canine nature. More exactly, each person has a spoiled human nature rather than a human nature plus a carnal nature.

326. Dear Children, 1995: Perfection

It would be nice to be perfect. God spoke to Abraham and told him to "... walk before me, and be thou perfect." (Gen. 17:1) Abraham yielded himself to God so much that he trusted God to keep His promise that Isaac would be in the line of the promised seed even though God had commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. We know the story. Abraham did not sacrifice Isaac, but his utter submission to God's will came shining through.

At camp one year, Dr. Kinlaw told the story of a young woman and her violin. She practiced consistently and loved to play at meetings. She felt she was playing her violin for the Lord. She had wanted to be an Olympic swimmer, but because of an accident, could not compete at that level. Her parents gave her the violin, and she had, through the years, put all her effort into it. So much so that when the Lord asked her to give up the violin, she could not do it. After such a struggle that she became physically ill, she finally said, "I'll take the violin outside and smash it on the tree next to the porch. As soon as she decided this, the Lord told her, "I don't want you to give up our violin I just want to be first place in your life."

The rich young ruler asked Jesus what to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments. The ruler said, "All these I have kept." (Matt. 19:20) Jesus said he wanted him to be perfect. "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Matt. 19:21).

If you want to be perfect, put God first in your life.

327. Dear Children, 1995: Righteous

For many years, I puzzled over the meaning of the word 'righteous' as expressed in the Bible. Sometimes it seemed to mean living an upright life, yet in the New Testament, the implication is that it was Jesus' upright life that is imparted to us, even though we do not live an upright life ourselves. This remained difficult for me to understand.

It has helped me to realize when Paul used the same word to mean different things. The word 'flesh' might mean the body, or the sinful nature. The word 'law' might mean the Mosaic

law, the torah (the first five books of the Bible), or all the commands of God. We often need the context to decide what he meant.

In the same way, we must use the terms righteous, just, and righteousness in their context for us to understand the meaning Paul wanted to impart. Righteous might mean living an upright life, following the commands of God. This made sense in the Old Testament times. God gave the law. The Jews believed that by doing the works of the law, God, who acted as judge, would declare them righteous rather than wicked on Judgement Day. Paul felt this was a hopeless expectation.

When Jesus came, He said that God was our Father, and we could even use the intimate term Abba (father) with him. With this changing idea of God, there is also a changed idea of righteousness. From a father, one expects a relationship. William Barclay wrote that a righteous man is a person who is in a right relationship with God and whose life showed it. The way to a right relationship with God is by trusting Him.

328. Dear Children, 1995: Sanctification and Eradication

There were a couple of terms used by Methodist and Holiness churches that were highly controversial and led to emotionally charged debates. These terms were 'eradication' and 'entire sanctification.'

When Methodists spoke of the sinful nature of humans, they focused on its removal. One might say we need to destroy or kill it, Paul wrote 'crucify,' but to say it needs to be eradicated seemed to go too far. Eradication, though, is a common gardening term we used regarding weeds in a garden. I supposed the reason eradication was so controversial was it gave the idea something was taken out of us and can never return.

Although sanctification was a common scriptural term, the phrase "entire sanctification" was controversial because it suggested we become no more subject to the wickedness of the world. I did not think it was possible for a person to reach a stage in their spiritual development where it was impossible for them to sin. Surely Adam and Eve had a better chance for sinlessness than we do, and they brought sin into the world. If I eradicated all the weeds in the garden this year, would they never return?

Chapter 8 of Romans indicated there was a spiritual stage that one could reach where a person does not need to sin, not that it became impossible to sin. We could reach such a stage by trusting God, accepting the redemption in Jesus Christ, yielding ourselves completely to God, and allowing the Spirit of God to direct our lives.

329. Dear Children, 1995: Body, Soul, and Spirit

We often divide a person into parts to explain how they function. The scripture supports the division of the person into body, soul, and spirit. It takes something as strong as the word of God to bring comprehension to the divisions. Another way of viewing the parts of a person is body, mind, and will. From a psychological perspective, we can divide a person's mind into the id, ego, and superego.

It is difficult to rationalize a future body when we leave the present body behind at death, so we commonly think of disembodied spirits. This was a Greek philosophy and not the Biblical

view. The Greeks taught us to believe in the soul's immortality. The Biblical view of the afterlife was resurrection of the body.

Although it is acceptable to divide a person into these different parts for study, I think we get a more truthful view of a person when we see them as a unit. Even when we leave this physical body behind, we will have a body controlled by spirit—a spiritual body.

Romans 8:11, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to our mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you."

330. Dear Children, 1995: The Virtues (part 1)

Faith, hope, and love were sometimes called the three virtues. They were three good (or best) things in the Christian life and the greatest, according to Paul, was love. Could there be any relationship among these three great ideas?

Love was the essential central or great idea. We might express the meaning of love as wishing and working for the person's highest good. This was the best definition of God's love I could find.

Faith in God means we believe he exists, and He wants the best for us. Adam and Eve, in the garden, disbelieved God's love, rejected his command (not to eat the fruit), and sin came into the world. This broke the relationship between humans and God. So, it made sense that to restore that relationship, a person must trust God loves them and wishes the best for them. That was why by grace you are saved—through faith (trust) in God.

Christian hope is just faith in God for the future. It is not, "I hope so" but acknowledges the truth that we could trust God to provide the best for us.

The English word for love referred to a wide range of emotions and actions. True love, the kind of love God has, is a principle of conduct (or a principle of being) rather than an emotion. This love always wishes for and works for the person's best and is not dependent on the loveliness of the object of love. This love is called *agape* love. This is God's love.

Look at the Fall from the point of view of love. God loved Adam and Eve and wanted the best for them. He knew it was best if they accepted his love. They needed to accept freely. They thought, "he is withholding the best from us," so they disobeyed. Rejection of God seems to be the ultimate sin.

331. Dear Children, 1995: The Virtues (part 2)

Compassion relates to love in the same way we relate righteous indignation to justice.

If there were two wealthy farmers who had hundreds of acres of land and thousands of sheep and one farmer took the other's sheep, slaughtered it for lamb stew and the wronged farmer brought the case before the court, what was justice? If you sat on the jury for this trial, you would probably say the offending farmer should replace the sheep he killed.

However, if one farmer was wealthy with thousands of sheep and his neighbour was a poor family with one pet lamb that played with their children and the wealthy farmer slaughtered the pet lamb, what was justice? If you sat on that jury, you would feel not only should the court uphold the principle of justice (replace the lamb), but something more should be done. You

would feel righteous indignation, an emotion, on behalf of the wronged family. Another similar lamb could not replace the lost lamb. The circumstance informed the depth of the transgression.

Love is the principle that seeks the best for other people. Compassion is the emotion that accompanies a desire to help the needy one. Compassion based on Christian love has been a significant force of good in the world. Matthew, in his gospel, wrote of Jesus, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like a sheep without a shepherd." (Matt. 9:36)

Some promote the idea that faith is a thing a person could hold with their spiritual hands. Belief and trust are like faith. However, the person who believed everything they were told is naïve, not faithful. It is necessary to believe in something, not just believe. It was one thing to say, I believe if I sat, I would not fall to the floor when there is nothing on which to sit. It was another thing to say I believed a chair would hold me if I sat on it. In the second case, the trust was in the chair. In the first case, the trust was "free floating," at least until you fell to the floor.

Most often, when the New Testament talked of belief or trust or faith, it meant trust in God. God is wholly trustworthy and will never let us down. Trust in God is based on what we know about Him, as creator and as one who loved us and gave himself for us. "The way to a *right relationship* with God is revealed when man's faith responds to God's fidelity." (Paraphrase of Rom 1:17)

332. Dear Children, 1995: Trinity

Love is a basic relationship of God the Trinity. Jesus speaks of the, "love wherewith thou has loved me." (John 17:26) The purpose of Jesus; life was that the world may know he loves the Father. (John 14:31) I John 4:16 says, "God is love." God wants to bring each person into this relationship of love with Himself. "See what love the father has... that we should be called children of God." (I John 3:1).

God loves us and seeks our highest good and because He is all-powerful, He can give that to us. Any disobedience to God is self-destructive because it is a step away from our highest good. People who love others with God's love seek for the other person's highest good and, as far as possible, help them get it. People who love God want and pray for and seek what God wants. Love expresses itself as obedience to God. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." (I John 5:3)

The basis of a proper relationship is love. Love is present in the Trinity (John 17:26, John 14:31). As I understand it, God wants to include each one of us in this loving relationship with Him and the whole of scripture from beginning to end is an expression of the fact that God loves us and wants the best for us. God is on our side.

God's love is expressed to us personally and historically (by sending His Son). "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) (I have read somewhere that the Aramaic word for life and for salvation is the same).

In this sending (of Jesus by God) we had undeniable proof of God's love for us. Though Paul loved God and Paul knew God loved him he stated in Galatians 2:20, "I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." That day on Calvary, that day in history, God showed His love for me in a way I could never doubt. He gave Himself for me.

*Editor's note: This is the beginning of Dear Children, 2010. I have included selected studies.

