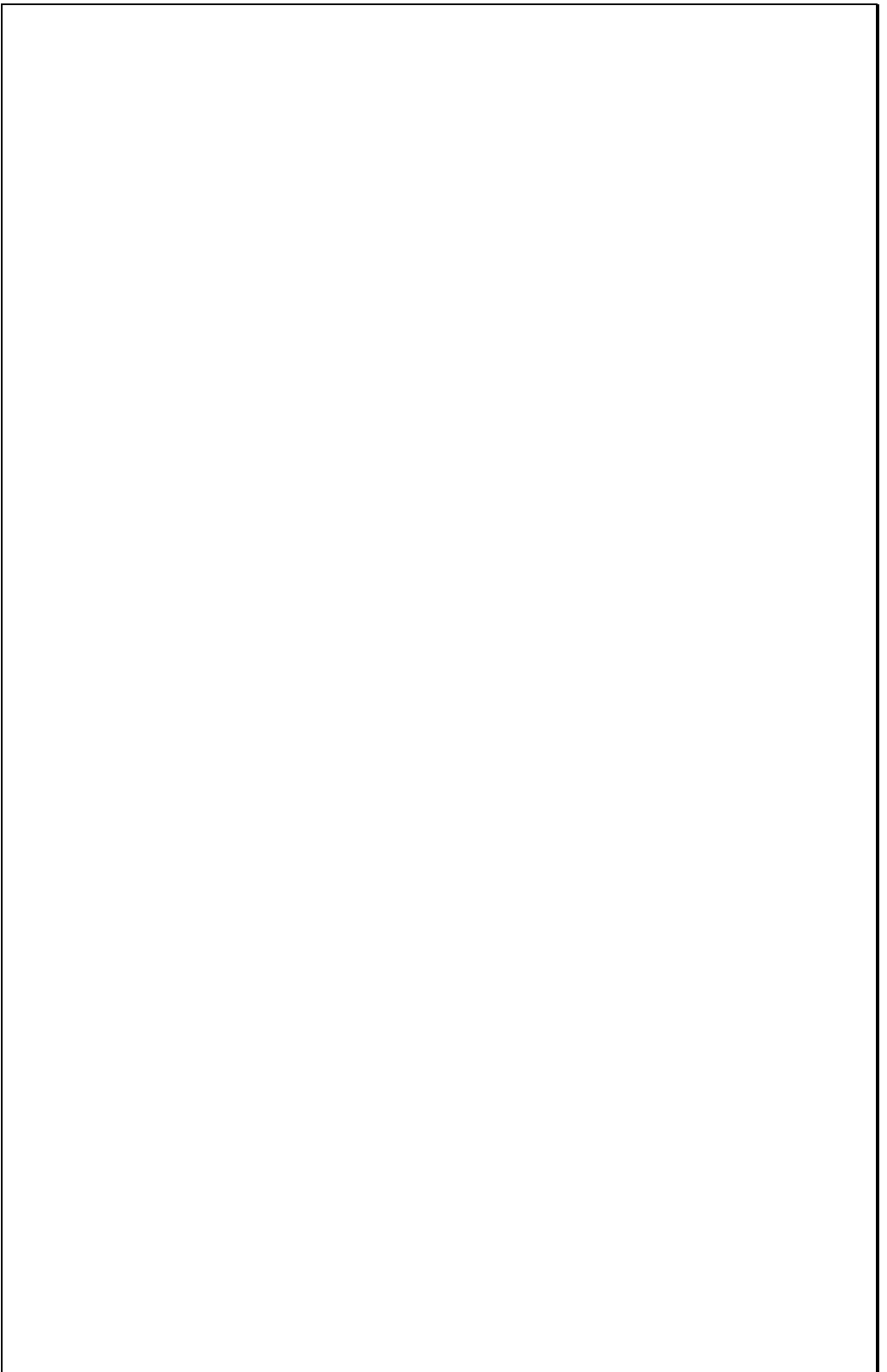


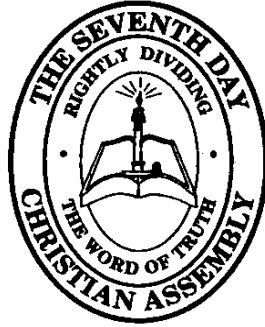
Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

Lesson Seven: Faith Toward God

Some believe that *faith* consists merely of a belief in the existence of God. Some extend that same idea to belief in Jesus as the Christ. This is generally born out of the tendency many have of using one scripture, or a small group of scriptures, as the basis for their *faith* paradigm. For example, in Acts 16:30, 31 the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?” Their reply was short and sweet: “Believe on the Lord, Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your entire household.” Too many people believe that is all you have to do. Is it? What does the Bible reveal about this?

Larry E. Ford





Without faith it is impossible to please God because he that comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

(Hebrews 11:6; author's paraphrase of the *Kings James Version*)

Faith means that we are certain of the things we hope for, convinced of the things we do not see.

(Hebrews 11:1; William Barclay translation; *The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Hebrews*; St. Andrews Press, 1964; p. 144)

For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

(Romans 4:13; *King James Version*)

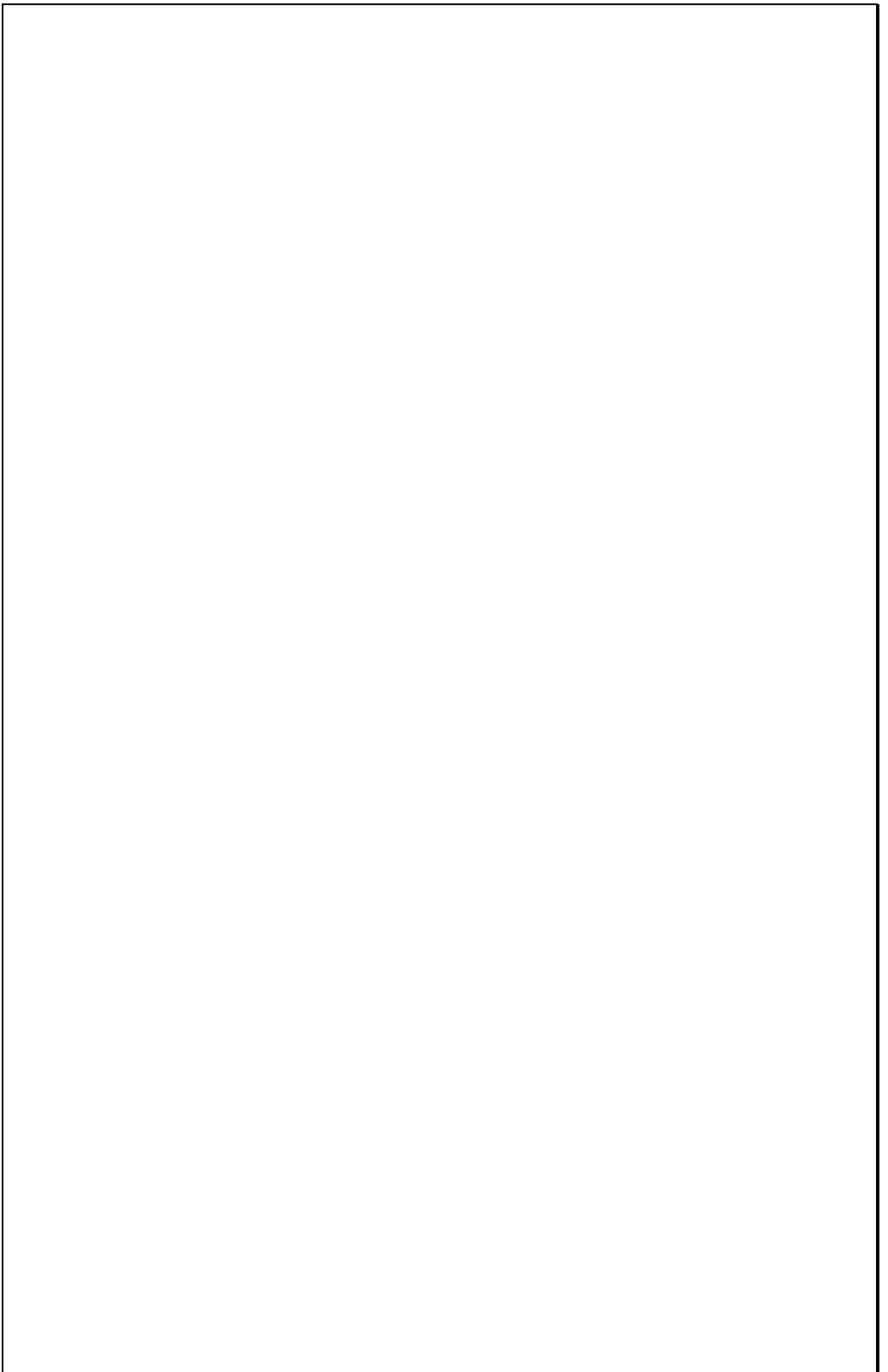
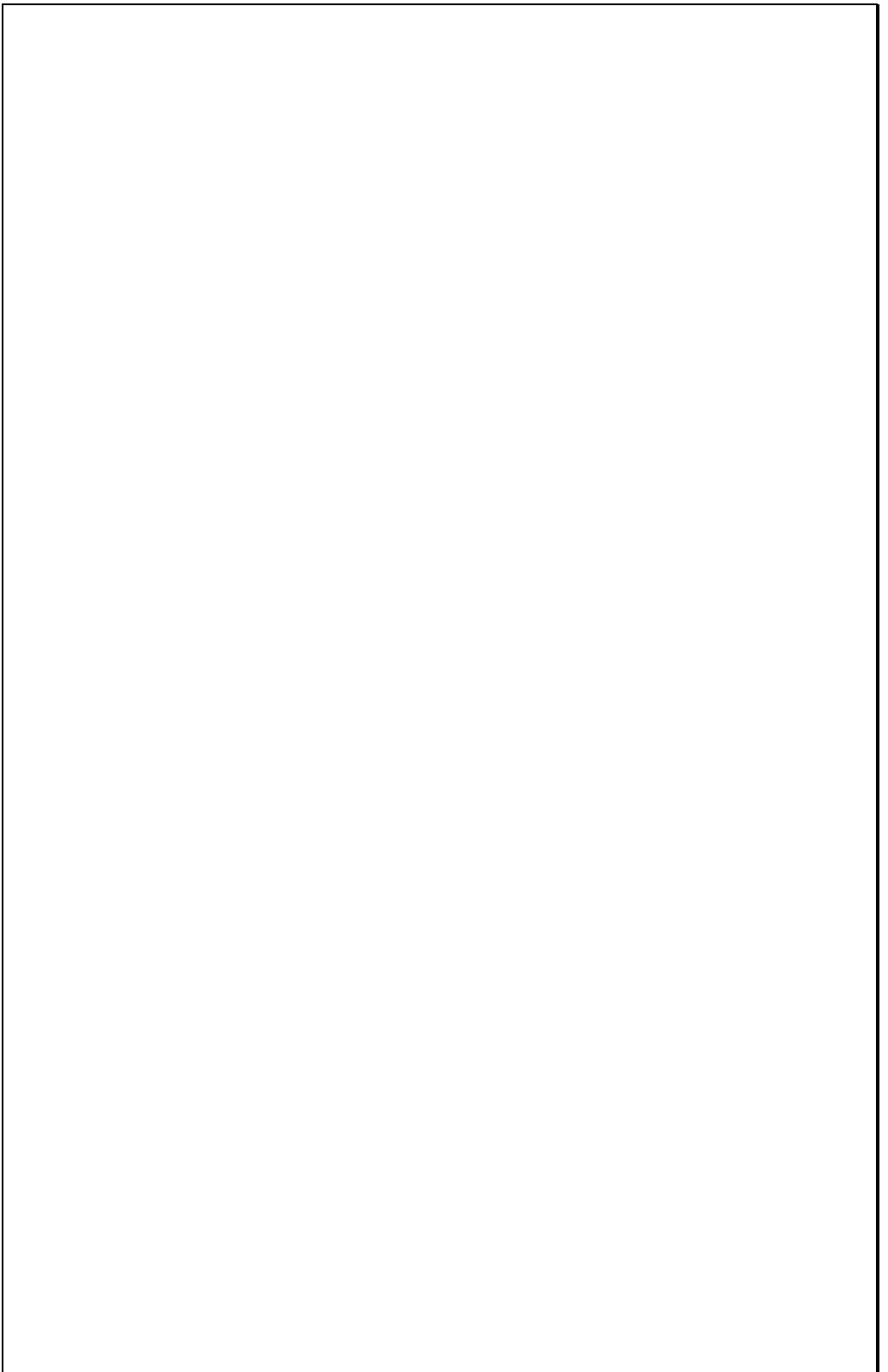


Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Faith Toward God	9
Proof #1: Creation Demands a Creator	21
Proof #2: Law Demands a Lawgiver:	33
Proof #3: Design Demands a Designer	39
Proof #4: Prophecy Proves God's Existence	53
Proof #5: Answered Prayer Proves God's Existence	71
Two Kinds of Faith	89



Introduction

In many respects, the *faith* spoken of in the Bible is misunderstood. I know – that’s a bold statement that brinks on the edge of absurdity. But ... give me a few minutes of your time to explain the basis for my conclusion. In order to do so, we have to understand some of the misconceptions about the scriptural context of *faith* – you know, what *God* expresses as *His* expectations of the structure and content of faith, as well as the things that *people* use as the structure and contents of their faiths. This will, perhaps, broaden your view and understanding in a way that will help you to assess your own idea about faith – and change whatever needs to be changed.

Suffice it to say, *faith toward God* involves, first of all, more than simply believing that He exists. There are the various *thoughts and ways* of God that we must consider – as well as the great gap that exists between His thoughts and ways and ours (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

Second, we must carefully consider this statement by James, the brother of Jesus Christ:

What does it profit a man if he claims to have faith, yet does not have *the works that faith demands*? Can that faith save him? ...Faith, *if it is not expressed in the deeds of faith*, is dead because it produces no fruit. ...You believe that there is one God – and that is well and good – but the devils also believe that ... and tremble. But know this, you empty, useless person, *faith without the works that it demands* is dead (author’s paraphrase of James 2:14-20; see also Eph. 2:8-10; *KJV*; emphases added).

Ephesians 2:8-10 explains that works will not give you merit by which you earn your salvation. God's grace is something that you cannot earn because it is a free gift that cannot be earned, bought, or paid back (vv. 8, 9). Nevertheless, God has prepared works for us to perform as a result of our journey in the true faith that He reveals to us as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (v. 10). What is the difference between the "works" of Ephesians 2:9 and those of Ephesians 2:10?

The Greek term is ergon. As is usual with many words, they have meanings that apply to specific situations. Think of the various situations by which love is defined. Ephesians 2:9 speaks of the "deeds that the law commands you to do" (see Exodus 20:1-17). But ... Ephesians 2:10 speaks "of the deeds of men, exhibiting consistent moral character" (*BAG*, p. 308). So, v. 10 tells us that God expects of true Christians a consistent moral character bound up in holiness, blamelessness, and lovingkindness (Eph, 1:4).

The devils believe in God's existence, but they are destined for destruction because their belief does not change their character one bit toward holiness. It is an established biblical principle, therefore, that faith demands actions that exemplify its claims. Claims of faith are useless without the deeds of faith.

Finally, in the same argument, it would do you no good if you spent your life and its resources pursuing *the wrong God!* It is imperative that your faith is expressed toward the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not the gods of the pagans or the gods made in the image of man. In the same way, your faith must be aligned with what the true God has promised. If you have faith in the wrong thing, you will meet a disappointing end.

Before we get into the study, let's take an indepth look at the meaning of Hebrews 11:1. As defined in this passage, faith is not an unfulfilled desire or a futile longing for something. The word Paul uses for faith is the Greek term pistis. This is the word that is overwhelmingly used throughout the New Testament. In one (1) case (Hebrews 10:23), the term elpis is used. Even then, you can see that it must be derived from pistis. In five (5) other cases (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; and Luke 12:28), the term is oligopistes – "lacking faith; of little faith." There again, you can see that pistis is

the root from which it is derived. All other references to faith use the term *pistis*.

This term *pistis* implies a couple of things. First, it is an *absolute conviction* that God can and will do the things He has promised to do. Look at Romans 4:20, 21 and understand faith as expressed by Abraham:

He [Abraham] did not *doubt* or *waver* at the promise of God by not believing Him, but was *strong in faith*, giving glory to God; and being *fully persuaded* that God was able to perform all the things that He had promised (author's paraphrase of the *KJV*; *emphasis added*).

Second, it is an *unwavering reliance* upon Jesus Christ for the salvation that is promised for faith in Him and His sacrifice for sins (see John 3:16-18 and Acts 4:10-12). It would follow, then, that the *faith* expressed by those named in Hebrews 11 involves both of these aspects.

Yes, even before Jesus Christ came to be sacrificed, these faithful had *unwavering faith* in the *promise of God* (Genesis 3:15) – and that His Christ would come for the purpose of saving mankind out of sin. They were, in effect, *Christians*. So, faith is to be expressed toward *this* God and *this* Christ – no other.

In the “politically correct,” multi-cultural world, you will hear scorn being heaped upon those who believe that their religious faith is the only true faith. Yet, how could we admit that all of the religions of the world are *all true* and *right* – that *all religions* are merely different paths to the *same* goal?

The same thing is true of the 32,000+ “Christian” denominations who teach *different* things that *compete* with each other and *contradict* one another. How can that be if God expects us to be:

...*One* body, and *one* Spirit, even as you are called in *one* hope of your calling; *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6; *emphases added*)?

Explain that to yourself.

So, *pistis* not only involves this *active belief*, it also involves *unwavering fidelity* to it. This is expressed by the U.S. Marine Corps motto: *Semper Fidelis* – “Always Faithful.” In other words, God *always* needs to be able to trust you as much as you *always* need to be able to trust Him. It is a two-way street. James expresses it very well by saying: “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

This two-way street demands *your fair share* in the effort to get you “saved.” That is part of Paul’s admonition in Philippians 2:12, 13: “... [You] work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: *For it is God which works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure*” (emphases added). God provides His Spirit to give you the proper willingness and power to act – but *you* have to approach the relationship as though it were up to you (believe me, though, it is only *partially* up to you). So, *pistis* presupposes that you will *always* be *active*, rather than *passive*, in pursuing the things God expects of you.

Now, let’s pick apart more of the meaning in this passage from Hebrews 11:1. Some believe that faith is *not the intellectual acceptance of a body of doctrines but faith in a person* (that is, Jesus Christ) However, that assumes a conclusion not in evidence in scripture. That kind of idea comes as the result of the existence of so many *different, conflicting doctrines* held by so many different “Christian” denominations and the general reluctance to say that some are biblically correct and some are not. It is largely considered “un-Christian” and “politically incorrect” to make such judgments.

Doctrine presupposes that *acceptable beliefs* have been formulated and set forth for the consumption of a body of believers. One would assume that a thorough investigation of scripture would have taken place in order to establish any standards of faith expected for membership in that group and that the standards are in agreement with the scriptural record.

The real problem comes when one group sets its doctrines against the doctrines of others. In that case, then, *faith in God’s truth* demands that *false doctrine* is to be differentiated from *true doctrine*. The result should be an *intellectual* pursuit of the *truth*.

Think about this: Jude exhorts Christians to “earnestly contend for the *faith* which was once delivered unto the saints” (v. 3). Is he

pressing only for a faith *in a person* – or, is there also a *body of true doctrines* that *support* the demand for that particular faith in that particular manner? Here are two excellent examples.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 11:4, rebukes the Corinthians for entertaining *other gospels* that teach *another Jesus* and advocate *another Spirit*. He rebukes them for “...putting up with it.” He calls those itinerant preachers “false apostles” and “deceitful workers” (v. 13). He calls them “masqueraders” and “pretenders.” He also rebukes the Galatians for turning away from *the true gospel* to a *perverted gospel* (Galatians 1:6-9) – and pronounces a devastating curse upon those who purveyed such a *false* gospel.

Were those false teachers merely teaching the *wrong person* – a false Christ? No! I suspect that they were *also* teaching a *body of false doctrines* as well. Read Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 as he argues against those who taught that there is no resurrection from the dead. *He is correcting the mistakes contained in a body of false doctrines* (see 1 Cor. 15). This provokes an interesting question. How can you be *always loyal* and *always faithful* to God through Jesus Christ if you do not understand and accept the *truth* revealed in God’s word?

Jesus told Satan that we must live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3). Jesus called God’s word *truth* (the Old Testament scriptures were what He had available at that time) and asked God to set aside true Christians for holy usage *through that truth* – that is, through what is contained in His Old Testament scriptures (John 17:17).

It is the various *interpretations* of those same scriptures that either adhere to *truth* or deviate from it. What happens if you believe *wrong doctrinal interpretations*? *Do you get an “E” for “effort”*? Or, does God hold you responsible for believing His *revealed truth* in its rightful context? Is it possible to line up scriptures showing that *pistis* is “faith in a person”? Yes – but to say that such a meaning is *all* that is involved is, in itself, a *deviation* from the scriptural revelation of God’s truth.

How can I “preach Christ” among you, yet teach *wrong doctrines* about that same Christ? I cannot do that and be faithful to God’s *revealed truth*. And neither can anyone else.

So, these are some of the issues that prompt me to conclude that the faith spoken of in the Bible is generally misunderstood. Pistis implies that there is *one belief* expressed in two ways: (a) unwavering faith in the historical truths embodied in all of scripture and (b) unwavering faith in scripture's revelation of God's Christ as the means by which we are to be saved out of sin (see Isa. 8:16, 20).

Hebrews 11:1 (KJV) says that pistis is "...the *substance* of things hoped for..." Substance is translated from the Greek term hypostasis and means: "that which becomes a foundation for another thing to stand on" (Adam Clarke). All of the things we come to believe about God, His promises, and His plan for the salvation of mankind use faith as the sure foundation. It is the *confident assurance* that all that God has revealed is just as good as done – regardless of the span of time between the promise and the fulfillment.

This verse also says that pistis is "...the *evidence* of things not seen..." Evidence is translated from the Greek term elenchos. Here is the strength of this *evidence*: A problem is clearly explained by reasoning (logic) and/or evidence. Once the evidence is presented, a conviction arises in which there is *no remaining doubt* that a thing exists, that it cannot do anything except exist, and that it cannot be anything other than what it is and has been proved to be (author's paraphrase of Adam Clarke).

That is the nature of this Bible Study Course. I lay out to you the explanations, clarifications, and evidence from which I establish the *proof* of God's truth relative to the matter under discussion. I do this to remove any doubt and to establish pistis – *the foundation for all of your hopes and expectations in God and Christ that are grounded in God's truth*. It is with this in mind that Paul calls God's True Church "...the pillar and ground of the *truth*" (1 Tim. 3:15; emphasis added).

I also pose numerous questions in order to direct your attention toward thoughts and patterns of thought. If you are going to learn the thoughts and ways of God, then you need someone to direct your attention to the noteworthy elements of scripture into which many seldom ever venture. Also, if you are a novice, then you need more experienced help to lead you to know how to find the information for which you seek.

Acts 8:26-39 is a good example of this. As you read this scripture, notice that the Ethiopian, who had been in Jerusalem during the observance of Pentecost (Acts 2), was obviously a novice who needed more mature guidance. Philip provided that guidance. His first question (v. 30) was: “Do you understand what you are reading?” The Ethiopian’s answer was: “How can I without the guidance of another [who knows]”? So, Philip began his instruction from the place in scripture that the Ethiopian was reading and expanded his understanding by showing him various other scriptures ... from the Old Testament ... that were related to Isaiah 53:7, 8 (v. 35). In doing so, Philip demonstrated how all of the scriptures of that day and time (Old Testament) were related to Jesus Christ, His crucifixion, and resurrection.

Now, let’s get into the study and learn more about *faith toward God*. Remember to write down the scriptures and your answers, study, and pray for guidance. May the God of Truth bless your understanding as you study this most important subject.

In Christ’s Service,

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Chapter One

Faith Toward God

Some believe that *faith* consists merely of a belief in the existence of God. Some extend that same idea to belief in Jesus as the Christ. This is generally born out of the tendency many have of using one scripture, or a small group of scriptures, as the basis for their *faith* paradigm. For example: in Acts 16:30, 31, the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?” Their reply was short and sweet: “Believe on the Lord, Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your entire household.” Too many people believe *that is all you have to do*. Is it?

Well, not being good Bible students, they leave off the next verse: “**And they** [Paul and Silas] **spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house**” (emphases added). It appears that Paul and Silas gave them a body of doctrine about God’s truth on which to base their *faith* paradigm. After sufficient instruction had taken place, the jailer and his household were **baptized**. *It was not enough to simply believe in the existence of God and/or Jesus Christ*. Let’s understand the fuller implications of this knowledge.

When the crowd that was gathered to celebrate Pentecost asked Peter what they should do about his sermon (Acts 2:14-36), his reply was different from Paul’s: “...**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall **receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**” (vv. 37, 38; emphases added). Repentance, baptism, receipt of the Holy Spirit. But ... was

that all? No, check the context. Verse 40 says: “...*With many other words did he testify and exhort*, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this stubborn and willful generation.’” You also have to understand that the majority of this crowd was there to observe a religious holy day (see Lev. 23:15-21: “Pentecost” = “Count 50”). In other words, they were already familiar with a body of religious doctrines that taught the coming of the Messiah/Christ. Yet, Peter described them as being *stubborn* and *willful*.

Peter’s exhortation contained *a body of doctrine about God’s truth* on which to base their decision about repentance, baptism, and receipt of the Holy Spirit: *Jesus Christ is the long-expected Messiah*. From that exhortation, they made up their minds about whether or not what Peter said was worthy of their wholehearted faith.

Both of these examples fly in the face of the radio and television preachers who exhort people to simply believe in Jesus Christ and be saved ... to “name the name of Jesus Christ” on their lips. *Faith toward God* involves more than mere belief. Therefore, let’s investigate this thoroughly for a better understanding of *God’s* requirements for *true faith*.

Proving the Existence of God

In Hebrews 11:6, Paul says that the person who wants to come to God must *believe* that He exists. This word is from the Greek term *pisteuo* (“to put one’s trust in” – pronounced *pist-yoo-o*) – a derivative from *pistis*. And ... it would be reasonable that you would believe that the only true God exists if you want to put your trust in Him! Why put your trust in something that does not exist or ... is not the true God? The problem that you face is in *proving* to yourself that He does, in fact, exist.

There are numerous sources that say that He does not exist, and others that say that He does not exist in the way the Bible says He does. There are many who say that He exists as the Bible says He does, but then they misinterpret what the Bible actually reveals about Him. We took up that discussion in BSC 2 (“Explaining the God of the Bible”). What can you do to settle this problem in your mind and heart? What source of information can you look at in order

to come to a trustworthy, definitive answer regarding God's existence? This will be an in-depth survey of what the *Bible* puts forth as its *proof*. Learn this well.

