

War of the Seed

Expanded Version



By Lorri Frandsen

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Lorri Frandsen

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WAR OF THE SEED Extended Version is a Biblical overview spanning the books of Genesis to Revelation, with commentary on the Old and New Covenants, the New Creation, Salvation in Christ Jesus, and the eternal plan of God. The first WAR OF THE SEED was written as a short introduction for those who are unfamiliar with the Scriptures and do not have a clear understanding of the Gospel. This book contains more expansive information and a deeper investigation into God's remarkable plan for mankind through the ages. I hope you will enjoy what is presented and be blessed through it.

The artwork is my own, a combination of AI and Photoshopping.

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GOD AMONG GODS



God always existed and there is no one like Him. The Hebrew Scriptures state *“ I am the LORD, and there is no other; Apart from Me there is no God.” (Isaiah 45:5)*

In some scriptures, God calls Himself the 'Word' because He is a relational God who communicates through, and to, His creation. In fact, God communicated His creation into being in the first place through His Word.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." (John 1:1)

Another word for God is Elohim (Hebrew meaning godhead). The term means “supreme one” or “mighty one.” In the Bible Elohim is also written as LORD.

Nehemiah 9:6 says: *"You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you."*

So there is only one ELohim God, but on occasion the scriptures designate human rulers, judges, and even angels as 'elohim'. Psalm 82, for instance, describes God as presiding over an assembly of 'gods' (elohim).

"God presides in the great assembly; He renders judgment among the "gods": "How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." ..The 'gods' know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. "I said, 'You are "gods"; you are all sons of the Most High. But you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler."

Who are these 'gods'? They are called 'sons of the Most High'. Are these divine beings equal to God? Wouldn't such an interpretation be polytheistic (many gods)? Polytheism is the worship of, or belief in, more than one god - a plurality of gods, like in Hinduism. Yet the Bible says there is only One God - so who is He talking to?

One view is that these verses are a conversation between the three Persons of the Trinity. However, the verses talk about 'dying like mere mortals' and being judged for showing 'partiality to the wicked'. This could surely not apply to the Trinity.

Another view is that these 'gods' are merely human judges. But why would God say He would judge them and they would die like mere mortals, if they were human? It would be obvious that humans will die like mortals. The verses imply that these 'gods' were not human, but rather divine rulers who met in a 'council' with the one true God. They were given authority over nations, but were not ruling them righteously. They were showing partiality to the wicked and not defending the weak and the fatherless or upholding the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

One commentator says: "The Divine Council is a council of divine beings created by God to make decisions about what happens in the universe and in the lives of humans. One of the clearest examples of this can be

seen in 1 Kings 22 in which the prophet Micaiah recounts a vision God gave him, and in the vision, God asked his heavenly host what the best course of action would be to bring about the demise of King Ahab. One says one thing, and another says another. Finally, one of the council members comes forth and says that he will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all of Ahab's prophets, and Yahweh tells him *"You will succeed. Go and do it."*

The book of Job mentions a council of gods.

Job 1: 6-12 says "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and the adversary also came among them... And the LORD said to the adversary, 'Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.' So the adversary went out from the presence of the LORD."

Clearly, there is a divine council of created beings called 'gods', or elohim, who regularly consort with the one and only Creator God as they did here in the Job passage.

Some believe the Lord Jesus is similar to one of these lesser 'gods'. The Bible describes Him as *"the only begotten Son of God"* in John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; and 1John 4:9, and this is taken to mean Jesus was a created being. However in the Hebrew language, "only begotten" is not referring to a birthing sense. The term means "one of a kind" or "unique". An example of this is Hebrews 11:17 where Isaac is called Abraham's "only begotten". *"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son."* Isaac was not Abraham's only son by birth. There was also Ishmael. But Isaac was a unique son (a son of promise). Jesus was the unique Son of God. There were no other Sons of God like Him.

Furthermore in John 1:1-3 Jesus is identified as fully God when He is called the Word.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

Here Jesus is identified as the Creator Elohim who has existed from the very beginning. The Bible is asserting that Jesus is the one true God. In fact, it is He who created the other divine beings called "gods".

ELOHIM



Elohim refers to various personages in the Bible.

- the God of Israel (Genesis 2:4-5; Deuteronomy 4:35).
- the members of God's Council (Psalm 82:1,6).
- the gods and goddesses of other nations (Judges 11:24; 1Kings 11:33)
- demons.
- the spirit of the deceased Samuel (1Samuel 28:13)
- angels and the Angel of the Lord (Genesis 35:7)

However the One Elohim above all others was separate and above all other names. He had the special name 'Yahweh', a term that occurs more than 6,800 times in the Old Testament. It is the name by which God has chosen to be remembered throughout all generations. It doesn't have an exact translation in English so in the Old Testament it is written as "LORD" in all capital letters. In Jewish tradition, "Yahweh" was too sacred a name to utter out loud so the Jews substituted "Adonai," "My Lord," or "God" when speaking of Yahweh. In Exodus 3:14 God uses "I AM" and "Yahweh" interchangeably.

Yahweh stands out from the rest of the Elohim as Someone much greater in every way.

"Who is like You among the other gods (elim), Yahweh? (Exodus 15:11)

"For You O Yahweh, are most high over all the earth. You are highly exalted above all gods (Elohim)" (Psalm 97:9)

Yahweh is all powerful.

"Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you." (Jeremiah 32:17,27)

He is the sovereign King over other Elohim.

"For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods". (Psalm 95:3)

"All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35)

There is only One Yahweh.

"You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. (Nehemiah 9:6)

"The Old Testament writers understood that Yahweh was an elohim - but no other elohim was Yahweh." (Michael S. Heiser p32 THE UNSEEN REALM)

TRINITY

What is the Trinity?

Elohim is a Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), meaning He is three Persons in One, a deep mystery difficult to understand. He has no beginning and He has no end. He is all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere-present, and completely just and righteous in character. He is the Creator of the universe and all that is within it, including galaxies, planets, stars, and moons, many of which are located light years apart from each other. The word "trinity", as applied to God, does not actually exist in the Bible. Yet the Old Testament hints at a plurality of entities in the godhead of Yahweh as early as Genesis 1:26 where God seems to

be talking to Himself when He says *“Let’s make man in our own image, after our own likeness.”* He can’t be talking to the angels, because they do not create, for He alone is the Creator.

The New Testament is more revelatory regarding the Trinity.

Matthew 3:16-17 *“As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”* In this passage, the three entities of God are revealed as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

John 10:30 *“I and the Father are one.”*

John 14:9-11 *Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”*

John 14:10-11 *“ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.*

Colossians 1:15-17 *“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”*

In these passages, Jesus asserts that He and the Father are in a unity of existence or personality.

Matthew 28:19 *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

Many are perplexed by the very concept of three entities in one. Part of the confusion may originate from the Christian Church’s early creeds, such as the Athanasian Creed (dating back to the fourth or fifth century) which described the Trinity as being three “Persons”. In our everyday

language, persons are separate beings independent of one another, each having their own individuality. To say that God is three Persons seems to indicate that God has three personalities. However the Bible asserts that this isn't so. The three entities of God are identical to one another in essence (central substance or core of being). Yet this is not to say that God is 3 identical cloned personages. Bible teachers have tried to define the Trinity in various ways to make it easier to comprehend.

One definition uses the 3 parts of an egg - shell, egg white, and yolk. Another uses the chemical name for water (H₂O) separating it into its various states of liquid, gas, and solid. While these illustrations may be helpful, the best illustration is the one God gave in Genesis (*"Let's make man in our own image, after our own likeness."*). In other words, man's structure of body, soul, and spirit is similar to God's makeup as a Trinity. God is the Father (correlating to man's soul); the Son (likened to man's body); and the Holy Spirit (similar to man's spirit). A human being's soul is the core of his being from which his self identity originates. Without a soul, what is there? No personality. No character. No one recognizable. He would simply be like a lifeless robot with an outer shell, but no inner life. God the Father is the core of the Trinity from which His Personality (or self) originates. It is His Essence. How would it be possible to know anything about Him if He had no personality (personhood)?

The Hindu religion has just such an idea of God (Brahman). Brahman is described as the highest universal principle or reality of the universe. It is non-physical, pervasive, an infinite force; but Hinduism recognizes that this is not enough to inspire worship among its human adherents. Hence the countless avatars (representations) and demigods who make this religion comprehensible and approachable to its millions of human followers. Yes, God needs a soul, and Yahweh, the God of the Bible has one, not being just a nonphysical force without personality, but a unique individual entity. However God needs some way to convey His personhood to His creation, or else it is inevitable that He will be mistaken for a deity like Brahman.

So back to our human analogy of soul, body, and spirit. Man has a soul, granted, but he also has a body which reveals the attributes of his soul or self. Without a body, man has no way to make himself known to others. He wouldn't even have a voice to speak with. His physicality is the visible form of his invisible inner person. Similarly God the Father would be unable to reveal Himself to His creation if He was unable to take on the physical attributes of angel or human being when in communication with

them. The Bible reveals that the Son is the entity of the Trinity that fulfills this function of visible communication with His creatures. He enables one to 'see' God, whether physically or spiritually.

Countless incidents are recorded in the Bible of God appearing to members of His human creation, often speaking (and even eating a meal) with them. He did this with Abraham, who was a special friend of His. More often than not, however, Yahweh chose to forego personal appearances in favour of sending His angels to bring messages to human beings. Speaking of angels, they find it easier to decipher God because they are in His very presence and can see Him physically (or rather, spiritually) since they and Yahweh are spiritual and function in the same ethereal realm. Yet the Bible indicates that the Son of God often relates to angels (and humans) by taking on an angelic appearance. He is even called the Commander of the Lord's army. Sometimes it is difficult in the scriptures to differentiate an angel from a theophany (God in visible form) until it is ascertained that the being can, or must not, be worshipped. If the 'angel' is worshipped, it's not an angel, but rather God Himself in angelic form. If it is not worshipped, it is most likely an angel. Yet in all we've just said, it is still not enough for man to have only a soul and body. An animating force is needed within a human being to convey the personality, or soul, to others. His spirit enables him to be self-conscious, without which characteristic his soul would be mute and indecipherable. And so it is with the Holy Spirit of God. It is that entity of the Trinity which takes the deep things of God and releases them through the Son so that His personality can be appreciated. This is how we know that He is a God of love, justice, compassion, wisdom, and righteousness. The Holy Spirit of God takes what is within His personhood and conveys that into the spirit part of His human creation. Jesus described this when He spoke of Christians being one with Him in spirit.

"But whoever is united with the Lord is one with Him in spirit".(1Corinthians 6:17)

This is similar to the unity Jesus Himself has with the Father.

"I and the Father are one." (John 10:30)

This oneness enables a Christian to intimately know God.

"For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God..."Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ (1Corinthians 2:11,16)

Humans who are born again (regenerated) receive the Spirit of God and thus are able to know what God is communicating to them. Interestingly, angels are less informed and may be limited in this aspect of knowing God. In fact, angels are said to be curious about what God is doing with the gospel. Paul, the apostle, received the deep mysterious revelation of the gospel, as did other apostles and followers of Jesus, but not so the angels. It would seem that the makeup of angels is not exactly like that of humans, making them unable to 'read' the mind of their Creator.

"It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things." (1Peter 1:12)

We can see that as a human being has 3 attributes that make up his personality (or being), so God also has three attributes that make up His Being. Because they are separately designated as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the scriptures, implying communication between them, the Christian Church calls them Persons. That is a useful designation, as long as it is understood that these are not 3 separate individual personalities. The Bible makes it clear that the 3 entities of Yahweh are combined in One essence (one personality) and these cannot be divided. It is the same with a human being. We never relate to a man's body, soul, and spirit individually. We relate to one another as holistic, single beings. When relating to God, we also relate to Him as One whole, not three separate parts (whether we address Him as Father, Jesus, or Holy Spirit.) Jesus told His disciples that to see Him, was to see the Father. In other words, the same Personality of God existed in each. We may perceive God in one of His entities (a visible theophany or the voice of the Holy Spirit) but all of God is interacting with us. It is the same with human beings. We see each other in bodily form and understand what is inside the heart (the spirit) when our thoughts are revealed in words or actions, but there is no separation of the 3 parts of our makeup. We relate to each other as one individual to another.

Communication is essential to God's nature, especially as God is love. Love requires an object to love, and seeks a reciprocal response from the one loved. Man is not any different. A human being without the ability to show himself in some form, and without a spirit to communicate his inner self, is an island. He cannot be understood by another. This is evident in death, when there is no longer a body energized by a spirit to

convey his personality to others, resulting in an end to communication. Jesus is called the “Word” because He communicates God’s inner Self through written correspondence (the Bible), audible voice, and visible form (i.e. as a theophany in the Old Testament and as God/man in the New.) God’s sentient creation cannot know God in depth unless there is a spiritual bridge between Creator and creature.

NATURE and GOD



Yahweh the Creator has used creation to reveal many aspects of His nature. Jesus often used nature to explain His Father. He used birds and flowers to convey spiritual truths about His care and love for us. The writers of Psalms used natural events like storms and whirlwinds to convey His emotions of anger or reproach. Shepherds and their sheep elucidate God’s relationship to His people. Wolves represent villainy. Just observing nature in itself gives multiple hints of the Divine Creator. The mountains speak of His grandeur; the fragile flower portrays His sense of detail and delicacy. The sea elaborates on His unfathomable depths. The sky filled with stars reminds us of His breadth of mind and intelligence. Nature is an endless avenue of instruction on God’s character and identity.

Romans 1:19-20 “...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”

OMNISCIENCE OF GOD

Omniscience is the quality of knowing everything - a trait that only God has. He knows the end from the beginning.

*Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.
(Psalm 147:5)*

"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good.'" (Isaiah 46:9-10)

God knew exactly how His creation would turn out. There were no surprises. When Adam and Eve sinned and brought a curse on the world, God was well aware that this would be their response. Yet He created them anyway. God also knew that a large number of His angels would rebel and He knew all about Satan and what He would do. God took all this into consideration and went ahead with His plan.

ELOHIM'S CREATURES



According to the Bible, God has created many different creatures.

Seraphim are a high order described as having six wings: two that cover their faces, two that cover their feet, and two with which to fly. They stand above God as He sits on His throne, continuously singing praises (*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory"*).

Cherubim guard the way to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. In Ezekiel they are described as having four faces (a lion, an ox, a human, and an eagle). Their task is to protect God's divine glory. Their depiction decorated the Temple as described in Exodus and Kings.

Archangels are leaders among the angels. In the Bible, the great Michael is described as contending with the devil.

Angels act as messengers of God, and serve humans as messengers and protectors. They also carry out God's judgments. Angels often appeared in the Bible to humans (Abraham, Jacob, and Mary, etc.)

Living Creatures (often associated with Cherubim) appeared in the visions of Ezekiel and the Revelation to John. They are described as full of eyes in front and behind. Each one of these creatures has a different face.

Principalities, Powers, Thrones, Dominions: Paul mentioned these in Romans 8:38 and Colossians 1:16. These represent various ranks or classes of angels, likely fallen ones, although their exact nature is not revealed.

ANGELS



God created the angels before He created the earth and humans. Elohim's angels were designed to act as His messengers, swift as the wind and fierce as flaming fire. In the **Book of 1 Enoch**, seven archangels are named - Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Saraquel, and Remiel. Michael and Gabriel, two of the highest angels, are the Creator's special messengers. They are often mentioned in the Bible.

Note: The **Book of 1 Enoch** is not in the Canon of the Bible, but the apostles Jude, James, and Peter quoted from it. Several apocryphal Jewish books (that were strongly debated by early Church leaders as to their inclusion in the Biblical Canon) are alluded to in the Bible and it would seem the Jews were well aware of these writings. These include the books of Enoch, Jubilees, and Jasher. References from them, when speaking of angels and judgement, were made by Peter, Jude (half brother to Jesus) and Jesus Himself. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church includes Enoch in their Bible and the Catholic Church includes all three in the Apocrypha (meaning of doubtful authenticity), which is part of their Bible. The Book of Jasher is mentioned in Joshua 10:12-13 when the Lord stopped the sun in the middle of the day. It is also mentioned in 2 Samuel 1:18-27. Today these books have captured the attention of modern biblical scholars in academic discussions and research. The Book of Enoch was preserved in Aramaic among the Dead Sea scrolls. It is attributed to Noah's great-grandfather and describes the rebellion of 200 angelic "Watchers" and the creation of Nephilim, as well as prophecies about the flood and coming judgement. The book of Enoch uses the term 'Watchers' in many places when describing angels. It is a term also used in the book of Daniel when describing a warring angel so powerful that only the great archangel Michael was able to defeat him. (Daniel 4:13,17,23). The Book of Watchers dates 300-200 BC whereas the Hebrew book of Daniel dates to 164 BC.)

One angel often mentioned in the Bible is Michael, an archangel. This word comes from the Greek "arche" meaning "chief" or "ruler," and "angelos" meaning "messenger" or "representative." Michael in Daniel 12:1 is said to be 'the great prince' who protects the people of Israel. This description corresponds closely to what Enoch says about Michael in 1 Enoch 20:5: *"Michael, one of the holy angels, who is in charge of the good ones of the people"*. Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, and Lucifer are the only angels mentioned by name in the Bible, but the Book of Enoch mentions others.

GARDEN OF EDEN



God's human creation came after the angelic creation. Job 38 says that the morning stars (referring to angels) celebrated at the creation of the world, which means the angels were already in existence when humanity was created.

“Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? ...while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.

Everything - angels, the universe, earth and the planets, animals, humans - all were created by the spoken Word of God.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.(John 1-5,14)

“For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or

principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him”.
(Colossians 1:16)

The Word was God and became flesh, meaning the Word is none other than Jesus Christ (the God/man) of the New Testament. He is the Creator, the One called Elohim.

Elohim made everything through speaking it into existence. However the creation of humanity was unique in that He formed a man out of the dust of the earth, and then a woman from the man's rib. They were named Adam and Eve respectively. From genealogical records, humanity has existed only about 6000 years. It is not known how long before the creation of humanity the angels existed. Mankind was created in God's own image, which may be true of the angelic realm too, although angels and humans are separate creations with different characteristics. However angels and humans are both called 'sons of God' in the Bible, especially in the New Testament where Christians are often designated in this way.

Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden and instructed to make it fruitful. At first Adam was without a mate. All the other creatures had mates, but not Adam. God brought the animals to Adam so that he could name them. Presumably God and Adam spoke a language of some sort and Adam probably drew ideas for names from the animals' physical traits. It is also suggested in Genesis 3:8 that God walked in the Garden of Eden (the home of Adam and Eve) implying that He approached Adam in a recognizable form (most likely a theophany) and spoke with him.

The animals lacked the intellectual, spiritual, and moral qualities necessary to serve alongside Adam as vice-regents in Eden and thus God created a woman for Adam. He did so after allowing Adam to be alone for a time, perhaps so Adam could treasure her as a suitable counterpart and helpmeet. Like Adam, Eve was made in God's image. They were without sin and morally neutral, having never made a decision either for or against righteousness. This was obviously not the way Elohim intended for things to remain because He gave them a test of obedience which would necessitate a choice between a Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and a Tree of Life. Unfortunately they made the wrong choice, resulting in spiritual and physical death. Elohim had been aware that His human creation would rebel against Him, choosing death instead of the Life which He desired for them. However it

was necessary to let them choose so that they would be able to return Elohim's love and form a close relationship with Him. Unfortunately their wrong decision alienated them from Elohim. Adam was told that his labor would be hard from now on, and Eve's birth labor would be hard as well. Both were expelled from the beautiful Garden of Eden and prevented from returning by an angelic guard at the entrance. They now had to make their way in a much less hospitable environment. The serpent also bore Elohim's judgement because it had tempted Adam and Eve to sin.



Angels may also have been present in Eden. Some sources, including ancient texts and religious commentaries, refer to multiple angels being present in the Garden, serving as protectors of this sacred place. It is certainly true that cherubim were assigned to guard the Tree of Life in the Garden after humanity fell into sin. They were to make sure that Adam and Eve could not return.

SERPENT

A serpent was in the Garden when Adam and Eve were there, perhaps observing them closely so as to devise the best means to tempt them. It is described as a being with high intelligence, able to communicate in the

language of God and Adam. The serpent also bore Elohim's judgement because it had tempted Adam and Eve and led them into sin. Elohim pronounced that He would put enmity between it's seed (offspring) and the seed of the woman. He also stated that "*He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.*" This was a cryptic prophecy that would have dramatic fulfillment in the future. The serpent's identity has been a mystery for many, with various ideas circulating through the Church.



Many Christians have taken the traditional view that the serpent was a real, physical snake possessed by Satan. However other sources think that what Adam and Eve saw and heard in the Garden was no mere snake but a serpent-like creature belonging to a higher order than the ordinary "beasts of the field." In Isaiah 6 the prophet had a vision of angelic creatures in heaven called seraphim. These were dragon-like angelic beings with multiple wings and a long neck. Such semi-divine creatures were depicted in legends and the mythology of ancient Near East, pre-dating Moses by almost 1000 years (or more). There are depictions of winged serpents that stand erect, wear crowns, and flank the throne of the fourteenth-century Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamen.



Sheet gold collar depicting the winged serpent goddess Wadjet found in King Tutankhamun's tomb New Kingdom 18th Dynasty Egypt 1332-1323 BCE. This reproduction was photographed at The Discovery of King Tut exhibition. Credit: Mary Harrsch - Flickr

Egyptian jewelry also features winged serpents. This ancient mythical concept of semi-divine dragon-like creatures that so many early nations held, may reflect the retained faint memory of that serpent-like creature in Eden. If the snake in Eden was a seraphim, and if the presence of angelic creatures like cherubim and seraphim were not unusual in the garden, this would explain why Eve was not at all dismayed when the serpent approached her, or when he spoke with her.

The serpent in Eden is not named. However Church tradition links him to the devil, or Satan, using verses like Revelation 12:9 to justify this view.

“And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

Another verse that links the dragon, the ancient serpent, the devil, and Satan as being one and the same is Revelation 20:2

“And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.”

Quite a few Bible scholars link the serpent to a fallen archangel identified as Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12-15.

“How you have fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! you have been cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet you shall be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.”

This scripture states that Lucifer had 'fallen from heaven'. We know that the angels were created before the earth and the serpent creature was already in rebellion to Elohim when he tempted Adam and Eve, so his fall had presumably occurred somewhere after the time the angels were created and before he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

If the serpent and Lucifer are the same entity, then his fall may not have barred him completely from heaven (the Bible mentions a third heaven). The book of Job tells us of someone called Satan, meaning adversary,

as having had access to heaven and to the throne of God during Job's time. *“One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ Satan answered the LORD, ‘From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it’* (Job 1:6-7).

'Satan' means 'adversary'. Certain Bible scholars believe that 'adversary' is a title, but not an actual name. Their position is that every term in the Bible used for this angelic adversary is a descriptive term. Whether this is accurate or not, translators of the Bible have traditionally used the term 'Satan' as both title and name, and for the purposes of easy identification in this book, we will do likewise.

The non-canonical book of Enoch **does** give an actual name for one of the fallen angels. Azazel is described as a leader of wicked angels and responsible for evil in the world. The term Azazel is highly debated but some identify him with Satan.

The New Testament also speaks of the 'devil' and an 'adversary'. It also uses the term 'Satan', especially in the King James Version (32 out of a total of 92 mentions throughout the Bible).

“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1Peter5:8)

“No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (2Corinthians 7:14)

There are no descriptions of Satan in the Bible, unless one considers the prophecy in Ezekiel 28 which addresses the King of Tyre but gives a detailed description of an evil cherub who was in the Garden of Eden - a reference to the serpent. Satan has traditionally been associated with this scripture.

“You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, in the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: carnelian, chrysolite and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness

was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour. So I threw you to the earth...

THE PROPHECY OF SEEDS

Adam and Eve were commanded by God not to eat fruit from the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. There was also a Tree of Life in the Garden but God gave no prohibition against eating the fruit of that one. However it seems that Adam and Eve weren't interested in either tree at first. The serpent had to draw Eve's attention to the forbidden tree and extol its so-called 'benefits' before she even thought of it. The serpent acted quickly to insure that her thoughts did not fall back on God's warning that she would die if she ate it's fruit. In all fairness, the threat of death was probably kind of vague in her mind because she and Adam had never seen death before. Maybe it didn't seem so terrible to them. At any rate, Eve succumbed to deception. Interestingly, Adam was not deceived. *"Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."* (1 Timothy 2:14) That would make Adam's culpability greater than Eve's. She was blinded by her naivety. Adam walked into rebellion with eyes wide open.

The temptation to sin centred around this lure from the serpent. The serpent said to the woman, *"You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings." (Genesis 3:4-6)

The serpent knew just how to seduce Eve because the lure he threw out probably reflected his own heart's desire. He himself wanted to be like God, to independently make his own rules as to what was good and what

wasn't. He didn't want anyone ruling over him and he suspected that the two humans wouldn't either. He added a flagrant lie to further convince them to disobey God. He ascribed a selfish motive to God, making Him out to be jealous of His human creation, not wanting them to be on the same level with Him. The serpent insinuated to Eve that this was a distinct possibility. Adam apparently knew better but he followed Eve's actions and so they both ate the fruit. At that moment, all naivety disappeared. All innocence vanished. The spiritual realm suddenly became dark and sinister, and contrary to the serpent's lie, they did die. First they died spiritually. Later they would die physically. God confronted Adam and Eve, probably while the taste of the fruit was still in their mouths. The serpent was still there with them in the Garden when God came on the scene. Satan didn't even have time to make a hasty exit. When God questioned the two guilty humans, they gave the typical response of the cowardly. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. And the serpent had no excuse. Then God delivered His judgement to all three. (Genesis 3:16,17)

To the woman He said: *"I will sharply increase your pain in childbirth; in pain you will bring forth children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."* And to Adam He said: *"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat, cursed is the ground because of you; through toil you will eat of it all the days of your life."* (Genesis 3:14)

Then the LORD said to the serpent, *"Because you have done this, 'Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life....And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'" (Genesis 3:15)*

This is a very cryptic prophecy. It involves two seeds - one human and one angelic. God foretold that there would be a great battle between the two, ending in one being wounded and one crushed in defeat. **This war between the two seeds is the prime focus of the Scriptures, and it began in the Garden of Eden.**

Seed' is the male reproductive cell in vertebrates. The term is derived from the Greek word "sperma" meaning "seed". Some Bible translations use the word 'progeny' or 'offspring' in Genesis 3 rather than seed because to say 'seed of a woman' is biologically incorrect. A woman does not have sperm. The phrase should correctly say "seed of man'.

However if 'seed' is the correct interpretation, it could be a prophetic allusion to the virgin birth of Christ. Jesus did not have a human father, so biologically no male human sperm was involved in His conception. The term used in Genesis may have been a hint of the divine/human makeup of Christ. The 'seed of the serpent' is another interesting phrase. Obviously the prophecy is not speaking of a biological snake, but of a spiritual entity, likely a fallen angel. Jesus said that in heaven the angels do not marry (procreate), yet this phrase hints at spiritual progeny. (This will be explained later in the book). The woman's seed would have victory over the serpent (bruising the head of the snake, indicating a head wound or death blow. This would make the serpent nervous of the birth of every male child, because he would never know which one would bring about his end. In the battle, he would 'bruise' the woman's seed on the 'heel' indicating that the promised woman's Seed would suffer, but it would not be a destructive blow. (Hebrews 2:9-15)

The seed of the woman is not identified at this point in the Scriptures and the seed of the serpent isn't immediately explained either.

ANGELS AND HUMANS

The book of Hebrews speaks of Christ's relationship with God as proof of His superiority over angels. By inference this also applies to all believers "in Christ" for we also have a deep intimacy with the Heavenly Father.

"For to which of the angels did God ever say: "You are My Son; today I have become Your Father. Or again: I will be His Father, and He will be My Son." "Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir." (Galatians 4:6-7)

"He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." (Ephesians 1:5)

Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6)

And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” says the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:18)

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (1 John 3:1)

Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:7)

This is the high purpose of God for humanity. God wanted a family of children who would be like His Son Jesus Christ. They were to have His holy and righteous nature and God would be able to have a loving relationship with them. Angels, although created first, were to serve and protect humanity. Although glorious and powerful, and privileged to be in God's immediate presence, they would not have the same intimacy with the LORD that His human children would have. In fact, believers are said to judge angels, suggesting a form of superiority in that context.

Hebrews 1:14 says: “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”

ADAM WAS REAL

The serpent (or perhaps a seraphim) in Eden was cursed by God for tempting Adam and Eve to sin. It was to be legless (*“on your belly you shall go”*) and have an earthy diet (*“dust you shall eat”*) - *Genesis 3:14*. This is a metaphor for disgrace and defeat, like the one in Psalm 72:9 where Solomon prays that Yahweh would cause his human enemies to bow to the ground and eat dust. The prophet Micah calls down God's judgment on the nations and depicts their defeat in terms of *“licking the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth”* (7:17). Also, God's prophecy to Eve of the woman's progeny crushing the Serpent's head with his heel in *Genesis 3:15* is not literal, but figurative, meaning a human victor would vanquish Satan. There is much in the Bible that is metaphorical but Adam and Eve were real people and the Biblical account is meant to be taken literally apart from the symbolic prophecies. This is proven from the New Testament genealogies of Jesus where the apostle Luke traces Jesus' descent back to *“Adam, the son of God”* (Luke 3). Each of the

human beings in this lineage came from Adam, indicating Luke's conviction that all human beings trace their descent from Adam.

Another reference is *Acts 17:26* - "*And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.*"

The apostle Paul does not mention Adam by name, but he testifies to the universal descent of humanity from a single man, whom Paul knew to be "Adam".

"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." (1 Corinthians 11:8-9)

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." (Jude 14)

"Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, 'Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones . . ."

Jesus alluded to Adam and Eve in Matthew 19:4-6:

"In reply he said: 'Did you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and will stick to his wife, and the two will be one flesh'? So that they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has yoked together let no man put apart."

CAIN AND ABEL

Eve bore two sons, Cain and Abel, but the sin of jealousy soon brought tragedy to the family. Cain, the elder son, was a farmer who grew vegetables, while Abel was a shepherd. Both young men brought sacrificial offerings to God. Cain brought the produce of the field and Abel brought the firstborn of his flock. God accepted Abel's offering (perhaps by causing fire to consume it on the altar), but He rejected Cain's offering. This may have had something to do with the animal skins God gave to Adam and Eve after they sinned and discovered their nakedness. This slaying of an animal could have been the first death

ever witnessed on the earth, and the first intimation that blood sacrifice was necessary to deal with sin. At any rate, Cain was exceedingly angry and jealous over God favouring Abel's sacrifice over his own. His rage brought him to the point where he murdered his brother, and this resulted in God exiling Cain and separating him from his family. Cain went away to live in the land of Nod and married one of his sisters. Lamech, a descendent of Cain, was also a murderer and even boasted about it. All this must have caused Adam and Eve much grief. When Eve bore another son, Seth, she saw this as God's act of compassion in giving her a son to replace the one she had lost.

ENOCH'S WATCHERS



The book of 1 Enoch is thought to have some typographical errors (such as certain measurements of the Nephilim that seem incredible) but it nevertheless sheds enormous light on the angels, or as Enoch calls them, 'Watchers'. The writings from Enoch predate Daniel (who used the same term 'Watcher' as Enoch did), so it would appear that the Book of Enoch was known to Daniel. In fact 1 Enoch has some striking similarities to several books in the Bible.

In 1 Enoch the Watchers are described as a high order of angelic being. They were like the archangels, very great in power and knowledge. They had been present when the human race was created and they had counselled with Elohim around His throne and performed His decrees. Enoch wrote this about the Throne Room.

I was looking and I saw a high throne, and its appearance was like ice, and its roundness was like the shining sun, and the border was cherubim. And from underneath the throne flowed forth rivers flaming with fire, And I was unable to see. Upon it sat the Great Glory; His garments were like the appearance of the sun and whiter than abundant snow. No angel could enter into this house and gaze on his face Because of the splendour and glory, and no human being was able to look at him (1 Enoch 14:18-21)

Daniel's account is similar.

As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. (Daniel 7: 9,10)

And John the apostle wrote this account which is also similar to Enoch's book:

'After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. ..At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. (Revelation 4)

There are other similarities between Enoch and the Bible as well. The big story of note in Enoch concerns the two hundred Watchers who came

down to earth and cohabited with human women. This rebellious act against God's order resulted in judgement on the Watchers.

When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the Lord said, "My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal, their days will be a hundred and twenty years." 'The Nephilim were on the earth in those days— and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. (Genesis 6:1-4)

The apostle Peter mentions angels sinning and God judging them by sending a flood to destroy them.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others... (2Peter 2:4)

Jude mentions the same thing.

And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. (Jude 6-7)

1 Enoch: 6-11 describes how the Watchers plotted their strategy.

And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: 'Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children.' And Semjâzâ, who was their leader, said unto them: 'I fear ye will not indeed agree to do this deed, and I alone shall have to pay the penalty of a great sin.' And they all answered him and said: 'Let us all swear an oath, and all bind ourselves by mutual imprecations not to abandon this plan but to do this thing.' Then they all swore together and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And they were in all two hundred; who descended in the days of Jared on the summit of Mount Hermon, and they called it Mount Hermon, because they had sworn and bound themselves by

mutual imprecations upon it. And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants. And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants, 300 ells....

(The measurement of 300 ells for the giants in Enoch equaled 450 feet, which some scholars hold to be a typographical error in the text. The giants recorded in the Bible were about 9-12 feet tall, although the pre-flood Nephilim could have been much taller.)

Note: Although this might be an error in Enoch 1, it should not disqualify the verity of the entire book. It should be noted that there are typographical errors in the Bible as well, although very few occur in the original texts. However in later translations there were some surprising mistakes.

A Bible printed in 1562 contains the following mistake in Mark 5:9 – *“Blessed are the pacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”* The correct word, of course, is “peace-makers.”

A Bible printed in 1653 reads: *“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall inherit the Kingdom of God?”* The passage, Corinthians 6:9, should read *“shall not inherit.”*

A Bible printed in 1862 botched a passage in Revelation, recording the number of the Beast, or Antichrist, as “999” instead of “666”

A Bible printed in 1914 listed *“Thou shalt kill”* as one of the 10 commandments. The correct commandment, of course, is *“Thou shalt not kill.”*

Oddly enough, a Bible printed in 1631 blew another commandment, which led to the most famous typo of all: *“Thou shalt commit adultery.”* Coined “The Wicked Bible”, it was meant to be a reprint of the King James Bible. The blunder was so severe, the publishers were punished with a £300 fine and their printer’s license revoked.

The Watchers apparently taught mysteries and magical arts to humanity through their wives. Azazel, who some consider to be Satan, *“taught men*

to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them the metals of the earth. He also taught the art of making bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony, and the beautifying of the eyelids, and all kinds of costly stones, and all colouring tinctures”.



In modern terms, this is metallurgy and cosmetology, but it is much more serious than that, involving participation in the occult. The use of metals was for use in warfare and other acts of violence. The cosmological information was to be employed in pagan idol worship involving prostitution and seduction. Semjaza, the leader of the two hundred Watchers, taught “enchantments and root-cuttings. The enchantments, root cutting, and rare substances were to be used in the making of love potions, spells of bewitchment, and all sorcery and idolatry hateful to God. Armaros taught humans how to resolve enchantments. Baraqijal taught astrology. Kokabel shared information on the constellations. Ezeqeel shared the knowledge of the clouds. Araqiel instructed on the signs of the earth. Shamsiel taught on the signs of the sun, and Sariel on the course of the moon.

This knowledge was given to humanity for their destruction, and for their enslavement to the wicked forces of darkness. God was greatly angered by these Watchers and pronounced judgement on them. Their punishment was to be sent to the Abyss. The rebel Watchers were terrified and they asked Enoch to make prayers on their behalf to God for forgiveness. God refused their petition and responded in this way: *“You thought you had secrets, yet all the mysteries had not been revealed to you. Little did you know, you only knew the worthless ones. You shall have no peace for all eternity.”*

THE ABYSS



The word *abyss* simply means “a deep hole.” Sometimes the Abyss is pictured as a deep or bottomless hole in the earth. This is the background for the New Testament usage. In Luke 8, Jesus cast the Legion of demons out of a man, *“and they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss”* (verse 31).

The Abyss is obviously a place that the demons fear and try to avoid. Elohim consigned the pre-flood rebel angels to imprisonment in the Abyss, where they would remain bound until their judgement at the end of the world. An eternal Lake of Fire awaits them. According to 1 Enoch, the archangels Sarial, Gabriel, and Michael were responsible for binding the wicked Watchers in the Abyss.

“The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. . . . They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (Destroyer).” (Revelation 9:1–3, 11)

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended.” (Revelation 20:1-3)

Many Bible scholars believe this is the same place referred to in 2 Peter 2:4 as “*hell*,” where some evil spirits are “*in chains of darkness to be held for judgment*.” Hell is a translation of the Greek word “tartarus”, thought to be the lowest part of Hades.

NEPHILIM

The progeny of the Watchers and human women were the Nephilim. They were giants of great stature, heroes of renown, fierce hunters, and warring fighters. The book of Enoch says they lived together with humans for hundreds of years in pre-flood times, quickly spreading over the earth and becoming increasingly evil. At first they forced the humans to provide for them from their resources, but it was not long before the humans were unable to meet their voracious demands. Then the giants began to cannibalize humans and even one another, drinking blood to satisfy their raging appetites. They also desecrated the animal kingdom, profaning all that the Creator had so carefully and lovingly designed.



Their wickedness was so great, and spread so quickly, that the Creator was deeply grieved in His heart and regretted ever having made both the Watchers, and the human race.

Jewish thinkers in the Second Temple period viewed the progeny of angels and humans as giant hybrids. They are described as 'fallen ones'. Mesopotamian literary works had giants called apkallus who were described as pre-flood divine beings from whom Babylonian kings descended. These apkallus were considered demonic by the Jews, but many pagan religions viewed them as gods.

The Nephilim were corporeal beings, although their reproduction was different from that of humans. For one thing, their spirits were descended from Watchers and not from their human mothers. It is claimed that when a Nephilim was killed, its spirit remained a disembodied spirit. This is considered by some to be the origin of demons.

1Enoch mentions the archangel Gabriel being tasked with destroying the Nephilim by causing them to war with each other. Gabriel was "*one of the holy angels, who is over Paradise and the serpents and the Cherubim.*"



The Bible mentions Nephilim in several passages.

“When human beings began to multiply on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose... The Nephilim were on the earth in those days— and also afterward— when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.” (Genesis 1-4)

“We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” – “The Emim used to live there—a people strong and numerous, and as tall as the Anakites. Like the Anakites, they too were regarded as Rephaim, but the Moabites call them Emim.” (Deuteronomy 2:10-11)

“In still another battle, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in all. He also was descended from the giants.” (1 Chronicles 20:5)

“Og king of Bashan was the last of the remnant of the giants. His bed was made of iron and was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide.” (Deuteronomy 3:11)

“Yet I destroyed the Amorites before them, though they were tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks; I destroyed their fruit above and their roots below.” (Amos 2:9)

The Nephilim giants were not the only oversized beings existing on the earth.



There were also huge animal creatures that were incredibly powerful and frightening to behold. The Bible names Behemoth, who may have been a real type of dinosaur. Another one mentioned is Leviathan, a sea monster. Many Christians believe that dinosaurs and humans walked the earth together. If so, the antediluvian world was a very dangerous place. However in spite of all the dangers, humans had a very long life span at this time. One of Adam's descendants, Methuselah, lived to be 969 years.

THE FLOOD

Wickedness had spread so widely over the face of the earth that the Creator decided to send a flood to destroy the Nephilim, and wicked humanity as well. Only one man, Noah, found grace in the Creator's sight. He was commissioned to build a great ark for himself, his family, and some of the animal kingdom. It took 120 years for Noah and his sons to build the ark so there was a lengthy time to warn the population of impending disaster. The ark was an ominous warning of what was to come. However Nephilim and humans alike went on with their lives as usual, becoming increasingly lawless and violent. Then the flood finally came.



Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. ... I am going to bring flood waters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark, you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them." (Genesis 6:11-21)

Interestingly, many pagan religions have accounts describing such a flood. One estimate of when the flood began is approximately 4,359 years ago in the year 1656 AD or 2348 BC. Egyptian pre-flood accounts speak of people being so wicked, that the god Atum said he would destroy the earth to primordial water, and then transform it back to its

original form as a serpent. Babylonian legends state that the pre-flood world had become overpopulated, so after trying plagues and diseases, the gods sent a global flood. Enki, the Sumerian god, showed the priest, Atra-Hasis how to cause stillborn babies so that only desirables would be born in the future. (It seems population growth may have been a concern in pre-flood times, as it is today. Starting with eight people you reach six billion in 1,100 years, not accounting for famines, wars, and plagues.)

The boat was longer than a football field (or 750 rail cars) and took about a hundred years to build. It wasn't made to go anywhere, just to stay afloat. It was large enough to hold 75,000 animals plus food storage for them. It is thought the seven pairs of every clean animal and the two pairs of every unclean animal were probably led by instinct to the ark and were likely specimens of the very youngest, smallest, and healthiest. Insects and amphibians would have survived via floating materials. Rising atop the waters the ark would have been softly rocked and the animals inside may have been lulled into a hibernation state.

Today one can find a great deal of evidence for a global flood. The hydro plate theory states that beneath the oceans there is a fracture encircling the entire earth, with extremely hot water spurting from trillions of vents in that ridge. It is believed that these giant cavernous pockets of water facilitated the enormous ecological systems that enabled huge plants to grow. It is thought a fracture caused such intense pressure that the great deeps sprayed volcanic water into the air as high as space. The water would rain down like an ocean of frozen sludge that would instantly freeze some parts of the planet. The continents would be pushed upwards and mountain ranges would buckle inwards. Forests and everything in them were swallowed up by earth and stone and compressed underground as oil deposits.

The book of Jasher (mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and 2Samuel 1:18, but not considered part of the Bible Canon) has this to say about the flood.

At that time, after the death of Methuselah, the Lord said to Noah, Go thou with thy household into the ark; behold I will gather to thee all the animals of the earth, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and they shall all come and surround the ark....And the Lord brought this about on the next day, and animals, beasts and fowls came in great multitudes and surrounded the ark... on that day, the Lord caused the whole earth to shake, and the sun darkened, and the foundations of the world raged, and the whole earth was moved violently, and the lightning

flashed, and the thunder roared, and all the fountains in the earth were broken up, such as was not known to the inhabitants before; and God did this mighty act, in order to terrify the sons of men, that there might be no more evil upon earth. And still the sons of men would not return from their evil ways, and they increased the anger of the Lord at that time, and did not even direct their hearts to all this. And at the end of seven days, in the six hundredth year of the life of Noah, the waters of the flood were upon the earth. And all the fountains of the deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, and the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. And Noah and his household, and all the living creatures that were with him, came into the ark on account of the waters of the flood, and the Lord shut him in. And all the sons of men that were left upon the earth, became exhausted through evil on account of the rain, for the waters were coming more violently upon the earth, and the animals and beasts were still surrounding the ark. And the sons of men assembled together, about seven hundred thousand men and women, and they came unto Noah to the ark. And they called to Noah, saying, 'Open for us that we may come to thee in the ark...and wherefore shall we die?' And Noah, with a loud voice, answered them from the ark, saying, 'Have you not all rebelled against the Lord, and said that he does not exist? and therefore the Lord brought upon you this evil, to destroy and cut you off from the face of the earth. Is not this the thing that I spoke to you of one hundred and twenty years back, and you would not hearken to the voice of the Lord, and now do you desire to live upon earth?' And they said to Noah, 'We are ready to return to the Lord; only open for us that we may live and not die.' And Noah answered them, saying, 'Behold now that you see the trouble of your souls, you wish to return to the Lord; why did you not return during these hundred and twenty years, which the Lord granted you as the determined period? But now you come and tell me this on account of the troubles of your souls, now also the Lord will not listen to you, neither will he give ear to you on this day, so that you will not now succeed in your wishes'. And the sons of men approached in order to break into the ark, to come in on account of the rain, for they could not bear the rain upon them....And the rain was still descending upon the earth, and it descended forty days and forty nights, and the waters prevailed greatly upon the earth; and all flesh that was upon the earth or in the waters died, whether men, animals, beasts, creeping things or birds of the air, and there only remained Noah and those that were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed and they greatly increased upon the earth, and they lifted up the ark and it was raised from the earth. And the ark floated upon the face of the waters, and it was tossed upon the waters so that all the living creatures within

were turned about like pottage in a cauldron. And great anxiety seized all the living creatures that were in the ark, and the ark was like to be broken. And all the living creatures that were in the ark were terrified, and the lions roared, and the oxen lowed, and the wolves howled, and every living creature in the ark spoke and lamented in its own language, so that their voices reached to a great distance, and Noah and his sons cried and wept in their troubles; they were greatly afraid that they had reached the gates of death.



And Noah prayed unto the Lord, and cried unto him of this, and he said, 'O Lord help us, for we have no strength to bear this evil that has encompassed us, for the waves of the waters have surrounded us, mischievous torrents have terrified us, the snares of death have come before us; answer us, O Lord, answer us, light up thy countenance toward us and be gracious to us, redeem us and deliver us'. And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Noah, and the Lord remembered him. And a wind passed over the earth, and the waters were still and the ark rested. And the fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained. And the waters decreased in those days, and the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. And Noah then opened the windows of the ark, and Noah still called out to the Lord at that time and he said, 'O Lord, who didst form the earth and the heavens and all that are therein, bring forth our souls from this confinement, and from the prison wherein thou hast placed us, for I am much wearied with sighing'. And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Noah, and said to him, 'When thou shalt have completed a full year thou shalt then go forth. And at the revolution of the year, when a full year was

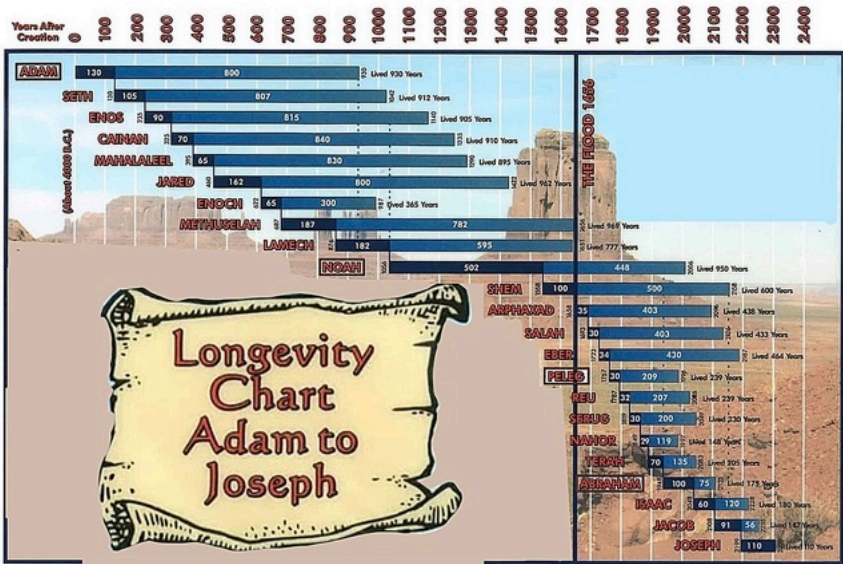
completed to Noah's dwelling in the ark, the waters were dried from off the earth, and Noah put off the covering of the ark. At that time, on the twenty-seventh day of the second month, the earth was dry, but Noah and his sons, and those that were with him, did not go out from the ark until the Lord told them. And the day came that the Lord told them to go out, and they all went out from the ark. And they went and returned every one to his way and to his place, and Noah and his sons dwelt in the land that God had told them, and they served the Lord all their days, and the Lord blessed Noah and his sons on their going out from the ark. And he said to them, 'Be fruitful and fill all the earth; become strong and increase abundantly in the earth and multiply therein.'



The Bible has this to say about the flood.

...on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible. After forty days Noah opened a window he had made in the ark and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked

olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him. By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry. Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it." So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease." (Genesis 8:21)



From the timeline above it can be seen that pre-flood people lived much longer than those born after it. Methuselah was the oldest living human at 969 years. He died just before the flood came. His name meant "When he dies, it shall come." Enoch was Methuselah's son and he had a very close relationship with God. (The book of Enoch is named after him). When he was 365 years old, he 'was not' as the Bible puts it, indicating that he was taken to be with the Lord without dying. Adam knew Methuselah for 243 years. In fact, the first 2,157 years of history are covered by three men whose lives overlap - Adam, Methuselah, and Shem. Shem lived long enough to know Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Noah had six living ancestors who could have known Adam personally. This means that there were many first-hand witnesses who could corroborate the facts that occurred during this time. The culture at this time was well advanced, probably because the long lifespans of people in pre-flood times facilitated huge strides in areas of learning and invention.

Once out of the ark and settled on earth, Noah and his sons would have had the monumental task of making an entirely new civilization from scratch. It obviously wasn't an easy endeavour, all the more difficult because the task rested on just one family. Scripture relates that soon an unhappy episode occurred in Noah's life involving him and his three sons. This incident was to create a great schism in the family. It all started when Noah planted a vineyard and used the grapes to make wine. He became drunk and lay naked in his tent. (Genesis 9:20-21) Noah's youngest son Ham saw this and did nothing to preserve his father's honour, but rather told his brothers about their father's shame. Ham's response was disrespectful but Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders and walked into the tent backwards, covering their father's naked body and turning their faces away. Later, Noah sobered up and found out what Ham had done to him. Genesis 9:24 suggests that Ham did more than just see Noah's nakedness, although what else he did is not revealed. It must be remembered that the pre-flood people were a mix of humans and Nephilim, and their evil influence had polluted the human race physically, mentally, and spiritually. It was so shocking that God had to destroy the world and begin over again. Perhaps Ham's sin against Noah reflected this influence. Whatever the sin was, it was reason enough for Noah to curse Canaan, Ham's son, saying that his status would be like the lowest of slaves and he would be beneath Shem and Japheth. Surprisingly Noah didn't curse Ham directly. This might be because God had blessed Ham earlier (Genesis 9:1). It is a principle in scripture that those whom God

blessees must not be cursed. (*Numbers 22:12, Numbers 23:20*). Consequently Ham's sin against his father brought a punishment through his son. However only Ham's descendants through Canaan were cursed. It may have been that Canaan was already showing wicked inclinations like his father and so Noah focused the curse on him. Another possibility is that Canaan was in some way complicit in Ham's sin against Noah.

The descendants of Canaan included the Sidonians, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Genesis 10:15–19*). Many of these tribes were giants, and likely the descendants of Nephilim. Noah's curse/prophecy came true because Joshua would later destroy and conquer the Canaanites, through the Israelites (descendants of Shem). True to God's Word, some of the Canaanites became slaves. (*Joshua 9:27; 17:12–13*). The Bible includes this story of how Canaan came to be cursed so that it could be seen that the Lord was completely justified in ordering the destruction of these tribes later on.

POST-FLOOD

Noah's son Ham had four sons who would become nations and peoples. Mizraim would become Egypt; Phut would become Libya; Canaan would be the Canaanites; and Cush (through his son Nimrod) would become the Assyrians. Noah's family multiplied and spread out over the land, establishing settlements in the new world. Noah and two of his sons remained faithful to Elohim, but a line of wicked descendants (through Noah's third son Ham) rebelled and went their own way. A great grandson, Nimrod, settled in the land of Shinar and built a great temple (ziggurat) where he re-instituted all the old religious practices of pre-flood times including prostitution, idolatry, human sacrifice, and sorcery.

NIMROD

In the Bible Nimrod is called "a mighty warrior on the earth" and it is believed that he was at least part Nephilim because Nephilim were often referred to as being great and mighty hunters. In the Sumerian record, Nimrod was called Enmerkar. In the Bible he is known as a 'gibbor', one of the 'men of renown'. His name, Nimrod, means 'rebellion'. His wife, Inanna, was the goddess/daughter of Ham.



The book of Jasher, although not on a par with scripture, has a lot of information about Nimrod, Noah, and Abram. Jasher 7-12 is especially informative.