333. Dear Children, 2010: Introduction

Dear Children,

It was during the last half of 2009 that, for various reasons, I had time to devote to a more intense study of some aspects of science that have long intrigued me. Astronomy, Einstein's theories, particle physics, and quantum mechanics lead one into new thoughts and exciting ideas that can be coordinated with Biblical truth.

Although a 'charm quark' has a pretty name, it and its fellow particles are unlikely to be the source of creation we ascribe to God. It is my hope and prayer that the following letters may help you see the path to the one who is the way, the truth, and the life.

Your mother has spent many hours typing the letters and making them look nice, and I thank her. Without her help, they would have been as legible as a doctor's prescription.

Love, Dad

334. Dear Children, 2010: Reason for the Hope Within

I Peter 3:8-18

Throughout history, there were those who directed their lives by the way they felt and those who thought through their position in an intellectual manner.

Since God made us with both feeling and reason, I suspect most combine these faculties in their lives. Many who hold a purely materialistic view of our place in the universe look at believers as fuzzy romantics who hold naïve beliefs with no rational basis.

The Apostle Peter scouted this view when he wrote in I Peter 3:15, "... and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you..."

Let us look at the concept of faith.

The definition in Hebrews 11:1 was good: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." As a definition, this was good, but when the Bible talked about faith, it meant faith in God (There may be exceptions). The Hebrew scholar Isaiah Gafni PhD looking at Habakkuk 2:4 where it said, "... but the just shall live by his faith..." assumed 'faith' meant 'trust in God.'

If a person believed everything they hear, we do not consider them to have faith, we consider them naïve.

In studying Buddhism, I discovered the faithful Buddhist could achieve *nirvana* by devotion to the Buddha. For instance, one presented themselves before a golden image of the Buddha, placed their palms together in a prayerful gesture, and bowed before the image. The person then imagined countless rays going out from the image, forming Buddhas at the end of each ray. Worshipping this imaginary image might release one into nirvana. In the study course, the professor called this 'salvation by faith.' One imagined something, then believed what someone imagined and is saved.

The Christian's faith in God is not based on imagination, but on the work of God in history. The climactic work of God was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Paul recognized this basis for our trust, or belief, in God. "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain,

and our faith is also vain.” (I Cor. 15:14) “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.” (I Cor. 15:20)

We who live some two thousand years after Jesus lived his exemplary life and gave his teachings for us are in the position of looking back in history to find the reason for the hope within us. The early Christians were willing to give their lives to witness to the death, resurrection, and lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I will build my church,” (Matt. 16:18) and he did. Christians have felt the responsibility through the centuries to be the repository and expression of the truth about God which is encapsulated in the gospel: Jesus the Son of God, born of a virgin by the power of God’s Spirit, lived, died, and was raised from the dead and now lives in heaven at the right hand of God. “Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

335. Dear Children, 2010: Early Christians

Matthew 1:18-25

In my previous letter, we saw how we should be ready to give a reason for the hope within us. We received the witness of the early Christians who felt responsible for passing on the truth of the gospel to future generations. Aside from the New Testament, there were few other sources to tell us about the early Christians. F. F. Bruce documented these sources in *Jesus and the Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*. About 150 A.D. Justin Martyr wrote his *Defence of Christianity* to the Emperor Antonius Pius. He wrote, “That these things happened you may learn from the acts which were recorded under Pontius Pilate.” They recorded the trial and death of Jesus and the reports existed in official records of the time. Bruce told us the Suetonius wrote about 120 A.D. that Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in 49 A.D., “... at the instigation of Chrestus.” Chrestus was a common slave name and a popular misspelling of Christ.

In the works of the historian Josephus in book eighteen of *Jewish Antiquities*, there was a paragraph about Jesus. Some argued Josephus did not write it. Whether Josephus wrote it really does not matter. Christians are not dependent on the opinions of Josephus. Someone, Josephus or another, wrote this opinion about Jesus earlier than 325 A.D. (the historian Eusebius recorded it in *Ecclesiastical History* written 325 A.D.)

Other records told a little here and there about Jesus, but historically it was the New Testament and especially Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that gave us the most information about the life of Jesus. The events around the life and death of Jesus were historical facts. The hymn writer wrote, “I will celebrate nativity, for it has a place in history.” (He’s Everything to Me by Ralph Carmichael)

“This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit... But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.” (Matt 1:18, 25)

336. Dear Children, 2010: Is the New Testament Reliable?

John 20:30-31, | John 1:1-4

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.” (I John 1:1-4)

Through time, Christian apologists (defenders) defended the truths of Christianity. Sometimes it cost them their lives. There were many who did not believe in the birth, life, death, and resurrection and ascension of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. One professor of history wrote: “The gospels are not biographies nor are they historical accounts of the life of Jesus, but they are religious statements of belief written by Christians for Christians and as a result they are highly unreliable in their portrayal of events.”

Let us look at this statement. Was it really a reflection on their authenticity that they did not fit the genre of either biography or historical account? They gave an account of what Jesus did and what he taught. To say they were religious statements of belief inferred there were no sound historical events described—that they were only statements of belief. This was not true. Peter’s confession that Jesus was the Christ, “the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16) was a statement of belief given after spending three years watching Jesus’ work and listening to him teach.

That Christians wrote the gospels is true. These deeply committed men did not conceal they believed in what they wrote, and they also commended their opinions to others. “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book: But these things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and the believing ye might have life through his name.” (John 20:30-31) A Christian wrote this for everyone.

Matthew could be a guide to Christian doctrine and behaviour. It also focused on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and targeted Jewish Christians. However, as with John, the Gospels appeal to non-Christians, Jewish or Gentile, urging them to accept the Way.

None of the complaints about the New Testament supported a conclusion that they were “highly unreliable in their portrayal of events.” Tradition told us all of Jesus’ twelve closest disciples, except John, died a martyr’s death. This is how strongly they believed in the gospel’s truth.

337. Dear Children, 2010: Gospels

Acts 10:34-43

It seems strange that such apparently conscientious people as the apostles who were willing to die rather than compromise with the truth of the gospel should be accused of diverting the truth. The empty tomb of Christ was the centre of the New Testament’s teaching. Indeed, it was the centre of the whole of scripture. Our historical understanding of this came to us mainly from the documents of the New Testament. Are they reliable?

The four Gospels tell what Jesus did and what he taught. Matthew was a good choice for a book that formed a link with the Old Testament, presenting Jesus as the son of David, the son of Abraham. F. F. Bruce wrote, “the written sources of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are not later than A.D. 60,” and “... in fact practically all the way through (we are) in

touch with the evidence of eyewitnesses. Peter, who was the apostolic authority behind Mark's Gospel, says in Acts 10:39 "... we are witnesses of the things which he (Jesus) did..."

The Gospel of Luke showed signs of careful research into the facts around the life of Jesus. Luke, a Gentile, wrote Luke and Acts to "most excellent Theophilus" and wrote with careful attention to detail. The Gospel of John contained many deep spiritual truths generated from the teachings of Jesus. John said of himself, "this is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true." (John 21:24)

F. F. Bruce in his book *The New Testament Documents—Are they Reliable?* agreed with and quoted Fredric Keyon's conclusion: "The interval between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."

"Then Peter began to speak: "... the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did... He commanded us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead... everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Acts 10:34-43)

338. Dear Children, 2010: He is Risen

Matthew 26:3-5, 27:62-65, 28:11-15

Imagine the consternation of Caiaphas, the man who orchestrated Jesus' death (Matt 26:3-5), when told on Sunday morning that Jesus had risen from the dead. (Matt. 27:62-65) I imagine a conversation with Caiaphas.

Caiaphas: "I asked Pilate to place a guard at the tomb."

Messenger: "He did, sir."

Caiaphas: "I understand he put a Roman seal on the stone at the tomb."

Messenger: "He did, sir."

Caiaphas: "How could this happen? Where is his corpse? We need to find the body. It must still be in the tomb."

His dilemma was what to tell people to keep them from believing in the resurrection of Jesus. The best solution was to produce the body. They could not! He could have the guards say the disciples stole the body at night while the guards slept. This was the best excuse. Not a very good one! They executed Roman soldiers for sleeping on sentry duty. Discipline was so excessive that generals could punish squadrons by decimation for cowardly behaviour in battle—they executed every tenth man. Roman soldiers knew how to keep watch. (Matt 28:11-15)

We might sympathize with them. What could they do against the mighty power of God? In I Corinthians chapter 15, Paul wrote of many who saw Jesus after his resurrection. He also claims to have encountered Jesus himself, "as one born out of due time." (I Cor 15:8) The eyewitnesses and writers of the New Testament believed Jesus had risen from the dead. They would die rather than give up this truth. They established the Church. They established weekly

worship on Resurrection Day (Sunday). Christians celebrated communion by remembering the death and resurrection of the Lord—until He comes again.

I read of the revivals that took place in Great Britain and America in the 1700s. People who preached with little success testified to their success that followed when they accepted, by faith, pardon from their sins and committed their lives to the risen Lord.

The Lord is risen indeed and is still at work in the world.