Hebrews 6:1 says that one of the basic doctrines of Jesus Christ is *faith toward God*. In Hebrews 11:6 (generally known as the "faith" chapter), we find this: "...Without faith it is impossible to please God because those who come to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him" (author's paraphrase). The remainder of Hebrews 11 contains examples of those who followed that essential, overarching concept.

The Greek term translated *toward* in the *KJV* is *epi*. This word means more than just "in the direction of something." This usage in Hebrews 6:1 is an accusative case usage – specifically, a preposition that implies *motion* in one form or another. In this case, it has to do with feelings *and* actions directed *toward* God that express belief, hope, trust – the *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek/English Lexicon* follows with the term *pisteuein*.

It is apparent, then, that those who come to God must do so with *feelings* and *actions* that express belief, hope, and trust in His existence. This definition also implies that such a person will do so with the willingness to allow God to have control over his/her life. How can you do that if you do not believe that God exists?

Read John 3:8. Are your five senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell) capable of detecting *spirit*? Or, does *spirit* have to be *revealed* to us? Even the detection of the *sound* of spirit would be a revelation. You would not detect it if it did not make the sound. Read Acts 2:1-4 to see an example of this. Both the sound of the wind and the tongues of fire were *revelations* of the presence of the Spirit of God.

Now read Psalm 14:1. What kind of person denies the existence of God? What does *fool* mean in this statement? Look up the definition. According to Romans 1:18-23, what prevents people from receiving the true revelation of God's existence? Has God given *proof* of His existence? In what ways? Are the unrighteous and fools without excuse? Why or why not? Paying attention to what scripture *says* and *means* is a vital part of your education in God's thoughts and ways. Learn to ask questions like those above. They are simple to ask ... maybe a little more difficult to answer.

However, the resultant education you derive from the exercise is well worth the extra effort.

What You Might Not Know about the Creator

Read Genesis 1:1. Who created the universe? Your reply might be: “God.” If you believe that “God” is a single divine being who reveals Himself in three different roles (trinitarianism), then you will not answer correctly. Why? Verse 26 adds information that begs the questions: (1) Does v. 26 reveal that there is more than one “God” involved in this creation? (2) What is meant by the expression “our [plural, first person, possessive] image”? The answers to those two questions can radically change your concept of “God” and ... your faith toward “God.”

As we have already studied in *Bible Study Course Lesson Two*, the Hebrew term translated God is Elohim. All of Genesis 1 uses Elohim in the places where you read God. The im ending shows that the noun is plural. The singular form is El or Eloah – which means “the Mighty One.” The plural form, then, would mean “the Mighty Ones” – more than one mighty being. Many scholars disagree with that conclusion ... probably because they have undue influence from the traditional Christian concept found in trinitarianism. How would we get scripture to reveal to us God’s truth of the matter and free us from misinterpretations forced by traditions (John 8:31, 32)?

Let’s consider Jesus Christ’s statement in John 5 when He was confronted by the Jews for healing on the Sabbath Day. Begin your reading in v. 10 and pay attention to how Jesus Christ defends His actions. His first line of defense is found in v. 17 where He refers to His “Father.” The monotheistic (one God) Jews are incensed that He would make Himself equal to “God” by claiming to be His Son. Why? That answer reveals the existence of two separate God-beings. Jesus does not claim to be their “one God” who had given up His spirit composition to become a flesh-and-blood human. He claims to be a separate Being who is the Son of God.

Now, notice vv. 19-31. Note the various ways by which Jesus Christ demonstrates the separateness between Him and the Father:

vv. 19, 20 – The Son does the things He sees the Father do; the Son imitates the Father and does the same kind of things.

v. 21 – The Father raises the dead and gives the Son the same power to also raise the dead.

vv. 22-25, 27 – The Father gives the Son the power and authority to judge the living and the dead. Those who oppose the Son's power and authority also oppose the Father's.

vv. 26, 28, 29 – The Father gives the Son the power and authority to have life *in Himself* as a *separate* individual. The coming resurrections of the dead are under the power and control of the Son.

v. 30 – The Son does not make judgments on His own ... He does not do His own will but seeks to do the will of the Father. Verse 36 adds that the Father assigns the Son various “works” to complete.

Other surprising revelations given by Jesus Christ add to the evidence of scripture. Remember that the Old Testament, in whatever form it had at the time, was the only scripture available to those who sought God's truth. In v. 39, Jesus proclaims that scripture (OT) testifies of Him. Verses 45-47 tell us that the Jews trusted Moses and ... Moses wrote of Jesus Christ. One might think that Genesis 3:15 is the first mention of Jesus Christ. That would be wrong. Genesis 1 is the first mention of the One who became Jesus Christ. You derive the answer by scriptural revelation. How so?

Read John 1:1-3. Who was in the beginning with God? Was the Word also God? How much of the work of creation did the Word do? Is there anything in existence that the Word did not create? Also read Ephesians 3:9-12 and Colossians 1:1-20 to get a better idea about the way Elohim has worked together in creation. Now read John 1:14. Did this Word become a flesh-and-blood human being and dwell among us? With what does John compare the Word's

glory? Who did this Being called “the Word” become when He came among us as a human?

Notice what Paul reveals in Philippians 2:5-11. In this explanation, Paul shows that there were two Divine Beings who accompanied with one another before the creation of the orderly universe. They were equals. One of them (Paul posits that it was the one who became Jesus Christ – v. 5) voluntarily gave up His equality with the other in order to become the human sacrifice for mankind’s sins. The natural result would be that His Divine partner would become “greater” than He (see John 14:20). Scripture also shows in Ephesians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:3, and 1 Peter 1:3 that such an arrangement ultimately would make His Divine Partner both His “Father” and “God.” We have discussed this already in relationship to the principle involved in Exodus 4:16 and 7:1. However, that is not the entire result of this event.

Philippians 2:9-11 and Colossians 1:19 show that the Father God put Jesus Christ into the position of Lord God (Heb. = Yahweh Elohim; Gen. 2:4). In effect, the Lord God was given the responsibility to create and administer the plan Paul discusses in Ephesians 1:3-14 (see also Heb. 1:1-14). Notice how Genesis 2:4, John 3:2, 3, and Colossians 1:3-19 explain that Jesus Christ was the Creator God – in effect: He is the Word God ... the Spokesman (John 1:1; Heb. 11:3; Psa. 33:1-9; 105:31, 34, 35). Genesis 1 is about Jesus Christ, the Spokesman God, creating the heavens and earth (see Job 38 – 41 for insight into this mystery; also, Read Gen. 1:1, 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24). How much faith can you have in the word (scripture) of God?

Jesus Christ: Our Lord and Savior

The first mention of the Lord God is in Genesis 2:4. The last part of v. 4 presupposes that all of the activity undertaken in Genesis 1 was the product of the Lord God of Genesis 2:4 (“...in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens”; emphases added). The Hebrew term is Yahweh Elohim ... Elohim being His “family” name. Most references in the Old Testament to the “Lord God” are to Yahweh Elohim.

Brown-Driver-Briggs supplies remarkable definitions for the name Yahweh Elohim. All of these definitions apply to the anglicized term Lord – that is: Yahweh. Pay close attention to the following:

1. the one who brings into being;
2. the life-giver;
3. the giver of existence;
4. the creator;
5. he who brings to pass;
6. he who performs his promises;
7. the one who is the absolute and unchangeable one;
8. the self-consistent and unchangeable ever-living one;
9. the one ever coming into manifestation as the God of redemption;
10. the one who gives evidence of his being and asserts his being (existence);
11. the God of Israel (p. 217).

Compare Isaiah 7:14 to Matthew 1:21-23. Who is giving Isaiah this sign? What was to be the name of the child born to the virgin? What does that name mean? So, does this mean that Jesus Christ is the One known as “the Word” and “God with us” (O.T. = Lord God – Yahweh)? Also consider this: Jesus is the Greek name derived from the Hebrew name Yehoshua (Joshua), which means “God is salvation.”

Was it mere accident that Joshua, the son of Nun, was appointed by the Lord God to lead Israel into the Promised Land? The Greek

name used in Hebrews 4:8 makes it seem as though *Jesus* (KJV) did not give Israel rest. Other translations correct that seeming error and translate it *Joshua* ... with the intended meaning that Joshua, son of Nun, was not able to bring Israel to the Lord God's intended *rest* (Greek = *katapauo* – to settle down in their promised homeland). You can see evidence of this in Judges 24:25. Read the entire chapter in order to understand Joshua's exhortation to Israel to abandon the false gods they clung to. In this, Joshua, son of Nun, was not able to be Israel's *savior* due to Israel's continued disobedience. Nevertheless, Jesus, the Christ (Savior) and son of God, is both *God* and *Savior*. Only He can lead us into the *rest* promised by the Lord God.

John 1:14; 21:24, 25; and Acts 1:1-3 show that there were *witnesses* to His existence and the things He said and did – many of which are recorded in the New Testament. The Apostle John says in John 21:25 that there were things that He did that were not even written down. As he put it: "...the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." Would you agree, then, that Jesus of Nazareth was a real, historical person?

If Jesus was a real, historical character, and *if* He was, in fact, "God with us," then we have *proof* that one member of *Elohim* actually exists ... and that He lived among us in human form (see John 17:1-5). How do we *prove* that He was, in fact, "God with us"? We have already used two key elements in the process: (a) *historical witnesses* and (b) *prophecy*. John 3:2 shows a historical record that there were numerous Jews who believed that Jesus was sent from God *because of the miraculous works He performed*.

We know that it is possible for people, under the influence of demonic spirits, to perform miraculous works. Exodus 7, 8 shows Moses in competition with Pharaoh's magicians, but ... there came a point at which the magicians could not duplicate the miracles (Exodus 8:18, 19). Revelation 13:11-15 shows that the False Prophet will have similar powers and will use them to *deceive* people into worshiping a false god: *The Beast*.

The way John writes his account in John 3:2 is interesting: "...No man can do *these* miracles that you do unless *God* is with him" (emphasis added). There appears to have been a specific type of miracles that Jesus performed that no human could perform *without*

God's help. Humans can do certain things that *appear* to be miraculous, but only God can do the truly miraculous. So, we can add another *proof* of God's existence: *true miracles incapable of human duplication.* Paul refers to such miracles in Romans 1:18-23. The major proof is that of *creation* itself.

The Bible, which Paul says was inspired by God Himself (see 2 Timothy 3:16), gives historical records of prophecy and miracles that have occurred from the very beginning of human civilization. *Faith* demands that you believe that they are *true* and they are *revelations of God's relationship with mankind.* Can you do that without reservation? Many people claim to be people of *faith*, yet they kiss off many scriptural accounts as mere myth, Zionist zeal, or the superstitions of primitive people. Don't forget that we have also seen in Romans 1:18-23 that *creation itself* is a *proof* of the existence of God.

At this point, we have four proofs of God's existence at our disposal: (1) creation, (2) eyewitness historical accounts, (3) prophecy, and (4) miracles. We will look at examples of each one of them so you can get an idea of how important each one is to the overall proof of God's existence. This is important information for your *faith*.

Do you realize, at this point, that your *faith* is to be expressed toward *Elohim* – because *both* the Father and the Son exist as separate Beings? Both of them had parts to play in the creation and salvation. *Many assume that faith is only expressed toward Jesus Christ as Savior.* That's not exactly true.

As strange as it might otherwise seem, there is a “package” of things in which we must have faith. You cannot have faith in *Jesus Christ*, attach to it all manner of ungodly life-styles, and claim that you are “righteous” and worthy of salvation. You cannot claim faith in *God* and attach to it all manner of doctrines that fly in the face of His revelation of “truth.” Read John 14:1 and ask yourself the types of questions modeled above.

The offer of salvation only through Jesus Christ is certainly an important part of God's revelation of truth, but it is not the *only* matter of truth revealed by Elohim that is necessary for *true faith*. This is very plainly evident in Jesus' statement in Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: *repent and*

believe the gospel” (emphasis added). *Which gospel?* Verse 14 says that Jesus was “...preaching *the gospel of the kingdom of God.*” That gospel has *a very specific doctrinal content* revealed in scripture. What if someone comes preaching *another gospel* or *another Jesus* or *another spirit* (2 Cor. 11:4)? Yet, that is done in far too many cases – without people being overly critical of the contradictions.

Matthew 7:21-23 also shows that simply preaching, healing, casting out demons, and doing all manner of good works in the name of Jesus Christ is not enough if it *contradicts the will of God the Father*. Understand this very deeply: Having faith in Jesus Christ is only part of *your journey into salvation and God’s kingdom!* There are many other things to which you must pay attention – things which cannot be summarily dismissed as being unimportant. Pay attention to how this unfolds in scripture. We will continue this discussion in the next chapter.

Review Questions

1. Briefly state why there is more to salvation than meets the eye.
2. What does Hebrews 6:1 teach us about faith toward God being one of the basic doctrines of Jesus Christ?
3. Based on John 3:8, do your five senses have the ability to detect *spirit*? Or, does spirit have to be revealed to us? Use Acts 2:1-4 in this discussion.
4. According to Psalm 14:1, what kind of person denies the existence of God? What does the word *fool* mean in that verse?
5. Read Romans 1:18-23. What prevents people from receiving the true revelation of God’s existence? How has God given proof of His existence? Why are the unrighteous and fools without excuse?
6. Genesis 1:1 – Who created the universe? Does v. 26 reveal that there is more than one God involved in this creation?

7. John 1:1-3 – Who was in the beginning with God? Was the Word also God? How much of the work of creation did the Word do? Is there anything in existence that the Word did not create? (Also read Ephesians 3:9 and Colossians 1:1-20 to get a better idea about the way *Elohim* has worked together in creation.)

8. Verse 14 – Did this Word become a flesh-and-blood human being and dwell among us? With what does John compare the Word's glory? Who did this Word become in the flesh?

9. Matthew 1:21-23; Isaiah 7:14 – What was to be the name of the child born to the virgin? What does that name mean? So, does this mean that Jesus Christ is the One known as “the Word” and “God with us”? (O.T. = Lord God – Yahweh)

10. John 1:14; 21:24, 25; Acts 1:1-3 – Were there witnesses to His existence and the things He said and did – many of which are recorded in the New Testament? Did John say that there were things He did that were not even written down? Would you agree, then, that Jesus of Nazareth was a real, historical person?

11. If Jesus was a real, historical character, and if He was, in fact, “God with us,” then we have proof that one member of *Elohim* actually exists. How do we prove that He was, in fact, “God with us”?

12. Do you realize, at this point, that your faith is to be expressed toward *Elohim* – because both the Father and the Son exist as separate Beings? Both of them had parts to play in the creation? And salvation?

13. Many assume that faith is only expressed toward Jesus Christ as Savior. Why is that not exactly true?

14. Explain the significance of the following scripture from Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe the gospel” (emphasis added). Which *gospel* did Jesus preach?

15. What if someone comes preaching another *gospel* or another *Jesus* or another *spirit*? Is it acceptable to God just because it is religious and mentions *Jesus Christ* in it? Explain Matthew 7:21-23.

16. How did the *Word* become the *Lord God* and *Jesus Christ*?

Chapter Two

Proof #1: Creation Demands a Creator

We have already seen in Lesson 3 how evolutionary science is divorced from the idea that there is a God who was involved in the creation of all that exists. In their concept, all that exists is the product of *blind, unplanned chance*. It all came into existence on its own – without the aid of any kind of *divine* cause or power. Let's go back to Psalm 14:1 and discuss the meaning of the term *fool*. (Psalms 14 and 53 are the same psalm – with minor variations.) Our objective is to determine if a creation can exist without a creator.

The Mind of the Fool

List three ways the *fool* is described in Psalm 14. The Hebrew term translated as *fool* is *nabal*. It describes a person who is lacking in value, force, sense, and/or purpose. The *fool* is a *contemptible, deliberate* scoundrel and/or criminal. While the term includes the *atheist* (*a* = no; *theist* = God), the *fool*, by no means, is only the *atheist*.

There are three types of people which would fit the term *fool*: (1) those who deny the existence of God; (2) those who do not deny His existence, but who deny that He guides and cares for the

creation; and (3) those who admit that God exists and guides and cares for creation, but who *live* as though there is no God to either reward or punish humans for their thoughts and ways. They also do not bother themselves with *why humans exist*. In effect, their belief does not affect the way they live.

Read Psalm 14:2. When God seriously ponders mankind (steadfastly fixes His gaze upon them), for what two things is He looking? He is looking for those who *understand* and *seek* God. It is in such observations that we find answers to our questions about the thoughts and ways of God. You can infer (draw a conclusion based on the facts presented) that God is sorting through the hearts of humans in order to discover those who bear the kind of personality needed ... and have the willingness ... to get involved in learning those things that support *faith-mindedness*. He can work well with such a person for the purpose of salvation.

This is reminiscent of the second verse of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic”:

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never sound retreat; *He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat*; O be swift, my soul, to answer Him; be jubilant my feet; Our God is marching on (Julia Ward Howe; William Steffe; emphasis added).

The term *understand*, in this instance, has to do with *rightly* understanding God’s thoughts and ways (see 2 Tim. 2:15). It is possible for a person to have great understanding of the things of the world, yet not understand even the minutest thing about God’s thoughts and ways (read 1 Cor. 1). It is possible for us to understand everything from atoms to how stars are formed and ... still not understand *God*.

Seek God means that our understanding (wisdom) leads us to conduct the affairs of our lives on, at least, the basic *faith* that God exists and has an intimate role to play in the unfolding purpose of the creation as it relates to the existence of human beings. However, we should not be satisfied with the mere *basic* faith. We can learn far beyond that level by *listening* and by *searching*. The *fool* will not bother to do either.

That level is what C. S. Lewis refers to as “mere Christianity”:

It is more like a hall out of which doors open into several rooms. If I can bring anyone into that hall, I shall have done what I have attempted. *But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals.* The hall is the place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, *not a place to live in.* ... You must keep on praying for light: and, of course, even in the hall, *you must begin trying to obey the rules which are common to the whole house.* And *above all you must be asking which door is the true one, not which one pleases you best by its paint and paneling* (*Mere Christianity*, London: Simon & Schuster, 1996; p. 11; emphases added).

What conclusion does God draw in Psalm 14:3 from His observance of the *typical human being*? Read also Paul’s conclusion in Romans 3:9-18, in which he quotes this verse in connection with others from the Old Testament (see also Isa. 53:6). Who is included in God’s judgment? It is apparent that *all of humanity* is included. So, you are not alone in this problem. That conclusion is the one to which the Lord God came before the Great Flood based on His observation of mankind for over 1,600 years from the creation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 6:5, 6).

Psalm 14:4 asks whether or not “All the workers of iniquity [have] any knowledge,” and suggests that such people devour others and do not call upon God for wisdom, understanding, and true knowledge. God’s “sifting” process is a process of *refinement*: making the human heart purer in order to “polish” one’s heart and mind (that is two methods of “refinement”; see Rev. 3:14-22; Jer. 31:31-34 for examples). It is the *continued* process of creating mankind in the image of God. There is more to that process than simply creating man out of the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7).

Read Isaiah 48:10; Zech. 13:7-9; and Malachi 3:2, 3. There are many ways by which God will bring us to faith and understanding. It will not always be by giving us instruction through His word. Sometimes, it will involve putting us through *life experiences* that will help us to focus our attention on His thoughts and ways. It is

not always a matter of sweet smiles and kind words – *emotional* words and actions. Read Hebrews 12 from any translation you choose. What does it tell you about your *spiritual* education, discipline, and training? How important is that to you?

Psalms 14:5 reveals the kind of generation of man in which God abides: those who understand and seek Him ... *the generation of the righteous*. The *righteous* are those who are just and morally upright ... people who obey God's law (Rom. 8:1-9). They seek to understand Him and His thoughts and ways as they develop a growing faith and confidence in them. James 4:8 explains it rather simply: "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."

The Wisdom of the World -vs- The Wisdom of God

In 1 Corinthians 1:17 through 2:16, Paul sets in contrast *the wisdom of the world* and *the wisdom of God*. One can readily admit that the term *wisdom* carries with it the meaning that it speaks of a certain quality of being wise, having good judgment, and an above average level of learning and knowledge. Throughout history, many individuals outside of what we might call *true* religion have been heralded for their *wisdom*. If you notice how the heading of this section of the discussion is titled, the operative basis of the discussion is driven by terms like *world* and *God*. Let's understand why Paul sets up this contrast.

World comes from two Greek terms: *aion* and *kosmos*. In both cases, translators have used the English term *world*. Let's explore the difference between them. In 1 Corinthians 1:20 and 2:6-8, the term *aion* is used. In 1 Corinthians 1:20, it means the same thing as Romans 12:2: This *present age* that is nearing its end; everything non-Christian, including striving after worldly wisdom (*BAG*, p. 27).

BAG associates 1 Corinthians 2:6, 8 with 2 Corinthians 4:4, which describes Satan the Devil, supported by subordinate demon spirits, as the ruler of this *aion* who influences the thoughts and ways of those who occupy the earth (see also Eph. 2:2, 3). Whatever elements of civilization that are affected by Satan's "wisdom" are perpetrated by thoughts and ways that are *adversarial* toward God. Read Romans 8:5-9 and Galatians 5:13-26 to get a glimpse of this.

On the other hand, 1 Corinthians 1:21, 27, 28 and 1 Corinthians 2:12 use the Greek term *kosmos*. There are two different definitions to be combined for the fuller meaning. In some ways, they are similar to *aion*. In 1 Corinthians 1:27, 28, *kosmos* identifies “the world” as the realm of mankind in general – especially with reference to the vexations (disturbances, annoyances, pettiness, distresses, and afflictions) among “the refuse of mankind” (Ibid; p. 447). In 1 Corinthians 2:12, it has to do with “everything that belongs to [that kind of world]” and “appears as that which is at enmity [bitter attitudes and feelings; hostility] with God, i.e. lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything divine, ruined and depraved” (Ibid.). Read Jesus Christ’s statement in John 18:36 where He declares that His *kingdom* is not represented by that kind of *world*.

The concept developed in scripture also reveals that simply *being good and decent is not enough* (Matt. 7:13-29). God created mankind for a specific purpose: to be adopted into the *Elohim* family through *Jesus Christ* (John 3:3-8; 1 Cor. 15:50-54; Eph. 1:3-14). *Jesus Christ* is the Creator God and the Lord God of the Old Testament (Matt. 1:18-23; John 1:1-3, 14; Phil 2:5-7, Col. 1:19; Heb. 1 and 2). The astounding human potential can be realized only through true faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:1-7; 17:1-19). It does not allow for pretenders and imposters and look-alikes (2 Cor. 11:1-4, 13-15).

According to 1 Corinthians 2:6, what is the ultimate end of the wisdom of this present world? The *KJV* reads that it will come to nothing. Some translations read that it will pass away (*MLB, RSV*). Others read that it is doomed to ultimate failure (*Living; Jerusalem*). *Moffat* describes the rulers of this world as though they are already dethroned (see also Eph. 4:8). All of this points to the ultimate conquest of the adversarial powers and people who make up this present age and world system that has stretched from rebellious Adam and Eve to our day and time. Why?

Paul says in vv. 7, 8 that God’s true people acquire a *hidden wisdom* that this *world* does not know or comprehend. If the rulers of this world had known it, they would have never crucified Jesus Christ. The implication is that their knowledge, understanding, and obedience to this *godly wisdom* would have solved that part of the sin and rebellion against God’s thoughts and ways. Adam and Eve,

who were the first rulers of this world (Gen. 1:26-28), would have never fallen for Satan's lies and deceit. They would have been obedient to the Lord God's command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Had that not have happened, then the death sentence would not have been incurred (Rom. 1:18-32; 6:23).

Now read 1 Corinthians 2:9-13. How do people of *true faith* receive their knowledge and understanding of God's thoughts and ways? Is this understanding a product of the *world's* wisdom and knowledge? How does the Holy Spirit teach us the things of God? Paul says that such things have not entered the hearts and minds of the people of this world. They have to be *revealed* to God's true people by God's Holy Spirit. That Spirit ultimately reveals to us the *deep things of God* as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18; 1 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5). What this involves is a gradual, steady revelation of God's *mind* (see Rom. 8:14-25; Heb. 12; Isa. 55:6-11).

Verse 14 tells us that the *natural* man cannot receive this *revelation* of God's truth. Why? First, because of his/her *natural mind*, it sounds like foolishness to him/her. Second, *it is not possible* for the *natural mind* to comprehend and recognize clearly the things of the Spirit of God. The *natural mind* is a mind that is unspiritual and lives on the purely material plane of life. Paul concludes his thought in v. 16 by saying that those who have the spiritual mind have the mind of Christ. *That is your ultimate spiritual objective.* Now you should be able to learn how to comprehend the difference between the *wisdom of this world* and the *wisdom of God*.

The Creator God

When you read Isaiah 44:6-20, you have to understand it in the context of the entirety of scriptural revelation – especially v. 6 where the Lord God declares: "...beside me, *there is no other God.*" This is not a declaration of *monotheism* – that is: the belief in only one "God." We covered that in Bible Study Course 2. Briefly reviewed, John 1:1-3, 14 reveals *two divine beings* who companied together ... one of whom became Jesus Christ. The Word, who became Jesus Christ (v. 14), created all that exists (v. 3; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:2).

According to Philippians 2:5-11, when Jesus Christ (the Word) divested Himself of His equality with His divine partner, His partner gave Jesus Christ a name above all names (except His own; see 1 Cor. 15:24-28) and made Him the supreme ruler (*Lord God*) over all of creation (Col. 1:19). Read the following examples in Psalm 24; Ezekiel 18:4; 29:3, 9; Hosea 2:5, and Haggai 2:8. These are examples of His claim of ownership of all that He created.

Hebrews 2:6-10 makes a bold statement that “God” (the Creator) made mankind a little lower than the angels and set man over His creation (cited from Psa. 8:4-6; see also Gen. 1:26-28). We do not presently see that mankind has been able to govern the earth responsibly, but we see that Jesus Christ (the *Son of Man*: Matt. 16:13; 24:27-44; 25:31-34; Rev. 14:14-20) has been given the responsibility to get the job done ... and He will complete His mission (Heb. 5:9; 12:2).

Is it reasonable to believe that *creation demands a creator*? Is it possible that a person can believe that a being called “God” created all that exists and ... still **not** correctly understand who is the true Creator? Would you agree that they, in fact, could give credit to the *wrong God*? That is the concern of Isaiah 45:5-19. Which God claims to be the *Creator* God (remember John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16, 17 and the other references made above)? Has God spoken in *secret* (remember Romans 1:19, 20)? Read Jeremiah 32:17. Is there anything too difficult for God to do? What is God’s *great power*?

God originally created – and later refashioned our earth (Genesis 1:1-3) – by His great power: *the Holy Spirit*. This spirit expresses *the unified creative will of Elohim* – the God Family that we learned about in Lesson 2. This Spirit is like a tool, but, unlike man-made tools, it never runs down or wears out. It is so pervasive that it literally fills the vast universe (see Psalm 139:7-12 and Jeremiah 23:24).