“And Cush the son of Ham, the son of Noah, took a wife in those days in his old age, and she bare a son, and they called his name Nimrod...the child grew up, and his father loved him exceedingly, for he was the son of his old age. And the garments of skin which God made for Adam and his wife, when they went out of the garden, were given to Cush. (These were the skins that God gave to Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness after they sinned). For after the death of Adam and his wife, the garments were given to Enoch, the son of Jared, and when Enoch was taken up to God, he gave them to Methuselah, his son. And at the death of Methuselah, Noah took them and brought them to the ark, and they were with him until he went out of the ark. And in their going out, Ham stole those garments from Noah his father, and he took them and hid them from his brothers. And when Ham begat his first born Cush, he gave him the garments in secret, and they were with Cush many days. And Cush also concealed them from his sons and brothers, and when Cush had begotten Nimrod, he gave him those garments through his love for him, and Nimrod grew up, and when he was twenty years old he put on those garments...And Nimrod strengthened himself, and he rose up from amongst his brethren, and he fought the battles of his brethren against all their enemies round about...And he set over his subjects and people, princes, judges, and rulers, as is the custom amongst kings. And he placed Terah the son of Nahor the prince of his host, and he dignified him

and elevated him above all his princes. And whilst he was reigning according to his heart's desire, after having conquered all his enemies around, he advised with his counsellors to build a city for his palace, and they did so. And they found a large valley opposite to the east, and they built him a large and extensive city, and Nimrod called the name of the city that he built Shinar...and Nimrod reigned in the earth over all the sons of Noah, and they were all under his power and counsel. And all the earth was of one tongue...Nimrod did not go in the ways of the Lord, and he was more wicked than all the men that were before him, from the days of the flood until those days. And he made gods of wood and stone, and he bowed down to them, and he rebelled against the Lord, and taught all his subjects and the people of the earth his wicked ways; and Mardon his son was more wicked than his father. And Terah the son of Nahor, prince of Nimrod's host, was in those days very great in the sight of the king and his subjects, and the king and princes loved him, and they elevated him very high. And Terah took a wife and her name was Amthelo the daughter of Cornebo; and the wife of Terah conceived and bare him a son in those days. Terah was seventy years old when he begat him, and Terah called the name of his son that was born to him Abram... And it was in the night that Abram was born, that all the servants of Terah, and all the wise men of Nimrod, and his conjurors came and ate and drank in the house of Terah, and they rejoiced with him on that night. And when all the wise men went out from the house of Terah, they lifted up their eyes toward heaven that night to look at the stars, and they saw...one very large star came from the east and ran in the heavens, and he swallowed up the four stars from the four sides of the heavens. And all the wise men of the king and his conjurors were astonished at the sight, and the sages understood this matter, and they knew its import. And they said to each other, 'This only betokens the child that has been born to Terah this night, who will grow up and be fruitful, and multiply, and possess all the earth, he and his children for ever, and he and his seed will slay great kings, and inherit their lands....' and they all went to the king and bowed down to him to the ground, and they told him what they had seen ...And the king heard their words and.. sent and called for Terah, and Terah came before the king. And the king said to Terah, I have been told that a son was yesternight born to thee, and after this manner was observed in the heavens at his birth. And now therefore give me the child, that we may slay him before his evil springs up against us, and I will give thee for his value, thy house full of silver and gold. And Terah answered the king and said to him: 'My Lord and king, I have heard thy words, and thy servant shall do all that his king desires...' And Terah hastened, (as the thing was urgent from the king), and he took a

child from one of his servants, which his handmaid had born to him that day, and Terah brought the child to the king and received value for him. And the Lord was with Terah in this matter, that Nimrod might not cause Abram's death, and the king took the child from Terah and with all his might dashed his head to the ground, for he thought it had been Abram; and this was concealed from him from that day, and it was forgotten by the king, as it was the will of Providence not to suffer Abram's death. And Terah took Abram his son secretly, together with his mother and nurse, and he concealed them in a cave, and he brought them their provisions monthly. And the Lord was with Abram in the cave and he grew up, and Abram was in the cave ten years, and the king and his princes, soothsayers and sages, thought that the king had killed Abram...

Right after Abram was sent away, Nimrod went on to build the Tower of Babel, his "grand gate for his god" (Enki/Satan). Meanwhile Terah's oldest son, Haran, had a son and he was named Lot. He also had a daughter named Sarai. (Abram was ten years old at this time and had just left the cave where he had been hidden from Nimrod.) **Jasher 9 states:** "when Abram came out from the cave, he went to Noah and his son Shem, and he remained with them to learn the instruction of the Lord and his ways, and no man knew where Abram was, and Abram served Noah and Shem his son for a long time. And Abram was in Noah's house thirty-nine years ...and he went in the ways of the Lord until the day of his death, as Noah and his son Shem had taught him; and all the sons of the earth in those days greatly transgressed against the Lord, and they rebelled against him and they served other gods, and they forgot the Lord who had created them in the earth; and the inhabitants of the earth made unto themselves, at that time, every man his god; gods of wood and stone which could neither speak, hear, nor deliver, and the sons of men served them and they became their gods....And there was not a man found in those days in the whole earth, who knew the Lord (for they served each man his own god) except Noah and his household, and all those who were under his counsel knew the Lord in those days. And Abram the son of Terah was waxing great in those days in the house of Noah, and no man knew it, and the Lord was with him. And the Lord gave Abram an understanding heart, and he knew all the works of that generation were vain, and that all their gods were vain and were of no avail...And king Nimrod reigned securely, and all the earth was under his control, and all the earth was of one tongue and words of union. ...And all the princes of Nimrod and his great men took counsel together; Phut, Mitzraim, Cush and Canaan with their families, and they said to each other, 'Come let us build ourselves a city and in it a strong tower, and its

top reaching heaven, and we will make ourselves famed, so that we may reign upon the whole world, in order that the evil of our enemies may cease from us, that we may reign mightily over them, and that we may not become scattered over the earth on account of their wars.' And they all went before the king, and they told the king these words, and the king agreed with them in this affair, and he did so. And all the families assembled consisting of about six hundred thousand men, and they went to seek an extensive piece of ground to build the city and the tower, and they sought in the whole earth and they found none like one valley at the east of the land of Shinar, about two days' walk, and they journeyed there and they dwelt there. And they began to make bricks and burn fires to build the city and the tower that they had imagined to complete. And the building of the tower was unto them a transgression and a sin, and they began to build it, and whilst they were building against the Lord God of heaven, they imagined in their hearts to war against him and to ascend into heaven....and God knew all their works and all their evil thoughts, and he saw the city and the tower which they were building...and they did this thing daily until many days and years were elapsed. God said to the seventy angels who stood foremost before Him, "Come let us descend and confuse their tongues, that one man shall not understand the language of his neighbour, and they did so unto them."

In Sumerian texts it is written that while the Tower was being built, Nimrod had sent word to Noah commanding him to bow before him and worship his evil gods. Noah refused multiple times, greatly enraging Nimrod, who then gathered his army to march on Ararat so as to kill his grandfather. However he received news of what was happening at the Tower of Babel and hurried back. Meanwhile the Tower of Babel was in chaos. The book of Jasher says: *"And from that day following, they forgot each man his neighbour's tongue, and they could not understand to speak in one tongue.. when they knew and understood the evil which was coming upon them, they forsook the building, and they also became scattered upon the face of the whole earth. And they ceased building the city and the tower; therefore he called that place Babel, for there the Lord confounded the language of the whole earth."*

Elohim saw that the humans were heading back into the perversity and bondage experienced by pre-flood civilizations. In order to hinder their descent into wickedness, He supernaturally confused their language so that the Ziggurat could not be completed. Many groups splintered off and left for other places to form nation states.



The abandoned Temple was then called the Tower of Babel because of the indecipherable babbling that went on there. (From Book of Jasher)

Nimrod, son of Cush, was still in the land of Shinar, and he reigned over it and dwelt there, and he built cities in the land of Shinar. And in the fiftieth year of the life of Abram son of Terah, Abram came forth from the house of Noah, and went to his father's house. And Abram knew the Lord, and he went in his ways and instructions, and the Lord his God was with him...And Abram (asked) his father, how canst thou then serve these idols in whom there is no power to do any thing? Can those idols in which thou trustest deliver thee? can they hear thy prayers when thou callest upon them?...Abram destroyed Terah's idols and then put a hatchet in the hands of the largest idol. Next day, when Terah saw what had happened and angrily demanded an explanation, Abram pointed to the large idol with the hatchet and said he had done it. Terah scoffed and said a lifeless idol could not do something like that. Abram then agreed, having made his point that inanimate idols had no power and were useless. And Abram hastened and sprang from before his father, and took the hatchet from his father's largest idol...and broke it and ran away. And Terah, seeing all that Abram had done, hastened to go from his house, and he went to the king and he came before Nimrod and stood before him, and he bowed down to the king; and said...Now fifty years back a child was born to me, and thus has he done to my gods and thus has he spoken; and now therefore, my lord and king, send for him that he may come before thee, and judge him according to the law, that we may be delivered from his evil. And the king sent three men of his servants, and they went and brought Abram before the king. And Nimrod

and all his princes and servants were that day sitting before him, and Terah sat also before them...and they all answered the king saying, The man who revileth the king should be hanged upon a tree; but having done all the things that he said, and having despised our gods, he must therefore be burned to death, for this is the law in this matter....And when Abram was come, the conjurors of the king and the sages saw Abram, and they cried out to the king, saying, 'Our sovereign lord, surely this is the man whom we know to have been the child at whose birth the great star swallowed the four stars, which we declared to the king now fifty years since. And behold now his father has also transgressed thy commands, and mocked thee by bringing thee another child, which thou didst kill.' And when the king heard their words, he was exceedingly wroth, and he ordered Terah to be brought before him...and seeing that the king's anger was so much kindled, Terah said to the king, 'My lord and king, thou hast heard the truth, and what the sages have spoken is right.' And the king said, 'How couldst thou do this thing, to transgress my orders and to give me a child that thou didst not beget, and to take value for him?' And Terah answered the king, "Because my tender feelings were excited for my son, at that time, and I took a son of my handmaid, and I brought him to the king". And the king said "Who advised thee to this? Tell me, do not hide aught from me, and then thou shalt not die". And Terah was greatly terrified in the king's presence, and he said to the king, "It was Haran my eldest son who advised me to this"; and Haran was in those days two and thirty years old. But Haran did not advise his father to anything, for Terah said this to the king in order to deliver his soul from the king, for he feared greatly; and the king said to Terah, "Haran thy son who advised thee to this shall die through fire with Abram; for the sentence of death is upon him for having rebelled against the king's desire in doing this thing". And Haran at that time felt inclined to follow the ways of Abram, but he kept it within himself. And Haran said in his heart, 'Behold now the king has seized Abram on account of these things which Abram did, and it shall come to pass, that if Abram prevail over the king I will follow him, but if the king prevail I will go after the king'. And when Terah had spoken this to the king concerning Haran his son, the king ordered Haran to be seized with Abram. And they brought them both, Abram and Haran his brother, to cast them into the fire; and all the inhabitants of the land and the king's servants and princes and all the women and little ones were there, standing that day over them. And the king's servants took Abram and his brother, and they stripped them of all their clothes excepting their lower garments which were upon them... they bound their hands and feet with linen cords, and the servants of the

king lifted them up and cast them both into the furnace... the Lord loved Abram and he had compassion over him, and the Lord came down and delivered Abram from the fire and he was not burned. But all the cords with which they bound him were burned, while Abram remained and walked about in the fire. And Haran died when they had cast him into the fire, and he was burned to ashes, for his heart was not perfect with the Lord; and those men who cast him into the fire, the flame of the fire spread over them, and they were burned, and twelve men of them died. And Abram walked in the midst of the fire three days and three nights, and all the servants of the king saw him walking in the fire, and they came and told the king...And when the king heard their words his heart fainted.. and the king rose to go and see it, and he saw Abram walking to and fro in the midst of the fire, and he saw Haran's body burned, and the king wondered greatly. And the king ordered Abram to be taken out from the fire; and his servants approached to take him out and they could not, for the fire was round about and the flame ascending toward them from the furnace....And when the king saw that his servants could not approach the fire lest they should be burned, the king called to Abram, 'O servant of the God who is in heaven, go forth from amidst the fire and come hither before me' and Abram hearkened to the voice of the king, and he went forth from the fire and came and stood before the king.....And all the kings, princes and servants gave Abram many gifts of silver and gold and pearl, and the king and his princes sent him away, and he went in peace. And Abram went forth from the king in peace, and many of the king's servants followed him, and about three hundred men joined him. And Abram returned on that day and went to his father's house, he and the men that followed him...

And at the expiration of two years from Abram's going out of the fire, that is in the fifty-second year of his life, behold king Nimrod sat in Babel upon the throne, and the king fell asleep and dreamed that he was standing with his troops and hosts in a valley opposite the king's furnace. And he lifted up his eyes and saw a man in the likeness of Abram coming forth from the furnace, and that he came and stood before the king with his drawn sword, and then sprang to the king with his sword...And the king...awoke out of his sleep and his spirit was agitated; and he felt a great terror. And in the morning the king rose from his couch in fear, and he ordered all the wise men and magicians to come before him, when the king related his dream to them. And a wise servant of the king, whose name was Anuki, answered the king, saying, 'This is nothing else the evil of Abram and his seed which will spring up against my Lord and king in the latter days. And behold the day will come when Abram and his

seed and the children of his household will war with my king, and they will smite all the king's hosts and his troops. Now therefore my king, surely thou knowest that it is now fifty-two years since thy sages saw this at the birth of Abram, and if my king will suffer Abram to live in the earth it will be to the injury of my lord and king, for all the days that Abram liveth neither thou nor thy kingdom will be established, for this was known formerly at his birth; and why will not my king slay him, that his evil may be kept from thee in latter days?...And Nimrod hearkened to the voice of Anuki, and he sent some of his servants in secret to go and seize Abram, and bring him before the king to suffer death. ...And Eliezer, Abram's servant whom the king had given him, was at that time in the presence of the king, and he heard what Anuki had advised the king, and what the king had said to cause Abram's death. And Eliezer said to Abram, "Hasten, rise up and save thy soul, that thou mayest not die through the hands of the king, for thus did he see in a dream concerning thee, and thus did Anuki interpret it, and thus also did Anuki advise the king concerning thee." And Abram hearkened to the voice of Eliezer, and Abram hastened and ran for safety to the house of Noah and his son Shem, and he concealed himself there and found a place of safety; and the king's servants came to Abram's house to seek him, but they could not find him, and they searched through out the country and he was not to be found, and they went and searched in every direction and he was not to be met with. And when the king's servants could not find Abram they returned to the king, but the king's anger against Abram was stilled, as they did not find him, and the king drove from his mind this matter concerning Abram. And Abram was concealed in Noah's house for one month, until the king had forgotten this matter, but Abram was still afraid of the king; and Terah came to see Abram his son secretly in the house of Noah....And Abram said to his father, Dost thou not know that the king thinks to slay me, and to annihilate my name from the earth by the advice of his wicked counsellors? Now whom hast thou here and what hast thou in this land? Arise, let us go together to the land of Canaan, that we may be delivered from his hand, lest thou perish also through him in the latter days...And Terah hearkened to the voice of his son Abram, and Terah did all that Abram said, for this was from the Lord, that the king should not cause Abram's death."

Genesis 12 goes on to relate more of Abram's story.

"The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a

great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.”

The book of Jasher states that Nimrod was still doing hunting expeditions during the time of Isaac, Jacob and Esau before he died at 215 years of age. Nimrod was said to be a 'gibbor' (mighty man) a designation used for Nephilim. The people of this time would all have known about the Nephilim because Noah was still around to tell them. The book of Enoch states that the disembodied Nephilim who drowned in the flood, remained on the earth as spiritual entities. Since these angelic-human hybrids were different from the human soul-spirit, it makes sense that they remained present in this world as evil spirits (or demons) after no longer having a physical body. If this is so, Nimrod, after leaving his body, would have continued his wickedness on the earth as a spirit.

The book of Enoch states:

Now the giants, who have been born of spirit and of flesh, shall be called upon earth evil spirits, and on earth shall be their habitation. Evil spirits shall proceed from their flesh, because they were created from above; from the holy Watchers was their beginning and primary foundation. Evil spirits shall they be upon earth, and the spirits of the wicked shall they be called. The habitation of the spirits of heaven shall be in heaven; but upon earth shall be the habitation of terrestrial spirits, who are born on earth. The spirits of the giants shall be like clouds, which shall oppress, corrupt, fall, contend, and bruise upon earth.'

After the Tower of Babel was abandoned, Yahweh divided the people into nations according to the number of angels in His council. There is a passage in Deuteronomy 32:8-9 that states: *“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God.”*

Some Bible translations say “sons of Israel” which is not the true rendering, as is now known from the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Also, Israel was

not known at this time, so to say the nations would be divided according to the number of Israelites makes no sense). Israel would later become God's own special people group but the rest of the nations were placed under the authority of the lesser elohim (gods). Psalm 82 reveals that these sons of God were corrupt in their responsibilities in administering the nations and incurred God's wrath.

God presides in the great assembly; He renders judgment among the "gods": "How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. "The 'gods' know nothing, they understand nothing. .."I said, 'You are "gods"; you are all sons of the Most High.' But you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler."

It isn't revealed how these 'gods' became corrupt, but they did. They exploited and enslaved the people under them. It could have been due to these rebel angels that the different pagan religions began as well. Most religions are rebellious toward God and in many ways persecute His people.



The corrupt Watchers (principalities and powers) over these nations increasingly use their authority to defy God's will and purposes on the earth. The Nephilim spirits, or demons, are their minions who seek a global world order similar to the one that had existed before the flood. Nimrod had also attempted to create a one world order. This would give them much power over humanity. Elohim (God) had already shut down both attempts, but people still rejected their Creator and worshipped demon gods instead. Noah had been called out of pre-flood wickedness to follow Elohim, and Abram was also summoned to do the same.

Elohim called Abram and his wife out of the land of Ur and gave promises to them and to their Seed, referring to the Saviour (seed of the woman) who would battle with Satan (seed of the serpent) for the prize of humanity. God called Abram out of Mesopotamia in order to create a new nation (Israel) that would serve as the conduit for the rebellious nations of the earth to return to the one true God. This is why Israel is called a 'kingdom of priests'.

The book of Jasher gives an account of Abram's departure from Ur: *'And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, the wife of his son Abram, and all the souls of his household and went with them from Ur Casdim to go to the land of Canaan. And when they came as far as the land of Haran they remained there, for it was exceedingly good land for pasture, and of sufficient extent for those who accompanied them. And the people of the land of Haran saw that Abram was good and upright with God and men, and that the Lord his God was with him, and some of the people of the land of Haran came and joined Abram, and he taught them the instruction of the Lord and his ways; and these men remained with Abram in his house and they adhered to him. And Abram remained in the land three years, and at the expiration of three years the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him; 'I am the Lord who brought thee forth from Ur, and delivered thee from the hands of all thine enemies. And now therefore if thou wilt hearken to my voice and keep my commandments, my statutes and my laws, then will I cause thy enemies to fall before thee, and I will multiply thy seed like the stars of heaven, and I will send my blessing upon all the works of thy hands, and thou shalt lack nothing. Arise now, take thy wife and all belonging to thee and go to the land of Canaan and remain there, and I will there be unto thee for a God, and I will bless thee. And Abram rose and took his wife and all belonging to him, and he went to the land of Canaan as the Lord had told him; and Abram was fifty years old when he went from Haran. And Abram came to the land of Canaan and dwelt*

in the midst of the city, and he there pitched his tent amongst the children of Canaan, inhabitants of the land. And the Lord appeared to Abram when he came to the land of Canaan, and said to him, 'This is the land which I gave unto thee and to thy seed after thee forever, and I will make thy seed like the stars of heaven, and I will give unto thy seed for an inheritance all the lands which thou seest.' And Abram built an altar in the place where God had spoken to him, and Abram there called upon the name of the Lord. At that time, at the end of three years of Abram's dwelling in the land of Canaan, in that year Noah died, which was the fifty-eighth year of the life of Abram; and all the days that Noah lived were nine hundred and fifty years and he died. And Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, he, his wife, and all belonging to him, and all those that accompanied him, together with those that joined him from the people of the land; but Nahor, Abram's brother, and Terah his father, and Lot the son of Haran and all belonging to them dwelt in Haran.



Abram and his nephew Lot had many possessions, and much livestock. The land where they were settled could not sustain all their herds, so Abram gave Lot the option of selecting the portion of land he favoured. Lot chose the best, most fertile land that was close to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In the fifth year of Abram's dwelling in Canaan, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah and all the cities of the plain revolted against the power of Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, who ruled over them. The Bible says that Chedorlaomer fought the Rephaim, the Zumim, Emim, Horites, and Amalekites and overcame them. These Canaanite tribes were giant tribals descended from the Nephilim, obviously mighty and fearsome, but Chedorlaomer overcame them. Then in the tenth year of Abram's dwelling in Canaan there was a war between Nimrod king of Shinar and Chedorlaomer, and they fought together. The book of Jasher reveals that Nimrod (who was supposedly part Nephilim himself) was leading these armies.

Nimrod assembled all his princes and subjects, about seven hundred thousand men, and went against Chedorlaomer, and Chedorlaomer went out to meet him with five thousand men, and they prepared for battle in the valley of Babel which is between Elam and Shinar. And all those kings fought there, and Nimrod and his people were smitten before the people of Chedorlaomer, and there fell from Nimrod's men about six hundred thousand, and Mardon the king's son fell amongst them. And Nimrod fled and returned in shame and disgrace to his land.

This certainly would have been a humiliating defeat for the mighty Nimrod, whose army of 700,000 was defeated by Chedorlaomer's 5000! After this battle, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and some other allies then joined the battle against Chedorlaomer. Like Nimrod, they were defeated in battle as well and Chedorlaomer then marched on their cities and looted them.

Lot and his family and all their possessions were part of the booty taken from Sodom. Abram got news of this and he led his 318 trained men against Chedorlaomer, killing him and defeating his army, and bringing back all the people and possessions captured from Sodom and Gomorrah, including Lot and all belonging to him. This was amazing since Chedorlaomer had already defeated the Canaanite Nephilite armies, including Nimrod's army, as well as the armies of Sodom and Gomorrah and their allies. Chedorlaomer had 5000 men to Abram's 318 and yet Abram's army was victorious! The king of Sodom went out to meet Abram in the King's Valley, and a mysterious figure joined them. His name was Melchizedek, king of Salem, the high priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, who gave him a tenth of everything taken in battle.

MELCHIZEDEK

Abram's defeat of Chedolaomer may have been related to the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, and perhaps also explains why Abram gave him a tithe of the spoils.

The Bible says this about this mysterious king.

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever. (Hebrews 7)

Melchizedek appears in history without any record of an ancestral line. The Bible states that He had no parents, no record of birth or death. In fact, He seems to transcend earthly existence. Melchizedek is referred to as the First King of Righteousness and the First Priest of Jerusalem, titles only ascribed to Jesus, so this personage appears as a type of Christ. He may even have been a theophany (the Son of God in visible form). The order of Melchizedek is said to be higher than the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 7). The Levitical priesthood existed under the Law (which would be given at a later time) and was temporary. It 'covered' sin through the offering of animal sacrifices, but these sacrifices had to be repeated over and over because they could not actually do away with sin. Eventually the Levite priest would die, and his work as mediator would cease. Such a limited priesthood could not provide a permanent solution for sinful humanity. From Adam to Abram, animal sacrifices had been offered, but the problem of sin remained. A better, eternal priesthood was needed to save us from our sins, just as a better sacrifice was needed for atonement for sin. The Order of Melchizedek provides both in the Person of Jesus. He is our Mediator and He is also the Sacrifice who paid the price of sin with His blood. This forever satisfied God's demand for perfect justice. It is a one-time Sacrifice that is permanent and eternal. What is interesting is that God, through this mysterious King and Priest, was giving Abram a glimpse into His plan of salvation that was yet far in the future. It seems Abram understood that this High Priest was to be given homage, and so he tithed to Him.

THE PROMISE

Abram and Sarai had no children and this greatly saddened them. However Abram had several encounters with God concerning the promise of a great heritage through the birth of an heir. At one point the Lord appeared to Abram and said, *“To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. (Genesis 12:6-7).* He also appeared to Abram in a vision. *“...the word of the Lord came to Abram ... “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’ But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.” Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars —if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness.(Genesis 15:1-6)*

These encounters seemed to involve the Lord appearing in a physical form (as a theophany of the Son of God). The phrase *“He took him outside”* to count the stars indicates that God was visible to Abram.

THE COVENANT

While Abram was living in Canaan, Noah and Shem were still alive in other parts of Mesopotamia where Nimrod, the Nephilim king, was building his ziggurats and the pagan cities of Nineveh, Babylon, Uruk, and Ur. Noah and Shem lived very lengthy lives and had a wealth of information about life before, during, and after the flood. Noah lived 350 years after the flood and Shem lived 500 years after the flood. Before the cataclysm, they both had experienced what it was like to live in a world occupied by Watchers and Nephilim. They had worked side by side building the ark that would save their family as well as various categories of the animal kingdom. When the flood came, they lived on the ark together, and when the ark grounded, they started a new life in a new world. Noah was Abram's great, great-grandfather and Abram knew him for 58 years. In fact, he had sought refuge with Noah in Mesopotamia when fleeing from Nimrod. He would have known Shem as well since Shem outlived Abram by 35 years. Noah and Shem would have shared

stories with Abram about all the amazing things they had experienced in their lives. Some of their stories would have come down to them from Methuselah, Noah's great-grandfather, who had been born while Adam and his children were still living. Methuselah was the father of Enoch, the one who wrote about the Watchers and Nephilim, so Methuselah would have shared Enoch's history with Abram as well. He also would have given Abram accurate information about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the serpent, Cain and Abel, the cherubim guarding Eden, the Watchers coming to Mt. Hermon and cohabiting with human women, and the Nephilim and how they corrupted humanity and the earth. All this testimony would have been imparted to Abram and he would have passed it along to his descendants. He would have learned that the world experienced by his ancestors had been a very peculiar place, populated with divine beings, monolithic creatures, ancient civilizations, and terrifying violence.

By Abram's 58th year he had been residing in Canaan for 3 years. It was at this time that Noah died in Mesopotamia and went to be with the Lord he served. Noah lived 950 years in total.

Abram was ninety-nine years old when the LORD appeared to him and said, *'I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.'* Then Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, *'As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram, but your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.'*"

The custom for making covenants at that time was for the parties to walk between two sacrificial offerings in a figure 8, the number for infinity. God made the contract with Abram by Himself, meaning that even if Abram failed in the end, God would keep His end for His name's sake.

Genesis 15:7-19 further describes the covenant God made with Abram. Then the Lord said to him, *"Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be*

buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

ISHMAEL

Abram and his wife Sarai became worried when the years passed by and they still had no children. Sarah was especially concerned when she became infertile due to old age. She persuaded Abram to take her maid, Hagar, as his concubine so as to father a child through her. The child would then become Sarai’s in name (a middle eastern practice at the time when a wife could not conceive) and Abram would have his heir. True to plan, Hagar bore Ishmael, but it did not have a happy outcome for any of them. Sarai became jealous and made Hagar’s life miserable and Abraham was caught in the middle of the conflict. None of the three had any satisfaction from a plan that was of their own making, and not God’s. Eventually Hagar, unable to endure Sarai’s persecution any longer, ran away into the desert. However an angel of the Lord found Hagar and told her to return to Sarah. He also told her to name her unborn baby Ishmael, saying he would be a *“wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers”* (Genesis 16:11–12). Hagar went back and bore a son and named him Ishmael, as the angel had instructed. Abraham was 86 years old at this time. When Abram was ninety-nine years old, he had another visitation from God. This time God repeated the covenant He was making with him, promising to greatly increase his numbers. He also changed his name to ‘Abraham’ and Sarai’s name became ‘Sarah. Abraham means “father of a multitude” whereas Sarah means “mother of nations”).

NOTE: Names are very important in the Bible. They are often used in a prophetic sense. This act of renaming is a common biblical practice, indicating a change in status or destiny as ordained by God. Abram’s name change to Abraham underscores the transformative power of God’s covenant, marking a new identity and mission for Abraham. God

then told Abraham that Sarah would bear a son who was to be called Isaac. Their son would be greatly blessed and become the father of twelve rulers, and God would make him a great nation. The one stipulation for this promise was circumcision. Every male in Abraham's household was to undergo this symbolic external rite.

NOTE: Circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin of a male. It was given by God in the Old Testament as a symbol of faith (having the flesh, or sin, removed). The spiritual meaning of circumcision is explained in Colossians 2:11:

"In Him (Christ) you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ."

New Testament Christians are no longer under the Old Testament Law, and the external physical rite of circumcision is no longer required. (Galatians 5:1–11; 6:11–16). Deliverance from sin as a result of faith in Christ was the whole meaning behind the rite of circumcision that God gave to Abraham. Even the Law acknowledged that circumcision alone was insufficient to please God: *"Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer." .."No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code."* (Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:29).

Circumcision also represents the New Creation in Christ, where the old Man in Adam has been put off and crucified, and a New Man has been created in Christ. Christians are *"created in truthful righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians. 4:24). That means we were brought into a new creation 'race' and as such we are blessed far beyond Adam. We now have a holy nature and divine power. We know good and evil, and we choose the good and hate the evil!

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.(Ezekiel 36:26) "On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, and his son Ishmael was thirteen; Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that very day. And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him."

THREE VISITORS

When Abraham was one hundred years old, he had another personal encounter with God and two of God's angels while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing nearby. Because they just 'appeared' Abraham may have realized that these were not ordinary visitors. This is hinted at in his bowing down to them and saying: *"If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant."*



Elohim is described in the Scriptures as dwelling in light so brilliant that no human being can approach Him. However as the second Person within the Godhead, He appeared to humans in indirect ways, such as a pillar of fire, a burning bush, or as a manifestation of a human or angel. These are called Theophanies. Sometimes He is called the "angel of the Lord" (a term that occurs over 60 times in the Bible) but this angelic manifestation is unique from created angels. When Elohim appeared to Abraham, He appeared entirely human, even to the point of sharing a meal with His host. Yet Abraham saw beyond the physical, recognizing that his visitors were divine. He was even able to differentiate between the angels and Elohim Himself for he had seen God in human or angelic form before, and he had heard God's voice, so he seemed to know which was the Lord and which were His angels.



He was very desirous that they stay for awhile, so he offered them typical middle eastern hospitality. As Abraham spoke with God, Sarah was inside the tent, listening. When God told Abraham that in one year's time Sarah would give birth, she laughed to herself but God heard her and confronted her. She tried to lie her way out of it but God persisted. *“Yes, you did laugh.”* When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

Then the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.” Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.” The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord.

God knew exactly how bad things were in Sodom but He wanted to give Abraham the opportunity to intercede for Lot and his family, as well as reveal Himself as a God of both mercy and justice. Abraham tried to bargain with God to hold back judgement from Sodom if there were

righteous people living there. He was undoubtedly thinking of Lot and his family. God agreed to hold back judgement if as few as 10 righteous people were part of the populace, showing the great extent of God's patience and tolerance for this wicked city.

SODOM & GOMORRAH

Abraham's nephew Lot had moved close to Sodom. However, later he moved right into the city. After Abraham rescued Lot and his family from Chedolaomer, Lot returned to Sodom, raising his family there. He seems to have been given favour by the king of Sodom because he was allowed to live in comparative comfort and safety. He even sat at the gate of the city, indicating he was there with other leading men of the city, either discussing the day's issues or engaging in important civic business. The Bible describes Lot as "*righteous*" and "*distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless*". (2 Peter 2:7).

Ezekiel 16:49-50 gives some more insight into the depravity of the city. "*Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me.*"

The Hebrew word translated "detestable" refers to something that is morally disgusting. It is the same word used in Leviticus 18:22, where homosexuality is an "*abomination.*" Jude 1:7 also weighs in: "*Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.*" So while homosexuality was not the only sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, it appears to be a significant reason for the destruction of those cities. Those who attempt to explain away the biblical condemnation of homosexuality claim that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was inhospitality. One could certainly say that the Sodomites were inhospitable, but it was the nature of that 'inhospitality' that brought down God's wrath.

A clearer picture of these twin cities comes from the book of Jasher. Apparently the inhabitants of these cities would trap and lure victims into their limestone maze and rob and rape them, keeping them in cages to torture them, and even eat them! Sodom and Gomorrah were undoubtedly some of the most hellish places on earth.

Elohim promised Abraham that if the angels found as many as ten righteous people living in Sodom, judgement would be withheld. Abraham felt sure there would be at least that number, so he was reassured regarding Lot's safety. As the angels, who are very beautiful, entered the city, they were quickly noticed and admired by the populace. Their admiration was mixed with lust, for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were very licentious.



The angels appeared in human form and when Lot saw them in the city square, he feared for their safety (not knowing then that they were really angels). He knew that as strangers to the city, they could be attacked, as strangers often were. He brought them to his home but a mob of men - old and young - quickly gathered at his door demanding that Lot send out the 'men' so they could have sex with them. Lot tried to appease the mob but they threatened to attack Lot himself. The angels brought him inside and struck the attackers with blindness. Then they instructed Lot to gather any other family members together. Lot tried to persuade his sons-in-law to accompany his family, but they thought he was joking and refused to come.

NOTE: The Bible says that Lot actually offered his two virgin daughters to the mob outside his home, in the place of the two angels! He said: *“Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t*

do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”



It seems totally incomprehensible and bizarre that Lot would offer his two virginal daughters to be gang-raped by a wicked, violent mob outside his home. It was so wrong and indefensible, that one wonders how the Bible could have described Lot as a 'righteous' man. It must be remembered that Old Testament believers did not have the indwelling Holy Spirit and the new creation rebirth experience that New Testament believers have. They did not have power over sin as Christians do today. This is why so many Old Testament saints are not always very 'saintly' in their behaviour. Also, the fact that Lot was surrounded by extreme evil and no longer had fellowship with his godly relatives, could have attributed to some of his reprehensible behaviour, but it is still largely inexcusable. The culture of that time generally placed a much higher value on men than women, so that could have been one factor. The two daughters would have been seen as having less value than the two male visitors to the city. The Bible says that every day Lot was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless and was tormented by the lawless deeds he saw and heard in Sodom, so he should have known that his offer of his two daughters was wrong. He probably felt helpless in this

situation and may have spoken out of desperation. The story definitely emphasizes the dangers of living in close proximity to sinful influences. Lot could have moved out of Sodom at any time, but chose to dwell there because of its comforts and amenities. Now he was facing the full repercussions of his choices.

The Sodom mob refused Lot's offer of his daughters and tried to break down his door, but the angels struck the mob with blindness so they couldn't find the door. The angels then forcibly led the frightened Lot and his family out of Sodom, warning them not to look back because God was about to judge the cities for their sins. As the angels were leading Lot's family to safety, Elohim rained down fire and sulphur. Lot's wife lingered along the way and turned back to gaze at the destruction, thereby imperilling her life as bitumen and salt smothered her.



Early the next morning Abraham looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. God had destroyed the cities of the plain, but He had rescued Lot out of the catastrophe. Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains and lived in a cave. Both daughters feared for their futures as their betrothed bridegrooms had been annihilated in the destruction of Sodom. There was no man around whom they could marry, and thus no way to preserve their family line. The wickedness of Sodom obviously influenced them as they plotted together and came up with the plan to get their own father drunk and sexually seduce him. They took turns and Lot never even knew what was happening. Eventually

both of Lot's daughters became pregnant and bore sons from whom the Moabites and Ammonites descended. These nations were pagan and would later be hostile to Israel.

NOTE: The area where Sodom and Gomorrah was situated is by the Dead Sea in Israel. There are many salt deposits there today. Salt can be tested for organic creatures. The salt of Gomorrah has been tested for once living things and the results are identical to the 'salt remains' of Hiroshima! There are also sulfur balls which are 95% pure. These light up immediately and release toxic fumes and leave behind sludge that can burn through metals in minutes. Most of the sulfur balls are in billions of capsules ranging from the size of a hand to the size of boulders. Also according to legend, there is a pillar of salt named "Lot's wife" located near the Dead Sea at Mount Sodom in Jordan. This pillar is said to resemble a figure leaning forward and wearing a dress.

ABRAHAM'S PROMISED SON



Elohim and Abraham were friends and Abraham now addressed his Friend by His more personal name, YHWH (Yahweh). Abraham had greatly longed for a family. The dream of his heart was to have sons and daughters who would carry on his name. YHWH understood fully, and so

did Satan. Satan wanted family so that his progeny, the giant Nephilim and their descendants could spread over the earth and conquer and enslave humanity, thereby establishing his rule over the planet. YHWH also wanted family, but He was a loving God who desired a close personal relationship with His chosen human children, who would be given kingdom rule over the earth.

Sarah was 90 years old when she became pregnant. What had seemed biologically impossible was made reality through God's intervention. She gave birth to a son, just as God had foretold, and the baby was given the name 'Isaac' meaning laughter (because she had laughed when she heard God say she would bear a son). Sarah said, *"God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me."* Sarah would live another 37 years before she died at 127. Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born and he would live to be 175.



Note: Abraham still had some living relatives from pre-flood times when Isaac was born. Shem, Noah's oldest son, was still living in Mesopotamia at this time and would outlive Abraham by 35 years! His lifespan would total 600 years.

When Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded. The child grew and was weaned, and on that day Abraham held a great feast to celebrate. But Sarah saw that Ishmael, the son of Hagar, was mocking her little boy. Like many mothers, she may have had an intuitive sense of danger that brought out her protective instincts. To

her mind, Ishmael's mockery may have been motivated by something more sinister than innocent teasing. She saw a threat to Isaac's future well-being. This is most likely why she told Abraham to get rid of Hagar and Ishmael. She wished to make certain that the older son would never share in Isaac's inheritance. Of course, the matter distressed Abraham, but God told him to do as Sarah wanted. He affirmed that Isaac was the one to whom His promise would come, but He assured Abraham that he would make a nation of Ishmael as well, because he was his son. Early the next morning Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away, giving them food and water for their journey. God watched over them in the desert and sent an angel to comfort them. Ishmael grew up and became an archer. His mother found a wife for him from Egypt.

Isaac was treated like a prince. All the dreams of his parents rested upon this precious son of their old age. YHWH told Abraham: *"I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him."*

It was a very great promise and Isaac's parents clung to it with every fibre of their being. Abraham's affection for Isaac was so great that it may even have rivalled the love he felt for YHWH. Perhaps that is why YHWH put Abraham to the test, to confirm that He was the number one priority in Abraham's life. It was to be the greatest test of Abraham's entire life. Sarah wasn't included in the test, perhaps because, as a mother, she would have found it more than she could bear. Also Abraham was asked by God to offer up his son Isaac as a human sacrifice. This must have been a surprise to Abraham, although animal sacrifices were a common practice in that world, having originated from the time of Adam and Eve. God Himself had slain the first animal so as to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness. Adam would have offered animal sacrifices to God from then on. His son Abel was a shepherd and regularly offered sacrifices from his herds. God approved his animal sacrifice over Cain's vegetable offering, indicating that blood was a requirement for approaching Him. One of the first things Noah did upon disembarking the ark on Mt. Ararat was to offer up an animal sacrifice. He understood that blood was required to cover the guilt of sin and gain God's approval. However God had made it clear that murder of a human being was forbidden. Even if an animal killed a human, it was to be executed because to kill a man was to kill one made in God's image. So when God asked Abraham to kill his own son as a sacrifice, Abraham undoubtedly must have wondered why God would ask him to do something He had forbidden earlier.

Scripture indicates that he probably realized God was testing him. *“Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death”.* (Hebrews 11:19)

The fact that Abraham was willing to do this act speaks highly of his faith and obedience to God. Small wonder that he was called a friend of God and the father of faith.



The book of Enoch says the Nephilim in pre-flood times were into cannibalism and the shedding of human blood. Murder was spreading over the entire earth, threatening the very existence of humanity. After the flood, Cain's descendants carried on the practice of human slaughter to appease their gods. Pagan religions developed this practice, making animal and human blood an essential component of their worship. Right from the beginning, Satan would have observed that God required blood to cover sin. He would have noted how God required this sacrificial rite in His relationship with humans. He also knew that shedding human blood was abhorrent to God and therefore forbidden. That would have made him even more desirous to flout God by engaging in it. Being a highly intelligent creature, Satan would have wondered how this all fit into God's plan and how the prophecy of the war of seeds would play out. How did blood sacrifice fit into the picture? Satan has always wanted to usurp God's place and desecrate whatever He was doing, so the idea of human sacrifices in pagan religion ideally fulfilled his purposes.

THE SACRIFICE

On the way to Mt. Moriah where Abraham planned to sacrifice Isaac, his son noticed that they were carrying the wood and fire, but no lamb for the offering. He asked his father about that, to which Abraham replied, *“God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”* And the two of them went on together. Later Abraham would name that place ‘The Lord Will Provide’. (Genesis 22:2). It is believed that this same area is where the city of Jerusalem was built many years later, where Jesus was crucified. Abraham probably didn’t know how significant his words actually were, but they were prophetically pointing to God’s own Lamb of Sacrifice whom He would provide for the salvation of mankind. It was a foreshadowing of the gospel in the New Testament. In fact, all that was happening in this incident was God’s way of using Abraham’s faith as an example of the type of faith required for salvation. Isaac, who acted in obedience to his father, foreshadowed the Lord’s own obedience to His Father when He prayed: *“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will”* (Matthew 26:39).



Abraham was just about to sacrifice Isaac, when YHWH's voice stopped him. A lamb was caught in some bushes close by and Abraham was told to sacrifice that instead of his son. Abraham passed the test by being

willing to give up his dearest son to YHWH, but YHWH would one day make an actual sacrifice of His own Son for humanity. He would rescue the nations from wickedness by giving up His own beloved Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice for the sins of the human race. That sacrifice would atone for sin and put an end to spiritual death, creating a New Creation through Him. This was the grand plan from the very beginning of time, even before YHWH had created the world and everything in it. Isaac was resurrected figuratively, as Jesus was in reality.

The Bible says: *“Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death”* (Hebrews 11:19)

Many centuries later, Jesus told the Pharisees: *“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad”* (John 8:56). He was referring to this very incident where Abraham was overjoyed to see the ram caught in the thicket. That ram was the substitute that would save Isaac’s life. In essence, seeing that ram was like seeing the day of Christ, the Substitute for all of humanity.

Throughout history, as recorded in the Bible, God was showing His plan of salvation for mankind. A Lamb of God was coming who would deliver humanity from sin. Even the great faith of Abraham could not pay the price for sin. Only a perfect sacrifice could accomplish this. This was the whole point of God’s instruction to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

GOD’S SOVEREIGN CHOICE

Isaac went on to live a life of faith, as his father had before him. When the time came for Isaac to marry, Abraham sent his servant back to his homeland to select a bride for his son because he didn't want Isaac to marry a Canaanite. This servant brought back Rebekah who became his bride. She bore twin boys, Jacob and Esau, who were very different from one another. Esau was the older, a skilled hunter, a hairy ‘man’s man’ who was Isaac’s favourite. Jacob was preferred by Rebecca. He dwelled in tents and stayed closer to his mother. The Bible says, *“Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob”* (Genesis 25:28). God also had a preference between the two boys. In Romans 9 it is stated that God’s choice was Jacob. He was in the line of Abraham’s offspring to whom God’s promise of the Messiah came.

Romans 9 explains that it is *“not the children by physical descent who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring...Rebekah’s children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand - not by works but by Him who calls - she was told, “The older will serve the younger. Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated (rejected).”*

The sovereign choice of God is difficult for some Christians to accept. The natural objection is that if God makes salvation dependent on Himself alone, and not on human effort or desire, He takes away our freedom of choice which seems unfair. The apostle Paul foresaw this objection and answered it decisively.

*“What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. For Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” **Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.** One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will? But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use? What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath— prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,” and, “In the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘children of the living God.’” Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “ Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.” It is just as Isaiah said previously: “Unless the Lord Almighty*

had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.”

Paul is saying that God is the One who determines who gets saved and who doesn't. Paul does not have much patience with those who argue against God's methods, labelling such argument as presumption. He says it is God's right to choose because He is the Creator. When he says that *“It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy”*, he means exactly that.

Paul also says in Ephesians 2:8 *“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

God's sovereignty applies to His choice of nations, as well as to individuals. In the Old Testament He chose to bring His salvation through the nation of Israel and not through the Gentile nations. His mercy was extended to Israel alone. His selective choice of nations began with Jacob and Esau. Jacob's lineage led to national Israel, while Esau's led to all the pagan nations. However the means for salvation was to be through faith, the gift spoken of in Ephesians 2:8, and Israel eventually spurned the gift and rejected their Messiah. It was the Gentiles who later received righteousness through faith and accepted Jesus as Saviour.

"That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone."

The Bible is clear that election is God's prerogative, no matter how uncomfortable that might make us. This applies to nations and individuals as well. The point Paul is making is that salvation is by God's design and choice, and not by human effort, will, or purpose. Humanity is spiritually dead in Adam and cannot make a decision for righteousness.

John 15:5 states: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”...No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him. ...”

John 6:44 ...The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

1Corinthians 2:14. "If you are in Adam, you are under the reign of death."

A dead person is unable to make himself alive by any means whatever.

Romans 5:12-14 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offence of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come."

One Bible expositor, Steven J. Cole, puts it this way: "Sin and death entered the world through Adam and 'in Adam' we all sinned... although Eve was the first to sin, God held Adam accountable for plunging the human race into sin. Why? Because God appointed the man as the head of his wife in the garden before the fall. The main idea of headship is responsibility or accountability. Satan approached the woman to tempt and deceive her. Adam passively followed her lead into sin. But God charges Adam with introducing sin into the world, because as Eve's head, Adam was responsible... Not only did people begin to die physically after the original sin, but also the entire creation began to experience death. When Adam sinned, he experienced spiritual separation from God that, apart from the gift of eternal life, would have resulted in eternal separation from God, which the Bible describes as "the second death" (Rev. 20:6, 14). So both physical and spiritual death entered into this world through Adam's original sin. But the crucial and most controversial phrase in Romans 5:12 is, "*and so death spread to all men, because all sinned*". Paul is saying, "When Adam sinned, we all sinned." In other words, God appointed Adam as the representative head of the human race. His sin involved the entire human race in sin. His sin was imputed or charged to everyone born after him. Because of Adam's sin, each of us was born guilty of sin before we ever committed our first willful sin. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners by virtue of our union with Adam. The common reaction to this is, "That's not fair!" But it's always very dangerous to accuse the Almighty Sovereign of the universe of unfairness (Rom. 9:20-21)! If God determined to treat Adam as the representative head of the human race, it is certainly God's prerogative to do so. Also, we live with this sort of representation every day. If our political leaders declare war against

another country, we go to war and some of our soldiers will die because of the action of our leaders. Their decision was our decision because they represent us. A further response to the unfairness charge is, do you think that you would have done better than Adam? Do you think that you would have resisted temptation and lived a sinless life if you had been born without the effects and guilt of Adam's sin? That's not likely! And, finally, if it's not fair that Adam represented you when he sinned, neither is it fair that Christ represented you when He died on the cross. The proof that Adam's sin affected the entire human race is that death is universal. ...Paul seems to be arguing that the fact of universal death from the time of Adam until Moses was not due to their individual sins, which were not imputed to them because they were not breaking the specific commands of the law, but rather due to their identification with Adam in his original sin... after the Law was given, sinners violated the specific commands of God, even as Adam did. But those who lived between Adam and Moses still sinned, even though their guilt was not imputed because they didn't violate specific commands. So, if their guilt wasn't imputed, why did they all die? Answer: they died because Adam's sin was imputed to them. They sinned when he sinned. The proof of their sinning in Adam is that they all died...Adam's descendants were all implicated in his sin and died, even though they didn't violate specific commands as he did, because they are "in Adam." When he sinned, they sinned. In like manner, all of Christ's descendants, born spiritually through the new birth, are identified with Him and are counted as righteous not because of their individual deeds of righteousness, but because of Christ's righteousness....Outside of Christ, the human race is still under the reign of death...We try to preserve our bodies through exercise and health food...Plastic surgery may allow us to leave a young looking corpse, but it's still a corpse! And, contrary to popular mythology, death is not a natural part of the life cycle. Death is God's penalty for Adam's sin, imposed on all his posterity. Death reigns if you are still in Adam...Romans 5:15: *"But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many."*...God's gift of salvation is provided freely to us at Christ's expense. It is an undeserved gift and it abounds to us through the grace of God and through the grace of Christ...How much sin have you piled up? God's grace in Christ is more abundant! How great is your guilt and debt? God's free gift and abounding grace is greater!...How do we escape the awful reign of death? By receiving "the abundance of grace" and "the gift of righteousness" through Jesus Christ! ... Christ's righteousness is credited to your account, which is the meaning of

justification. God does not just forgive your sins; He also bestows the positive righteousness of Christ to you, so that you stand before God not in your own righteous deeds, but in the righteousness of your representative, Jesus Christ. And, not only do you escape the reign of death. Also, you will reign in life through Jesus Christ. This begins now as you live in victory over sin (Romans 6). It also means that the sting and fear of death are removed, so that we are more than conquerors in Christ (Rom. 8:36-37; 1 Corinthians 15:56-57; Hebrews 2:14-15). (Lloyd-Jones, p. 265) (quote from Steven J. Cole)

Note: Titus 2:11 says *"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people."* This is not referring to universalism where all people are saved. That would contradict what Paul teaches elsewhere, that sinners will face judgment and eternal condemnation. Rather, 'all' refers to all the tribes and peoples of the earth being invited to receive the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ.

PROPHECY OF SLAVERY

When Ishmael, the son of Hagar, mocked and persecuted Isaac, it represented an important prophetic event - the slavery of the Hebrews in Egypt. According to the book of Jasher, Hagar was the daughter of Rikayon (Narmer), a Pharaoh of Egypt, born to one of his concubines. Hagar had been given to Abraham as a gift for Sarah.

In Genesis 15:12-16 the Lord had told Abraham: *"Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."*

This was a bitter-sweet prophecy of the future for Abraham's descendants. Four hundred years of enslavement and abuse, followed by wealth and freedom, and finally a return to Canaan when the sins of the Ammonites invited God's wrath.

JACOB



Jacob's life began with a struggle. As a twin in his mother's womb, he struggled with Esau and was born grasping his brother's heel. When his mother, Rebekah, asked God during her pregnancy what was happening to her, God told her that there were two nations within her womb who would become divided. (Genesis 25:23). One would be stronger than the other, and the older (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob). The two boys grew up together living a nomadic life. They were very different from one another. Esau was his father's favourite because he brought home game which Isaac liked to eat. Jacob was favoured by his mother.

When Isaac was old and his eyesight faded, Jacob pretended to be Esau in order to get his father's blessing which usually went to the firstborn. When Esau found out, he was enraged and threatened to kill Jacob, but Rebekah sent Jacob away to his uncle Laban in Haran. During Jacob's journey, he had a dream of a ladder to heaven with God at the top and angels ascending and descending. God gave Jacob the assurance of His presence and reiterated His promise to Abraham. Jacob came to his grandfather Abraham's homeland and lived with Laban for many years,

working to marry Laban's daughter Rachel. Laban tricked Jacob into marrying both Rachel and her sister Leah, which caused many problems. Jacob had only wanted Rachel but Laban got Leah to pretend to be her sister on the wedding night. (Deceit and pretence seemed to run in this family.) Then Laban offered Rachel as a second wife to Jacob. Through these 2 wives and his 2 concubines, Jacob sired 12 sons and one daughter. When Laban began to oppress Jacob by trying to keep back his wages, Jacob left with his family and herds for his homeland. On the way he had a dream. Through this dream YHWH reaffirmed the promise He had made to Abraham that all the earth would be blessed through their descendants and He later changed Jacob's name to 'Israel'. Eventually Jacob returned to Canaan, and made peace with his brother Esau, but not until he wrestled with God in the wilderness. This wrestling match was by God's design, to free Jacob from the fears and anxieties he experienced as he approached his estranged brother's domain. Esau was on his way with 400 men to meet up with Jacob, and this looked ominous. Esau had once said he would kill Jacob for cheating him out of his birthright and it appeared he was about to make good on his promise. Jacob prayed for the Lord's help and a stranger came and wrestled with him throughout the night. The stranger crippled Jacob with a blow to his hip but still Jacob held on. He probably knew there was something supernatural about this stranger, because he demanded a blessing from him. The stranger then gave Jacob a new name: Israel, which means "he struggles with God". Jacob limped for the rest of his life, but he saw God face to face and received God's blessing. In his weakness, he was strong. The next morning, God's blessing had its effect when his brother Esau received him gladly. However Jacob lived apart from Esau, not fully trusting his brother. His large family prospered and his twelve sons became the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. Meanwhile Esau married Canaanite women and became the father of other nations. (He also was the one who killed Nimrod as written in Jasher 27:4).

JOSEPH THE FAVOURITE SON

Jacob came from a family where he was the favourite son of his mother. It almost led to his murder when his brother's jealousy boiled over into hatred. Jacob had to flee for his life and was exiled from his family for many years. During that time Jacob lived with his uncle and married two of his daughters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob favoured Rachel over Leah

and the sisters were in constant competition with one another, making Jacob's life miserable. He had ten sons and a daughter through Leah, but his favourite was a son he had with Rachel named Joseph. This family trait of favouritism would have serious repercussions for this young man. When his father made a special coat in royal colours for him, it aroused great jealousy among his brothers. There was also evidence that God had special plans for Joseph early on. God gave him prophetic dreams which indicated he would have a future of honoured exaltation above his family members. In one dream Joseph saw his entire family bowing to him. Unfortunately when Joseph told his family about this dream, it exacerbated his brothers' hatred of him. They mockingly referred to Joseph as a 'dreamer'.

One day Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers who were shepherding flocks a distance away. The brothers saw him coming and plotted to get rid of him. Some of them wanted to kill him but Judah reasoned that there was no profit in murdering him. He suggested Joseph be thrown into a nearby well instead, and then he could be sold to passing slavers. The brothers agreed but Reuben, the oldest brother, wanted to secretly rescue Joseph later on. However when he returned to the well, Joseph had already been sold to Midianite traders and was on his way to Egypt.

Once there, Joseph was purchased by Potiphar, a very wealthy Egyptian man. Potiphar was employed as captain of the guard and may have been in charge of executions ordered by Pharaoh. He was rich enough to be able to purchase a household servant. Potiphar clearly saw advantages to Joseph's labours: *"When Joseph's master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favour in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate"* (Genesis 39:3-6)

Potiphar's wife was attracted to the handsome and well-built Joseph and tried several times to seduce him. However Joseph was a man of integrity and he refused her advances.

“With me in charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants were inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. “Look,” she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.” She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.” When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. He was soon placed in charge of the other prisoners. Two of the prisoners, who were servants of Pharaoh, had disturbing dreams and Joseph correctly interpreted their dreams for them. (Genesis 39)

Jacob thought Joseph was dead and didn't know he had been taken to Egypt as a slave. Joseph's brothers had taken his coat and smeared it with goat's blood, telling Jacob that Joseph was most likely killed by wild animals. Jacob believed them and he was in deep grief for many years. Joseph had once had a dream of his family bowing down to him in honour, but that seemed unlikely now. At home, his father thought him dead and gone, and in Egypt he was in prison, falsely accused of raping his owner's wife. It looked very bad for Joseph but YHWH was with him.