339. Dear Children, 2010: Jesus and the Old Testament

Matthew 4:1-11

I showed the New Testament documents were reliable, and they reliably presented Jesus as the Son of God and the situation at the beginning of the Church. These documents showed believers had a profound belief in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus became the pivotal point from which to consider the Old Testament.

I wondered if there were a few references in the gospels that showed Jesus supporting the authenticity and inspiration of the Old Testament. Jesus said about divorce, “Have ye not read... he which made them in the beginning made them male and female... What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Matt 19:1:6) Here, Jesus not only speaks of marriage but also confirmed the creation record. I remembered Jesus spoke of the days of the coming of the Son of Man and they would be like the days of Noah before the flood. (Matt 24:37-39) Jesus believed the historic reality of both Noah and the flood of Noah’s day.

As I perused the book of Matthew backward, looking for its opening chapter, my eyes picked out Matthew 11:20-24, where Jesus indicated the judgement on the land of Sodom was less than would be on Capernaum. In the same chapter, Jesus confirmed the words of Isaiah as prophesying the works of the Messiah. “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” (Isaiah 11:5) In Matthew 12, Jesus talked of Jonah and Nineveh. In Matthew 22:41-45, Jesus teaches about the relationship between David and the Christ.

I leafed through Matthew to the first eight chapters. In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus used the Old Testament scripture three times to counter the devil’s temptations. “Jesus answered, ‘It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matt 4:4). In chapter 5, Jesus tells of fulfilling the Law and the Prophets. He spiritualized the Old Testament Law. Jesus advised the man healed of leprosy to follow the Mosaic Law and show himself to the priest (Matt 8:11). Jesus said subjects of the Kingdom would be rejected but many others would come to feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

I was convinced. Jesus believed in the inspiration of the Old Testament. If Jesus, the Son of God, believed in the Old Testament... so should we.

340. Dear Children, 2010: Awe and Morality

Psalms 11

What Jesus thought of the ancient Old Testament scripture was highly important. Almost as important was the clarity with which these scriptures described the coming Messiah and what would happen in the world. Why were both good and bad in people? The scripture said, God

created them good, and they fell into sin, which caused the bad. Why did all groups of people desire to worship? God created us in His image; we intuitively feel there is a God to petition and thank. Rebellion against God destroyed the proper relationship with God and man substituted an imagined god (made in man's image).

I could not imagine a sense of morality developing without a creator. How could we explain a conscience within humans? How could we explain a sense of guilt if we leave God out of the picture?

Pagan religions rarely coordinated morality and religion. Religionists dealt with worship, and philosophers dealt with morality. C. S. Lewis thought human beings had within them a sense of awe and a sense of right and wrong. He spoke of the 'numinous' as the object that excited the feeling of awe. The sense of right and wrong was our moral sense.

The scriptures bring together the cause of these two inherent senses of humanity, awe and morality, in the Lord God. David said, "the LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven... For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness." (Psalm 11:4, 7)

341. Dear Children, 2010: Prophecy

Ezekiel 26:1-14

Many predictions made in the Old Testament came true. Some did not come true for thousands of years. This fulfillment of prophecy supported the Old Testament as being God-breathed (inspired by God). Some prophecies were clear, and others were subjective. St. Augustine regarded all the Psalms as Messianic—they tell us something about the coming Messiah. In modern times, a scholar named Gunkel claimed the Psalms have no Messianic features.

Prophecies concerning the coming Messiah provided an interesting and instructive line of argument supporting the inspiration of the Old Testament. Regarding the serpent, God said, as recorded in Genesis, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Gen 3:15) In Abraham, "all peoples on earth will be blessed..." (Gen 12:3) "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh come; And unto him shall the gathering of the people be." (Genesis 49:10) Shiloh might refer to the coming Christ. The prophet referred to in Deuteronomy certainly referred to the Messiah, "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." (Deuteronomy 18:15) Balaam had a vision recorded in Numbers. He saw a star would rise out of Jacob and a sceptre from Israel (Numbers 24:15-19). When the wise men came to Jerusalem and asked where the King of the Jews would be born (Matt 2:1-6) the Jewish religious advisors referred to the prophet Micah to show Bethlehem was where the Christ would be born (Micah 5:2).

The Psalms had definite references to the coming Messiah (Christ). "Thou are my Son..." (Psalm 2:7). We find the strictly prophetic element in Psalm 22, 45, 72, and 110.

One fulfilled prophecy concerned the city of Tyre (Tyrus) on the Mediterranean coast. They built the city in ancient times, about 2700 B.C. The main city extended seven miles along the coast, with suburbs extending to twenty miles. It was built opposite an island about one-half a mile offshore. Assyrians attacked it in the eighth century B.C., but it continued to thrive as a commercial shipping power. With Carthage, it ruled the Mediterranean Sea. In 590 B.C., Ezekiel

prophesied Tyre would be destroyed. "They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers; I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock." (Ezekiel 26:4) Also, Ezekiel predicted it would be a place fishermen would spread their nets to dry. (Ezekiel 26:5) In 585 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacked the coastal city and left it in ruins. During the siege, the Tyrians transported their wealth by ship to the island city. Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. conquered the city by building a causeway to the island. He used all the pillars and stones from the walls and towers, scraping it and throwing it into the sea. Arthur Custance, in *Doorway Papers Vol. VII pp. 121-127*, describes a photograph of Tyre showing pillars on the causeway and fishing nets drying in the area.

Other fulfilled prophecies, some detailed, supported the inspiration of the Old Testament. The study of prophecy deserves much time and thought.

342. Dear Children, 2010: How to Read the Bible

It would be helpful to think about the different ways people interpret the Bible. The literal interpretation is the words of the Bible mean what they say. We accept there are different genres of literature in the Bible, such as history, poetry, prophecy, letters, and apocalyptic literature. Each one needs to be viewed differently.

The way I suggest interpreting the Bible is a middle way. It avoids the extreme view that God directly gave the actual words for the authors to write (the secretarial view) and avoids the both the allegorical view (scripture necessarily holds a deeper meaning than the literal one) and the liberal view that scriptures have only a human source. I believe the scriptures mean what they say.

New Testament scriptures had high marks for reliability. They told of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Jesus was who He said He was. The Gospel of John contained statements of Jesus about himself:

"If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me." (John 5:46)

"... the one who believes in me has eternal life." (John 6:47)

"... before Abraham was, I am!" (John 8:58)

"I and the Father are one." (John 10:30)

"... the Father is in me, and I in the Father." (John 10:38)

Jesus, claiming divine status, became the authority. His support of the Old Testament verifies its inspiration and authenticity. I showed scriptures from the Old Testament that predicted events in the future. Jesus fulfilled the passages predicting a Messiah.

The way one interprets the Bible reflects what one already believes. Archbishop Anselm wrote, "I believe in order to understand," applies to reading the Bible. We must be conscious of the reasoning of those that do not believe. Saying "the Gospels are neither history nor biography but were written by Christians for Christians, which makes them unreliable," is a firm statement of a person's pre-formed bias. Thus, you can approach with Anselm's bias of belief or the secular scholar's bias of disbelief (much like the hardened heart of Pharaoh). With the first you can connect with he who inspired the words. A third alternative would be approaching the Bible with an open mind. This permits God to work on the reader so they may uncover both the literal and spiritual meanings of the words.

Myth and legend are terms used in Bible interpretation. Stories of this nature may be actual events, or based on actual events, but have a deeper meaning than what appears on the surface. This may not be history but it is still non-fiction. How does one distinguish myth or

legend from history? One professor says, "Often myths have to do with how God works among humans." Some liberal scholars interpret the stories of creation, the fall of Adam and Eve, the flood of Noah's time, and the tower of Babel as false myths. All miracles must be false by the perspective of some, so any story of the supernatural is a false myth. However, recording a miracle or a legend (possibly passed down by oral tradition) would understandably come with the writer's version of the tale, complete with their understanding of what it meant.

It is important we come to Bible study with an understanding of our own pre-formed biases. This will determine the value we get. However, an encounter with the living God can change our bias quickly. Otherwise, we may get trapped in circular thinking: miracles are impossible, so any story about a miracle must be false. It can lead to endless speculations such as that heard by my mother that, "the books of Moses were not written by Moses but another man of the same name."

Therefore, read the Bible for the literal meaning, understand the context of the time, strive to understand the perspective of the audience for who the words were written. But also, accept the power of God's Spirit to reveal truths from your reading that may apply to your life today. Consider how the scripture speaks to the work of Jesus and how Jesus' work clarifies the scripture passage.

"He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and slow to believe all the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:25-27)

*Editor's Note: I have heavily edited the last three paragraphs, which I found confusing, but I believe I kept the meaning and Dad would approve the changes.

343. Dear Children, 2010: The Beginning

Scripture started with an account of the beginning. It is a mistake to balance the scriptural account of creation with a scientific account and choose on that is true. In studying the New Testament documents, particularly the gospels, to show their historicity and accuracy, we find evidence of the resurrection of Jesus. These writings showed Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. He considered the Old Testament the inspired and authentic Word of God.