It is this same Spirit that must be allowed entrance into your mind in order to transform it from a mind that merely understands the physical, material universe to one that also understands spiritual matters (refer back to 1 Corinthians 2:9-14). God does not trespass your personal choice, so He will not allow that Spirit power to influence your thinking unless you *choose to surrender* to its influence. The typical person does not understand this nor actually

do this – especially those guided only by the spirit/wisdom of this world system.

Hebrews 11:3 reveals that the Lord God created all that exists out of *nothing*. The Word spoke and the spirit power was unleashed to cause His spoken will to be made manifest. All material things were spontaneously made to exist as He willed them to exist. Compare Genesis 1 to Psalm 148. In what way did God utilize His spirit power to create all that exists? Now read Psalm 33:6-11. How did the Word create? What does it mean when it is said that “...it stood fast”? Is that *miraculous*?

In Psalm 148:1-6, in what way did God utilize His spirit of power to create all that is? Read Genesis 1 and compare it to this scripture. Also read Psalm 33:6-11. How did He create? What does it mean when it is said that “...He *spoke* and it stood fast”? The expression “stand fast” means that it is “firmly fixed or bound; adhered firmly; unchangeable.” In other words, in and of itself it is fixed into a condition that will remain intact *forever* unless some kind of power is exerted upon it that disrupts that fixed condition (see Matt. 24:21, 22 re: Jesus Christ’s intervention in this matter). Is that *miraculous*? What does it tell you about the *false prophets* among the “climate change” crowd who insist that the world will end in 12 years from 2019? Read Romans 8:19-39. What do you think about Paul’s declarations there?

Recall that John 1:1-3 says that the *Word* was the agent by which all things were created. The term translated *Word* is from the Greek term *logos*. So, this *Word* is the one who became flesh – the personage in *Elohim* who became *Jesus Christ*. Think about this very carefully: *This means that Jesus Christ is the Creator God – the one in Genesis 1 who said “Let there be...” and it came into existence!* We can conclude, then, that Jesus Christ is the *Spokesman* of *Elohim*. In most cases, when you see the term LORD or LORD GOD in the Old Testament, it is referring to the one who became Jesus Christ. That being the *scriptural* revelation, we can better understand Ephesians 3:21; Hebrews 13:8; and Jeremiah 31:35-40; 33:19-26.

Now, read Psalm 89:28-37. To which heavenly bodies does God’s covenant with David refer? How long will David’s throne endure when compared to those heavenly bodies? Does this help you

to understand the expression *stand fast*? Jeremiah 33:15-26 and 2 Samuel 7:12-19 tell us by which covenant the Lord God swore His faithfulness to David. How *awesome* to you is this oath – you know, to *guarantee forever* that David’s throne will exist? Does that suggest that our sun and moon are not *temporary fixtures* in space? Does it make sense that God would have to have the power to keep all things operating *precisely* throughout the ages so that they would not fall apart? Is that *miraculous*? Now read Nehemiah 9:6; Hebrews 1:2, 3; and Psalm 66:7. How do you feel about all of these revelations? There are many more such revelations about the Creator God.

Conclusion

Evolutionary scientists know very well the interdependence of various factors that keep things operating in our universe – *yet, they attribute their existence to chaotic, blind, unplanned chance*. Their *worldly wisdom* says that it is foolish for anyone to believe that a God wills, speaks that will, and causes His Spirit to act on any and all things thus spoken. It is true that God does not reveal the exact mechanism by which He does that, but He has revealed enough of the general process to give us historical and scientific proof that all nature is obedient to Him. He uses His great spirit power to sustain and rule His vast creation. This brings us to our second proof of God’s existence: Law demands a Lawgiver. Anyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior ought to find it very easy to understand that He is also the Creator.

Review Questions

1. List three ways the *fool* is described in Psalm 14:1.
2. Verse 2 – When God seriously ponders mankind (steadfastly fixes His gaze upon them), for what two things is He looking?
3. Verse 3 – What conclusion does God draw from His observance of the typical human being? Read also Paul’s conclusion in Romans 3:9-18, in

which he quotes this verse in connection with others from the Old Testament. Who is included in God's judgment?

4. Verse 5 – In what kind of generation does God find those who understand and seek Him?

5. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 – Which two types of wisdom does Paul put into contrast in these verses? In which type of wisdom does God want our faith to stand? Explain briefly.

6. Verse 6 – What is the ultimate end of the wisdom of this world?

7. Verse 8 – Do the rulers and wise men of the world possess God's *revealed wisdom*?

8. Verses 9-13 – How do people of *true faith* receive their knowledge and understanding of God's thoughts and ways? Is this understanding a product of the *world's* wisdom/knowledge? How does the Holy Spirit teach us the things of God?

9. Verse 14 – Can the natural man receive this *revelation* of God's truth? List two reasons given in this verse.

10. Isaiah 44:6-20 – Would you agree, then, that a person can believe that *God* created all that is and still not understand the importance of the idea that *creation demands a creator*? Explain. Would you agree that they, in fact, could give credit to the *wrong God*? Explain.

11. Isaiah 45:5-19 – Which God claims to be the Creator God (remember John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16, 17)? Has God spoken in *secret* (remember Romans 1:19, 20)?

12. Jeremiah 32:17 – Is there anything too difficult for God to do? What is God's *great power*?

13. Hebrews 11:3 – Out of what did God create the *matter* that forms the worlds?

14. Psalm 148:1-6 – In what way did God utilize His spirit of power to create all that is? Read Genesis 1 and compare it to this scripture.

15. Also read Psalm 33:6-11. How did He create? What does it mean when it is said that “...He spoke and it stood fast”? Is that *miraculous*? Explain.

16. Psalm 89:28-37 – To which heavenly bodies does God’s covenant with David refer? How long will David’s throne endure when compared to those heavenly bodies? Does this help you to understand the expression *stand fast*? Explain.

17. Jeremiah 33:15-26; 2 Samuel 7:12-19 – By which covenant did the Lord God swear His faithfulness to David? How *awesome* to you is this oath – you know, to *guarantee forever* that David’s throne would exist? Does that suggest that our sun and moon are not *temporary fixtures* in space?

18. What does this say about the “climate change” prophets’ concept that the world will end in 12 years from 2019? Does it make sense, according to Romans 8:20-23 that God controls the “climate” of the world? Read also Deuteronomy 26 and 28 for more information.

19. Nehemiah 9:6; Hebrews 1:2, 3; Psalm 66:7 – Does it make sense that God would have to have the power to keep all things operating *precisely* throughout the ages so that they would not fall apart? Is that *miraculous*? Explain.

Chapter Three

Proof #2: Law Demands a Lawgiver

In Jeremiah 33:20, 25, what, exactly, are the “covenant with day and night” and the “ordinances of heaven and earth”? These expressions are roughly equivalent to the concept of “natural laws” by which day and night are regulated, as well as other natural laws that keep planets and moons in their orbits and the stellar system in its positions. It speaks of the *vast stability* of the creation because of the laws that govern it.

God’s “Natural” Laws

Read Psalm 104 and make a list of things that operate according to *laws* established by God. Seriously contemplate the claims of this Psalm and be as complete as you can be. Remember: this is not a race; the objective is to learn.

Here is an example of what I want you to do: v. 2 – *light* operates by specific, definite laws. However, scientists do not really know how to explain it other than by making note of its properties, like color, types (examples = X-rays, gamma rays, infrared, etc.), speed, *et cetera*. It travels in straight lines at 186,000 miles per second. God knows exactly how He made light; man has only a vague idea, in spite of the many things we know of what man has discovered about

it. Man is not really properly equipped to understand it fully. Read an article about light in an encyclopedia and see what has been discovered about it – as well as the limitations of man to fully understand it. It is good to try to understand how things operate and why they operate as they do.

Read Job 38. Again, make a list of things that operate according to *laws* established by God. Also read Job 26:7, 13. Upon what does the earth appear to be suspended? What keeps it in its place? The term *sustain* means “to hold suspended, to support, to keep alive, to keep from ruin.” God’s creation would literally “fly apart” if He had not anticipated the laws by which to hold it together – to *sustain* it. So, not only is He the Creator of all that is, He is also the Creator of the laws by which it all operates and stays together. Since they are natural laws, then it is possible for man to trespass against them and *sin* in the process. That *sin* will have natural consequences. What do I mean by that statement?

A lung-breathing creature cannot enter a liquid environment and “breathe” that liquid. If it does, it will drown and die! Neither can a human jump from a height that would cause greater pressure upon his/her skeleton than it can withstand. If s/he does, s/he will be terribly broken and, probably, die! Those consequences are determined by laws that God established to control His creation. Do not jump off such a height, change your mind half-way down, and cry out to God to save you (see Matthew 4:5-7).

What does Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 14:33 by saying that “God is not the author of *confusion*”? In this context, Paul is referring to how the Spirit of God should work among His Church in the expression of the various gifts it brings to God’s people. However, we should be able to generalize this example to the totality of God’s character. ***God does not operate as a God of tumult and disorder – that is, there is no instability in anything that God does.*** Why? Because He holds everything together with appropriate laws. In order to do that, it would stand to reason that *Elohim* would have laid out a *plan* before They began the actual process of creating.

I have often pointed to Ephesians 1 as an example of such a planning session (read it). The term predestined suggests that there was an idea and a plan before there was a creation. God’s assignment of His Spirit in attaining His plan and purpose suggests

that He is intent on finishing what He started. Maintaining the physical universe through specific laws suggests a long-term plan. It also suggests that God does not plan to destroy it or allow it to become so fragile that it will “wear out” and eventually fall apart. We have seen evidence of this in the “eternal” covenants we have discussed elsewhere.

True miracles suggest extraordinary events that testify to the existence of God. The existence of natural laws proves the *kind begets kind* concept of creation we discussed in Lesson 3. Man can tinker with the laws and cause various things to operate against nature. By doing so, man causes *confusion* and *chaos* and *tumult*.

For example, Leviticus 18:22, 23 says that homosexuality is an *abomination* (that is, *detestable* – the same term is used to describe someone who *curses* while calling on a *deity* as a witness – which is a type of spiritual *chaos*), and *bestiality* is *confusion* (that is, a mental or spiritual *disorder* and *turmoil*). Both break the laws of sexual conduct that God established by creating humans as male and female who would engage in sexual intercourse for both pleasure and the procreation of their kind. *Homosexual* intercourse does not obey God's will – even though same-sex couples express toward one another love and devotion and fervently desire to spend their lives together in that relationship (see Matthew 7:21-23; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). In 1 Corinthians 6:11, Paul shows that all manner of lawbreaking has to be repented of and corrected through Jesus Christ and the receipt of the Holy Spirit.

It might *seem* to be so good and so right because there is a form of love and devotion involved, but it has never been God's design or desire for such relationships to exist – no more than it having been His design and desire for married man and woman to divorce (see Matthew 19:3-8). Ways that seem right to mankind are not always, in fact, right in God's sight and according to the laws of His design and plan (see Proverbs 14:12).

Read Romans 1:18-32 again to see the *natural* cause-effect progression of law-breaking and the sexual and social degeneration of the mind and actions of humans. The *wisdom of this world* thinks that it is all well and good for things to be this way because we are, supposedly, *endowed* with these *rights* by our Creator (see 1 Corinthians 1:19-31). However, we should know that God's desire

for our life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness is bound up as much in the *natural laws* that He created to govern such things as it is in the *commandments* that He gave that govern our behaviors.

Evolutionary science teaches that the vast universe came into existence by a *random* explosion of some hydrogen gas. It is called “the Big Bang Theory.” This explosion, they proclaim, both eventually created the sun, stars, moons, and planets and set them in their places and courses. All that has appeared since then is ultimately a product of this *random* explosion – even the various life forms that have come into existence.

But ... from where did all of the laws and materials come? By which laws did the hydrogen explode? Which laws put the earth into an exact orbit around the sun to provide just the right conditions for the emergence of life and the maintenance of its existence? It was not an accident; it is the product of a Creator who set everything in its place according to specific laws. The existence of laws demands the existence of a lawgiver. Laws are miracles from God.

Review Questions

1. Jeremiah 33:20, 25 – What, exactly, are the “covenant with day and night” and the “ordinances of heaven and earth”?
2. Psalm 104 – Make a list of things that operate according to *laws* established by God. Seriously contemplate the claims of this Psalm and be as complete as you can be. Think of as many examples possible – be as thorough as possible. This might take a considerable amount of thinking on your part. Remember: this is not a race; the objective is to *learn*.
3. Job 38 – According to your list of things that operate according to *laws* established by God, explain the point made by Job 38 through 41.
4. Job 26:7, 13 – Upon what does the earth appear to be suspended? What keeps it in its place? Are you convinced that the Word (Jesus Christ) is the creator? Explain.

5. 1 Corinthians 14:33 – What does Paul mean by saying that “God is not the author of *confusion*”? How does that knowledge affect you?
6. What is the difference between a natural law and a moral law? Which one does the command in Genesis 2:17 represent?
7. If Exodus 20:1-17 represents the Lord God’s basic moral law, is it any less inviolable and eternal as the Creator’s natural laws? Does Romans 6:23 represent the ultimate consequence for violating God’s moral law ... unless faith in Jesus Christ is shown, repentance for committing sin is made, followed by baptism and laying on of hands by God’s true ministry for the receipt of the Holy Spirit?
8. Explain the importance of understanding Matthew 22:34-40 relative to knowledge of the maxim that laws require a lawgiver. Take time to think back through all that you have learned to this point.
9. Does it make sense that God would have done away with His moral law if He preserves forever His creation with His natural laws? Explain.
10. Use the following premise to explain John 14:15; Roman 13:8-10; and 1 John 2:3-5: *The Ten Commandments are not merely a list of ten laws, but primarily ten principles of love.*
11. Use the above to explain 1 Corinthians 13:13 (charity in *KJV* is translated love more modern versions). Pay attention to the word abides/remains.

Chapter Four

Proof #3: Design Demands a Designer

In Psalm 139:14-16, David attributes his existence to God's *design*. Look up the meaning of the term. Note some of the more salient points made in the definition are: (a) "to sketch out a pattern for development"; (b) "to devise for a specific function or end"; (c) "to conceive and draw the plans for."

How does David describe how his own body was made? Note especially in v. 16 how David speaks of God having had the "eyes" to imagine a pending creation, having it written in a book ... complete with the process by which it would become a reality ... before anything of the "building" materials even existed.

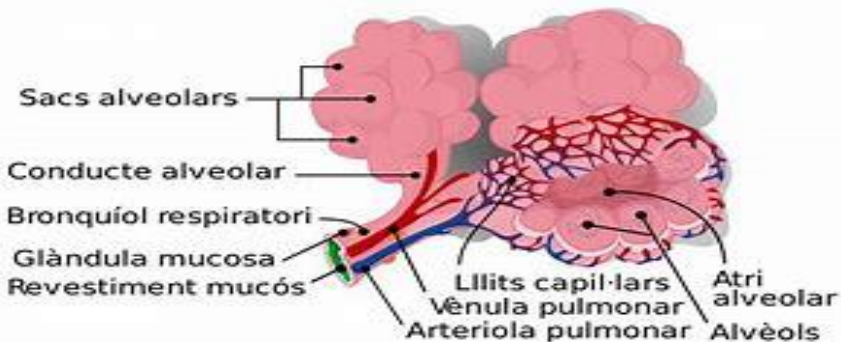
You would have to understand that this specific example applies only to *David's* life. The Lord God chose to specifically create David for his special place in salvation history. *If that is an example of the Designer creating a special project for His own purposes, think of what it must have involved when the Lord God and His divine partner, the Father, planned the creation of our vast universe!* Now read and contemplate Genesis 15; Hebrews 6:13-20; and Hebrews 11:10 relative to this concept.

As you study the information that follows, read it thoroughly so that it makes a significant impression on your mind. Your objective is to understand the *truth* revealed in scripture about the thoughts and ways of God. You can have *true* faith when you understand this.

“Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”

The term *fearfully*, in this case, means “causing reverent awe and great awareness.” Not only should it inspire your reverence of this holy God, it should bring to you an awareness of some *great purpose* He has in mind for all humans and the creation around them. The term *wonderfully* means “causing astonishment.” So, David appears to be greatly astonished and awe-struck at the design and purpose of the human body. He shows his understanding of that *design* when he remarks that God saw his *substance* and had his members *written in a book* and *fashioned* before they even came into existence.

Think about the claims of the *Theory of Evolution* – especially the idea that all that exists is the product of blind, dumb, chance. If anything existed before the “space” in which the green swamp slime came into existence, by what “laws” did that slime come into existence and produce microbial elements that eventually gave rise to creatures that, over millions and millions of years, produced humans? David’s comments do not even remotely support such a fantasy! Examine the graphic below.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulmonary_alveolus

Think about all of the various “systems” within the human body that work in harmony to keep the individual “alive.” How prescient could simple organisms have been to predict that they would need to make structural and system adjustments in order to survive changing conditions? How could they have predicted the changes in

skeletal structure and moved from an extraordinarily simple cardio-pulmonary system to what we presently have? How could they have anticipated the need for the alveoli in the lungs to control the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the respiratory system?

This just one example out so many in the human body. Pay attention to the bronchial tubes, the alveoli sacs, the mucous membranes, and the intricacy of the various blood vessels that carry the oxygenated blood to the body (red) and the vessels that capture carbon dioxide to be expelled from the lungs into the environment (blue). Is there any reason, that you can imagine, why this does not represent evidence of a marvelous design of an extraordinary cardiovascular system?

Now think of all the other body systems that function to give life to the human and maintain it: the brain, the vital organs, vision and hearing, the five senses, *et cetera, et cetera*. Do not overlook the reproductive organs and processes ... along with ingestion, digestion, and elimination ... and all of the fluids secreted by the liver, pancreas, gall bladder, and spleen ... taste buds on the tongue and rods and cones in the eyes. Is there any reasonable basis for claiming that it appeared accidentally over millions of years through blind, stupid chance? There is too much complexity and “system” designs for this to have been the product of blind, stupid chance.

Also, David is not making a case that supports those who claim that God knew from the beginning who is going to be born, when, how they will look, and what specific, individual plan He has for their lives. Such a concept also would have God planning adulteries, rapes, and fornications by which children are illegitimately born. Why? Because He would have been creating sin. Such a concept is a gross misunderstanding of God as the Designer of creation. It also grossly misunderstands David’s comments.

The Lord God created man and woman for the express purpose of perpetuating the human kind (see Gen. 1:21, 24, 25 re: the kinds of plant and animal life He created; see also Gen. 2:20-24). That cannot be achieved through same-sex relations. Read Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 for scriptural proof that God does not accept same-sex relationships. Male/female relationships were His will/plan for the purpose of kind perpetuating various kinds. As a late friend of mine wrote in his book *Solomon, Einstein, and Me*:

If it is acceptable for some to live this way, then it is acceptable for everyone. This kind of conduct would bring about the end of humanity, the ultimate evil [because] mankind would simply cease to reproduce (Xlibris, 2002; p. 90).

Read all of Leviticus 18 and 20 to understand that male/female relations are also restricted to man and wife. Otherwise, unlawful male/female sexual relationships amount to incest, fornication, or adultery ... all of which are punishable by death. Jesus Christ addresses this in Matthew 5:27, 28, 31, 32. Paul addresses it in 1 Corinthians 5:1-11; 6:9-11. God expects our obedience today.

We have studied Ephesians 1:3-14 in previous lessons. When you combine all of that with Genesis 1:26-28, you should be impressed with God's plan to ultimately create the God kind (see John 3:3-8; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54). Humans were created in God's image to ultimately transition from being composed of flesh, blood, and bones to being composed of self-existing spirit (John 3:3-8; 1 Cor. 15:50-54). You can also see this in 1 John 3:1-3. This has long been the hope of God's true people. Same-sex relationships frustrate that plan (Rom. 1:18; *MLB*; *RSV* = suppress).

The Relationship between the Creation and God's Religious Laws

In Genesis 1:14, 15 we read about the creation of the "heaven" part of the universe (see Gen. 1:1). For what purpose were the "lights in the firmament of the heaven" designed? You can plainly see that the "lights" consist of things like the sun, moon, and stars – in short, the entire universe. In this way, the basis for day/night, weeks, months, years, and seasons was created.

The Earth has a set speed at which it spins in an eastward direction: 1,037 mph – 17.28333... miles per second. It takes an ecliptic path around the sun at a linear speed of 67,062 mph (18.5 mps) while the sun follows its ecliptic path through the Milky Way at a speed of 485,913.48 mph. The Earth's axis is tilted 23.5° (degrees) away from the plane of the ecliptic that it travels ... which causes the Earth's change of four seasons: Spring, Summer,

Autumn, and Winter. (see www.universetoday.com/26778/tilt-of-the-earth/). The Milky Way also travels in an ecliptic path at a set speed through the rest of the universe. All of that movement has to be precisely coordinated in order to avoid massive “traffic jams” and collisions. How is that possible through blind, stupid, chance?

Why did God design and create such a system? Was it merely for the means by which we can measure time? Was it simply “window dressing” to cause us to be filled with wonder and awe at what lies beyond our own habitable sphere (read Psalm 8)? No, there is far more to it than that. Isaiah 55:11 says that His words do not go out of His mouth for vain purposes. But, the efficient, economical use of words in Genesis 1:14 does not leave us ignorant of God’s purposes for all of the “lights in the firmament of heaven” portion of His creation.

Let’s consider a variety of translations of verses 14 and 15 to see what we can glean about this special purpose. Note the following:

KJV; RSV; MLB; Living Bible: “...to divide the day from night; and let them be for signs [tokens of changes of weather and times (*BDB*, p. 17)], and for seasons, and for days, and years: and let them be for lights in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth...” [All of these translations are essentially the same.]

The Jerusalem Bible: “...to divide day from night, and let them indicate festivals, days and years. Let them be lights in the vault of heaven to shine on the earth...”

Moffat: “...to separate day from night, to mark out the sacred seasons, the days, and the years; let them shine in the Vault of heaven, to shed light on the earth...”

If *TJB* and *Moffat* are correct, then we should be able to find evidence in God’s word that He did, in fact, reveal festivals and/or sacred seasons to be observed by His people. We find that revelation in Leviticus 23. Notice in v. 1 that this is revealed to Moses by the Lord God (the one who later came in human form as Jesus Christ). This is God’s Law ... not the law of Moses or Jewish law. As such,

these words were not spoken by the Lord God for vain or temporary purposes. You should be able to learn how to “rightly divide” God’s truth about His word (2 Tim. 2:15).

Verse 2 clearly defines these “festivals” and/or “sacred seasons” that are to be observed at various “times” in the year. Verse 2 also clearly stipulates that they are to be considered as being holy time during which God’s people will meet in holy convocations – that is: time that is specifically dedicated to the observance of specifically named feasts that have specific purposes relative to the spiritual growth and development, training, and discipline of God’s true people. Note the Lord God’s claim at the end of v. 2: “...these are my feasts” (emphases added). They are not Mosaic or Jewish law.

Make note of v. 3. What is the first holy day given by the Lord God? This holy day is predicated on Genesis 2:1-3. The Lord God did three things regarding that first seventh day that thereafter made it holy to God and, therefore, holy to mankind: (1) He rested from His work of creation because He had finished it in six days with the creation of mankind (see Gen. 2:7, 20-25); (2) He blessed it: that is, He made it holy; and (3) He sanctified it: that is, He set it apart for holy purposes (see also Mark 2:27, 28). It is a simple lesson: If it is holy to God, then it should be holy to you. Isaiah 55:11 and James 1:17, 18 should explain to you why that is important to you.

From that time forward, the Lord God determined that from sundown at the end of the sixth day to sundown at the end of the seventh day was holy time for holy purposes. That pattern came from the first six “days” that are described in Genesis 1 as consisting of time called “evening and morning” (vv. 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). How does one understand that these feasts have anything to do with seasons? For a more complete explanation of the weekly Sabbath and the Holy Days, see pp. 25-41 in our booklet *A Statement of Beliefs* on our website at www.theseventhdaychristianassembly.org.

The following is specifically stated in Leviticus 23:4: “...you shall proclaim them in their seasons” (emphases added). The Hebrew word mowadah means that it is an appointed time and place – which includes seven yearly Sabbaths (sometimes referred to as being “high days” – see John 19:31). Therefore, the Lord God appointed various times during the year in which mankind is

supposed to observe *holy time* for *specific* purposes. We know that there will be a meeting during every *yearly* Sabbath (v. 3).

Verse 4 begins to explain these *seasonal* meetings. They are briefly summarized as follows:

1. v. 5: *Passover* is observed the 14th day of the first month (determined relative to the *Spring* Equinox – after March 20). This event foreshadows the death of the firstborn son of God (Jesus Christ) for the sins of mankind (see Gen. 3:15; Ex. 12 through 15; 1 Cor. 11:23-29).

2. vv. 6-8: The *Feast of Unleavened Bread* is observed from the 15th day through the 21st day of the first month following directly after Passover. The first day and the seventh day of those seven days are the days for the holy convocations. This event symbolizes the true believer's exodus out of sin (see Ex. 12 through 15; 1 Cor. 5:6-8).

3. vv. 9-21: The *Feast of the Firstfruits* (read Ex. 23:14-16 for a comparison) is also called *Pentecost* because that name is taken from the counting between a Sabbath within the Feast of Unleavened Bread until a Sunday 50 days later (seven Sabbaths plus one day = 49 days + 1 day = *pente* [50] and *cost* [count]; vv. 15, 16). This is a late Spring Harvest festival that symbolizes the spiritual "harvest" of the *firstfruits* of true Christians at the return of Jesus Christ (see Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:20-23; James 1:18; Rev. 7 and 14), as well as the giving of the Holy Spirit.

4. vv. 23-25: The *Feast of Trumpets* is the first of three Fall Harvest festivals observed in the seventh month of the year – which comes during our present calendar time of mid-September to mid-October. This Feast probably forecasted the "seven trumpets" spoken of in Revelation 8 through 11 (see also 1 Cor, 15:52 and 1 Thes. 4:16, 17). During the third month after the Exodus, the Lord God announced His presence with the blowing of the trumpet (read all of Ex. 19). Notice also Revelation 11:15 where Jesus Christ

revealed to John that He will return at the seventh and final trumpet.

This feast symbolizes the time when Jesus Christ will return, “harvest” the “firstfruit” Christians (1 Cor. 15:50-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-18), defeat the enemies of God (Zech. 14:1-9), imprison Satan (Rev. 20:1-3), and set up the Kingdom of God on the earth (Isa. 2:1-5; Dan. 7:13-27; Matt. 25:31-35). For 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4-6) thereafter, Jesus Christ and the “firstfruit” saints will rule over the earth (Rev. 19:7-16) in order to complete the “ministry of reconciliation” of all who ultimately will be “saved” through Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:24-28; 2 Cor. 5:17-21). Zechariah 14 and Isaiah 2:1-5 make it plain that Jesus Christ and His saints will rule over a *human* population and continue to teach God’s thoughts and ways in order to bring as many as possible to salvation. These converts will be “*secondfruits*.”