A few years later, Pharaoh had a dream that none of his counsellors could interpret for him. One of Pharaoh's servants, who had been a fellow prisoner with Joseph, told the king about Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. Pharaoh summoned Joseph for an interview. Joseph told Pharaoh that his dreams foretold seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. He wisely suggested a plan to Pharaoh to institute a program that would conserve grain during the good harvests and later disburse them when the famine hit. Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph's wisdom that he made him second in command over all of Egypt.



Joseph stored grain for seven years and when the famine hit, everyone came to Egypt to buy grain, including Joseph's family. They arrived from Canaan, seeking to buy food, because the famine severely affected their land also. They did not recognize Joseph. He would have been years older and dressed in Egyptian regalia befitting an Egyptian ruler. For his part, Joseph did not reveal himself to them. He dealt with his brothers harshly, pretending that he couldn't understand their language while listening to them talk to one another. He was very shrewd, placing them in situations where he could test their loyalty to one another and to Jacob, his father. He knew they could be untrustworthy because of their earlier treatment of him, and he wanted to discern their present character. He had suffered greatly at their hands over twenty years prior, so he had every reason to distrust their words, actions, and commitment

to the family. Joseph's methods were cunning in that he withheld critical information and manipulated events in various ways. He was like a detective getting reliable information from them. When he tested them further by treating the youngest, Benjamin, more generously than the others, they proved they had learned not to behave jealously as they had done when they sold Joseph into slavery. He could have exploited his brothers' desperate predicament and spitefully punished them, but instead he used knowledge to save them. After finding them truly repentant, he disclosed his true identity to them and arranged for his entire family to live with him in Egypt. According to the Torah, Joseph died at 110 years.

Joseph's story shows how God sovereignly works to overcome evil and bring about His plan. After all his troubles, Joseph saw God's hand at work. When he revealed his identity to his brothers, Joseph said: *"Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. . . . It was not you who sent me here, but God"* (Genesis 45:5, 8). Later, Joseph again reassured his brothers, offering forgiveness and saying, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good."* (Genesis 50:20). Man's most wicked intentions can never thwart the perfect plan of God.



Joseph's life parallels the life of YHWH's Son, Jesus Christ, the promised holy Seed who would arrive many centuries later. Both were righteous; both were betrayed by their brethren; both were persecuted unfairly and brought low; both were then raised up above all others; and they both forgave their enemies and ruled as kings over a kingdom. Many characters and events in the Bible were types, or shadows, of the redemption YHWH was to bring through His Son, Jesus Christ. He gave many indications of His grand plan, but they were cloaked in mystery. Even the angels longed to look into these things but did not perfectly understand what YHWH was doing.

NOTE: Many Bible scholars think Joseph was Imhotep, a famous and somewhat mysterious figure from Egyptian history. Legend connects him to Egypt's rescue from a seven-year famine. Inscriptions, carved many centuries later during the reign of Ptolemy, credit Imhotep with ending a long drought connected to the lack of flooding of the Nile River. Imhotep is also credited with major advances in architecture and medicine. He rose to become the primary adviser to the Pharaoh and was later deified by the Egyptian people. According to Egyptologists, the Pharaoh Djoser employed Imhotep, who designed his pyramid. This building was much larger, more durable, and more beautiful than the tombs that preceded it. Djoser was so impressed that he allowed Imhotep's name to be inscribed within the tomb, something incredibly rare in Egyptian history. However Joseph and Imhotep may not be the same person. For instance, a stone carving from the reign of Ptolemy was made somewhere after the 4th century BC while Imhotep (presumably) lived several hundred years before Joseph and nearly a millennia before Moses. Joseph worshipped Yahweh while Imhotep worshipped a couple of Egyptian gods. There are some parallels but also many discrepancies between the Biblical account and the Egyptian record. It is likely that folklorists adapted Joseph's story in order to credit Imhotep with shepherding Egypt through a famine.

JUDAH

The Lion of Judah is a symbol of the fierce majesty of an all-powerful King who rules over all. This is a recurring theme throughout the Bible pertaining to the Messiah. The first prophecy describing this lion-like king was given by Jacob concerning his son Judah.



"You are a lion's cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness - who dares to rouse him? The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his." (Gen. 49:8-10)

What is strange about God choosing Judah over Joseph to be in the Messianic line concerns the disparity in the natures of the two brothers. Joseph had the more noble, righteous character, whereas Judah was weak and compromised. When Joseph was thrown into a well by his brothers to die there, Judah came up with a plan to sell Joseph to the caravan's merchants as a slave instead. Maybe he felt remorse or guilt for his actions. After this, Judah married a Canaanite woman in spite of knowing that God decreed that the Messiah was to come through the Hebrews and not through any pagan nation. The Canaanite wife gave Judah three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. These would not have qualified as members of Messiah's lineage and God was not pleased with these three. When Er grew up, Judah gave him a wife named Tamar who was a Hebrew. However Er was an evil man, and the Lord put him to death. Following the custom of levirate marriage, Tamar was then given to Onan, who selfishly refused to give Tamar children. He was also put to death by the Lord for his actions. Shelah was too young to take a wife, so Judah ordered Tamar to live as a widow in her father's house. This was a severe blow for it meant that Tamar would never be able to bear children (unless illegitimately) and thus never be a progenitor of Messiah. After several years Judah's own wife died, and he grieved. Later he went

to oversee the shearing of his sheep. Tamar heard that her father-in-law was coming and put on a disguise, pretending to be a prostitute. Judah slept with her but had no money with him, so Tamar persuaded him to leave his staff, seal, and ring as a deposit until he could send payment. Judah later sent his servants to pay her but Tamar could not be found so Judah lost his property. Meanwhile Tamar had become pregnant, which had been her goal all along. Judah found out and was filled with rage and wanted to have her burned to death. That's when Tamar produced Judah's property which proved that her pregnancy was due to Judah's own immorality. Judah repented, recognizing that Tamar was more righteous than he. Judah did not have sexual relations with Tamar after that and she later gave birth to twins, two boys named Perez and Zerah. (Perez is listed as an ancestor of Messiah).

Judah's character had never been as reprehensible as some of his other brothers. After all, he had dissuaded his brothers from murdering Joseph and he seems to have undergone a change for the better way back when he and his brothers had gone to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph kept his true identity secret from them because he wanted to test them. At one point he demanded that the brothers show their good faith by bringing their youngest brother, Benjamin, back to Egypt with them if they hoped to buy more grain. When his brothers returned home and told Jacob what the Egyptian ruler had demanded, Jacob refused to let Benjamin accompany his brothers to Egypt. With difficulty Judah won over his reluctant father by guaranteeing with his life that he would bring Benjamin home. Back in Egypt, Judah's promise was soon tested. Joseph devised a ploy to enslave Benjamin in Egypt, and Judah was faced with a terrible decision, - whether to give up his freedom to save Benjamin or allow his young brother to be enslaved in Egypt. This was a scenario similar to what had occurred with Joseph. Like Joseph, Benjamin was now Jacob's favourite son and Jacob would likely not survive if he lost him. In an act of great courage and sacrifice, Judah confronted Joseph and offered to exchange his freedom for Benjamin's. Joseph was overwhelmed by Judah's self-sacrifice and was unable to continue his ruse. He broke down in tears and revealed his true identity. Jacob's family reconciled and moved to Egypt to be supported by Joseph during the famine. There they were fruitful and multiplied. Judah's penitent actions indicated that, in spite of his weaknesses, his heart had changed. In fact, all the brothers had repented of their past actions against their brother Joseph. God knew this and it may have been a factor in choosing Judah to be in Messiah's bloodline.

WOMEN IN MESSIAH'S LINEAGE

Throughout the Bible it can be seen that God often protected and preserved the lineage of the Messiah. The first prophetic message from God concerning the Messiah stated that it would be the seed of the woman who would vanquish the serpent (Satan). Consequently Satan tried to circumvent this by polluting the DNA of the women whom God was singling out to be ancestors of the coming Messiah. Sarah was one of them. When a lustful pagan king took Sarah into his harem, God protected Sarah so that the lineage of Messiah would remain pure.



Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her. But God came to Abimelek in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman." Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands." Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against Me. That is why I did not let you touch her. Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die."(Genesis 20:2-12)

Everyone learned something from this scenario. The king learned to be more careful when seeking to expand his harem. Abraham learned to trust God rather than use half-truths to protect himself from harm.

Isaac was now 40 years old and ready to begin his own family. Abraham wanted a godly wife for him, not one from the pagan culture of Canaan. God wanted the same thing, and provided a special bride for Isaac to protect the bloodline of Messiah. When Abraham sent a servant to bring back a bride from his relatives who lived far away, God sent an angel along with Abraham's servant to make sure that the right woman was chosen. The woman turned out to be Rebecca, a beautiful young girl of good character and generous heart. The servant asked God "*If a young woman comes out to draw water and I say to her, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar," and if she says to me, "Drink, and I'll draw water for your camels too," let her be the one the Lord has chosen for my master's son.*' *Rebekah came out, with her jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water, and the servant asked her for a drink. She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too.'* *Laban and Bethuel (Abraham's relatives) saw that this was from the Lord and consented to give Rebecca to Abraham's son. (Genesis 24)*

When Rebecca became pregnant and was about to give birth, she was given a prophetic promise for her children. God told her that He had chosen Jacob to be of Messiah's lineage, preferring him over Esau. "*But before the two sons were born, God told Rebecca, "The older son will serve the younger."*

When Esau later threatened to kill Jacob, Rebecca was the one who sent Jacob far away to her brother Laban so as to protect her son, therein protecting the Holy Seed as well. All this deception was neither condemned nor sanctioned by God, but it did fulfill His own purposes for the coming Messiah. Many more instances in the Bible follow this pattern of God using women to perpetuate and protect the 'Holy Seed of the woman'.

MOSES AND EGYPT

in Egypt the descendants of Jacob (Hebrews) grew in number and strength. When Egypt was attacked by the descendants of Esau and Ishmael, the Egyptian pharaohs called on the Hebrews to join the fray.



The Hebrews fiercely drove off the attackers and exhibited such strength that the pharaohs became afraid of them and came up with a plan to neutralize them. They first of all assigned them to mammoth building projects like the pyramids, giving them high pay. This was not slave labour at the time. The Hebrews prospered under this arrangement for the entire time of Joseph's rulership, about 80 years. Gradually the pharaohs increased the number of working hours and lowered their pay. Then Egyptian taskmasters were set over them and if the Hebrews refused to work, they were beaten and mistreated. In this way the Hebrews became Egypt's slaves, just as God's prophecy to Abraham had foretold. This enslavement was to prevent them from forming into a nation. To further prevent this possibility, the pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all male babies at birth, but this plan failed when the midwives told the lie that the Hebrew women delivered their babies so quickly that there was no opportunity to kill them. He then ordered all the Hebrew male babies to be thrown into the river to drown.

The Bible states:

"Then a pharaoh came that knew not Joseph. He said to the people, "the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us, and leave our

country.” ..But the more they oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread. ...Then Pharaoh gave his order to all his people: “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.” (Exodus 1:6-22)



One Hebrew family put their baby boy in a waterproofed basket and set it on the Nile River, trusting that YHWH would save him, which He had every intention of doing. The baby's name was Moses. He was born to a Levitical family. Aaron and Moses descended from Levi, the family line that was assigned priesthood.

NOTE: Egyptian records don't mention Moses or the Exodus, likely because the Pharaohs rarely recorded defeats or crises, and the Exodus of the Hebrew slaves was certainly a crisis. The Bible is the primary account we have of the Exodus. However the 18th Dynasty pharaohs definitely linked to the man called Moses. In spite of the fact that the Bible doesn't give the name of any particular Pharaoh, several Pharaohs could have interacted with Moses, including Ahmose I, Amenhotep I, Thutmose I, Thutmose II, Hatshepsut, Thutmose III, and Amenotep II.

There is conflicting information for the exact date of Moses' birth. Some think it was during the reign of Tuthmose I. At any rate, a decree went out from the reigning Pharaoh to kill Hebrew male infants, not an unusual action as a new dynasty might fear foreign populations.

Pharaoh Tuthmose I had a daughter who was called Hatshepsut (meaning 'grace' in Hebrew) and it is believed it was she who rescued a Hebrew baby and adopted him as her own. However there are conflicting ideas about who may have been Moses' adoptive mother. Undoubtedly she had to be a very powerful woman in Egyptian history and Hatshepsut would certainly have qualified. That would explain why she was able to circumvent her father's genocidal intentions in the case of her adopted Hebrew son. If Hatshepsut was the 'pharaoh's daughter in the Bible, she would have known Moses as a young man before his flight from Egypt. Her reign as a Pharaoh would have happened during his exile. She named the baby 'Moses' which is close in sound to the Hebrew name 'Moshe'. Alternatively the name could be of Egyptian origin from 'mose' meaning "child' or 'born of'. This aligns with Moses' Egyptian upbringing. His name thus is tied to both Hebrew and Egyptian contexts, reflecting Moses' dual identity in the Bible.

Adopted by a royal princess (perhaps Hatshepsut) and raised in the palace of the Pharaoh (perhaps Thuthmose I), Moses received the best education the ancient world could offer at that time. Along with the royal children and the children of favoured royal officials, Moses would have studied under a royal tutor. He would have learned not only to read but also to write the hieroglyphic script as well as Babylonian cuneiform script. In addition, he would have studied mathematics, astronomy, and the origins of the gods, with unlimited access to the wealth of texts in the royal archives. Moses' education in Egypt would have more than prepared him for his role as a leader or general, which would have served him well when he led the embryonic nation of Israel into the desert. However Moses may also have learned about his true lineage and history at the feet of his own nurse, his mother, until he was weaned. He knew he was a Hebrew and the Bible says he identified with his Hebrew brethren and was disturbed by how they were being treated by their Egyptian overlords. When he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave, Moses became enraged and killed the taskmaster. Pharaoh soon heard of it and Moses had to flee for his life. Moses fled to the land of Midian where he again intervened, this time rescuing the daughters of Jethro from some bandits. (He seems to have been a man who highly valued justice and hated oppression). In gratitude for protecting his girls, Jethro granted his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Moses lived in Midian for about forty years.



If Hatshepsut had had hopes that Moses would be the next Pharaoh, they were dashed when Moses fled after murdering the Egyptian taskmaster. She went on to marry Tuthmose II, her half brother and was co-regent with him for the early part of Moses' absence. Tuthmose II died and Tuthmose III came to power. Hatshepsut was co-ruler with him until she died. His sole rule began close to the Exodus date. His image fits the image of a powerful Pharaoh overseeing an oppressed Israelite population and his reign's timing aligns with the Biblical narrative. This is the Pharaoh who Moses may have confronted.

NOTE: Accepting that Moses was born in the 18th Dynasty of Egyptian kings, some of these Pharaohs (the first five) would have known Moses.

- Reign of **Thutmose I**: Father of Hatshepsut. Ordered all male Hebrew babies to be thrown into the Nile.
- **Queen Hatshepsut**, the elder daughter of Thutmose I: princess who rescued Moses from the Nile: Was married to her half brother Thutmose II.
- **Thutmose II** inherited his father's throne and ruled with Hatshepsut as his consort. Hatshepsut bore one daughter, Neferure, but no son. When her husband died about 1479 BC the throne passed to his son Thutmose III.

- **Thutmose III** was an infant so Hatshepsut (his aunt and stepmother) acted as regent for the young king for 22 years. He became sole ruler after Hatshepsut's death in 1458. Thutmose III conducted between 17 and 20 military campaigns, all victorious. Two years before his own death, and after the death of his firstborn son and heir (during the plague of the firstborn in Exodus) Thutmose III appointed a later son, Amenhotep II, as junior co-regent and successor-in-waiting.

The next major incident in Moses' life was his encounter with God at the burning bush. (Exodus 3-4) Moses was tending a flock of sheep belonging to his father-in-law on Mt. Horeb in Midian, when he saw a burning bush that was not consumed by the flames. There, the angel of the Lord called to him and told him that He was sending him to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.



Moses hesitated and tried to evade the summons, but YHWH assured him He would go with him. He told Moses that he was to bring the people back to Horeb to worship YHWH on that very mountain. He also gave Moses His personal name, 'Yahweh, I AM', to convey His love and presence to His people. Moses still felt a lack of confidence to carry out this mission, so Yahweh had his brother Aaron, meet him on the way.



He also gave Moses some signs that would convey the Lord's power. One of these was a stick that would turn into a snake when cast to the ground. The stick turning into a snake was an important display of power that would impress the Egyptians. They were deeply steeped in all manner of magic and sorcery. Egyptian art was full of snakes, depicted on coffins and even on Pharaoh's crown (as a protective talisman). Snakes symbolized evil and chaos, but also life, rebirth and healing. There was a cobra goddess who represented guardianship over childbirth. Another was believed to guard the underworld and was worshipped during funerary rites. Eventually this snake god supposedly became Ra's successor as King of the Sky. The wilderness had fiery flying serpents and these were also depicted in Egyptian art. It was no coincidence that Yahweh gave Moses a rod that could turn into a snake since Pharaoh would recognize this as a show of power.

Moses and Aaron traveled to Egypt together. They knew it was very daunting to approach Pharaoh because he had many powerful magicians trained in the black arts. Even though the old Pharaoh (who had wanted to kill Moses) was now dead, Egypt hadn't changed over the years. Egypt was still full of demonic worship of everything under the sun - planets, weather, animals, sun, death, fertility, even Pharaoh himself - all controlled by powerful demon-inspired priests. Moses well understood

the powers wielded by these sorcerers because he had been brought up around them. Moses knew he was in for a heavy spiritual battle.

TUTHMOSES III

Moses returned to lead his people out of Egypt when he was about 80 years old. (He had left Egypt at 40 years of age (Acts 7:23) and had spent forty years in Midian). When he and Aaron arrived in Egypt, they brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped. Then Moses and Aaron went to the palace to confront the Pharaoh.



Thutmose III was the most powerful pharaoh who ever lived, never losing a battle. He was also the most religious, having been raised by priests who taught him the sorcery of the evil gods. He wrote and distributed THE BOOK OF THE DEAD. He was actually the illegitimate son of Thutmose II and he was also Hatshepsut's half-brother. He scoffed at Moses when he was told that the God of the Israelites wanted

him to let His people leave Egypt. Pharaoh recognized no authority but his own so he demanded a sign of Yahweh's authority. God had instructed Moses and Aaron to throw down the staff when they met Pharaoh, and when Aaron did so, his staff turned into a huge snake. Pharaoh immediately summoned his own magicians who were also able to turn their staffs into snakes. These were sorcerers who were very deep into the black arts. Two of them, Jannes and Jambres, are named in the New Testament (2Timothy 3:8) and also in the Talmud, a compilation of Jewish teachings. If the rabbinical literature is correct, these two men later followed the Israelites into the desert and died there. But now, as Aaron's staff turned into a huge snake before the throne of Pharaoh, the two magicians were able to replicate the miracle. However, in an ominous display of superior strength, Aaron's snake devoured the magicians' snakes. Yet in spite of this, Pharaoh's heart remained obstinate.



He was so hardened that he refused to be impressed by this obvious sign of Yahweh's superior power. His response was *"Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go."* What followed this arrogant response was Yahweh sending a series of 10 plagues that made it very clear just who He was. Just as the 10 Commandments become symbolic of the fullness of God's moral law, the ten ancient plagues of Egypt represent the fullness of God's expression of justice and judgment upon those who refuse to repent.

10 Plagues With Corresponding Egyptian God

1. Water Turned to Blood (**Hapi** was the god of Nile floods) - As Aaron, the spokesman for Moses, touched the rod of the Lord to the Nile River, the waters immediately turned to blood, all the fish died, and the river stank. Partially able to duplicate this miracle, the magicians of Pharaoh also turned water into blood, leaving Pharaoh unimpressed with this great wonder from God.

2. Frogs Coming From the Nile (**Heket** represented by a frog stood for fertility) - The second plague was that of frogs. The frogs came up from the river and were in the Egyptians' houses, in their food, in their clothing, and in every place possible. From the greatest to the least, no one in Egypt escaped the plague of frogs. Pharaoh's magicians were able to bring more frogs in their attempt to imitate the power of God, but only Moses was able to make the frogs go away.

3. Lice From the Earth's Dust (**Geb** was the god of the earth) - At the command of the Lord to Moses, Aaron was told to stretch forth his rod and smite the dust of the earth. The dust became lice throughout all the land, on both people and beasts. The magicians of Pharaoh were humiliated, being unable to compete with this power that was so much greater than the powers they had from their Egyptian gods and goddesses. They were forced to profess, "this is the finger of God." This was the last plague that required Aaron's involvement, as the next set of three plagues are issued by the word of Moses himself.

4. Swarms of Flies (**Khepri** was the god of morning sun, creation, and rebirth, often depicted as a scarab beetle or a man with a scarab head). Moses met Pharaoh at the Nile River in the morning and made the demand from the Lord "*Let My people go, that they may serve Me.*" Again, Pharaoh hardened his heart and disregarded the request, resulting in a pronouncement of swarms of flies. Plagued by flies, Pharaoh tried a new tactic and tried bargaining with the Lord, showing his desire to maintain power and authority over God. He tried to dictate the terms and conditions of the offer, telling them they could sacrifice but only "in the land", clearly not complying with the requested "three days journey" that the Lord required. Moses wouldn't budge, and Pharaoh relented giving permission for them to leave, but telling them not to "go very far." This temporary allowance was made solely to have Moses

intreat the Lord that the swarms of flies would depart. As soon as the request was granted by the Lord, Pharaoh reneged on his promise and would not let the Israelites go.

5. Death of Cattle and Livestock (**Hathor**, the major goddess in Egyptian religion, represented a sky deity; she was the mother or consort of the sky god Horus and the sun god Ra). The next plague was given with an advanced warning, allowing a period of repentance to occur, which went unheeded. A plague fell upon all the cattle and livestock of the Egyptians. This plague affected the Egyptians by creating a huge economic disaster, in areas of food, transportation, military supplies, farming, and economic goods that were produced by these livestock. Still Pharaoh's heart remained hard and he would not listen to the Lord but remained faithful to the Egyptian gods and goddesses.

6. Ashes Turned to Boils and Sores (**Isis** was the goddess of motherhood, magic, and healing). Being instructed by the Lord, Moses took ashes and threw them into the air. As the dust from the ashes blew all over Egypt, it settled on man and beast alike in the form of boils and sores. Cleanliness being paramount in the Egyptian society, this plague pronounced the people "unclean." The magicians were unable to perform ceremonial rituals to their Egyptian gods and goddesses in this unclean state, not allowing them to even stand before Pharaoh. From then on they were not seen in the scriptural account. In contrast Moses and Aaron were the only ones left standing in front of Pharaoh, with the One True God as their support.

7. Hail in the Form of Fire (**Nut** was the Egyptian goddess of the sky, associated with stars, the cosmos, and for giving birth to Osiris and Isis). Next came hail of unspeakable size and ability to destroy, raining down from the sky and turning to fire as it hit the ground. Interestingly, the crops that were destroyed by the hail consisted of flax and barley, which were ripening in the fields. These two particular crops were not the mainstay of their diet, but were used specifically for their clothing and libations. This destruction would make their life uncomfortable, but as far as effecting their food supply, the wheat still survived. This gave the Egyptians still another chance to turn to the One True God, and forsake their own Egyptian gods and goddesses, thus showing God's mercy and grace even yet.

8. Locusts Sent From the Sky (**Seth** was god of deserts, storms, disorder, violence, and foreigners). The eighth plague issued by the Lord

had an even greater purpose than all the others. It was to be felt so that Pharaoh would tell even his sons and grandsons the mighty things of the Lord, thus teaching even future generations of the power of the "strong hand of God" over all the other Egyptian gods and goddesses. Moses and Aaron again approached Pharaoh with the request, "Let my people go so that they may serve Me", and pronounced the judgment of locusts if not heeded. Whatever crops were left after the hail, were now completely consumed by the swarms of locusts that were unleashed from the sky. This wonder definitely affected their life source. By hitting them in their food supply, the Lord displayed the possibility of eminent death if a change of heart did not occur. Still, Pharaoh would not listen.

9. Three Days of Complete Darkness (**Ra** was the Egyptian deity of the Sun). Darkness next fell upon Egypt, unannounced. It was so immense it could be physically felt, and it covered the land of Egypt. It was a prelude to the future fate to be felt by the Egyptian empire when the message of the Lord was not heeded. The Lord showed that he had control over the sun as a witness that the God of Israel had ultimate power over life and death. The psychological and religious impact would have had a profound influence on the Egyptians at this point. Darkness was a representation of death, judgment and hopelessness. Darkness was a complete absence of light. Still the people remained loyal to Pharaoh and their own Egyptian gods and goddesses.

10. Death of the Firstborn - **Pharaoh** the king of Egypt, was worshipped by the Egyptians because he was considered to be the greatest Egyptian God of all. It was believed that he was actually the son of Ra himself, manifest in the flesh. Since virtually all of the Egyptian animals had been consumed by the judgments of the Lord, Pharaoh now consented to the request made, to let the people go, but they had to leave their animals behind. This was a totally unacceptable offer, as the animals were to be used as the actual sacrifice to the Lord. Enraged by Pharaoh's refusal, God pronounced the last deadly plague through Moses. *"Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sits upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more."*

The Israelites were given instructions to follow so that they did not also suffer the judgment of this last plague sent by the Lord. These

instructions are known as "The Feast of Passover", "The Feast of Unleavened Bread", and "The Law of the Firstborn." In these rituals the lamb's blood on the doorposts foretold the coming of the divine Lamb of God. Yahweh sent His destroying angel to kill the firstborn of everyone who did not have the lamb's blood smeared on their doorpost. All the homes of the Hebrews were passed over because they made sure to apply the blood on the doors of their homes, but countless Egyptians died. All Egypt was in mourning, including Pharaoh.



Finally he surrendered after his own firstborn son died, telling Moses and the 600,000 plus Hebrews to leave Egypt. The huge entourage left Egypt laden with wealth, for the Egyptians were so glad to be rid of the Hebrews that they gave them all they asked.

Numbers 1:21–43 gives an account of the numbers of Israelites from each tribe. Adding these up, one arrives at the figure given in Numbers 1:46, just over 600,000 adult men, implying a total population about four times that size, or 2.4 million. The idea of the Hebrews growing from 70 to more than 2 million in 430 years is not implausible. It would require a population growth rate of 2.6 percent. This is extraordinarily high but not too far beyond the 2.2 percent growth rate seen worldwide in the middle of the twentieth century. Biblical references to Israel's increase reflect a level of explosive growth.'

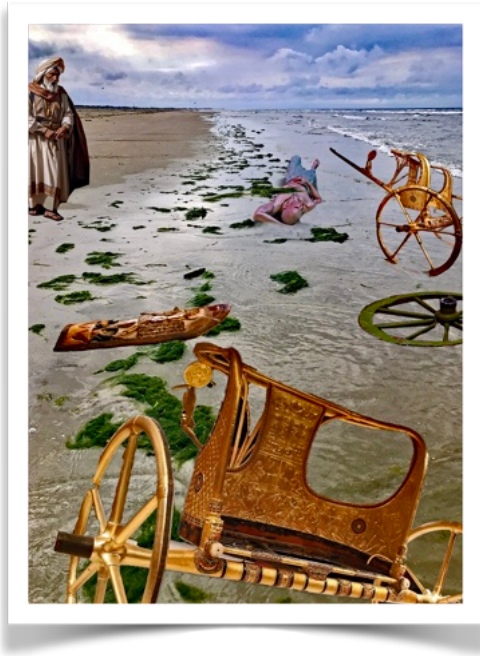


Upon reflection, Pharaoh thought better of letting all his slaves leave Egypt and he was consumed with rage as he raced after them. He had learned nothing from the plagues Yahweh had sent earlier. His army raced after the Hebrews who were seen crossing the Red Sea, with Moses standing on the other side, his rod held aloft as the waters stood parted on either side.



Thinking his army could cross as the Hebrews were doing, Pharaoh commanded his men to go forward, but Moses lowered his staff and the waters returned to their place. Pharaoh's chariots and soldiers were mired in mud and found no escape when the waters closed over them.

Next day the Hebrews saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore and were in awe of Yahweh's great power. Not one of Pharaoh's army made it out alive. Just as in antediluvian days, a flood of water had destroyed evil.



The Hebrews celebrated the monumental victory Yahweh had given them. They were so elated that Miriam, prophetess and elder sister of Aaron and Moses, led the women in song and dance with tambourines. Today the 'Song of the Sea' is read on the seventh day of the Jewish Passover, the day on which the sea was split and the song was sung. On this day, many Jews have the custom of staying up the entire night, studying Torah, and recreating the miraculous parting of the sea. Some will even pour water on the floor and then dance through it, commemorating this miraculous event.

NOTE: One of Egypt's Pharaohs was truly unique. He was the 10th Pharaoh, Amenhotep IV, who changed his name to Akhenaten, meaning "Effective for Aten". There is no evidence that he was influenced by Moses, or by the Israelite religion, but the fact that he was the only Pharaoh to ever practice monotheism has intrigued many. There are many speculations about this king and why he abandoned the traditional ancient Egyptian religion of polytheism and introduced Atenism, or worship centred around one god, Aten. He declared Aten the only god to be worshiped, ordered the defacing of Amun's temples, and removed 'plural gods' inscriptions. He wrote the GREAT HYMN TO THE ATEN, with the lines: "*You are the only one, who created the earth according to your will, you alone, O Aten, for whom all live.*" "*O Sole God beside whom there is none! You made the earth as you wished, you alone.*" "*You are in my heart and there is none who knows you except your son (i.e. Akenatan).*" This captures the idea that he considered Aten a singular, all-powerful deity. Akhenaten's art also emphasized his role as the mediator between Aten and humanity, suggesting a deep personal commitment to this god, which could be interpreted as living for Aten's glory. Some of his art depicts Akhenaten and his wife embracing and kissing their babies, so unlike earlier Egyptian art which centred on pagan gods, death, and the violence of war. After his death, the Egyptians began to erase the names of Hatshepsut, Akhenaten, and Tutankhamen from all the palaces and monuments in Egypt. However the idea persists with many that Akhenaten may have been influenced by the God of the Israelites.

GIVING OF THE LAW



The Hebrews didn't really know their God and the first thing Yahweh did, through Moses, was to reveal to them His holiness and hatred for sin. God led the people by going before them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When they came to Mt. Sinai, Moses climbed up and met with Yahweh to receive the ten commandments written on stone tablets. These laws were given so that the people would know what Yahweh expected of them. Meanwhile the Israelites had to stay below and could not approach the mountain which displayed flashes of lightning to prevent them from being killed if they tried to climb the mount. This was intended to show the Israelites that God was holy and could not be approached by sinful humanity.



The ten Commandments are 10 basic moral rules which were necessary to establish order in Hebrew society, plus they clearly showed the extent of Yahweh's holiness. The commandments are a summary of God's holy and righteous nature carved on stone tablets. These laws are also 'written' on the conscience of every one of us because we are created in the image of God. Every human being has inherent knowledge of right and wrong. This moral standard is still used today in many nations and civilizations of the world, without necessarily following the God of the Jews. Most civilizations have laws against theft, murder, bearing false witness, adultery, fornication, etc. Of course to reach the moral perfection of God by obeying the Commandments required perfect obedience, and that disqualified everyone. However the Israelites naively affirmed to Moses that they would keep all ten commandments. They also built a tabernacle according to Yahweh's instructions. It was a tent-like structure that could be carried with them as they travelled through the desert. The Law of Commandments, the Tabernacle, and the Old Covenant were all designed to keep Israel faithful to God.

However the Israelites were continually complaining to God because they had little faith in Him. They had been considerably weakened in character while in Egypt. Their slave mentality often made them craven,

and their lack of trust in Yahweh resurfaced continually. Even though Yahweh continually provided them with all their needs (even sending angelic food called manna at one point), the Israelites remained fearful and disobedient.



When Moses had gone up to Mt. Sinai to receive the 10 commandments, Israel had quickly reverted to worshipping a golden calf which they coerced Aaron into making for them. They were so used to idol worship in Egypt, that they could not trust a God they could not see face to face. Even the thunder and lightning on the mountain had only impressed them for a short time. Their weak faith could not withstand a 40 day absence by Moses when he went up into the mountain to receive the commandments. When Moses returned to camp, he was enraged at the people when he saw the golden calf. He had Aaron grind the metal calf into powder and made the Israelites drink it in a mixture.

The Hebrews persisted in rebelling against Yahweh, greatly trying His patience. Then Moses sent spies into Canaan, who reported that the land was very fruitful but the cities were well fortified and there were giants living there, descendants of Anak (Gen 15:18-21). There were many tribes related to Anak, (or the Anakim). One particular people group was the Amorites. God had told Abram: *"To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river Phrat, with the Kenite, the Kenizzite, the Kadmonite, and the Hittite, Perizzite, and the Rephaim, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, Girgashite, and the Jebusite."* God had mentioned to Abraham: *"In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."* The full measure of the Amorites' wickedness had now been

reached and God wanted the Hebrews to annihilate them. These fierce warriors were not only related to the Anakim, but were said to be the ancestors of the Philistines. When the Hebrew people were told that they would be facing these formidable giants in the land, they were overcome with terror and refused to go any further. They wanted to choose new leaders to take them back to Egypt.



It was at this point that Yahweh gave up on them. He wanted to strike the entire nation down and start a new nation through Moses. However Moses begged Him to have mercy. He argued that killing all the people would reflect badly on the LORD. Because of his intercession, Yahweh relented but this did not save the people from judgment. Yahweh sentenced the older generation to roam in the desert for forty years.

The Lord declared, *“But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these **ten times** and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it.”*

“Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.” (Hebrews 3:16-19)

No adult Israelites in the Exodus were allowed to enter the Promised Land. At first glance, this seems like a particularly harsh punishment, but the Israelites had previously “tested” the LORD on ten separate occasions. It was the cumulative effect of all those incidents that led the LORD to pronounce this judgment on the Israelites.

- **Lacking faith before the crossing of the Red Sea** (Exodus 14:11-12)
- **Complaining over the bitter water at Marah** (Exodus 15:24)
- **Complaining in the Desert of Sin** (Exodus 16:3)
- **Collecting more manna than they were supposed to** (Exodus 16:20)
- **Attempting to collect manna on the Sabbath** (Exodus 16:27-29)
- **Complaining over the lack of water at Rephidim** (Exodus 17:2-3)
- **Complaining at Taberah** (Numbers 11:1-2) The Israelites grumbled about their hardships, displeasing Yahweh, so He sent fire to consume parts of their camp until Moses interceded. The place was named Taberah, meaning "burning," due to the fire.
- **Complaining over the lack of food** (Numbers 11:4)
- **Failing to trust God and enter the Promised Land (Rebellion at Kadesh Barnea)** (Numbers 13-14): After the spies returned from Canaan, the Israelites doubted Yahweh’s promise to give them the land, fearing the inhabitants. Yahweh declared that the entire generation (except Caleb and Joshua) would die in the desert over 40 years, and their children would inherit the Promised Land instead. The rebellious spies who spread fear died immediately of a plague. (Numbers 14:1-4)
- **Craving Meat and Rejecting Manna** (Numbers 11:4-35): The Israelites complained about eating only manna and demanded meat, showing ingratitude. Yahweh sent a massive flock of quail, but while they ate, He struck them with a severe plague, killing many. The place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, meaning "graves of craving."
- **Korah’s Rebellion** (Numbers 16): Korah and others challenged Moses and Aaron’s leadership, questioning their authority. The earth swallowed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, along with their families. Fire

consumed 250 of their followers, and a plague killed 14,700 others who grumbled afterward. This reaffirmed Moses' and Aaron's divinely appointed roles.

- **Sin at Baal Peor** (Numbers 25): The Israelites engaged in idolatry and immorality with Moabite women, worshiping Baal of Peor. Yahweh sent a plague that killed 24,000 people until Phinehas intervened by killing an offending couple. Phinehas was commended, and the plague ceased.
- **General Disobedience and Grumbling:** Throughout their journey, the Israelites repeatedly complained about water, food, and leadership (e.g., Exodus 15:24, 17:3; Numbers 20:2-5). In one instance (Numbers 21:4-9), Yahweh sent venomous snakes to bite the people after they spoke against Him and Moses. Many died until Moses made a bronze snake for healing those who looked at it. The bronze snake became a symbol of repentance and divine mercy.

These punishments reflect themes of divine justice, testing of faith, and the consequences of covenant unfaithfulness in the biblical narrative. Each event was meant to teach the Israelites dependence on and obedience to Yahweh. The Hebrews could not go back, and they could not enter Canaan, so they just wandered from place to place. God had lost all patience with them. Moses also lost patience with the constant complaints of the Israelites and at one point lost his temper with them and dishonoured God with his tirade, thereby disqualifying himself as the one to lead Israel into Canaan. Joshua was given that honour instead. Moses watched as the Israelites headed into Canaan, and then he died on the mountain.



In Jude, there is a mysterious passage about the burial of Moses. *“But Michael the archangel, when he was personally taking issue with the devil, disputing about the body of Moses. . . (Jude 1:9).*

It is thought that Satan wanted access to the body of Moses but God’s archangel hindered him, probably to hinder Israel from worshipping the body and tomb of Moses, the revered leader of the nation. Israel had been quick to worship a golden calf, and it is not unlikely that they may have resorted to worshipping the tomb of Moses, given the opportunity. (Deuteronomy. 34:5-7)

SYMBOLS IN THE TABERNACLE

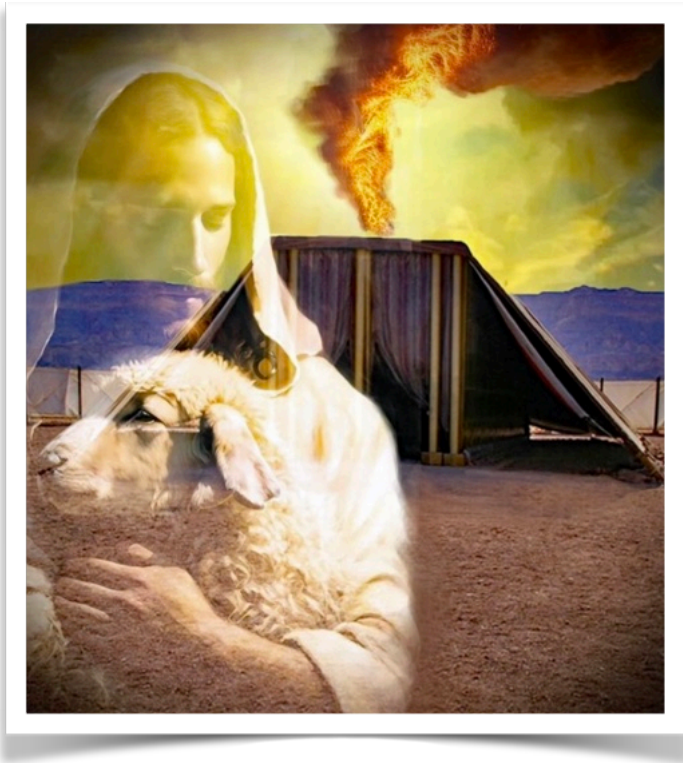
God used symbols in a powerful way to convey His truth to Israel. The furnishings of the Temple in Jerusalem, as described in the Old Testament, are rich with symbolic meaning, reflecting the spiritual truths and divine principles central to the worship of Yahweh. Each item within the Temple served not only a functional purpose but also conveyed deeper theological significance, pointing to the nature of God, His covenant with Israel, and the coming Messiah.

The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant was the most sacred object in the Temple. It was in the Most Holy Place which symbolized God’s throne on earth and His covenant with Israel. The Ark contained the stone tablets of the Law, Aaron’s rod, and a jar of manna (Hebrews 9:4). The presence of the Law in the Ark represented God’s righteous standards and His desire for His people to live in obedience to Him. The mercy seat atop the Ark, overshadowed by the cherubim, represented God’s mercy and the atonement for sin, foreshadowing the ultimate sacrifice of Christ.

The Table of Showbread

The Table of Showbread, located in the Holy Place, held twelve loaves of bread, symbolizing God’s provision and His covenant with the twelve tribes of Israel. This bread, known as the "Bread of the Presence," was a continual reminder of God’s provision for His people. It prefigured Christ as the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35) who provides spiritual nourishment and eternal life to believers.



The Golden Lamp-stand

The Golden Lamp-stand, or Menorah, situated in the Holy Place, was a seven-branched candelabrum that provided light within the Temple. Its perpetual light symbolized God's presence and guidance, as well as the call for Israel to be a light to the nations. The lamp-stand pointed to Jesus Christ, who declared, "*I am the light of the world*", illuminating the path to salvation and truth.

The Altar of Incense

The Altar of Incense was situated before the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, and was used for burning incense, symbolizing the people's prayers ascending to God. The sweet aroma represented the intercessory role of the priests and the pleasing nature of sincere worship. Revelation 8:4 reflects this symbolism: "*And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose up before God from the hand of the angel.*"

The Bronze Altar

The Bronze Altar, located in the Temple courtyard, was used for burnt offerings and sacrifices. It symbolized the necessity of atonement for sin and the means by which the Israelites could approach a holy God. The sacrifices offered on this altar pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. The fire on the altar was to be kept burning continually.

The Bronze Basin

The Bronze Basin, or laver, was used by the priests for ceremonial washing before entering the Holy Place. This act of purification symbolized the need for spiritual cleansing and holiness in approaching God. It prefigured the cleansing power of Christ's sacrifice and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers.

The Veil

The Veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was a powerful symbol of the barrier between a holy God and sinful humanity. Only the high priest could pass through the veil once a year on the Day of Atonement, signifying the limited access to God's presence under the Old Covenant. The tearing of the veil at Christ's crucifixion (Matthew 27:51) symbolized the new and living way opened through His sacrifice, granting believers direct access to God.



SYMBOL OF A SNAKE ON A POLE



In the book of Numbers it is recorded that the Israelites got discouraged and murmured against Moses for bringing them into the wilderness. As a judgment for their sin, God sent poisonous serpents into the camp and people began to die. They came to Moses to confess their sin and to ask for God's mercy. God instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole so the people could be healed. It took an act of faith for anyone to be healed, and the serpent on the stick was a reminder of their sin which brought about their suffering. There is no connection between this serpent and the serpent in the Garden of Eden. This image of a serpent on a pole was kept for many years, and later on the Israelites worshipped it in Canaan. As a result, the righteous Hezekiah destroyed the statue, having named it Nehushtan. This word is related to the Hebrew term for brass or bronze, nehoshet, and essentially labels the venerated statue as "merely a brazen thing." The bronze serpent was actually a foreshadowing of the crucifixion of Christ, symbolizing Jesus who took away sin so that everyone who looks to Him in faith (as the Israelites did by looking at the upraised serpent symbol) would be healed and delivered from death. The Rod of Asclepius is a symbol of medicine and healing, featuring a single serpent entwined around a staff. It is associated with Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, and is often used in healthcare logos today. This Greek symbol had nothing to do with medicine or healing but remains the most popular symbol used by the medical profession today.

CANAAN



The Hebrews were now a nation, calling themselves 'Israelites' after the name Yahweh had given to Jacob. The men had been trained in warfare by Joshua and Caleb and they were ready to conquer Canaan. On the border stood the city of Jericho. As they came near the city, they saw it was a heavily guarded fortress that seemed impregnable. It was very old, dating to 10000 BC. and was surrounded by a stone wall about 41 feet high. This city would be the first one attacked by the Israelites. Before attacking Jericho, Joshua had an encounter with a mighty warrior.



He looked human and so Joshua asked Him whose side He was on. The warrior introduced Himself as the Commander of the Lord's Army and

told Joshua He had come to aid him. Realizing he was speaking with Elohim Himself, Joshua fell on his face and worshipped Him. He was then told to remove his footwear as he was standing on holy ground. The Theophany of Elohim then gave very detailed instructions on how Joshua and his army were to conquer Jericho. He told Joshua: *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for I will be with you wherever you go."*

Rephaim

It was much needed encouragement because there was great danger ahead for the Israelite army. The inhabitants of Canaan were mostly Rephaim (meaning 'terrible ones') descended from the pre-flood giants. The Rephaim are never mentioned directly as being Nephilim, yet they are directly connected to the Anakim, who are connected with the Nephilim.

*"The Emim lived there formerly, a people as great, numerous, and tall as the Anakim. Like the **Anakim**, they are regarded as **Rephaim** (Deuteronomy 2:10-11) "We saw the **Nephilim** there, **the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim**" (Numbers 13:32-33)*



These were giants, perhaps not as large as the original Nephilim, but still very fierce fighters. After Babel, when the people were divided into different nations and languages, the Rephaim took on various names associated with the geographical places they chose to dwell in. There were Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Amorites, Gilgashites, Jenuites, and Canaanites. Nevertheless, they were all Rephaim, and therefore descendants of the Nephilim. Giants were not unknown to the Israelites.

When Moses was still leading the people through the desert, Og king of Bashan, an Amorite king, had fought the Israelites on their way to Canaan. He was king over 60 cities and Ashteroth, the capital city, was named after the chief goddess of the Nephilim. The monolithic buildings of this city were made of blocks of basalt weighing hundreds of tons. God gave the Israelites victory over King Og's forces, and Moses and the Israelites possessed Bashan.

“So the Lord our God also gave into our hands Og king of Bashan and all his army. We struck them down, leaving no survivors. At that time we took all his cities. There was not one of the sixty cities that we did not take from them—the whole region of Argob, Og’s kingdom in Bashan. All these cities were fortified with high walls and with gates and bars, and there were also a great many unwalled villages. We completely destroyed them.. destroying every city—men, women and children. But all the livestock and the plunder from their cities we carried off for ourselves.” (Deuteronomy 3:3-7)



Og was said to be the last of the Rephaim, although not the last of the giants. (Later giants were not as huge or as powerful as the Rephaim). Og's bed is described as being made of iron, and being roughly 14 feet, making Og around ten or eleven feet tall! Leading up to the Israelites' encounter with Og king of Bashan was a battle with another Amorite,

Sihon, also a giant Repha who refused to let the Israelites cross his territory. Deuteronomy 2:33 says Israel killed him and his sons, thereby eliminating their genetic line. The Bible says that the Angel of the Lord helped Joshua in his battle against the Canaanites, many of whom were Rephaim (i.e. Nephilim). It can therefore be deduced that the Son of God, who would later become Jesus Christ, was already waging war against the Nephilim. It had been prophesied that the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent would be at war with each other. This was an ongoing war that would continue unabated until the final culmination, when a mighty confrontation between the two protagonists would decide the outcome forever.

The events in Canaan as described in the Bible have shocked and confused many. In Deuteronomy 7:4-6 God expressed His wrath against the Canaanite nations, leaving no doubt that He intended genocide. This is the same God who is described as a God of love in the Bible and who later took on humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ.

*“When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you— and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then **you must destroy them totally**. Make no treaty with them, and **show them no mercy**. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, His treasured possession (Deuteronomy 3:3-7)*

*Hear, Israel: You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. The people are strong and tall—Anakites! You know about them and have heard it said: “Who can stand up against the Anakites?” But be assured today that the Lord your God is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire. He will destroy them; he will subdue them before you. And **you will drive them out and***

annihilate them quickly, as the Lord has promised you.” (Deuteronomy 3:3-7) (Deuteronomy 9:1-3)

Michael Heiser has this to say about the giants of Canaan. “In the view of biblical writers, Israel is at war with enemies spawned by rival divine beings. The Nephilim bloodlines were not like the peoples of the disinherited nations. Genesis 10 clearly casts the human inhabitants of those nations as owing their existence to Yahweh, as they descended from Noah’s sons, and therefore from Noah - all the way back to Adam (Yahweh’s first human son). The Nephilim bloodlines had a different pedigree. They were produced by other divine beings. They did not belong to Yahweh, and therefore He had no interest in claiming them. Coexistence was not possible with the spawn of other gods. Wherever they were found, the bloodlines of the giant clans - descendants of the Nephilim - were to be eradicated.”

God made it clear that the Israelites were chosen as the instruments of God’s wrath, not because they were righteous in themselves, but because they were not of the cursed bloodline of the Rephaim, and also because they did not indulge in the great wickedness of these giant clans.

After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, “The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.” No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.” (Deuteronomy 9:4-6)

TAKING JERICHO

Joshua realized that the capture of Jericho would be no small feat. The city was so well fortified as to be virtually impregnable. The first thing Joshua did was to send out two spies to glean information of the enemy’s forces. The spies travelled over the land and came to the city of Jericho

where they entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab. Rahab had heard about the great miracles Yahweh had done in Egypt and at the Red Sea. She believed that He would surely give the Israelites victory in taking the city. (She was in fact the first recorded Gentile convert). Rahab agreed to help the spies escape if they would promise to protect her and her family in the upcoming battle. The spies agreed as long as she hung a scarlet cord out of her window to mark her home, and as long as her family was in the same house as she was when the Israelites attacked.



Unfortunately the king of Jericho found out about the spies and he sent his men to Rahab's brothel to capture them. She hid the spies on the rooftop of her house under some flax. When the king commanded her to send the spies out to him, Rahab didn't deny that she had entertained the two Israelites but she said they had left at dusk. The king's agents did not dare risk stopping to search Rahab's house because, if they did, the spies might get away. When they left, Rahab told the spies to hide in the hills for three days before attempting to cross the Jordan. Safely escaping the city, the two spies returned to Joshua and reported that the *"whole land was melting with fear."* Then the Israelite army crossed the Jordan into Canaan where they laid siege to the city of Jericho. Joshua then executed a most unconventional battle strategy which was given to him directly from God. He had 7 priests take up the Ark of God while loudly blowing ram's horns. Armed men marched in front of the cavalcade in silence. They did this while circling the city. At the end of the march, the priests blew a single trumpet blast. This went on for 6 days. On the 7th day the Israelites circled the city 7 times and shouted, and the walls of Jericho supernaturally fell flat, allowing Israel to march right in.



Everyone was killed inside the city. Rahab and her family were the only survivors. The red cord had been her lifeline, indicating her faith in Yahweh, just as the blood of Yahweh's Son would one day rescue all who put their faith in Him. Rahab was no longer viewed as an unclean prostitute, but one who, because of her faith, was worthy to belong to God's people. Ultimately Rahab married Salmon, a prince of Israel from the tribe of Judah, thereby placing her in the genealogical line of the Messiah. There was no greater honour Yahweh could have given her. She was now a part of Yahweh's people and in direct line to the coming Deliverer. In spite of her being a Canaanite and a former prostitute, she



had trusted Yahweh and He had seen her heart and loved her. Her old life was gone and her new life was full of promise.

Note: Excavation around Jericho between 1930 and 1936 discovered that the city fell outwards so completely that the attackers would have been able to clamber up over the ruins of the city. Archaeological evidence of other ancient city ruins show that the walls always fell inward, **except** for Jericho! Joshua went on through Canaan capturing and destroying other cities as he had done with Jericho. He annihilated Gezer, Makkedah, Libnah, Hebron, Elton, Lachish, Debir, Gilgal, Aijalon, Ekron, Gath, etc. These cities were devoted to destruction and every person in them was killed - men, women, and children, and even animals in some cases. Israel focused on the regions where the Anakim (or Anakites) were known to live and their orders were to leave none alive. In certain cities the livestock were spared and taken for booty. Although the Anakim were targeted directly, other Canaanites who were living alongside the Anakim would have been destroyed as well. Some were undoubtedly dispossessed and not killed. Joshua continued the campaign through the north for 7 more years.

*“At that time Joshua went and destroyed the Anakites from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns. No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; **only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive.** So Joshua took the entire land, just as the Lord had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.”*
(Joshua 11:21-23)

Israel was to rue the day they let some of the Rephaim survive. It was a costly error. Because the surviving tribes were small in number, they were not seen as a threat at first, yet Joshua had this to say in his final address to the 12 tribes.

*“But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, **they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land,** which the Lord your God has given you. “Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord*

your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. But just as all the good things the Lord your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the Lord your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you.” (Joshua 23:12-16)



The false religions in Canaan were all centred in the cities where the Nephilim once dominated. These would later become cities of the Philistines where the pagans worshipped the sun, moon, and stars, indulging in idolatrous practices such as wizardry and necromancy, offering up human sacrifices, and communing with their fallen angelic ancestors. The Israelites intermarried with the pagans and forgot all about their history and Yahweh's admonitions. They joined their pagan neighbours at their groves (replicas of the Garden of Eden) to offer obeisance to their satanic deities, forgetting their own holy place of worship - the tabernacle. The Bible mentions a place called the Valley of Rephaim where the Philistines often camped. This valley adjoined the Valley of Hinnon where child sacrifice was commonly carried out. These demonic places were situated close to the southern side of Jerusalem.

The Philistines became a scourge to Israel. There were giants among them, as described in 1 Chronicles 20:4-8.

“In the course of time, war broke out with the Philistines at Gezer. At that time Sibbekai the Hushathite killed Sippai, one of the descendants of the Rephaites, and the Philistines were subjugated. In another battle with the Philistines, Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver’s rod. In still another battle, which took place at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot—twenty-four in all. He also was descended from Rapha.” (1Chronicles 20:4-8)

JUDGES

God allowed the enemies of His people to exist near Israel’s territory in order to test His people’s obedience. When they sinned and refused to repent, He allowed them to be oppressed, but when they cried out to Him, after a period of oppression, He raised up judges to free them from their enemies.

1398 to 1380 B.C

Joshua was actually the first Judge at the age of 92 after battling seven years to conquer Canaan. He lived to the age of 110.

1350 to 1310 B.C.

Othniel valiantly led Israel’s army against the Mesopotamian king and was victorious. He served as Israel’s judge for forty years.

1292 to 1212 BC

Ehud, rare left-handed warrior, led Israel against Moab’s king.

??? To 1212 BC

Shamgar championed the cause of God’s people by killing 600 Philistines with nothing more than an ox goad.

1192 to 1152 B.C.