Matthew recorded Jesus' view of marriage (Matt. 19:1-6). He took the institution of marriage back to creation and observed that God originally joined man and woman in marriage. This study will not try to discredit scientific discoveries but will attempt to use them when they enlarge our view of creation.

My trust in God and the Lord Jesus Christ led me to accept that, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1) C. S. Lewis said science provides us with a model of how things must work based on the facts available at the time. As new facts are discovered, and views clarified, the model changes. I saw models of treatment change during my years of practicing medicine. As new information emerged, treatments changed.

The famous astronomer and teacher, Dr. Alex Filippenko PhD, said in one of his lectures: "Truth is for philosophers and theologians. Physicists and astronomers are trying to always get a better working model of the universe and eliminate wrong theories." However, in my opinion, truth is truth, wherever we find it.

The scriptures provided a firm foundation for our thinking and assumed the living, eternal God created the universe. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of what was visible." (Heb 11:3) Jonah, when asked to tell the sailors who he was, said, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which made the sea and the dry land." (Jonah 1:9)

The Psalms had several passages that glorified God as creator:

Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handywork."

Psalm 33:6, "by the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth."

Psalm 90:2, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hast formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God."

Psalm 102:25-26, "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish but thou shalt endure..."

Psalm 104 is worth reading in the context of creation and God's control of nature. Verse 24, "Oh LORD, how manifold are thy works! In Wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches."

We worship the living God and praise Him for the wonders of creation.

344. Dear Children, 2010: Creation

As we look at God's creative process, science provided us with some interesting comparisons. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen 1:1) This statement was beautifully clear and concise. Young and old; educated and uneducated; layperson and scientist can all understand it. It was comprehensible in any language. God did it. He created the earth on which we walk and everything above us. He did it in the beginning.

What was God doing before He created the world? Who made God? Where did God come from? These are the natural questions that form from this creation statement.

The beginning might be the beginning of the universe or the beginning of time itself. Scientists might consider time as the beginning, the heavens as space, and earth as matter. Matter was the particles that form atoms and molecules that made up the material of the universe. Whatever was in the universe, God created. Physicists would say that time, space, and matter belong together, and you cannot have one without the others. They proposed space-time as a fourth dimension. How can this be? Consider a line with no thickness as one dimension, a flat surface as two dimensions, and a box as three dimensions. A flat surface like a picture on a wall has two dimensions, but an artist may paint a two-dimensional image to look as if it had depth, a third dimension.

A large box (three dimensions) might hold you and your friends. If you moved the box at a certain speed, you have introduced a fourth dimension, space-time. If the box was now a spaceship, and you and your friends travelled close to the speed of light, 300,000 km/s, four things happen. You and your friends perceive the spaceship at rest and the planets and meteorites sped towards or away from you. Imagine a clock on the inner wall of the box. Anyone from another frame of reference, if they could glimpse the clock, the second hand would go very slow. From the spaceship, the distance to the next milestone would seem very short. Your weight would increase, but your clock would appear to run normally. As you approach the speed of light, time slows, the direction of travel shortens, and mass increases. For the photons, moving at the speed of light, no time passes.

God created time and space and matter. He set it in motion. "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." (Gen 1:2b) The time required, and the distances of space are irrelevant. If he created at the speed of light, no time would pass in God's frame of reference.

345. Dear Children, 2010: Particles

Fred Hoyle, the first physicist who mentioned the world's beginning was a 'Big Bang' did so sarcastically. The scientific community widely accepts this theory. The 'bang' started with the elementary particles, the quarks, the electrons, and the neutrinos. These moved rapidly in a very hot space which went through a period of rapid inflation. The heat was tremendous, the speed of motion of the particles was tremendous, electromagnetic energy was tremendous, but the photons were kicked back and forth so quickly they could not escape. It was dark. This world of tiny particles that made up the substance and energy of the universe remains a mysterious world to this day. We called this world of tininess quantum mechanics or quantum physics.

Even those who studied it for years felt quantum mechanics was counter intuitive. The experimental results and theories they produced are not what we would expect. Particles, for instance, travel through space as waves and in this form can be in several places at once. A single photon of light could travel two routes to end up in the same place.

The vacuum of space, which we think of as nothing, could be the source of energy if the energy was returned nearly immediately.

Entanglement is a strange property of these tiny particles. For instance, there are two electrons in a Helium atom. They are in the same orbit and so become entangled and behave as one particle which has the quality of spin at spin 0. Each individual electron has spin $-1/2$ (two electrons with spin $-1/2$ makes one spin 0). To entangle the spins must be opposite directions and, even separated by great distances, they remain entangled. When such particles were manipulated, the second particle changes to maintain oppositeness. The change happens immediately and is not limited by the speed of light. Einstein called this 'spooky.' This property of entangled particles can be used to send coded information from the holder of one particle to the holder of the other one. Scientists are working on quantum computers using these techniques.

This strange world of tiny particles must have been very weird. It was a homogenized mixture, hot, churning. No atoms or molecules had yet formed—it was too hot. It rapidly expanded and cooled. When the temperature cooled to about 3000 K the atoms formed from the particles and light escaped.

Is this another way of saying, "The earth was without form and void and darkness covered the face of the deep"? (Gen 1:2) And God cooled the dark mixture and allowed the atoms to form, and light escaped. It seems as if these scholar-scientists were explaining the Bible. "And God said, let there be light, and there was light." (Gen 1:3)

346. Dear Children, 2010: Sin Changed the Universe

Travel at very high speeds, approaching the speed of light, and exposure to very high gravity can slow down clocks when seen from another frame of reference. Time is not, "like an ever-flowing stream that bears all her sons away," as the hymn says. Yes, it seems like that in our day-to-day lives, but time is stranger than that.

Time started when God created time-space-matter. During creation week, we do not know how God manipulated these aspects of creation. All we can do with science is to look at what we have now and interpolate backwards. But God completed the work of creation was at the end of the sixth day. It was very good. God had achieved a universe capable of running itself without running down.

While God rested, the universe continued without God's active work. Dare I suggest perpetual motion? Perhaps. But the universe was not as we know it. After humans rejected God's law and disbelieved and disobeyed God, the universe changed. Death and decay entered the universe. Not only Adam and Eve were affected, but all creation.

The principle of entropy is the second law of thermodynamics. It asserts things are running down. Matter and energy are conserved but as they are used and converted back and forth, they are becoming less useful.

During creation week, creation principles were in place. The universe we have now is, according to scripture, not the universe at the end of creation week. The teaching of scripture is the universe changed because of the sin of humankind.

347. Dear Children, 2010: Light

God allowed light to shine out of the 'deep.' The Big Bang theory would say that as the formless, empty, homogenized soup-like stuff cooled light escaped. The entire universe did not become a little bright—there were light and dark areas. Light was such a thing that could shine in some areas and not others. Daylight could shine and then at night dark could be present. We see that this day-night cycle would be called one day.

God formed the homogenized mass by putting more space between some stuff and compressing other stuff together. In Genesis 1:6, we are introduced to waters. In Hebrew, the word for sky or heaven is *shamayim*. The ending, *-im*, is the masculine plural. The word for water is *mayim*. The word for water is part of the heavens and plural.

From the deep unformed, empty stuff, waters were divided by the firmament which God made—the word created is not used. God took what he created and made the universe.

Astronomers described winds that are particle bursts coming from stars, including our sun. They described electron gas and degenerate neutron gas. These were not winds and gasses, as usually understood. In describing conditions, they thought existed in the early Big Bang theory, they described photons trapped in plasma, a fluid containing photons, dark matter, and normal matter. They say because light could not emerge, the universe was opaque.

We can view the waters as the fluid (or plasma) of the astronomers. The firmament started to sort things out and, if astronomers are right, variations in the microwave background pushed matter around and eventually the matter formed the stars and planets.

Early scientists like Kepler, Newton, and Obler wondered at the darkness of the night. It seemed a paradox. Their assumptions suggested the star shining in the sky should light the universe as brightly as the sun lit the earth during the day. Somehow, however, God knew we needed rest from sleep at night and limited starlight.

The firmament separating the above from below completed this aspect of the process, and a period of darkness followed by light proceeded to the third day. (Gen 1:3-6)

348. Dear Children, 2010: Celestial Lights

On the third day of creation, God turned His attention to the earth, separating the dry land from the seas. Without creating any new thing, God made vegetables, trees, and grasses that produce seeds. On this day, God twice saw that what He made was good. God, on day four, formed the sky and the multitude of heavenly bodies studied by astronomy. The universe is vast. The large numbers used to describe the universe should not intimidate us. We noted the relativity of time and space. We must be careful not to think of the universe as being so immense that it swallowed up God. God created it and created the relativity part of it and remains outside of this large, complex system. But He can move inside it anytime He pleases.

Physicists estimated they understand only 4% of the contents of the universe. 21% of the universe is dark matter, and 75% dark energy, but physicists understood neither. The 4% comprised the elements and we only partly understood them.