God, being fair and just, has built into His plan of salvation a time and place where *all* will have an *unfettered* opportunity to make a choice for eternity (Eccl. 3:1-8; John 3:14-21; 2 Pet. 3:9). Even those who have been called and chosen face the possibility that, through a fleshly weakness, they can be denied ultimate salvation if they, *of their own volition*, turn away from God’s truth (see Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26-31; Mark 3:24-29).

5. vv. 26-32: The *Day of Atonement* is held on the 10th day of the seventh month. Leviticus 16 is where this is described. The central focus of the ritual is on two goats (see Lev. 16:7-10). You can see that one of them is chosen as a *sacrifice*, while the other is chosen to be an innocent *scapegoat* upon whom the sins of the people are laid. Both goats, in fact, *typify the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins*: one actually dying and the other having all the sins laid upon him. In the drama, it makes sense to use two equally qualified goats since one of them *dies* as a sacrifice.

It is difficult to use a dead goat as a symbol of taking away our sins for destruction before God. You can see a graphic description of this prophetic event in Isaiah 53 ... note especially vv. 4, 5. You can also see it in Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10:9 explains the significance of the fulfillment of the symbolism: In the context, the death of Jesus Christ took away the first manner of the repetitious sacrifice of bulls and goats and replaced it with the second manner of the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Notice that the death of Jesus Christ did not do away with God's Law; it did away with the Levitical ceremonial sacrifices and oblations because the death of Jesus Christ brought them to the reality prophetically intended (see Matt. 5:17-19). As Paul points out in 2 Corinthians 5:21, Jesus Christ became sin for us in order to reconcile us to God the Father.

6. vv. 33-43: In this section, you have two distinctive holy days that comprise eight days from the 15th day of the seventh month to the 22nd day: The Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. Notice that the first day and the eighth day are the days for the holy convocations, that is: yearly "high day" Sabbaths.

The Feast of Tabernacles is a reminder of the temporary nature of things in our present world ... including the human body (see Gen. 3:19-24; Eccl. 3:18-20; 9:4, 5, 10; 12:1-8; Isa. 65:17-25; 1 Cor. 15:35-58; 2 Cor. 4:7 through 5:10; Rev. 21:1 through 22:6).

The Last Great Day is an observance of a prophetic event found in Revelation 20:5, 6, 11-13: The Great White Throne Judgment. It is observed as part of the Feast of Tabernacles on the 22nd day of the seventh month. It is a yearly Sabbath. The second resurrection and Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the 1,000 years will be the ultimate point when all of God's enemies finally will be destroyed.

Multiple billions of people from ages past who have never had a real opportunity to know and understand God's truth will be taught His unvarnished truth for the purpose of salvation. Jesus Christ makes it plain in John 6:44, 65 that one has to be drawn by God to Jesus Christ in order to have that opportunity (see also Matt. 7:13, 14; 20:1-16; 22:1-14). Matthew 24:4, 5 and 2 Corinthians 4:3-7 show that Satan takes advantage of those not called out "first" and blinds them. God shows that, even though He does not call them out as "firstfruits," He has not abandoned them for destruction until they have had their opportunity to receive His truth toward their salvation. However, once you understand this truth, you are not allowed to willfully sin now and postpone your offer of salvation until a later time. Use Luke 12:13-21 as a guide for that instruction. Also, read James 4:12-17.

If the Feast of Tabernacles is a prophecy about the "day" of salvation during the 1,000-year Kingdom of God, then this eighth day added to the Feast of Tabernacles has prophetic meaning for another "day" of salvation. Indeed, we find just such a "day" in Revelation 20:5, 11-13. This second resurrection comes at the end of the 1,000-year Kingdom period and involves all those throughout human history who have never had the opportunity to know enough of God's truth to make enough of a knowledgeable decision about the sacrifice of Jesus for their salvation.

Also, there are untold numbers of dead who have never even heard of Jesus Christ – many because of the circumstances into which they were born and raised. There are untold millions of aborted fetuses – each of which represent an individual human being that was capable of being brought to life and growing to full maturity. Many other lives were cut short in infancy and early childhood – for example, think of the small children offered as sacrifices to false gods ... or killed by the governments of godless nations (see Ex. 1:7-22 and Matt. 2:16-18). Untold

others have been deceived both by the god of this world and those who have posed as “Christian” ministers. Once this “day” of salvation is completed, Jesus Christ will have conquered all of God’s enemies and will prepare to turn everything back over to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

So, Leviticus 23 demonstrates a relationship between these holy days and the *seasons* of the year (v. 4). In that relationship, God demonstrates very well His plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. It also should impress you that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ did not do away with the Law and the Prophets; rather, it did away with the repetitious sacrifices that pictured His once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins. In doing that, it did away with the services of the Levitical priesthood that involved such sacrifices (see Heb. 10:1-14).

Hebrews 7 explains how that act effected a change in the priesthood from a temporary priesthood to an eternal priesthood (Heb. 7:11-17). Verse 17 is not a signal that the Law was destroyed; rather, it is a statement that the eternal priesthood is not subject to the mortality of a human priesthood. This explains v. 12 ... because the Law had set forth the tribe of Levi to be the priestly tribe without a land inheritance (read Num. 3 and 4). That is why they were given the tithes from the rest of Israel.

When Jesus Christ was made a priest after the order of Melchizedek, He became our High Priest (Heb. 7:19-28) forever thereafter. As v. 16 explains: He was made a priest ... after the power of an endless life. Why? Because the men of Levi were flesh-and-blood. One generation of human priests after another succeeded the other. There is “built in” instability in that. God erased that instability by appointing Jesus Christ to be our eternal High Priest.

Conclusion

Psalm 139:14-16 gives us the idea that the creation of all that exists followed a pattern and plan that God set forth before anything was put into motion to bring it into existence. The *KJV* translation in v. 15 (“curiously wrought”) is better understood to read “intricately constructed.” This is meant to convey to the reader that God’s creation is: (a) full of intricate, minute details and (b)

masterfully designed. This was not *kismet* or *fate* ... some blind, chance-driven power that supposedly determines the final outcome of things that, through happenstance (chance; accident), come into existence.

We can see evidence of this design and plan in numerous verses in the New Testament. Ephesians 1:4 reveals that God's plan to create humans in order to bring them into the *Elohim* family was designed and organized "before the creation of the orderly universe." In 1 Peter 1:18-20, we find that God (that is: The Word and His divine Partner), before the creation of the orderly universe, anticipated the *possibility* that mankind would have to be rescued from the deadly consequences of sin (Rom. 6:23). Because of that, the Word (John 1:1-3) volunteered to give up His divine equality with His Partner in order to become that human sacrifice for sins (Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 10:5). That, too, was a masterful and intricate design and plan.

Matthew 25:34 reveals that Elohim's purpose for all of this was to create a *kingdom* into which the righteous could be given *family* membership. John 3:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 15:50 explain that this would take place through a change of the human *flesh-and-blood* composition into a self-sustaining life force of *spirit* composition. All of the intricacies of that design had to be thoughtfully and meticulously planned. When the plan was set into motion, the flesh-and-blood body was created first (1 Cor. 15:46; Gen. 2:7). The *spirit* body will follow at its appointed time (1 Cor. 15:23; Job 14:1-15).

All that we have studied here points out the truth about the principle that *design demands a designer*. *The Jerusalem Bible's* translation of Hebrews 11:10 makes the point very succinctly: "...[Abraham] looked forward to a city *founded, designed, and built* by God." That means, very simply put, that God designed a city that will be brought into existence, set up as planned, and last forever in the future ages to come (Rev. 21:1-5; Isa. 65:17-25).

Review Questions

1. In Psalm 139:14-16, how does David attribute his existence to God's *design*?

2. Genesis 1:14 – For what purpose were the “lights in the firmament of the heaven” designed?
3. Leviticus 23 – Do you find a relationship between these holy days and the *seasons* (v. 4)?
4. Psalm 8 – How does David extol God for His great *design* of the universe and earth’s life forms?
5. What does Hebrews 11:10 tell you about God as a *designer*? Use the translation from *The Jerusalem Bible*: “...he looked forward to a city *founded, designed and built* by God” as your guide. What does Revelation 21 tell you about that city?
6. In Ephesians 1:4-14, *when* did God decide all of the things about which Paul writes here?
7. Do you get the idea that He just made it up as He went along in time? Or, is there some great *purpose* for which God created all that exists?
8. Did He even plan a span of time during which His plans would be accomplished (v. 10)?
9. Write a brief explanation about how God is a *designer* who not only sets out a *pattern*, but also a *purpose* and a *schedule for its accomplishment*?
10. Read Genesis 1:3-25 – Using your dictionary definition of the term *design*, write out an explanation of the *design* of the created things described in these verses. Here’s an example: v. 14 – we have seen that these lights were put there for *telling time* in various ways: day, night, month, year, season (*The Jerusalem Bible* says “...let them indicate *festivals* [remember Leviticus 23], *days, and years*” emphasis added). That’s a *design*.
11. Read Genesis 1:26-28. In what way did God create man? After which *kind*? Were they of one gender or two? Why? Does sexual

activity between members of the *same gender* (homosexuals) fulfill God's *design* and *purpose* for creating *males* and *females*? Depend on all that you have learned thus far to help in answering these questions.

12. Does it appear to you yet that God is a great *designer* with a great *plan* and *purpose* for humanity and the creation around them?

13. Read Job 38-42 and note the ways God reprimands Job for his lack of understanding about God's *design* and *purpose* for all things (if you can, read this from a modern translation). Also, note Job's confession in ch. 42:1-5 and how God dealt with him for that confession (vv. 6-16). Write this down in a list form.

14. What does Job's experience inform you about mankind in general with regard to knowledge and understanding about God's thoughts and ways (Isa. 55:8-11)?

Chapter Five

Proof #4: Prophecy Proves God's Existence

On Friday, June 15, 2007, I placed a three-column, eight-inch-long ad in *The Moultrie Observer* (a local newspaper) that asked the question “Will Jesus Return in 2007?” I was doing a radio program at the time and was about to begin a series of studies on the *Rapture* concept. The *Left Behind* books had sold in the millions and had spawned a series of movies – all of this based on the concept that Jesus Christ is going to *secretly* return, seven full years *before* His “second” coming, in order to rescue Christians out of the terrible prophesied *Tribulation Period*. I have a serious problem with the *Rapture* concept because it *radically* misinterprets prophecy.

Each year that certain events do not take place, the return of Christ moves up at least three more years from that time. ***I know this because God has revealed what to look for! That prophetic revelation proves God's existence! To update that message on this date (October 29, 2011), I can say with great confidence that Jesus Christ will not return between now and October 29, 2015 – and probably not before October 29, 2017. BSC 7 was originally published in 2009. This new booklet edition is being written in 2020. Based on the preceding information, I can tell you***

now on March 11, 2020 that Jesus Christ will not come any time before 2027. You can see that I have learned enough to know that I can estimate by at least seven years the time during which He will not come. I began this estimation about 1994 ... 26 years ago. That is the power and advantage of understanding prophecy.

One way in which traditional Christianity betrays their understanding of prophecy is by fostering the idea that Jesus could return *at any moment*. Many “Christian” ministers warn you to make your profession of faith right away because Jesus could come *tonight*. Well, *that is not true*. Since 1994, I have regularly updated this cautionary message: *Jesus will not come tonight, nor will He return by 2027*. My statement in that June 15, 2007 ad was simple and to the point: “Will Christ return *tonight*? No. Will He return in 2007? No. Will He return anytime – by *secret rapture* or *Second Coming* – between now and June 2010? No. And so it has gone for about 25 years. And ... it should have been obvious that I wrote the ad several days *before* I submitted it to the newspaper ... which is printed three times a week. By traditional thinking, Jesus could have come several times between the plan for the ad and its submission.

How can we *know* this to be true?” At that point, I deferred to my radio program and the series I was going to present over the next *several weeks*. But ... the question remains: ***How can we know this to be true?*** Based on what God reveals in *prophecy*, I can tell you with the utmost certainty and confidence that Jesus Christ will not return anytime between now (March 11, 2020) and March 2027. I do not do this to diminish the need for you to repent and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior ... or to give you the idea that you can be very casual about doing so. You might die and be confronted by Him *in your next waking moment*, but His *Second Coming* most definitely will not occur within the next seven years from March 11, 2020.

How God Uses Prophecy

God’s *plan and design* are already written in the Bible. If Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8) – that is, the Beginning and the End – then He is well aware of where that plan will take us. After all, Ephesians 1:9, 10 tells us that there is a

definite *terminus point* at which this present world system will end and a new one will begin (see also Dan. 2:44, 45; 12:1-4). I know that we will ultimately *win*, but ... let me give you a better example of how we can understand God's plan through prophecy.

So, let's understand how that works. Look up the term *prophecy* in your dictionary. Do not settle for the definition that says "a divine utterance by a prophet." That's vague and incomplete. Write down the definitions that say something like "apocalyptic revelation" (a revelation in which evil will be destroyed) or "foretelling" and "prediction." Write down as complete a definition as you can. It's important to understand what *prophecy* means so you can understand why it is a *proof* of God's existence.

The book of Revelation is also called "The Apocalypse" because it foretells the destruction of evil and the establishment of God's Kingdom on the earth (read 1 Cor. 15:24-28 for another example of an "apocalyptic"). God uses prophecy for a specific purpose – sometimes for good and sometimes for ill. Luke 1:70-75 gives us an excellent example of how God has used prophecy from the beginning of mankind's history. Write down the basic features in this description that explain this to us. Take note of these features: salvation, execution of the *holy covenant* He made with Abraham, and the ability to live holy and righteous lives before Him all the days of our lives – which most certainly includes the eternal life we can acquire through faith in Jesus Christ.

Read 2 Chronicles 9:29. How many *prophets* are mentioned there? – Are Nathan's, Ahijah's, and Iddo's writings referred to as *prophecies*? By definition, would you assume that they were *inspired by God* to *write down* those prophecies? What we know is that the "rest of the acts of Solomon" are *written* in their books of prophecy. However, we do not have any *physical evidence* (that has survived through time) through which we can know what they wrote. Some people at that time benefitted from their work.

At this point, we also do not know if *God* inspired them. The reason is simple: we know that there is such a thing as *false prophets*. But ... we can look at 1 Kings 11:26-40 and find *Ahijah* bringing to Jeroboam a prophecy from God that was later fulfilled just as God had revealed it (read chapter 12). Based on that *surviving*

information, we could conclude that Ahijah was a true prophet of God. God's true people benefitted from his work.

Now read 2 Samuel 11:1-12:25 and Psalm 51. Here you see the work of the prophet Nathan. Many times God's prophets were sent to confront the Kings of Israel and Judah regarding various matters ... especially their sins. David, who was king over all of Israel, was guilty of adultery and murder. For this, Nathan was sent to confront David with a parable about a rich man who took a poor man's lamb in order to entertain a stranger instead of one from his own flock. David's reaction to the parable was used to judge him (vv. 7-14). Notice v. 10: "the sword shall never depart from your house." If you read the rest of David's history, you will find this prophetic judgment by God to have been true. Therefore, we can conclude that Nathan was inspired by God to deal with David's sin.

What about Iddo? He is unknown to us today ... except as he is mentioned by others in the Old Testament. We saw an example of that in 2 Chronicles 9:29. We can see in 2 Chronicles 12:15 that he is mentioned again along with another prophet unknown to us today: Shemaiah. There, Shemaiah is called a prophet, and Iddo is called a seer – a prophet to whom visions are given (example = John re: The Revelation).

What did Azariah, son of Oded, prophesy to King Asa in 2 Chronicles 15? Did that prophecy come true? Was Azariah a prophet of the True God? The expression "the prophecy of Oded the prophet" should be understood to be the prophecy given by Azariah, the son of Oded. In this case, the term prophecy means "a specific and genuine prophecy." So, we can conclude that Azariah was a true prophet of God.

In Nehemiah 6:1-14, what problem did Nehemiah have with Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem? Verse 2 sums it up: "They thought to do me mischief." In v. 7, they accuse Nehemiah of sending prophets out to the Jews to claim that Nehemiah would soon be king. What is Nehemiah's reply in v. 8? In that false accusation, they are accusing Nehemiah of using false prophets to rebel against the Persian Empire.

In vv. 10-13, we are introduced to Shemaiah. Did Shemaiah bring to Nehemiah a prophecy? What was it? Why did Nehemiah refuse to meet with him? In this case, the term prophecy (v. 12)

means “*false* prophecy.” Shemaiah was foretelling something that was not of God. It was a false report about a so-called coming event.

Read over Proverbs 30-31. Do these two chapters appear to be foretelling future events (30:1; 31:1)? Do they *warn* against certain actions, thoughts, and/or beliefs? Look up the term *oracle* and determine how that definition might apply. Were these *prophecies* *divinely* inspired? The term *prophecy* as used here means “a burden (a message of doom); an utterance or oracle.” Note how these two men warn against certain thoughts, actions, and beliefs. It should be evident that they know by *inspiration* that certain things will result in certain consequences – consequences that can be avoided if one uses this advice wisely. These words are like that spoken by Moses when he told Israel: “Be sure [that] your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23). Such understanding points to the wisdom of following God’s thoughts and ways. This, too, is a type of prophecy that *proves* God’s existence.

What did the archangel Gabriel tell Zacharias was going to happen to him and his wife in Luke 1:5-25? By what *sign* would Zacharias know that what Gabriel told him was true (v. 20)? Now read vv. 57-80. Did Gabriel’s prophecy come true? What happened to Zacharias when it was fulfilled (v. 64)? In his follow-up comments, Zacharias explained that God has had prophets in the world to foretell future events “since the world began” (v. 70). It would make sense, then, that God has provided true prophets to help in steering mankind in the direction that God desires them to pursue.

Second Peter 1:19-21 tells us how *God’s* prophecies compare to any others when he calls it “a more sure word of prophecy.” What warning does Peter propose to people about heeding God’s prophecies? In v. 19, he says that we would do well to pay close attention to them as we would to a light that shines in pitch-black darkness ... and do so until the light of God’s truth has been permanently placed into our hearts and minds. In v. 20, he warns us that prophecies from God are not subject to the private interpretation of any individual human. This understanding presupposes that prophecies are *aimed at a specific objective* and, therefore, they are *firmly set in place* with the meaning that *God* attaches to them. Finally, Peter says that prophecy is not the product of the mind and

will of *humans*. Rather, the human prophet is moved by God's Holy Spirit to make the announcement of *God's* intentions (v. 21).

It should be obvious from this explanation that God uses prophecy for His divine purposes as a *witness* to how He controls history and as a *warning* that something/someone will be affected by His great power to guide the events of history to its intended goal. Read again Isaiah 55:8-11. He does not speak His words in vain.

Now read 1 Kings 13:1-10. What was the content of this prophet's message? It had to do with the future birth of a Jewish king named *Josiah*. Did Jeroboam agree with the prophecy? Apparently not, because he ordered that the prophet was to be seized. How did God protect His prophet and the message? He caused Jeroboam's hand to be shriveled and immobile. And ... the altar on which Jeroboam was making a sacrifice (12:32-33) was torn apart by the Lord God's power and the ashes upon it were scattered off it (see 13:3). What special instructions did God give this prophet about leaving Jeroboam? After the Lord God restored Jeroboam's hand, Jeroboam invited the prophet to dine with him and offered him a reward (vv. 6, 7). The Lord God instructed the prophet to refuse Jeroboam's offers and to not eat or drink anything as he went home in a different direction from which he came (vv. 8-10). Did the prophet obey? Read verses 11-34.

The moral of this story is that we should be obedient to what God tells us to be and do. Please note that the point at which the prophet was deceived was when he met a fellow prophet who told him something different from what the Lord God had told him (v. 18). Notice the words: "... 'I am a *fellow* prophet'... but he *lied* to him" (emphases added). The lesson is simple: Similarities in religious duties do not warrant disregarding what the Lord God commands of *you*. How does that work among 32,000+ opposing "Christian" denominations (Matt. 7:21-23)?

Although there are numerous examples I could draw from, I will use this one final example to show how prophecy proves the existence of God. This prophet came as God's messenger against Jeroboam's imposition of an idolatrous system of worship over the House of Israel over whom God had made Jeroboam king. This is probably one of the most remarkable and most specific prophecies of the Old Testament.

As a *sign* to Jeroboam, God foretold the coming of a man named *Josiah* who would destroy Jeroboam's idolatry. Jeroboam would not live to see its fulfillment because Josiah did not come for **340 years**. *Because of the lapse of time, Israel and Judah believed it to be a false prophecy and sank deeper and deeper into the idolatry that God despised.* But ... they underestimated both the knowledge and power of God. They even forgot the two *miracles* by which God sought to validate this prophecy: (a) He protected the prophet by drying up Jeroboam's arm, and (b) He tore up the altar Jeroboam was protecting.

Although Jeroboam offered the prophet a meal with the king and a reward, the Lord God told him not to accept either. As a precaution for his safety, He told him to go home a different way from which he came. The caution about eating and drinking also applied to his trip home. However, meeting a "fellow" prophet proved to be fatal for the Lord God's prophet. The two men were *strangers* to one another. Eating and drinking with the *lying* prophet was a grave disregard of the Lord God's instructions. This is right out of Deuteronomy 8:3 and Matthew 4:3-10.

In 2 Kings 22, we find a historical account about King Josiah – the king prophesied in 1 Kings 13:1-10 – ordering the High Priest Hilkiah of Judah to make repairs to certain sections of the Temple. Josiah's father and grandfather had damaged the Temple with their idolatrous practices (read chapter 21). In the process, Hilkiah found an ancient book. When he read it, he was emotionally overcome that he had found an ancient book of the Law that the Lord God had given to Moses. So, he notified King Josiah of its discovery.

Josiah sent Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah to inquire of the *prophets* about the book. What fear did Josiah express? Because of the contents of that book, Josiah was gravely concerned the Lord God was about to bring great wrath against the nation because of the sins of Judah's "fathers" (the kings and priests who had preceded him. To whom did they go to get understanding of the book? A female prophetess named Huldah. So, God has no problem using *women* as prophetesses.

We find the prophetess's reply in vv. 15-20. During Josiah's lifetime, the Lord God would postpone the punishment He had

planned with respect to Judah's idolatry. What did the prophetic's answer inspire Josiah to do? That is the subject of 2 Kings 23.

He undertook a massive religious reform in Judah. He called all of the nation's elders, priests, prophets, and citizens small and great to a great meeting at the Temple in Jerusalem. There he read to them the book of the Law that the High Priest Hilkiah had found. The book that Hilkiah found was the book of *Deuteronomy*. Read it sometime to see what affected Josiah so profoundly – especially chapter 28. Notice what Josiah did as part of this reform:

The King stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes [see Gen. 26:5] with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to [agreed to live by] the covenant (2 Kings 23:3)

Read Deuteronomy 12:29-32 for the background to this decision. Read 2 Kings 23:4-23 in order to understand the full scope of Josiah's commitment to that covenant. Whom did Josiah execute (ch. 23:24)? Now pay close attention to v. 25 about the scriptural praise heaped upon Josiah for his actions. How *exact* was God's prophecy **340 years** after it was spoken? The sad part of this entire history is that the Lord God later had to carry out His judgment against the sins of Josiah's father and grandfather. Read vv. 29-37. Does that give you an idea about how *tenuous* was the commitment of Josiah's successors to that covenant? At that point, Jeremiah 25:8-18 was set into motion (see 2 Kings 24-25).

Isaiah 46:9-11 makes a bold statement about God's ability to declare that a thing will be done (regardless of how much time passes by) and cause it to occur as He stated. Make note of the following important statements made about His ability to do this:

[I] declare from the beginning [of a matter] what the end of it shall be, and from ancient times [I] have declared the things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all that I find pleasure in doing"; ... I

have spoken it, I will bring it to pass; I have determined that it shall be done; so, I will do what I have determined to do (author's paraphrase).

Is God *bragging* too much about His ability? Or, is He merely stating *fact* to which we should pay attention? You should pay attention to this in reference to Matthew 5:17-19. Wherever the Bible reveals God's prophecies, we would do well to pay attention to them. However, we must take two precautionary measures: (a) we must understand that they are *inspired by God* – not the private utterances of *men* to serve their own agendas, and (2) we must not be thrown off-guard because of the time that has passed between the giving of the prophecy and its fulfillment. One of the monumental failures of the early “church fathers” was that they paid no heed to such statements by the Lord God. In the bargain, they either changed God's truth into a lie, or they exchanged God's truth for the lie. Either way, they caused a very serious theological “drift” to take place, and ... it has resulted in the creation of 32,000+ opposing “Christian” denominations and the ensuing religious chaos and confusion.

The Role of Religious Chaos and Confusion

You might well wonder what *religious chaos and confusion* have to do with this discussion. To put it simply, it is indicative of another role of *prophecy*. I will use two scriptures to make the point more understandable: Matthew 24:4, 5 and 2 Peter 2:1-3.

In Matthew 24:4, 5, we find a *prophetic* warning from Jesus Christ about the rise of a *false “Christianity.”* It will be *deceptive* because it will use the name and teachings of Jesus Christ to spread a *counterfeit* “Christianity.” The most damning aspect of it will be that the “counterfeit” will be represented by the *many*, while the *true* Christians will be represented by the *few* (see His earlier comments in Matt. 7:13-21).

What does Peter say in 2 Peter 2:1-3? Much the same as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15. *False* prophets will increase in number, and they will introduce into “Christianity” *damnable heresies*. Here, we should understand the implications of the term

heresy. It comes from the Greek term *airesis* (pronounced *ha-ee-ree-sis*). There are two definitions given to this term in *BAG* to which we should give serious attention ... because of the prophecy by Jesus Christ in Matthew 24:4, 5.

The first definition refers to a “sect, party, school.” Christianity was originally a “sect” of Judaism ... as much as the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, *et cetera* were *sects* of Judaism. That definition could easily be extended to our modern term *denomination(s)*. Traditional “Christianity” consists of 32,000+ sects, parties, schools, or denominations of “Christian” beliefs and practices. A *denomination* is a *class* or *kind*; so, it is synonymous with the terms “sect, party, and school.” Political parties fall into the same category.

The second definition refers to “opinion, dogma.” In 2 Peter 2:1, the expression *damnable heresies* could be translated “destructive opinions” or “ways of thinking that deserve condemnation.” Rightly understood, the two definitions give rise to the thought that those sects, or denominations, created and perpetuated by *false teachers* will bring into existence *damnable* ways of spreading a *false* “gospel” about Jesus Christ.

If you consider the logic of Jesus Christ’s warning in Matthew 24:4, 5 and 7:13-21, it would appear that the “gospels” of the *many* will ultimately overwhelm the *true* gospel of the *few* and, in essence, make the *few* appear to be those who teach the *damnable heresies*. Why? Some people believe that the “many” of traditional “Christianity” is *proof* of its *validity*. Is that true? Let’s consider something that might shed light on this problem.