Deborah and Barak led Israel to victory against Jabin, the king of Canaan. Deborah, a prophetess, was the only female Judge of Israel. One of Deborah’s judgments was to instruct Barak to summon 10,000 men and attack Jabin’s army. Barak told Deborah, *“If you go with me, I*

will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go". She replied, "Certainly I will go with you, but because of the course you are taking, the honour will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman."

Just as she prophesied, all Sisera's troops fell by the sword and Sisera himself fled to the tent of Jael, a Hebrew woman who gave him milk to drink and covered him with a blanket in her tent. Then while he lay fast asleep, Jael drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died. Deborah's prophecy was fulfilled: Barak won, Sisera was killed by a woman, and the Israelites were freed from their enemies.

1153 to 1113 BC

Eli, a corpulent man, was both a High Priest and Judge in Israel. He died, at the age of 98, after falling backwards on his chair and breaking his neck.

1145 to 1105 BC

Gideon was an Israelite farmer who considered himself the least in his family and questioned God's choice when God called him to judge Israel. He asked for two signs to confirm God's call. The first sign was to see dew appearing only on the fleece in the morning, while the ground around it remained dry. In the second sign, the opposite occurred: the fleece was dry and the ground was wet. With God's confirmation, Gideon gathered an army, but God reduced the number of his men from 32,000 to just 300, so that the victory would not be attributed to the men, but to the power of God. Gideon defeated the Midianites, restoring peace in Israel. He was given the name Jerubbaal after defeating Baal, the god of the Midianites as a symbol of his victory over idolatry and the worship of false gods. However Gideon made a mistake by creating an ephod with the gold collected from the battle and it became an object of worship, leading the people of Israel away from true worship of God.

1105 to 1102 BC

Abimelech, one of Gideon's sons, arranged for the city of Shechem to make him their king and then had all his sixty-nine brothers, save one, murdered. He assumed the power of a king over northern Israel and was finally killed when a woman dropped a millstone on his head.

1102 to 1079 BC

Tola was called to be a Judge after the death of Abimelech. Nothing more is known about him other than he was buried in his hometown of Shamir.

1087 to 1081 BC

Jephthah, son of a harlot; served in the eastern portion of the Jordan River for six years.

1119 - 1079 BC

Samson, a Nazarite from birth, had unique superhuman strength. He destroyed many Philistine leaders and weakened their nation for several years.

1085 to 1053 B.C.

Samuel, called by God at an early age, became a prophet and well-respected Judge. He anointed both Saul and David as kings over Israel.

1081 to 1074 BC

Ibzan served the eastern section of Israel's territory. Not much is recorded about him other than he grew up in Bethlehem.

1079 to 1057 BC

Jair was wealthy, had thirty sons, and was an inhabitant of Gilead who governed the northern part of the land for 22 years.

1074 to 1064 BC

Elon was of the tribe of Zebulun. Nothing more is known about him except that he served the eastern part of the Promised Land for ten years.

1064 to 1056 BC

Abdon had forty sons and thirty nephews. He served, in the eastern section of the country, for eight years.

1053 to 1050

Joel and Abijah were Samuel's two sons who served as the last Judges of Israel. Samuel's advanced age, as well as the corruption of his two sons, led the people to request a human king be placed over them. God reluctantly approved this request and Samuel anointed Saul as king in 1050 B.C.

SAMSON

One unlikely judge was Samson whose birth was a miracle. A Danite man named Manoah was married to a woman who was unable to have children, but an angel of the Lord visited her and told her she would have a son. She was to follow the rules of the Nazirite during her pregnancy—no fermented drink and no non-kosher food. The woman told her husband and he prayed that the angel would pay them another visit and give more information about their future son's upbringing. (Interestingly, the angel didn't appear to Manoah, but only to his wife who seemed to have the greater faith of the two). She was told that her son was to be a Nazirite all his life, never to drink wine, never to touch dead bodies, and never to cut his hair or beard (which was linked to his supernatural strength). True to God's word, Manoah's wife gave birth to a son, and they named him Samson.



The Lord blessed Samson as he grew and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him many times to fight the Philistines who were oppressing the Israelites. Israelites were commanded by God not to marry outside their faith, but Samson lusted after a Philistine woman whom he wanted as his wife. He pressured his parents to agree to a wedding and overcame their objections. His mother and father accompanied Samson to Timnah

to make the wedding arrangements for his betrothal, when a lion suddenly attacked Samson. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands. Later, Samson passed by the carcass of the lion and found it filled with a honeycomb, which he ate. This was a violation of the Nazarite vow not to touch anything dead. Samson gave the honey to his parents and told no one where he had got it from.

The wedding feast was a drinking party, but Samson was a Nazarite, who was to abstain from wine and other fermented drink. Likely Samson ignored this injunction. During the feast, Samson offered a wager. Whoever could solve his riddle would receive thirty changes of clothes and thirty linen garments. Samson's new Philistine wife betrayed him and gave the answer to his riddle to her countrymen. Enraged by this, Samson killed thirty Philistines and gave their possessions to those who had solved the riddle. Samson left the feast in thundering rage and his wife was then given to another man. The Bible states that *"this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines"*. Samson, full of anger, swore vengeance on the Philistines for stealing his wife from him. He burned the Philistines' crops and later, after the Philistines murdered his wife, *"attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them."* Samson hid out in Judah for a while, but the Judeans, worried that Samson was worsening their situation with the Philistines, tied him up and delivered him to the enemy. However the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon Samson who then easily broke the ropes binding him. He then picked up the jawbone of a donkey and slaughtered 1,000 Philistines with it.



In Gaza, Samson hired a prostitute and when the people of Gaza learned that Samson was in their city, they lay in wait for him at dawn. Samson escaped by rising in the middle of the night, and taking hold of the doors of the city gate, tearing them loose, lifting them on his shoulders, and carrying them to the top of the hill. The Philistines repeatedly failed to capture Samson until he met Delilah, a Philistine prostitute.



When they saw Samson's interest in Delilah, the rulers of the Philistines bribed Delilah to discover the secret of Samson's strength and betray him into their hands. Delilah and Samson were lovers and Delilah used her charms to entice Samson into telling her the secret of his physical power. When he kept evading her with lies, she accused him of not loving her. Her nagging finally broke down Samson's resistance and he revealed that his strength was due to his separation to the Lord; specifically, the fact that his hair had never been cut, due to his vow. (Likely the only part of the Nazarite vow he kept). As they had done previously, the Philistines were waiting outside Delilah's apartment to overpower him in case Delilah managed to get the truth out of him. This time she succeeded. After Samson fell asleep she quickly told the Philistines about his secret. They came and silently cut his hair. When Samson awoke, he realized that his great strength was gone. His enemies were able to overpower him and they dragged him off to prison. Samson's eyes were gouged out and he was brought to Gaza,

where he was bound with bronze chains and forced to grind corn at a mill wheel. Samson's willful disobedience had reached an end. He had been so confident in his strength that he assumed he could spurn any law. Now he finally had to face the consequences of his actions.

The Philistines rejoiced that they had defeated their great enemy and they loved to humiliate him. But they also made the claim that Samson's God, Yahweh, was inferior in strength to their own god, Dagon. To show off the superiority of Dagon, they decided to hold a feast in his honour to celebrate. Samson was to be the main entertainment. They were claiming "*Our god has given Samson into our control!*" Thousands of Philistines were invited to the party. Samson was chained to two large pillars that held up a house filled with Philistine lords and ladies.



Three thousand were on the upper floor alone. No one had noticed that Samson's hair had grown longer over the months while in captivity. Samson prayed to the Lord, "*Remember me O God; please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.*"

God granted Samson's request. As he strained at the pillars, Samson brought the house crashing down, killing more Philistines when he died, (about 3,000) than while he lived.

WHO THROUGH FAITH CONQUERED KINGDOMS,
ADMINISTERED JUSTICE, AND GAINED WHAT WAS
PROMISED...WHOSE WEAKNESS WAS TURNED TO
STRENGTH, WHO BECAME POWERFUL IN BATTLE,
AND ROUTED FOREIGN ARMIES.



MOSES ABRAHAM SAMSON

Samson was impulsive, violent, and driven by his lusts, yet Yahweh used this warrior, with all his faults, for the good of His people. Yahweh Himself is perfect but sometimes uses the sin already existing in the world to fulfill His purposes. The story of Samson showcases this. Samson is listed in the Bible's 'hall of faith' in spite of his many flaws. His name stands alongside those of Moses and Abraham.

Note on the Philistines:

The Philistines were aggressive and warmongering in nature. The name “Philistine” comes from the Hebrew word *Philistia*, and the Greek rendering, *palaistinei* gives us the modern name “Palestine.” It is thought that the Philistines originated in Crete and migrated to the Mediterranean coast near Gaza. The Bible records that the Philistines had contact with both Abraham and Isaac as early as 2000 B.C. They are next mentioned in the book of Exodus shortly after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea: *“When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, ‘If*

they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt” (Exodus 13:17).

During the time of Samson, the Philistines moved inland from the coast of Canaan and built their civilization primarily in five cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron (Joshua 13:3). Gath was the place of the Anakim, a race of giants. The Bible mentions a giant named Goliath coming from there, and other giants are mentioned, including one called Saph (also called Sippai), and a giant with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. The Israelites referred to the Philistines as “uncircumcised” meaning those who had no relationship with God. They were not God’s chosen people and were to be strictly avoided as a contaminating evil. They were the enemies of God and His people. One thing the Philistines were known for was their use of iron, which was superior to the bronze used by the Israelites for weapons and implements. In fact, Enoch had written that it was the Watcher named Asael (or Satan) who had taught human beings to make swords of iron, shields and breastplates, and every instrument of war. This secret would have been passed on to the Nephilim, the gigantic progeny of the Watchers and their human subjects. It seems this iron metallurgy was eventually passed down to the Philistines, perhaps through the Anakim who dwelt among them. The Anakim were considered Nephilim. (Numbers 13:33) The Israelites did not have this knowledge and were forced to rely on the Philistines to sharpen or repair their iron tools. With their more advanced armaments and aggressive military policy, the Philistines continually harassed and oppressed Israel. This went on for 200 years. The Philistines were also infamous for their consumption of alcohol, especially beer, and had numerous breweries and wineries. Samson’s wedding feast, recorded in the book of Judges, illustrates the Philistine practice of holding week-long drinking parties.

RUTH

The events in the book of Ruth occurred in the period of Judges, and Jewish tradition attributes Samuel as the author. The story is about a Judean family: Elimelek, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. They moved to the pagan territory of Moab because of a famine in Bethlehem, but things only got worse for them when Elimelek died.



Naomi's sons married Moabite women but after ten years, the sons died too. Naomi decided to return home to Judah because of a famine, and one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, chose to go with her. Naomi and Ruth turned up in Bethlehem just as the barley harvest began. Ruth worked as a gleaner in a field belonging to Boaz, from the clan of Elimelek. Boaz, who had already heard of Ruth's care for Naomi, spoke to her and assured her that she would be provided for in his field. He then secretly told his harvesters to leave behind some stalks of grain for her. One evening Naomi found out that Ruth had been working in Boaz's field and she realized he was a close kinsman, and therefore a guardian-redeemer (a relative who had the privilege or responsibility to act on behalf of a relative in need). On Naomi's advice, Ruth went to Boaz and let him know that she needed a guardian-redeemer. She did this by making herself vulnerable by going to him at night while he was asleep. Boaz awoke to find Ruth lying at his feet. If discovered by the other harvesters, this would have been enough to accuse Ruth of harlotry. However Boaz was already in love with this Moabite woman and he told her that he was pleased to offer her redemption, which would include marriage to her. However there was one relative who was closer in line to be the guardian-redeemer. Boaz then met with the other relative and presented the situation. The other relative declined to marry Ruth, and Boaz then made a commitment in front of the town's leaders that he would take Ruth as his wife. They were married, and Obed was born. We know nothing about the life of Obed other than his conception was directly ordained by the Lord.

“The Lord enabled [Ruth] to conceive, and she gave birth to a son” (Ruth 4:13); he was cared for by his grandmother.”

Obed’s birth caused great joy in Bethlehem and he became the grandfather of king David.

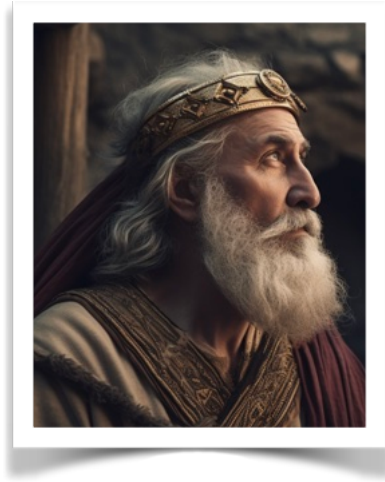
As a guardian-redeemer, Boaz becomes a picture of Jesus Christ. Ruth was vulnerable and needed rescue from her situation. She trusted Boaz to protect and care for her and he lovingly did so. Jesus is our near guardian who came to buy us back into God’s family. We were “outsiders” (sinners), forsaken, and struggling. Just as Boaz showed compassion and gentleness to Ruth, Jesus has done the same for His Bride. He lifted us out of spiritual poverty, provided for our eternal needs, and gave us a forever home.

Note: Ruth, once an outsider and alien to God, became not only part of Israel but part of the lineage of Christ. This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah: ([Matthew 1:1-6](#))

- Abraham was the father of Isaac
- Isaac the father of Jacob,
- Jacob the father of Judah,
- Judah the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar)
- Perez the father of Hezron
- Hezron the father of Ram
- Ram the father of Amminadab
- Amminadab the father of Nahshon
- Nahshon the father of Salmon (who married Rahab)
- Salmon the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab)
- Boaz the father of **Obed (whose mother was Ruth)**
- Obed the father of Jesse,
- Jesse the father of King David.

Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth were all Gentile pagans who converted to the God of the Israelites and were in the line of the coming Messiah.

SAMUEL



During the transitional time in Israel between the period of the Judges and the establishment of the monarchy, there had been 11 judges. The last judge was a man named Samuel. He wrote an account which was likely written after Israel's division into northern and southern kingdoms in 931 BC. One incident in the account (similar to what happened with Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah) involved a mob from the tribe of Benjamin. The men surrounded a house and demanded to have sex with the Levite man inside. To save himself, the man threw his concubine out to them and she was gang raped in his place. Next morning the man took his dead concubine and cut her body up into 12 pieces which he sent to the 12 tribes of Israel, demanding Israel avenge him. It was a horrendously gruesome crime and Israel responded by attacking the tribe of Benjamin. They killed 25,000 men, practically wiping out the tribe. They then attacked another tribe that had not participated in the war against Benjamin, killing a bunch of the men and taking 400 virgins as booty. On top of that, they then told the male survivors of Benjamin to kidnap wives for themselves at a festival so that they would have an inheritance as a tribe. Law and order seems to have been absent and greatly corrupted during this time. Samuel's account ends the book of Judges with the statement: *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes."* (Judges 21:25.)

Samuel whose name means “heard of God” was dedicated to God by his mother, Hannah, as part of a vow she made before he was born. She had been barren and prayed so fervently for a child that Eli the priest thought she was drunk. When he realized his mistake he prayed for her and God granted Hannah’s request for a baby. Hannah had promised to dedicate her child to God’s service, and after weaning Samuel, around age four, she brought him to the tabernacle to serve under Eli the priest. Even as a child, Samuel ministered before the Lord in the tabernacle tent at Shiloh, where the ark of the covenant was kept. It was usual for the son of a priest to succeed to a father’s ministry, but Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were immoral and showed contempt for the Lord’s offering. Samuel however grew in favour with the Lord and with men. He was given prophecies and visions. Once Samuel, as a young boy, heard what he thought was Eli calling him during the night. This happened three times until Eli understood what was happening and instructed Samuel to respond to the Lord if He called again. Then God gave Samuel a message of judgment to relay to Eli. Later Eli foolishly allowed the ark of the covenant to be carried into battle with the Philistines, who captured it. Both Eli’s sons died in battle and Eli, an obese man, fell over in shock when he heard the news and broke his neck. After several months, the Philistines returned the ark to Israel after disease and plague consumed their numbers. However Philistine oppression of the Israelites continued until God’s beleaguered people cried out to Him for help. Samuel instructed them to be rid of the false gods they had been worshiping. Under Samuel’s leadership, the Philistines were overcome, and peace reigned for a time. Samuel was recognized as the judge of all Israel. The elders of Israel told Samuel that because he was too old and his sons did not walk in his ways, they wanted Samuel to appoint a king to rule over them like other nations did. Samuel was displeased but God told Samuel that Israel had not rejected him, but had rejected God as their king. God told Samuel to warn the people what they could expect from a king.

“This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and

attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.” (1 Samuel 8:6–21).

God told Samuel to anoint a handsome man named Saul as Israel's first king. His appearance inspired confidence for he stood head and shoulders above most men.



Israel hoped that by having a king, they would be able to defeat the Philistines once and for all. Saul was shy at first and even tried to hide when the people wanted to anoint him as king. However he had a flawed character that soon revealed itself when he was disobedient to Yahweh's commands. Saul began to like the power of his position and treated God's commands in a cavalier manner. Samuel learned that Saul had been rejected by God to lead His people because of disobedience in presuming to offer a burnt offering without God's sanction. Samuel warned Saul that God had already sought out a replacement for him. After Saul continued to disobey, Samuel denounced him as king and returned home, never to be at King Saul's side again, although he mourned for him. God instructed Samuel to choose another king from the

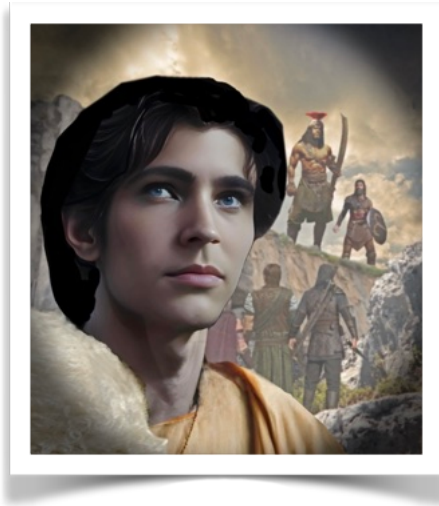
family of Jesse and Samuel anointed Jesse's youngest son, David, as the next king of Israel. However Samuel died before David was made king, and all Israel assembled to mourn for him.

DAVID & GOLIATH



King Saul was soon harassed by the troublesome Philistines who sought to overthrow Israel any way they could. One day a 10 foot Philistine giant named Goliath placed a challenge before King Saul wherein each army would send out a champion and whichever champion won, that army would be declared victorious, leaving the losing side subject to the winning side. All of Israel's army was terrified and King Saul could find no champion willing to take on the giant. Twice a day for 40 days Goliath taunted the Israelites, daring them to send a champion to fight him, but no one dared to take up the challenge. (Some scholars believe Goliath was a Nephilim, but he was likely of the Rephaim who descended from the Nephilim.

The young shepherd boy named David, who had been secretly anointed by Samuel as the next king, was sent by his father to bring supplies to his brothers in the army. David heard about Goliath's insults to Yahweh and his mockery of Israel. He loved Yahweh deeply and he was incensed. He declared that he would champion Israel against the giant. He had complete faith that Yahweh would protect him and give him victory because he had personally experienced Yahweh's protection and deliverance many times before.



Often he had encountered wolves and lions which tried to attack the sheep he was guarding. Yahweh had given him the strength and courage to kill or drive them off every single time. Though just a teenage boy, he volunteered to fight Goliath, much to everyone's amazement. His brothers mocked David and accused him of wanting fame for himself. The idea of their young brother fighting Goliath, a mighty Raphaite, seemed ludicrous. Goliath is recorded as being 9' 6" whereas a typical Israelite would have been 5'8". David was just a young teenager, so he might have been even shorter in height. Goliath was also equipped with a bronze helmet, a bronze - scaled coat of mail, a sword, shield, and greaves (shin guards), altogether weighing 125 pounds. David had refused Saul's armour and had only a slingshot as a weapon. It is small wonder that Goliath, when he saw Israel's champion, mocked Israel and felt insulted. He bragged how he would kill him, but David answered right back that Yahweh would give him the victory.



Once on the battlefield, David rushed at the giant and flung a stone that pierced Goliath's forehead, felling him just long enough for David to cut off his head. The Israelites were wild with excitement and cheered David as their hero. Understandably the demoralized Philistines fled in terror.

David became very popular in Israel after having slain Goliath. He was handsome and well-liked by everyone, especially the young women who made up songs in his honour. He had good lineage and character, being the 13th generation after Abraham, and exhibiting the same trust in Yahweh that his ancestor had. Yahweh had called him to be the next king of Israel, for He had rejected Saul because of his disobedience. King Saul watched David becoming more and more popular and he became increasingly jealous.



One event particularly rankled Saul.

“As the troops were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs, and with tambourines and other instruments. And as the women danced, they sang out ‘Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands.’ Saul was furious and resented this song. ‘They have ascribed tens of thousands to David,’ he said, ‘but only thousands to me. What more can he have but the kingdom?’ (1Samuel 18:7)

God’s divine favour towards David and the absence of God’s favour towards Saul become central to Saul’s animosity, but another factor was Saul’s spiritual and psychological state. He was being tormented by an evil spirit from the Lord which manifested in erratic and violent behaviour. On two occasions, Saul tried to pin David to the wall with a spear while David was playing the harp. These attempts on David’s life were driven by Saul’s irrational paranoia. They were also most likely driven by Saul’s desire to eliminate potential rivals to ensure the stability of his reign and the succession of his descendants.

After the defeat of Goliath, Saul offered his older daughter Merab to David as a wife, but David felt unworthy of this honour, and so Merab was given to another man. Saul’s younger daughter Michal was in love with David, and when Saul heard of it, he was pleased because he saw an opportunity to have David killed. Saul offered Michal to David in marriage but requested an odd bride price—a hundred foreskins of the Philistines. He thought the Philistines would kill David, but David completed the mission and took Michal as his wife, making Saul an even greater enemy. Later on, Saul sent men to kill David, but Michal helped David escape through a window, and she covered for him with a story that he was sick. She afterwards falsely claimed David had threatened to kill her if she didn’t help him. Saul took Michal from David and married her off to a man named Palti.

Michal was not the only one who loved David. He was also close friends with Saul’s son Jonathan. The friendship between David and Jonathan was a covenantal relationship. They formed an agreement in which Jonathan was to be second in command in David’s future reign, and David was to protect Jonathan’s family. Jonathan gave David his clothes and military garb, signifying with this gift that Jonathan recognized that David would one day be king of Israel. Rather than being envious or jealous, Jonathan submitted to God’s will and sacrificed his own right to

the throne. When King Saul told his followers to kill David, Jonathan rebuked his father and recalled David's faithfulness to him in killing Goliath. Saul was enraged that his own son would defend David and threw a spear at him to kill him. This was proof conclusive to Jonathan that his father meant to kill David. A plan was concocted by Jonathan to reveal his father's intentions toward David. Jonathan was going to practice his archery and David was to be within listening distance. If Jonathan told his servant that the arrows he shot were to the side of the target, David was safe. If Jonathan told his servant that the arrows were beyond the target, David was to leave and not return. Jonathan told the servant that the arrows were beyond the target, meaning that David should flee. After sending his servant away, Jonathan found David and the two men wept together.



For the next 10 years David was a hunted man. He and his followers were relentlessly pursued by Saul and his armies, forcing David and his men to be constantly on the run. It was guerrilla warfare training that would later be indispensable when David became Israel's next king. But in the meantime it made David's life very precarious. He also had to watch out for the Philistines who roamed the land. There were enemies on every side and David's faith was often stretched to the limit, yet his trust in Yahweh only grew stronger. David also consistently demonstrated loyalty and respect towards Saul.

On multiple occasions, David had the opportunity to kill Saul but refrained, citing his reverence for Saul as the Lord's anointed king. On one occasion, David and his men were hiding in a cave that Saul entered to relieve himself. David was near enough to Saul to cut off the edge of his robe, yet he would not kill him. Instead he said, *"The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord"*. (1 Samuel 24:6) David remonstrated with Saul and the king seemed ashamed, saying: *"Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul cried loudly to David, "You are more righteous than I am, because you have treated me well even though I've treated you poorly. You have explained how you treated me well, in that the Lord delivered me into your hand but you didn't kill me."* (1 Samuel 4:16-18) However this moment of remorse was not to last for long or change the course of Saul's persecution of David.



Finally Saul died in a battle against the Philistines, along with his three sons, and David was crowned king. David demanded Michal back as his wife as a condition of his becoming king of Judah and his condition was met. David's ascension to the throne was bittersweet. He was finally free of Saul's persecution but he had lost a dear friend in Jonathan. He mourned greatly for Jonathan, and even for Saul, who had made his life so miserable. After seeing them buried, David kept his covenant promise to Jonathan by seeking out Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan. Mephibosheth was five years old when his father was killed in battle with

the Philistines. His nurse had tried to flee with him but unfortunately, in her haste, she dropped him and his feet were crippled. He was carried to the land of Gilead, and that's where David found him along with his infant son Micah. Wishing to display his loving loyalty to Jonathan by ministering to his family, David brought them to Jerusalem, where they resided from that point on in David's palace.

David had other wives besides Michal, the daughter of Saul. Abigail had been the wife of a man named Nabal, a wealthy property owner. When David had been low on supplies while fleeing Saul, he had requested food from Nabal. David thought it only fair that Nabal should provide provisions since it was because of the proximity of David's army that Nabal's flocks were safe from marauders. However Nabal didn't see things that way and insulted and rebuffed David. David was enraged and commanded 400 of his troops to attack Nabal's home. Fortunately Nabal's wife Abigail heard of this and acted quickly. She gave David and his men a generous supply of provisions. Her prudent action caused David and his men to bless her and return to their camp. Nabal was unaware of his close call or what his wife had done. He got drunk that night and in the morning, when his wife told him all these things, he fell into a coma and died. When David heard of these events, he offered Abigail a marriage proposal, which she accepted, becoming his wife soon after.



David was king over Judah for 7 ½ years and then Ishbosheth, king of Israel, was killed, so David was made king over Judah and Israel both.

He was 30 years old. Hiram, the king of Tyre, sent messengers to David with cedar trees, carpenters, and masons to build David's house. David also took more wives to the seven he already had and he sired more children. Meanwhile the Philistines geared up to fight David when they heard he was king, but God protected him and gave him victory over them. David drove the Philistines back to Gezer and with 30,000 men, he went to get the Ark of God (Ark of the Covenant). It was on a hill in the house of Abinadab. The ark was put on a new cart and Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab's sons, drove the cart.

The ark was a wood box completely covered with gold and with an ornate gold lid called the mercy seat. It was 3 feet 9 inches long, 2 feet 3 inches wide and 2 feet 3 inches high. In it were the tablets of the law that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod that miraculously budded as a confirmation of his leadership. It represented the immediate presence and glory of God in Israel. David considered it a high priority to bring the ark to Jerusalem so that Israel would have a sense of the near presence and glory of God. As they brought the ark out of the house of Abinadab, which was on a hill, Ahio went before the ark. Then David and all the house of Israel played music on all kinds of instruments in celebration. Everyone was excited and happy, but God was displeased. The ark was not being handled with respect and honour according to God's instructions and when the oxen of the cart stumbled making the ark wobble, Uzzah grabbed it to keep it from toppling. God's anger burned against Uzzah and He struck him down and he died. David, not understanding at the time the reason for God's anger, was angry himself because of the Lord's outbreak against Uzzah.

David was afraid of the Lord that day; and he said, "*How can the ark of the LORD come to me?*" Eventually David found his answer. God had commanded Moses: "*Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, two rings on one side and two on the other. Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, so that the ark may be carried by them. The poles are to remain in the rings of the ark; they must not be removed.*"

These instructions protected the Ark's sanctity and the need for it to be handled with utmost care. The poles, permanently attached to the Ark, ensured that it could be transported without direct human contact, preserving its holiness and preventing defilement. (Exodus 25:12-15). For 3 months the Ark remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. When

David saw that the Lord was blessing Obed-Edom, David went and brought the Ark to Jerusalem, this time according to God's instructions. Then David danced before the LORD with all his might and everyone shouted with the sound of the trumpet. David explained to the priests why God struck out against them in their first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem: *'For because you did not do it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order.'* (Chronicles 15:13)

David was wearing a linen ephod, indicating that he had set aside his royal robes and dressed just like everyone else in the procession. As the ark of the LORD came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window at King David leaping and whirling before the LORD, and she despised him in her heart. She felt it wasn't dignified for the king of Israel to exuberantly express his emotions before God in such a manner, and to carry on as one of the common people. She came out to meet David, and said sarcastically *"How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!"*

David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel. Therefore I will play music before the LORD. And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight. But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honour."

His response put Michal in her place, but the damage had been done. For David, this moment was deeply spiritual, expressing his heartfelt devotion to God. It was a display of humility and joy as he set aside royal decorum to express his jubilation. The Ark was brought and set in its place in the midst of the tabernacle that David had erected for it. He offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord and then blessed the people in God's name. Then he distributed among all the people a loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and a cake of raisins. So all the people departed, everyone to his house.

Michal's disdain for David's emotional behaviour in worshipping the LORD had been insulting and disrespectful. The Bible says that Michal had no children to the day of her death, implying that David had been so offended by her response that the relationship broke down and he no longer had marital relations with her. There may have been other

reasons for their relationship failing. Michal may have harboured past resentment against David for severing her marriage to Paltiel, the man to whom she'd been given in marriage by Saul. Paltiel had wept bitterly behind her when she had been taken from him to be returned to David. There were also undoubtedly differences in spiritual perspective. Michal did not appear to share the same spiritual fervour for God as David did. Her failure to appreciate David's heart for God ultimately left her isolated and childless, a tragic end to a once-promising relationship.

During his lifetime David was a shepherd, poet, musician, warrior, and king. He wrote some of the most beautiful scripture in the Bible. His psalms reflect his passionate love for God and transport all who read them into the very presence of the Lord. His sensitivity to God, understanding of mankind, and appreciation of life itself reveals a deeply intelligent, highly reflective nature. Surprisingly there was another side to his character that one would not expect in such an emotive person. He was also a fierce and battle-hardened warrior renowned for defeating his enemies and protecting his nation. His heroism won him unfading popularity with his people. He lived in a palace with his wives and children and had everything a man could hope for. His courage and devotion to Yahweh were also exemplary. In fact, Yahweh described him as *"a man after My own heart who shall fulfill all My will."* But there was one blot on his record that would cost him the loss of his blessings.



It happened during a war campaign when he stayed back in Jerusalem while his army was away fighting enemies.

David was walking along the roof of his palace, gazing at the city below, when he spied a beautiful woman at her bath in the house next door. He was entranced with her beauty and asked his servants about her. They told him she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's mighty men. Despite her marital status, David summoned Bathsheba to the palace and slept with her. Bathsheba became pregnant and informed David of the fact. He immediately attempted to hide his sin by commanding Uriah to report back to him from the battlefield, and then sending him home, hoping he would sleep with his wife. In that way David conspired to pass the baby off as Uriah's child. Instead of obeying David's orders, Uriah slept in the quarters of the palace servants, refusing to enjoy a respite with Bathsheba while his men on the battlefield were still in harm's way. Uriah did the same thing the next night, showing his integrity in sharp contrast to David's own lack of it. Instead of pricking David's conscience, Uriah's upright character only frustrated him. He devised another more sinister plan which involved having Uriah sent to the front lines of battle so there would be a strong likelihood of his being killed. The plan worked and Uriah died, leaving Bathsheba a widow. David married Bathsheba and thought he had gotten away with his crime but God was angry and sent the prophet Nathan to confront him.



Nathan told him a parable: a rich man took a poor man's only sheep and killed it, even though he had many flocks of his own. David, a former shepherd, was greatly angered by this story, which he thought was true,

and responded, *“As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity”*. Nathan then told him he was the guilty one of this sin. He added that God's judgement would be upon David's house in the form of ongoing violence. Additionally the child of Bathsheba and David would die a week later. True to His word, Yahweh took back the life of the baby and David was heartbroken that he had caused the death of his son. David deeply grieved and repented of his evil deeds and Yahweh, in His mercy, forgave him. David then comforted Bathsheba and slept with her, and she became pregnant and gave birth to another baby.

Just as Nathan had prophesied, the house of David was plagued by tragedy. Tamar, David's daughter, had a brother, Absalom, and a half-brother, Amnon. Amnon obsessively lusted after Tamar and at one point pretended to be sick so he could lure her into his bedroom to care for him. Once alone with her, he raped her, callously abandoning her after the deed. David did not punish Amnon or require him to marry Tamar, so Absalom, in a rage, took revenge by murdering Amnon. David dealt with Absalom's crime by becoming estranged from him rather than confronting the situation head on. He sent Absalom into exile for 3 years, and after granting his return, refused to speak to his son for a further 2 years. This estrangement resulted in Absalom developing a festering hatred for his father. Absalom used the next 4 years to gain popularity among the people of Israel, cunningly undermining his father's authority and plotting a coup to overthrow David. At Hebron he declared himself king and marched towards Jerusalem. David heard about it and fled with his personal bodyguard of 600 mercenary soldiers to the well-defended city of Mahanaim. There he was able to re-group and summon assistance. He ordered the priest Zadok to remain behind in Jerusalem and report back to him. At David's palace, Absalom took his father's concubines and lay with them, thereby demonstrating publicly his contempt for his father. An advisor to Absalom suggested that he pursue David immediately with a small force and kill him. However another counsellor persuaded Absalom to consolidate his position before attacking David with a large army. In the ensuing battle of Ephraim, Absalom's long hair got caught up in the boughs of an oak tree as his donkey rode past, and David's general, Joab, came upon him and killed him. This went against David's command that no one execute Absalom. David returned to Jerusalem and mourned Absalom's death.



When David reached 70 years of age, his health seriously declined and he suffered such poor circulation that he couldn't keep warm by ordinary means. David was advised by his doctors to enlist the aid of a virgin named Abishag, to lie beside David so that the warmth of her body might warm him. Though she did not have sexual relations with David, the fact that she lay with him elevated her to the official status of one of David's concubines.

Now that David was weak, the fourth son, Adonijah, tried to ascend to the throne. Since David's 3 elder sons had died, this left Adonijah as the oldest son, who probably felt this fact entitled him to the throne. Adonijah, tried to claim the throne with the support of Joab (who probably could see that David bore him ill will for having murdered Absalom). As a sign to the nation that he was going to be the next king, Adonijah summoned a huge host for a banquet to honour his intentions. Nathan realized the purpose of this banquet and immediately approached Bathsheba to inform her of Adonijah's treachery. He counselled her to inform David, and after she did so, Nathan took steps to counteract Adonijah. He knew that Adonijah would execute both Bathsheba and Solomon once he was in power. David acted immediately by recognizing Solomon as his heir and instructing both Nathan and Zadok, the priest, to anoint Solomon in full view of the people. Solomon departed the palace riding upon David's mule, with trumpets sounding - a sign to the people that David had

chosen Solomon to succeed him. (Until David died, Solomon was the co-regent with David, although he acted as the sole regent because of David's medical condition).

Nathan had once prophesied that the sword would never depart from David's house because of his sins, and this certainly came true, although Yahweh never stopped loving David in spite of his grievous sins of adultery and murder. David's relationship with the God he loved is beautifully depicted in the Psalms he wrote.



*The Lord is my Rock and my Fortress and my Saviour,
My God, my Rock, in whom I take refuge;
My Shield and the Horn of my salvation, my Stronghold.
I call upon the Lord, Who is worthy to be praised,
And I am saved from my enemies. (Psalm 18:2-3)*

The 23rd Psalm

*The Lord is my Shepherd, I will not be in need.
He lets me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For the sake of His name.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;*

*Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
Certainly goodness and faithfulness will follow me all the days of my life,
And my dwelling will be in the house of the Lord forever.
(1Samuel 16:11-13)*

SOLOMON

When Adonijah got news that Solomon had been made king, his guests all fled the banquet and Adonijah rushed to the tabernacle, grabbing the horns of the altar, thereby claiming sanctuary. Solomon sent word to Adonijah that no harm would befall him as long as he dropped his claim to the throne. However Solomon's mercy did not extend to Joab. Before he died, David had instructed Solomon to have him executed. This was because of Joab's past betrayals, including the cold-blooded murders of Abner and Amasa, which went against David's wishes, and the killing of David's son Absalom. As David neared death, he instructed his son Solomon to ensure Joab's execution to remove this threat to his reign and legacy. David must have known that Joab was a dangerous man to have around and could be a real threat to Solomon. David also instructed Solomon to execute Shimei who had cursed David as he fled Jerusalem during Absalom's rebellion. Shimei still wielded influence and would probably have used it against the young king.

Apparently Adonijah had not accepted the fact that Solomon was to be the king over Israel and Judah. In a sneaky attempt to usurp the throne, Adonijah approached Bathsheba, reminding her that at one point the throne was rightfully within his grasp because he was the oldest son. Then he sighed and said that because the Lord wanted the throne to go to Solomon, he at least hoped he could have Abishag (David's concubine) in marriage. Bathsheba was taken in and approached Solomon to make the request. Solomon greatly respected his mother, even seating her on the throne at his right hand in a position of honour, but when Bathsheba made her request for Adonijah, Solomon was angered. He immediately saw through the ploy. The standard rule was that the person who got the harem, that is, the concubines, got the throne. This was why Absalom raped his father's concubines after he

had forced David to flee Jerusalem. Through this despicable act he was asserting his claim to his father's throne. Adonijah was more subtle but his purpose was the same. He knew better than to approach Solomon directly, so he went through the queen mother. Bathsheba felt sorry for Adonijah because even though he was the eldest son, he was not given the rule over Israel. However when she told Solomon about his half-brother's request, Solomon knew immediately that Adonijah was trying to grasp the throne. It was a stupid move on Adonijah's part and it cost him his life. Solomon sent Benaiah, a loyal warrior who had served under David, to slay Adonijah immediately. Benaiah also executed Joab and Shemei. All three of these men would have been serious threats to Solomon's rule.

Solomon was the third and last king of the united kingdom of Israel, following King Saul and King David. He ascended to the throne and sought after God, Who gave him the opportunity to ask for whatever he wanted. Solomon humbly asked for wisdom so he would rule God's people justly. God gave him wisdom and wealth as well. In fact, Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. God also gave Solomon peace on all sides during most of his reign, thus fulfilling the meaning of his name (peace).

One illustration of Solomon's wisdom was his judging a dispute over the identity of the true mother of an infant child. Two prostitutes had birthed babies and one of the women had accidentally smothered her baby while she slept. She then tried to claim the other woman's living child as her own. Solomon proposed cutting the living child in half, knowing that the true mother would prefer to lose her son to another woman than to have him killed. That is exactly what happened and the real mother was given the child.

Solomon's great wisdom was so renowned that even the Queen of Sheba heard of it. She traveled 1,200 miles to verify the rumours of his wisdom and grandeur. After Solomon answered all her questions, and she saw the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed. It was beyond anything she had heard or envisioned.



DATED BETWEEN THE 6TH-14TH CENTURIES C.E., THE KEBRA NAGAST (THE GLORY OF KINGS) IS AN IMPORTANT TEXT TO THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH. IT NAMES THE QUEEN OF SHEBA AS THE BEAUTIFUL QUEEN MAKEDA AND IDENTIFIES THE LAND OF SHEBA AS ANCIENT ETHIOPIA. LEGEND HAS IT THAT THE QUEEN BECAME A CONVERT TO JUDAISM AND BROUGHT THE FAITH HOME TO HER OWN LAND.



Solomon wrote many proverbs and songs and completed many building projects. He built a fleet of ships and acquired tons of gold. In fact, every year he received from his taxes and tributes the value of between \$1,092,906,000 and \$1,165,766,400 (in U.S. dollars!) He was the world's first trillionaire. He became so rich that all his cups were made of gold. Silver and other precious metals were as common in Jerusalem as stones. However Solomon's most important accomplishment was the completion of the Jewish temple which was absolutely magnificent. Solomon had another 'accomplishment' that outdid all other men. He had a huge harem of 700 wives and 300 concubines, many of them foreigners. Most of these marriages were alliances made with nations for diplomatic reasons. Unfortunately those nations were pagan and practiced idolatry and Solomon's wives brought those practices with

them. Out of the diplomatic desire for peace, Solomon even set up altars to his wives' gods in Jerusalem. This led to God's displeasure and anger because Solomon's heart had turned away from Him. God told Solomon that he would remove the kingdom from him, but, for the sake of David, He would not do so during Solomon's lifetime. He also promised not to tear the whole kingdom away.



It is a truism that a good start is not always enough to finish well, and this was borne out in Solomon's life. He wandered off the path of righteousness and felt empty, lacking purpose in spite of his many great achievements. His disillusionment is revealed in the book he wrote called Ecclesiastes. Fortunately Solomon eventually realized that life lived apart from God was meaningless, regardless of education, fulfilled goals, the greatest of pleasures, and the greatest abundance of wealth. He ended his book saying:

"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil"
(Ecclesiastes 12:9-14)

Jesus would later say much the same thing: *"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and for the gospel will save it. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Mark 8:36)

When Solomon died in 931 BC, his son Rehoboam became king. He was young and arrogant, prone to follow bad advice. Solomon had not died a popular king, but if Rehoboam had put the peoples' best interests first they would have followed him. However, he followed the counsel of the Sanhedrin who advised him to deal harshly with the people. He said: *"My father chastised you with whips. I will whip you with scorpions"* (*1 Kings 12:14*).

A gifted, charismatic scholar named Jeroboam heard what Rehoboam told the people and he promised change. Consequently, the ten northern tribes followed him in a bloodless rebellion, becoming the kingdom of Israel. This kingdom had 75% of the land mass and also a much more powerful army. Judea had no more than 600,000 people during the First Temple era, and only a few square miles of infertile land. However, they possessed Jerusalem and the Bible commanded that Jews had to make at least 3 pilgrimages every year to the Temple. Jeroboam knew that if his new kingdom was to survive he had to undermine the centrality of Jerusalem. Consequently, he forbade the Jews under his control from going to Jerusalem and mobilized the military all along the border to make sure his edict was obeyed. In this way Jeroboam effectively destroyed any possibility of unifying the Jewish people under Judaism. To provide a substitute for the people to worship, he set up 2 golden calves at key points on the border. He also allowed the importation of pagan deities like Baal, Asherah and other Phoenician gods. In a short time, the majority of the Jewish people became largely non-Jewish in their outlook and behaviour.

God was angry with Jeroboam and delivered a message to him through a prophet saying: *"The God of Israel, says: 'I raised you up from among the people and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, but you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes. You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have aroused my anger and turned your back on me. Because of this, I am going to bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every last male in Israel —slave or free. I will burn up the house of Jeroboam as one burns dung, until it is all gone. Dogs will eat those belonging to Jeroboam who die in the city, and the birds will feed on those who die in the city, and the birds will feed on those who die in the country. The Lord has spoken!'*

In total, Jeroboam reigned over Israel for 22 years, and then died. Nadab his son reigned over Israel for 2 years, continuing his father's idolatry before he was assassinated by Baasha, who also killed Jeroboam's whole family. Not one family member survived, thus fulfilling the word the Lord given through his prophet. The dire prophecy against the house of Jeroboam came true. All subsequent monarchs of the kingdom of Israel followed Jeroboam's lead. Not one of them was a believer in God. In Judea, there were good kings and bad kings. Every once in awhile a great king arose to strengthen the faith of the people in Torah and God. However the Northern Kingdom never had a dynasty. There was a father, a son, and then a coup with an assassination. Jeroboam's legacy was only assassinations, paganism, idolatry, and war. The division between Israel and Judea continued for approximately 160 years until the Assyrians defeated the kingdom of Israel, sending it into exile. Judea however existed another 160 years until the Babylonians conquered it and drove the people into exile. Gradually the ten northern tribes of Israel slipped into obscurity. Judea fared better because it was not as prone to idolatry, had the dynasty of David, the prophets were able to influence the people, and it had the Temple.



THE PROPHET ELIJAH



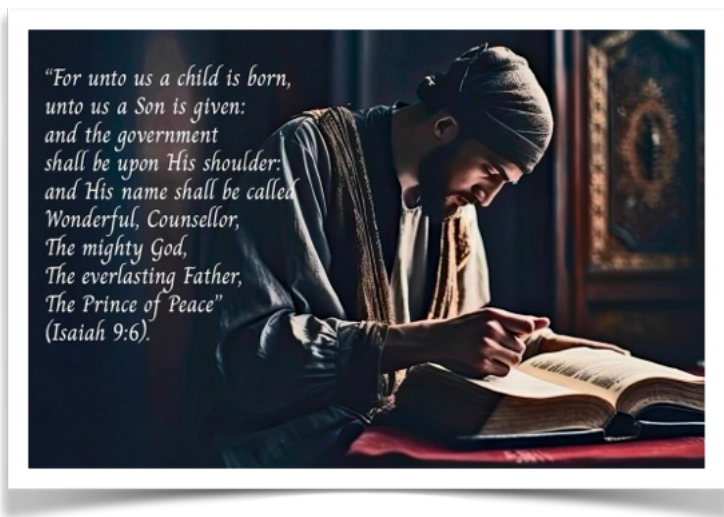
Prophets played an important role in both Israel and Judea's history. One such prophet was Elijah who was expected to come back to earth to make way for the coming Messiah. (This was a metaphorical reference to John the Baptist who would point out Messiah's identity centuries later.) Elijah came from Tishbeh in Gilead, but nothing is known of his family or birth. The character of Elijah was bold and decisive, but sometimes he was fearful and hesitant. He knew both the power of God and the depths of depression. He lived during the reign of Ahab, the 7th king of the northern kingdom of Israel. One time Elijah prophesied a drought to come upon the whole land because of King Ahab's evil ways. Ahab tried to capture Elijah but, warned by God, Elijah hid near a brook where he was fed by ravens.

As the drought and famine in the land deepened, Elijah met with a widow in a nearby country. Through her God provided food enough for him, the woman, and her son. Miraculously, the widow's barrel of flour and jar of oil never ran out. One day the widow's son died of an illness and she brought him to Elijah, who took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged. He laid him on his own bed

and cried to the Lord, *“O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?”* Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and begged for the boy's life. The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah and the child was revived. Elijah delivered him to his mother, who exclaimed: *“Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.”*

Eventually the situation with Ahab came to a showdown between Elijah and the king's wicked Baal-worshipping prophets. In this contest, the prophets of Baal called upon their god all day long to rain fire from heaven but nothing happened. Then Elijah built an altar of stones, dug a ditch around it, put the sacrifice on the top of wood and called for water to be poured over his sacrifice three times. Then Elijah called upon God, and God sent fire down from heaven which burned the sacrifice, the wood, and the stones and licked up the water in the ditch. God proved He was more powerful than false gods. It was then that Elijah and the people killed all of the false prophets of Baal, in obedience to God's command. After that, rain again fell on the land. Ahab told his wife, Jezebel, of God's display of power over Baal's prophets and Jezebel vowed to kill Elijah. Elijah's faith wavered and he became deeply depressed. He fled to the wilderness and took a forty-day journey to Mount Horeb. There he hid in a cave, feeling sorry for himself and even confessing his belief that he alone was left of the prophets of God. The Lord instructed Elijah to stand on the mountain as He passed by. There was a great wind, an earthquake, and then fire, but God was not in any of those. Then came a still, small voice in which Elijah heard God and understood Him. The demonstration was an object lesson meant to show Elijah that God was guiding him through the gentle prompting of His Spirit. God told Elijah to take his place as a prophet, assuring him that there were still 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed to Baal. Elijah obeyed God's commands.

A young prophet named Elisha became Elijah's assistant for some time, and the two continued to deal with Ahab and Jezebel, as well as Ahab's son and successor, Ahaziah. Rather than die a natural death, Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1-11). Centuries later John the Baptist's ministry would be marked by *“the spirit and power of Elijah”* (Luke 1:17), fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6. *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”*



Another prophet was Isaiah who foretold that Yahweh's Son, the promised Seed, would bring an everlasting kingdom when He came to earth. More than 300 scriptures allude to Jesus, His lineage, and method of execution, all of which could not have been accidentally fulfilled. They are remarkable proof of the veracity of the Jewish Scriptures and the clear identity of the Messiah who knew He was fulfilling these prophecies, and used this knowledge to confirm His claims of being the Son of God in the flesh. He would tell His followers: "*You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to Me!*" (John 5:39)

BABYLON

The Assyrians from northern Mesopotamia (today northern Iraq), invaded the northern Kingdom of Israel (722 BC) and deported the Jews to other parts of the Assyrian Empire. The Kingdom of Israel perished. Then after the fall of the Assyrian Empire (586 BC), the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar II, conquered Jerusalem in Judea. The most influential Jews were deported to Babylon and the first Jewish temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. Most of the remaining residents were taken to Babylon. Some were young men from noble families, like Daniel and his three friends, who were part of the first deportation. They were to be trained to serve the Babylonian government. Babylon wanted to prepare

administrators to rule the Jews in captivity so the goal was for the young men to become loyal to Babylon and then use them to integrate the culture of Babylon into Israel.



Daniel and his three friends were the ‘cream of the crop’ that Israel had to offer. They were without any physical defect and were intellectually superior in every kind of learning. They may have been trained as scribes so they could read cuneiform legal documents, religious texts, fables, omen texts, astrological material, mathematical material, economic data and historical records. They were given Babylonian names. (Daniel was named Belteshazzar; Hananiah was Shadrach; Mishael was Meshach; and Azariah was Abednego). This sort of training would have immersed the young men into the culture of Babylon, clashing severely with their own Jewish traditions. Nevertheless the young exiles were able to walk the fine balance between adjustment to a foreign pagan culture and uncompromising adherence to the tenets of their own faith.

One night God gave Nebuchadnezzar a dream about what kingdoms would arise after his own. In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar was a “head of gold” on a statue, with the descending parts of the body, comprised of silver, bronze, iron, and iron mixed with clay, representing the less powerful kingdoms that would come after him. Nebuchadnezzar demanded the astrologers and wise men to interpret his dream without telling it to them. When they were unable to do this, Nebuchadnezzar ordered all of the astrologers and wise men to be killed. Daniel spoke up and through a miracle from God, interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The king then promoted Daniel to be one of his most influential advisers. Interestingly, when Daniel interpreted his dream, Nebuchadnezzar declared, *“Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.”* (Daniel 2:47)



In spite of his admiration for the Hebrew God as a revealer of mysteries, Nebuchadnezzar's pride remained. In his great arrogance he made a golden statue of himself. It was immense, 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. Everyone was ordered to worship it or be thrown into a furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to pay homage and the king's counsellors informed on them, saying, *"These men, O King, have*

not regarded you: they don't serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up." Nebuchadnezzar, in his rage and fury, commanded his soldiers to bring the three men to him, demanding the reason for their disobedience. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego then answered the king, *"Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to explain these things to you. If you throw us into the hot furnace, the God we serve can save us. And if he wants to, he can save us from your power. But even if God does not save us, we want you to know, King, that we refuse to serve your gods. We will not worship the gold idol you have set up."* (Daniel 3:16-18).

At the king's command, the three men were tied up and thrown into the furnace, which was so hot that the servants who threw them in died from the heat. Then as King Nebuchadnezzar watched the furnace, he suddenly jumped to his feet in surprise. He asked his advisors, *"We tied only three men, and we threw only three men into the fire. Is that right?"* His advisors said, *"Yes, King."* The king said, *"Look! I see four men walking around in the fire. They are not tied up and they are not burned. The fourth man looks like an angel."* Then Nebuchadnezzar went to the opening of the hot furnace. He shouted, *"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, come out! Servants of the Most High God, come here!"* So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire.



When they came out, the satraps, prefects, governors, and royal advisors crowded around them. They could see that the fire had not burned them. Their bodies were not burned, and neither were their hair or robes. They didn't even smell as if they had been near fire. Then Nebuchadnezzar said, *“Praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their God has sent his angel and saved his servants from the fire! These three men trusted their God and refused to obey my command. They were willing to die instead of serving or worshiping any other god.”*

God gave Nebuchadnezzar another dream and Daniel interpreted it. The dream was a warning to the king to humble himself and recognize that his power, wealth, and influence were from God, not of his own making. Nebuchadnezzar did not heed the warning, so God judged him as the dream had declared. He was driven insane for seven years. When his sanity was restored, Nebuchadnezzar finally humbled himself before God, declaring: *“How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation...For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, ...all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’ ... ‘Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”*



Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a tree reaching to heaven and a Watcher commanding it to be chopped down. Daniel interpreted the dream to mean Yahweh was going to humble the king, and after 7 years he would be restored. Everything happened as foretold with the King praising and honoring Yahweh at the end: “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom...and all inhabitants are as nothing. He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand or say ‘What have You done?’”

The exclamations of Nebuchadnezzar recorded in the book of Daniel indicate the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar may have become a believer in the one true God. Based on his words recorded in Daniel, it definitely seems likely, especially as God refers to Nebuchadnezzar as *“my servant”* three times in the book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6; 43:10). Nebuchadnezzar is an example of God’s sovereignty over all men and the truth that *“The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will”* (Proverbs 21:1)

Nebuchadnezzar died (562 BC) and Nabonidus became king of Babylon. He appointed his son Belshazzar as co-regent while he was away. During Belshazzar’s reign Daniel had a dream of a judgment court with thrones placed so that the judges might sit upon them. One of these thrones was like the fiery flame and its wheels as burning fire, and upon it the Ancient of days sat. One, like a Son of Man, came with the clouds of heaven and was then escorted unto the Ancient of days, and to Him there was given an everlasting kingdom.