Light travels at 300,000 km/s which translates to 10 trillion km per year (6 trillion miles per year). The physicists estimated the size of the universe is 13.7 billion light years. Oh, the mighty power of God!

Let me point out, when thinking of the sun, moon, and stars, that if God had not previously created light, there would be no purpose, from our point of view, of putting sources of light in the sky. God had already separated light and darkness, then he arranged the solar system to continue the day-night cycle. And God “saw that it is good.” (Gen 1:9-19)

349. Dear Children, 2010: Animals

On day five of creation, the scripture recorded the second use of the word create. “So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.” (Gen 1:21) Apparently, the created stuff of the universe as recorded in verse 1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...” (Gen 1:1), was sufficient for everything until animals. Time was present in its usual and relative aspect. Space separated matter from matter, atoms from atoms was also, with time, part of the fourth dimension of space/time. It was not ‘nothing’ but allowed for transformation of particles as energy could be borrowed from space if given back in a very short period. Also, in an expanding universe, it was not the things of the universe that expanded, nor is it that things get farther apart, but space itself expanded. Matter was created, at first a very dense and very hot mixture of elementary particles, like quarks and electrons, kept the photons of light from appearing. Cooled to 3,000 K, atoms formed, and light appeared.

All this was enough to make the universe, but God now created something more; something not present until then. He created animal life. God created sea creatures and flying creatures. And He blessed them and made it possible for them to multiply in their environment.

Could all this be accomplished without God? We do not know where the elementary particles—quarks, gluons, electrons, and neutrinos—would come from. Could we give quarks purpose? Could they unite in a way to form plants, animals, and humans? Was that possible? How would beings with intelligence and spirituality come to be?

Some would deny God yet give creative power and even intelligence to inanimate primary particles. It is more reasonable to believe in God.

350. Dear Children, 2010: Humans

It seems impossible to read the first chapter of Genesis without seeing humans as the purpose and crowning glory of creation. There was something magnificent in the creation of humans. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," and "let them have dominion," and "God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." (Gen 1:26-2:3)

For the third time, the author of Genesis used the word created, and then repeated it a fourth time. The first time was in Gen 1:1, then with the creation of animals, and then with creation of humans. "God created man in His own image... in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them."

Magnificent! Very Good! All He created and made was good. Both terms, created and made, are in Genesis 2:3, "God rested from all His work that he created and made."

God rested on the seventh day. Creation was finished. The work was done, and the laws and principles needed to create were no longer needed. He released the galaxies to spin, stars to explode. The stars recycled hydrogen and recombined ionized particles to form more heavy elements. The iron core of stars collapsed to form neutron stars or black holes. Photons of light travelled at 300,000 km/s. Nuclear fusion occurred in the sun to give energy to the earth. Hundreds of billions of stars existed in galaxies and hundreds of billions of galaxies spread across the universe. Wow!

Thank you, God, for this beautiful earth you made for us. It was just the right distance from the sun, just the right size so we were comfortable with the gravity, and at the perfect 23 ½ degree tilt to produce the seasons. The moon was just far enough from the earth to prevent constant tidal waves, and He positioned big Jupiter to attract meteorites away from earth.

Earth followed the same principles as the rest of the universe. It does not have its own unique physical laws. But consider the care and love God took in fine-tuning the world so men and women, boys and girls may live in beauty and harmony, trusting and serving our creator God.

351. Dear Children, 2010: Sin

Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 described the creation events of the universe and the earth, the home made for humans. At verse four, the story became personal. The story showed God's love for Adam and Eve, and through them for us all. There was a time, before humankind, when plants did not grow and there was no rain, only a mist to water the ground. The story described the Garden of Eden and Adam names the living creatures. In verse four, we learn God's name, Yahweh, a word related to the verb 'to be.' When God spoke to Moses, he gave his name. It is a Hebrew word for 'self-existent one.' "I am that I am," (Ex 3:14) is he first person singular form, which was the basis for the name of the living God. Because the Hebrew people would not pronounce His name out of respect for Him. The English Bible translators used all capitals when the name Yahweh appears, either LORD or GOD.

God placed two special trees in the garden of Eden (Gen 2:9): the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They were not to eat of the second tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The beauty of the cosmos, the earth, and the garden were theirs to enjoy, and the fruit of any other tree they could enjoy. The fruit of one tree was forbidden—to eat would bring death.

This showed God's love for Adam and Eve and through them to all of us. He made a beautiful garden to meet the needs of humanity in a magnificent cosmos. He taught them to speak. He gave Adam and Eve to each other and would come to them and visit with them. After this show of love, it is shocking that Adam and Eve should believe God withheld the best from them. They chose to believe a lie. They discovered God was truthful and his instructions were for their good. This is called the Fall, and it resulted in death and decay, not only for humans but for the universe.

Did Adam and Eve believe in the sovereignty of God? I believe they did. Did they believe they were free to choose to trust or defy God? I believe they did. Sin entered God's creation and continued. We needed redemption. Speaking to the serpent, the one who harboured Satan, God said, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, any you will strike his heel." (Gen 3:15)

Adam and Eve did not believe God loved them and wanted the best for them. They distrusted His word. They disobeyed His command. Salvation will come to us when we reverse what they did. When we repent of our contrariness and disobedience to God and believe in God, he gives us access to the tree of life. We need to trust that He loves us, accepts us, and wants the best for us. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

352. Dear Children, 2010: Suffering (part 1)

Suffering is a major stumbling block for some in believing in an all-powerful, loving God. Charles Templeton, an evangelist with Billy Graham, lost his faith in God and became an atheist. He had a long list of reasons, but suffering in the world was chief among them.

The Greek philosophers considered suffering. They concluded wisdom came from suffering. One might even learn wisdom from the suffering of others. Greek tragedies were plays performed to teach people the result of destructive behaviour. We correct children and they can learn to change behaviour to avoid punishment. Behaviour modification rewards proper behaviour and punishes improper behaviour.

The book of Job in the Bible addresses suffering. Job lost his possessions, his children, and the support of his wife. He was afflicted with boils that covered his body. We might expect Job to say, "I learned much wisdom in my suffering." But after Job's suffering, he does not glory in the wisdom he learned. Facing his comforters, Job asks a rhetorical question, "But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12) He answers his own question, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding." (Job 28:28)

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Prov 1:7) Proverbs 2:1-9 entreats the reader to seek knowledge and understanding. If you do this, you will understand, "... the fear of the LORD" (Prov 2:5). "For the LORD giveth wisdom: Out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous." (Prov 2:6-7a)

Trust God. Fear the avoidance of His will, not the following of it. I may find deep meaning in my suffering, but it is not the suffering that is the source of wisdom. It is the Lord who is the source.

By the swimming pool hangs a clock. The motto on that clock is, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." (Psalm 111:10)

353. Dear Children, 2010: Suffering (part 2)

How are we to deal with suffering in the world, a world created by a good God that was pronounced 'very good?' Greek philosophers suggested finding a purpose in suffering. One might cope if wisdom is the expected outcome. According to my studies, the Hindu religion saw the world as full of suffering. Reincarnation was simply a prolongation of suffering. *Samsara* was the endless cycle of births, deaths, and rebirths. The Hindu strove to achieve deliverance (*moksa*) from the cycle. Buddhism believed, as Hindus, the world was full of suffering, and escape from *samsara* is *nirvana*. Buddhism seemed more optimistic, as by following the right path, one can achieve deliverance.

Different philosophies and religion addressed suffering in the world. Some Christians taught that if we had enough faith, we will be "King's kids" and delivered from suffering. Unfortunately, this was not reality. Jesus warns, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33) Paul expected suffering. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom 8:18) God helped us. "... the Spirit helps us in our weakness... the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans." (Rom 8: 26)

It is reassuring to consider how suffering affects our relationship with God. "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in death and so somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead." (Phil. 3:10) Dr. L. T. Johnson, professor of Christianity, said, "Christians resolve the mystery of suffering by having God participate. Suffering is not alien to God." This idea helps, though it does not resolve the issue.

Christ suffered terribly prior to his death. Suffering was part of a sinful world. Paul wrote of sharing with Christ's suffering when others persecute us for his sake. But much of our suffering is unrelated to our faith. Knowing Christ suffered innocently may help when we face illness or trauma. And God does not stand aloof from our sufferings. A stanza of an old hymn says,

And when human hearts are breaking
Under sorrows' iron rod,
Then they find that self-same aching
Deep within the heart of God.

There is pain and suffering in the world. We may divide suffering into different categories to understand it better.

1 Pain is a protective device. It was most likely given by God, along with touch, taste, and smell, to help us avoid harm. We have all seen pictures of people with leprosy who are deformed because they have lost their ability to feel pain. Hurrah for pain!

2 There is suffering as a direct result of sin.

3 There is suffering because we live in a world embedded in sin.

354. Dear Children, 2010: Changed Lives (part 1)

Another reason for the hope within is the changed lives of those who repented of their sins, trusted God, and believed in the provision He gave, for their salvation, Jesus Christ. Such a change might be like Jimmy Carter, the ex-president of the USA. He was raised attending church and, according to the dictates of the Baptist church he attended, waited until he was eleven to be 'born again.' He said, "I cannot agree with church policy that encourages people to become more adult before accepting Christ. I remember as a preschooler my mother asking me if I would like to ask Jesus into my heart. I thought that was a good idea, so I asked him to come into my heart and from then on, I would be Jesus' boy.