The following is a quote by Walter Hooper in his introduction to the book *Christian Reflections*, a series of essays, articles, and public addresses by C. S. Lewis, a well-known Christian apologist:

Shortly after his conversion [from atheism to Christianity] in 1929, C. S. Lewis wrote to a friend: “When all is said (and truly said) about the *divisions* of Christendom, there remains, by God’s mercy, *an enormous common ground*.” From that time on Lewis thought that the best service he could do for his unbelieving neighbours was to explain and defend *the belief that has been common to nearly all*

Christians at all times – that “enormous common ground” which he usually referred to as “mere” Christianity (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.’ 1997; p. vii; emphases added).

The term mere means the most basic, simple form. An expression like “Jesus Christ is Lord” – without any further definition or discussion – is an example of “mere” Christianity. All 32,000+ “Christian” denominations might very well agree with that expression. However, expended conversations and explanations of the term would force the differences to surface and cause whatever spiritual unity that should exist to become fragmented and ineffectual.

Hooper adds later that Lewis avoided writing and speaking about the differences of belief among “Christianity” because sticking to the “enormous common ground” made more sense to him (Ibid; p. xi). At this point, you should keep in mind Paul’s comment in 2 Corinthians 11:4 where he rebuffs the Corinthians for associating with and listening to those who taught another Jesus, another gospel, and another spirit. Now read vv. 13-15 to understand the gravity of Paul’s concern.

That is exactly what goes on among the 32,000+ “Christian” denominations! The “enormous common ground” is, in fact, a misleading concept that gives the appearance of an underlying spiritual unity (read Eph. 4:1-16). In fact, and practice, they are like the “The Pointed Man” in Nielsen’s album *The Point*: He had so many points in so many different directions that it was like having no point at all. In the “enormous common ground” reside too many differences of belief and practice to ignore.

In the face of 32,000+ “Christian” denominations, how seriously should you consider these warnings? How much would knowledge of God’s truth benefit you in these situations? Would God have prepared the few for dealing with the false prophets if the many had listened to God’s true prophets from the beginning of the world?

You have to understand the ability of Satan to deceive people in a religious setting (2 Cor. 4:1-4). Notice Matthew 7:21-23. In whose name do these people operate? Jesus Christ’s. How easy is it for you to speak against people who come in the name of Jesus Christ? My

guess is that you find it very difficult to do so because you do not fully trust your own knowledge of God's truth as opposed to what others teach. The result is simple: you adopt a "live-and-let-live" approach to your Christianity. Would you settle for the "enormous common ground" as opposed to the truth of God's word because you believe that the many have to know more than the few?

You might not realize that Jesus Christ and His apostles took God's argument against the pretenders. Read again 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15. This is Paul's commentary about false "Christianity." All of the writers of the New Testament, which is as prophetic as the Old Testament, engaged in arguments against false Christianity. We should have no problem doing the same if we know and understand God's truth. God's prophets told us ahead of time that we would face this dilemma! God's prophecy is timelessly authoritative simply because those who wrote and spoke it were God's spokesmen moved by His Spirit (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

In a larger sense of the word "prophet," we must understand that concepts about the destiny of those who are "saved" is prophetic. If you preach that people go to heaven or hell when they die, then you are making no room for a time called in scripture "the judgment." If you believe that the real person is the immortal soul that, supposedly, inhabits the human body, then you might be misreading scriptures like Genesis 3:22, 23 (where the Lord God prevented mankind from acquiring immortality of any kind by preventing them from having access to the Tree of Life); Ecclesiastes 3:18-20; 9:4, 5, 10; and Job 14:1-15 (which speak of end-of-life issues).

If you believe that "God" is a trinity in which a single "God" reveals Himself in three different "faces," then you might not be able to put together the significance of John 1:1-3 (regarding two divine partners), Ephesians 1:3 ("the God and Father of Jesus Christ"), and Philippians 2:5-11 (about the one who became Jesus Christ having originally been equal with His divine partner), Matthew 24:36 (where Jesus reveals that the Father has information that Jesus does not have), and John 17 where Jesus Christ prays to His Father in heaven (see especially vv. 5 and 11-26). Was He praying to Himself? These are matters that are not accepted by or associated with the theology of the "enormous common ground." But ... they are God's truth.

What does God warn us about in Deuteronomy 18:9-14? It is a warning similar to Deuteronomy 12:29-32. This warning is part and parcel to the first three Commandments in Exodus 20:1-7. The Lord God (who became Jesus Christ) gives laws prohibiting the mixing and mingling of His truth with the beliefs and practices of the pagans. Do those practices that are described there in Deuteronomy 18:9-14 use *foretelling* to deceive people?

Several hundred years later, Jeremiah was inspired to write Jeremiah 10:1-16. Read this carefully and make note of the differences between what might otherwise have been “a great common ground” between Israel and the pagan nations relative to the concept of “God.” Now ... read vv. 17-25 and understand what happened to Israel when they did not obey the Lord God’s commandments.

This involves the sin of syncretism – which is the practice of combining opposing and contradictory religious beliefs into a compromised form that appears to unify them. It is widely known that religious concepts from paganism, like Easter and Christmas, were syncretized into “Christianity” in order to unite the Roman Empire under a common “Christian” banner. The sun-worshipper, Emperor Constantine, was the political force behind this syncretization. He promoted a compromise between Mithraism and Christianity.

In Deuteronomy 18:15-22, whose words will the true prophet speak? Not his own words? Does God commit Himself to fulfill whatever He puts into the mouth of His true prophets? So, if God warns against mixing pagan religious concepts into His truth ... then will He ultimately punish those who ignore His commands?

Now Read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Pay attention to both the blessings and the curses. Could nations suffer dire consequences because of their resistance to God’s thoughts and ways? How does this work as prophecy?

In Amos 3:7, does God act without making known what He is up to? By whom does He send the messages? Remember that Luke 1:70 says that God has had prophets among us since the world began. Would you consider this lesson to be prophetic? Explain your answer.

The New Testament “Prophet”

Who inspired the writing of the scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15-17)? For what purposes? Let me give you a brief explanation of the four purposes mentioned by Paul for providing scriptures:

- (a) for establishing the tenets (that which is considered to be truth) of instruction to be held in common by a body of believers,
- (b) for correcting faulty ideas, attitudes, and actions through evidence,
- (c) for testing all theories, theologies, and ethical teachings for correctness and truth relative to the thoughts and ways of God, and
- (d) for training the believer in righteousness so s/he will be spiritually mature and thoroughly capable of doing the works for which God has called him/her into His truth.

(You can download your free copy of our statement of beliefs from www.theseventhdaychristianassembly.org.)

Paul had only the Old Testament to serve as his scriptures, so we have to understand his position about the value that all of those writings have for leading us to salvation through Jesus Christ. If we are not careful, we denigrate God’s word by denying its divine inspiration – saying that it is the product of *man*, not God. Satan would lead us to believe that there is nothing special about God’s holy word because it calls *him* out as a liar, murderer, and deceiver. *And he is desperate to keep you from believing that!* We can also insult the God who inspired the Old Testament by casting it aside because of the belief that it has no relevance to a New Testament Christian.

What does Ephesians 4:11-16 say about God providing His True Church with *prophets* among the types of religious leaders He sends

to educate His people? List three prominent reasons for doing so. Is protection from deceivers one of those reasons? Why?

Who is speaking in Isaiah 44:6-8? Does He claim to be *God*? Is there any other *God* than Him? Does He claim that other “Gods” do not have the power to prophecy in the manner that He does? Does this mean that there is only one “God”? Why do I ask? Because some use these verses to try to prove that there is only one God. But ... you have to look carefully at what is said.

Notice v. 6: “Thus says *the Lord the King of Israel, and His Redeemer the Lord of hosts...*” This is speaking of two separate Gods. We know this by His comment at the end of the verse: “...Beside me there is no *God*.” That statement seems, on the surface, to be contradictory. However, the word translated as *God* is *elohiym* – a plural noun; a collective noun. *Elohim* has the power to foretell and make it come to pass.

In v. 8, *God* is used twice. The first reference is *elowahh* – the singular form of deity. He explains His uniqueness by the second reference translated *God*. What does this mean? The second reference is *tsur* – “the mighty God, the *rock*.” This is a reference to Jesus Christ.

First Corinthians 10:4 provides us this information: “[Israel] drank of that spiritual *Rock* that followed them: and that *Rock* was Christ” (emphases added). Acts 4:10-12 tells us two things: Jesus Christ is the *stone*, as well as the only name under heaven whereby men must be saved – that is, the *rock* and the *Redeemer*. Read David’s Psalms 28:1; 31:2, 8; 62:2; 89:26; 94:22; and 95:1. Outside the *Elohim family*, there exist no other gods. Within the *Elohim family*, there is no other *Rock* or *Savior* than *Yahweh Elohim*. He is unique.

Read Philippians 2:5-11. Note how Paul shows that, prior to His incarnation, Jesus existed on an equal basis with a Divine Partner (see also John 1:1-3). He gave up that equality in order to become the human named Jesus Christ, the Savior (see 1 Pet. 1:18-20; Heb. 10:5; John 1:1-3, 14). At that point, His Divine Partner became His “God” – superior by divine appointment. Once He was born of the virgin Mary, His “God” also became His “Father” (see also Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; and 1 Pet. 1:3). Philippians 2:9-11 shows that the Father God gave to Jesus Christ a name above every name

in heaven, on earth, and under the earth (those dead and buried). Paul reveals in Colossians 1:19 and Matthew 28:18 that the Father God turned over to Jesus Christ all of the power of the godhead. In that position, He has the full control of creating all things (John 1:3; Col. 1:16) and the power to bring salvation to the entire creation if sin had entered into His creation.

Paul further explains in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 that, once Jesus Christ has defeated all of the enemies of God, He will return full power to the Father God and subject Himself to Him. Paul explains in v. 27 that *the Father God was never put into subjection to Jesus Christ*. That is one very good reason why Jesus Christ reveals in the four “gospels” that He did not come to do His own will ... He came to do the will of the Father (John 4:34; 5:30; Matt. 7:21).

That is how God’s word explains itself without men imposing their meaning upon it. Isaiah 28:9, 10 (KJV) explains that we should follow “precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, and there a little” in order to derive and understand God’s truth. *It is incorrect to formulate religious traditions/doctrines and then search scripture for selected passages that seem to support them*. It might give the religious concept the *appearance* of biblical “truth,” but it will not be *the will of God as revealed in His word* (Matt. 7:21-23). Therefore, New Testament scripture, in its support of the Old Testament scripture, is also *prophetic* in nature because it *reveals the ultimate outcome* of God’s plan through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3-14). Thus, *this* message itself is *prophecy*.

The coming of the Kingdom of God is a case in point. Great spans of time have passed since God revealed His plan to Adam, and many have come to not believe it and/or to change the teaching about God’s original plan. Be careful! There are many *pretenders* out there (1 John 4:1). We are charged with the responsibility to put ourselves into a relationship with God so that He can reveal to us His truth (see John 14:15-18, 26 and 16:13).

The fulfillment of prophecy is *proof of the existence of God Almighty*. It is *proof of the divine inspiration of the Bible*. It is *proof that the Bible contains revelations from God Almighty that we could not have otherwise known or discovered in advance!*

Review Questions

1. Define the term *prophecy* as completely as you can. Emphasize the aspects of prophecy that enable you to understand how it *proves* God's existence.
2. 2 Chronicles 9:29 – Are Ahijah's writings referred to as *prophecy*? By definition, would you assume that Ahijah was inspired by God to write down those prophecies? Explain.
3. 2 Chronicles 15 – What did Azariah, son of Oded, prophesy to King Asa? Did that prophecy come true? Was Azariah a prophet of the True God? Explain your conclusion from the scripture given.
4. Nehemiah 6:1-14 – What problem did Nehemiah have with Shemaiah? Did Shemaiah bring to Nehemiah a prophecy? What was it? Why did Nehemiah refuse to meet with him?
5. Proverbs 30-31 – Do these two chapters appear to be *foretelling* future events? Do they warn against certain actions, thoughts, and/or beliefs? Look up the term *oracle* and determine how that definition might apply. Were these prophecies divinely inspired?
6. Luke 1:5-25 – What did Gabriel tell Zacharias was going to happen to him and his wife? By what sign would Zacharias know that what Gabriel told him was true?
7. Verses 57-80 – Did Gabriel's prophecy come true? What happened to Zacharias when it was fulfilled?
8. Verse 70 – How long has God had prophets in the world to foretell future events?
9. 2 Peter 1:19-20 – How do *God's* prophecies compare to any others? What warning does Peter propose to people about heeding God's prophecies? Are prophecies subject to whatever meanings different people want to give them – or, does it appear that prophecies are *objective* and *fixed* in the meaning that God attaches

to them? By what means are the prophets able to foretell future events?

10. Matthew 24:4, 5; 2 Peter 2:1-3 – In the face of 32,000+ “Christian” denominations, how seriously should you consider these warnings? How much would knowledge of God’s truth benefit you in these situations? Would God have prepared people for dealing with the false prophets if they had listened to God’s true prophets from the beginning of the world?

11. Deuteronomy 18:9-14 – What does God warn us about in these verses? Do those described in these verses use foretelling to deceive people?

12. Verse 15-22 – Whose words will the true prophet speak? Not his own words? Does God commit Himself to fulfill whatever He puts into the mouth of His true prophets? What does John 12:49 reveal to you about the role that Jesus Christ has regarding prophecy?

13. Amos 3:7 – Does God act without making known what He is up to? By whom does He send the messages?

14. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 – Who inspired the writing of the scriptures? For what purposes?

15. Ephesians 4:11-16 – Has God provided His True Church with prophets within the types of religious leaders He sends to educate His people? List three prominent reasons for doing so. Is protection from deceivers one of those reasons?

16. Isaiah 44:6-8 – Who is speaking in this situation? Does He claim to be God? Is there any other God than Him? Does He claim that other “gods” do not have the power to prophesy in the manner He does? Why is this important to you?

17. 1 Kings 13:1-10 – What was the content of this prophet’s message? Did Jeroboam agree with the prophecy? How did God protect the prophet and the message from God? What special

instructions did God give this prophet about leaving Jeroboam? Did he obey?

18. 2 Kings 22-23 – During a remodeling project, what did Hilkiah the high priest find? What did he do with this book? How did it affect King Josiah? What fear did he express? To whom did they go to get understanding of the book? So, God has no problem using women as prophetesses? What did the prophetess's answer inspire Josiah to do? Whom did Josiah get rid of (ch. 23:24)? How exact was God's prophecy 340 years after it was spoken?

19. Isaiah 46:9-11 – Is God bragging too much about His ability? Or, is He merely stating fact to which we should pay attention?

Chapter Six

Proof #5: Answered Prayer Proves God's Existence

Jesus' disciples experienced the power of His conversations with God the Father. They witnessed how He and John the Baptist approached the Father, what requests they made, and how those requests were treated. It was no surprise, then, that they wanted to be able to approach the Father in the same way. So, in Luke 11:1 we find them asking Jesus to teach them *how to pray*. The result of that request is what has come to be known as *The Lord's Prayer*.

It is actually a *model* upon which prayers should be based – an outline of one's approach to the Father and the things that should be included in one's prayers:

- (a) recognition of God's holiness and your *willing submission* to Him;

- (b) a desire for His *Kingdom* to be established *on the earth* and for His *will* to be the governing factor among its inhabitants;

(c) requests for *our* daily needs – not just selfish requests for *personal* needs;

(d) admission of *our* sins and petition for forgiveness in relationship to *our* willingness to forgive those who have sinned against *us*;

(e) request for deliverance from any and all sources of temptation and evil;

The rest is found in Matthew 6:13: (f) recognizing God as the great *eternal and glorious* power that reigns over such a kingdom; and (g) ending with *Amen* – an expression that means “Let it be done as it has been spoken.”

The disciples realized that Jesus was not just throwing words into the air and hoping that somehow what He spoke would come true. The fact that Jesus prayed to a “Father in heaven” is one more proof that there exists more than one God-being; otherwise, Jesus looks like an *idiot* praying to *Himself!*

To the point: what does *answered prayer* teach us about the existence of God?

How Real is God to You?

Would you bow yourself reverently to pray to a *non-existent* Being? Would you expect that your prayer requests to that Being would be given to you – in other words, would you expect an *answer*? What would be your reaction if your prayer was answered? Understand this: It is highly unlikely that you would do such a thing if you did not believe that such a Being exists.

I realize, of course, that some people have gotten so frustrated with or threatened by life’s circumstances that they have reached out in desperation for help from what *might* be out there. Some of those prayers were “answered” and some were not. It was an act of *desperation*. It was like placing a bet on a roulette wheel. More times than not, the bettor does not win. Many times, those who did not get

an answer reply that it only confirmed what they believed about “God” not existing. Do you see the problem?

This is very important to understand because people pray, get no discernable answer, and conclude one of two things: (a) there *might* be a God, but He *doesn't* answer prayers, or (b) no answer to prayers proves that God does not exist. How do we solve this problem?

Read Matthew 6:5-14. Verses 5-8 lead up to Jesus Christ's description of the “model” prayer. What lesson about prayer is given in vv. 5-9? Is your prayer to be for the entertainment of an audience? Is prayer mostly a matter between you and God? How does God reward your *private* prayer? Would you conclude that there is a right and wrong way to pray? Should the *wrong way* expect an answer from God?

Does this mean that no kind of *public* prayer is permitted by God? No, there are numerous examples of public prayer mentioned in scripture. Read 1 Kings 8:22-66. Does that answer your question about *public* prayer? It is reasonable to understand that God's people can pray to Him as a corporate body. It is not reasonable that they should gather as a group on a public street and make a “show” of their religiosity.

In v. 7, what does Jesus mean by the expression *vain repetitions*? This has to do with repeating the same phrase over and over – the kind of thing people do when they chant incantations: a formula of words chanted or recited as part of *a ritual of magic*. It is also descriptive of prayer in which someone might use the same phrase over and over (examples = “God and Father” and “O Lord.”). And ... they go on and on and on and on doing so. The same could also be true for the “cookie cutter” prayers that are learned and repeated over and over again. In v. 8, Jesus taught us that we should not be that kind of person when we pray.

Does God already know what you need (v. 8)? If that is so, why would He expect you to tell *Him*? Read Philippians 4:19. By whom will He supply our needs? Shouldn't He just go ahead and give it to you without you having to ask (think of all the elements Jesus told us to include in our prayers before you answer the question)? It is a matter of getting you to understand *God's* role through *Jesus Christ* of being our great provider. Read Hebrews 4:12-16 with that in mind.

Relative to the above discussion, keep in mind that “The Lord’s Prayer” was not intended to be a repetitive, “cookie cutter” type of prayer. It is a *model for prayer*. In other words, it is descriptive of the elements that you should generally include in your prayers. Note again the following outline of those elements:

1. Acknowledgement of and expression of faith in the sovereignty of God over your life ... with praise for His holiness and love.
2. Expressions of your faith in and expectation of the coming of His glorious Kingdom to rule over all of creation ... with the faith and confidence that He will reign over that Kingdom in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-5; Zech. 14:9; Rev. 5:10; 11:15; 21:1-7).
3. Explaining to Him what your needs are ... that would include food, clothing, shelter, finances, *et cetera*. He will understand from such requests where your heart is. If it amounts to selfishness, He might very well put you on a path to learn how to be more giving and less selfish.
4. Requesting forgiveness in proportion to how you have forgiven others. If you are not willing to forgive and forget, how can you expect God to forgive your sins and forget that they ever existed? Read very carefully Isaiah 65:16, 17 in order to understand the degree to which God forgives.
5. Requesting deliverance from the Evil One (Satan) and all of the tricks he uses to lead you astray from God’s will and grace (2 Cor. 4:4; 11:1-15; 1 Pet. 5:6-11). Ask Him to protect you from being led astray through various types of temptation (see 1 John 2:15-17).
6. Close with an acknowledgment of God’s power and glory and right to rule over all of creation forever and ever.

7. The “amen” is a statement that means something very special: *Let it be done as it has been spoken*. That is a powerful statement to be made to the One who has the power to do just that. Make sure that what has been spoken is within His will and plan ... and not a pile of selfishness.

Now, read Matthew 5-7 to understand the context in which Jesus gave these instructions about prayer. Are you expected to be obedient to these instructions? If you are not obedient to them, should you expect the Father to answer your prayers? Would you agree that your prayers will be answered in proportion to your obedience? Could you pray like that if God was not real to you?

Conditions for Answered Prayer and the Role of Faith

Pay special attention to Matthew 7:7-12. Are there *conditions* for receiving things from God? What is the meaning of asking, seeking, and knocking? Are they connected to an expectation that someone is there to whom your requests can be made?

Notice in v. 12 how Jesus connects the “golden rule” to the Law and the Prophets. It is as if He were saying that receiving blessings from God requires that you thereafter should be generous to others because that is part and parcel to what the Law and Prophets are all about. With that in mind, read Romans 13:8-10. How could the Law have been abolished if the “golden rule” is dependent on the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:34-40)?

In Matthew 21:21, 22, Jesus Christ lays out the basis for having your prayers answered: faith without doubting and belief that you will receive what you have requested. Mark 11:22-24 treats the incident a bit differently. Verse 11 says that you must have faith in God. Please understand that this is not teaching you to have unreasonable faith in God. Matthew 4:1-11 demonstrates that Satan can tempt you to do unreasonable things and expect God to save you from them or bless you in them. That is especially true with regard to vv. 5-10. You can, in fact, make unreasonable requests of God that He will not grant you because of the harm they could cause

you or others, or they are selfish things that do not serve His will (Matt. 7:21-23; 15:1-9).

In Mark 11:23, Jesus is employing a *euphemistic maxim*. In this maxim (a rule of conduct), the term “mountain” is a *euphemism* (substitution) for “great problems.” As some commentators put it: The expression was a common, vivid Jewish phrase that had to do with *removing great difficulties*. “You Gave Me a Mountain” is a song written by country singer-songwriter Marty Robbins during the 1960s. In it, he spoke of difficulties he had encountered in life ... which he called “hills.” However, he called the problem with which he was faced in the song a “mountain” because the difficulty with life’s problem levels had gone from “hill” to “mountain.” Therefore, it would be foolish to think that Jesus was telling us that we could pluck up literal mountains and cast them into the sea if we have faith that God will grant that request.

The conclusion of v. 23 points out that we can get God’s attention if we ask with full belief that God will grant our prayerful requests. Barclay says that this section of scripture gives us three rules for prayer (underlined portions = *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark*, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1965; pp. 287-289):

1. *Prayer must be the prayer of faith.* In this case regarding the “removal of mountains,” prayer represents a *power* that can solve any problem and equip us to deal with any difficulty.

2. *Prayer must be the prayer of expectation.* Hope and confident expectation give us greater possibility of success with most of life’s problems. Prayer should not be a mere religious principle with a low level of hope. But ... we should be *spiritually* aware enough to recognize that *not* getting what we ask is as much a *positive* answer from God as getting all we ask for and more.

3. *Prayer must be the prayer of love.* Love for God and love for our fellowman are the two basic laws of the 10 Commandments (Matthew 22:34-40). If we come to God

with only *partial* love, we are at a definite, determined disadvantage as far as an answer to our prayers is concerned. We must approach God boldly with the love and faith He requires. Lacking that, you would do better to work on your mind and heart before you venture to ask God for anything ... except, perhaps, the *spirit of true repentance*.

Read John 14:13, 14 and pay attention to the context in which Jesus makes this statement. What must be your *faith condition* in order for your prayer requests to be answered by God the Father and Jesus Christ? You find that in vv. 1-12, 15-21. How much time have you spent to become familiar with God and His Christ? What do you believe about the relationship between God and His Christ? Then there is v. 15: What do you know about God's *commandments* and how do you organize your life relative to them? How eager are you to understand the role of the *Spirit of truth* in your beliefs and practices (see John 4:23, 24)?

All of this presupposes that you desire more than a *superficial* relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Does this mean that you can ask God to help you win the lottery and expect that He will do it any and every time you ask? No. It means that you will take your prayers to God and leave them there to be answered according to His will (read again Matt. 6:10 and the last part of v. 13).

Read Paul's comment in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 regarding a "thorn in the flesh" that he asked God *three times* to remove from him. It might seem that he got an odd answer from God about the matter: "[Christ] said to me. 'My grace is sufficient for you because my strength is made perfect in weakness.'"

Because of this response from the Lord, Paul later writes the Philippians a letter in which he admits that he does not complain about the things he lacks because he has learned to be content in whatever life-conditions he finds himself (Phil. 4:11). Why would he have such an attitude? Because he had learned through Jesus Christ that our citizenship in God's Kingdom is held secure for us in heaven (3:20). That does not mean that Paul taught that going to *heaven* is the reward of the saved. It means that all that we have in store for us as a result of God's grace, mercy, and love through Jesus

Christ is more secure there than it would be if it were kept in our present, evil world (Matt. 6:19-21; 2 Cor. 4:6-18).

David tells us in Psalm 66:18, 19 that God will not hear our prayers if our prayers are based on wickedness and/or injustice. In other words, if some wicked or unjust intent is behind your prayer, then God expects you to remedy that in your heart and mind and bring your heart and mind into unity with His. Isaiah 59:1, 2 tell us that there is nothing in all of creation that can withstand God's power to hear and act on our behalf; however, our sins and iniquities can ... and will ... cause Him to turn His face away from us and refuse to listen to our prayers.

Then there is James 1:5-8. Read this carefully. He tells us that our lack of wisdom and understanding should not prevent us from approaching God with our prayers. Many are reluctant to approach such a holy being when their own lives are so insignificant relative to His (read Isa. 55:8, 9). James tells us that God is willing to liberally grant our requests without severe scolding and censorship. However, he adds a cautionary explanation to head off any misinterpretation of his claim: "Ask in faith without wavering." Be convicted that what you are asking is right and good and loving. Do not show indecision or vacillation or doubt about your cause (see Heb. 4:15, 16). James is very direct in his conclusion: "The person who is like that should not think that s/he will receive anything from the Lord" (v. 7).

James does not stop there. Read James 4:1-3. Here, James goes to the bedrock (foundation) of the problem with many unanswered prayers. The life filled with spiritual turmoil needs a remedy. Personal lusts (excessive bodily appetites and desires) that feed the spiritual turmoil need to be conquered. Why? Because prayer that is driven by such desires and turmoil will ask amiss in an effort to use the things requested to feed the lusts, instead of conquering them. Amiss has to do with being the wrong way to approach something, going astray from the intents and purposes of true spiritual prayer, and being faulty and, thereby, failing to remedy the inherent problems.

Some might think that these are knit-picky "add-ons" that try to cover up for unanswered prayers. Far from that! They are sensible pieces of understanding about what growing in the grace and

knowledge of Jesus Christ is about. Spiritual “children” are like most “children”: They ask for things that they do not need ... or things that are unreasonable and/or harmful. Part of the training new Christians receive in the true faith is to learn decency and order and the difference between desire and need. We need to learn how to approach our spiritual “wrestling” matches so we can enjoy greater understanding of God’s thoughts and ways.