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”



This vision was astounding because Daniel was receiving a glimpse into heaven where the Almighty was seated on His throne, while God's Seed, (who looked like a 'son of man') came before Him. This personage would be King over an everlasting kingdom that would encompass all the nations of the world. Daniel would have known this was the promised Messiah, the Seed promised so long ago in Eden. This Son of Man is not a coming from heaven to earth, but coming to God who is seated in heaven on his throne. The direction of the "coming" is not from heaven but towards heaven. This vision is not a prophecy of the Second Coming of Jesus but rather as a prophecy of Christ's ascension to the right hand of God after his resurrection.

Belshazzar hosted a grand feast for a thousand of his nobles and showed off his wealth by ordering that the gold and silver vessels that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem, be brought to the banquet. These were sacred items, dedicated to the worship of Yahweh, but the king and his guests drank wine in them and praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. As they partied in their blasphemy, a terrifying event occurred. The fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote a message on the wall of the king's palace. The sight filled Belshazzar with fear, his face turned pale, and his knees knocked together. In a panic, he called for the enchanters, astrologers, and diviners to interpret the writing, promising great rewards, including being clothed in purple, a gold chain, and the position of third highest ruler in the kingdom to whomever could decipher the message. None of Belshazzar's wise men could interpret the writing until the queen suggested the king summon Daniel, a man renowned for his wisdom and ability to interpret dreams and visions. Daniel, now an elderly man, was brought before the king. Belshazzar offered him the same rewards, but Daniel, uninterested in material gain, declined them. Daniel began by reminding Belshazzar of the lessons his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had learned. Daniel then interpreted the writing on the wall, which read, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN." He explained that "MENE" meant that God had numbered the days of Belshazzar's reign and brought it to an end; "TEKEL" meant that Belshazzar had been weighed on the scales and found wanting; and "PARSIN" (or "PERES") meant that his kingdom was divided and given to the Medes and Persians (Daniel 5:26-28). True to the prophecy, that very night, Belshazzar was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom. This event marked the end of the Babylonian Empire and the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire.

Note: It appears from the account given by Daniel that Darius the Mede was the sovereign appointed to rule over Babylonia after the death of Belshazzar. However one scripture mentions two kings over Babylon. Daniel 6:8 states: *"Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, that is, during the reign of Cyrus the Persian."* Daniel 6 mentions 'Darius' and 'Cyrus' and the passage appears to be implying that these two titles describe the same person. However Cyrus the Great ruled from 559-486 BC while Darius (also known as Darius the Great) ruled from 522-486. It is more likely that Daniel knew Cyrus as king and Darius as a governor or official who worked under Cyrus.

The capture of Babylon was a notable feat for Darius. The Walls of Babylon were one of the major wonders of the ancient world. The massive walls circled the city completely, even over the Euphrates River which ran through the centre of the city. There were large metal gates constructed at the point where the river ran through the city in order to prevent anyone from sneaking into the city underwater. There were also eight massive gates to help manage the massive foot traffic in this ancient city, the most famous one being the massive Ishtar Gate made of beautifully crafted blue glazed bricks. Nebuchadnezzar built three massive walls as well as the Ishtar Gate around Babylon that were about 40 feet high and so wide that two chariots could race around them side by side. They were 10 miles in length and 25 feet thick, towering over 320 feet into the sky. There were also 250 guard towers that were positioned along the walls and garrisoned with archers and soldiers to defend against any invaders.

Cyrus the Great laid siege to Babylon (539-530 BC). He was able to take the city by diverting the Euphrates River upstream in the north which lowered the water level enough that his soldiers could walk right through it. At night his army crept right underneath the metal gates and besieged the city before anyone even realized what had happened. Cyrus is a king mentioned more than 30 times in the Bible. It was under his rule that Jews were first allowed to return to Israel after 70 years of captivity. One hundred fifty years before Cyrus lived, Isaiah the prophet called him by name and gave details of his benevolence to the Jews: *"This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him . . . 'I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honour, though you do not acknowledge me'"* (Isaiah 45:1, 4; see also 41:2-25; 42:6). God says of Cyrus, *"He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please"* (Isaiah 44:28).



Some commentators point to Cyrus's decree to rebuild Jerusalem as the official beginning of Judaism. Daniel served until at least the third year of King Cyrus. He likely had some personal involvement in the decree that was made in support of the Jews. The historian Josephus says that Cyrus was informed of the biblical prophecies written about him. The natural person to have shown Cyrus the scrolls was Daniel, a high-ranking official in Persia.

Darius the Mede, who may have overseen local governance under Cyrus, set 120 satraps over the kingdom, one of them being Daniel. But the other administrators and satraps hated Daniel and tried to find some way to trap him. However Daniel was trustworthy and they couldn't find any corruption in him. Finally, they decided to trap Daniel with his own faith in God. They appealed to the king's ego and influenced him to issue a decree that no man was to worship any God other than the king himself. Of course, Daniel could not obey and he continued to pray to the Lord three times a day, as was his custom. His enemies pounced, informing the king of Daniel's "rebellion, and the king was forced to comply with his own decree, even though he loved and respected Daniel.

Daniel was thrown into the lion's den and Darius's last words to Daniel were, *"May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you."* The next morning, rushing to the den of the lions, Darius called out, *"Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually,*

been able to rescue you from the lions?” Upon hearing from Daniel that he was unharmed, Darius was overjoyed and demanded Daniel be let out of the lion’s den. Then Darius declared, ...in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.”

Then Darius commanded that those men who had accused Daniel should be brought and thrown into the den of lions.

DANIEL’S PROPHECIES (Overview)

Daniel’s **first vision** (603 BC) had been during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar. It was a picture of a statue portraying the Babylonian-Chaldean Empire (605 to 539 BC); the Medo-Persian Empire (539 to 330 BC); the Macedonia-Greece empire (from 330 to 64 BC); and the Roman Empire (64 BC to AD 70).

Daniel’s **second vision** (555 BC) was in the first year of the reign of Belshazzar, the son of Nabonidus and successor of Nebuchadnezzar. It described the four kingdoms in more detail.

Daniel’s **third vision** (553 BC) came in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar. It was interpreted by 2 angels, describing the Medo-Persian Empire (539 to 330 BC); the conquest of the world by Alexander the Great (330 to 323 BC); the Seleucid and Ptolemaic succession (323 to 167 BC); and the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanies in Syria (167 to 164 BC).

The **fourth vision** was in the first year of Darius, king of the Medes (539 BC). The angel Gabriel appeared to Daniel while he was fasting and inquiring of God the meaning of Jeremiah’s “seventy years.” The vision described the 483 year time period from King Artaxerxes (457 BC) to the baptism of Jesus Christ (AD 27) when He first began to preach and execute the office of the Messiah.

The **fifth vision** was in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia (535 BC). An angel came to Daniel while he was fasting for three weeks. The angel

showed Daniel the wars and succession of kings in the Persian, Greek and Roman Empires and the time period from the coming of Messiah to the reign of Vespasian and the Great Tribulation (AD 67 to 70 AD).

THE SEVENTY WEEKS

Daniel 9 opens with the prophet acknowledging the nation's sins against God when suddenly the angel Gabriel appeared to him. Gabriel gave Daniel a vision of Israel's future, saying there were 70 sevens decreed for the Jews and their holy city. Almost all commentators agree that the seventy "sevens" should be understood as seventy "weeks" of years, in other words, a period of 490 years. The prophecy goes on to divide the 490 years into three smaller units: one of 49 years, one of 434 years, and one 7 years. The final "week" of 7 years is further divided in half.

"From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.'"

Seven "sevens" is 49 years, and sixty-two "sevens" is another 434 years: 49 years + 434 years = 483 years. Add another week of 7 years and the sum total is 490 years,

The prophecy states why God would bring these events to pass.(Daniel 9:24)

- to finish transgression
- to put an end to sin
- to atone for wickedness
- to bring in everlasting righteousness
- to seal up vision and prophecy
- to anoint the most holy

In other words, to bring about the total eradication of sin and the establishment of righteousness. The prophecy of the 70 weeks summarizes what happens before Jesus' coming in 70 AD to set up His millennial kingdom. The part that mentions atonement for wickedness happened when He died on the cross to do away with sin and bring in the New Creation Kingdom. Gabriel said the prophetic clock would start at the time that a decree was issued to rebuild Jerusalem. From the date of that decree to the time of the Messiah would be 483 years.

The first unit of 49 years (seven “sevens”) covers the time that it took to rebuild Jerusalem. The command to “restore and rebuild Jerusalem” was given by King Artaxerxes of Persia in 444 B.C. Converting the 360-day year used by the ancient Jews, 483 years becomes 476 years on our calendar. And 476 years after 444 B.C. places us at A.D. 33, which would coincide with Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1–9). The prophecy in Daniel specifies that after the completion of the 483 years, *“the Anointed One will be cut off”*. This was fulfilled when Jesus was crucified. Daniel 9:26 continues with a prediction that, after the Messiah is killed, *“the people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.”* This was fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The *“ruler who will come”* is a reference to the Antichrist who appeared when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. Jesus warned of this event in Matthew 24:15.

“So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak.” These were Christ’s warnings to His followers just before 70 AD.

Daniel 12:1 states: *“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.”*

ANGEL WARS

Daniel had a troubling vision in **536 B.C.** concerning a Great War. He went into a three-week period of mourning, fasting, and prayer. In response to Daniel’s prayer, God sent a heavenly messenger to explain the vision. However, the messenger was delayed for those same three weeks, as he explained to Daniel: *“But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia”* (Daniel 10:13). Later, the angel predicted further fighting: *“Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece*

will come; but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince)” (verses 20–21).



The cosmic battle going on when Daniel was praying to Yahweh to tell him about Israel's future, was intense. It involved Michael, Yahweh's mightiest archangel, and the Prince of Persia. (Michael's role, as described in the Bible, is warrior, protector, leader of God's army, and defender of Israel). It appears that the conflict between this mighty archangel and the Watcher of Persia was because the Watcher did not want Daniel to know Israel's future, or the timing of Messiah's arrival to earth. Michael was the Watcher over Israel and always protected her from her enemies, but Israel had fallen away from Yahweh and perhaps this was why Persia (Cyrus) was able to conquer Israel. However because Yahweh loved Daniel and His people, Michael was sent to help make certain that Daniel received Yahweh's reply to his prayer.

Note: Daniel reveals that the Watchers from pre-flood times, spoken of in Genesis and 1 Enoch, were still active on the earth 3500 years later. Psalm 82 described them as members of a council that met with God, described in the book of Job. Satan is described as being present at this council. These 'sons of God' ruled over pagan nations and became wicked, leading people into pagan worship and idolatry, just as they do today. The book of Daniel and 1 Enoch alludes to them as 'Watchers' and

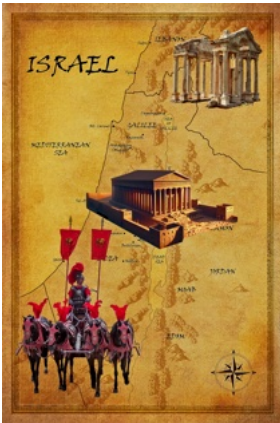
the apostle Paul called them 'principalities and powers'. Although powerful, they cannot withstand the great archangel Michael, plus they have no defence against the power and authority of the Commander of the Lord's Army, which is a reference to the Son of God Himself. This Commander (actually a Theophany) once struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, protecting Jerusalem from doom (2 Kings 19:35).



Angels care for God's people in times of need. Hebrews 1:14 describes angels as "*ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation.*" They also bring messages from God which are sometimes positive, but can also be warnings of God's judgment against sin or rebellion. Genesis 19:1-13 recounts how angels warned Lot of God's destruction of Sodom, giving Lot time to get his family to safety. In the apocalyptic Revelation, angels sound trumpets and pour out bowls of wrath to bring God's judgments at the end of the Old Covenant age. (chapters 8-9). Angels also observe and give reports on both God's works and human actions. In Zechariah 1:10-11, angelic beings go back and forth over the earth and report back to God about nations.

In Daniel's vision, Gabriel told him that Michael was of greater power than the Watcher of Persia. This mighty Archangel had ensured that God's message was delivered to Daniel. It was also explained that God loved Daniel and had sent a message soon after Daniel's prayer, but the evil Watcher had tried to stop it from being delivered. Daniel was told that Gabriel would next face another spiritual enemy, the Prince of Greece. Greece would be the next world power after Persia and it would dominate Israel for a time. In fulfillment of Gabriel's message, the Greek-Macedonian ruler **Alexander the Great** destroyed the Persian Empire (332 BC) thereby gaining control over Judea.

ROMAN EMPIRE



Just as had been revealed to Daniel, the Romans became the next conquerors over Israel after Greece. The Romans invaded Greece (63 BC) and also conquered the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire in the Middle East. Though the Jews were granted some measure of autonomy in Jerusalem, Judea was in reality ruled from Rome. Following a failed Jewish rebellion (37 BC) the Romans turned Judea into a regular Roman province, and installed the Jewish **King Herod the Great** as administrator. He remodelled the Jerusalem temple in the 18th year of his reign.

According to the Jewish historian, [Josephus](#), Herod proposed an expansion of the original second temple that was built under the leadership of Zerubbabel during the time of the Macedonians. Herod spoke to the people of Jerusalem about this idea, but they were not enthusiastic at first because they feared that Herod might tear it down again. After he reassured them that he would not tear it down, the people agreed to this magnificent building project. At this time Yahweh came to be addressed as 'God' (derived from the Greek) or 'Lord'. High priests oversaw worship in the temple. One Jewish group was the Pharisees, who adopted the highest standards and were interpreters of Jewish law. The Sadducees were a priestly group that used the law but not the other writings. Another group, the Essenes, lived in separate communities.

They considered the temple leadership to be corrupt. There were also Zealots who sought to regain Jewish independence from Rome. Most of the Jews were desperate for a Messiah who would defeat the Romans and cause Israel to rule over the nations.

MESSIAH



The Jews were anxiously awaiting a majestic Messiah who would drive the Romans from their land. It was imagined that He would come with great fanfare and all the nations would become subject to Him. He would be a redeemer from the lineage of David, and not only would he bring physical deliverance from the Gentiles, but he would restore the Temple and reestablish the kingdom rule of David. Although the Messiah was envisioned as a military and political leader who would rule as king, and one who would bring everlasting peace to Israel, he was not viewed as a God/man. It was anticipated that he would be a man with unusual power from God, like the prophets, priests and kings in the Old Testament. From the prophecies of the Messiah in the Bible, the Jews ascertained that he would have a dual role, one as a suffering servant who would die in battle as he fought against the enemies of Israel, and another as a descendant of King David who would redeem Israel and rule over her to the end of days. Although this was the expectation for the coming Messiah, God had other plans for His arrival that would take the Jews by

surprise. God's plan was to send the Deliverer by stealth, under the radar of both man and demon. There would be no fanfare to herald His coming, or alert the Watchers in heaven who were closely following historical events. Satan especially was on the lookout. He was still alert to the warning received in Eden that a 'seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent'. However he appears to have been ignorant of Messiah's entrance into the world. God quietly sent the archangel Gabriel to visit a young Jewish virgin living in Nazareth, to announce His plan, just as the prophet Micah had prophesied: *"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity."* (Micah 5:2)



The virgin was named Mary and she was of the tribe of Judah and a descendent of Boaz. Mary's lineage, as recorded by Luke, does not mention Mary, but that's to be expected—including women's names in genealogies was not standard practice. It begins this way: *"[Jesus] was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli"* (Luke 3:23) However Matthew 1:1 lists Joseph's biological father as Jacob. Matthew is demonstrating that Jesus is the promised Messiah descending from Abraham and specifically from King David. He is presenting Jesus as the royal heir of the Jewish nation. Luke traces Jesus' ancestry through Joseph (legally recognized as Jesus' father on earth) going back to Adam, indicating Jesus as the "Son of God" reaching all humanity, not solely the Jewish nation.

At that time, Jewish law traced inheritance and descent through the male, not the female line. Joseph is named but the line actually belongs to Mary's ancestry, whose father was Heli. Culturally, a husband could be recorded as the son of his father-in-law, particularly if there were no sons and the inheritance/lineage was transferred through a daughter. Thus Luke 3:23 would be clearer if translated as "Joseph, the son-in-law of Heli," or "Joseph, the legal son of Heli."

Some notable points in Mary's lineage are that she provided the biological connection between King David to the Messiah, but being a virgin, there had to be a legal connection through male lineage. Joseph provided the legal inheritance connection as a male descended from David and this validated the Messiah's royal status.



Mary and Joseph probably had an arranged marriage which was in the betrothal stage. Children during that time did not usually choose their own spouses. They also often married close relatives. In the late Second Temple period Jewish families preferred their daughters to marry either a cousin or uncle. Therefore, it is probable that Joseph and Mary were relatives. The groom would submit a contract, either written or oral, to the bride's family. If the family agreed to its terms, the couple was engaged. The groom also pledged a divorce or widow-settlement to be paid to the bride should the marriage dissolve. At the time of their marriage, Mary was probably a teenager, and Joseph may not have been much older.

Gabriel, God's chief messenger, served as the divine herald in some of history's most momentous announcements. The name "Gabriel" comes from the Hebrew "Gavri'el," meaning "God is my strength" or "Strength of God." He is one of only three angels explicitly named as an archangel in the Bible, alongside Michael and Lucifer (Satan). Gabriel's first biblical appearance occurred in the Book of Daniel, where he served as interpreter of prophetic visions. Later, in Daniel 9:20-27, Gabriel appeared again to explain the prophecy of the seventy weeks, thereby establishing his role as a messenger but also as an interpreter of divine mysteries. Gabriel's most famous appearance of course occurred when he visited Mary to announce that she would conceive and give birth to Jesus, the Son of God.

Gabriel told Mary that she was highly favoured by God. He was gentle and yet authoritative in his approach to Mary, offering reassuring words: *"Greetings, favoured one, the Lord is with you!"* Mary was understandably greatly troubled by his words and began to wonder about the meaning of this greeting. Gabriel gently calmed her. *"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God! Listen, you will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."* Mary said to the angel, *"How will this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?"* Gabriel replied, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child will be born holy; he will be called the Son of God."* Gabriel had more news for Mary. *"And look, your relative Elizabeth has also become pregnant with a son in her old age—although she was called barren, she is now in her sixth month! For nothing will be impossible with God."* So Mary said, *"Yes, I am a servant of the Lord; let this happen to me according to your word."* Then the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38)

The news brought to Mary by Gabriel was definitely amazing but it must be remembered that the Old Testament had several examples of Jewish women who had miraculously birthed a child. When Sarah birthed Isaac she was 90 years old! Isaac's wife Rebekah had been unable to conceive until God opened her womb and gave her twins - Jacob and Esau. Jacob's wife Rachel was barren for many years before God enabled her to conceive Joseph and Benjamin. Samson's mother had been unable to conceive before God gave her the mighty Nazareth warrior who would deliver Israel from the Philistines. Hannah had been

desperate for a child and God gave her Samuel. An unnamed Shunammite woman who had shown hospitality to Elisha was given a son after years of being barren. And Gabriel told Mary that her cousin Elizabeth, wife of the elderly priest Zacharias, was already 6 months pregnant. However all these women had birthed babies through the normal channel of reproduction (a male human sperm joining with a female human ovum). However in Mary's case, a far greater miracle would occur. Gabriel told Mary that Joseph, her betrothed, would not be the baby's father. Mary would become pregnant by means of a miracle of God's Holy Spirit who would overshadow her, joining her human ovum with the Seed of God and producing the Messiah himself!

Of course no one else knew about this. The logical surmise among her family and neighbours would be that she and her betrothed husband had sexual relations before their marriage had been finalized. That was not unusual with betrothed couples, although frowned upon by society. There was often a year between betrothal and the marriage feast. However in Mary's case, her betrothed husband Joseph would know the baby couldn't be his because he had never had sexual relations with her. He would naturally assume she had committed adultery with another man. Mary knew all this beforehand yet submissively accepted her destiny. She was undoubtedly a woman of rare faith, which is why God had chosen her to bear the Messiah. It was no coincidence that she had great women of faith in her DNA, such as Rahab, Tamar, and Ruth. However it is doubtful that Mary understood the full ramifications of what was about to happen to her and her babe. For instance, the fact that her baby would not have a human father, and therefore no hereditary Adamic sin nature, may not have crossed her mind. She wouldn't know that God was fusing Himself with humanity. Mary would have guessed that her child would be unique and have a special calling on his life like the prophets of old, but that he would be God Himself in human flesh was not likely in her thoughts. After all, the Jews had no idea of the exact nature of their Messiah. Even as the prophets wrote of the Messiah's suffering and glorification, they did not fully understand what would happen or when it would happen. They desired to know the object to which Scripture pointed. Jesus would later say: ...*"many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it"* (Matt. 13:17). Peter wrote *"Even angels long to look into these things."*

Mary hurried to make a long 90-mile journey to visit Elizabeth and when she got there, something amazing happened. As soon as Elizabeth

heard Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's unborn baby leaped for joy in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed how wonderful it was that God should favour her with a visit from *"the mother of my Lord"*. Mary then burst into praise, rejoicing in God. It was a time of celebration for both. Perhaps Mary's visit to see Elizabeth was God's way of bringing encouragement and confirmation to both ladies. Both women were experiencing something quite out of the ordinary, something the outside world would not understand. God was assuring Mary that she was already carrying the Messiah in her womb, and Elizabeth was being assured that her baby had a divine mission associated with the Messiah. Technically this would have been the first meeting between John the Baptist and Jesus.

The Bible says Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months and then went home. She would have been there to help the older woman during her pregnancy. By the end of her visit, Mary would have been 3 months pregnant and just beginning to show. In another month or two, it would have been impossible to conceal the fact that she was with child. Her family would know, and most importantly, her betrothed husband, Joseph, would know.

Joseph was undoubtedly shocked when he discovered Mary's condition. He loved her but at first he made the logical conclusion that Mary had betrayed him with another man. He likely thought she had taken a lover while visiting Elizabeth. The hurt and disillusionment would have been great. Because of this development he felt he couldn't marry her, but it placed him in a dilemma. Jewish Law demanded the death penalty for both the adulterous woman and the man she sinned with. Although this sentence was rarely carried out, exposure to public shame carried many serious repercussions. Joseph was a righteous man and he sincerely loved Mary, so he was loathe to go that route. He considered quietly divorcing her instead, probably for some 'uncleanness'. Such a provision was allowed under Jewish Law. (Deuteronomy 23:14). Moses had said: *If a man marries a wife, and then she finds no favour in his eyes, because he has found some uncleanness in her, he may give her a bill of divorce and send her out of his house.*" It is not clear, even to Jewish rabbis today, what type of 'uncleanness' the Law was referring to. Whatever it was, it was a way out of exposing his wife to the penalty of adultery, and because Joseph *"was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."*(Matthew 1:19) However before he could do so, God revealed the truth to Joseph in a dream, which conclusively changed his whole perspective. Up to then,

Mary may not have told Joseph about her encounter with Gabriel, or the fact that her baby was the Messiah. Perhaps she surmised how incredulous Joseph would be when hearing such an assertion. In his eyes, she would be adding deceit to betrayal. He might have even considered her to be deluded or mentally unstable. Or perhaps she did tell him, only he rejected her explanation. At any rate, after the dream from God, he immediately married Mary and kept her chaste while she carried God's holy Child. Then some unwelcome news came from the Roman authorities.



JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

Mary was nearly ready to deliver the Christ child when the news of the census came to the Jews. Due to a decree issued by Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor at the time, everyone was required to return to their ancestral homes to be registered for taxation purposes. This census was probably implemented by Herod at the command of Rome to coincide with their decree that all peoples should take an oath of allegiance to Augustus, which took place in history around 2 B.C. This oath, forced upon everyone in Israel, is recorded by the first-century historian Josephus.

The trip was nearly 90 miles and had to be made either on a donkey or on foot. It must have been a gruelling journey for Mary who was almost at her due date. Joseph carried the responsibility of keeping both his wife and the unborn Messiah safe, a task that must have worried him as they journeyed along the way. What if she delivered the baby on the road? Who would help them? All the travellers going to Bethlehem were passing them by. Mary and Joseph had to proceed more slowly because of Mary's condition. When they finally reached the town, there was another problem to face. All the inns were packed with others who had also come to register for the census. One after another the innkeepers relayed the disappointing news that they were filled to capacity. The young couple found only one option open to them.



One of the inns had a stable under the inn, where animals were kept. It was the only place available. Mary would have been exhausted by this time. She faced her first childbirth unattended, with no material comfort, and no conveniences of any kind. In a dirty stable Mary gave birth to Jesus with only Joseph attending the delivery. However God was watching and protecting them and Mary safely gave birth to the Holy One. She wrapped the infant Jesus in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger (a cattle food trough). It was probably the most insignificant arrival of a royal king in history, especially considering the divine status of this particular Monarch. However although the Messiah was hidden in

obscurity, without public fanfare at his earthly arrival, it was not so in heaven. The angels were rejoicing as they observed the birth of Jesus. They had known the Son of God personally throughout the eons and this birth was obviously something very unique and momentous for humanity. Then an angel of the Lord called on a band of shepherds in a nearby field. *"Today,"* the shepherds were told, *"in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord"* (Luke 2:11).



A great company of the heavenly host suddenly appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."* (Luke 2:13-14). The prophecy was now fulfilled. *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* (Isaiah 9:6)

The shepherds were terrified at first, until the angel informed them of the virtually unknown parents in a nearby stable that harboured the Great Shepherd Himself.

Note: It was strange that these shepherds were honoured in this way, considering their inferior status in society. Shepherds were generally poor people, leading hard lives. Theirs was an outdoor life while overseeing their flocks of both sheep and goats, facing dangerous predators, robbers, and inclement weather. They were generally allowed to feed their flocks in fields near villages. At night, they had to place their flocks in sheepfolds for protection. If one sheep went missing, the shepherd searched diligently until it was found. Some of the sheep were used as sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem; their thick wool was used for clothing; and they also provided meat.

Many of the great patriarchs in the Bible had been shepherds, such as Jacob and David. The Egyptians at the time of Joseph looked down on shepherds and separated from them by relegating them to the land of Goshen. By the time of Jesus they were scorned by the Pharisees and looked down upon by others. Yet these ordinary men were the first to hear of Jesus' birth and to spread the good news. It was to lowly shepherds that the God of the universe displayed His beloved Son. Ordinarily one might think such glorious news would have been made to the religious leaders. However shepherds had the capacity to be humbled and amazed that God chose them to hear the news. Pharisees would have presumed upon the honour. They thought highly of themselves and loved religion more than they loved a relationship with God.

After the shepherds witnessed the infant Messiah lying in the manger, they joined the angels in glorifying and praising God for the awesome news of His coming. Then those humble shepherds took the Good News of Jesus and did just what God wanted them to do – took the wonderful message to others so that the blessings of Messiah could be shared.

After 8 days passed, Joseph and Mary had Jesus circumcised, according to Jewish Law. God had instructed the Hebrews in Exodus 13:1 *“Sanctify to me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of animal. It is mine.”* Under the Old Covenant, the ring of physical flesh that was removed from a male baby's penis attested to his birth into the Jewish community. This would have been the time when Joseph gave Jesus his name, signifying his legal adoption of the child.

Note: Although an Old Covenant practice, circumcision has great spiritual significance for New Covenant believers. Circumcision is a foreshadowing of a spiritual reality. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, a believer is transformed in his soul by the Holy Spirit who severs his old sin nature (symbolized by the flesh around a penis) from his reborn spirit. That circumcision makes a person an eternal son (or daughter) of spiritual Israel, the New Jerusalem. *'But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not of the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God.'* (Romans 2:29) *"In whom you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body the sins of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ. (Colossians 2:11)*

Forty days after the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph took another trip from Bethlehem to Jerusalem in order to fulfill the purification requirement for Mary. The temple in Jerusalem was only a few miles from where they are staying. The Law said that 40 days after giving birth to a son, a mother was required to present a purification offering at the temple. (Leviticus 12:4-8). This was because under the Old Covenant, a woman who gave birth to a baby boy was considered 'unclean' for seven days. On the eighth day a baby was circumcised, and then the mother had to wait for 33 days to be made pure from her bleeding. During that time she was not permitted to touch anything sacred. After the 33 days were over, she had to bring two offerings to the priest at the Tabernacle - a yearling lamb for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon (or a dove) for a sin offering. The priest would offer these to the Lord to pay for her sin. If she was poor and couldn't afford a lamb, she could bring two doves or two young pigeons instead. (Leviticus 12). As Joseph was likely a carpenter or stonemason, and therefore a poor man, he would not have been able to afford a lamb sacrifice at the Temple. Instead he and Mary brought 2 pigeons as an offering.

An old man named Simeon saw the couple enter the Temple with their baby. Simeon lived in Jerusalem and had been told that very day, by the Holy Spirit, to go to the Temple. He was a man close to the Lord, a righteous and good man, who had received a promise from God that he would not die before he saw the Messiah with his own eyes. He was now very old after waiting for many years to see this wondrous miracle. He, and others in Israel, were eagerly expecting the Messiah around this time. The Jews had a fair idea when their Messiah would appear, taken from the prophecy in Daniel 9:25 where it is stated: *"Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild*

Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' This amounted to 483 years, using the one-day-for-a-year principle. According to Daniel's calculations, the Messiah would come and die prior to the year 70 AD. This is why some godly Jews, like Simeon and Anna, were persuaded that the Messiah could be born during their lifetime.

When Mary and Joseph arrived at the Temple with Jesus, Simeon immediately knew their baby was the one Daniel had spoken of. He realized this through a special revelation from the Holy Spirit. Taking the baby Jesus in his arms, he praised God, saying: "*Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.*" (Luke 2:28-35) It must have been overwhelming for Simeon to realize that he was holding the tiny Messiah in his arms! After seeing the Messiah, Simeon felt great peace for he knew that God would bring His salvation to Israel and to the world, just as promised in the Old Testament.

"Yahweh has made known his salvation. He has openly shown his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his loving kindness and his faithfulness toward the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God...."Arise, shine; for your light has come, and Yahweh's glory has risen on you. For, behold, darkness will cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but Yahweh will arise on you, and his glory shall be seen on you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Psalms. 98:2-3; Isaiah 60:1-3).

There was another in the Temple that day who recognized the Messiah in the infant Jesus. Her name was Anna, an 84 year-old widow and prophetess who lived at the Temple. It is said of her that she didn't depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and petitions night and day. Probably she was fasting for the sins of Israel and longing for the promised Deliverer. Like Simeon, when she saw Jesus, she also knew by divine revelation that this was the Messiah. She thanked God for Jesus and told everyone who was waiting for God to free Jerusalem, that the Messiah had arrived.

Joseph and Mary were amazed at these events and the wonderful prophecies spoken over their son. It was further confirmation that God

was planning something amazing through Jesus. And it had been no accident that these remarkable events had taken place at the Temple. The prophets had spoken of the appearance of God's Messiah at the temple.

*“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his **temple**; and the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, behold, he comes!” says Yahweh of Armies. (Malachi 3:1).*

There were other times in Jesus' life that this prophecy would be fulfilled, but this first appearance was a very significant event. After this, Joseph and Mary made the short return trip back to Bethlehem.

MAGI



In ancient literature, astrological phenomena sometimes accompanied the birth or death of notable kings, including both Julius Caesar (death) and Augustus Caesar (birth). In the birth of His Son, God used a star in summoning Gentiles from the east to visit the new King. These Gentiles were called magi, powerful advisors like Daniel had been in Babylon. Daniel had been the leading counsellor to several kings in Babylon, including Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Cyrus, and Darius. He was renowned for his interpretations of dreams and visions.

Magi such as Daniel became skilled in astronomy and astrology (which, in that day, were closely associated) and they had a sacrificial system that somewhat resembled the one that God gave to Israel through Moses. They first appear in history in the seventh century as a tribe in eastern Mesopotamia. Many historians consider them to have been Semites, which link them with descendants of Noah's son Shem. They may also, like Abraham, have come from ancient Ur in Chaldea. Some were learned wise men, and some were charlatans. Scripture both prohibits and mocks astrology (not to be mistaken with astronomy) because the worship of stars has historically been prevalent in many pagan religions. The Bible does not explicitly state that these magi practiced astrology, or that they worshipped the stars, but many pagan religions involved such worship. The worship of stars was related to the rebellious Watchers in Genesis who were fallen angels and were worshipped as gods because of their divine status, having come from the heavens. To the pagans these gods were the stars they saw in the sky. Pagan religions also worshipped Nephilim as the sons of gods. Babylon had been inundated with this type of paganism and Daniel would have been exposed to it. However Daniel knew the truth about the living God and His angels. He knew about the Watchers from the books of Genesis and maybe 1 Enoch, and He had seen angels in visions who told him about a Watcher so powerful (the Prince of Persia) that only the great Archangel Michael could subdue him. Daniel would have had a vast knowledge of these powers in the heavens. He would have known they were actual entities and this information was likely available to the magi through his writings. These particular magi had seen a strange star in the east that portended the birth of a great king to be born in Israel. The star was unusual because a normal star does not move in front of a person and then stop. A normal star doesn't appear to move because it is billions of miles away in the sky. However this star was a special, divinely appointed light, most likely an angel, which served as a guide for the wise men leading them to the Messiah. Because it's likely the magi were aware of Daniel's prophecy of the coming Messiah to Israel, they would have known something of the timing of His birth. When they noticed the star, they were so intrigued that they made the long trek to Jerusalem.

Note: Interestingly God's own angels are called stars in the Bible. *"When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy."* (Job 38:7) In fact, Jesus and Satan are also referred to as morning-stars in the Scriptures. (Isaiah 14:12, Revelation 2:16). However Jesus is the Bright and Shining Morning Star, the One who outshines all the others. He alone is to be worshipped. In the Bible God sometimes sent angels to

approach certain people, who would be so overcome with their glory that they would fall down to worship them. However the angels were quick to tell them not to do it. Only God is to receive worship.



The journey from Persia to Jerusalem (900 to 1,000 miles) probably took many weeks, or as some scholars think, two years. It is often assumed that the magi were three in number, corresponding to the three types of gifts they brought with them, but their number could have been greater. As they travelled to Jerusalem, they obviously expected to find the future king in a palace, which was a reasonable deduction, but no son had recently been born to King Herod. When he heard the Magi's announcement of a new king, he took it as a threat and was very troubled by their news. Herod wasn't even a Jew. He was an Idumean, and because he was both a tyrant and a usurper (having taken the kingship by force and intrigue), he knew he was one of Israel's historical enemies. He ruled by terror and murder and was paranoid about losing his position. He committed numerous atrocities, ruthlessly eliminating anyone he saw as a threat to his power, including his own beloved wife Mariamne and the two sons they had together. He would go on to kill a third son (his firstborn) later in life, as well as dispatch plenty of other family members simply because he suspected they may be plotting against him. In the last few years of his life, he became increasingly

mentally ill. When he heard from the magi about a new king being born in Judea, his paranoid fears were magnified. He summoned his advisors and questioned them repeatedly as to the little king's birthplace. Citing Micah 5:2 the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees informed Herod that Israel's king was to be born in Bethlehem.



They also added, *"From you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel...for so it is written by the prophet."* Herod, learning Messiah's birthplace, cunningly told the Magi to find the child's location and inform him so he could worship Him too, which was a lie of course. Meanwhile, the star reappeared to the Magi and eventually came to rest over the place where the child was. The Bible describes Jesus as a "child" meaning he could have been an infant or a toddler (up to two years of age) as it is uncertain how long the magi travelled to find him.

Matthew is clear that Jesus was in a house by the time the wise men arrived. *"And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh."* (Matthew 2:11)



Gift giving was essential in that culture, especially when approaching a leader. The Magi brought gold as a gift to Jesus. This was the Old Testament symbol of kings, so whether it was intentional or not, they were proclaiming Him king. They also brought frankincense which the high priest of Israel burned in the temple on the Day of Atonement. The Magi were proclaiming Jesus to be their high priest. The myrrh was an embalming oil, symbolizing Christ's mortality as a man. These gifts show that the Magi had some knowledge of who Jesus was.

The impact of all these revelations - Gabriel's visit and his proclamation about Jesus, the shepherds' encounter with a host of angels, the prophetic words of Simeon and Anna, and then the Magi's visit - amazed Joseph and Mary. They saw that they had been entrusted by God with a very special Child who would be for the salvation of Israel, and even the Gentiles. They must have wondered what would come next. God warned the Magi to return home by a different route, without seeing Herod, and He warned Joseph to flee to Egypt because Herod intended to kill Jesus. The gospel of Matthew tells us that after the wise men had started back home, *"An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until*

I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” The valuable gifts from the Magi enabled Mary and Joseph to make the trip and set up a home in Egypt. This event was symbolic of what God had done earlier in bringing Israel out of Egypt over a thousand years ago. Now God would bring Jesus (representative of spiritual Israel) out of the same place. Jesus also paralleled Moses in that He was rescued by His parents and would save Israel out of slavery.



When Herod realized that the Magi would not be returning to inform him of the Messiah's location, he was enraged. He sent soldiers to Bethlehem to kill all the male children in the town and its environs who were two years old or under. This was the length of time ascertained from the wise men first seeing the star and then visiting Bethlehem. The Bible says this incident fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: *“A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”* Herod was driven by jealous fear and probably by demons in this wicked act. He had been on the throne for 33 years, but died a short time after slaying the children of Bethlehem, a just retribution for atrocities like this one. After he died, Jesus' family moved to Nazareth where Jesus grew up in relative obscurity. He probably worked with Joseph at carpentry.

EARLY YEARS

Twelve years passed and Jesus approached the stage of His life when Jewish boys entered the adult community. Many Jewish boys were educated at a local synagogue from the age of five and very likely that was where Jesus received instruction in the Scriptures, although His parents would have taught Him as well.



It would have been a deeply personal education. The Old Testament testified to Jesus' existence as the Son of God in countless passages, so for Jesus, it must have been like looking into a mirror. He would have recognized Himself as the 'Angel of the Lord' who appeared to Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Jacob, and Samson's parents. He would have recognized the identity of Melchizedek, the 'king of righteousness' and priest of the Most High God, as being none other than Himself as a theophany of God. He would have seen His reflection in the Triune God as He contemplated the making of humanity. Creation speaks eloquently of the Maker's character and personality, and Jesus would have had an innate sensitivity to the language of creation. Observing nature's intricate design and activity would have been particularly fascinating to Him because He was the Author of it all. Not only that, but He had information from His parents of angelic visitations and dreams, His miraculous birth, the visits from shepherds and Magi, and the prophecies given in the Temple by

Simeon and Anna. As He matured and developed, He would have glimpsed His divine destiny as the Redeemer King who would become the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of His people and for the world at large. In all of this, Jesus would have recognized His heavenly Father and fallen in love with Him, His passion even superseding the love and loyalty He felt towards Joseph and Mary. In fact this is shown in an incident that occurred when his family went up to the Passover festival in Jerusalem.



JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

After the festival when His parents were returning home, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without telling them. Mary and Joseph thought He was with relatives so they traveled on for a day before realizing that no one knew of His whereabouts. Immediately they went back to Jerusalem to look for Him but for three days they had no luck. Finally they found Him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. He was amazing the teachers with His understanding of the scriptures, but Mary was less than impressed. She had probably suffered the anxieties most mothers experience when they discover their child is missing. She may also have been especially

vigilant in protecting her son because of the dangers surrounding his early years when the family had to flee to Egypt. When she saw Jesus, she scolded him saying, *“Son, why have you treated us this way? .. Your father and I were anxiously looking for you.”* (Luke 2:48) *Jesus seemed surprised by this, assuming that they would know where He could be found. “Why were you searching for me?” He asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”* (Luke 2:49)

Mary mentioned that she and 'his father' were looking for him, but Jesus stressed that he was with His true Father all along. He was openly affirming his identity as God's Son, and it seemed perfectly natural to Him that He would be in the Temple of God. Surprisingly Mary and Joseph did not understand what He was saying to them. The impact of previous revelations and miracles had dimmed in their minds over the years, especially as Jesus seemed like any other normal boy growing up in Judea. However, He was also unique, as this incident in the temple illustrates. Jesus had a knowledge of God far surpassing the usual in one so young. Mary kept His words in her heart, perhaps pondering them over and over again as Jesus matured and grew in wisdom. Being without sin, Jesus' behaviour would have been exemplary, although we are given no further details in the Bible of His development. All we are told is that He won the favour of man and that the grace of God was upon Him. From other scriptures, it is revealed that Jesus had 4 brothers and at least 2 sisters, and that Joseph must have died some time after Jesus was 12, and before He turned 30. This would have made Jesus the head of the household and the protector of His widowed mother and siblings, a responsibility that no doubt further contributed to His role as Shepherd of Israel. Living in this family also would have given Him firsthand experience of personal suffering. He would have had a close-up view of the foibles and weaknesses of human nature, and He would have realized the hardship of living on the earth as He observed people struggle amid sickness and poverty. During this time, God His Father protected Him from harm by keeping Him out of the public eye, and with the great Michael as Watcher over Israel, there were no further recorded attempts on His life while He was growing up. True to His Father's commands, Jesus went with His parents and was obedient to them.

BAPTISM

According to Bible chronology, Jesus got baptized in 27 AD when he was 30 years old. The Bible tells us it was in the fifteenth year of the reign of

Tiberius Caesar. Jesus' cousin John was just starting his public ministry and had been baptizing out in the desert for about 6 months. He was a strange man who wore clothing made out of camel's hair and whose diet consisted of locusts and honey. Some scholars think he may have belonged to the Essenes, a desert cult that despised riches and stressed purity, but others see vast differences between these extremists and John. Essenes dressed in linen shifts and refrained from public appearance, whereas John was clothed in camel's hair and went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In doing so, John was fulfilling the words of Isaiah the prophet: The voice of one who calls out, *"Prepare the way of Yahweh in the wilderness! Make a level highway in the desert for our God. (Isaiah 40:3,4)* The theme of repentance was popular at this time. Many people came out into the desert to hear John preach, and even the Jewish leaders sent priests and Levites to inquire about him, wondering if he might not be the Messiah himself. John immediately denied this.



One day as John was baptizing the people at the river; Jesus came to be baptized too. But John refused saying, *"I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"* But Christ said to him, *"permit it to be so now, for it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed*

Him" (Matthew 3: 13-15). As John was praying, heaven opened up and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. An audible voice came from heaven: 'You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' (Mark 1:11) John saw and heard this and he eagerly told the people: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'after me comes a man who is preferred before me, for he was before me.' I didn't know him, but for this reason I came baptizing in water: that he would be revealed to Israel... I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained on him. I didn't recognize him, but he who sent me to baptize in water, he said to me, 'On whomever you will see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' I have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29-34)

It must be remembered that Jesus was born under the **Old Covenant**. The reason Jesus came to John at the Jordan to be baptized was not because he was acknowledging any personal sins. Jesus was identifying with humanity descended from Adam, **the old creation** under condemnation. Baptism into water symbolized taking sinful humanity into death with him. Rising out of the water symbolized the resurrection into new creation life. In this resurrection, the sinner's sins were counted to Christ, as if they were His, so Christ's righteousness could be credited to the sinner. This wasn't completely understood by John. He was perplexed that Jesus wanted to be baptized. John's mission was to prepare the way for Jesus by summoning hearts to repentance. This was why he was calling out for the Jews to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. He told them that his message was the preparation for the coming Messiah who would put all things to rights. But he added an ominous warning that the Messiah would bring judgment when He came: *Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor, and will gather the wheat into his barn; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Luke 3:17)* John was stressing the dual purpose of Christ's coming as Saviour and Judge. He used blunt language that forcibly brought home the message to his hearers. Sometimes he insulted them, especially the religious Pharisees and Sadducees whom he called hypocritical *'broods of vipers'* who were coming to him for baptism in order to escape God's coming wrath, but who weren't truly repentant at all. He told them that being the physical descendants of Abraham would not save them. *"Don't think to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I tell you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. (Matthew 3:9,10)*

TEMPTATION

The next step to commencing the Lord's mission involved a challenge to His faith. It was a necessary part of His preparation for what was to come. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert where Satan, His adversary, waited. This was the same being who caused Adam and Eve to sin in the Garden and the same one who later accused Job before God and the angelic Divine Council, seeking to convince God that humankind was not worth redeeming. For millennia Satan had tried to dissuade the Lord from rescuing His people. He wanted them in his own power, along with all the other nations of the world. He had undoubtedly been aware of some part of God's plan to redeem humans through a Deliverer. He had been the serpent (or seraphim) who had been in the Garden of Eden when God decreed that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head, and the serpent would in turn bruise his heel. Satan was now face to face with the 'seed of the woman', his arch-nemesis. All his past efforts to prevent the Messiah from being born had failed. The initial plan had been for the Watchers to create Nephilim to pollute the bloodlines of humanity so that a 'seed of woman' would not be a possibility. That plan was overthrown when God sent the flood, destroying the Nephilim and saving Noah and his family to carry on the human line. Satan and the Watchers then attempted to destroy God's people through war with other nations, disease, famine, and pagan idolatry. Every time Satan tried to destroy God's people, God kept rescuing them. He instituted the Law and Temple to separate His people from evil influences. When the nation of Israel couldn't be wiped out through the Enemy's tactics, Satan and his cohorts tried to exterminate Hebrew male babies in Egypt, and more recently, Herod had been influenced to murder all male babies in Bethlehem under the age of two when the magi brought news of the Messiah's birth. Now Satan was looking for some way to accuse Jesus and thus disqualify Him as a Saviour. Satan had assumed that Jesus' humanity would make Him easy prey, but Jesus was also divine, and that made the job more difficult. Additionally, God's Son always had angels to guard Him. They had protected Him from childhood on. But now a rare opportunity came when Jesus went alone into the desert and fasted for forty days and forty nights. He was physically weak and exhausted and there didn't seem to be any angels around. This was because God had led Jesus into the desert by His Spirit. Satan recognized he was being given an opportunity to test Jesus with the Father's permission. (Matthew 4:1)



The tempter approached Jesus carefully; much in the same way he had approached the first humans in the Garden of Eden. Back then Eve had faced temptation in three areas, defined in 1John: 2:6 as *"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"*.

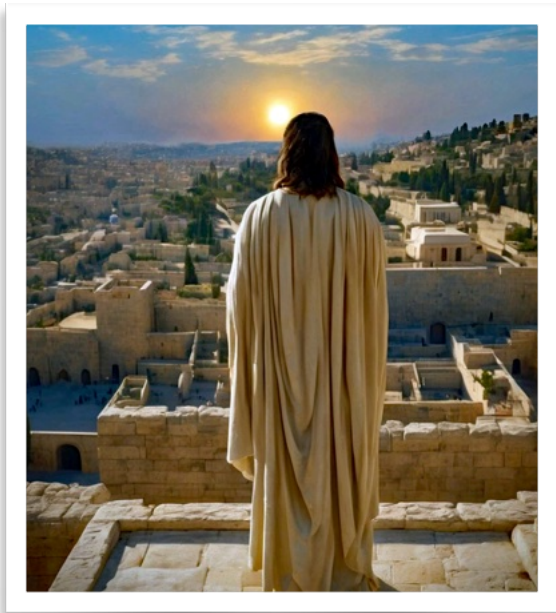
"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took some of its fruit, and ate; and she gave some to her husband with her, and he ate it, too ."(Genesis 3:6)

Satan used this same method with Jesus, attempting to stir up the lust of the flesh in Him. He said: *"If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."* (Matthew 4:3)

Jesus, however, did not allow the hunger of His human flesh to lead Him into sin. Neither did He give in to the devil's temptation to prove that He was indeed God's Son. There was no need to prove His identity. He knew who He was and He trusted His Father to provide for Him because He believed that all the promises of God were true. This included sustenance and provision in times of physical want, although spiritual sustenance was of even greater importance to the human soul. God's words could satisfy the heart like nothing else. So He replied: *"It is*

written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'(Matthew 4:4) It was the perfect answer! Satan's first attempt to snare Jesus had failed!

Satan lost this round but he wasn't giving up just yet. He had successfully lured Eve with the promise of being as wise as God Himself if she ate of the forbidden fruit. She had wanted that wisdom in order to give her significance and high value. Satan could empathize. He had wanted the same thing, believing that it could exalt him above God Himself. That rebellion had cost him his home in heaven and it had cost Adam and Eve their home in Eden. Now Satan had only to get Jesus to desire the power and glory of the Messiah to the extent that He would be willing to take a shortcut to get it. With that in mind, Satan took Jesus to a high place and showed Him all the kingdoms and nations of the world.



How he managed to do that is not explained. Did he physically lift Jesus up there? In the Old Testament the prophet Ezekiel was transported from place to place in a vision from God. The apostle Paul said he was caught up to the third heaven. *'I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I don't know, or whether out of the body, I don't*

know; God knows,) such a one was caught up into the third heaven' (2Corinthians 12:2)

However it happened, the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. What a vision it must have been! Carefully and slyly, Satan offered: *"I will give you all of these things, if you will fall down and worship me.'*(Matthew 4:9) Satan must have been certain that this would surely stir up the lust of the eyes in Jesus. And it wasn't even an empty offer! As ruler over all of sinful humanity on the earth, Satan could legally hand over authority to whomever he wanted. All he asked in exchange was for Jesus to make Satan His god. Of course that would necessitate Jesus rebelling against His Father and switching allegiances, but it was definitely a quick way to gain dominion over the earth. Jesus was unmoved and angrily replied: *"Be gone Satan! It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"* (Jesus quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13) Another failure for Satan!

It must have come as a real blow to the Devil. There was only one other temptation that might possibly succeed where the other two had failed. This time Satan took Jesus to the very highest pinnacle of the Temple and made a dramatic suggestion. Satan said, *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will put his angels in charge of you.' and, 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you don't dash your foot against a stone.'*(Matthew 4:6) Satan was quoting from Psalm 91 in the Bible, and his aim was to challenge Jesus into proving that He was the Son of God. If Jesus had complied and jumped off the building, His Father would certainly have sent the angels to catch Him, as promised. And the Israelites would have been amazed if they saw Jesus drop from a great height without a scratch or bruise upon Him. He would be hailed everywhere as their great Messiah. But by forcing His Father to protect Him, Jesus would have been led into a subtle error. Fortunately Jesus knew His Scripture far better than Satan did. He replied: *It is written, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.* (Jesus quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16).

Satan's last temptation had also failed! What a disappointment! He could do nothing more at this time so he left Jesus there in the desert. Angels came from heaven to attend to the Lord, who must have been physically exhausted from His long fast, and spiritually exhausted from his battle with the enemy. Yet Jesus had won! He had succeeded where Adam and Eve had failed. Unlike them, He did not sin by rebelling against His Father, and Satan was therefore unable to claim power over Him. After this, Jesus returned to Galilee where John was baptizing.

Note: A question many Christians struggle with is whether or not Jesus could have sinned when tempted by Satan. Jesus is completely human like Adam, but unlike Adam, He has no sin nature. Jesus is also God, and we know that God cannot sin as He is perfectly righteous. This dual nature is unique to the character of Jesus, so it is difficult for us to ascertain what went on inside Jesus when tempted by Satan. However the fact that Jesus prayed: *“Yet not what I will, but what you will”* (Matthew 26:39) indicates that Jesus could feel the tension between His human nature and His divine nature during times of temptation. The Bible asserts that ... *“we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet he did not sin.”*(Hebrews 4:15) The possibility of Jesus succumbing to Satan's temptation and rebelling against His Father seems impossible because of His divinity. Also, as the federal head of mankind, if Jesus had sinned, all of humanity would have been placed under the permanent curse of death, and everyone in Sheol (including Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, etc.) would have been doomed forever along with the sinners and unbelievers. There would have been no hope of redemption for them. Another complication is the fact that God had joined Himself to mankind through Jesus, and an act of sin would have severed humanity from the Godhead and destroyed Jesus Himself. That would have proven that Satan was more powerful than God! Such a possibility lacks credibility.



FIGHTING THE ENEMY

Satan's ploys didn't work. Jesus saw right through them. In the Bible, Satan is called the 'father of lies', and likened to a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, an accuser of the saints, and completely evil. His obsession is the enslavement and brutalization of humanity. One of Satan's greatest deceptions is that he doesn't exist, but the Bible exposes him repeatedly. His cohorts are other Watchers (called 'principalities') and demons (disembodied spirits of Nephilim from pre-flood times). They battle against humanity, bringing disease, violence, murder, sexual licentiousness, poverty, tyranny, Satanic worship, and every form of evil imaginable. There is only one defence. That one defence is Messiah Jesus. His mission was to bring good news to the poor; to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to open the prison for those who are bound. This would also be the mission of His disciples, who seem weak and vulnerable, but have spiritual armour well able to confront Satan who opposes them. They also have the mighty authority of Messiah Himself.

Jesus promised His followers that whatever they asked in His name would be done for them. He also enabled them *“to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy.”*



Followers of Jesus are far from defenceless when it comes to fighting the evil forces of this world. The language of warfare is everywhere in the scriptures. In Isaiah 59:17 the prophet says of God, *“He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head;*

He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped Himself in zeal as a cloak."

Angels are created to do warfare for God's people. They make constant appearances as warriors in the scriptures. Christians are also called to war and Jesus has given us spiritual weapons - a shield of faith; a sword of the Spirit (word of God); a helmet of salvation; a breastplate of righteousness; a belt of truth; and feet shod with the message of peace. This weaponry is spiritual but all the more mighty because God's own authority is behind it. These weapons can tear down formidable enemy strongholds.

CHOOSING DISCIPLES

Sometime after Jesus was baptized, two of John's disciples saw Jesus walking by and John said, *"Look! The Lamb of God!"* The two disciples immediately began to follow Jesus, who asked them what they wanted. They wanted to know where He was staying and Jesus led them to His place. They spent the rest of the day with Him. Word spread and soon others wanted to meet with Jesus. One man, Andrew, went to find his brother Simon and when Jesus saw him, he already knew who he was. *"You are Simon, son of John", he said. "You will be called Cephas."* (*Cephas means Peter, or Rock*).