Other people experienced the change in a more dramatic way, but in all these cases of commitment to God through the Lord Jesus Christ the change is Change with a capital C."

Change was a change of direction from their selfish way to following Christ. It was a new relationship with the living God and with His Son, our Lord Jesus. The changed person lived a new life, not after the 'flesh' but after the 'spirit.' This change occurred in the Apostle Paul, who threatened and violently oppressed Christ's followers. While on the road to Damascus, he saw a light and heard the voice of Jesus. Trembling and astonished, Paul changed. Changed with a capital C. He became a great missionary and apologist for Jesus.

Aurelius Augustinus changed in 386 A.D. He despaired of his old life and sat weeping in the garden of a friend. He took up a scroll that was nearby and read, "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness. Not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." (Rom 13:13b-14) Augustine, having read this, felt a clear light flooded his heart and all the darkness of death vanished away.

Martin Luther was a well-educated Augustinian monk, a professor of theology, a priest. The burden of sin and guilt was great. He confessed and performing severe acts of penance. In fact, he hated the God who made laws he could not keep and judged him for them. He saw the 'righteousness of God' as "that righteousness which deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous." Paul, in Romans 1:16-17, explained the righteousness of God was revealed in the gospel of Christ. Suddenly, Martin Luther realized the righteousness of God was that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, He justified us by faith. He said, "This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven." The great heritage of the Christian church came from Martin Luther and his emphasis on *sola fides*, salvation was by faith alone.

355. Dear Children, 2010: Changed Lives (part 2)

Some of those who experienced the Change, with a capital C, in their lives became influential leaders and made important contributions to the Church. Martin Luther showed the importance of faith. John Wesley contributed a teaching that a person can have assurance they are a child of God.

John Wesley was an ordained minister in the Anglican Church. He went abroad to save souls in America and returned discouraged, unsure of his own salvation. On May 24, 1738, he went "very unwillingly" to a society on Aldersgate Street when someone read from Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*. In his journal, Wesley wrote, "About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God worked in the heart thought faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, in Christ alone, for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken my sins away, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Although John Wesley played a large part in the revival in England of the

1700s, many others were also involved. When the Change occurred in ministers of the gospel, their ministry became effective. It affected many people in several countries and society changed. Many suggested the changes in Britain prevented a bloody revolution like the one in France.

Eldridge Cleaver was a leader of the Black Panthers in the United States. He became a fugitive from justice and fled to Cuba, Algiers, then France. One night, he was extremely troubled as he sat on a balcony overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. As shadows moved across the moon, he saw his own face forming distinctly on the moon and it filled him with dread and he trembled. There passed, in turn, some of his revolutionary heroes, then, unexpectedly, he saw the face of Jesus Christ in the moon. This caused him to lose control in a flood of tears. Relief came little by little each time he repeated the Lord's Prayer or the 23rd Psalm. He finally collapsed on his bed to experience a peaceful night's sleep.

Charles Colson was the 'hatchet man' for U.S. president Richard Nixon. He was willing to do anything to further the political career of the president. We know well his involvement in the Watergate scandal in the early 1970s. A friend, Tom Phillips, told Charles he had come to realize he needed a personal relationship with God. Tom told him about a hole he had in his life and how he asked Christ to come into his life. He could feel God's presence with him and sense his Spirit within him. Charles recognized his own need and on leaving Phillips' home pulled his car off the road and prayed his first real prayer, "God I don't know how to find you, but I'm going to try... Somehow I want to give myself to you." "Take me." He chanted those two words repeatedly.

What more shall I say? Time would fail me to tell of the changed lives of multitudes who received strength from weakness and hope from despair. I saw evidence of this Change throughout the last two thousand years and it continues in the lives of men and women, girls and boys who call on the name of the Lord.

*Editor's note: The following is a sermon Dad gave on February 22, 2009. At the time, he did not have a reference for holding hands with God. He found this five months later and in Dear Children, 2010 he gave the reference: Psalm 73:23. I added this below and removed references in the sermon of not having it. For the sermon he gave scriptures: Gen 5:24, Romans 8:1-4, 34-39.

356. Keith Fidler Sermon: Holding Hands (part 1)

"Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand." (Psalm 73:23) My message today is about holding hands. In our somewhat free culture, it is quite acceptable for two people to walk in public holding hands. It is a sign of a relationship between them, a positive and mutual relationship. Both persons desire, accept, and agree to that relationship.

A young lady and young man may develop their relationship by talking to each other. The time comes when he shyly reaches out his hand to take her hand. If, at that point, she pulls her hand away; he knows he has misread the situation, and he had better back off. If, however, she clasps his hand, the two can go down the street hand in hand. Their relationship has deepened.

If it is the girl who wishes to hold the fellow's hand she waits until he tells his joke for the third or fourth time, laughs at the right time, raises her hands and as her hand drops, she grasps his hand and they walk off. They are halfway down the block before he realizes they are holding hands.

More conservative societies do not approve of hand holding in public. While I and my wife would barely be noticed if, hand in hand, we walk from store to store in the mall... well someone may comment, "What a cute old couple"... in Biblical times this might not be accepted.

This idea of holding hands shows a kind of relationship we, as human beings, can have with God. To walk hand in hand with God means we are going in the same direction and at the same pace. It also shows that God agrees with the relationship, and we also agree. God will, with his mighty hand, reach down and I, with my weak and arthritic hand, reach up to him and we hold hands as I walk through my life. Now, I am aware that this must be taken in its spiritual sense. That, of course, is the whole idea of what I am trying to say. God loves me and because He is gracious to me, he wants to hold my hand.

I, loving God, ask Him to forgive my rebellion against Him and I reach up my hand in faith. I believe in God. I trust God loves me and forgives me. I trust Him to the extent that I yield myself to Him. Paul says, "by grace you are saved by faith." (Eph 2:8) According to our illustration of holding hands, God offers His hand, and we reach up in faith to hold His hand.

Modern hymnody gives us: "Precious Lord, take my hand and lead," "I don't know about tomorrow... but I know who holds tomorrow... and I know He holds my hand."

Adam and Eve sinned against God in the Garden of Eden. They had two sons and lost them both. Abel was murdered and Cain was exiled by God away from them to wander in the land of Nod. Seth was their third son and from him a righteous line of people came—the seventh from Adam was Enoch (Gen 5:24), "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not, for God took him."

I love the Old Testament. I find it very easy to understand. It speaks to us through real people and real events. From this short statement, I infer there was something different about Enoch. While all the others in this list end their section with "and he died," Enoch was taken by God. He walked with God, and apparently without undergoing death. God changed his earthly body as God took him to heaven. As far as I know, this only happened two more times in this world. Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire and left no dead body on earth. Our Lord Jesus Christ, though his body was dead and, in the grave, rose and took his heavenly body with him to sit at the right hand of God.

357. Keith Fidler Sermon: Holding Hands (part 2)

Near the end of his ministry, Jesus was down near the Jordan River. John chapter 11 tells us that news came to him that his friend Lazarus of Bethany was very sick. Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. Jesus and his disciples walked up that steady climb from Jericho to Jerusalem and came to Bethany near the top of the Mouth of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. As Jesus approaches Bethany, Martha runs out to meet him. She says to Jesus, "If you had been here my brother would not have died." Jesus says, "Your brother will rise again." Martha, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus now corrects her thinking. She is thinking that the resurrection is a time and is an event. But Jesus says to her, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live."

Up to this point, we can easily understand what Jesus is saying. A dead person, who has believed in Jesus, has eternal life. If we look back to our illustration of walking hand in hand with the Lord, He continues to hold our hand even in death. As God is eternal, holding the hand of the eternal one gives us eternal life. Eternal life is not something we can have given to us without God. It is our relationship to God; holding His hand, as it were, that is the basis of our

eternal life. Jesus goes on to say in John 11:26, "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

I am reminded of Enoch: "And God took him." Someone suggested, and I think it is worth consideration, taking these two statements of Jesus together that when a believer in Jesus dies, it looks to their loved ones and all around that the person is dead, but that the person themselves, "shall never die" as Jesus said. Holding the hand of the Lord Jesus, we go to be with Him in that home of many mansions.

I bring you now to one of the most important and instructive chapters in the Bible. I am referring to Romans Chapter 8. Paul wrote much about living the Christian life; much in the way of practical suggestions. The eighth chapter of Romans is a classic chapter. It tells us the great privileges we have when we walk with God. It starts out striking a note of freedom. This is a most interesting thought! It is the Devil's great deception that if we give ourselves to God, if we walk, as it were, hand in hand with God, we will lose our freedom. We will become like zombies and lose our individuality. The atheist organization that has recently become active reflects this thought. Signs on buses and in subways proclaim there is probably no God. Now, stop worrying and enjoy life. I am reminded of an article I read in a medical magazine. The author wrote that, "the people in the beer commercials have more fun in five minutes than I have in my whole life."