The Lesson Learned from Jacob

We are taught in Ephesians 3:20 that God is able to do far more than we ask Him to do ... or think that He can or will do ... because of the great power that resides in Him and works on our behalf. There is *no limit* to His power to bless us abundantly. Of this, we must be thoroughly convinced. Many a spiritual wrestling match has been had when God, for His own instructive purposes, has not *immediately* granted our requests or has not considered them important to what He is trying to do with our lives.

One of the great stories in scripture is found in Genesis 32:24-39. The man *Jacob* (see the story of Jacob and Esau’s birth in Genesis 25:19-34) was given a name that means “the supplanter; one who takes the place of another through force or plotting.” That initial story about Esau and Jacob gives us the foundation of the prophetic nature of Jacob’s *name*. What is the point of this discussion?

In Genesis 25:19-34, we see a strange thing happen that was predicated in that birth story (25:23). Jacob had tricked Esau into giving him the “birthright” blessing that was intended for Esau, the firstborn. Esau grew to regret ever having done such a thing (see Gen. 27). Because of Esau’s wrath against Jacob, Jacob was forced to flee. He went to his mother’s kinsmen and took wives. Over 14 years later, Jacob sought to be reconciled to his brother (32:1-22).

Alone at the Jabbok ford, Jacob was confronted with what is described as “a man” (v. 24; Heb. = *iysh*: in this case: a male personage) who wrestled with Jacob until the break of day. This “man” found out that he could not win the wrestling match, so he used some available power to dislocate Jacob’s hip to end the match because of some unexplained concern about the coming sunrise. He was neither a zombie or a vampire (tongue-in-cheek). He asked

Jacob to let him go, but Jacob refused to do so without receiving a blessing from him.

Here is where we learn a lesson about what is in a name: This male personage changed Jacob's name to *Israel* (Heb. = *Yisrael*: "He will rule as God") ... which could mean that Jacob was made a divine appointee for a special divine cause. Note v. 28: "...as a prince you have power with God and with men, and have prevailed (*KJV*).” Other translations say: “You have striven with God and men and have won/prevailed.” We know that he had striven with men like Esau and his father-in-law Laban. In v. 30, Jacob marks the place where he wrestled with the “male personage” with the name Peniel because he says that, at that place, he had seen God face-to-face and lived.

I believe that it could be argued that the Lord God was the “male personage” with whom Jacob wrestled. I also believe that it could be argued that v. 28 is the point at which the Lord God bestowed upon Jacob the power and authority to rule as “God” over the budding family that would become the Lord God's Church (see Ex. 4:16; 7:1). This was Jacob's conversion from being a supplanter and one who takes the place of another through force or plotting. Later (35:9-15), the Lord God appears to Jacob and confirms that he will no longer be called Jacob because the Lord God renamed him as being Israel (“He will rule as God”).

The objective in using this story is to demonstrate an interesting characteristic about God and His dealings with mankind. In this entire story about Jacob and Esau, there is the theme of rivalry, competition, and ill will. Jacob ... and all that his name implies ... is given more “ink” than is Esau. Why? Before their births, the Lord God had already determined to use Jacob in His plan to create a kingdom of people descended from Abraham (read Gen. 12:1-3; 15:13-21; 17:15-22; 21:1-5; 22:1-18; 25:1-6; 19-23; 26:1-5; 28:1-22).

In Romans 9:1-16, Paul uses this story to make a great point. Verse 9 is singularly (uniquely, extraordinarily, remarkably, peculiarly) important because Paul says this: “For this is the word of promise...” (emphases added). The core of the “promise” runs from Genesis 15 to Genesis 49 (see Paul's account in Gal. 3:1-18

and Heb. 6:13-20). At its core, it is *prophetic*. Remember the Lord God's claim about *prophecy* in Isaiah 55:11:

So shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth: *It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall accomplish the purpose for which I spoke it* (emphases added; compare to Matt. 5:17-19).

Now read Isaiah 40 through 66. To whom is this prophecy addressed? *Israel* ... the "seed" of Abraham and the man after whom they were named. Is there any reason to believe that this prophecy was spoken *in vain* by the Lord God? No. Why, then, should we think that His comments about *prayer* are not as fully supported as His *prophetic* utterances? Jacob did not ask for a specific blessing, but found that the Lord God had already decided on a blessing that was so great that it had never even entered Jacob's mind that it would be made available to him and his posterity. Whether or not you have yet become aware of it, through Jesus Christ you can be a fellow recipient of Jacob's blessing ... an *eternal* blessing that consists of more than just your salvation from the consequences of sin (see Rom. 6:23; 8:14-39; Gal. 3:26-29; Heb. 6:13-20).

Romans 8:26, 27 teaches us that we do not always know that for which we should pray ... or the manner of prayer we should use in approaching God to get it. We should remember that God's *grace* is sufficient for any need we might have. It is God's Holy Spirit that should guide our prayerful requests, not personal selfishness and carnal desires. Notice the end of v. 27: "...*according to the will of God*" (emphases added). If we remember that God's thoughts and ways are much higher than the best of mankind's thoughts and ways, then that conviction should foster in us the knowledge and confidence that God is going to answer our prayers with our best interests in mind. Read Psalm 103. What great spiritual insight does it give to you about God's concern for your welfare? Read James 4:13-15. What does it teach you that can be applied to prayer?

Gaining true spiritual insight is part and parcel to becoming familiar with God's word in scripture. Because of this vital spiritual education, you will learn not to be disappointed regarding what you

think are *unanswered* prayers ... because you will have become confident that God: (1) knows best what you truly need and (2) will provide it in due season.

Final Words of Wisdom and “Spirit”

Second Corinthians 12:8, 9 tells us that we do not always get what we ask for – even if it is not asked *amiss to consume it upon our lusts*. Would you expect “No” to be an *answer* to your prayers at times? Read 1 John 5:14, 15. What prayers may we confidently expect God to answer? John points out that all prayerful requests of God must be linked to *God’s* will. While your prayers are naturally very personal, they might not always be something that God *wills* to do for you (see Matt. 6:10). Verse 15 should be understood in the context of v. 14. The gist of this instruction is found in Jesus’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:39: “...not according to what I want, but according to what you want”; author’s paraphrase). Submission to *God’s will* is of primary importance.

John 11:41, 42 should also be considered in this instruction because it introduces an element of prayer that must be understood properly. Here, Jesus intentionally makes a remark for the listening public prior to His resurrection of Lazarus: “Father, I thank you for hearing my prayers ... I know that you have always heard me.” Has the Father always *answered* Jesus’ prayers? The Greek term for *hear* is *akouo*. While its basic definition is “to hear,” it also contains an important element of hearing: *understanding* ... which includes understanding the petitioner’s heart and mind.

Because of what Jesus Christ is in His heart and mind, the Father has always listened to and *understood* the bases for His prayers. Verse 42 implies that the answers that Jesus Christ receives from the Father are manifested as *proofs* that God had sent Him into the world to accomplish a most important step in establishing the Kingdom of God and effecting the salvation that we need to be a part of it. However, read Matthew 26:39. Did the Father grant Jesus’ prayer here?

John 16:23-27 introduces another aspect of prayer to which we should pay attention: praying *in the name of* Jesus Christ. What does that mean? With respect to God the Father and Jesus Christ, their

names mean something beyond the words that identify them as individuals. Their names identify their personal qualities of character, ethics, morals, power, love, compassion, mercy, grace, *et cetera*. Why are true believers referred to as being Christians? The concept involves a person who is intent on taking on the personal characteristics of God the Father through the intervention of Jesus Christ (see Eph. 1:3-14). This is one sense of the expression “in the name of” Jesus Christ.

In John 17:11, Jesus asks the Father to “...keep through your own name those whom you have given me....” This is far more than asking the Father to add them to the membership of an organization named “the Church of God.” It has to do with drawing them to His personal characteristics of holiness (Lev. 19:2) through Jesus Christ. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, true Christians actually derive a piece of the very nature and personality of the Father and the Son – their qualities and powers.

Therefore, if we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, then it has at least two connotations of great importance: (1) we are participants in the salvation process through Jesus Christ ... learning and spiritually growing in all that defines Him and the Father as holy beings, and (2) we also appeal to the intercession of Jesus Christ to communicate with the Father what our real physical and spiritual needs are. That is the sense of 1 John 2:1 when it refers to Jesus Christ as our Advocate (Greek = parakletos) who sits at the right hand of the Father. That word is the same Greek term used in John 14:15-18, 26; and 16:7-15. This word is rarely used to mean an attorney or lawyer. It is used far more often to mean “*one who appears in another’s behalf, mediator, intercessor, helper*” (BAG, p. 623).

It is no small matter to understand the importance of BAG’s continued commentary about this:

In 1 John 2:2 ... Christ is designated as *parakletos*: ...we have Jesus Christ the righteous one, who intercedes for us. The same title is implied for Christ by the *abbas parakletos* [intercessor with the Father] of J 14:16. It is only the Holy Spirit that is expressly called *par.* = *Helper* in the fourth gosp.: 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7.

Why is this important? Acts 5:32 is an important statement in this matter because God does not give the Spirit of Holiness to those who do not obey Him. John 14:15 and 1 John 1:6-10; 2:3-6 are very definitive in this matter: God knows the extent of your regard for Him based on your obedience to His thoughts and ways. Jesus Christ, our parakletos, sits at His right hand as an advocate and a witness of our spiritual growth and development ... and our spiritual intentions in asking God for His help and blessings in our spiritual growth and development.

Let's be sure of one thing here: you and I are not going to be *perfect* like Jesus Christ was as a human. Because of that, should we expect that God would *never* hear and answer our prayers? **NO!** But ... we must come in *faith* and have a willing heart to repent of our sins and be as obedient as we possibly can be. We must also come boldly before God's throne – not like a *whipped puppy* (Hebrews 4:16)!

God does not expect us to come to Him with a whining voice to make requests like unfortunate beggars. He expects that our faith will give us courage and confidence. He expects that the holy spirit in our hearts and minds will help us to approach Him as His children, instead of as “neighbors” who have no such kinship. As children, we have certain rights and privileges, as family members, to make requests of our most important parent. Why? Because we bear His name in spirit and truth (John 4:23, 24).

Obedience to God helps us to be bold in our approach to God. God understands what He is dealing with in the human being (read Psalm 103 to understand this comment); so, an obedient faith posture is very important to Him. Half-hearted, insincere effort is not good enough. As He reveals to us things that we need to change, we immediately must be willing to change them.

There are at least seven basic conditions to be met if you want your prayers answered. I will not discuss them in detail, but I will give the conditions and some scriptural references for them. Study this thoroughly so you can increase your understanding of this matter and improve your prayer life. Understand them in relationship to the discussion above:

1. Know God's Will: James 4:1-3; John 5:30; Ephesians 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 John 5:14, 15.

2. Believe God: Romans 4:20, 21; Galatians 5:22; James 1:5-7; 2:20.

3. Obey God: Romans 6:16; 1 John 2:4; 1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 3:4; Isaiah 59:1, 2; John 9:31; Daniel 10:12; Romans 11:7, 8; 1 John 3:22.

4. Have Proper Fear and Humility: Psalm 111:10; James 4:14; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 5:7; 1 Peter 5:5, 6; Luke 18:10-14.

5. Be Fervent: Hosea 7:13, 14; Luke 22:44; Psalm 4:1; Psalm 6:2; Joel 2:12, 13; James 5:16.

6. Be Persistent: Luke 18:1; James 1:3, 4.

7. Use Christ's Name: John 16:23, 24; Acts 5:32; Hebrews 4:14-16.

Suffice it to be said that one cannot be obedient to this instruction without faith in God's existence. When we immerse ourselves into this kind of faith posture, God *reveals* His fatherliness to us by providing our needs in the same way any loving, caring father would do – even more because God knows exactly what we need and in what proportions. And you should be open to the possibility that He knows that you need something other than that for which you ask (read Matthew 26:36-46).

God must be allowed to do *His will* in our lives over whatever time span He thinks best so that we can be thoroughly converted to worship Him in *spirit* and *truth* (John 4:23, 24). I say that because your prayer might not get answered for *several years*, and you should not get a sour attitude when the answer does not come according to *your* schedule. In this way, answered prayer is *proof* to the truly converted that God exists. Others will not understand that or really believe it (see 1 Corinthians 2:14).

The five proofs of God's existence given in this chapter should suffice in dealing with your belief that God exists. They should also demonstrate how He rewards those who diligently seek Him.

Review Questions

1. Would you pray to a non-existent Being? Would you expect that what you asked of that non-existent being would be given? What would be your reaction if your prayer was answered? Would you begin to believe in the existence of a non-existent being, or ... would you think that it was a stroke of luck?
2. What lesson about prayer is given in Matthew 6:5? Is your prayer to be for the entertainment of an audience? Would you conclude that there is a right and wrong way to pray? Should the wrong way expect an answer from God?
3. What does v. 6 teach us? Is prayer mostly a matter between you and God? How does God reward your private prayer?
4. Verse 7 – What does Jesus mean by the expression “vain repetitions”?
5. In v. 8 and Philippians 4:19, does God already know what you need? If that is so, why would He expect you to tell Him? By whom will He supply our needs? Shouldn't He just go ahead and give it to you without your having to ask (think of all the elements Jesus told us to include in our prayers before you answer the question)?
6. Now, read Matthew 5-7 to understand the context in which Jesus gave these instructions about prayer. What is the context? Are you expected to be obedient to these instructions? If you are not obedient, should you expect the Father to answer your prayers?
7. Would you agree that your prayers will be answered in proportion to your obedience? Why would that be true?
8. Pay special attention to chapter 7:7-12. What are the conditions for receiving things from God?

9. What two things might you conclude if you get no discernable answer to your prayers? Are these the only possible answers? Explain.
10. Read Matthew 21:22 and Mark 11:24-26. Is faith a requirement for answered prayer? What else?
11. Read the context of the statement that Jesus makes in John 14:13, 14. What must be your faith condition in order for prayer requests to be answered by God the Father and Jesus Christ? Does this mean that you can ask God to help you win the lottery and expect that He will do it every time you ask? Explain.
12. In Psalm 66:18, 19; Isaiah 59:1, 2; and James 1:5-8, what kinds of things cause God to not answer prayers?
13. What further answer does James give in James 4:1-3 to the above question? What does he mean by the expressions ask amiss and consume it upon your lusts?
14. In Ephesians 3:20, what does Paul tell us about there being limits to God's ability to help us?
15. Romans 8:26 – Do we always know what to pray for?
16. 2 Corinthians 12:8, 9 – Do we always get what we ask for – even if it is not asked amiss or to consume it upon our lusts? Would you expect “No” to be an answer to your prayer at times?
17. 1 John 5:14, 15 – What prayers may we confidently expect God to answer?
18. John 11:41, 42 – Has the Father always answered Jesus' prayers? Would you expect, therefore, that Jesus has always met all of God's requirements of obedience?
19. What does Hebrews 4:16 teach us about praying to God?
20. What does Psalm 103 teach us?
21. There are at least seven conditions to be met if you want your prayers answered. What are they?

22. Being honest with yourself, what have you learned about prayer proving the existence of God? Try to “boil it down” to a couple of well-expressed statements.

Chapter Seven

Two Kinds of Faith

We have seen that *true* faith is embodied in the existence of the true God and the body of revealed truth He has given us. We have already seen four essential elements of faith: belief, confidence, trust, and the evidence provided by God. But ... there is more that we should know about faith toward God.

Living Faith – vs – Dead Faith

James 2:14-26 is a synopsis of the *works* that are required by faith. Many overlook this aspect of faith because they have a one-sided belief in *grace* ... which posits that there is *nothing* you can do to earn, deserve, or repay God for the salvation He offers through Jesus Christ. While that is true, it is an *incomplete* understanding of Christian responsibility relative to the full meaning of grace and faith. For example: read Ephesians 2:8, 9. This is the scripture to which many refer to explain that they are not to attempt to please God by *works*. In this case, one must understand Paul's reference point regarding the term *works*.

There are numerous Pauline references to “works of the law” or “deeds that the law commands you” (Romans 3:20, 28; 4:2, 6; 9:12, 32; 11:6; Galatians 2:16; and 3:2, 5, 10). I can cite a reputable source that will explain the problem regarding “law” in Paul's writings and how you can understand his meaning:

Paul uses the term “Law-*nomos*” at least 110 times in his epistles, *but not uniformly*. The same term “Law” is used by Paul to refer to such things as the Mosaic Law (Gal. 4:21; Rom. 7:22, 25; 1 Cor. 9:9), the whole Old Testament (1 Cor. 14:21; Rom. 3:19, 21), the will of God written in the heart of Gentiles (Rom. 2:14-15), the governing principle of conduct (works of faith – Rom. 3:27), evil inclinations (Rom. 7:21), and the guidance of the Spirit (Rom. 8:2).

Paul’s view of the Law ... offers insights into why Paul views the Law both as “*abolished*” (Eph. 2:15) and “*established*” (Rom. 3:31, *unnecessary* (Rom. 3:28, and *necessary* (1 Cor. 7:19; Eph. 6:2, 3; 1 Tim. 1:8-10). (Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire*, Biblical Perspectives: Berrien Springs, MI, 1998; p. 186; underlined emphases added)

Bacchiocchi’s point is that the reader must understand the *context* in which Paul is discussing the Law. If you do not understand the *context*, then you are likely to misunderstand Paul’s true conclusion.

I understand that some use Ephesians 2:8, 9 to include the Jewish concept of that time that one’s salvation was linked with their “works” according to the Law. Was Paul’s point, in that isolated scripture to teach grace versus law/works? No. Paul is explaining in Ephesians 2:8, 9 that there are not enough *works* in the *human* realm that could *earn* what was accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins. If you have understood the previous six lessons, that should be self-explanatory.

However, what does Ephesians 2:10 say? Paul is following up on his revelation in Ephesians 1:3-14: God determined *before* the creation of the orderly universe to create for Himself “children” that will be brought into the *Elohim* family through Jesus Christ. Peter explains in 1 Peter 1:18-20 that Jesus Christ was ordained to be the sacrifice for sins *before* the creation of the orderly universe. *In both cases, we see **grace** being extended long **before** the creation of*

mankind! It was planned long before Adam and Eve sinned ... not immediately afterwards.

Ephesians 2:10 explains that we were created in Jesus Christ for the express purpose of certain good works. Not only that, but God purposed before the creation of the orderly universe the types of works that we should do in holiness, blamelessness, and love (Eph. 1:4). It is not a situation where the true believer receives salvation only on the basis of grace. How would grace apply if you neglect or refuse to do the works required of you by God? Paul discusses this in 1 Corinthians 13 ... concluding with comments about faith, hope, and love.

To understand the sense of this, we refer to the Greek term that applies here: ergon. Paul gives us the proper sense of this term in the expression erga nomos: “deeds that the law commands you to do.” Loving God supremely and your fellow man as yourself are the two main “works” of this kind that are discussed by Jesus Christ in Matthew 22:34-40 as being “required by the law.” Notice in v. 40 that Jesus Christ attaches these two “great” laws to “all the law and the prophets.” Indeed, the Old Testament is plentifully supplied with that kind of “works.” There is nothing that suggests that Jesus Christ anticipated the termination of the Law and Prophets relative to His impending crucifixion on the cross (see especially Matt. 5:17-19 and Luke 24:44).

Understand what James discusses in James 2:14-26. He gives the example of Christian charity toward the poor and destitute. He points out that the devils believe in God’s existence, but they are bereft of the holy spirit it takes to live righteously and produce the “fruits” of righteousness (see Matt. 7:15-23). He says that works without true faith is a dead faith. And ... he points out that faith and works combine to bring the true Christian to spiritual maturity.

He uses the following analogy to make his point clear: If the human body is not supported by the spirit (breath of life) given to it by the Lord God (Gen. 2:7), then it is a dead body (Eccl. 3:18-22). That is analogous to the individual who claims true faith but does not complete the works ordained of God to make that faith complete. It is a dead faith. God provides the spirit of holiness to His true people so that the “works” they do in Christ’s name will not be empty and useless (see John 14:15-26; 15:1-14; 16:7-15; Rom. 8:1-

9). Go back through James 2:14-26 and list examples of what James refers to as being *dead faith*.

Now look at Galatians 5:6. What does Paul mean by the expression *faith which works by love*? The Greek term from which this word is derived is *energeo*. Does this kind of faith move one to act upon God's revealed truth? Indeed! The *true faith* expresses *God's* love through the life and actions of the true believer. It is genuine, true *spiritual* concern for the welfare of others ... not the *spiritless* actions of someone who does things by a checklist of requirements. For example, if you use your "checklist" to get baptized so you can call yourself a "Christian," then you can have the "name" without having the "spirit." You might even be able to do "many wonderful works" in the name of Jesus Christ, yet not be fulfilling God's intended will. Read Matthew 7:16-29. The core emphasis is on vv. 21-23. Does this teach you that you can be an "empty" ***Christian*** (see also 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15)? Yes!

You can also understand the Greek term *energeo* as being the word from which we get the English term *energy*. That word, first and foremost, defines the force of expression, power, and capacity for action that is *inherent* (that is: it is a natural and inseparable quality) in *holy spirit*. As you grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, you acquire more of this *energy* in order to mute and negate the power of the carnal mind (Rom. 8:1-9; 2 Pet. 3:18).

Acts 2:37, 38 reveals a type of "works by faith" that must be done by those who want their sins to be forgiven so they can start a new life as a true believer in the mission and work of Jesus Christ. The question the people (mostly composed of the Israelite Jews and converts to their religion) asked after Peter's explanation of what they had just experienced is found in v. 37: "...What must we do?"

The logical reason for the question was the recent death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ following His horrid death on a Roman cross. The mention of Jesus Christ having been *appointed* by God to be both *Lord* and *Christ* (v. 16) was understood by these people because of their association with and/or membership in the Jewish religion. Whatever true knowledge and understanding they had of the Old Testament was clarified to a higher level of understanding with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

God, having made Peter's message understandable through that presence, opened the door for their question because it must have become more apparent to them that their religious experience had not been sufficient to deliver that which they sought through their traditional concept of the Messiah/Christ.

Read v. 37 carefully in order to more clearly understand this point: "...When they heard this [that is: that Jesus Christ was made Lord and Christ by God], they were pricked in their heart..." (emphases added). What does that mean? The Greek term for pricked is translated from the Greek term *katanussomai*. This is not the slight sting felt from an insignificant contact with a sharp object. It is the sharp pain felt when you are pierced or stabbed. In the emotional sense of the word, it is "the feeling of sharp pain connected with anxiety, remorse, etc." (*BAG*, p. 416). Another translation presented by *BAG* is this: "They were cut to the heart." This emotion was felt in the innermost part of their being.

What must Saul of Tarsus have experienced in his conversion in Acts 9? Make note that he was out to slaughter those who followed Jesus Christ (vv. 1, 2). On his way to Damascus to arrest more Jews who followed Jesus Christ, the glorified Christ confronted him and stood in his way. He asked Saul why he persecuted Him ... because that was what Saul was doing when he persecuted and executed Christ's people. That was the point at which Saul felt the stabbing, piercingly sharp pain connected with anxiety and fear.

When Jesus Christ saw Saul's reaction to this confrontation, He made a very poignant statement: "...It is hard for you to kick against the pricks" (v. 5; emphases added). Animals that pull wagonloads sometimes kick against the driver's goad (a sharp-pointed stick or similar "spur"). Generally speaking, they are in no position to resist because of the yoking and other restraints put upon them.

Jesus Christ was telling Saul that any resistance he wanted to put up against the charges levied against him would be futile. Read Psalm 34:18 with that in mind. When we are brought to true repentance, God wants us to realize the utter futility of our carnal condition so that we will wholeheartedly yield to His will and instructions.

How did Peter answer their question? What were these people supposed to do to be put upon the path of God's remedy? Peter was

prepared with an important list of “necessary works” of faith that have to be done. Our inability to complete them with plenitudinous (look up the definition) perfection requires God’s grace. We cannot earn by multitudinous “works” what lacks between God’s standards and our own (see Isa. 55:8-11). With that in mind, read carefully v. 38:

1. Repent of your sins (that is: feel deep regret for your sins and change your approach to the way you are living; see 1 John 3:4 and Rom. 6:23).
2. Request baptism (full immersion in water) for the remission (that is: forgiveness, pardon, release from the penalty of) previously committed sins.
3. Receive the Holy Spirit of God by the laying on of hands by God’s true ministry (see Eph. 1:13, 14).

The laying on of hands for receiving the Holy Spirit is required after baptism. Acts 8:15-17 shows the example of people who had been baptized, but who had not received the Holy Spirit because they did not have hands laid on them. Peter and John did the laying on of hands in order for them to receive the Holy Spirit. In Acts 10:44-48, God gave Cornelius and his household the gift of the Holy Spirit before baptism because this was a special circumstance in which God was showing Peter that God’s will was for Gentiles to be brought to salvation (read the entire account to get the idea presented here). The same was true in the conversion of the great enemy of God’s Church, Saul of Tarsus – who became the Apostle Paul.

Acts 19:1-6 shows that men who were baptized by John the Baptist had to be rebaptized in the name of Jesus Christ and immediately had hands laid on them for the receipt of the Holy Spirit. This demonstrates that some baptisms are not acceptable to God – and...they must be corrected in order for God to accept them.

“Baptisms” by pouring and sprinkling would, no doubt, be examples of such baptisms because they are not complete immersions. Baptisms in the name of a Trinitarian God also would

not be acceptable because “God” has not been revealed to be a single God who plays three different roles. Not all things done in the name of Jesus Christ are acceptable to God. That includes various types of baptisms. Those who believe and teach that all you have to do to be “saved” is to name the name of Jesus Christ on your lips are grossly mistaken ... mainly because they base that assumption on just one scripture. You already should have studied the fallacy involved in that during Lesson One of the Bible Study Course. You will study baptisms (plural; see Heb. 6:2) in more detail in Lesson Eight.

All of this is predicated on the most vital element: *your belief in and acceptance of Jesus as your Lord and Christ*. As Peter later points out, *He is the only name under heaven known among mankind whereby we can and must be saved* (Acts 4:12). You can find a fuller discussion of this subject in our free, downloadable book *A Statement of Beliefs* (pp. 69-79) and Lessons six, seven, eight, and nine of our free Bible Study Course. You can find them at our website: www.theseventhdaychristianassembly.org.

True Faith Demands Action

Some people believe that all you need for salvation is faith (Acts 16:30). You should download our free book *There's More to Salvation Than Meets the Eye* for a more complete treatment of this subject. Let me give you a sample of its discussion from the Postscript:

We come back full-circle to our original query: Is calling on the name of Jesus Christ all there is to being saved? No. You must express a certain kind of faith by living a certain way. You must have faith in specific things that God has revealed. You must change the way you think and live. You must continually examine your life and get rid of the ungodly things that would shipwreck your progress toward salvation. You must develop genuine certainty and hope in God's plan for humanity without doubting or shrinking away from it in disbelief. There are things to learn and things to do. A simple belief in Jesus Christ or a simple naming of His name upon your lips is not enough. There is

more to salvation than meets the eye. May the God of Truth bless you with “eyes that see and ears that hear” as you seek to understand His revealed truth (p. 97).