NOTE: In the Old Testament, when God changed a person's name, it was usually to establish a new identity. God changed Abram's name to Abraham (father of a multitude) and his wife's name from Sarai (my princess) to Sarah (mother of nations). God also changed Jacob's "supplanter" name to 'Israel' (having power with God). In the New Testament there is a reference to God changing the names of Christians by giving them a white stone with a new name on it: *"To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it"* (Revelation 2:17). The white stone, with the believer's new name engraved on it, could refer to an ancient Roman custom of awarding white stones to the winners in athletic games. The winner of a contest was awarded a white stone with his name inscribed on it, which served as his 'ticket' to a special awards banquet. This was similar to Jesus' promise that the believer was assured entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven. The white colour of the stone could also be

symbolic of the fact that the Christian is a new creation, perfect in Christ's righteousness.

Peter (Simon) and Andrew thought they had chosen to follow Jesus but he would later tell them that it was He who had chosen them. They were being carefully handpicked for the enormously important job of taking the good news of the Kingdom to the world. Already they were doing just that, by telling others that Jesus was the Messiah. The next man to become a follower of the Lord was Philip, who was so excited after meeting Jesus that he ran off to tell his friend Nathaniel. Unfortunately his friend was less than impressed and asked sarcastically whether anything good could come from Nazareth. Nevertheless he went to see Jesus who said: *"Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."* Nathaniel asked Jesus how He knew him, to which Jesus responded: *"I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."* That definitely got Nathaniel's attention and he asked Jesus how he could have known about him. He was so amazed that he declared Jesus could only be the Son of God, the king of Israel. Since Jesus saw Nathaniel under the fig tree, He probably also knew about the skeptical remark he had made about nothing good coming from Nazareth. That's why Jesus had hailed Nathaniel as someone who was without deceit (couldn't be fooled), and answered him accordingly. In essence Jesus told Nathaniel that he would see far greater miracles confirming Him. In other words, 'You think that's impressive? You haven't seen anything yet.' Next, Jesus went up on a mountainside and called those He had chosen to be with Him, and they came to Him. Jesus had many disciples (literally 'learners') but the ones He was choosing now would become apostles (sent ones). He picked out twelve, the number of fullness, which is reminiscent of the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel. These twelve were to go out and preach, and Jesus gave them authority to cast out demons. They were: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.

Jesus' disciples began to baptize in the same area where John was baptizing. Jesus Himself did not baptize anyone, but many people came to hear Him teach. This caused some of John's disciples to complain that Jesus was getting more followers than John. But John exhibited no jealousy over this. He told his followers that a person could only receive

what was given them from heaven, reminding them that he was not the Messiah.

“He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. This, my joy, therefore is made full. He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:29-30) ‘One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son won’t see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.’(John 3:36)

John was testifying that he was of far lower status than Jesus, and it was only right that Jesus be exalted over him. As the Messiah, He was the centre of God’s plan for saving humanity. Belief in Him would bring eternal life but rejecting Him would bring God’s judgment. John couldn’t have been clearer in his language. And his words about Jesus being the Bridegroom had a particular impact because God often used that analogy in the Old Testament when describing His relationship with Israel.

“For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you. (Isaiah. 62:5) “I will betroth you to me forever. Yes, I will betroth you to me in righteousness, in justice, in loving kindness, and in compassion. I will even betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know Yahweh”. (Hosea 2:19-20)

WEDDING

The analogy of God being Israel’s Bridegroom had significant associations with the first public miracle of Jesus, which occurred at a wedding in Cana. The wedding was a social event that Jesus’ mother had been invited to, along with Jesus and His disciples. But by the third day of the wedding celebration, a disaster occurred. The wine had run out! Because it was a wedding, it was expected that the wine would flow for a full week. A good party signified a good blessing on the newly married couple.

Note: In the Bible, most people drank wine. There was no stigma attached to it. Drinking wine was normal for all Jews, except for the Nazarites, the Rechabites, and the Levitical priests in service at the temple. In the New Testament, John the Baptist also abstained because an angel from God had instructed his parents that he was never to take wine or other fermented drink. However Jesus Himself drank wine. In

fact the Pharisee legalists even charged him with drinking too much. Wine was also used in celebrating the Passover in the Old Testament and it was used in celebrating the Lord's Supper in the New Testament (Luke 22:7-23). And certainly no Jewish wedding or festival was ever without it.

To run out of wine meant that the celebration had been poorly planned and this would be a great embarrassment for the couple and all in attendance. It was Mary who went to Jesus and pointed out the lack of wine to Him. It appears that Jesus' mother fully expected Him to perform a miracle. Perhaps Jesus had done many such miracles of provision in the past and that was why it came naturally to go to Him with such a problem. Jesus gently asked Mary why she was involving Him since it wasn't yet time to reveal Himself to the public. In other words, He was telling Mary that if He miraculously provided wine, it might reveal His identity as the Messiah prematurely. Mary, however, was unfazed by His objection and told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them. She was obviously completely confident that He would not let her, or the wedding couple, down. Her remarkable faith was not misplaced, for Jesus went into action as soon as she left. Perhaps, as Jesus thought over the situation, His Father revealed that performing a miracle at this time was His will after all. There was a definite reason that such a miracle, with its powerful symbolic reference should inaugurate the Messiah's mission.

Standing nearby were six large stone jars, which were used by Jews for ceremonial washings. Each jar could hold 20 to 30 gallons. Jesus told the servants to fill these with water right to the top. Then He instructed them to dip some out and take it to the person in charge of the dinner, which they did. The person in charge tasted the wine, not realizing where it came from, and called the groom to one side, exclaiming over the superior quality of the wine.

He said, *"Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have drunk freely, then that which is worse. You have kept the good wine until now!"* (John 2:10)

In totality Jesus made 1500 bottles of high quality wine, a miracle that not only saved the reputation of the wedding party organizers, but also showed the glory of Jesus, causing His disciples to increase their faith in Him. However Jesus explained the real reason that this miracle was so important. He spoke of old wine and new wine, saying, *"No one puts new wine into old wineskins, or else the new wine will burst the skins, and the*

wine pours out, and the skins will be destroyed; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins.”(Mark 2:22)

Wine expands when it ferments over time, stretching the wineskins and making them brittle. Using them again by pouring new wine into them would risk bursting them. Jesus used this analogy to proclaim that the New Covenant, which He was bringing in, could not exist with the Old Covenant, which was passing away. The Cana wedding, symbolic of God's marriage to Israel, required a New Marriage Covenant (symbolized by new wine) because the Old Marriage Covenant (old wine) was finished.

The New Testament puts it this way: *But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, ... he is also the mediator of a better covenant, (with) better promises... For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. For finding fault with it, he said, “Behold, the days come...that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they didn't continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them...For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days...**I will put my laws into their mind, I will also write them on their heart.** I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Hebrews 8: 6-10,12-13)*

This New Covenant would not come into full effect until the Lord died and was resurrected, and when the Old Covenant Temple was completely destroyed. At that point, the Law and Prophets would be completely fulfilled and the Old Covenant age would be over. From then on the New Covenant of grace would be fully in effect.

SYNAGOGUE IN NAZARETH

Jesus began His ministry by teaching in the Jewish synagogues. The practice of meeting in synagogues emerged during the period of Israel's Babylonian captivity when the Jewish temple was unavailable for worship. An alternative gathering place to assemble for prayer and to worship the Sabbath was needed, so synagogues were built. Later when the Temple was rebuilt, synagogues functioned as centres that could support the spiritual and physical needs of those in the community. The

activities of a synagogue included reading and giving instruction in the Law. They also had facilities for dining and for lodging strangers. This type of building, where the Jewish community gathered, served an important purpose in the ministry of Jesus. It was there that Jesus found an immediate audience accustomed to public scripture reading and exposition. But it was also where Jesus could heal those in great need, and where His miracles could be publicly witnessed, thereby affirming that the Kingdom of God had indeed arrived.



One day when Jesus came to Nazareth, he went, as usual, into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read the scriptures and delivered a message from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord".

He closed the book and gave it again to the minister, and sat down. Everyone was looking at him and when he saw he had their attention, he said simply *"This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. (Luke 4:16–21)*

All were amazed and wondered that a simple carpenter's son could speak so well. Then Jesus provocatively challenged them. *"Surely you*

will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum. Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.'

Jesus was calling out the people of Nazareth for being resistant to God. He wasn't interested in being conciliatory and He refused to temper his words. He knew hard words were often necessary to get through to hearts encrusted with pride. Using this proverb, Jesus was likening himself to the physician, while the Nazarenes were likened to those demanding that He heal Himself.



The basic idea was that no one wants to visit a feverish doctor who is himself sick. According to the Nazarenes, if Jesus wanted them to believe he could heal (make them whole), he needed to give some proof that he himself was not needful of healing himself. Jesus knew they saw him as presumptuous. He anticipated their opposition and gave examples of Elijah and Elisha to show how unbelief in Israel had caused those prophets to minister to Gentiles who had been more receptive to

God than His own people. He was telling them outright that they had unbelieving hearts and would receive nothing from God, while believing Gentiles would. The crowd was insulted and angry. All the people in the synagogue got up and drove him out of the town, taking him to the brow of a hill in order to throw him off the cliff. Jesus, however walked right through the crowd and went on his way. It was not a great homecoming, but it had not been unexpected. Jesus always knew his audience and reacted in accordance to the condition of their hearts. Nazareth was His home town after all.

MANY MIRACLES

The people in other parts of Israel were more open to Jesus' message. He was able to do miracles there, which was very important to build faith in His followers, but also to confirm He was who He claimed to be. Besides turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana, there was the time when he walked on water to meet His disciples during a storm.



He was also able to calm ferocious winds with one word. He healed countless people from every disease and infirm condition imaginable,

and cast out legions of demons. Whenever He healed a blind person, He was proving that He was the Light of the world. When he raised someone from the dead, He was proving He was the Resurrection and the Life. All these miracles clearly proved that He was divine, while also being fully human. No one had ever done the things He did in Israel, excelling every other prophet in the past. As more people heard about Jesus and His miracles, they went out in droves to see Him. Some were just curious, others wanted healing, some wanted to hear His wisdom, and the religious ones (the Pharisees) wanted to see if He could be useful to them. The Enemy, of course, wanted to kill Him. For His part, Jesus did not entrust Himself to the people who came out to see Him. He knew all about people and what was in their hearts. Most of the people in Jerusalem who followed Him did not have true, saving faith. They were greatly impressed by the signs Jesus did, but they did not actually trust Him for salvation. It was a primarily signs-based faith and not a gospel-based faith. Jesus knew this and was not surprised when many turned fickle and later rejected Him.

TEMPLE CLEANSING



Soon it was time for the Jewish Passover Feast so Jesus and His disciples went up from Capernaum to Jerusalem to visit the Temple. Everything in Jerusalem centred around the Temple. The first Temple was built by King Solomon around 1000 BC. It was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. Then the Persians conquered the Babylonians almost a century later, and they agreed to let the exiled Jewish leaders return to the land of Israel so they could rebuild the Temple. This Second Temple stood for hundreds more years and then was renovated and expanded by Herod the Great.

The Temple complex contained courtyards surrounding the central room, the Holy of Holies, which was only entered once a year, on Yom Kippur, by the high priest. The Temple complex also contained many other storage and administrative rooms, plus numerous ritual baths for purification. The whole system was fed by an aqueduct that brought water from 10 kilometers away, and it was protected by high walls and a series of gates. Some of the most religious items in the First Temple were apparently lost to history in the time of the Second Temple. The first Temple's Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant that housed the Ten Commandments Moses had brought down from Sinai, but the second Temple's Holy of Holies stood empty. Celebration was an integral part of Jewish worship and at festivals the Temple became the site of a carnival that, according to the Talmud, was unlike anything else around. At nighttime golden candelabras hoisted onto poles burned so brightly they illuminated the entire city. The festival featured dancing, juggling, singing and a full orchestra of Levite musicians.

The primary purpose of the Temple and its staff (the priests and Levites) was to offer sacrifices to God. It was open 365 days a year and many sacrifices were animals that were brought live into the Temple and slaughtered in the courtyard. Some, or all, of their flesh and blood was offered on the altar. On pilgrimage festivals, all of Israel came to offer sacrifices. As a result, the courtyard of the Temple ran almost constantly with animal blood, while the smell of sacrifices on the fire probably spread to most of Jerusalem. Some sacrificial blood was collected and sprinkled on the altar as part of the ritual. Much of it was rinsed away via channels that conducted it out to the nearby Kidron River. The Temple stones required regular deep cleaning.

However Jesus came to do a different type of cleansing at the Temple. When He entered the temple courtyard, He looked around and found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and some people were sitting at

tables exchanging money. The animals were being sold as sacrifices and the moneychangers were converting Roman coins into other currencies (the inscriptions of emperors on the coins were deemed idolatrous and therefore unsuitable for the temple). They charged extremely high rates for this service. The whole environment in the courtyard took on the appearance of a chaotic marketplace, whereas it was intended as a place for Gentiles (non-Jews) to worship God. However the courtyard had become so crowded that Gentiles had no room for worship. The Jews may have felt that God didn't care about this, but they were wrong. Jesus regarded the scene with indignation and felt compelled to do something about it. Making a whip out of ropes, He chased all the sheep and cattle from the temple courtyard. Then He scattered the coins of the money exchangers by turning over their tables.

To the dove sellers He said, *“Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!”* (John 2:16)

The disciples watched all this and were reminded of an Old Testament scripture, Psalm 69:9, where it says, *“My great love for Your house will destroy Me.”* Little did they know at the time, that this act by Jesus would seal His fate just as prophesied in the Psalm 34.

The Jewish leaders in the Temple demanded a sign from Jesus to prove His authority to do what He did. Jesus answered them, *“When you destroy this temple, I will raise it up again in three days.”* (John 2:19)

This remark astounded them and they reminded Jesus that it had taken 46 years to build the temple. How was Jesus proposing to raise it in 3 days? But of course Jesus wasn't referring to the temple building at all. The temple He was speaking of was His body which was in-dwelt by God and which would be raised from the grave after 3 days, thereby substantiating His divine authority. The physical temple would be replaced by Jesus Christ, the New Covenant Temple. Later the disciples would remember this incident and what Jesus had said to the Jewish leaders, and it would greatly strengthen their faith in Jesus and the scriptures. Meanwhile, Jesus and the disciples took part in the Passover Feast and many people in Jerusalem saw Jesus perform signs. They were amazed by this and professed faith in Him as the Messiah, but Jesus knew they could be unpredictable. He was a keen judge of character and was fully knowledgeable of peoples' motives and behaviour.

PARABLES



Hard Ground



No Root



Thorns



Good Soil

Jesus used parables to explain why there were such variable responses to His message. Parables were easier for the people to understand, and easier for them to remember the lessons presented. One parable involved seed (Word of God) thrown on different types of soil (people's hearts). The ones with hard hearts didn't receive the message at all, and Satan (shown by the birds devouring the seed) came and took it away. Some seed fell on hearts without much depth and as soon as the sun rose (as soon as trials came), the Word withered and died in their hearts. Other seed grew up well enough, but thorns (cares of the world) choked out the Word of truth in their souls and they bore no fruit. Lastly, some seed fell on good soil and the Word took root and produced fruits of righteousness, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. Only one in four who heard Messiah's message actually received it and put their trust in it. This was a very important parable because it showed so clearly why some became followers of Jesus and others did not.



Another parable was the story of a merchant who found a pearl of great price. The pearl represents Jesus and the salvation He offers. This treasure was hidden and could not be found by intelligence or worldly wisdom. In the parable, the merchant found the treasure and was willing to give up all he owned in order to purchase the matchless pearl.

In the same way, the Kingdom of heaven is so priceless that one can only obtain it if one is willing to give up one's soul for it. Jesus was telling His listeners that no worldly possession or earthly consideration can compete with what He offers us. Only He can fulfill our greatest needs, satisfy our longings, give us peace in our hearts, and make us whole and righteous before God. This is a treasure beyond all else and it is ours by faith in Messiah. Exchanging our life, which is temporal and offers no future, for the Life of Jesus, which is eternal and perfect, only makes sense. Everything is dross in comparison.

Yet another parable involved two houses, one built on sand and another built on a rock foundation.



House built on sand



House built on rock

Jesus gave the spiritual meaning of the parable when He said: *“Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”* The proper foundation for life is the Truth found in Jesus so that when the storms of life come against us, we are not moved from our confidence and certainty in God's love, provision, and protection.

“He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved.” (Psalm 62:2)

OTHER PARABLES

WHEAT & WEEDS

Jesus told another parable about the kingdom of God. This one involved a sower who sowed good seed in his field, but an enemy came in the night and secretly sowed weeds among the wheat. When the wheat sprouted, the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants were confused by this and asked the owner where the weeds came from. "An enemy did this," he replied, whereupon the servants asked if they should go and pull up the weeds. The landowner said no because he was concerned that they might accidentally pull up the wheat along with the weeds. He told them to let both grow together until the harvest. At that time the harvesters would collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, and then they would gather the wheat and bring it into the barn. After telling this parable, Jesus explained it to his disciples. He said that the one who sowed the good seed was the Son of Man. The field was the world, and the good seed represented the people of the kingdom. The weeds were the unbelievers and the enemy was the devil. The harvest was the end of the Old Covenant age, and the harvesters were angels. As the weeds were pulled up and burned in the fire, so it would be at the end of the age. The Son of Man would send out His angels, and they would weed out of His kingdom everything that caused sin and all who did evil. They would throw the wicked into hell where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous would shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

MUSTARD SEED

In another parable, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed which a man planted in his field. Mustard seeds are very tiny but when they grow, they turn into large trees so that the birds can come and perch in the branches. Jesus was telling the disciples that the kingdom looked small now, but one day it would grow into a great kingdom that would shelter many people. He also used the example of leaven to illustrate the same thing. A woman mixed some yeast into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough. The Kingdom of God would permeate the world in a similar fashion.

THE FISH PARABLE

Yet another parable compared the kingdom of heaven to a net that was let down into a lake and, when pulled up, was full of all kinds of fish. The fishermen pulled it up on the shore and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. Jesus explained that this was how it would be at the end of the age. The angels would come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw the wicked into the blazing furnace, where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This referred to the coming judgment on Israel that would separate wicked unbelievers from the righteous. Jesus was prophesying about the judgment foretold in Daniel.

“I saw thrones placed, and on one the ancient of days sat: his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came out from before him: thousands of thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.... Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (judgment) (Daniel 7:9-10; 12:2)

Jesus asked His disciples, *“Have you understood all these things?”* and they replied that they did. Jesus then told them that every teacher of the Law, who became a disciple in the kingdom of heaven, was like the owner of a house who brought out of his storeroom both new treasures as well as old. Jesus and the disciples were born under the Law (Old Covenant) but they were now entering the kingdom of heaven (New Covenant). They were in a transition time where old covenant truths and principles (treasures) were being fulfilled and superseded by new ones. A teacher of the Law, who was now a disciple in the kingdom of heaven, had to know how to rightly divide the truths about the two covenants when teaching others.

LOST SHEEP

There were several parables on the theme of loss. One story Jesus told was about a shepherd who had a hundred sheep, but one of them got lost. The shepherd left the other 99 sheep in a field and went out to find the missing one. Finally he found it and tenderly lifted it to his shoulders and joyfully carried it home. He was so excited about having found the little sheep that he called together all his neighbours and friends and

asked them to celebrate with him. Jesus told His disciples that this is how it was in heaven when a sinner repented of his sins. Jesus was making the point that He, as the Good Shepherd, was seeking to save the penitent. It was the weak and humble, knowing themselves to be in need of salvation, who would be rescued from their sins. They would be taken home to heaven in joyful celebration.

PRODIGAL SON

One of the stories Jesus told is a special favourite of many today. It is about a man with 2 sons. The younger son asked his father for his share of the estate and once he received it, he left for a distant country. Once there, he squandered his money with wild living until he had nothing left. To make matters worse, a famine spread across the land so that he couldn't even get a decent job. Eventually he found work feeding cornhusks to pigs, but by this time he was so hungry that he even wished he could eat the pigs' food. Finally, in dire straits and close to starvation, the young man thought of his home where his father's servants never went hungry. He knew he didn't deserve to be called his father's son after his riotous living and after wasting his inheritance, but he could always ask his father to hire him as a servant. As he headed back to his country and was still some distance from home, his father saw him in the distance. The father's heart was filled with compassion for his son and he ran to meet him, throwing his arms around him and kissing him. The son admitted that he had sinned against his father and told him that he was unworthy to be called his son, but the father turned to the servants and commanded them to bring the finest robe, sandals, and jewelry for his boy. They were also to prepare a feast in celebration of his son's homecoming. The father said, *'For this, my son, was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found.'* (Luke 15:24) As the party carried on, the older son heard the dancing and music and asked the servants what was going on. When he heard that his brother had returned and his father was rejoicing by throwing a big party for him, the older son was angry and refused to go in. The father went to him outside and pleaded for him to join the celebration, but he stubbornly refused, saying: *"These many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed a commandment of yours, but you never gave me a goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this, your son, came, who has devoured your living with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' His father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But it*

was appropriate to celebrate and be glad, for this, your brother, was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found.' (Luke 15: 29-32)

Jesus told this beautiful story to illustrate the gracious heart of His Father, who is willing to totally forgive us if we only come to Him with penitent hearts and the realization that we need a Saviour. Like the father in the story, God seeks to show mercy and grace to the humble, longing to welcome us with open arms as sons and daughters in the kingdom of heaven. The older brother represents those who are self-righteous, like the Pharisees, who see no need for repentance and who resent God's compassion for the undeserving. Pride keeps these ones from recognizing their need for Jesus as their Saviour with the result that they remain outside the kingdom of heaven. It is interesting that the father in the story said that his son was dead but had come to life. Jesus was probably alluding to the fact that though a sinner is born spiritually dead, He would give eternal life to anyone who believed in Him and trusted Him for salvation.

THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS

Jesus often brought up the subject of hell and eternal judgement as a warning to those who were not living for God. One story involved a rich man who was always dressed in expensive clothing and lived a very extravagant life. He enjoyed luxuries of every kind. At the gate of his palatial home, there was a beggar named Lazarus who suffered from open sores. Feral dogs often came to lick his wounds. He was always hungry, so he would wait at the rich man's gate, hoping to eat just the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Eventually the poor man died from his illness and the angels came to carry his spirit to 'Abraham's bosom' (the part of Sheol where believers went). Then the rich man also died and was buried. His spirit went to Sheol too, but to the part where the unbelievers suffered in torment. The rich man happened to look up, and far away in the distance he saw Abraham with Lazarus by his side. He called out to Abraham, begging him to have pity on him by sending Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue, because he was in agony in the fire. But Abraham replied, '*Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But now here he is comforted and you are in anguish. Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that no one may cross over from there to us.'* (Luke 16:25-26)

The rich man then asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his family to warn his five brothers so that they would not share the same fate with him in Hades. But Abraham replied, *'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'* The rich man persisted saying: *'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'* Abraham replied that if they would not listen to Moses and the Prophets, then they would not be convinced even if someone rose from the dead.

There were several points to this story that Jesus wanted to make. One was that there was a place reserved for believers after death, and one reserved for unbelievers, separate from one another with no possibility of crossing from one side to the other. Another was that those who lived complacent, selfish lives without regard for God or their fellow man could expect to end up in hell, in the place of torment. Of particular interest was the fact that the rich man was fully conscious of where he was and why. He had gloried in his wealth without sharing it with the poor, and now he was in hell from which he would never escape. The story made it clear that he was where he was because he had never paid attention to Moses and the Prophets who gave warnings about living a godless lifestyle. They had also pointed to Jesus as the coming Saviour of mankind, but because the rich man had never believed the Old Testament scriptures, he would certainly not be persuaded by Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

DEMONIAC

Jesus had many encounters with demons who were terrified of Him since He could cast them out of their victims with a single command. One of the reasons He came was to "proclaim liberty to captives and to open the prison to those who are bound." On one trip, Jesus and His followers sailed to a place called the Gerasenes, which was across the lake from Galilee. As Jesus came ashore, a demon-possessed man ran up to Him and fell on his knees, shouting at the top of his voice: *"What have I to do with you, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God? I adjure (beg) you by God, don't torment me."* For Jesus said to him, *"Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" (Mark 5:7,8)*

The voice belonged to the man, but the ones crying out were the spirits within him who didn't want to leave the man's body. Interestingly, the man had run towards Jesus, yet the evil spirits inside him wanted nothing to

do with Jesus. Perhaps they were compelled to come by the Lord's power. At any rate, their victim was a wild man, naked, who lived among the tombs. He seemed to have little self-control because the demons would often make this poor man scream and cut himself with stones.



They had been tormenting the man for a long time, forcing him to live like a wild animal. When the neighbouring villagers had tried to subdue the demoniac with chains, the demons gave him supernatural strength to break the chains asunder and escape his guards. Now Jesus was commanding the demons to leave and this was what they most feared. Jesus demanded to know what name the spirits went by and they answered, "Legion" meaning many. (A legion was a Roman unit of 3000 to 6000 soldiers. The name may just have indicated a great many in number.) The demons continued to beg Jesus not to order them out of the man. Luke 8:31 adds: *"And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.*The Bible mentions this place several times in the book of Revelation.

'The fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from the sky, which had fallen to the earth. The key to the pit of the abyss was given to him. He opened the pit of the abyss, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke from a burning furnace. The sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke from the pit. Then out of the smoke came locusts on the earth,

*and power was given to them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.”
(Revelation 9:1–3, 11)*

I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. He seized the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited earth, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were finished. After this, he must be freed for a short time. (Revelation 20:1–3)

Bible scholars believe that this abyss is what Peter referred to in 2 Peter 2:4.

‘God didn’t spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved for judgment’

Note: **Sheol** refers to the home of the spirits of the wicked dead and the righteous dead. Sometimes both Sheol and “the pit” can refer to the grave. The spirits of the wicked dead in Sheol have consciousness and will continue to be wicked. Isaiah 38:18 indicates that the wicked who go down into Sheol have no hope for eternal life. *“For Sheol cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your faithfulness.”*

Hades is the New Testament word corresponding to Sheol. The Hebrew word for Sheol and the Greek word for Hades are usually interchangeable.

Abyss is mentioned in Luke 8:30-31 as the place where demons do not want to live. 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 suggest that the abyss is a prison that was originally created for certain angels who committed the terrible sin of cohabiting with human women (Genesis 6:1-4). The abyss has existed for a long time. Many demons are already there. There is also a Lake of Fire which is the final place of doom for demon and human alike after being judged at the Great White Throne Judgement .

To the demons, living in a herd of pigs was preferable to living without any body whatsoever. Surprisingly Jesus gave them permission, and as

soon as the demons entered the swine, the animals were thrown into a great frenzy. They rushed off the cliff into the lake and drowned, and the demons were left to their dreadful fate after all. Those tending the swine saw the whole thing and ran off to report what had happened to the townspeople. The villagers arrived to find the demonized man at Jesus' feet, dressed and completely sane. The swineherds had told them the whole story and it frightened them. They requested Jesus to leave the region, so He got into a boat and prepared to depart. The healed man, however, begged Jesus to let him go with Him, but Jesus told him to return home and tell the villagers what God had done for him. And so the man went away and testified about Jesus all over town. What is interesting about this story is that the demons knew exactly who Jesus was and they also knew He had great power over them. They recognized His authority and they knew where they were destined to end up. Perhaps living in the bodies of men and animals delayed their doom for a time. Some wonder why Jesus permitted the demons to possess the pigs, especially as He must have known the outcome. It isn't really explained, but it could have been to show the people God's power over the demonic spirit realm.

JESUS & CHILDREN



Many loved Jesus, especially women and children who felt safe in His presence. In a society not always kind to them, they sensed the gentle kindness in the Lord and gravitated towards Him. Some of His closest friends were women and they often provided supplies for Him and His disciples. In a time where women could not associate with men from outside their family, they sacrificed social standing to follow Him. But they did so gladly, and many brought their children to Jesus to bless them. Jesus especially loved the little ones and some of His most stern warnings were to those who would cause them harm. *"It would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck and to be thrown into the sea than to cause one of these little ones to stumble."*

PHARISEES



Religious Jews called Pharisees wondered if Jesus might be the Messiah. They were hoping for a leader who would restore Israel to greatness and defeat the Romans. They were strict Law-keepers and felt sure they would be approved for leading positions in Messiah's new kingdom. At first they courted Jesus, even flattering Him when they addressed Him, but when Jesus didn't reciprocate and began calling them out for their hypocrisy and accused them of being self righteous

oppressors of the poor, they turned on Him in anger. Their rage only intensified when Jesus said they had hard hearts and were spiritually dead. They got together to discuss these insults and their anger bubbled over into vengeful hatred.

Many of the things Jesus taught were so different from what the Pharisees had been teaching that some people probably wondered if Jesus really was a heretic, like the Pharisees accused Him of being. Was He radically overthrowing the Old Testament Law? Perhaps it was to set their minds at rest that Jesus explained His stand on the Law and Prophets.

Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill. For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished. Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 5:17- 20)

This was a clear statement that Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not abolish it. The Law would stand until such time as its requirements were completely satisfied. *"This is what I told you, while I was still with you, that all things which are written in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me must be fulfilled."* (Luke 24:44)

The Law had acted as a guardian to Israel to sanctify the Jewish culture through moral decision-making. However the Law was never able to give eternal life or make people perfectly righteous. Yet perfect righteousness, as epitomized in the Law, was the requirement for eternal life. Even the Pharisees with all their law-keeping couldn't make the grade. Jesus said a person's righteousness had to **exceed** theirs. Only Jesus could do that. New Testament scriptures make it clear that Jesus did indeed fulfill the Law, keeping it perfectly. As Head of the New Creation (after His death and resurrection), Jesus shared His perfect righteousness with all who believed in Him. This was done through the Holy Spirit placing believers into that New Creation. The Law no longer had a part to play in their lives as a guardian because it was already

perfectly fulfilled in them through Jesus. External commandments were not needed.

'For Christ is the fulfillment of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4)

HEALING

Jesus performed a great many healing miracles and these backed up His claims to being the Messiah.

Official's son: Once a royal official who was in Cana had a son lying sick at home. This official had heard of Jesus and all the miraculous things he had done so he begged Jesus to come and heal his boy who was very close to death. Jesus told him he could go on his way because his son would live. The man believed Jesus and left. While he was still on his way home, his servants met him with the news that his son was better. After discovering the exact time when the boy's fever had left him, the official realized that this was exactly when Jesus had told him that his son would live. Consequently he and his whole family became believers.

Leprous Man: At one place Jesus came down from the mountainside and, as usual, large crowds followed Him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before Him, saying: "*Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean.*" (Matthew 8:2) Jesus was indignant at this poor man's suffering and He reached out His hand and touched the man (something no one else would ever do for fear of catching the disease). "*I am willing,*" He said. "*Be clean!*" Instantly the man was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus told him to tell no one what had happened, but to show himself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them. But the healed man was too ecstatic to keep quiet and went about spreading the news. As a result, Jesus couldn't enter the nearby towns openly, but stayed in lonely places instead. Yet the people still came to Him from everywhere.

Paralyzed Man: Jesus again entered Capernaum and the people heard that He had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door of the place where He was preaching. Four men carried a paralyzed man on a stretcher, hoping to get him to Jesus so he could be healed, but the crowd made it

impossible to get anywhere near Jesus. Undaunted, they made an opening in the thatched roof and lowered the stretcher down. Jesus was impressed by their persistent faith and told the paralyzed man, “*Son, your sins are forgiven.*” (Mark 2:5) That statement greatly displeased some teachers of the law who were sitting there, thinking to themselves that Jesus was blaspheming because they knew that only God could forgive sins. Immediately Jesus knew in His spirit what they were thinking and He said to them, “*Why do you reason these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to tell the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven;’ or to say, ‘Arise, and take up your bed, and walk?’*” (Mark 2:8-10) Then Jesus told the man to get up, take his mat, and go home. The man did exactly that, and walked out in full view of them all, thereby amazing everyone. Many praised God, saying, “*We have never seen anything like this!*”

In telling the man that his sins were forgiven, Jesus was fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy by proclaiming good news to the poor and setting the oppressed free. Also Jesus was making it clear that miraculous healing proved His authority as God, and therefore His pronouncement of forgiveness of sins was not out of line. God, in Christ Jesus, was bringing salvation to humanity and He had complete authority to declare forgiveness of sin to this paralytic. However the crowd was not convinced that Jesus could make such pronouncements. They knew that only God could forgive sin and they were not even convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. His statements could certainly have been taken as blasphemous if they were not true, and blasphemers were stoned in Israel. Stoning was a tradition harking back to Moses' time. The accusation of blasphemy was why the people of Nazareth had attempted to throw Jesus off a cliff. Undoubtedly this crowd would have done something similar, if it were not for the healing miracle. The people were mystified that Jesus could make a paralytic walk, which caused them to wonder if He might not be who He claimed to be.

Withered Hand: Another time when Jesus went into a synagogue, a man with a withered hand was there. Some of the people were watching Jesus closely to see if He would heal the man on the Sabbath day. If He dared to do it, they could accuse Him of breaking the Law. Jesus told the man to stand where everyone could see him. Jesus then asked, “*Which is lawful on the Sabbath day: to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to kill?*” (Matthew 12:12) No one answered His question, and their hard-hearted lack of response angered Jesus. He looked at them, and He felt very sad because they were so stubborn. Then He told the man to hold out his hand, and as the man did so, his hand was made completely whole.

The Pharisees had seen enough, and immediately left the synagogue to make plans to kill Jesus. Jesus knew exactly what they were plotting, so He left that place. Many people followed Him, and He healed all who were sick, warning them not to tell others who He was.

This was to fulfill what Isaiah the prophet had said: “Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delights— I have put my Spirit on him. He will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout, nor raise his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street. He won’t break a bruised reed. He won’t quench a dimly burning wick. He will faithfully bring justice. He will not fail nor be discouraged, until he has set justice in the earth, and the islands will wait for his law.” (Isaiah 42:1–4)

Widow’s Son Resurrected:



Another time, Jesus and His disciples, followed by a large crowd, approached the gate of a town called Nain. A funeral procession was going on. It was for a young man, the only son of his widowed mother, and Jesus was moved to compassion for her. This woman was a widow like His own mother, and so Jesus would have known the pain widows suffer. However Mary had not been left totally destitute after Joseph died. She had been fortunate to have Jesus to protect and provide for the family. However the poor widow of Nain had no one to take care of her

now that her son was dead. Life could be very hard for a woman without a husband or grown son to care for her. She could be exploited and taken advantage of, which was often the case. In the Old Testament, God had much to say about helping the vulnerable, revealing His special concern for orphans and widows.

“Yahweh preserves the foreigners. He upholds the fatherless and the widows, but the way of the wicked he turns upside down. (Psalm 146:9)... You shall not take advantage of any widow or fatherless child. (Exodus 22:22)... Learn to do well. Seek justice. Relieve the oppressed. Judge for the fatherless. Plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)

Jesus, being God, was especially tuned in to the cries of the fatherless and oppressed. Now the villagers of Nain were about to see God's loving concern displayed in a marvellous miracle. First Jesus gently told her not to cry. Then He stopped the procession by touching the shroud of the young man lying on the stretcher. Out loud He said: *“Young man, I say to you, get up!”* Amazingly the dead man sat up and began speaking. Jesus then gave him back to his astonished mother. Not surprisingly the people were filled with wonder and began to praise God, exclaiming that a great prophet was in their midst. *“God has come to help His people!”* they shouted. Very quickly news of Jesus and what He had done spread throughout Judea and the whole countryside. Crowds began to follow Him because His teaching captivated them. Some were so impressed that they offered to become His disciples. However the Pharisees were getting increasingly nervous as news of these great miracles spread around the country. They continued to seek some strategy to put an end to it.



Pool of Mercy: Jesus went to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. There was a pool in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate, which was also known as Bethesda meaning 'house of mercy'. It was surrounded by five columns and many disabled people gathered there, probably because it was a shaded area, but also because of a legend that told of an angel that would sometimes stir up the water. It was believed that the first person to enter the pool after it was stirred up would get healed from whatever ailment they had. Jesus went to the pool and saw a man there who had been an invalid for 38 years. He asked the man if he wanted to be healed and the man replied that he had no one to help him into the pool when the angel stirred up the water. He said that others always went in before him. The man obviously believed the legend and probably had been coming to the pool for many years, hoping to be made well. Perhaps it was his desperation that touched Jesus' heart, for He said to the man, "*Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.*" (John 5:8) At once the man was cured, and he picked up his mat and walked. This happened on a Sabbath, so there were Jewish leaders about. They witnessed the miracle but instead of being awed by it, they were offended, and scolded the healed man for carrying his mat on the Sabbath. It was a ridiculous response, but the religious leaders were blinded to everything except their own religiosity.

Woman With Bleeding Condition: In one of the places where Jesus went, a crowd surrounded Him, and a synagogue leader named Jairus fell to the ground at the Lord's feet. He begged Jesus to come to his house where his only child, a 12-year-old daughter, lay dying. Jesus began following the man to his house but the crowd was so packed that it was hard to move forward. A woman who had a menstrual bleeding condition for twelve years came up behind Jesus. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and spent all she had to find a cure, but it was no use. She just kept getting worse and worse. According to the Laws in Leviticus, a woman was impure for seven days from the beginning of her menstrual flow, and anyone touching her would be unclean until evening. This poor woman had been unclean for 12 years! Her condition would have socially ostracized her and caused her to live a lonely miserable life. Society would have shunned her and even condemned her. This is probably why she didn't dare approach Jesus directly, but came up behind Him and surreptitiously touched His cloak. This was very daring on her part because Jesus was a rabbi and making a holy person like Him unclean with her touch could have brought severe censure. However she had absolute faith that touching just the edge of

Jesus' cloak would bring healing, and her faith was rewarded for her blood flow stopped immediately. She could feel in her body that she was healed. Jesus realized at once that power had gone out from Him and He turned to the crowd, asking: *"Who touched My clothes?"* The disciples were surprised at this question, reminding Jesus that it was a big crowd so anyone might have brushed up against Him. But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. He had felt power go out from Him in response to someone's faith and He wanted to give her the opportunity to declare her faith and healing in public. It is very likely that Jesus knew exactly who had touched Him, but it was for the woman's sake that He called her out on what she'd done. The woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at His feet, trembling with fear, and confessed what she had done. Most people would have been greatly angry with an unclean person daring to touch them, thereby making them unclean as well. The Pharisees and Jewish leaders certainly would have been. But Jesus of course was not angry, and said to her, *"Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be cured of your disease."*(Mark 5:34)

Jairus's Daughter: Meanwhile, a servant from the house of Jairus arrived to tell his master that he needn't bother Jesus anymore because his daughter had died. Jesus overheard this and told Jairus not to be afraid. *"Just believe," He said, "and she will be healed."* When they arrived at Jairus' home, Jesus did not let anyone accompany Him inside except for the parents, and Peter, John, and James. The professional mourners were wailing outside and Jesus told them to stop because the young girl was not dead, but asleep. They laughed at Him, probably thinking Him a fool to assume they were unable to tell the difference between a dead body and one that was merely in slumber. But Jesus was speaking spiritually. He was well aware that the child's spirit had departed and was in Sheol, but unlike the crowd, He knew she wouldn't stay there for long. He was about to perform the amazing miracle of bringing her back to life. So, once inside the house, Jesus took the girl by the hand and said, *"My child, get up!"* and her spirit immediately returned to her body, much to the astonishment of her parents. Jesus told them to give their daughter something to eat, ordering them not to tell anyone what had happened. As for the young girl, she may have experienced what many others who have died report after returning from the dead. Perhaps she had seen a light at the end of a tunnel, and while her body lay lifeless on the bed, her spirit may have hovered over the room, seeing everything that was going on. Maybe an angel had taken care of her during her brief time in death's grasp. Whatever she experienced,

she would never have forgotten it, or the wonderful Messiah who had made a special visit to her home to bring her back to life. Undoubtedly this event would have excited great curiosity among the people who were certain that the child had been truly dead, and if the details of the miracle were made known, it would have brought a lot of attention to Jesus, which He didn't want at this time. Too much recognition too soon could actually hinder the Lord's ministry, drawing unwelcome interest from King Herod or the Pharisees. This is why Jesus told the girl's parents to keep the miracle to themselves, although it must have been a great temptation to tell everyone the wonderful thing Jesus had done in bringing their beloved daughter back from the dead.

Demonized Man: Next along the way Jesus and His disciples met up with a demon-possessed man who was mute. Some people had brought the man to Jesus, obviously expecting Him to help the man in some way. It's not clear if the crowd understood that a demon was behind the man's problem because they were amazed when Jesus drove it out and the man began to speak. They had never seen anything like this in all of Israel. However some Pharisees who were there muttered that Jesus drove out demons by the power of Satan, an accusation they had made before. They were not about to admit that Jesus had power from God because then Jesus would become even more popular with the people. This young Rabbi was gaining a significant following and the Pharisees feared losing their power and control over the crowds. Using whatever means possible, they were determined to undermine Jesus' ministry any way they could.

Note: The man who was mute had an indwelling demon who was causing his condition. The people were amazed when Jesus cast the demon out and the man could speak once more. They had not expected that a demon was behind the affliction. Perhaps they were aware that the high priest Zechariah had been struck dumb over 30 years ago when he had expressed doubt about God's promise to give him a son (John the Baptist). In that case, it was God who caused a man to become mute. It is important to remember that not all illness or suffering is from the devil. Jesus explained this during an encounter with a blind man.

"Now as Jesus was passing by, He saw a man blind from birth, and His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God would be displayed in him....(John 9:2)

WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY



The Pharisees were not above using underhanded means to attain their objective. The crowds were getting too big. People pressed around Jesus wherever he showed up, straining to hear His every word, watching His every move. They felt the power of His words which were filled with grace and love, whereas the rulers of the Jews laid heavy burdens on the people, treating them with disdain and scorn. The Pharisees needed a plan to discredit Jesus and thought they had the perfect one when they caught a young woman in the act of adultery. The man was not caught, or if he was, he wasn't apprehended. Just how the Pharisees managed to catch the young woman in the adulterous act is not mentioned, but there was definitely an insinuation of a setup.

Early in the morning Jesus returned to the temple and the crowds followed Him there to hear Him teach. The scribes and the Pharisees came too because this was the day they planned to entrap Jesus. They brought the adulterous woman with them and placed her in front of Jesus, accusing her of her sin. The first thing they did was to remind Jesus of the Law of Moses which commanded that 'such women' be stoned. The Pharisees then demanded that Jesus give His opinion as to what should be done with the woman. This was meant to test Jesus so that they could bring some charge against Him. If the Lord told them to

let the woman go, they could accuse Jesus of teaching against the Law of Moses. He would lose all credibility with the people as a result. If Jesus agreed with the Law and told them to stone the woman, many would witness the brutal act and Jesus would henceforth be feared. He would lose His reputation as a compassionate, merciful Saviour and the people would turn away from Him. Either way, the Pharisees saw it as a win/win situation for their own side. Unexpectedly Jesus said nothing. He then stooped down to write something with His finger on the ground. Many believe that the words Jesus wrote on the ground in some way drew attention to the sins of the men who were judging the woman so that they were unable to condemn her without condemning themselves.

Nevertheless the Jews kept haranguing Him to give them His answer and finally He stood up and said to them, "*He who is without sin among you, let him throw the first stone at her.*" (John 8:7) His reply baffled them. Jesus wasn't denying that the Law was right in condemning the woman's sin, so they couldn't accuse him of being a lawbreaker. However His response made it impossible for them to stone her themselves. Everyone knew that only the perfectly righteous God is without sin, so if they went ahead and stoned her, they would be the ones the people accused of hypocrisy. With just a few words Jesus had disqualified them from becoming the woman's executioners. The Pharisees went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before Him.



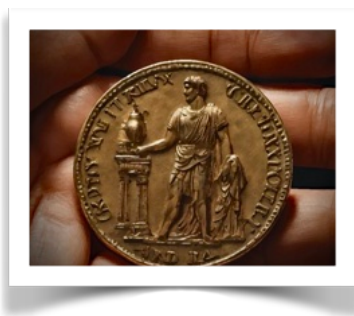
Jesus said to her: *‘ Woman, where are your accusers? Did no one condemn you?’ She said, “No one, Lord.” Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From now on, sin no more.” (John 8: 10-11)*

Jesus alone had the qualifications to condemn the adulteress, but He didn't. It wasn't because He was annulling the law against adultery, or its just penalty. It was because He would later deal with her sins (and the sins of the world) on the cross, thereby fulfilling the Law's penalty on her behalf, yet fully ransoming her from death. For now, her physical life had been spared, but it seems probable that Jesus' compassion and grace saved her in an even more profound way. By offering her mercy, she had the chance to start over and live a better life with God at its centre. The amazing thing about this event was the way in which Jesus turned a situation that demanded justice and punishment into one extending grace and mercy instead - yet without abrogating the Law's demands in any way.

The Pharisees must have been livid with anger and frustration after Jesus foiled them so expertly. Instead of making Jesus look bad, they had succeeded in making themselves appear foolish in the eyes of the people. The Pharisees had hoped that Jesus would side either with justice or with mercy, and that this polarization would cause Him to lose followers. Instead Jesus' wisdom and grace only served to increase His reputation with the people, who were impressed that Jesus would not disobey the Law of Moses, (thus maintaining the righteousness of God), while still revealing God as merciful and compassionate. Jesus had won yet another round with the Pharisees.

TAXATION

In spite of their many failed attempts to trap Jesus in His words, the Pharisees had no intention of giving up. They devised another plot to bring about His downfall. They were sly however, and approached Jesus through words of flattery. *“Teacher, we know that you are honest, and don't defer to anyone; for you aren't partial to anyone, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (Mark 11:14)* It was a trick question because if Jesus said 'no' He could be charged with treason against Rome. If He said 'yes', the Pharisees would accuse Him of being disloyal to the Jewish nation, and the crowds would withdraw from Him.



Jesus wasn't fooled for a minute. Well aware of their malicious intent, He told them to show Him a coin used for paying the tax. They brought him a denarius and Jesus asked them: *"Whose image and inscription?"* The denarius was made of silver and featured the emperor's image on it. The Jews considered such images idolatry, and this was another reason the Pharisees hoped Jesus would say 'yes' to paying the tax. If Jesus authenticated the tax, it would be the same as authenticating the coin with its image (idolatry). The Pharisees could then accuse Jesus of breaking the second commandment *"You shall not make an engraved image for yourself, any likeness of what is in heaven above, or what is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (Deuteronomy 5:8)* Breaking a Commandment would cast doubt on His claim to be the Son of God. In answer to Jesus' question, the Pharisees answered: *"Caesar's."* Jesus said to them: *'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'*

Jesus was drawing a distinction between the earthly and spiritual realms. In the world, Caesar minted coins and the populace used Roman money for their financial transactions. In return, the government required taxes in order to function. Therefore it was legitimate to pay taxes to Caesar. However, in the heavenly realm, God's image was stamped upon humanity and therefore all people were obligated to keep His demands. God had 'minted' the human soul and stamped His image on every one. So Jesus was saying to give to Caesar his due - the temporary stuff of this world - but to give to God His due - our hearts and souls.

When the Pharisees heard the Lord's answer, they were amazed. His answer was masterful in its subtlety, simplicity, and intellectual superiority. Once again their nefarious plans were upended and there was nothing they could do except withdraw.

TEMPLE TAX

After Jesus and His disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked if Jesus paid the tax. Peter replied that He did. Every Jewish male over 20 paid the temple tax for the maintenance of the temple. In the Old Testament, God told Moses to collect this tax at the time of the census taken in the wilderness. From then on, every Jewish male paid this tax annually. It amounted to about two days' wages. Peter assumed that Jesus would pay it as well. Later when Peter was with Jesus, the Lord asked him from whom earthly kings collected duty and taxes. Was it from their own children or from others? Peter must have been astounded that the Lord would know about his conversation with the tax collectors. After all, He hadn't been present at the time. Jesus seemed to have an uncanny way of knowing things. Peter answered that kings taxed their people, not their own children, whereupon Jesus responded: "*Then the children are exempt.*" Jesus was basically telling Peter that because the temple was His Father's house, why should the Son of God pay a tax to His own Father? However, Jesus added that in order to not cause offence with the Jews, He would comply with the tax rule. He then instructed Peter to go to the lake and throw out his line, taking the first fish caught. Inside the fish's mouth there would be a four-drachma coin, which was enough to pay the tax for all of them. Peter followed Jesus' instructions and found the fish and money exactly as foretold. This was yet another miracle pointing to the omnipotence and omniscience of the Lord's divine nature. It wasn't always evident, however, because Jesus often intentionally veiled His attributes. This is why so many of the Jews saw nothing remarkable in Him. However, for the sake of instructing and inspiring His disciples, Jesus often revealed His divine side. In this instance, Jesus was giving Peter an object lesson to show him that although the children of the kingdom were free from earthly religious constraints and traditions, sometimes it was better to forego one's freedom in order to maintain a good witness.

PHARISEE & TAX COLLECTOR

Jesus gave a lot of teaching in the area of taxes. The Jews were very incensed that the Roman government taxed them. It was a hot topic of contention. Jesus knew that those who worked for the Romans as tax collectors were considered the lowest of the low. One day He gave a

moral lesson to the Pharisees using a tax collector as an example. The story was about two men who went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: *'God, I thank you, that I am not like the rest of men, extortionists, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get.'* (Luke 18:11-12) This man exhibited no repentance for sin because he didn't see himself as a sinner. He was self-righteous, trusting in his human works, such as fasting and tithing, to gain acceptance with God. However the tax collector stood at a distance, too ashamed to even look up to heaven. He beat his breast in sorrow and prayed: *'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.'* Jesus ended the story by saying: *" I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

ZACCHAEUS THE COLLECTOR

Jesus entered Jericho and the crowd was packed tightly against Him. A wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus but he was short of stature and unable to peer over the crowd. However he ran ahead to a sycamore-fig tree and climbed it in order to see Jesus coming. Amazingly, the Lord stopped when He reached the spot beneath Zacchaeus' tree and in a show of His divine, supernatural knowledge, He addressed the tax collector by name, saying: *"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.'* (Luke 19:5) Zacchaeus must have been astounded to be singled out in this way. He was a hated tax collector and he knew he deserved some of that antagonism because collectors like him were known for lining their pockets with the added surcharges they demanded from the people. He was guilty of it himself. Many of the people following Jesus grumbled: *'He has gone in to lodge with a man who is a sinner.'* Zacchaeus, however, was overjoyed and immediately told Jesus: *"Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. If I have wrongfully exacted anything of anyone, I restore four times as much."* Jesus said to him, *"Today, salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."*(Luke 19:8-10)

By calling Zacchaeus "a son of Abraham" Jesus was declaring to the crowd His acceptance of Zacchaeus' faith for salvation. It was exactly

such sinners that Jesus had come to save. Zacchaeus' willingness to give away half his money and to repay four times the amount he had cheated from others indicated that he had truly repented of his sinful ways. He was like the penitent tax collector in the story Jesus had told the Pharisees.

JESUS CALLS MATTHEW

One of the disciples chosen by Jesus was a man named Levi (also known as Matthew). Most Jews shunned this class of person, but Jesus broke with cultural tradition and stopped at Matthew's booth to speak with him. *"Follow me,"* Jesus told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with Him and His disciples, for there were many who followed Him. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples: *"Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"* This was not an unusual question since in Jesus' day, rabbis and other spiritual leaders were the highest members of Jewish society (because they strictly held to the Law and traditions). They stayed away from those they considered "sinners" because they felt they had a clean image to maintain. It puzzled them that Jesus, who was so zealous for God, should mix with 'low' people like Matthew. They didn't understand that spending time with the publicans and sinners was part of Jesus' mission. If He was to reach the lost, He had to have contact with them. In fact, when He heard the Pharisees grumbling about Him, He said, *"Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (Mark 2:17) This is why Jesus gladly accepted Matthew's invitation to a dinner party. It was a wonderful opportunity to share the good news of the kingdom with those who most needed to hear.

TEACHERS OF THE LAW

The Pharisees were very proud of keeping the Law and followed hundreds of extra rules to make them appear super righteous. They felt their legalism was approved by God. The word of a Pharisee carried an authority in religious matters that was seldom questioned.



They were practitioners of the Law and they wielded the 10 commandments like weapons against the people, instilling condemnation and guilt in their hearers. The people accepted this as being right and consequently they were afraid of God, believing themselves to be rejected by Him. They were unaware that not even the saintliest Pharisee could keep the Law perfectly. The Law was never meant to be a means of attaining righteousness because such a thing was impossible.

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, confined for the faith (locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed). So that the law has become our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (Galatians 3:23-25) Having abolished in the flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace. (Ephesians 2:15).

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ... that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no flesh will be justified by the works of the law. (Galatians 2:16).

Jesus said had once told His audience that He had fulfilled the entire Law, but that it would remain in effect until 'heaven and earth' passed

away. These statements have confused many Christians because they seem contradictory. Some Bible teachers try to solve the problem by saying Jesus fulfilled only the ceremonial, sacrificial aspects of the Law, leaving the Commandments still in effect for believers today. This would effectively place Christians under a legal system of works until the universe is no more. We would be under obligation to keep the Law in totality, and we would be under its curse if we disobeyed its commandments.

For whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (James 2:10)

*For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who doesn't continue in **all** things that are written in the book of the law, to do them. (Galatians 3:10)*

So if we can't keep the Law, but it remains until heaven and earth pass away, where does that leave us? Actually it all depends on how we interpret "heaven and earth" in this passage. A literal interpretation of a physical heaven and earth would mean that the Old Covenant Law would be in effect for as long as mankind exists, until the end of time. However that is not the correct way to interpret the phrase. The Bible often uses figurative language to describe cataclysmic happenings. In Isaiah 13:1-13, a prophecy was given against the nation of Babylon.

'Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place in the day of his fierce anger'. (Isaiah 13:13)

The language makes it sound like a worldwide destruction was going to happen, but it was referring to Babylon's destruction in 539 BC. When the Medes destroyed Babylon (Isaiah 13:17) the Babylonian world came to an end. The physical heaven and earth (universe) did not end, but the entire Babylonian culture collapsed. The Bible used figurative language to describe this apocalyptic event.

Isaiah also gave a description of the fall of Edom describing it in similar language: *Their slain will also be cast out, and the stench of their dead bodies will come up; and the mountains will melt in their blood. All of the army of the sky will be dissolved. The sky will be rolled up like a scroll, and all its armies will fade away, as a leaf fades from off a vine or a fig tree. For my sword has drunk its fill in the sky. Behold, it will come down on Edom, and on the people of my curse, for judgment. (Isaiah 34:3-5)*

This language was meant to describe Edom's fall as a nation, not the end of the world. When Jesus used the term 'heaven and earth' He was employing it as the prophets had used it in the Old Testament scriptures. What He was saying in Matthew 5:17-18 was that the Law would not end until everything concerning it in the Old Covenant age (old heaven and earth) was fulfilled. Jesus Himself would be the One fulfilling the Law when He bore the death penalty for sin on the cross, thereby redeeming mankind from the Law's curse and setting us free from it's condemnation.

The Pharisees didn't understand what Jesus meant about fulfilling the things written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets, and they certainly had no idea that the Old Covenant was to end shortly. They meticulously followed the 613 commands in the Mosaic Law, including thousands of manmade rules of their own. For instance, the Law for the Sabbath commanded the Jews to keep the Sabbath holy and not work on Saturdays, but Jewish scholars created 39 categories of what 'work' meant. Then they created another 39 sub-categories under each of those 39 categories! Most Jews didn't even try to keep all those rules, but the Pharisees prided themselves on trying to keep most of them. Of course not even they expected to be 100% successful. They imagined that God would overlook a broken rule here and there since they were doing so well on the average. They felt great superiority over the common people, who didn't even know all the rules and who broke them repeatedly. To their mind, a Pharisee had a much better chance of gaining heaven than a sinner from the common rabble. The common people thought so too. They looked up to the Pharisees as religious authorities and they meekly submitted to the heavy burdens of guilt and condemnation heaped upon them by the teachers of the Law. However Jesus' teachings did not follow the party line. He spoke with grace and wisdom and the crowds were enraptured with what He had to say. Even some of the Pharisees were drawn to His words at first. So when Jesus said that He had come to fulfill the Law, they probably nodded with approval, applying their own idea of what He meant by the word 'fulfillment'. To the Pharisees, fulfilling the Law meant trying to keep the commands in the Torah so as to become righteous enough to gain God's acceptance. And in their minds, when it came to law keeping, nobody had better track record than they did. But then Jesus uttered words that must have shaken their confidence to the core.

THE SPIRIT & THE LETTER OF THE LAW



“You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, ‘You shall not murder;’ and ‘Whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be in danger of the judgment; and whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ (Worthless!) will be in danger of the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of Gehenna. “If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are with him on the way; lest perhaps the prosecutor deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Most certainly I tell you, you shall by no means get out of there, until you have paid the last penny. (Matthew 5:21-26)

This was a standard that not even the Pharisees expected. Jesus was equating anger with murder!?! In other words, Jesus was teaching that refraining from the act of murder was not enough. The hatred that causes a person to hurl insults at another is the same hatred that causes another to commit murder. The attitude is the same in both cases and

that attitude makes a person guilty before God and eligible for judgment! In fact, an unresolved grievance from an offended party could damn a person to hell! Then Jesus drove His point further with His next words.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery;’ but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna (hell). If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna. (Matthew 5:27-30)

The crowds, especially the Pharisees, must have been stunned by this word picture. Surely this was taking obedience to the Law too far! Was Jesus serious about this? And if He wasn't, why did He use such harsh words? For shock value? One can imagine that this method certainly got the attention of the crowd. Even the Pharisees would have recognized themselves as sinners under this standard, for what man hasn't looked at a woman with lust? These impossible standards put the Pharisees on the same level as the commoners! This was exactly what Jesus wanted to do. He wanted to show the Pharisees that they were in need of salvation from their sins just as much as any other person. He was showing how sin really works, beginning in the spirit of man before manifesting in outward action. And even if the thought never becomes action, both thought and deed are equally sinful and they bring God's inevitable condemnation and judgment. Jesus' picture of gouging out an eye or cutting off one's hand illustrated the serious nature of sin and its power to condemn to hell. Jesus was not advocating that these drastic measures be put into practice literally, but He did want to make sure that His audience took the matter of sin seriously.

On the same topic, Jesus added: *“It was also said, ‘Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorce, but I tell you that whoever puts away his wife, except for the cause of sexual immorality, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries her when she is put away commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31-32)*

Even though divorce and remarriage were permitted under the Mosaic Law, broken marriages were the source of great pain and social instability in Jewish society. The Pharisees often debated on this topic,

but generally they were biased towards the husbands' rights, whereas the well being of wives was not considered. A man seeking a divorce could simply get a certificate of divorce and the woman could be divorced against her will. This is why Jesus described the divorced woman as a 'victim' of adultery, and the one who married her as a guilty adulterer. Jesus said divorce was not permissible except in cases of immorality.

MERCY & VENGEANCE

The Mosaic Law had the 'eye for an eye' concept in its justice system. God had given this law in order to regulate justice in cases of injury so that the punishment would fit the crime. The natural temptation for an injured party is often to exact revenge out of proportion to the crime, but this law prevented that. There is no evidence that the 'eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth' principle was carried out literally in Israel. However capital crimes were punished with execution if there were multiple witnesses, and other crimes resulted in fines or payment in goods, such as supplying wages to a man who was accidentally injured and couldn't work due to his employer's negligence. Over time the Pharisees and scribes had taken the "eye for an eye" principle to mean that personal revenge was acceptable. If someone hurt or insulted you, you could hurt him back in equal measure. But Jesus taught that this was not the intent of God's law.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. ...Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew: 5:43-48)

The Pharisees, although arrogantly self-righteous, knew they couldn't claim to be as merciful or perfect as God. They must have wondered how it was even possible to love an enemy when he spat on you, took away your possessions, and lorded it over you. It was much easier to practice the eye for eye concept of justice, although the Pharisees had forgotten that it had initially been instituted by God as a legal guideline for government law enforcement, not as a practice for social relationships. In

matters of civil justice involving retribution and punishment, it is up to the police and courts to carry out the penalties. Believers are to be guided by a much higher law of love that returns evil with blessing. This is not to say that Jesus was advocating pacifism, which has the potential to put us and loved ones in mortal danger. He was dealing with the lesser issues of personal insults against our dignity, lawsuits over property rights, and violations of personal liberty. In such cases, God's people were to surrender their rights, showing kindness and forgiveness instead of seeking revenge.

PERFECTION

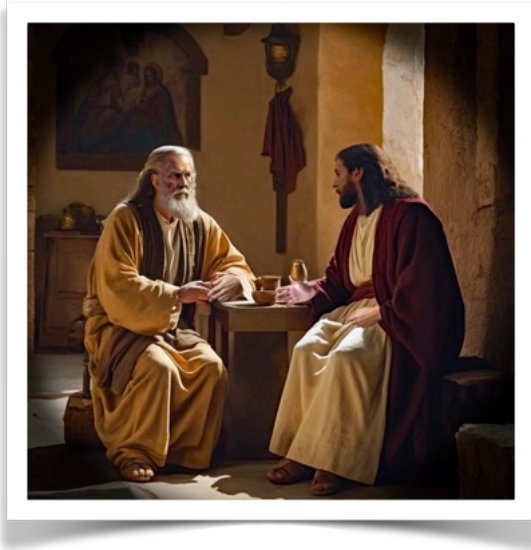
When Jesus said: '*You must be perfect - just as your Father in heaven is perfect*', He was holding up an impossible standard that no one could hope to attain. Even if the word 'perfect' means 'completion' as some Bible scholars maintain, the word still conveys an impossibly high measurement of righteousness - one equaling that of God Himself! Even the Pharisees knew they could never equal the purity and righteousness of God. Jesus was indicating that God's Law requires perfection. The Law of Moses demanded complete obedience, not just in the letter, but in the spirit as well. The Law also had to be obeyed as a whole, not just in part. All the teachings Jesus was giving were designed to emphasize this. Undoubtedly the people in the crowd felt overwhelmed. Who could possibly live this way? To never feel lust or rage? To never retaliate against insults or defend one's personal rights? To bless those who curse you? To never commit a single sin? Only a person who was so completely righteous that ordinary fleshly urges had no power over him, could hope to fulfill such stringent requirements. Surely no human on earth could do it. But there was One who could. And He was standing right in front of them. One day Jesus Himself would provide His followers with the perfection God required. Those who trusted in Him would be justified before God's Law because they would no longer be ruled by their former life. That former old life (i.e. old nature) was programmed to sin and stood condemned before the Lord. It would have to be destroyed and replaced with a new spirit - a new life - that would be divine, complete, and perfect. It would be Christ's very own life that would energize and motivate them. This Christ life could never be diminished or enslaved. Not seeking to retaliate in the face of an insult would be inherent. Blessing would be so inbuilt into the new nature that returning good for evil would be the norm. Temptations to lust or rage would be

overcome by a righteous predisposition that would overrule such inclinations. Granted, there would still be the residual 'hangover' from the old nature, (called the flesh) which could arise from time to time, but although it might struggle for supremacy, it would be consistently overcome by the new Christ life inside the believer. All this would happen because of Jesus and the work He would do on the cross. Even now Jesus was preparing the hearts of the people to cease trusting in their own works in order to receive His perfect righteousness instead. By recognizing the futility of their own efforts to attain right standing with God, they would one day accept Christ as their Redeemer and Sin Sacrifice. But to get them to that place, Jesus had to use words that would shock them out of their complacency.

*“I will give you a new heart and a new spirit.
I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh
and give you a new heart of flesh.
I will put My Spirit within you
and cause you to walk in My ways.”*



NICODEMUS



Most of the Jewish leaders had always thought themselves experts on matters concerning the Law. However Jesus' teachings demanded a far higher standard and this made them uncomfortable because it was unattainable. To add to their discomfort, the words of Jesus carried the weight of God's authority. A few of the Pharisees were more open minded and desirous of learning more. One was Nicodemus, who although afraid of losing his reputation, called for Jesus under cover of night. He had questions for Jesus and wanted to discuss them with Him. He had heard Jesus talk about perfect obedience to the Law and it troubled him. He asked Jesus how anyone could be accepted by God if no one could keep the Law. Jesus went straight to the point and told him that no one could approach the Father unless he was born again. Nicodemus asked: *"How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time, can he?"*

Jesus told him that unless a person had a spiritual rebirth, making him a new creation, he would not be able to enter the kingdom of God. He added: *"What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."* Nicodemus was confused and asked how someone could be born when they are old. *"They can't go back inside their mother! They can't be born a second time!"* he exclaimed. Jesus then explained that He was speaking in

spiritual terms. No one could enter God's kingdom unless they were born with water and the Holy Spirit. The 'water' Jesus was speaking of was spiritual cleansing. Throughout the Old Testament, water was used to symbolize cleansing, such as in Ezekiel 36:25: *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, I will cleanse you.*

Nicodemus would have been familiar with this idea of physical water representing spiritual purification, and as a Pharisee and student of the Law, he should have been able to grasp Jesus' meaning when He spoke of the necessity of a new birth. There were Old Testament scriptures which prophesied about this, such as Ezekiel 36:26:

'I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh'.

Later, in the epistles of the New Testament, new birth (or regeneration) was again linked to water as a "washing" brought about by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God at the moment of salvation.

Such were some of you, but you were washed. But you were sanctified. But you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11).

But poor Nicodemus didn't get it. *"How can this be?"* he asked. Jesus replied with a question of His own. How was it that a teacher of the Law didn't understand these things? After all, He was speaking plainly, using earthly symbolism, yet Nicodemus was deaf to His meaning. Jesus explained that He had taken him as far as He could. He could give Nicodemus heavenly explanations, but he wouldn't be able to receive them. Then Jesus added that He had come down from heaven, something no other man could do. He had been in heaven with the Father, and He came down. And just as Moses had lifted up the snake in the desert, the Son of Man would also be lifted up. Then everyone who believed would receive eternal life.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:14,15)

It was kind of shocking for Jesus to compare Himself to a snake because snakes are thought of as evil. The snakes in Exodus were killing people and the snake on the pole was a picture of God's curse on the people. But this picture was completely accurate because Jesus would also become a curse.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree," (Galatians 3:13)

In becoming like the snake, Jesus became both sin and the curse for us, and in doing so He was able to take them out of the way so that those who believed in Him could have eternal life. That was what Jesus was meaning when He spoke of 'believing' in Him. He was teaching Nicodemus that he needed to look to Him in faith, just as the dying Israelites in the desert had looked up in faith at the pole with the snake on it. Their act of faith resulted in healing for their bodies. Similarly, looking to the risen Christ for spiritual healing would bring eternal life through the new birth. Jesus added some important words to His message:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him. He who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn't believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and doesn't come to the light, lest his works would be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God."(John3: 16-21)

Nicodemus, like the rest of the Pharisees, had always believed that obedience to the Law was the way to acceptance with God. But Jesus taught that the Law was never able to save humanity because everyone broke it. The Law demanded perfection. Animal sacrifices offered in the Temple also couldn't save anyone because they were only reminders that fallen humanity needed a Saviour, a perfect sacrifice without blemish or flaw - a Lamb of God without sin. Jesus was now here, the fulfillment of what the animal sacrifices were all about. Believing in that divine Sacrifice would bring about the rebirth experience that Jesus talked about. Rebirth alone could do what the Law never could. God had never intended to clean up the old fallen humanity. It was dead. Rather, He always intended to create a new humanity that would have His heart, mind, and Spirit. This new humanity would be His own "holy seed" birthed from the Seed of God, which is Jesus. Out of Him, others would be birthed with His nature and heart. God had told this to Abraham,

promising an inheritance of countless descendants. Later, the Mosaic Law was introduced, but it did not annul the promises made to Abraham or to Abraham's Seed (Christ). These promises were for a new genus - a new creation - which would live with Him forever and would share in His very own Life.

PRESUMPTION

The Pharisees often opposed Jesus, but there were others much closer to home who tried to hinder Him. When Jesus had declared Himself the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue in Nazareth, His own neighbours had been so enraged that they tried to hurl Him off a cliff. They thought He was demonized or crazy. These were people He had grown up with. They knew His character. Yet in an instant they turned homicidal. The fact that He was just a carpenter caused them to disdain Him. Then another incident happened when Jesus went home. He was healing people and surrounded by a large crowd. There was so much activity going on that He and His disciples could not even eat. When His family heard about this, they went out to take custody of Him, saying, "*He is out of His mind.*" His mother and 4 brothers, who knew Him better than anyone, thought Jesus was crazy! And the scribes who had come down from Jerusalem were saying, "*He is possessed by Beelzebul*"... "*By the prince of the demons He drives out demons.*"

Jesus' mother and brothers came and stood outside. They sent someone in to summon Him, and a crowd was sitting around Him. "*Look,*" He was told, "*Your mother and brothers are outside, asking for You.*" Imagine the effrontery of 'summoning' God to come outside so they could take 'custody' of Him! Jesus replied, "*Who are My mother and My brothers?*" Looking at those seated in a circle around Him, He said, "*Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother.*" Jesus was declaring that His true family were believers, those who believed His words and belonged to the spiritual kingdom. Relationship with His unbelieving family members was secondary to His bond with His Kingdom family. He shared His mother's DNA with her, and with his half-brothers and half-sisters, but He was not closely bonded with them because they were not united to Him in Spirit.

Jesus' brothers also openly mocked Him when it was the time for the Feast of Booths. They dared Him, saying: "*Leave here and go to Judea,*

that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." The Bible says that not even his brothers believed in him. They thought He was a show off! Jesus said to them, *"My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come."* After saying this, he remained in Galilee. However after His brothers had gone up to the feast, Jesus also went up, not publicly but in private. This was because the Jews were looking for Jesus at the feast. As He told His brothers, there were many who hated Him because His words convicted them of their sins. But the issue was not whether Christ would go to that feast (such was required of Jewish males) (Deuteronomy 16:16-17) but rather the **manner** in which He would go. The brothers were sneering at Him, accusing Him of wanting to make a grand Messianic procession on the way to the feast in order to show off His powers. Jesus informed His half-brothers that His time to declare Himself the Messiah was not supposed to happen at this feast. He told them plainly that when that time came, it would be according to His Father's timing and agenda. Then there would be a procession and declaration of His identity as Israel's Messiah (this occurred at the Feast of Tabernacles). So when Jesus said He was not going up to this feast, He was saying He was not going in the manner in which his brothers were expecting. He would not reveal Himself publicly at this time. If Jesus had accompanied His brothers to the Feast of Booths, they would have seen it as proof that He was indeed going to declare Himself the Messiah and they would likely have noised it abroad. So Jesus went after they had left, so as not to give them a wrong impression and to give them no opportunity to force God's agenda. When they were gone, there was no problem with Jesus attending the Feast of Booths.

Another incident occurred when He told His incredulous disciples that He would die in Jerusalem, Peter tried to rebuke Him for saying so. Jesus knew immediately that Satan was influencing Peter's mind to dissuade Him from His purpose, and sternly commanded Satan to leave. Peter probably thought he was being loyal and loving in rebuking Jesus. He was remonstrating with Jesus not to talk about dying. Surely He would not die! Peter's words indicate that in spite of all the teaching he had sat under, he still didn't understand what the mission of Jesus was really about. Peter was undoubtedly shocked when Jesus as much as told him

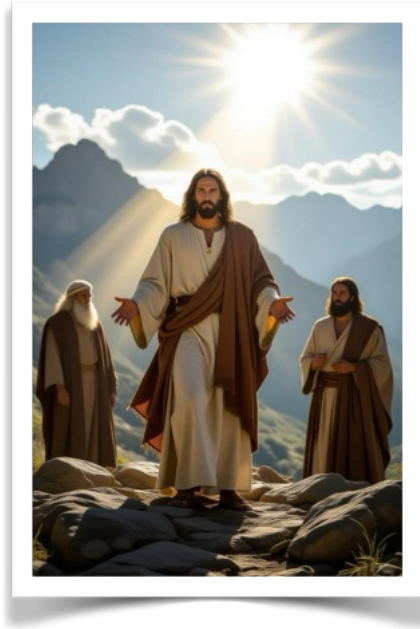
he was being the mouthpiece of Satan. Jesus never hesitated to correct His disciples when necessary, and this was definitely one such time.



Having experienced firsthand the rejection and disdain of His close family members, Jesus knew how painful and disheartening it could be. He warned His followers that being His disciple would subject them to the same kind of persecution. He told them: “ *Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household...For a son dishonours his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man’s enemies are the members of his own household....From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.*” (Matthew 10:46, Luke 12:51-53)

Jesus had often taught that He was bringing 'peace' between God and believers, but ironically this would result in lack of peace between earthly family members. Jesus Himself was experiencing this with His own biological family.

TRANSFIGURATION



About a week after Jesus told His disciples that He would suffer, be killed, and then raised to life, He took Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray. While praying, His appearance was changed into a glorified form, and His clothing became dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus about His death that would soon take place. Peter offered to put up three shelters for them, referring to the booths that were used to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. The Israelites dwelt in booths for seven days and Peter was expressing a wish to stay in that place. Then a cloud enveloped them, and a voice spoke: *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to HIM!”* The cloud lifted and the personages of Moses and Elijah disappeared. The Father was telling the disciples that His Son, Jesus, superseded the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah) in authority. The disciples were to give primary attention to Christ's words. He was the New and Living Way that was replacing the Old Covenant. Also, in His glorified form the disciples were getting a preview of the Lord's coming glorification and enthronement as King of kings and Lord of lords. They now had a greater realization of the deity of Christ and that gave them

the reassurance they needed after hearing the shocking news of His coming death.

JESUS AS PROTECTOR

Satan and his minions had been watching Jesus and His disciples all along, hoping for an opportunity to destroy them. But Jesus had guarded His followers over and over again. He had stopped a raging storm at sea by calming it with one word of command. He had stopped the attack of a demoniac filled with a legion of devils by casting them out. He healed the family members of His disciples when they became gravely ill. He was ever on the alert for Satan's evil strategies and quelled every onslaught in the power and authority of the Spirit inside Him. No one could come to harm with Jesus there to protect them.



One time Jesus was in a boat and He fell asleep along with His disciples. This was not surprising because He was constantly teaching and healing as He travelled around the towns and villages. He probably did not get a lot of rest at the best of times. The lull of the waves probably helped to soothe His exhaustion and cast Him into a deep sleep. A windstorm came down on the lake and the boat began to fill with water. The disciples woke Jesus, saying, "*Master, Master, we are perishing!*" Jesus awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and the storm

ceased and the sea became calm. Then Jesus said to them, *“Where is your faith?”* And they were afraid, and marvelled that He could command even the winds and water to obey Him. (Luke 8:22–25)

Note: There is a possibility that the storm was not natural in origin. Satan, the prince of the power of the air (John 12:31) may have manipulated the weather in this instance. His power over the elements was demonstrated in the life of Job when God told him: *“Everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger”* (Job 1:12). Satan then caused a fire to come down from the sky, burning up Job’s sheep and his servants, followed by a strong wind that struck the house where his sons and daughters were eating, causing the death of all. So Satan may have been behind this storm as well, trying to kill Jesus and His disciples.

The fact that Jesus greatly loved His disciples, and all who would one day follow Him, is reflected Jesus’ prayer in John 17:6-26. His protective concern for them is clearly revealed as He asks His Father to keep them safe.

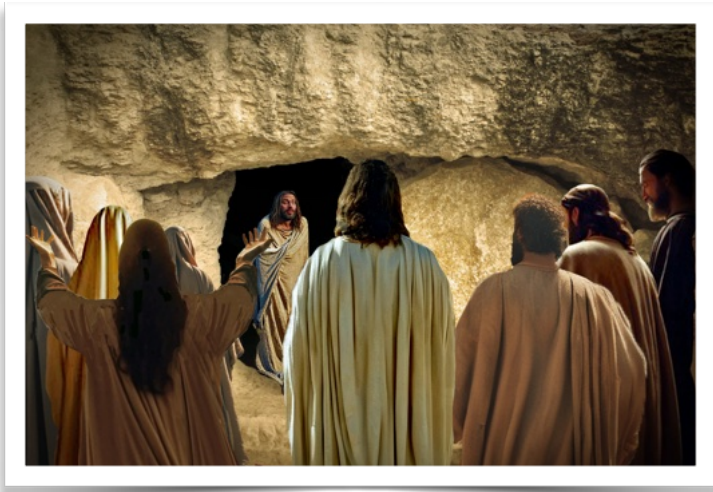
“They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. ...My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

Jesus prayed this prayer on the night before His crucifixion. He emphasized the importance of keeping His followers safe and united. The phrase *“kept them in Your name”* suggests that they belonged to God and Jesus acted as Guardian to them using God’s authority to keep

them safe. They were not only chosen by Jesus but were also given to Him by His Father.

RAISED FROM THE DEAD

Jesus went on performing miracles, even raising the dead, which caused great consternation among the Pharisees. Jesus had already brought others back to life such as the widow of Nain's son. When Jesus was in Capernaum, He had resurrected the 12 year old daughter of Jairus, a leader in the synagogue. These two incidents happened earlier in Jesus' ministry when the Pharisees were still undecided on the best way to neutralize Him. However later on, Jesus raised a close friend of His from death, and the Pharisees became more urgent in their determination to rid themselves of this Rabbi.



Three of Jesus' closest friends were Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus of Bethany. He often stopped over at their home during His travels. Oddly, when Jesus was told Lazarus was sick, Jesus didn't rush to his side but rather stayed two more days where he was. When he left, Jesus told His disciples that Lazarus had died. The disciples were confused by this. Couldn't He have healed Lazarus and prevented his death if He had left two days earlier? By the time they arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Martha met them outside the village, where Jesus told her, *"Your brother will rise again. I am the*

resurrection and the life." Martha agreed but clearly didn't understand the full import of what Jesus was telling her. They approached the tomb, and Jesus saw the great sorrow of Mary and Martha and the friends of Lazarus. He truly loved Lazarus and He knew He was going to raise his friend from death, but the effects of death on his friends caused Jesus to weep along with them. Jesus' mission was to do away with death, removing its sting forever through the Cross. Jesus had come to bring His Life to humanity and raising Lazarus would emphasize that. However Lazarus had been dead many days and no one, not even Mary and Martha, thought Jesus could help their brother now. When Jesus ordered the stone to be rolled away, Martha warned that there would be a terrible stench, but Jesus said: "*Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?*" Raising His eyes to heaven, He prayed aloud to his Father and then commanded Lazarus to come out. Lazarus walked out of the tomb, wrapped in burial cloths, much to the joy and amazement of everyone there. The news of Lazarus being raised from the dead spread far and wide. The Pharisees soon heard of it and called emergency meetings to decide what should be done. If they didn't manage to stop Jesus - and fast - they would lose all political and religious clout in Jewish society. They would lose their hold over the masses. Even now some of the Pharisees and Sadducees were defecting to Jesus. It couldn't go on! They began to make secret plans in earnest to have Jesus arrested and killed.

FEEDING THOUSANDS



On one occasion the people of Galilee heard that Jesus was in their area, and when they saw Him coming, they ran ahead to tell others. Soon crowds were coming from all over to hear Him preach. Jesus saw that many came on foot and He had compassion for them. It was already evening and very late. The people had been so caught up in the words of Jesus that they had forgotten about food. Some of the disciples suggested that Jesus send the crowds away so that they could go into the surrounding villages and buy some food, but Jesus told the twelve, *“You give them something to eat!”* The disciples were understandably perplexed. They objected that they didn't have enough money for the thousands that had gathered. Jesus then asked them how much food they had. After checking with the people, they came back with a mere five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus then did an amazing thing. He commanded all the people to sit down on the grass in groups of hundreds and fifties. Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven and blessed the food, after which He broke the loaves and fish into pieces and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. Amazingly everyone had enough to eat and there were still twelve full baskets of the broken pieces of bread and fish left over! Five thousand people dined that day! It was a reminder of when God had miraculously provided manna for their forebears in the Sinai Desert. The people were thrilled that Jesus had the power to give them free food. With such a leader they would have no worries about going hungry. Many made up their minds that this had to be the Messiah. However Jesus could see that most of the people were more interested in the food He provided than in hearing the truth about God.

Another time a large crowd gathered, numbering around 4000. They had been with Jesus for 3 days and had nothing to eat. Just like the other occasion, Jesus felt sorry for them and told His disciples that He couldn't send them home now because they would collapse from hunger along the way. He then asked His disciples how much food they had, but they told Him they only had 7 loaves of bread. Jesus told the crowd to sit down on the ground and took the bread, giving thanks, and then distributed it to His disciples to share with the people. There were a few small fish as well and these were also distributed. Amazingly, the people ate and were satisfied, with several baskets of leftovers. This event took place in the region of the Gerasenes, in the region around the Decapolis where some Gentiles lived. This was the second time Jesus had fed thousands of people on a few fish and loaves of bread. Earlier He had fed 5000 near Bethsaida, close to the Sea of Galilee, a Jewish region.

Both miracles show Jesus' love for all people, both Jew and Gentile, and His desire to provide for them.

This provision of physical food for the people foreshadowed the day when He would feed humanity spiritually with His very own body and blood on the cross. In fact, Jesus told them bluntly that unless they drank His blood and ate His body, they would not have eternal life. He told them that they were looking for Him, not because of the signs He performed (which would signify a spiritual search for God) but because they saw Him as a welfare program. They were impressed that He could feed them from a little bit of bread and fish. They wanted Him to always provide food for them, thereby making their lives easier. Jesus told them not to work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which He would give them. Jesus told them that His Father had placed His seal of approval on Him and they needed to focus on Him as the Source of eternal sustenance. Still not getting it, the people asked what they needed to do to accomplish the works God required. In other words, they were asking Jesus what they had to do to insure God's provision and blessing. Jesus answered, *"The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent."* This didn't satisfy the crowd and they asked Jesus to give them a sign to prove that they should believe in Him. This was quite amazing since Jesus had just provided food for 4000 people from a few loaves of bread and a few fish! This miracle should have been all the proof they needed, but the people wanted more. They alluded to their ancestors who had been provided with manna every single day while traveling in the desert. They were hoping Jesus would do the same thing for them. But Jesus told them that it wasn't Moses who had given the Israelites the manna, but His Father in heaven. Now God was giving them the true manna (bread) from heaven that gives life to the world. The crowd immediately asked Jesus to give them that bread, not understanding that Jesus was speaking of spiritual matters. So Jesus came right out and said: *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty"* (John 6:35)

However Jesus could see that the crowd was taking everything He said literally. He told them that they didn't believe in Him because His Father had not drawn them. If He had, they would have come to Jesus and Jesus would have accepted them as His own, not losing a single one. They would have received eternal life and the promise of being resurrected on the coming day of judgment. But this was not at all what the Jews had hoped to hear. They began to grumble about Jesus, denouncing Him for putting on airs, refusing to believe that He had come

down from heaven. Jesus told them to stop grumbling and then repeated what He had said earlier.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'They will all be taught by God'. Therefore everyone who hears from the Father, and has learned, comes to me. (John 6:44-45)

He added that only He had seen the Father in heaven. He had come from God as the Bread of Life who could give eternal life to anyone who believed in Him. He reminded the crowd that the manna their ancestors had eaten did not give them that. The Israelites had all died in the wilderness. However He, Jesus, was the living Bread. In fact this bread was His flesh and whoever ate of it would live forever. Immediately the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, asking how He could possibly give them His flesh to eat. It sounded ridiculous to their ears. Their literalistic minds could not perceive the Lord's spiritual language.

Jesus, however, persisted in His explanation, saying: *"Most certainly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you don't have life in yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he who feeds on me, he will also live because of me. This is the bread, which came down out of heaven—not as our fathers ate the manna, and died. He who eats this bread will live forever."* (John 6: 53-58)

Jesus couldn't have made it clearer. He was plainly stating that eternal life was in Him and only He could provide life to the human soul. When Jesus mentioned eating His Body (flesh) and drinking His blood, He wasn't speaking of cannibalism. He was speaking metaphorically about giving His life to everyone who partook of Him (His sacrifice on the cross). Eating the manna in the wilderness had physically sustained the Israelites, but it offered nothing for the soul. Jesus, however, was spiritual Bread and He could provide eternal life. This fact should have greatly excited the Jews because many of the Old Testament scriptures promised a new relationship with God, and here was One who claimed to be able to fulfill that promise. The Jews would also have been aware of the Table of Showbread in the Holy of Holies and the blood of the Atonement offered each year for the sins of Israel. Steeped as they were

in Old Testament teachings, and devoted to their Temple ceremonies, they should have seen that Jesus was referring to Himself as the promised Lamb Sacrifice who would atone for the sins of the nation. But they missed the point entirely and rejected both Jesus and His message.

END OF THE AGE



Some of Jesus' disciples remarked how beautifully the Temple was decorated with costly stones and gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus told them that the time was coming when not one stone would be left on top of another because the Temple would be completely demolished. The disciples immediately wanted to know when it would happen and what sign would be given as an advance warning. The Lord cautioned them not to be deceived by the many who would come professing to be Him and proclaiming that the end was near. They were not to follow them. When they heard of wars and uprisings, they were not to be afraid because these had to happen before the end finally came. Nations and kingdoms would go to war and there would be great earthquakes, famines and plagues in various places. There would even be fearful events and great signs from heaven. Those who followed Christ would be persecuted, imprisoned, and brought to stand before kings and

governors in order to testify of Jesus. They were not to worry beforehand how to defend themselves because the Lord would give them words of wisdom to refute their adversaries. They would be betrayed even by parents and relatives and friends. Some would be executed. Everyone would hate them because they loved Jesus, but not a hair of their head would perish. This was a strange thing to say as Jesus had just told them that some of them would be executed, so He obviously wasn't saying that their physical bodies wouldn't be harmed. He was speaking of who they were in their spiritual essence - eternal beings with eternal life. This rendered them indestructible and they were to stand firm in their faith and confidence. Jesus told them that when they saw Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, they were to recognize that it's desolation was near. Those in Judea were to flee to the mountains while those in the city were to get out immediately. Those in the country were to stay well away from Jerusalem. It would be particularly terrible for pregnant women and nursing mothers who would not be able to get away easily. Great distress would cover the land and its people would fall by the sword and be taken as prisoners to all the nations. The Gentiles would trample Jerusalem until the prophecies concerning it were fulfilled. Even the heavens would be in turmoil with strange signs occurring in the sun, moon and stars. The nations on earth would be roiling with anguish and confusion like a storm-tossed sea. People would faint with terror, wondering if the world was coming to an end. At that time they would see the sign of the Son of Man coming in the clouds in glory.



*'And then the **sign** of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory'. (Matthew 24:30)*

Note: Jesus repeatedly used “cloud” language in His teaching, particularly when talking about judgment and His return. His Jewish audience would have understood that He was using the language in the Old Testament where God “coming with clouds” often symbolized judgment, not a literal descent.

“Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt.” (Isaiah 19:1) “He makes the clouds his chariot...” (Psalm 104:3)

When Jesus said He was coming “on the clouds,” He was using this same symbolic, prophetic language. He was saying He was coming in judgment and authority.

*“Look at the fig tree and all the trees.” Jesus said. “See the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see it and know ... that the summer is already near. Even so you also, when you see these things happening, know that God’s Kingdom is near. Most certainly I tell you, **this generation will not pass away until all things are accomplished.** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away. (Luke 21:29-33)*

It is very clear that Jesus was giving His disciples a clear picture of what was to occur within their lifetime. Everything He prophesied would happen within that generation and they were to protect themselves by acting on every word of His instructions.

“So be careful,” He said, ‘or your hearts will be loaded down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day will come on you suddenly. For it will come like a snare on all those who dwell on the surface of all the earth. Therefore be watchful all the time, praying that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will happen, and to stand before the Son of Man.’ (Luke 21:34-36)

When Jesus used the term ‘*on the surface of the whole earth*’ He was referring to the world that was then known. The apostle Paul would later use similar terminology.

*'First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, that your faith is proclaimed **throughout the whole world.** (Romans 1:8) ... the Good News which you heard, which **is being proclaimed in all creation under heaven;** of which I, Paul, was made a servant. (Colossians 1:23). But I say, didn't they hear? Yes, most certainly, **'Their sound went out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.'**(Romans 10:18)*

THE COMING KINGDOM



That evening Jesus left the Temple and spent the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, but early next morning Jesus returned to the Temple and all the people came to hear Him. Jesus returned to His earlier theme of the coming judgment on Jerusalem. He accused the crowds of hypocrisy because they could tell what kind of weather was coming by looking at the signs in the sky, yet they couldn't decipher what was coming in the spiritual realm. He challenged them to be morally discerning and make things right in their lives before they had to face God. One of the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come and Jesus told him that it's coming wouldn't be observed and people wouldn't be able to point to its location. It was a spiritual kingdom and therefore it would exist invisibly in the midst of them. He added: *'The*

*days will come, when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and **you will not see it**. They will tell you, 'Look, here!' or 'Look, there!' Don't follow after them, for as the lightning flashes out of one part under the sky to the other part under the sky; so will the Son of Man be in his day. (Luke 17:22-24)*

In other words, **Jesus' coming would not be physically visible on the earth but His presence, like lightening, would reach everywhere.** However before He returned, He would have to suffer many things, including the rejection of His people, who would carry on their business like usual, never suspecting that their doom was just around the corner. It would be similar to Noah's time when people were unconcerned about the future - eating, drinking, and marrying right up to the day when the flood came and destroyed everything. It was the same with the people of Sodom. People carried on as usual until fire and sulphur rained down on the city. That's how it would be on the day when the Son of Man would be revealed. On that day anyone on the housetop should forget about trying to save his possessions and just make a run for it. Anyone in the field shouldn't go back for anything. Lot's wife had paused to look back to Sodom and she had been turned into a pillar of salt. Her hesitation and reluctance to leave Sodom had cost her her life, and it would be the same with them.

Jesus warned: *'Whoever seeks to save his life loses it, but whoever loses his life preserves it.'* (Luke 17:33)

This was His way of saying that those who clung to their earthly existence would lose the chance for a heavenly one, while those who sought an eternal existence would keep it forever. He added that the coming danger would be so imminent and sudden that if two people were in the same spot, one would be 'taken' and the other 'left behind'. There are various views on what Jesus meant by this but since the context deals with sudden destruction, one might conclude that just as a lightning bolt can strike two people, killing one and leaving the other, so it would be with those in Jerusalem. The people asked where this would all take place and the Lord replied: *'Where the body is, there will the vultures also be gathered together.'* (Luke 17:37) He meant that Jerusalem was a city of the spiritually dead and it would draw devouring enemies who would consume its inhabitants like vultures feasting on carrion. This actually did happen in 70AD when the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem and completely destroyed the city and its populace. This was within the time frame of the current generation Jesus had been

addressing. He had prophesied: *'Most certainly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things are accomplished.'* (Luke 21:32) Future events would prove Jesus to be 100% accurate in all He had foretold!

FINAL JUDGEMENT

The Jews were in danger from earthly threat, but even more so from a spiritual one. Jesus warned about Sheol (hell) as a place of spiritual darkness, a place apart from God's presence and without His protection, where all who rejected God would go after death.



But even the faithful, like the patriarchs of old, went there. It was divided into a place for God's people (paradise, or Abraham's bosom) and a place of torment for the wicked. The faithful awaited deliverance from the grave when the Messiah would come to deliver them. Horrible as Sheol was, especially for unbelievers, Jesus warned of a final hell called the lake of fire, where the wicked, both human and angelic, would end up. It is a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" - an eternal state of spiritual anguish. Jesus also referred to an "outer darkness" describing it as the final destination of those who reject Him. This is a state of complete separation from God, never-ending and inescapable. Though it is the kindness of God that draws people to Him, Jesus also used the

fear of judgement and hell to awaken people out of their spiritual lethargy, giving repeated warnings to seek Him before it was too late. Only Messiah's advocacy could protect them from this doom.

Jesus wept when He looked into their future. He foresaw the siege of Jerusalem that would occur within their own generation. He warned: "*For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.*" Then Jesus used the same type of apocalyptic language that John employed in writing Revelation. "*Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken...when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.*" (Matthew 24)

He told the crowds that when He returned to heaven in His glory with all His angels, He would sit on His glorious throne and the nations would all be gathered before Him. Then He would separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep would go on His right and the goats on His left. To the sheep He would say: '*Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me.*' The righteous ones would ask Him when they had done all this, and He would reply: '*Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.*' (Matthew 25:36-40)

Then He would command those on His left to depart from Him because they had shown no mercy or kindness to His brethren. They would be cursed and cast into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Jesus added: '*These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*'

The sheep and the goats referred to the resurrection of all the people from the time of Adam and Eve to just before the Lord's second coming. The sheep would comprise all those who had believed in the Messiah, and the goats would comprise all those who had rejected Him. Currently they were all waiting in Hades, the believers separated by a gulf from the unbelievers (as described in a parable Jesus once gave about a rich

man and a beggar called Lazarus). Jesus' words revealed how closely He identified with His followers. The way in which the nations treated His disciples would signify the Lord's dealings with them. If they persecuted Christian believers, rejected their message, and neglected to care for them, they were heaping judgment on themselves. If they showed favour to believers and received their message, they would be blessed with eternal life in the kingdom. These words were especially applicable to the Jewish nation. If Christ's disciples were treated righteously, the nation would receive God's favour, but if they did otherwise, they would be judged. It would happen soon, within the lifetime of the current generation. The Old Covenant age was already winding down and it would be completely over at the downfall of Jerusalem. The Temple would be torn down and the sacrificial system would end, after which the Jews would be dispersed, and the kingdom offered to the Gentiles. God was completely just in bringing His judgement against the people of Israel. In Deuteronomy 28 of the Old Testament, the Covenant God made with the Jews clearly stipulated that God would send blessing to the Jews if they were obedient, and curses if they rebelled against Him by going after other gods.

HISTORICAL FULFILLMENT



The warnings of Jesus concerning judgement on the Jews would be confirmed historically. Flavius Josephus, a Jewish priest, governor, and historian, wrote 'The Jewish War' (around AD 75–79). In this work, he described the conflict between apostate Israel and Rome. In 66 AD, the Jews of Judea rose in revolt against Rome in a bid for freedom. According to Josephus, the Roman governors of the province were the main cause of Jewish anger. They were malicious towards the Jews, and so were the emperors in Rome. In 64 AD, Gessius Florus presided over Judea and his disdain for the

Jewish people brought about a riot in Caesarea, during which the Zealots wiped out the Roman-backed Greeks that inhabited the area. Florus was enraged and he plundered the Jewish Temple, erecting statues of Emperor Nero and himself with the money he took. The Jewish people were horrified.

The temple was the centre of religious and social life for the Jewish people and a sign of God's presence in the Holy City. When Florus raided the temple, it was the biggest insult to the Jewish religion. The Jewish people rebelled and attacks were made on Roman citizens throughout Judaea. Then the priests of the Temple at Jerusalem suddenly refused to offer the daily sacrifice for the wellbeing of the Emperor and people of Rome. These sacrifices had become the accepted token of Israel's loyalty to Rome. The Jews had been excused, because of their religious convictions, from sacrificing to the Roman gods, but refusal to offer this form of 'loyal sacrifice' was tantamount to an act of rebellion on the part of the Jews.

In Rome, Emperor Nero, enraged at the rebellion of the Jewish rebels, sent the Roman army under General Vespasian to destroy the rebel armies and punish the citizens in Judea. The Christians in the city saw the Roman soldiers approaching. They were apparently able to escape the horrors that followed by rushing out of Jerusalem as soon as they saw the Roman "eagle-bearers" carrying their standards. Jesus had warned: "*Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*" (vultures being a metaphorical description of the Roman Aquila eagle emblazoned on their flags, and the 'corpse' being Jerusalem). It is not known conclusively whether all the Christians escaped the terrible destruction, but tradition states that many Christians fled to Pella, across the Jordan River. Josephus, who recorded the fall of Jerusalem, does not mention any Christians being slain in the massacre, and the fourth-century Church Fathers Eusebius and Epiphanius cite a tradition that before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the early Christians had been warned to flee to Pella. They had remembered Jesus' words of warning that there would be miraculous signs and wonders preceding the fall of Jerusalem. True to these words, several signs had been reported and chronicled by both Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus.

In 66 AD, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a bright light shone around the altar in the Temple, as bright as daylight, that lasted for half an hour. Later during the feast, the massive gate that 20 men could

scarcely move, opened of its own accord and could only be closed again with great difficulty.



A similar event had occurred at Jesus' crucifixion when the outer veil (24 feet wide and 80 feet high) in front of the Holy of Holies in the Temple, was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-54). In the same year of 66AD, before sunset, an armed battalion of chariots had been seen in the sky over the whole country. (This was similar to the chariots seen by Elisha and his servant (2 Kings 6:16-17) when the army of the king of Aram surrounded them). Another sign appeared on the next feast day of Pentecost. Twenty-four priests officiating in the Temple heard a loud superhuman voice declaring: "We are departing hence!" That same year a star, in the shape of a sword, had shone in the sky over Jerusalem and remained hovering overhead like a comet for an entire year. Yet despite all these signs and warnings, the Jews did not repent of their apostasy.

Josephus commented: "These men, therefore, trampled upon the laws of man, and laughed at the laws of God..yet did these prophets foretell many things concerning the rewards of virtue, and the punishments of vice, which when these zealots violated, they occasioned the fulfilling of those very prophecies belonging to their own country. ...Neither did any other city suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world." (Josephus, The Jewish War)

Because of Israel's rejection of the King of kings, Jerusalem became the haunt of demons and every kind of unclean spirit. Historians reported that a large part of that generation became demon-possessed. Many of the Jews lost all ability to reason. Maniacal mobs attacked one another in a frenzied lust for murder, executions, suicides, and rapes. Families

killed their own children. Satan's host of destroyers were let loose on the Jewish nation and this demonic host of hell swarmed over the land of Israel, consuming the apostates. It was literally a hell on earth. Yet this was not to be the worst that would come upon the land.



By the year 67 AD, Vespasian and his son Titus had taken back all of Judea and killed the Jewish rebels that were left. The Jewish strongholds were now under Roman control. Only the city of Jerusalem was left. Then the Romans under Vespasian and Titus approached Jerusalem. However, before the siege could really take off, news came to General Vespasian that Nero had died by his own hand after being declared an enemy of the state by the Roman Senate. Vespasian was acclaimed the new emperor by his own military. He left his son Titus as second in command in the war against Jerusalem. By 70AD the Romans were besieging the walls. Inside the city there was great famine. Upper rooms were filled with dying women and children. City lanes were piled with dead bodies. Young men were swelled with starvation and the city became deathly quiet. Josephus gives one account of a woman who took her infant son and killed him, eating his body for food. When the Zealots smelled cooking, they came to her home to demand food, only to back away in horror at this sight of grisly cannibalism.

Meanwhile Titus had ordered the city gates set on fire and he and his army marched into Jerusalem. The roar of the fires and loud lamentation

by the Jews could be heard to the mountains. The zealots and robbers fled the Temple area and hid in underground caves, only to be discovered and executed. The rest of the people were killed and 97,000 went into captivity. The city was burned down, the walls demolished, and the Temple utterly destroyed, never to be rebuilt again. Over one million Jewish people were killed or sold into slavery. Seventy thousand Jewish slaves were taken back to Rome to build the Roman Coliseum. Josephus sums up by saying: "Neither it's great antiquity, it's vast riches, the spread of its people all over the earth, nor the veneration paid to it could preserve Jerusalem from destruction. And thus ended the siege of Jerusalem." (Josephus The Jewish War).



RECEIVING THE KINGDOM

This was the future scenario of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation which caused Jesus to weep. He saw these horrors and He grieved to think of the tragic sufferings that would come upon Israel. He had been offering them a totally different outcome, but the people were resistant to receiving it. Jesus often spoke of His kingdom, a spiritual kingdom that would be comprised of people from every nation of the world, not just the Jews. The people of this kingdom would be those whom God had called out of darkness into His light. They would be a chosen race, a holy

nation, sojourners and exiles on the earth, whose citizenship is in heaven. Nothing evil would exist in this kingdom. It would be a kingdom of grace and glory.

To emphasize the necessity of being alert and ready to receive His kingdom, Jesus told a parable about ten virgins at a wedding. The ten virgins, all carrying lamps, went out to meet the bridegroom. This was a common sight in Israel whenever a wedding took place. The bridegroom would dress himself at his house and then proceed with his attendants to his bride's home. Along the way he would be accompanied by the virgins of Israel who would carry their oil lamps to light his way. They would be shouting "*Behold, the bridegroom comes, go out to meet him!*" In this way the virgins would escort him to the entrance of the bride's father's house. The groom would collect his bride and then the procession would go back to the groom's house where a big celebration awaited everyone. Once the guests were inside, the doors would be shut and the revellers would feast and dance all night. In Jesus' story, there were ten such virgins who waited to escort the bridegroom. However five of them were foolish because they forgot to take along oil for their lamps. The other five virgins were smarter and had oil with them. The bridegroom took a long time in coming so eventually the virgins all fell asleep while waiting for him. Then at midnight a cry rang out that he was coming and all the virgins woke up to trim their lamps. However the five foolish ones had no oil so they asked the wise ones for some of theirs. The wise ones refused because they didn't think there would be enough for all of them. They told the foolish virgins to buy their own oil from the oil sellers. While the foolish virgins went to get oil, the bridegroom arrived and the virgins who were ready went with him to the wedding banquet. Then the door was shut and the party began. Later the other virgins came to the house and asked to be admitted, but the bridegroom turned them away saying he didn't know them. Jesus ended the story by warning: '*Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*'(Matthew 25:13)

In this allegory, Jesus was warning the Jews to be ready when He returned for His Bride (believers). He would come at an unknown time when they least expected Him. If they were not prepared (without the 'oil' of God's life inside), they would be too late to receive entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Only those who had eternal life, because they had believed in Jesus and taken Him as their Messiah, would live forever with God (enter the banqueting hall). The rest would be rejected, even though they called themselves the sons of Abraham and thought of themselves

as God's people. Jesus said: 'Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.' (Matthew 7:22,23)

THE KING



It was as a king that Messiah entered Jerusalem on the Passover. Upon their coronation, kings would commonly ride into a city on a mount. Jesus sent two of His disciples to go to a nearby village where He said they would find a donkey colt tied up. (A donkey is a symbol of humility)

and peace). This colt had never been ridden, but the disciples were to untie it and bring it to Jesus. If anyone asked them what they were doing, they were to reply: "*The Lord has need of it.*" The disciples found the colt, just as they were told, and as expected, the owners wanted to know why they were taking it. When they heard that Jesus needed it, they offered no objection. The disciples then threw their cloaks over the back of the colt, and Jesus sat on it. As they proceeded on their way, a large crowd began to assemble and the people spread their cloaks on the road before the Lord. When Jesus came near the place where the road veered off to the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to loudly praise God for all the miracles they had seen. They began to sing: "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!*" (Luke 19:38)

This was the second time in His life that Jesus had been referred to as a king. The first time had been at His birth when the Magi had been seeking Him. Now, by calling Jesus a king, the crowd was fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah.

'Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you! He is righteous, and having salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ...he will speak peace to the nations: and his dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.' (Zechariah 9:9-10)

However when the chief priests and the teachers of the law heard the children shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant, asking Jesus if He heard what they were saying. Jesus replied that He did and He recited these scriptures to them: '*From the lips of babes and infants you have established strength, because of your adversaries, that you might silence the enemy and the avenger.* (Psalm 8:2)

Jesus chose to ride on a donkey colt that no one had ever ridden. It was a public announcement that He was Israel's King.

The prophet Isaiah had written: "*For a child will be born to us; a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*"

JUDAS



One disciple, Judas Iscariot, followed Jesus in hopes that He would overthrow Roman rule and thus give him a position of power. Jesus had entrusted him with the funds for the group, and Judas was often pilfering from it. Perhaps he was hoping that once Jesus was crowned King of Israel, he would retain his financial post and become fabulously wealthy. Judas was also a member of the Zealots, known for their extreme hatred of Rome. Many were violent and aggressive, and they have been called some of the world's first terrorists. Not all Zealots were violent, but they had a reputation of being forceful, aggressive agitators.

Judas made a decision to do a most despicable act. He decided to betray Jesus to His enemies. Judas never believed Jesus to be God and never referred to Him as the Messiah. When addressing Jesus, he used the term 'Rabbi' instead. The other disciples at times professed their faith and loyalty but Judas never did. He seems to have had no personal relationship with the Lord. The only dialogue between Judas and Jesus, that is recounted in the scriptures, was when Judas was rebuked by the Lord for scolding Mary because she anointed Jesus with expensive perfume. In that instance, Judas was annoyed because the perfume hadn't been sold for money and put in the common purse 'for the poor', thus denying him the opportunity to skim off some of the money for himself.



But more importantly, Judas apparently believed the Messiah was going to overthrow the Roman rule over Israel and now Jesus was predicting that He would be crucified. This undoubtedly dashed Judas' hopes that Jesus was the Deliverer whom Israel was hoping for.

THE LAST SUPPER



On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus to ask Him where to make the preparations for the Passover. Jesus told them to go to a place in the city and tell the owner of a certain house that He wanted to celebrate the Passover there. The disciples found the house and the owner readily agreed to let them have the use of an upper room. The disciples then made all the necessary arrangements and when evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with His disciples. While they were eating, Jesus suddenly said: *"Most certainly I tell you that one of you will betray me."* (Matthew 26:21)

Jesus knew exactly who the betrayer would be. The Old Testament scriptures had prophesied the Lord's betrayal by a close friend, and Jesus knew one of His own disciples would be the culprit. *'Yes, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate bread with me, has lifted up his heel against me.'* (Psalm 41:9)

The scriptures had even foretold the exact amount of money the betrayer would receive.

'...So they weighed for my wages thirty pieces of silver. Yahweh said to me, "Throw it to the potter, the handsome price that I was valued at by them!" I took the thirty pieces of silver, and threw them to the potter, in Yahweh's house.' (Zechariah 11:12-13)

When Jesus had chosen Judas as His disciple, He knew that Judas was greedy, avaricious, and disloyal. Jesus was never fooled by anyone because He knew human nature inside out, and was well aware of people's motives.

"For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who didn't believe, and who it was who would betray him." (John 6:64)

In God's plan, a traitor was needed who would sell Jesus out and expedite the Lord's execution. Therefore Judas was useful to the Lord for that reason. However Judas' wicked actions would doom him to everlasting destruction.

'Those whom you have given me I have kept. None of them is lost, except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.' (John 17:12)

Note:

Judas was 'doomed to destruction' by the choices he made, not because God forced him to act against his will. No one forced him to betray Jesus. Like all of humanity, Judas' human nature was sinful. The Bible says that

no one is righteous and no one seeks after God.(Romans 3:10). No one can please Him due to the condition of the sinful heart. (Romans 8:8) Only if the Father teaches a person to understand the truth, is he able to seek after Jesus for salvation. (John 6:37). When God chooses to save someone, it is called election. The elected ones are selected out of fallen humankind, not because they are less sinful or ‘better’ than anyone else, but because of God’s sovereign choice. God’s Holy Spirit moves invisibly upon these elected ones to regenerate their hearts, enabling them to have the faith necessary to trust in Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 2:8). This process is the rebirth into a new creature that Jesus talked about with Nicodemus. (John 3:1-21). God is not obligated to do this for anyone, and those who receive the gift of salvation are chosen purely by grace. Human effort, merit, or desire are not involved. (Romans 9:16). God is sovereign in choosing whom He wishes to rescue, and He is not obligated to do it for everyone. Indeed, He is not obligated to do it for **anyone**. If He had chosen not to save a single human being, He would have been completely righteous in doing so. And if He had done so, not one human being would have chosen Him as Saviour. All of humanity is dead spiritually and, like a dead body, cannot suddenly come alive on its own. This is because all humanity sinned and received the death penalty. However God is also a God of love and He desires to show the merciful side of His nature, which He did in sending Jesus to redeem the elect ones.

After Jesus remarked that one of them would betray Him, the disciples were very sad and began to question one another as to who it could be. *“Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?”* they asked one by one. This indicates that each disciple suspected the weakness in his own heart, along with the possibility that he might turn away from the Lord, especially if his own life was threatened. Jesus replied that His betrayer would be one who had dipped his hand into the bowl with Him. He told them that everything written in the scriptures about Him would happen, but woe to the one who betrayed Him. It would be better for that one if he had never been born. Then Judas, who surely knew he was the one referred to, also asked: *“Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi?”* Judas may have asked this question in order to allay the others’ suspicion, or maybe he was trying to ascertain if Jesus truly knew his intentions. Judas had already made a deal with the Pharisees and Sadducees to turn Jesus over to them for 30 pieces of silver, so his question was not sincere. When Jesus replied: *“You have said so,”* Judas would have had no further doubts that the Lord was well aware of his treachery.

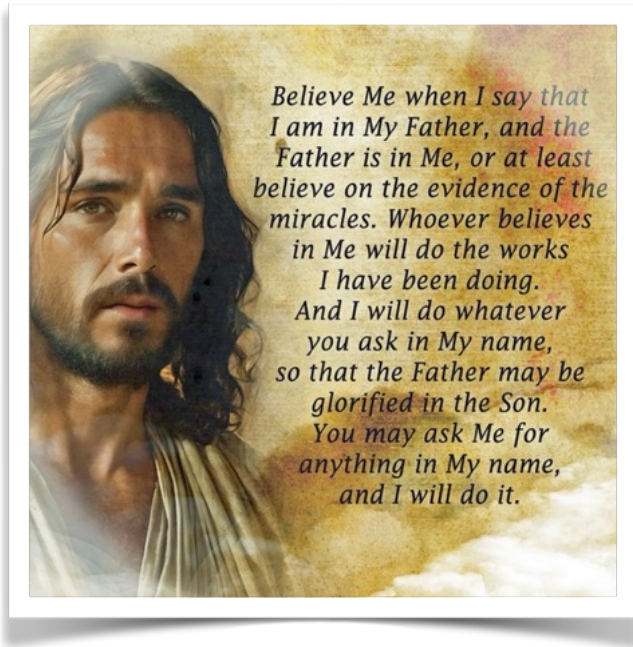


The disciples were troubled as Jesus talked about His coming death, but He assured them He was going away to prepare mansions for them, and He would come back for them. He would also not leave them orphans, but would send His Spirit to be with them. He also assured them that they could ask anything in His name, and He would do it. Jesus also took some bread and wine and said these were to be used as symbols to remember Him by. He likened the wine to His blood and the bread to His body. He said: *"For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink" meaning that salvation would come through the sacrifice of His physical body on the cross.*

The disciples were still confused about all this talk of the Lord leaving them. They kept asking for more details, so Jesus explained: *"Most certainly I tell you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy."* (John 16:20)

Jesus likened this to a woman giving birth to a child. At first she suffers a lot of pain during contractions, but she soon forgets her anguish and is filled with joy when her baby arrives. It would be similar for the disciples. When Jesus returned, their elation would be great. In that day they would

have all their questions answered. In the meantime, they were to ask the Father in Jesus' name for whatever they needed because the Father would give them whatever they asked. *"Ask," Jesus said, "and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."*



The Lord admitted that He had been speaking figuratively to them a lot of the time, but a time was coming when He would no longer do so. They would freely petition God for themselves, without first asking Jesus, and because the Father loved them, He would answer all their requests. The disciples thought they finally grasped what Jesus was saying and said: *'Now we know that you know all things, and don't need for anyone to question you. By this we believe that you came from God.'* Jesus was not so sure. *"Do you now believe? Behold, the time is coming, yes, and has now come, that you will be scattered, everyone to his own place, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.'* (Luke 16:30-33)

Jesus then once again promised to give them peace, although the world would give them much trouble. *"But cheer up!"* Jesus comforted. *"I have overcome the world."* Jesus asked the disciples if they had ever lacked

anything when He had commissioned them to spread the news of the kingdom without taking a purse, bag, or sandals with them. They replied that they had wanted for nothing. Jesus told them now it was different. They were to take provisions and if they didn't have a sword, they were to sell their cloaks to buy one. They would be hunted as criminals and Jesus Himself would be numbered with the transgressors, just as had been written of Him. The time for that fulfillment was very near.

Jesus warned them that in the next little while He would not be able to offer them the same provision and protection, as before, so they were to look out for themselves. This was because, once arrested by the authorities, Jesus would not directly use His powers as before. The disciples, however, took Jesus literally and found two swords, which they brought to Him. In response, the Lord simply said: *"That' is enough."* Ultimately Jesus indicated that there was nothing sinful about owning a weapon, which could be useful and even necessary in some contexts. In the present situation, there was a strong likelihood of possible violence coming from the soldiers who were seeking to arrest Jesus. The Lord did not want the disciples to be harmed and so Jesus permitted them to take a few weapons along.

GETHSEMANE

Jesus and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives, to a private place called the Garden of Gethsemane. There He prayed about the cup of suffering that He was about to drink. This cup was the cup of God's wrath against sin and Jesus would be completely helpless on the cross, without His Father's help or comfort. He would feel the loss of His Father's presence. Though the unity of God and man would always be there in His makeup, Jesus would not experience it in the same way as He had done before. For the first time ever Jesus would feel bereft. This is what Jesus was dreading when He took on the sins of humanity. Being human, He was also dreading the pain and suffering that was sure to come. He asked His disciples to pray, but they soon fell asleep and were no solace for Him. He was without human comfort and filled with anguish. The Bible says that Jesus was a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" and probably at no time was this more evident than when He prayed in the Garden that night. As always, Jesus' will was united with His Father's so that there was never any conflict in desire. Nevertheless Jesus was in such great anguish as He earnestly prayed,

that He sweat drops of blood, and an angel from heaven was needed to strengthen Him.



Sweating blood is a medical condition that involves the blood vessels around the sweat glands constricting and dilating to the point of rupture. The fact that this was happening reveals that Jesus was obviously under enormous pressure. He knew the gruelling details of what would soon follow for He had undoubtedly witnessed many instances of Roman crucifixion during His lifetime. Crucifixion was considered to be the most painful form of torture ever devised. But it wasn't only the excruciating physical pain He would suffer that concerned Him. He would be bearing the weight of the world's sin on the cross, which would temporarily alter His closeness with the Father whom He so dearly loved. This didn't mean that the Godhead would be split apart, but it meant that the human part of Jesus would feel the abandonment and condemnation of a holy and just God who hates sin.

But your iniquities have separated you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:2)

It is interesting that Jesus entered a garden where His faithfulness to His Father was tested. It was in another garden (the Garden of Eden) that Adam first sinned against God. Adam's choice doomed the entire human race to physical and spiritual death. Jesus' choice would result in the

creation of a New Humanity that would transcend physical death and live eternally in heaven with God.

Jesus rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, who were all asleep. Jesus had revealed His Father to those whom God had taken out of the world, and this included the eleven disciples as well as all those He called friends. They had belonged to the Father who had given them to Jesus so that He could instruct and protect them. These ones had accepted and obeyed the Lord's words, believing that He came from God and that He spoke the truth to them. They were God's beloved ones and that's why Jesus prayed for them. They belonged to both the Father and to Jesus, as did everything in heaven and earth. Jesus was magnified through these disciples and now He would have to leave them behind when He returned to heaven. This was part of the reason Jesus agonized in the garden. He was concerned for them and He asked the Father to protect them through His name - the name Jesus shared with His Father as God. In His prayer to His Father, Jesus said: *'I pray not that you would take them from the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, even so I have sent them into the world.'* (John 17:15-19)

When Jesus spoke of 'sanctification' He was talking about purification that results from dedication to God. Jesus had dedicated Himself to His Father and He was pure in everything He did and thought. He wanted His disciples to be dedicated to God in the same way. Jesus also extended His prayer to all those who would believe in Him in the future. He wanted them all to share the unity He had with His Father.

THE ARREST

Judas knew the place where Jesus was because Jesus often went there with His disciples. When Judas went to the garden, he was guiding a detachment of soldiers along with some officials sent by the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons to light their way as they advanced towards the Lord. Jesus was not surprised. He knew everything that was about to happen and went out to them, asking whom they wanted. Judas approached Jesus to kiss Him in order to identify Him to the soldiers, but Jesus asked him, *'Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?'*



Judas' betrayal was bad enough, but his pretence of loving the Lord while doing so was especially repugnant. Jesus asked the soldiers who it was they were looking for. "*Jesus of Nazareth,*" they replied, and Jesus said, "*I am He.*" The soldiers were probably shocked at how Jesus fearlessly stood His ground instead of trying to escape. They wouldn't have expected that kind of response. In fact, so much power exuded from the Lord that the soldiers drew back and fell to the ground. Jesus asked them again: "*Who are you looking for?*" and again they said they wanted Jesus of Nazareth. "*I told you that I am He.*" Jesus replied. "*If you are looking for Me, then let these men go their way.*" The Lord's aura of power and authority made it impossible for them to disobey. It was as if they had no control over the situation and because Jesus had specifically prayed to the Father that not one of those given to Him would be lost, the soldiers could not lay a hand on the disciples. However Jesus' followers were ready for battle and asked: "*Lord, should we strike with our swords?*" Peter, who had a sword, didn't wait for a reply but struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus commanded Peter to put his sword away, saying: "*The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not surely drink it?*" Then, even though the servant was one of His enemies, Jesus touched the man's ear and healed him. Addressing the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, Jesus said: "*Have you come out as against a robber, with*

swords and clubs? When I was with you in the temple daily, you didn't stretch out your hands against me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”(Luke 22:52-53)

The disciples finally realized that Jesus was going to see this out to the end, so they all deserted Him and fled. Now the Lord was alone.



The soldiers who had come to arrest Jesus may have been a Roman detachment sent along with the temple guards to ensure that no riot occurred. One translation uses the word 'cohort' but that would be 600 soldiers. Other translations say it was a 'band' of soldiers who arrested Jesus. The High Priests probably sent out such a large number of soldiers because they wanted to secure Jesus because they had been waiting so long to finally capture him in a situation that wouldn't stir up any trouble. They wanted to quickly kill Jesus, and that way hopefully nobody would remember him. However God's plan was that through Jesus' death and resurrection God would be glorified and our sins would be forgiven, so it turned out to be an event that had many witnesses. The commander arrested Jesus and had Him bound. The soldiers brought Jesus to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.



Two of the disciples, Peter and John, followed at a distance. The high priest knew John so he was allowed into the high priest's courtyard without arousing any suspicions as to why he was there. However Peter had to wait outside at the door. Later John came back and spoke to the servant girl on duty to allow Peter to come in as well. The first thing Annas did was demand that Jesus explain His teachings, but Jesus reasonably pointed out that His teachings had never been a secret so if He had been guilty of anything, it would have been clear to all. *"I have spoken openly to the world,"* He told Annas. *"I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question Me? Ask those who heard Me. Surely they know what I said."* (John 18:20-21)

One of the officers standing nearby felt this response was disrespectful to Annas, and he slapped Jesus in the face, but Jesus did not take this abuse silently.

'If I have spoken evil, testify of the evil,' He said, *'but if well, why do you beat me?'*

What Jesus said was completely true. He had preached openly and honestly, so there was no point in repeating Himself to Annas and the Temple officials. And by pointing out that He had said nothing deserving of a blow, He not only indicated that He would not be intimidated, but He also shamed the officer for abusing his position. His refusal to be cowed or manipulated by Annas and the court must have greatly frustrated them. Jesus did not fit the profile of a guilty or frightened man. Annas finally stopped questioning Jesus and sent Him, still bound, to his son-in-law, Caiaphas the high priest, who had the legal authority to lay charges against the Lord.

Back in the courtyard, Peter was standing around the fire when one of those nearby saw him and accused him of being one of Jesus' followers. Peter denied it vehemently. Twice more he was accused and each time Peter denied knowing the Lord. After the last denial, a rooster crowed and just then Jesus came out to the courtyard and looked straight at Peter. At the Passover supper, Jesus had told the disciples that the Shepherd would be struck down and the sheep would be scattered. Peter had spoken up that he would never fall away. However Jesus had replied: *"Truly I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."* Now, as Jesus regarded him, Peter remembered the Lord's words. Heartbroken and ashamed, Peter went outside and wept bitterly.

CAIAPHAS

Caiaphas invited the chief priests and council members, as well as some witnesses, to present evidence against Jesus so that they could put Him to death. Though many testified against Jesus, their statements were in conflict and clearly false. Some accused Jesus of saying He would destroy the Temple made with human hands and in three days build another not made with hands, but even then their testimonies did not agree. Caiaphas grew impatient when Jesus remained silent and gave no answer to the accusations levelled against Him. Caiaphas was perplexed and frustrated. Finally he asked Jesus point blank: *"Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"* To this Jesus answered: *"I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of the sky."* (Mark 14:62)

The high priest knew that Jesus was referring to Daniel 7:13, 14: *"I saw in the night visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of the sky one like a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and*

they brought him near before him. There was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.'

Jesus was declaring Himself the Messiah who would reign over all nations. Caiaphas regarded Jesus' admission as pure blasphemy and tore his clothes. This was a common practice among the Jews when they wanted to express loss or grief, but the high priest was not allowed to tear his clothes (Leviticus 21:10) The fact that he did so reveals the great anger he felt. The entire council agreed with Caiaphas and came to the decision to condemn Jesus to death. It was now dawn and Annas, Caiaphas, and the council of chief priests and teachers of the Law met together, putting Jesus on trial for the third time. As they discussed together, they realized that to their way of thinking a charge of blasphemy deserved execution, but it was unlikely that Rome would feel the same way. Rome didn't care if someone called himself the Son of God. However if Jesus could be accused of declaring Himself a king, then Rome would see that as insurrection against the Emperor, and a death penalty would follow. The council felt confident that by manipulating evidence against Jesus, they would get such a pronouncement.

The men who were guarding Jesus began to mock and beat Him. They put a blindfold over His eyes and demanded, *"Prophecy! Who hit you?"* Some spit at Him and said many insulting things to him. Others struck Him with fists. This went on for some time as the guards indulged their cruelty. Jesus did not resist their bullying but suffered in silence.

JUDAS HANGS HIMSELF



When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he felt great shame and tried to return the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests. He told them that he had sinned by betraying innocent blood. The chief priests couldn't have cared less. "That's your responsibility," they said. Judas then flung the money into the Temple and went away to a field where he hung himself from a tree. The chief priests picked up the coins and, because it was against the law to put blood money into the treasury, they used it to buy a potter's field as a cemetery for foreigners. It was called the Field of Blood from that time onward. All this was the fulfillment of prophecy: *'Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him upon whom a price had been set,...and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.'* (Matthew 27:9-10)

Some have wondered whether Judas repented or merely felt guilty after betraying Jesus. Because the Lord called Judas 'the son of perdition' (John 17:12) and said he was doomed to hell, it is unlikely that Judas truly repented. The Bible describes godly sorrow as leading to repentance that leads to salvation, whereas worldly sorrow leads to death. (2 Corinthians 7:10) People often feel remorse because they get caught doing something wrong and they feel guilt and shame. Even though remorse can consume a person emotionally, it is often a temporary feeling that does not result in true or lasting change. However godly repentance brings about a change in thought and behaviour that results in taking responsibility for sinful actions and seeking God's forgiveness. Judas definitely felt remorse, but it may have arisen from disappointment that his dreams for the future were destroyed. He may have felt shame and guilt for his actions, but he did not actually repent, or he would have sought forgiveness from God instead of ending his life.

PONTIUS PILATE

Early in the morning the chief priests and the elders of the people bound Jesus and led Him away to be handed over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate held office from 26 AD to 36/37 AD and during that time he regularly upset the Jews by disregarding their religious and social customs. However he still had to be careful to keep the peace in Judea or he would be in trouble with Caesar. The chief priests knew this about Pilate and they rightly surmised that he would not condemn Jesus to death unless he saw Him as a national threat to Rome.



They therefore told the governor that Jesus was trying to overthrow Roman rule by opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar and by claiming He was a king. This intrigued Pilate and he asked Jesus: *“Are you the king of the Jews?”* *The Lord merely replied: “You have said so.”* After further interrogation, Pilate realized that the Pharisees had religious motives for arresting Jesus and he announced to the chief priests and the crowd that he found no basis for a charge against Him. However the Jewish assembly insisted that Jesus was stirring up the people all over Judea by His teaching, all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem. On hearing that Jesus was a Galilean, Pilate saw an opportunity to hand the problem over to King Herod who had jurisdiction over Galilee, and who just happened to be in Jerusalem at the time. Herod was delighted because he had heard about Jesus and hoped He would perform a miracle for his entertainment. However Jesus remained aloof. In frustration, Herod handed Him over to his soldiers who ridiculed Him by putting a crown of thorns on His head and a royal cape over His shoulders. After a severe beating by his soldiers, Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate to share in his joke.



By now it was early morning, and the chief priests brought Jesus back to Pilate but they would not enter the Praetorium because doing so would make them ceremonially unclean for the Passover. Consequently Pilate came out to them in the courtyard and asked them what charges they were bringing against Jesus. The Jewish leaders responded that He was a criminal or they wouldn't have handed Him over to Pilate in the first place. But because Pilate had rightfully surmised that the whole scenario was religiously based, he told them to judge Jesus by their own law. *"But we have no right to execute anyone,"* they objected. They wanted Jesus to be crucified and that required Roman authorization. Pilate then went back inside the palace and summoned Jesus before him. *"Are you the king of the Jews?"* he asked. *"Do you say this by yourself,"* Jesus replied, *"or did others tell you about me?"* (John 18:34) Pilate scoffed, saying that he wasn't the one who handed Jesus over for execution. It was His own people, the Jews, who wanted Him dead. In response to Pilate's question, Jesus declared that His kingdom was not earthly but from another place. If His kingdom had been of this world, His servants would have fought to prevent His arrest. *"You are a king, then!"* Pilate exclaimed. *Jesus admitted that He was. 'For this reason I have been born,' He said, "and for this reason I have come into the world, that I should testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my*

voice. Pilate was a skeptic at heart and he asked rhetorically “*What is truth?*” believing that there was no such thing.

However Pilate didn't feel he could ignore the Jews and their accusations so he went back outside and declared that he definitely found no basis for a charge against Jesus. However, to appease Jesus' accusers, he pointed out that it was the time for the annual custom of releasing a prisoner at Passover and he offered to release the so-called 'king of the Jews'. The other choice was a noted killer and insurrectionist called Barabbas. Pilate was certain that they would never choose a vicious killer over a gentle rabbi, but surprisingly the Jews shouted back, “*No, not Him! Give us Barabbas!*”



Pilate still had one other tactic to try. He took Jesus and had him brutally flogged by his soldiers. After this ordeal, Pilate brought Jesus out to the Jewish leaders, saying: “*Look, I am bringing Him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against Him.*” He pointed to Jesus wearing a crown of thorns, and with a face marred by beatings and

pronounced, *“Here is the man!”* Surprisingly the chief priests and their officials were not satisfied with this, and they began shouting, *“Crucify! Crucify!”* Pilate answered, *“Take him yourselves, and crucify him, for I find no basis for a charge against him.”*

Then the Jewish leaders explained that according to their Jewish law, Jesus had to die because He claimed to be the Son of God. This made Pilate nervous and he went back inside the palace to get more information. *“Where are you from?”* he asked, but Jesus gave him no answer. *‘Aren’t you speaking to me?’* Pilate said. *‘Don’t you know that I have power to release you, and have power to crucify you?’* Jesus replied that Pilate would have no power over Him if it hadn’t been given to Him from above. God was the One who gave kings and governors authority over the affairs of men and Pilate had been chosen to deal with Jesus at this time.

*‘He changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings, and sets up kings..’ (Daniel 2:21)...**‘For there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God.’ (Romans 13:2)*

Jesus said that Pilate would be held responsible for his decisions, but the one who handed Him over to him was guilty of a greater sin. He was referring to the high priest who had instigated the whole plan to murder Him and whose actions were illegal and against God’s Law. Pilate was unnerved by these words and from then on he tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, *“If you release this man, you aren’t Caesar’s friend! Everyone who makes himself a king speaks against Caesar!” (John 19:12)* The Jews cared nothing about Caesar. They felt no loyalty to him whatever. Pilate knew this and decided to expose their hypocrisy. He brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat, once again showing Jesus to the Jews. *“Here is your king,”* he announced to them. This inflamed the Jews who shouted ever more loudly that they wanted Jesus crucified. Pilate then asked mockingly: *“Shall I crucify your king?”* Goaded beyond endurance, the chief priests answered: *“We have no king but Caesar!”* This was an admission that they normally would never have made because they hated Caesar and the Roman occupation of Israel. However their bloodlust was so great that they now chose the hated emperor over Jesus! Pilate, who disdained the Jews, was finally satisfied that he had won over them and he then handed Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified.

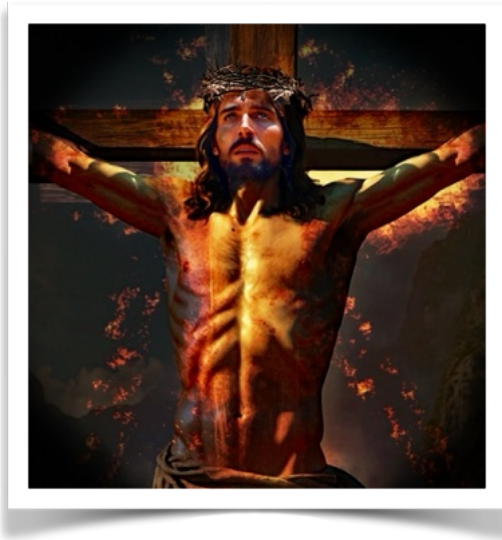
Crucifixion



Eventually Jesus, the soldiers, and the crowd all arrived at Golgatha (meaning The Skull in Aramaic). Jesus, who had been badly beaten and was bleeding from many wounds, fell to the ground beneath the cross beam He was carrying on His shoulders. It was quite heavy, weighing around 100 pounds, so the soldiers forced a man from Cyrene, named Simon, to carry the beam the rest of the way. A large number of people followed Jesus, including women who were weeping and wailing for Him. Jesus had always been especially kind and respectful to women whereas Roman and Jewish society often treated them as second-class citizens. To see this kind and gentle man tortured so despicably must have torn their hearts in two. Jesus turned to the grieving women and said: *“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me; weep for yourselves and for your children.”* He told them that a time was coming when they would consider themselves blessed if they were childless and not pregnant, and a quick death would be seen as preferable to facing the horrors awaiting them.

Crucifixion was such a vile method of execution that no Roman citizen could be crucified without express permission from the authorities. It was usually reserved for insurrectionists and the worst of criminals with the intent of causing them as much pain and agony as possible. First the victim of crucifixion was severely scourged or beaten, an ordeal that was life-threatening by itself. The scourging was brutal, often ripping open muscles, veins, and organs. Then the victim was forced to carry the large wooden crossbeam to the site of the crucifixion which was extremely painful after the beating. It was like digging one's own grave as the victim carried the instrument of his own torture and death. When the victim arrived at the site of crucifixion, he would be stripped naked to further shame him. Then he would be forced to stretch out his arms on the crossbeam, where they were nailed in place. Sometimes the person being executed was tied to the cross beam but Jesus had nails hammered into His hands and feet which would have added to the excruciating pain of His torture. The nails were hammered through the wrists which kept the nails from pulling through the hand. The nails would press on the large nerves of the hands causing agonizing pain. The crossbeam would then be hoisted up and fastened to an upright piece anchored in the ground. After fastening the crossbeam, the executioners would nail the victim's feet to the cross as well, normally, one foot on top of the other, through the middle and arch of each foot, with the knees slightly bent. Once the victim was fastened to the cross, all his weight was supported by three nails, which would cause pain to shoot throughout the body. The victim's arms were stretched out in such a way as to cause cramping and paralysis in the chest muscles, making it impossible to breathe unless some of the weight was borne by the feet. In order to take a breath, the victim had to push up with his feet. The victim's raw back would rub against the rough upright beam of the cross as he did so. After taking a breath, the victim would begin to slump down again. This action put more weight on his wrists and again rubbed his raw back against the cross. The torture was intense. It was also slow, often taking hours or even days to die from causes such as heart failure, suffocation, cardiac rupture, and dehydration. Death was ultimately by asphyxiation as the victim lost the strength to continue pushing up on his feet in order to take a breath. In order to hasten death, the victim's legs might be broken, which would prevent him from pushing up in order to breathe; thus, asphyxiation would follow shortly after. It was gruesome, cruel, and evil and the Romans were experts at this type of torture. They made it as frightening as possible with the goal to dissuade insurrectionists and uprisings against the empire.

Satan, who would have been watching everything, obviously thought Jesus was finally in his power, and he must have been exulting. However the Lord once said He had legions of angels at His beck and call, and He told Pilate that He had no power over Him, except whatever His Father allowed. So it was only His great love for His followers that kept Jesus on His sacrificial mission - something beyond Satan's understanding.



Pilate had issued orders to fasten a sign on the cross of Jesus saying: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The chief priests objected to this and wanted it changed, but Pilate refused, saying: *"I have written what I have written."* The soldiers had stripped Jesus of all His clothes and now began dividing them into four shares, one for each of them. The undergarment was seamless, having been woven in one piece from top to bottom, so the soldiers decided not to tear it into sections, but to gamble for it instead. This fulfilled the scripture that said, *"They divide My clothes among them; they cast lots for My garment."* (Psalm 22:18) As Jesus watched what was happening, He prayed, *"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."*

Jesus' mother, his mother's sister (Mary the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene were all standing near the cross. When Jesus saw His mother beside John, He said to her: *"Woman, here is your son,"* and to John, *"Here is your mother."*



Mary was a widow at this point and Jesus was entrusting Mary to His closest friend, John, rather than to her other sons who were not believers. As the oldest son, Jesus had the cultural obligation and responsibility to make such a choice. John obeyed the Lord's command and took Mary into his home from that time on.

Golgotha was a very public place and there were people passing by who hurled insults at Jesus, shaking their heads and saying, "*You who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!*"



The chief priests and teachers of the Law did likewise, mocking Him by saying: *'He saved others, but he can't save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he wants him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'* (Matthew 27:41-43)



One of the criminals hanging beside Jesus also mocked the Lord, saying: *"Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"* However the other criminal rebuked him. *"Don't you even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."* (Luke 23:40-41) Then he asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom. Somehow the thief had heard of Jesus' claims to be the Messiah and he believed them. Jesus replied to the thief, *"Assuredly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*

Note: Abraham, David, Elijah, Daniel, and a host of other Old Covenant believers were waiting in 'Abraham's bosom' (or Paradise). They had hoped in God's promise to send a Messiah to save them. Now they would see Him shortly. Unbelievers were in another part of Sheol, separated from believers by a vast chasm. However the thief who believed in Jesus was promised a place in Paradise and the Lord said He would meet up with him there.

After excruciating hours of pain and suffering, Jesus cried out: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* He was asking His Father why He was so far from saving Him; why He had deserted Him. This was the cry of Christ's humanity as He bore the full weight of humanity's sin and the Father's consequent rejection.

The prophet Isaiah had prophesied this moment when he wrote: *"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."*

A great darkness fell over the land at three in the afternoon. But this wasn't all that happened. The earth shook, rocks split apart, and some tombs broke open. Just before He died, Jesus cried out *"It is finished."* Immediately after that He said *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."* At that very moment Jesus died. And then a violent earthquake shook the land and rocks were split apart.

When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, *"Truly this was the Son of God!"* Luke expands on this saying *"when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, 'Certainly this was a righteous Man!'"*



Later it would be discovered that the bodies of many holy people, who had recently died, were raised to life and these went into Jerusalem where they appeared to many people. Their names are not mentioned and they may not have had physical bodies. They may have been translated like Enoch and Elijah. However the incident showed that something of a cataclysmic nature was happening in the spirit realm that involved Life overcoming death.



At the moment of the earthquake, the thick, heavy curtain of the Temple was torn from top to bottom. This was astounding because the curtain was 60 feet long and 4 inches thick. It took 300 men to lift the curtain to install it. Only God could have torn it in half. This revealed the Father's

great anger over sin and over what was being done to His Son. It also signified that the barrier to God because of sin was torn down. Messiah, through His death, had removed it. But there was still something more that Jesus had to accomplish.

Burial of Jesus

It was common to leave the bodies of those crucified on the cross until the next day so as to send a warning to other would-be criminals. However, because it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was a Sabbath and the festival of Passover, the Jewish leaders didn't want the bodies left on the crosses. They asked Pilate to have the crucified victims' legs broken so that they would die more quickly. Then the bodies could be taken down that same day. The soldiers broke the legs of the two men crucified on either side of Jesus, but when they came to Jesus, they found He was already dead, so they did not break His legs. This was a fulfillment of Psalm 34:20 about *'the righteous man'*: "...*he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken...*" and points to Jesus as being the final Passover Lamb slain on behalf of the people: "*The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "These are the regulations for the Passover meal: It must be eaten in one house. You shall not carry any of the meat outside of the house. Do not break any of its bones.'*" (Exodus 12:43).

To be sure that Jesus was truly dead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, causing a sudden flow of blood and water. There was likely a medical reason for this discharge. Jesus had been flogged, receiving 39 lashes or more, from a whip that consisted of leather thongs with metal balls and pieces of sharp bone attached. The pieces of bone cut into the flesh, causing cuts so deep that the underlying veins, sinews, and bowels of the victim were exposed. Often the victim did not survive because of low blood pressure, the kidney shutting down, dehydration, and shock from blood loss. This explains why Jesus collapsed on the way to Golgatha and was unable to carry the crossbeam. During the entire time on the cross Jesus' heart would have been beating very rapidly, causing fluid to gather in the sack around His heart and lungs. When the soldier pierced Jesus' side, that sack was punctured and blood and water flowed out.

Many years earlier the prophet Zechariah had written: *“They will look on the one they have pierced,”*(Zechariah 12:10) and that is exactly what happened as the people looked up at the Lord’s broken body on the cross.

As evening approached, Joseph from Arimathea, a rich man and a secret disciple of Jesus, went to Pilate and requested Jesus’ body.



At the council, Joseph had not given his consent to Jesus’ execution and had not joined in when Jesus was mocked. However he had not spoken out in the Sanhedrin, probably because he feared the chief priests, but now he wanted to honour Jesus by providing a proper burial for Him. Pilate ordered that the Lord’s body be given to him and, along with Nicodemus, Joseph wrapped the body in clean linen and placed it in his own new tomb that was cut out of rock. Then they rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the wife of Clopas, were present when this was being done, so they both saw where Jesus was laid. The next day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate because they remembered that while Jesus was still alive He had said He would rise again after 3 days. They wanted Pilate to make the grave secure until the 3rd day to prevent the disciples from stealing the body and telling people

that Jesus had been resurrected. *“This last deception will be worse than the first,”* they said. Pilate told them to take a guard and make the tomb as secure as they wished, which they did by placing a seal on the stone and posting a guard.



At dawn on the Sabbath, there was a violent earthquake and an angel came down from heaven and rolled back the stone from the tomb, sitting on it. The angel's appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so terrified at seeing him that they trembled and fainted, becoming unconscious.



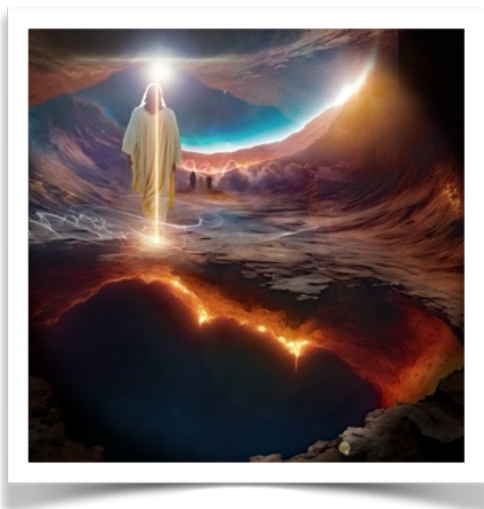
Meanwhile Mary Magdalene, Jesus' mother, and Mary the wife of Clopas went to the tomb to finish preparing Jesus' body. They saw the stone rolled away and the tomb sitting empty. It may be that Mary Magdalene left the other women at this point and did not see the angel sitting there. However the angel spoke to the other women telling them not to be afraid. *"for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying'.* The angel told them to quickly go and tell the disciples that the Lord had risen from the dead and that He would meet them in Galilee. The women hurried away, afraid but also excited, and ran to tell the disciples. Suddenly they were greeted by Jesus Himself and with great joy clasped His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said: *"Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see Me."*

While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. They didn't dare go to Pilate because they could have been punished for dereliction of duty. After all, the tomb's seal had been broken and the Nazarene's body was missing. The chief priests and elders immediately conferred together and came up with a plan to bribe the soldiers to say that Jesus' disciples had come during the night and stolen His body while they were asleep. They promised the soldiers that if a report was sent to Pilate, they would make excuses for them and keep them out of trouble. The soldiers took the bribe money and did as they were instructed, circulating the story among the Jews.

Meanwhile Mary Magdalene seemed to have been the first to tell Peter and John that Jesus' body was missing. However Peter and John decided to go see for themselves. Both of them looked in at the strips of linen and the burial face cloth lying there. As they looked at the evidence, they finally believed that Jesus was gone, although they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

Resurrection

Jesus went in spirit to the Paradise part of Sheol where Jesus told the thief they would meet up after they both died. However Death couldn't hold Jesus because He was without sin.



The scriptures predicted the Messiah would overcome death: *"You will not abandon Me to the realm of the dead, nor will You let Your faithful One see decay."* Other prophets foretold that God would one day abolish death: *"He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces" and "I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?"*

When Jesus was resurrected, His body did not decay. It was transformed into a body that was spiritual and yet visible. Jesus described His body as being of "flesh and bones" (not flesh and blood).

Note: Hebrews 9:12 states that Christ entered heaven by His blood.

"He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption."

This would be a metaphorical allusion to the fact that Christ's body (including His blood) was a prepared body for such a heavenly sacrifice.

'Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am

—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God.’ (Hebrews 10:5-10)

His offering on the cross broke the veil of His mortal flesh that had separated humanity from direct access to God in heaven.

Jesus was seen by many when He returned to earth to bring the good news to His followers. He made a personal appearance to Mary Magdalene who was in very deep grief. It could have been that she was in shock after having witnessed the harrowing murder of the Lord and now the disappearance of His body. Sensing someone nearby, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but didn't recognize Him. When Jesus asked her why she was crying and who she was looking for, Mary thought it was the gardener speaking to her.

Brokenly she begged: *“Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will get Him.”*

Jesus gently spoke her name: *“Mary”* and immediately she cried out: *‘Rabboni!’* meaning *‘Teacher’* and fell down to worship Him. She clung so desperately to His feet that the Lord had to tell her not to hold on to Him for He still had to ascend to His Father.

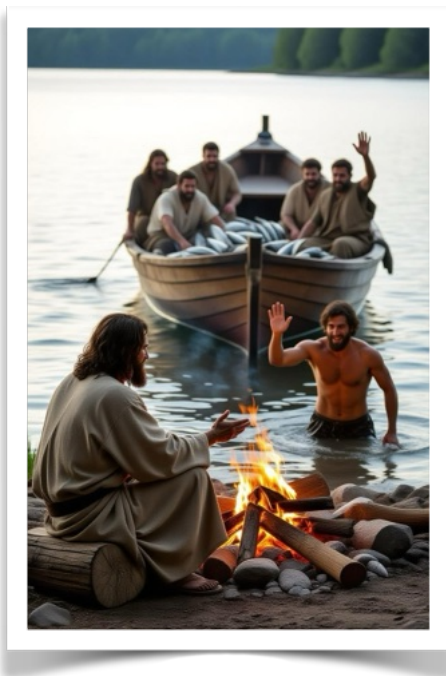


It's amazing that the Lord made this special appearance to Mary Magdalene and to the other women before going up to heaven. Undoubtedly Jesus was eager to see His Father, yet because of His great love and concern for these women, He stayed back long enough to comfort them. These women had remained with Him throughout His ordeal on the cross, witnessing His agony and feeling His pain. Very likely they despaired of ever seeing the Lord again and their hearts must have been utterly broken. Now they were privileged to be the first to see Him alive from the dead and to bring that good news to the other disciples. Jesus commissioned Mary, saying: "*Go to My brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.'*" With these happy words ringing in her ears, Mary went to the disciples, exclaiming: "*I have seen the Lord!*" Then she joyously told them everything Jesus had said to her.

Jesus suddenly appeared to His disciples who were gathered behind locked doors, and He singled out Thomas, who had doubts about Jesus rising from the dead. He showed him the wounds in His side and hands, and invited Thomas to touch Him. (John 20:25) He assured the disciples that He was not a ghost but had a body of 'blood and bones'. He said: '*See my hands and my feet, that it is truly me. Touch me and see, for a spirit doesn't have flesh and bones, as you see that I have.*' (Luke 24:39) He also appeared to two of His followers on the road to Emmaus, dining with them and teaching them from the scriptures what had been prophesied about Him. They only recognized Jesus when He broke bread with them, and right after that He disappeared. Another time Jesus was on the beach and provided his disciples with his own food, bread and fish, and ate in their presence. (Luke 24:43). From these incidents it's clear that Jesus' body was spiritual and yet very different from a merely physical one. Jesus could be touched, He could eat, and He could appear and disappear at will. His body definitely had undergone a change after rising from the grave. Initially He hadn't even been recognizable to Mary Magdalene or to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Only when He spoke or acted in a familiar way did they realize it was the Lord.

Note: It is important to remember that Jesus did not say 'flesh and blood', but rather 'flesh and bones'. The apostle Paul said: '*Now I say this, brothers, that flesh and blood can't inherit God's Kingdom; neither does the perishable inherit imperishable.*' (1 Corinthians 15:50)

An important post-resurrection meeting between Jesus and His disciples occurred by the Sea of Galilee when Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were fishing. They had been out all night but had caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't know it was the Lord. Jesus then called out to them: *"Friends, haven't you any fish?"* They replied that they had caught nothing. Jesus told them to throw their net to the right side of the boat and they would catch some. When they did so, they were unable to haul the net in because it was so full of fish. That's when John probably remembered another time when something similar had happened (Luke 5:1-11) because he told Peter: *"It is the Lord!"* When Peter heard this, he wrapped his outer garment around his waist and jumped into the water.



The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals and some bread. Jesus told them to bring some of the fish so Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore, which had not broken in spite of the many fish. Jesus then invited them to breakfast and none of the disciples dared to ask Him who He was because they knew He was the Lord. Jesus took

the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him, possibly corresponding to Peter's three denials of the Lord in the Temple courtyard. He was giving Peter an opportunity to be reinstated to his former position as leading apostle and also impressing upon him the necessity of absolute devotion to the Lord in order to faithfully serve other believers.

Since the disciples had not yet received the Holy Spirit, their faith still wavered, even though Jesus had spent 40 days encouraging them and preparing them for their mission. He told them: *"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20)

After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of His followers, and then again to James and all the apostles. These appearances occurred over a period of forty days and during that time Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God. After 40 days on the earth, Jesus led the disciples out to the vicinity of Bethany. There He lifted up His hands, and while in the act of blessing them, Jesus was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight. As they were looking intently up into the sky as He was departing, two angels dressed in white stood beside them. *"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky."*

The angels were referring to Jesus coming on clouds. In the Old Testament, clouds are depicted as showing God's majesty. In Psalm 18 God is described as coming to the rescue on clouds with great power and might. Jesus told Caiaphas that he would see Him coming on the clouds of heaven.

*'Jesus said to him, "And then the **sign** of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. He will send out his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. Now from the fig tree learn this parable. When its branch has now become tender, and produces its leaves, you know that the summer is near. Even so you also, **when you see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Most certainly I tell you, this generation will not pass away, until all these things are***

accomplished. *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. (Matthew 24:30-35)*

The apostle John also warned that coming judgment was right around the corner. The judgement he was referring to was the judgement that fell on the Jews in 70 AD, destroying the Temple and the Old covenant, replacing it with a new one. The Jews were well aware that a promised judgment was coming because the prophet Zephaniah had said the same thing 600 years earlier.

That day is a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of the trumpet and alarm, against the fortified cities, and against the high battlements. I will bring distress on men, that they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against Yahweh, and their blood will be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. (Zephaniah 1:15-17)

This is repeated over and over again in the Old Testament and everyone who heard Jesus give this warning would have understood that He was speaking about God coming in judgment. Caiaphas, the High Priest certainly did! Everyone would see the destruction of Jerusalem in 66-70 A.D. and that is what Jesus meant by people seeing Him come in clouds. **Coming in clouds was synonymous with the wrath of God.** Thankfully God is never eager to bring judgment. He takes no pleasure in seeing people destroyed because of sin.

For I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies, says the Lord Yahweh: therefore turn yourselves, and live. (Ezekiel 18:32)

The apostles who wrote the New Testament had this to say about the Lord's coming:

*Let your gentleness be known to all men. **The Lord is at hand.**" (Philippians 4:5)*

*"For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that **we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord,** will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep." (1Thessalonians 4:15)*

"In a very little while, He who comes will come, and will not wait... Now once at the end of the ages, He has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." (Hebrews 10:37; 9:26)

"But the end of all things is near. Therefore be of sound mind, self-controlled, and sober in prayer."(1Peter 4:7)

*"Don't grumble, brothers, against one another, so that you won't be judged. **Behold, the Judge stands at the door.**"(James 5:8-9)*

*"Little children, these are the end times, and as you heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen. By this we know that **it is the final hour.**" (1John 2:18)*

*"This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to His servants **the things which must happen soon**, which He sent and made known by His angel to His servant, John." (Revelation 1:1,3)*

*"Nevertheless, hold that which you have firmly **until I come.**" (Revelation 2:25)*

*'Because you kept My command to endure, I also will keep you from the hour of testing which is to come on the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. **I am coming quickly!** Hold firmly that which you have, so that no one takes your crown." (Revelation (3:10-11)*

*"Even so you also, when you see all these things, know that **He is near, even at the doors.**" (Matthew 24:33)*

MESSAGE FROM THE KING

Revelation was given to the apostle John as a vision for the Church. It portrayed future events using metaphor and symbolism, accompanied by stunning imagery. While in the Spirit John heard a loud voice, like a trumpet, telling him to write what he saw. He saw a vision of Jesus, the **Alpha and Omega** (Greek for the beginning and the end) standing in the midst of 7 golden lamp stands, indicating that he was seeing into the Holy of Holies of the heavenly Tabernacle. Jesus was dressed in a long robe with a golden sash around His chest. His hair was white as snow, His eyes were like flames of fire, His feet were like burnished bronze,

and His voice was like the roar of a waterfall. His face shone like the sun in full strength and in His right hand He held 7 stars. John was so overcome that he fell to the ground at His feet, as though dead, but the Lord touched him and told him not to fear. John also saw Jesus with a sharp, two-edged sword proceeding out of His mouth. (Hebrews 4:12 states, *"For God's word is alive and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, so penetrating it separates life and breath, bone joints and their marrow, judging the thoughts and intentions of the mind."*)



The Bible says that Jesus is of the high priestly order of Melchizedek who was a king of Salem and a priest of God in the Old Testament. This picture of Jesus is remarkably similar to the vision Daniel saw of the Ancient of Days seated on a throne of fire and One like a Son of Man approaching Him who *"was given an eternal dominion to rule all peoples ... a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold around His waist. His body was like beryl, His face like the appearance of lightning, His eyes like flaming torches, His arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of His words like the sound of a multitude."*(Daniel 7:9,14) The images are remarkably similar.

The Lord's admonitions in Revelation indicate that His Bride, the Church, was in need of encouragement. Jesus told His followers that they were called to be over-comers in the strength of His might. This was essential

if they were to rule and reign with Him in His Kingdom. He had given them powerful spiritual gifts - salvation, faith, righteousness, His Word, and the gospel - and they were to use this weaponry, as the kings and priests they were, to defeat the principalities and powers in the spiritual realm and thereby extend God's kingdom over all the earth. The revelation Jesus was giving to the Church would tear aside the veil concealing the forces lying behind the physical realm, and reveal the momentous events that were to come - events that would bring persecutions, tribulations, and trials that would tax faith and courage.



Jesus wanted His beloved ones to be prepared. The things that were to transpire on the earth would be shattering and mind-blowing. Great faith in God's sovereign power, His protective love, and His perfect plan would be required to resist giving in to fear. So momentous were the coming cataclysmic events that many peoples of the earth would despair in

abject terror. But not so with God's people. They would be aware that their Messiah was watching over them and turning every evil to their good. They were to always remember that Jesus had already defeated Satan (also called the Dragon, Apollyon, Abaddon). The Devil had been vanquished by the blood of the Lamb at the cross. Jesus had prophesied: *"Now judgement is upon this world. Now the ruler of this world will be thrown out."* (John 12:31) He had also announced: *"If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom has come upon you."* (Matthew 12:28)

Having stripped the principalities and the powers, Christ openly made a triumphant display of them. (Colossians 2:15)

Yet though the Dragon had been defeated, humiliated, and thrown down to earth, he was still the enemy. He was on a mad rampage to do all he could to ruin the people of God. The saints of the Old Testament and those from the early Church who had died would accompany Jesus when He returned in judgement (in 70 AD) These would be beyond Satan's reach because they would already be with God. However the saints living on the earth would have to contend with him.

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Revelation 12:9)

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. (Revelation 12:10)

In which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 2:2)

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1Peter 5:8)

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (Ephesians 6:11)

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. (Luke 10:19)

The gospel of Jesus Christ has been spreading throughout the world and there have been many positive results as a consequence. In many places wickedness has been restrained and limited, even though it is not eradicated. The world has been evangelized. However the Bible says an end of all things is coming. Revelation reveals that fire (judgement) will come down from heaven and it will devour the wicked, along with the devil who deceived them. This could be a symbolic reference to some type of cataclysm. Irregardless of the nature of this judgement, it is God who brings it about because of the menace closing in on His people. God did this once before when He sent a flood to annihilate the wicked on the earth. Throughout history God has shown Himself to be protective of those He loves. When the final end comes, the Bible says Satan will be singled out and thrown into the lake of burning sulphur as judgement for his wickedness. The demons will also end up there. And wicked humanity will meet the same fate.

JUDGEMENT

John saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened detailing everything each one had done in his life. Another book was opened, which was the Book of Life. Ultimately it was

this last Book that decided their eternal destiny. If their names were not found in the Book of Life (which contained the names of all who had put their faith in Jesus for salvation) they would be accountable for every sin committed and would be condemned to eternal damnation. The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades also gave up the dead who were in them, and then they were thrown together into the lake of fire. This is the second death, and if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the Lake of Fire.



The saints do not appear at this tribunal of condemnation. They receive resurrected life upon salvation and go to be with Jesus upon the death of their bodies. They are not condemned of any sin.



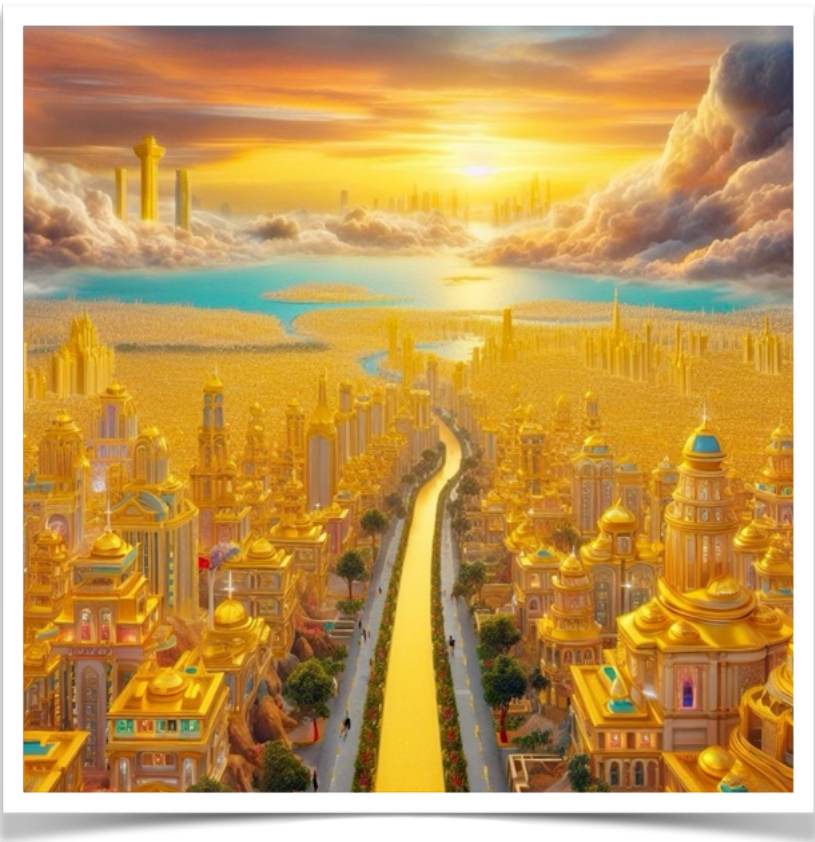
The New Jerusalem



Alongside the warning of judgement, the Lord held out a wonderful invitation to all. Jesus had once told His disciples a parable about a wedding feast given by a king. He had sent out invitations to friends to come to a wedding feast for his son, but they all made excuses not to come. The angry king then told his servants to go into the streets and invite anyone they saw, good or bad, and soon the wedding hall was filled. Then the king saw a man at the feast who was not wearing wedding clothes and he asked him why he was not properly attired. (All the guests had donned special outfits provided for them). The man was speechless and he was expelled from the feast. (Matthew 22:1-22).

The parable foretells the judgement that would come on those who reject Christ. The wedding clothes represent the righteousness of those who *"...have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."*(Revelation 7:14).

He also told His despondent disciples: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”* (John 14:1-3)



The New Jerusalem is an incredibly beautiful place. The apostle John saw it in a vision from Jesus and described it this way:

"The foundations of the city's wall were adorned with all kinds of precious stones - jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth; and amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls. Each one of the gates was made of one pearl.

The street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple. The city has no need for the sun or moon to shine, for the very glory of God illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk in its light. The kings of the earth bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. Its gates will in no way be shut by day (for there will be no night there), and they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it so that they may enter. There will in no way enter into it anything profane, or one who causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Revelation 21: 19-27)

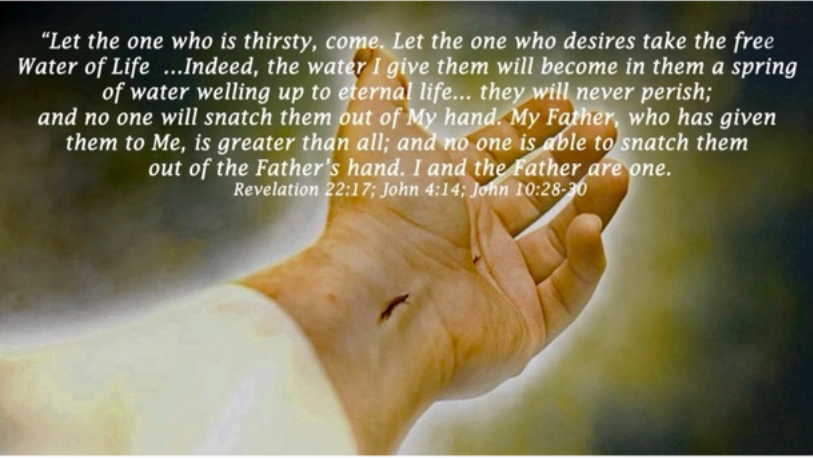
The New Jerusalem is comprised of believers in Christ **only**.

"You also, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1Peter 2:4-5)

"So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19-22).

"He showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruits, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will be no curse any more. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. There will be no night, and they need no lamp light or sun light; for the Lord God will illuminate them. They will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 22:1-5)

The living waters are not literal water, but rather a symbol of Life of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples: *"Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."*(John 7:38)



"Let the one who is thirsty, come. Let the one who desires take the free Water of Life ...Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life... they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

Revelation 22:17; John 4:14; John 10:28-30

We may not know exactly what our eternal home will look like, but we can be certain that it will be a wonderful place of great beauty and peace. God's loved ones will see Him face to face and enjoy His close Presence forever. We will never suffer pain or privation of any kind. Past sorrows will be dissolved by the Lord's sweet comfort, and we will see our loved ones again. Sin will not exist there, so we will be safe from harm, violence, or anything that might hurt us. Jesus left His glorious home in heaven in order to rescue us, even though it entailed suffering abuses of every kind at human hands, finally culminating in brutal torture and death on a cross. Wouldn't someone who went to such great lengths to make us His own, not also give us every blessing for our good? *"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"* (Romans 8:32)

The final words of Jesus in Revelation are: *"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony ... I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star. ...Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Come! ... Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes, take the free gift of the water of life.... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*



Messiah had completed the mission which had been planned within the Godhead before the beginning of time. God had always wanted a family of beloved children who would love Him and reflect His righteous character. He had created a new genus - a new creation - that would live with Him forever in heaven. He had battled Satan, Nephilim, demons, and every kind of wickedness in high places on their behalf, and through it all, He had come out the Victor. He told His disciples; "I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." That victory is available for all who desire it..... for all who come to the Messiah.

The War of the Seed has been won.