Paul scouted this idea to tell us true freedom comes by giving ourselves to God.

358. Keith Fidler Sermon: Holding Hands (part 3)

A while ago, around the time of Halloween, there was a Family Circus cartoon in the newspaper. The children were out on the street dressed in their Halloween costumes with their bags for trick or treating, but they were standing still, frightened by the stories they had heard of ghosts and goblins. They could not move. Their dad leaned out from behind a tree and said, "Psst, I'm right here." When they realized their father is right there with them, their fear disappeared, and they were free to continue doing what they wish to do. I think it is something like this that happens when we yield ourselves to our heavenly Father.

Romans 8 starts with this note of freedom. Verse 1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." The first freedom is freedom from condemnation and guilt. Verse 2, "for the law (principle) of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus had made me free from the law (principle) of sin and death." Sin leads to decay, it leads to disintegration, and it leads to death. Walking with God frees us from the principle of sin and death. We are free from the domination of sin. Verse 3 tells us that it is the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins that makes it possible for... verse 4, "the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:4) We are free to walk in righteousness.

Let us now go to the end of the chapter. What factors can separate our feeble hand from God's hand? Verse 35, Who or what can separate us from the love of Christ—perhaps too much tribulation can separate us from God? Or distress or persecution or other physical problems like famine, or nakedness, or maybe peril or sword? Perhaps some of these things can separate us from our relationship with God.

Verse 37, No! In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. If physical things cannot separate us from God, perhaps some evil things or spiritual powers can be strong enough to pull my feeble grip from the mighty hand of God. In Romans 8:38-39, Paul gives us a Biblical text worth taking home. "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor

angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor heights, nor depths, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Our relationship to God is the most important relationship in our lives. In fact, it is the most important thing in our lives. We must remember the Father is Spirit. He is too big to have a body. So, we cannot see Him with our eyes. We see Him by faith. We believe that He is, and trust that He loves us.

N. V. Tilak was a high caste Hindu who became a follower of the Lord Jesus. He was a great poet and wrote many hymns in both English and Marathi. He wrote this one on the seriousness of separation from God. The title is: To Me, To Live, is Christ.

From Thee, Lord Christ,
How can I flee,
What other refuge find but thee?
Hell's fiery terrors on me roll,
If thou be parted from my soul.

*Editor's Note: The following is a speech Dad gave in India when he and Diane visited in 2005.

359. Keith Fidler Sermon: The Love of God as it relates to India (part 1)

John said, “God is love.” (I John 4:8) Even in the Old Testament God told his people to “Love the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 6:5) and “your neighbour as yourself.” (Lev 19:18) Jesus reinforced this when asked how to obtain eternal life and he agreed with the lawyer who quoted these commands about love and Jesus said, “this do and you shall live.” In this vein, John Wesley, in his sermon on charity (or love) agreed with Jew who had said of the ‘love chapter,’ I Cor. 13, “this single chapter contained the whole of true religion.”

We are told by such great scholars as C. S. Lewis and William Barclay that the essential part of God's love is not so much emotion as it is a principle of conduct. To wish and do what is best for your neighbour—that is love. Who is my neighbour? Anyone in need.

Dutiful Thomas, the apostle, loved his Lord and expressed the duty that proceeds from love. When Jesus was determined to go to the dangerous area of Bethany Thomas said, “let us go that we may die with him.” This same Thomas carried the gospel to India, landing on the southwest coast in 52 A.D. He preached the gospel, founded churches, and was martyred by a spear thrust for his efforts. Others from the Syrian church also loved their Lord and the Indian people enough to come and tell the good news.

We skip to the year 1498 when Vasco de Gama landed in the same general area as Thomas. From the Portuguese came missionaries. They were eager to convert but developed a reputation as a mean and cruel people—one wonders about love. Trade goods attracted other Europeans: cotton, textiles, and precious Indian spices. The Danes, Belgians, French, and Dutch came, but the English stayed, establishing the East India Company in the 1600s—its goal trade; its philosophy greed. They did not care about the Indian.

During the 1700s, John Wesley travelled England preaching the gospel. Because of the word of God, the evangelical perspective gained power in the politics of England. The Clapham group were influential evangelicals—William Wilberforce, Charles Grant Sr. and Jr., Zachary Macaulay and his son Thomas Babington Macaulay, and a few others. Most will recognize Wilberforce. Politically, England had the usual parties, the Tories, and the Whigs. Their opinions

of India: Tories wanted trade to make as much money as possible without concern for the people. The Whigs wanted to change Indian ways as they believed cruel and backward social customs, such as *sutee* (widow burning) or *thugi* (ritual robbery and murder as devotion to Kali), were holding up progress. Progress was the goal. When F. W. Stevens built the V. T. (Victoria Terminus—now the C. Shivaji Terminus) he put a statue personifying of progress on the front of the building.

The evangelicals, the Clapham group wanted to do what was best for the Indian people. Through their efforts, with a little help from the Whigs, improvements in education, development of a free press, the abolition of cruel social customs, opposition to the caste system evolved. Christian missionaries began to be accepted in India. Evangelicals showed their love for a group of people most had never seen or would ever see.

360. Keith Fidler Sermon: The Love of God as it relates to India (part 2)

Ernest and Phoebe Ward set out for India in 1880. The nurse, Mary Chynoweth, nursed the sick and was a powerful preacher. One day she came home from a village with smallpox and her dying testimony was, "I have no regrets. If I had a hundred lives, they should be spread over needy India." Effie Southworth who planned to be married then come to India was heartbroken when her betrothed left her just before the wedding. She came to India anyway. She had no time to study Marathi as the orphans needed looking after. She spent her life in sacrifice to the needs of India. Loretta Root wrote a book on Effie's life, *Outflowing Love*.

I have known many Indian Christians who have expressed the love of God. I think of Dr. Acquilla, who came to Umri in our hour of need. I think of nurses, Mrs. Timothy, and Mrs. Torde, who administrated and nursed with loving care. I think of ward boys, Sudhakar and Nathanael, who washed dirty feet and cleaned putrid sores with a self-sacrifice and humility that is truly remarkable.

As Christians, the love of God is our life and the basis for our philosophy of life. It is and must be the motive for our work. But when it comes face-to-face with Hinduism, it is bound to be misunderstood. To the Hindu, they interpret service as a selfish desire to promote our karma. Sin is stepping on an ant or turning away a cow or killing a monkey rather than violating God's law or harming our neighbour. Society becomes compartmentalized—it's okay for you to be a Christian, that's what you are, but I am a Hindu of a certain caste... that is what I am.

In view of these misunderstandings, how shall we react? I believe: 1. We should continue to act as Christians should, always showing the love of God and wishing for and doing what is best for those we serve. 2. We should give medical help, economic help etc. out of love. 3. Because we love as God so loved the world, we bring the message of the gospel: Jesus suffered and died for us. This is a powerful message to the Indian mind. He died not for his own soul's transmigration, but he died for me! 4. We need not expect gratitude for our service from the Hindu as they suspect we do it to better ourselves.

Luke 10:25-28: "On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?' He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbour as yourself.' 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.'"

*Editor's Note: To conclude Dad's Words of Wisdom, I asked each of his children to write a study. Here follows, in order of birth, our efforts. Dad envisioned his completed work would have one lesson a day for his readers.

361. Diane's Words: Humble

Humble is not a word many of us understand well or a virtue we actually strive to master. We think humility means to be weak, to devalue yourself, and let people walk all over us. The true meaning of humble is to have a low estimate of one's own importance. It does not mean that we are useless or unworthy, just that we are not better or more important than any other person.

Humble, in the Bible, means to have a modest self-perception, especially in light of one's sinfulness and dependence on God. It also means to be submissive and obedient to God's will and to value others over oneself. Humble in the Bible is a heart attitude, not just an outward behavior. It involves believing what God says about oneself over any other opinion. "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

One of my favourite Bible verses is Micah 6:8, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

It is not easy to be humble and I will say some of us (me) have a difficult time with this. Sometimes it is easy to say I forgive that person, but deep down, we are not really being humble. We don't really see that person as someone of value, after all, they wronged us and there should be some justice. We should make the person see what they have done. However, I have learned that humble means giving every person a valuable place in our heart and mind. My dad (Keith Fidler) said, "Loving a person means you want the best for them."

To truly love all people, one must be humble. I just don't see how it is possible to love everyone without humility. "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2)

362. Wesley's Words: Sorrow

Sorrow, the noun, "a feeling of deep distress caused by loss, disappointment, or other misfortune suffered by oneself or others." (Oxford English Dictionary) Is there something different about sorrow for the Christian? When Dad died, I met this terrible feeling. It was like a devouring beast and a cloud descended into my mind. Deep distress... yes... and then some. Disappointment? Absolutely. I was disappointed in the medical establishment and in myself. And acutely disappointed in God. Where was he when we needed him? Is there anything we can learn from this terrible experience?