Read Acts 8:37, 38. Did the eunuch see the necessity of *doing something* as a sign of his faith? What? Now read Acts 9:1-22. Did Jesus reveal to Paul that he had to *do something* for God? Did Ananias also have something to do? Did he really want to do it? Why? Did both men ultimately *do* what was expected of them?

From these two examples, you should understand that *doing something* as a subsequence to your confessed faith is vitally necessary. Read Matthew 7:7-28. You should be impressed with Jesus Christ’s instruction that there are *actions* required of those who seek to develop true faith. Note especially vv. 14-20. God requires the production of spiritual “fruit” – things that indicate your spiritual growth and development in the true faith ... and the “fruits” that are produced by them. Immature “fruits” must come to full “ripeness.” You should also notice in vv. 21-23 that not everything done in the name of Jesus Christ is acceptable to Him and the Father (see also Matt. 15:1-9 and 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15). Read Romans 12:1, 2 with that in mind.

Read Acts 10 very carefully and highlight what you think are very important *actions* required of the Apostle Peter and others. Did you list v. 5? How about vv. 13-16? Let’s try vv. 19, 20. Does all of this required action eventually put Peter and Cornelius together in order to fulfill something that is required by God’s will? Now, compare vv. 13-17 with v. 28. Was Peter’s vision about *animals* or *men*? Read the account carefully before answering. What did God expect Peter to do? Did he do it? Can you explain how some can claim that this vision is about *doing away with God’s laws that forbid eating unclean animal flesh* (see Lev. 11 and Deut. 14:1-21)? Would Peter have done God’s true will if he had begun eating unclean animal flesh *instead of* taking God’s gospel to the Gentiles? You should be impressed that true faith requires that you *know* and *understand* God’s true will (John 4:23, 24).

Let’s try one more scriptural example that exemplifies how true faith demands action. Read the account found in Acts 16:16-34. You can see that a situation develops that puts Paul into a relationship

with a Philippian jailor and his family. What do you think is the point of the jailor's question in v. 30? Is he asking about being saved from death because of the prisoner question? Or, is he asking about spiritual salvation through Jesus Christ because he had understood Paul's example through prayer and song? Whatever your answer is, there is no denying that the question was a prompt to Paul to do something. He took advantage of the opportunity to teach the man and his family about salvation through Jesus Christ (vv. 31-34). Belief in the truth of God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ is something that you must do! Knowing Paul's zeal after his own conversion, there is no reason to doubt that he baptized the jailor and his family and laid hands on them for the receipt of the Holy Spirit (see Acts (15-18).

Are these situations that we have studied examples of living faith? What does that expression mean? Does the expression mean that we all have something to do ... some God-given "works" ... because we have been called into the "family" of God to share His vision and plan and will with others? Would you conclude, then, that living faith is the only avenue to God's saving grace – that it is essential to salvation? If not, then you have more spiritual growth and development to pursue if you truly desire to know and understand God's will.

How Do We Obtain True Faith?

In Romans 10:13-17, Paul tells us the ingredients for obtaining true faith. Verse 13 is often used to say that salvation comes simply by calling upon the name of Jesus Christ. Few realize that the expression calling upon the name of Jesus Christ carries with it the sense of making an appeal to be held in the custody of Jesus Christ because He is the only true Lord and Savior in existence. It is an appeal for Him to become your legal guardian for the purpose of saving you from the penalty of sin and the limitations of the "flesh." In effect, He is to be your teacher and guide toward the eternal salvation that He provides for you. In this relationship, you must surrender to His thoughts and ways and relinquish control over your life to Him. Why is this important?

God's True Church has historically taught that salvation is a *process*. It has historically taught that God does not deal in a vain hope for repentant mankind because in God's mind He will be faithful to keep His promises regarding salvation. This is where *faith* is paramount. However, God's word also reveals that mankind cannot be relied on to always keep his word. What is God's attitude in such situations? Let's consider a couple of scriptures that give us the answer to such a question.

The Jerusalem Bible translates Hebrews 11:1 like this: "Only faith can guarantee the blessings we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen." So, can you simply believe in God and/or Christ and be "saved"? Apparently not. You must *do something* that demonstrates that faith. How will God *know* your *faithfulness* by a single moment in time when you make a profession of faith?

Paul points out in 2 Timothy 4:3-10 that some who profess faith in Jesus Christ will actually turn away from the truth and believe fables instead. Why? Because *they cannot endure sound doctrine*. Demas was one such individual. Paul's admonition to the Philippians to *work out their salvation in fear and trembling* is not indicative of an action that takes place merely by a profession of faith at a single moment in time (2:12). Also consider those disciples of Christ who were confronted with some "hard sayings" by Jesus Christ and turned their backs on Him (John 6:59-66). Don't be too sure that *you* could not be similarly offended due to your *spiritual inability* to understand God's *gradually revealed* truth as you *grow* in the knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ!

Matthew 24 is a pivotal prophecy by Jesus Christ that describes the historical factors that lead up to the Great Tribulation and the subsequent return of Christ. He describes many things that will cause people of true faith to face considerable problems – even alluding to the fact that the last days will have to be cut short for the sake of the elect (v. 22).

Then He shares His concern that *the very elect* could be deceived by the false Christs and false prophets who come up in those tumultuous days. Why should that concern Him? He has already explained the answer in v. 13: "*He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved*" (emphases added). He is not saying this

just to comfort and encourage those who think they might die as a result of these things!

We are told in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 13:7 that the saints are going to suffer physical damage from Satan and the Beast power – even, according to Revelation 20:4, *martyrdom*. But ... what happens if they accept the mark of the Beast? Jesus opened up the possibility that such a thing could happen – and what God’s attitude would be toward such people if they did. It will most certainly be *a salvation issue* if they are not faithful until they are changed from flesh to spirit at the return of Jesus Christ. Once that change is made (which constitutes *true salvation*), it cannot be undone – that is the true meaning of the expression “once saved, always saved.” If that is true, then no one is presently *saved*. There’s more to it than simply calling upon the name of Jesus Christ! As the famous New York Yankees catcher, Yogi Berra, once said about the game of baseball: “It ain’t over ‘til it’s over.” That applies to so much more than games.

Hebrews 6:4-8 is more specific in its warning. Notice the description given in vv. 4, 5 about enlightenment, tasting of the heavenly gift, being partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasting the good word of God and the powers of the world to come. *Is it possible for them to fall away? Yes*. What warning is given to us about doing such a thing? Would it result in destruction by fire (v. 8)? Is it apparent in this warning that such a person would have: (a) repented, (b) been baptized, and (c) been given the Holy Spirit? That they had (d) acquired significant understanding of God’s word and plan for humanity? Even acquired (e) spiritual gifts like those described in 1 Corinthians 12? Do *you* understand that from this passage?

Most churches would claim that such an individual had never been “saved” in the first place! But that answer ignores the plain truth of God’s revelation. In a strange sort of way, they would be correct because, as a matter of fact, *none of us has yet been saved*.

Most of us, hopefully, will have been *converted* – that is, *spiritually regenerated*. That and *sanctification* are the only two steps of the process we can take while in the flesh. The step called *glorification* marks the point at which *salvation* actually takes place. That is what the Bible reveals to us. However, the most popular

teaching in mainstream Christianity would claim that glorification is merely the end-result of salvation – not salvation itself.

Read Hebrews 2:10 and note the expression “...bringing many sons to glory” (emphases added). What does that mean? Simply this: The word glory is translated from the Greek term doxa. That word generally expresses the brightness, splendor, and radiance of God. In many references to glory, gloriousness, glorification, and the like, it expresses the state-of-being in the next life in which the “saved” will participate in the brightness, splendor, and radiance of God Himself. That is the point made in 1 John 3:1-3 and Psalm 17:15.

This is where the clash of doctrinal positions must result in discussion. This is where we must go to God’s word and ferret out all of the truth God has revealed so that we can walk away from this study being able to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24), as well as being freed from the misunderstandings and wrong applications of God’s truth (John 8:31, 32). So, let’s find out why there is more to salvation than meets the eye. If, indeed, you want to believe and act upon God’s unmitigated truth.

Matthew 7:21-23 and 15:1-9 demonstrate three most important scriptural facts relative to this discussion:

- (1) Doing religious things that are not connected to God’s will and purpose will not be acknowledged by God as true faith.
- (2) You cannot formulate religious practices and traditions that you call “Christianity” and use them as though they are the commandments of God (see again 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15).
- (3) You do not prove God’s truth by leaving out salient points (easily seen and vitally important). If you cannot accept that simple scriptural fact, then you will not have really surrendered your life to Jesus Christ as your Savior, Guardian, and Spiritual Guide.

What three things does Romans 10:14-17 tell us about obtaining faith? Does it tell us that God’s revealed truth must exist and there must be preachers sent by God to correctly teach it? So, we can

conclude that faith comes by hearing and preaching? Does it also tell us that not everyone who hears the true gospel will obey the things that it reveals about God’s truth? Part of the reason for that is simple: They often settle for something similar and more convenient – another Jesus, another gospel, and another spirit (2 Cor. 11:4, 13-17; Matt. 7:21-23; 15:1-9; 24:4, 5) – because the truth of God is not always convenient for their lifestyles and carnal pursuits.

In Luke 17:5, the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith. If you practice your Bible study skills, you will read above and below to see if there are any “dots” that need to be connected to this request. Is it related to vv. 1-4 ... or, to vv. 6-19? Exactly what did the disciples expect Jesus to do in order to increase their faith?

It is at this point that you should remember one very important principle: *Faith is built upon experiences that you have with God and His word.* Your primary belief that He exists and is the one true rewarder of true faith (Heb. 11:6) motivates and propels what you learn from your experiences with Him and His Savior and Redeemer.

A lack of true faith indicates one of the following:

- (1) You believe that God does not exist;
- (2) You do not want what God offers if He does exist;
and/or
- (3) You believe that your personal concept of “God” offers you something better.

Read Mark 9:14-30. What do the disciples experience here? In v. 19, does Jesus express impatience with those who could not cast out a demonic spirit from a child? Why? Did He expect that they would have acquired enough true faith during their time with Him to have sufficiently dealt with a demon spirit? In v. 24, what request did the father of the child make of Jesus Christ? Does it appear that the father of the child realizes that he needs more of the faith required than he presently has? Now read vv. 25-29.

What does Jesus reveal to His disciples about their inability to cast out the demon? It should be apparent that they had not studied

the situation closely enough to discern with what they were dealing. This is indicative of a type of *inattention* to details that the disciples had to correct in their own minds and hearts. Jesus had expected that they would have shown the willingness to become more spiritually aware.

How many of your own spiritual failures can *you* correct with greater personal commitment to be more spiritually aware? Would an increase in faith be one of the things that we should ask God for? Yes ... with the understanding that *we* are to put in the “sweat equity” needed to acquire it with His assistance. Hint: *It does not come with being mystically and magically zapped with a magic twanger*. It requires of the believer *dedicated* participation.

In Acts 10:30-33, we are given a special situation for our spiritual consideration: Cornelius, a Gentile, had a spiritual concern that he considered serious enough that he *fasted and prayed* about it. This he did in *true faith* that God would respond. All of this was predicated on vv. 1-8. When Peter came to his home, Cornelius gave this account to him as *evidence* that something of a serious spiritual nature was in progress. In this case, an angel came to explain to Cornelius what was about to happen. Cornelius later explained to Peter what the angel told him to do.

The point of this is not to give you any kind of hope that fasting and prayer will merit sending you an angelic messenger to confirm that God has heard your prayers. The point of this is to explain how God used Cornelius to meet the Apostle Peter in order to show the Christian Jews that God had opened the door for the *Gentiles* to have opportunity to receive salvation through Jesus Christ.

This, in effect, set up the means by which Romans 11:16-29 can be fulfilled. It set up the situation by which Acts 10:28 could be revealed: “God has shown me that I should not call any *man* common or unclean” (emphases added; see also Gal. 3:6-9). Those who claim that God used that vision of the unclean animals (vv. 9-16) to show Peter that the laws about clean and unclean animal flesh ((see Lev. 11 and Deut. 14:1-21) were declared null and void *fail to understand the significance of Acts 10:28*.

This is an example of how you can miss the opportunity to obtain *true faith* (see John 4:23, 24). *Misinterpretation* of what God reveals to us in His word ultimately amounts to changing the truth of God

into a lie or exchanging the truth of God for the lie (Rom. 1:25). You can hold all of your misinterpretations near and dear to your heart and have what you believe is the perfect relationship with God through Jesus Christ, but you will not receive what you wrongly have faith in (Matt 7:21-23).

The Power of Prayer

Imitation is not always the act of mimicking something ... in the sense of ridiculing it. The primary definition says that it is the act of following the form, pattern, and/or example. With that definition in mind, one would be on good “ground” to understand the power of prayer by imitating those who pray for certain things in a particular way. What form (general structure) do they use? What pattern (model or plan) do they use? What example (pattern of behavior) do they exhibit in approaching God in prayer? Jesus Christ gave us all of these things in what is called “the model prayer” in Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 11:2-4). He did not intend for this model to be repetitiously recited word for word. Understand its pattern.

In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul admonishes us to follow the correct pattern of scripture (KJV = “rightly dividing”; MLV = “correctly interpreting”; RSV = “rightly handling”; Living = “know what His word says and means.”)

The Greek term from which dividing is translated is orthotomeo. Independent of the New Testament usage, it was used to describe a “straight direction” in cutting patterns for clothing and plowing fields. Travelers desired to “cut a path in a straight direction” instead of wandering needlessly through the countryside. Scripture has a pattern into which true believers are led to God’s spirit and truth (Isa. 28:9, 10; John 4:23, 24; 8:31, 32). Those who study God’s word are expected, therefore, to “guide the word of truth along a straight path” (BAG) as they follow that revealed pattern.

In that same vein of thought, the various topics that can be included in the model prayer were to be the form/structure/pattern of the topics of discussion in our prayers to the Father:

- (1) worship of the Father,

- (2) yielding to His will,
- (3) expectation of the establishment of His Kingdom upon the earth (see Dan. 2:31-45; 7:13-27; Zech. 14; Rev. 21),
- (4) requests for daily needs,
- (5) repentance and requests for forgiveness for sins,
- (6) requests for assistance regarding the temptations and trials you face ... especially requesting to be delivered from them; and
- (7) acknowledgement that God has the eternal power and authority to expect true faith and godly works from you.

Read the prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17 and note how He generally follows this pattern without reciting Matthew 6:9-15 verbatim. Now read John 11:1-46. Read again vv. 41, 42. Did He follow a similar pattern in such a short prayer? How could some of these people have acted against Jesus Christ for resurrecting Lazarus from the dead? Do you get a sense that all of the topics of the model prayer do not have to be included in every prayer you utter? However, the correct pattern of faith and hope should be there. It is not enough to simply recite the model prayer verbatim every time you pray to God. Why? That would be a vain repetition (Matt. 6:7).

Read Daniel 9:1-23 very carefully. This occurs during the first year of King Darius's rule over the Medo-Persians. Babylon had been overthrown by them (read Daniel 5). What does v. 3 tell you about Daniel's attitude about the subject he was studying? He uses the term supplications there. What does he mean by that term? It has to do with a quality of humility and reverence that he shows before God. You can tell by his use of "fasting, and sackcloth (wearing a very coarse, rough fabric woven from flax, jute, or hemp ... like burlap), and ashes."

Notice how, in vv. 4-19, he begins by highly praising God and His faithfulness to keep covenant with His people (v. 4). In v. 5, he continues his prayer by admitting and confessing the corporate sins

of Israel ... and confessing that God had warned Israel that He would pour out righteous punishment for such sins, and it would result in the very things they had suffered relative to Jeremiah's prophecy. In fact, this occasion was predicated on Daniel's studies "...by books the number of years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (v. 2). Daniel was trying to figure out when the 70 years would be completed.

What does Daniel do in vv. 16-19? He makes his plea to God to bring to an end the situation by which the Israelite Jews were suffering through that 70-year period. What does Daniel mean in v. 18 when he says: "...We do not present our supplications before you for our righteousnesses, but for your great mercies" (emphases added)? By the time of Daniel had arrived on the world scene, the Lord God had had an abundance of experience with Israel's self-righteousnesses.

As a matter of fact, Isaiah 64:6, which is framed as part of a prayerful request from Israel (see Isa. 63:1-64:12), is a plain and simple assessment of their so-called "righteousnesses: "...We are all of us an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...." Daniel had prayed with respect and reverence.

So, we can reasonably conclude that Daniel was telling the Lord God that the Israelite Jews had no "bargaining chip" with the Lord God. Daniel was saying that they were totally dependent on the Lord God's mercy and grace. That realization is a key part to a holy and righteous relationship with God. Make note that Daniel's prayer had been initiated by his concern over the time remainder of the 70 years Judah was to be in Babylon.

Did the Lord God give Daniel what he requested? Yes, He did that in vv. 20-27 – which was framed in the form of another prophecy: the "70 Weeks" prophecy. Read v. 21. Again, I cannot tell you that God will send an angelic messenger to you with God's answer to your prayers. More than likely, regardless of the circumstances, it is very unlikely that you will ever have an angel appear before you with the answer to your prayers.

Now read Daniel 10:12, which occurs in the third year of the Persian king Cyrus – What two things did the angel credit Daniel with? He had: (1) set his mind to understand God's thoughts, plans,

and will and (2) chastened himself before God. So, would prayer indicate that we should set our hearts and minds to understand God's will and to discipline ourselves to come into God's presence to request it? Would that help us to come *boldly* before God?

Now read James 5:16b-18. What kind of prayer avails much? What does James mean by the expression *effectual, fervent prayer*? Does the expression of *a righteous man* suggest that such a prayer comes from a person of *deep, abiding faith*? Can one achieve that level of faith without proper discipline and desire? James, the brother of Jesus Christ, lays out an effective pattern of prayer. Nowhere in this discussion does he mention the physical posture in which one must pray. Rather, he provides the special ingredients needed to make one's prayers *effectual* (producing, or able to produce, the desired effects) and *fervent* (showing great warmth of feeling; intensely devoted and earnest).

How Does One Acquire True Faith?

Remember our discussions about God's truth and following the correct pattern of His word. God's truth is contained in His word. Note Jesus Christ's prayer to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane just before His crucifixion (John 17). Verses 1-5 are admissions made by Jesus Christ about His relationship with His divine partner before He came in the flesh as baby Jesus (note especially v. 5). In v. 4, He admits that He was in the process of completing the sacrificial stage of their plan of salvation and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14, 15).

In vv. 6-16, He asks the Father to "... keep those whom you have given me through your own name that they may be in spiritual unity like we are..." (author's paraphrase; emphases added). In v. 17, He asks the Father to sanctify His disciples through His truth ... after which He states that God's word is truth. Let's unpack the meaning of these two requests ... because it has something specific to do with acquiring true faith. We must understand His references to keeping them God's name, sanctification, and truth.

Briefly stated, sanctification has to do with being set aside for holy purposes and to make free from sin. This is related to keeping them in spiritual unity through God's name. The idea behind God's

name is important because it is much more than that which identifies His person. The Greek term is *onoma* ... which has to do with the very nature of the personality whom it identifies (His values, ethics, morals, character, et cetera). All who maintain the same values, ethics, morals and character will be in spiritual unity (see Eph. 4:1-16).

What does Jesus mean when He asks the Father to keep them through the Father's name (v. 11) and from evil (v. 15)? The Greek term for keep is *tereo*. With regard to keeping the disciples in the Father's name, Jesus is asking the Father to preserve (to help to maintain their godly character, sanctification, and spiritual unity) their holy purpose during their lifetimes in His mission to bring God's Kingdom and the attending salvation to mankind (v. 11). In v. 15, He is asking the Father to protect them from harm and danger.

If you consider this prayer in the contexts of John 14,15, and 16, where Jesus has told His disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit, then you can get a more complete picture about how we are to acquire true faith. If Jesus asks that they be sanctified through God's truth ... and then stipulates that God's word is the truth involved in that sanctification ... then you should understand the role that scripture plays in enabling us to focus on God's values, ethics, morals, character, et cetera (see Heb. 4:12).

Because we have earlier debunked the concept of a trinitarian "God" (BSC 2), you should understand that Holy Spirit is not a personage (a male or female). Therefore, in the following discussion, you should understand that it should be referred to as being "it" rather than "he" or "she." Why?

In many languages, pronouns are not like the English equivalent that assigns "gender" (masculine, feminine, neuter) to pronoun forms of nouns (male = he, him, his; female = she, her, hers; neuter = it, its). In German, for example, a chair is *masculine*, a wall is *feminine*, and a young maiden is *neuter*. We know that chair and wall are *neuter* in English ... and maiden is *feminine*. What is the point here? Since the Holy Spirit is not a "personage," it is neuter and should not be rendered as being *masculine* or *feminine* in its English pronoun form.

What follows is the explanation given in our *Statement of Beliefs* on our website www.theseventhdaychristianassembly.org. The

Holy Spirit is not a third personage in the Godhead. The Hebrew word for spirit (*ruach*) originally meant “wind,” “breath,” and “spirit.” The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament defines it like this:

The *ruach yahweh* is a term for the historical creative action of the one God which, though it defies logical analysis, is always God’s action (VI, p. 367; emphases added).

George Eldon Ladd writes:

The *ruach Yahweh* in the Old Testament is not a separate, distinct entity; it is God’s power – the personal activity in God’s will achieving a moral and religious object. God’s ruach is the source of all that is alive, of all physical life (A Theology of the New Testament, p. 287; emphases added).

S. MacLean Gilmour writes in *The Interpreter’s Bible* concerning the Holy Spirit that filled Jesus Christ:

In the O.T. the Spirit is a sporadic and temporary influx of divine energy that enabled certain individuals to see visions, prophesy, or perform remarkable feats of strength (vol. 8, p. 83; emphasis added).

The Greek equivalent, *pneuma*, connotes an “intangible substance” that possesses great power to create or destroy. It is always associated with power or force. It, like *ruach*, means breath, blowing, wind, air, and spirit as part of one’s personality, spiritual state, state of mind, and disposition. In some limited applications, it can be used to distinguish spirits as independent beings – but that does not apply to God’s Holy Spirit.

Genesis 1:2 speaks of that Spirit in the creation process. As God spoke, that power moved to accomplish what they commanded. This is the thought in Zechariah 4:6 where Yahweh Sabaoth declares that certain things will not be accomplished by man’s might or power, but by His Spirit. You must remember that neither the Old nor New

Testament contains any concept at all of a *Trinity*. It is widely recognized that 1 John 5:7 is a spurious addition to the original letter. So, carefully consider the role of the pervasive (widely spreading) *power* of God's Holy Spirit in His plan for mankind.

Once the individual is properly repentant of his/her sins, baptized by full immersion (Greek = *baptizo*: fully immersed; drenched, overwhelmed), and has hands laid upon him/her for the receipt of the Holy Spirit, his/her *mind* begins to be *permeated* (see Acts 1:5, 7) with that Spirit by the Father as *part* of a spiritual "begetting" – that is, a *new mindset*. This *partial* gift of the Holy Spirit – called an *earnest* – is given by the Father as His assurance and promise that He will resurrect the true believer from the dead to eternal life at the return of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:13,14).

If the individual does not have the *imbuement* (growing permeation of godly character, values, morals, and emotions) of the Holy Spirit, then s/he is *not* the begotten child of God (Rom. 8:9). This *power* of God makes it possible for each "begotten" child of God to be a partaker of His *divine nature* and enables him/her to develop the thoughts and ways of God so they can be sanctified in His word of truth.

As the true believer seeks to serve God and to be completely obedient to His expectations of holiness, blamelessness, and love, the Holy Spirit will lead him/her into all of the *truth* that is contained in God's holy, inspired scriptures – the *truth* that is vitally essential for salvation (Eph. 1:4). It will also enable him/her to develop the *fruit* of the Holy Spirit discussed in Galatians 5:22-26: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.

It is possible to *lose* the gift of the Holy Spirit. The individual can quench it, grieve it, suppress it, and cast it aside – or, by *growing* in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, can cause it to increase. Its leadership into God's truth can be neglected, disdained, and ignored. The individual – even after repentance and baptism – can blaspheme the Holy Spirit and incur a very serious penalty. The believer can also abandon the true faith and not be able to return – thus, unable to receive the Holy Spirit again (Heb. 6:4-8). This is the point of Paul's comment in Hebrews 10:31: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Read very carefully John 14:26. How will God enable you to *remember* the truths you should know? Next, read John 15:26, 27. Will this Spirit of Truth help to *increase* your *faith* to the point that you can explain God's truth to others? Now read John 16:13. What leads you to *know* and *understand* God's truth? Should you ask God for more of it? Is the objective of the *injection* of this Spirit of Truth into your mind and heart to *lead* you to true faith and, once there, to *increase* your faith in God and His plan? All of that is descriptive of the *power* of God to renew your mind so you can more properly understand what His will and purpose is (Rom. 12:1, 2).

First Timothy 4:12, 13 is Paul's admonition about the true believer's example to others in the world. As your faith grows stronger, what should happen? How valuable is *your* faith to others? List some ways in which it is valuable. Also, note the importance Paul stresses in v. 13 about *reading*, *exhortation*, and *doctrine*. Of course, Paul is directing the person of true faith to be well-informed in God's word, listening to sound spiritual advice, and knowing the validity of the true doctrines of God that are taught in His word.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:3, 4, 13-15 and Matthew 7:21-23. These two scriptures make two things very plain: (1) not everyone who preaches "Jesus" will be telling you *God's* truth, and (2) not everything taught and done in Christ's name is accepted by God as being His will. The power of God's Spirit working in your mind and heart makes it easier and easier to know His truth and avoid the mental and spiritual mistakes that can lead you astray (John 8:31, 32).

You should be able to see from the above discussion five ways by which we can obtain true faith. They are:

- (a) by listening to God's true ministers – because they know God's truth;
- (b) by studying God's word (see John 17:17 and 2 Timothy 2:15);
- (c) by asking God, through prayer, to increase your faith;

(d) by yielding to God's gift of His holy spirit of truth (reread 1 Corinthians 2:5-16); and

(e) by following the examples of those who are faithful.

What True Faith Does For You

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German minister martyred by the Hitler regime during World War II, made some comments about faith that are worthy of our attention. He said that responding to the call of Jesus Christ is an act of *obedience* ... the necessary **first** step toward faith:

Faith is only real where there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience. In exactly the same way in which obedience is called the consequence of faith, it must also be called the presupposition of faith (*The Cost of Discipleship*, Simon & Schuster: New York; 1995; p. 64; emphases added).

So, faith requires ahead of time that you will be obedient to God's revealed truth. Your actual obedience is the proof of your faith. What does that statement mean to you? Read John 3:16-20. Does your faith in Jesus Christ assure you of salvation? So, you can have faith in the idea that God sacrificed His only begotten Son for your personal, eternal benefit?

What does Acts 16:31 teach you? Do you already understand that this verse is not all that is involved in securing your salvation? List some other things that also must accompany true faith in Jesus Christ. You can have a more complete understanding of this claim by downloading our free book *There's More to Salvation than Meets the Eye* (www.theseventhdaychristianassembly.org). Below is the Table of Contents:

Introduction: "What Must I do to be Saved?"

1. What is Conversion?
2. Becoming Perfect
3. Calling and Election

4. Drawn by God
 5. Salvation Through Faith
 6. Faith: Guarantee and Proof
 7. How Faith Proves the Existence of Things Yet Unseen
 8. How Do We Get There from Here?
 9. A Brief Overview of God's Plan of Salvation
 10. The Restitution of All Things
- Postscript

John 1:12 explains that our confession of faith in Jesus Christ enables us to receive a great benefit: the privilege and authority to become the *children of God*. This is information that you can harmonize with scriptures like Genesis 1:26-28; John 3:1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; Ephesians 1:4-14; Hebrews 2; and I John 3:1-3. Your faith in Jesus Christ amounts to your realization of a plan that the Father and the Son put together before the creation of the orderly universe (Eph. 1:4) to move us out of the *human realm* into the family of God (Col. 1:9-15).

Now read Romans 8:15-17. What do you read there about being a *child of God* through Jesus Christ? What does Paul mean when he says that we become *joint heirs* with Jesus Christ? Let me give you a little hint: Read Psalms 8 and 24.

Psalm 8:6 is an echo of Genesis 1:26-28, which speaks of giving mankind *rulership* over a certain amount of territory in God's *creation* – v. 6: the works of God's hands (refer back to v. 3). Genesis 1:26-28 speaks specifically of the *earth*. Psalm 8:6 expands that concept when it speaks of "all things" – which is defined in vv. 7, 8 in terms of the *earth* (read Zech. 14:9, Rev. 5:10, and Rev. 11:15). Compare that to Daniel 7:13, 14. All of that and more is the true Christian's *eternal inheritance* – not going to *heaven*.

An expanded interpretation can be found in John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:13-16, Romans 8:14-17, and Isaiah 9:6, 7. John 1:1-3 explains that the Word, who became Jesus Christ (v. 14), was the one who created all that exists. Colossians 1:13-16 explains that it was created by Him and for Him – in other words, it became His *inheritance*. Romans 8:14-17 explains that true Christians become joint heirs with Jesus Christ over all that is His ... with the expectation that we will have our own form of sacrificial suffering

with Him. Paul further points out in vv. 18-23 that our present suffering is nothing compared to the glory we will share with the Father and His Christ when we have been openly manifested as the true sons of God by having been changed into our glorious spirit bodies at the return of Jesus Christ.

So, what is so special about Isaiah 9:6, 7? Isaiah's prophecy explains that Jesus Christ's Kingdom will be an *ever-expanding* government over *all things* ("...the *increase* of His Kingdom and peace will have *no end*..."; emphases added). In effect, it is not difficult to posit that we will *ultimately* move out into the vast regions of space to occupy all that exists! *That is why there is more to salvation than meets the eye!*

Now read Galatians 3:26-29. – What *benefit* do we realize from our true faith? Do you understand that it means that *your* true faith *assures* you of a place in *the family of God*? All that the Father gave to Jesus Christ as the Chief Executive Officer of their plan to create man in the image of God (Col. 1:19) will be shared with true Christians in the eternity ahead. We will become co-owners of *all* that they own.

Finally, we must understand what God does about the sins we commit before and after our spiritual conversion. It is important to understand this because you will not be sin-free after you begin to learn God's thoughts and ways. Conversion is a *process* ... an *ongoing education* in God's thoughts and ways. Carefully consider what Paul teaches about this in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:12-6:8. The main idea involved has to do with *stages* of spiritual growth and understanding – what Peter refers to as “growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ” (2 Pet.3:18; also read Heb. 12). Your “walk” in true faith is a *process* of *justification*. What does that mean?

Read Acts 13:38, 39. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, all of mankind has access to the *forgiveness of sins*. By the same sacrifice, you are given access to what Paul refers to as *justification*. The theological definition of that term is simple: to free from *blame* or *guilt*. In other words, your condemnation is *voided* and your shame and disgrace are *removed*. God's judgment against sin is death (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23 – God's Law makes that declaration), but the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in your place satisfies God's demand

for your death (read Heb. 10). When you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are laying claim to the sacrifice He made on your behalf to satisfy God's demand that no sin should exist in His creation (see Eph. 1:4 re: holy, blameless, and loving).

What do Acts 13:39 and Romans 3:28-31 tell you about this? Look up the definition of the terms *justify* and *justification*. Pay attention to the definition that says that one is "regarded as being free from guilt or blame." Knowing that you are a sinner and worthy of eternal death (Romans 3:23; 6:23), what does this mean to you? Can obedience of the law *without* faith in Christ *justify* you? Does faith *establish* (make valid; set upon a firm foundation) the law? Does *justification* allow us to continue to willfully sin (see Romans 6:1-2 and Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26, 27)?

You should be able to understand that God's *Law* is not the problem when it is accompanied by faith in Jesus Christ (see Matt. 5:17-19; 22:35-40; John 14:15; Rom. 7:12-14; 13:8-10; and 1 John 2:1-5; 3:4-11). Without the intervention of Jesus Christ, God's Law says that your sins will be punished by death. First John 3:6 takes into consideration that you will not be thoroughly free from sinning even after you have accepted Christ as your Savior. You are a work in progress ... so, you will be striving *not* to live habitually in sin (1 John 1:1, 2). In that verse, the term *abides* (KJV) means: "Whoever does not *live habitually* in sin."

Faith in God's revealed truth and His Christ makes it possible for God to *treat* us as though we have never, ever sinned – even though we and God know that we have (2 Cor. 5:17). It is our *repentance* – the *attitude* we take to *willingly surrender* our lives to God through Jesus Christ and to be led *out of sin* – that causes God to take this attitude. *Mere obedience to God's law is not enough.*

The law merely *defines* for us what God considers to be sin (Romans 3:20). Understanding what sin is and the penalty one incurs for sinning should lead us to *Christ* (Galatians 3:17-25). Once we understand what sin is and accept Christ as our sacrifice, the spirit of God begins to put God's law into our *hearts* (Rom. 8:1-4), and we begin to be obedient to it *in spirit* – that is, we no longer need to be tutored by an *external* force after it is *established* in our *hearts* and *minds*.

Think about this carefully: Do you need a teacher to continue to teach you the rules of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division? Why? Because you have learned the laws governing such things. When you understand the answer to that, then you will understand why God's law has not been done away with and how it continues to serve us after faith has come (see Matthew 5:17-19 and Hebrews 10:11-31)!

Now read Romans 5:1 and 1 Peter 1:8, 9. What two things are the result of our being justified by faith? How important are joy and peace to your life (1 Pet. 1:9)? All that goes into your relationship with God through Jesus Christ will bring about the supreme goal toward which you are headed: the great potential that God planned for all of His true children before the creation of the orderly universe (Eph. 1:3-14; 1 John 3:1-3). That knowledge and understanding should bring both joy and peace to your life (read Heb. 6:13-20).

Does James 5:13-20 imply that your faith makes a difference in your *health*? Does it help you to understand why Jesus Christ is called our *Great Physician* – our *Healing God*?

How about Ephesians 6:10-16? How important to you is God's protection against the forces of evil? Why do you think Paul refers to it as a shield of faith? And ... consider very seriously all of the spiritual armor that is available to you: truth, righteousness, gospel of peace, faith, salvation, Holy Spirit, prayer, and knowledge of God's mysteries. Of great importance is what Paul tells Timothy: "God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. You should be impressed that God is providing the true child of faith great weapons with which to enter the fray against sin and the evil it produces. Despite what we might have to otherwise suffer as we are being trained to be God's legitimate children (Heb. 12), He is providing us with numerous spiritual weapons to finish the fight of faith (Luke 14:25-35; John 4:34; 5:36; Acts 20:17-24). How about you? *Are you ready to join the fray (the noisy brawl)*? It does not lack excitement!

Unrealistic Expectations

In Matthew 17:20 and Mark 9:23, Jesus makes an astounding statement that at face value seems to invite the unrealistic into the

“true faith” model. He posits that a very small amount of faith, true and undefiled, can make *nothing* impossible to achieve. So, this is instruction about *power* and *possibilities*. It is about the *expectations* that true believers hold regarding their beliefs in the power of God.

At the beginning of His statement, He says that the disciples were unable to deal with demonic spirits because of their *unbelief*. That is the basis for His instruction regarding the *power* of a very small amount of *true faith/belief*. Peter momentarily experienced the power of that kind of faith when he stepped out of his boat in the midst of a storm and walked on water toward Jesus (Matt. 14:22-33). Under normal circumstances, such a thing would have been unrealistic ... not to mention *very dangerous*. How does one come to understand the difference between such a feat and a decision that tempts God (Matt. 4:5-7; Deut. 6:14-19)?

Many become frustrated by unrealistic expectations of faith. In making this comment to His disciples, did Christ open up the possibility for people to cause huge disturbances in our landscape by simply saying to a mountain, in true faith, “Rip yourself up and be deposited in the ocean”? If you take those words *literally* and begin to have *unrealistic expectations* of your faith, then you set yourself up for great disappointment and frustration.

Here’s how you understand Jesus’ comments about *power* and *possibilities*. The comment about removing mountains is Jesus’ use of a literary device called *hyperbole* – the use of extravagant exaggeration to make a point. Barclay, in his *Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew*, says this:

When Jesus spoke about *removing mountains*, He was using a phrase which the Jews knew well. A great teacher, who could really expound and interpret scripture, and who could explain and resolve difficulties, was regularly known as an *uprooter* or, even a *pulverizer*, of mountains. To tear up, to uproot, and to pulverize mountains were all regular phrases for *removing difficulties*. Jesus never meant this to be taken physically and literally” (vol. 2; St. Andrews Press: Edinburgh; 1963; p. 184; emphases added).

So, although Jesus used this well-known device to make His

point about the *power* and *possibilities* of faith, He by no means intended to teach us to be *unrealistic* in our expectations. Remember: If God can say “No” to your prayers, then He can also refuse to use His power to help you achieve something that is totally unrealistic.

Jesus meant to teach us that enough of the *proper faith* can enable us to solve our greatest of difficulties and accomplish the hardest of tasks. Barclay concludes:

Faith in God is the *instrument* which enables men to remove the hills [mountains] of *difficulty* which block their path” (p. 185; emphases added).

Now for the really important question: How *realistic* would it be for a true Christian who is 4' 3" tall and weighs 103 pounds to *believe that she* could become a starting quarterback on an American professional football team? *God does not do magic tricks, so do not expect that of Him!*

In 1 John 5:1-6 (see also John 3:3-8), what kind of faith makes possible so many things for the person of true faith? What does John mean by the expression *overcomes the world*? What does he mean about being *born of God*? John uses three forms of that expression in v. 1 alone.

The answer is really very simple at its base: the person who has been *born of God* is the one who has repented of his/her sins, accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, been baptized, and received the gift of Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands by a true minister of God. At that point, a process of *spiritual regeneration* (spiritual renewal and restoration) begins (see Rom. 12:1, 2). But ... how does that relate to *overcoming the world*? *Overcome*, in this sense, means to prevail over the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-10). It means to put to “death” your carnal desires and mindset (Rom. 8:5-14).

The Greek term for “world” is *kosmos*. It is defined as follows:

The world, and everything that belongs to it, appears as that which is at enmity with [hostile toward; in opposition to] God, i.e., lost in sin, and wholly at odds w. anything divine,

ruined and depraved. (BDB, p.447).

Paul identifies the “god” of this “world” in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6. You can see in Genesis 3:1-7 the point at which he staged a *coup d'état* over God’s first representatives. That is the kind of “world” you are given power to overcome through Jesus Christ and the gift of Holy Spirit.

Read Galatians 5:13-21. Notice how plainly Paul describes the “world” and its attitudes and practices. Now read vv. 22-26. Can you understand the difference between the two “worlds” that exist? The choices you will have to make in order for your mind to be spiritually transformed, renewed, and restored to what God originally had in mind (see Eph. 1:4)? This is achieved, choice by choice, as you choose to be holy, blameless, and loving.

Now read Romans 8:24, 25 and 2 Corinthians 5:7 with the following question in mind: Are faith and hope the same thing? Re-read Hebrews 11:1 before answering that question. Also read 1 Corinthians 13:13. What is the difference between them? Faith is the unquestioning belief that what God has promised He will deliver (see Heb. 6:13-20). Hope is a feeling or desire that is accompanied by expectation. What should be our attitude as we wait in faith for our hopes to be realized?

You should not be naïve about this “walk of faith.” *It does not immunize (exempt) you from various carnal tendencies or temptations to compromise it or abandon it.* As a matter of fact, Hebrews 6:4-8 declares that it is possible for someone to lose his/her hope of salvation through “falling away” from the true faith (see also Heb. 10:26, 27, 31). Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 10:13 is that God has provided the means by which you can overcome all temptations if you will allow your true faith to guide you in overcoming whatever obstacles you encounter. Nowhere does God’s word of truth promise you an easy, peasy, breezy journey for bringing your faith and hope to fruition.

As a matter of scriptural fact, James 1:2-8 informs us that we can and will fall into various temptations – no doubt manufactured by Satan and his minions (see 1 Pet. 5:6-11). But ... what does James say in vv. 3, 4 about being patient and steadfast (firmly fixed) in your faith? What action plan should you implement when you fall

into temptations great or small (vv. 5, 6)? What should you expect from God if you waver or become double-minded about your faith (vv. 7, 8)? Even in this short section of scripture, God has laid out important clues to how one fights the good fight of faith and overcomes the world.

At the beginning of Luke's epistle (Luke 1:1-4), he states that what he is writing is based on eyewitness accounts from faithful Christians and God's true ministers. His stated purpose for writing his epistle is: "So that you might know the certainty of those things, wherein you have been instructed" (emphases added). In those few verses, you can understand that eyewitness accounts give serious weight to Luke's claims.

In 1 Corinthians 15:58, Paul encourages us to be steadfast and unmovable in our faith and to work diligently in the Lord's business. He assures us that our work will not be in vain. In 1 Corinthians 16:13, he encourages us to pay attention to what is going on in our spiritual growth and development ... to be strong in the true faith. His expression "quit you like men" (*KJV*) means this: Be courageous and brave in the face of physical and spiritual adversity. Without reducing your effort or drawing back in fear and despair, bravely and with determination stand up against the adversarial forces.

Jude, the Lord's brother, introduces his short epistle with the exhortation to "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints." Then he gives a series of examples of situations in which it was necessary for the true faith that God has revealed to His true saints to be guarded and protected. You cannot be casual and nonchalant about it.

You should get the idea from Luke, Paul, and Jude that you do not produce the "fruits" of true faith by being spiritually timid, lackadaisical, and easy going. In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul describes it as spiritual warfare in which we must be appropriately spiritually dressed in order to enter the fray as Christian soldiers. We must be alert, vigilant, strong, brave, and willing to die for God's cause. Giving your life in sacrifice for His noble, eternal cause is a very appropriate imitation of our Lord's sacrifice. Our unwavering faith should be a growing, expanding faith that takes us from being suckling babes in Christ to being spiritually mature in His thoughts

and ways. Remember this: the name “Christian” means that we have become “little Christs.” We are being formed in His image.

Building a lasting, growing faith in God and His plans for mankind is our primary task. We cannot be the proverbial “shrinking violets” that come out so fresh and beautiful in the cool of the day ... but wither and fade when the sun’s heat beats down on them.

Conclusion

This has been a good overview of *faith toward God*. Do you now understand that *faith* is not only belief in the existence of God, but also in his Christ and the body of *true doctrines* They have revealed to us? If so, then you are making great progress.

Let me give you some final thoughts about this subject. In order for our faith to grow, it must be constantly *exercised*. The faith that you express by accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is not the end of God’s expectations of you. Sadly, though, some people think that is all there is to the salvation process: a one-time expression of faith in Jesus Christ. They fail to understand that faith is *a way of life* – an everyday, simple, child-like trust in God ... and an unwavering obedience to His revealed truth. This child-like trust and unwavering obedience make it possible for us to overcome difficulties under the most trying circumstances – even when we might otherwise have no good reason to have hope.

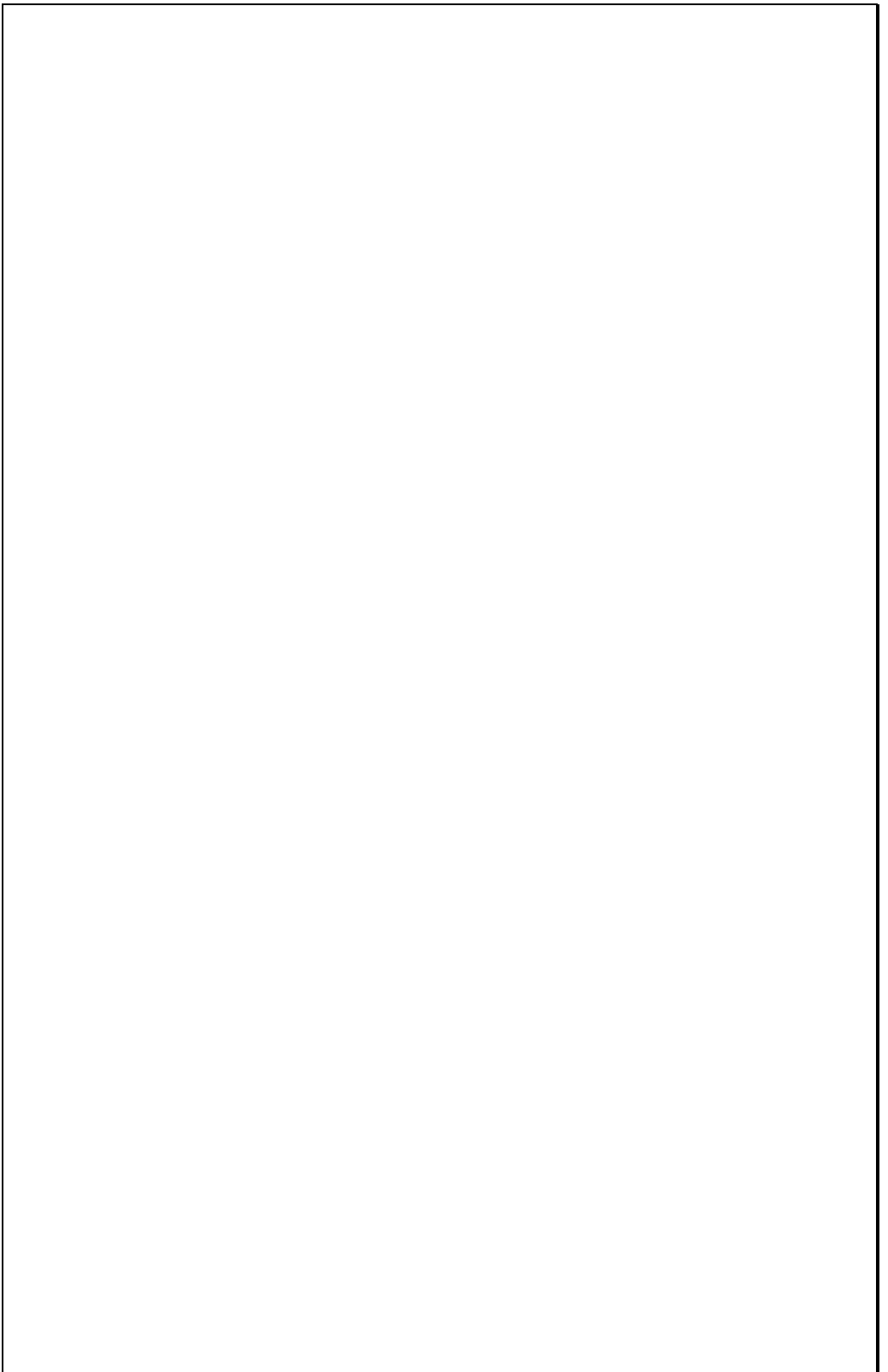
In Romans 4:18-22, Paul describes the faith of our Father of Faith, Abraham, by pointing to several salient points:

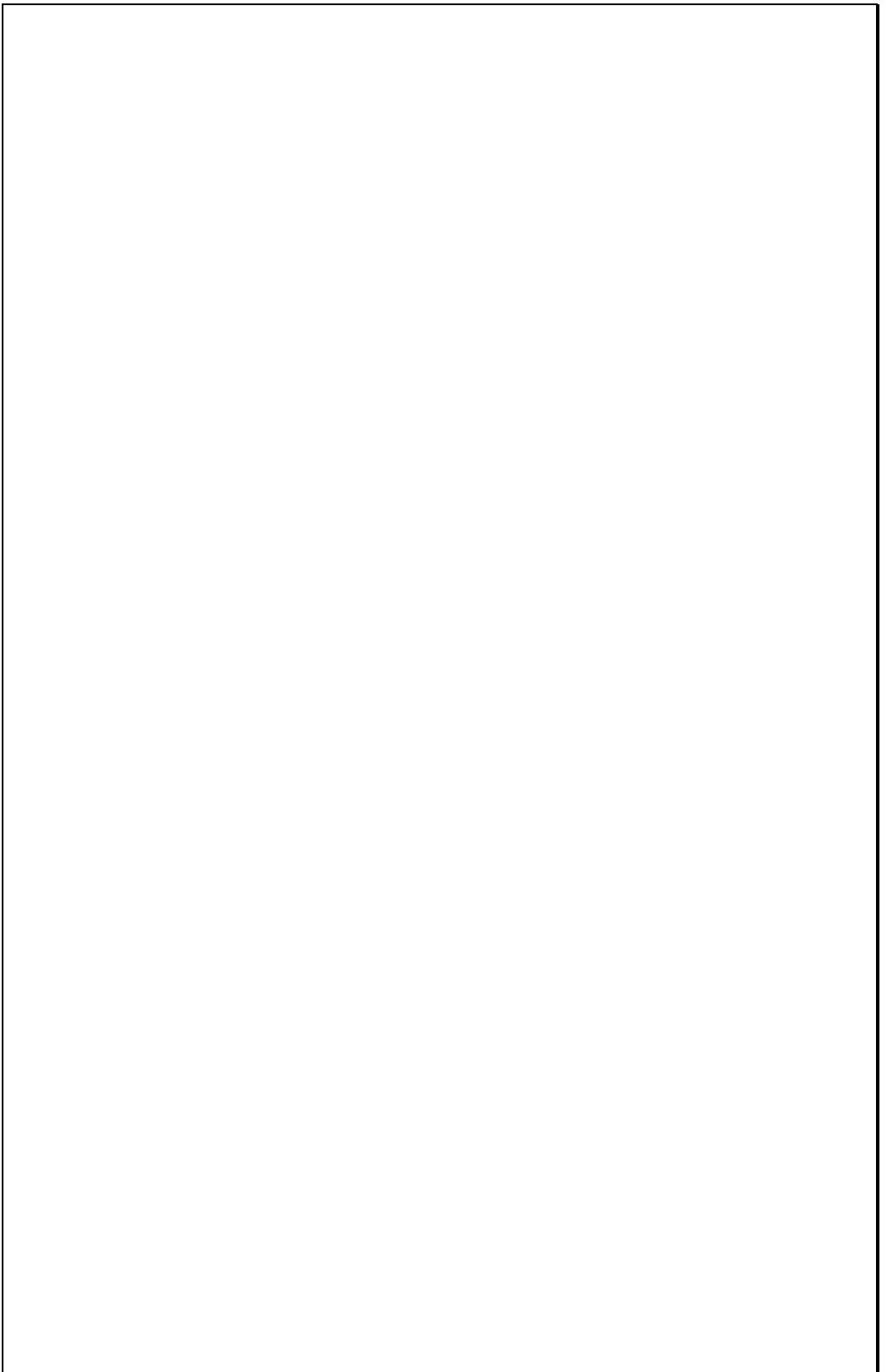
- (a) he hoped when there was no reason to hope;
- (b) he was not weak in faith;
- (c) his strong faith helped him to overcome unbelief and not stagger at God’s promises; and
- (d) he was fully persuaded that God could and would do what He promised.

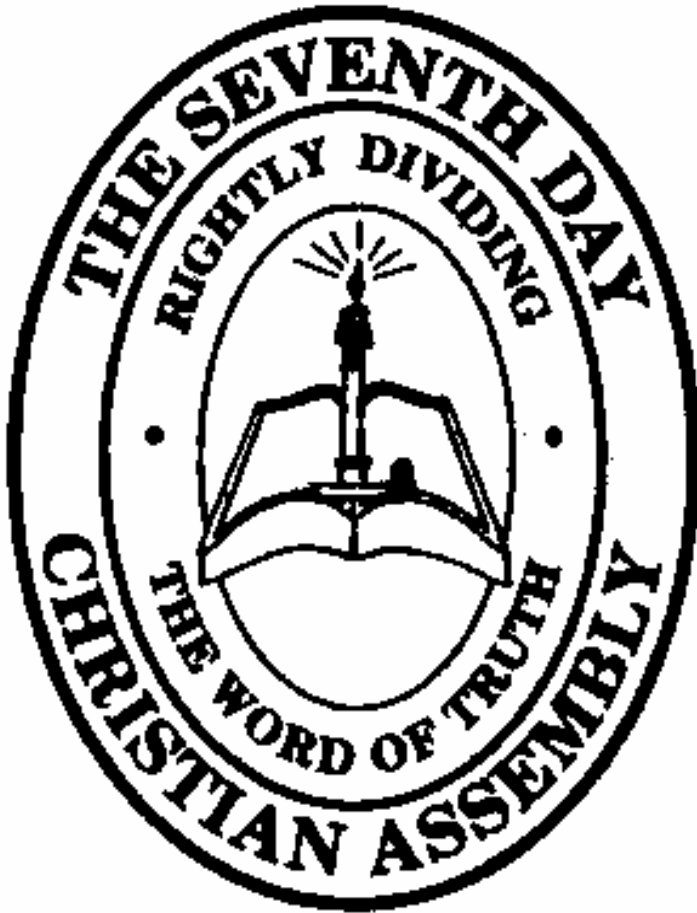
The fact that God waited 25 years before He gave to Abraham and Sarah the son that He promised them shows that Abraham was patient and allowed God to work out things according to His will, not Abraham's. Oh, they tried a couple of times to do it their way, but they were corrected by the Lord God and set on the right path (see Genesis 15:1-4 and 17:18-21).

Finally, intelligent faith will understand that God will answer our faith according to His will. *We cannot set our hopes on things that God never promised.* We must understand what God's word says about the things our faith expects of Him. To do otherwise is presumptuous. *Faith* rests on the *certainty* of the promises of God; *presumption* rests on personal feelings and personal desires – things on which that faith *cannot* rest.

Faith is a pure belief and a confident trust in the promises and will of God regardless of personal feelings. We should do our part to increase our faith, but we should also realize that God must also be allowed to do His part in making our faith perfect through Jesus Christ. With that, I hope you have learned much about faith toward God that will help you in the future.







Straight Talk ... Plain Truth

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