When seventeen-year-old Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, (Gen 37:27) life must have seemed over for him. But what about Jacob? The brothers conspired to trick their father and dipped Joseph's robe in goat's blood and showed it to their father. "'It is my son's robe!'... Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned... All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. 'No,' he said, 'I will continue to

mourn until I join my son in the grave.' So his father wept for him." (Gen 37:33a, 34, 35) What a cruel thing his sons did to him. Losing someone vital to you changes things forever.

But God was with Jacob. Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes of the chosen people of God. If he had a life of sorrow, surely, we could expect nothing different. Joseph's brothers went to Egypt to buy grain and found their lost brother. What a joyful reunion when Jacob found his son alive. God said in a vision, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again." (Gen 46:3-4) Jacob's sorrow turned to joy. And, indeed, God brought his descendants back to the promised land, but they had to survive slavery and the wilderness.

But Jacob's sorrow turned to joy. What about Job. "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead." (Job 1:18-19) What did Job do? "At this, he tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." Job's struggle was terrible. Even when he prospered again, his children were still dead. Unlike Jacob, there was no reunion with the loved ones thought dead.

Kubler-Ross describes the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Newer psychologists add guilt after denial, and reconstruction before acceptance. I suffered all the stages after Dad's death, cycling through random stages, and sometimes more than one at the same time. But reading his studies connected me with him powerfully. Again, I sat at his knee, or across from him at the dining room table, as he explained a spiritual truth. I understood the value of these lessons. If you let Him, God will speak to you, too.

I have no way of making the loss any less. But our Bible heroes suffered and grieved, yet God was with them. No one suffered more than Jesus, so he understands. By maintaining a conversation with God, even when I was disappointed with Him, and maintaining or recovering my conviction that God loves us, reminded me we have a hope beyond the grave. I will take his hand and I urge you to take His hand too.

*Editors Note: scripture quotes in Debbie's Words are from New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted. English Standard Bible is ESB. Debbie's Words part 1 was written by her son, Jared Shaftoe. Debbie's Word's part 2 was written by her son and daughter-in-law, Nate and Gillian Shaftoe with contributions from other family members.

363. Debbie's Words: What Gift of Grace? (Part 1)

By the Shaftoe Family: Dedicated to Dr. Keith Edward Fidler (Dad & Grandpa)

In the wilderness, God shows Himself to the weak and the wondering. His presence is known, and His kindness is proved. From parched earth, His hand pours out water. On barren ground, His storehouse sends forth daily bread. In a burning bush, His voice is heard. God's ways are not ours, I'm sure we would much rather that God spoke most loudly in our frantic schedules or from our comfy lazy-boy armchair. But that's not how God works, and in truth, that's not really how we work. This makes sense in the end, since He created us to be like Him. Yes, we hear God best when we are quiet. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." (Isaiah 30:15) "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10 NKJV) His words ring truest

when things seem dark. We seek Him truly when we're furthest from comfort. When things are bleak, we realize how good God is. The cracked ground becomes bathed in light. The dryness is washed in pure water. "For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, And the thirsty land springs of water." (Isaiah 35:6-7)

And the bones that were dead are given flesh once more. The dead men walking are restored with a spring in their step. "Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves ... I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live ..."' (Ezekiel 37:12-14)

This may seem strange that God would choose to work through uncomfortable things, but indeed, what could speak more loudly than the cross? "He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." (Isaiah 53:3) The most painful and scorned death sentence the Romans could think of. It is a terrible display of 'human sensibilities.' "I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me." (Psalm 22:14) In fact, it reminds us how far we fell when Adam and Eve first chose Satan's council over God's. "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:13) But it also tells us something else. Something God told Israel and Noah before the covenant: I am the Life-Giver. "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6) The cross was the worst we could do – It shames a man, takes his life, and abuses his body. But it was not enough to defeat our Creator. No. God's plan began with a "very good" creation and climaxed at the resurrection of His only begotten Son. God's deliverance, His mercy, His love, was perfected in the death and new life found in Christ. "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:37)

This is the new life God invites us into. With His perfect Son, marking the path, blazing the trail before us, making us new even as we die daily to our old selves. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6) We were in darkness but now we see a great light. (Matthew 4:16) Jesus' face smiling at us. His hand outstretched, a strong, kind voice saying, 'follow me.' 'Follow me through the storm, follow me through the wilderness, follow me into death, and follow me into new life.'

While we are on this earth, we will have troubles, we will see death and we will see corruption. (John 16:33) We can sometimes ask why things happen the way they do. But we can also know that God is sovereign, He rules, He cares, and He walks every trudging step with us. He is in the trenches; He knows our pain. "Jesus wept." (John 11:34-35) He also knows the joy of seeing loved ones returned. As a little girl is returned to her grieving father, as madman is restored to his people, as a dead man rises from the tomb, so we who seek God now will be returned, restored, arisen to a new day, a new life, a new family. "Therefore, you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you." (John 16:22) In God's house are many rooms and all are welcome. "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me..." (John 14:1-3) Only lay down your life to become God's own fool. "If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise." (1 Corinthians 3:18)

Set your hearts on things above, the hope eternal that sets all men free, the loving eyes of El-Shaddai. The waiting arms of the God Who Sees. The Rock and the Redeemer.

My grandpa knew that God's kingdom was better far than this world could ever be. He lived his life seeking God's will over his own. He died in the sure knowledge that he was going home. And he left behind not just dust that will return to dust, but also the knowledge of a Friend he knew throughout his life. A friend who knows you better than you know yourself. Jesus waits for you, arms open wide, sandals on, ready for the journey. Will you take his hand? Will you walk in hope and grace and love with Him? Will you see God's loving face at the end of the race? Will you sing with the saints in the throne room of the Most High?

I know my grandpa is singing (maybe skipping the high notes) right now. And I'm looking forward to singing with him in paradise.

“Let such as love Your salvation say continually,
‘The LORD be magnified!’
But I am poor and needy;
Yet the LORD thinks upon me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
Do not delay, O my God.” (Psalm 40:16-17 ESV)

Written by Jared Shaftoe (March 2023), verses added by Debbie Shaftoe, edited by Crispin Shaftoe

364. Debbie's Words: What Gift of Grace? (Part 2)

By the Shaftoe Family: Dedicated to Dr. Keith Edward Fidler (Dad & Grandpa)

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,
‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.
Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
Who determined its measurements – surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it” Job 38:1-5 (ESV)

How do we approach some of life's hardest moments as Christians? This is where we find Job, struggling to understand the justice in what appears to be an unjust situation. He cries out to God for answers and after many chapters of lamentations and accusations, God comes and provides this response. In this passage we see two powerful themes at work: humility and perspective.

On the one hand, this passage sees Job humbled. He is pointedly reminded that as finite beings, we are ignorant and have a very limited perspective, namely our own experience. God reprimands Job for accusing Him of wrong-doing and questioning His power and goodness. God reminds Job of his finiteness: how can Job answer the questions posed to him? Job did not exist when the world was created, nor is he aware of how creation works. If he cannot understand God's creation, how can he ever hope to understand all the plans and purposes of God the Creator? Much like Job, we need to remember that we too are finite. We are prone to acting as gods in our own lives, assuming we have all the answers and the knowledge to be the judge of

both others and God himself. So, we need to be reminded that we are not ourselves gods: we do not know everything, and are rarely, if ever, in a good position to judge.

However, there is more to this than simply a call to humility in the face of the divine. Indeed, God is too big for Job, and too big for us, to ever fully understand. We can get small snatches, but they will always be distant echoes of God's true nature. And that is a comfort when you consider that we know that God is good, and He desires good for us. A God too big for us to fully understand is a God too big to be defeated by the things of this world. The creation will never be more powerful than the creator. Since God is all-knowing, He can never be surprised or caught off guard. No matter how confusing or surprising the situation is to us, God is already aware of every aspect of the situation and is powerful enough to plan for it. Like Job, we are silent in the face of these questions, but we don't have to have all the answers. Even when we cannot understand God's ways, and lack the context to see the path ahead, we know that our Good Shepherd has a plan and will guide us through.

When we find ourselves at a loss for words, when we cannot understand why some terrible thing has happened to us or to others, we can trust that God is still in control. We can trust that His plans are not disrupted, and He is still watching out for us. When we face our darkest days, we can trust that the One who laid the foundations of the Earth is mightier than what we face. Therefore, we can be at peace and continue without fear. For if God the Creator is for us, who can stand against us?

Thus, what seems at first glance to be a harsh, criticizing and uncompassionate response to someone ground down in the face of great trials, is in reality, a response of comfort and hope. We are not meant to have all of the answers, nor to pass through these trials in our own strength and wisdom. Rather, we should rely on the might and wisdom of the One who created all things, the One who was there when the foundations of the Earth were laid, who knows its exact measurements. His plans are greater than ours, and we can rest in his presence knowing that He is for us and will bring all things to good in the end, no matter how dark it may seem.

Written by Nate & Gillian Shaftoe (April 2023)

Contributed by: Crispin & Debbie (nee Fidler); Nate & Gillian (nee Lee); Jared & Reanna (nee Braeker) ©April 17, 2023

365. Dwight's Words: