



Study Guide

From the Producers of The HOPE
© 2007 Mars Hill Productions

ISBN# 1-892-271-68-0

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,
1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation
Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Event 1	The Universal Question and the Need for a Reference Point	
Lesson 1	The Universal Question <i>Is there a purpose...for the world and for me?</i>	9
Lesson 2	The Need for a Reference Point <i>What is a reference point and why do we need one?</i>	11
Event 2	The Voice – Recorded for All Time in a Book Called the Bible	
Lesson 3	The Uniqueness of The Bible – Part 1..... <i>The most unique and the most published book in history.</i>	13
Lesson 4	The Uniqueness of The Bible – Part 2 <i>It takes faith to believe the Bible is not a work of God.</i>	17
Lesson 5	The Greatest Story Ever Told <i>The Grand Story that explains every other story.</i>	19

CHAPTER 1 – IN THE BEGINNING

Event 3	The Story Begins with God – His Attributes	
Lesson 6	The Attributes of God..... <i>What the Bible says about God.</i>	21
Event 4	Creation – A Reflection of God’s Power and Nature	
Lesson 7	Creation – Part 1 <i>The Watchmaker Theory – evidence of a Designer.</i>	25
Lesson 8	Creation – Part 2 <i>A scientific case for creation.</i>	27
Lesson 9	Creation of Adam & Eve – Part 1 <i>What makes a human different from all of creation?</i>	29
Lesson 10	Creation of Adam & Eve – Part 2 <i>Our purpose – to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.</i>	31

CHAPTER 2 – THE CHOICE

Event 5	The Tree of Life and The Tree of Knowledge	
Lesson 11	Two Trees – Two Ways..... <i>Two approaches to God – works and grace.</i>	33
Lesson 12	Willing to Be Made Willing <i>Man’s role and God’s role.</i>	35
Lesson 13	Created to Love God and Be Loved by God <i>Where does your picture of God come from?</i>	37
Event 6	The Rebellion of Satan and The Creation of Hell	
Lesson 14	Our Discontented Adversary <i>Satan was not content to fulfill God’s purpose. Are you?</i>	39
Lesson 15	The Certain End of the Great War <i>God will one day vanquish Satan, sin, and death forever!</i>	41

CHAPTER 3 – THE DEADLY DISEASE

Event 7 The Deception and Fall of Man

- Lesson 16 The Beautiful Side of Evil 43
A primary strategy of Satan: the perversion of good.

Event 8 A Deadly Spiritual Disease Enters the World

- Lesson 17 A Deadly Line of Thought 45
The first question is not “Is He good?,” but rather “Is He God?”
- Lesson 18 Sin – What Exactly Is It? 47
The deadly spiritual disease that infected all humankind.
- Lesson 19 Shame and Blame – The Fruit of Sin 49
The victim mentality – a vicious cycle.

Event 9 The First Promise of a Deliverer

- Lesson 20 Before There Is a Problem, God Has the Solution 51
God’s first promise of a Deliverer.

CHAPTER 4 – PRELUDE TO THE PROMISE

Event 10 God Was Grieved – The Great Flood

- Lesson 21 How Quickly Sin Spreads 53
The need for a solution that outdistances the problem.
- Lesson 22 And God Was “Willing” to Be Grieved 55
His willingness to be grieved shows how much He loves you.
- Lesson 23 Safe Even Through Judgment 57
God’s means of salvation is the only means of salvation.

Event 11 The Beginning of the Nations – The Tower of Babel

- Lesson 24 Be Fruitful and Multiply or Not 59
God’s way to blessing is the only way to blessing.
- Lesson 25 The Beginning of the Nations 61
God works all things according to His grand plan.

CHAPTER 5 – BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

Event 12 The Calling of Abraham

- Lesson 26 Abraham – A Man Who Walked by Faith 63
Step by step, God initiated – Abraham responded.
- Lesson 27 Who Does God Consider Righteous? 65
It’s not about trying to be good, but trusting God.
- Lesson 28 Beware of Pursuing God’s Will without God 67
The world still bears the burden of their good intentions.
- Lesson 29 No Throw-Away People 69
With God, everyone has value.

Event 13 Abraham Offers His Son – God Provides a Substitute

- Lesson 30 God Will Provide 71
God provides all we need for what He calls us to do.

CHAPTER 6 – PEOPLE OF THE PROMISE

Event 14 Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph – The Promise Lives

- Lesson 31 Abraham – Knowing the End before the Beginning 73
He walked out what God had already shown him.
- Lesson 32 Joseph – Submitted to His Purpose 75
A living example of Romans 8:28.

Event 15	God Prepares Moses to Lead the Hebrew People	
	Lesson 33 Moses – Never Too Late for God	77
	<i>When he thought he was finished, he was finally ready.</i>	
	Lesson 34 The Passover – Images of the Promised Deliverer.....	79
	<i>A picture of the promised Deliverer.</i>	
Event 16	God Brings the Hebrew People Out of Slavery	
	Lesson 35 The Greater the Obstacle, The Greater His Glory	81
	<i>A life that glorifies God has God-sized challenges.</i>	

CHAPTER 7 – CALLED TO WALK IN THE WAYS OF GOD

Event 17	God Gives the Hebrew People the Law	
	Lesson 36 The Law – A Sacred Trust, A Holy Calling	83
	<i>The Law – A Reflection of God’s Holy character.</i>	
	Lesson 37 A Covering for Sin	85
	<i>The sacrifices covered sin, but did not take it away.</i>	
	Lesson 38 The Law – God’s Mirror	87
	<i>A mirror can reveal a dirty face, but can’t clean the face.</i>	
	Lesson 39 From Blessing to Bondage	89
	<i>Where are you in the cycle?</i>	
Event 18	The Need for a Deliverer	
	Lesson 40 The Source of Unshakable Hope	91
	<i>Knowing Him through His Story.</i>	

CHAPTER 8 – THE PROMISED ONE

Event 19	The Birth of the Promised Deliverer	
	Lesson 41 God of the Unexpected	93
	<i>The birth of Jesus.</i>	
	Lesson 42 How Could Jesus Be Born Without Sin?	95
	<i>How sin is transmitted.</i>	
Event 20	Jesus as a Child	
	Lesson 43 Jesus as a Child – Fully Human and Fully God.....	97
	<i>The Father was pleased because of “Whose” He was.</i>	
Event 21	The Baptism of Jesus	
	Lesson 44 The Baptism of Jesus	101
	<i>Jesus declares His intention to die in our place.</i>	
Event 22	The Temptation of Jesus	
	Lesson 45 The Temptation of Jesus	103
	<i>The difference between a test and a temptation.</i>	

CHAPTER 9 – THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

Event 23	Jesus Calls His Disciples	
	Lesson 46 Called to Follow Jesus	105
	<i>God values availability over ability.</i>	
Event 24	The Ministry of Jesus	
	Lesson 47 The Ministry of Jesus – Teaching and Miracles	107
	<i>Jesus proves Himself.</i>	
	Lesson 48 Seeking the Blessing, but not the Blessor	109
	<i>Even today people seek the blessing over the Blessor.</i>	
	Lesson 49 The Greatest Miracle of All	111
	<i>Forgiveness of sin – the miracle of all miracles.</i>	
Event 25	Jesus Offends the Religious Leaders	
	Lesson 50 Liar, Lunatic, Lord – “Who Do You Say that I Am?”	113
	<i>Why Jesus left us no other choice.</i>	

CHAPTER 10 – GOD’S LOVE AND JUSTICE INTERSECT

Event 26	Jesus States His Mission	
Event 27	Jesus Confronts the Religious Leaders	
	Lesson 51 The Good Thing or The God Thing?	115
	<i>Everybody had an agenda for Jesus – do you?</i>	
Event 28	Jesus’ Final Hours With His Disciples	
	Lesson 52 The Lamb of God Celebrates Passover	117
	<i>He wrote the story and then submitted Himself to it.</i>	
Event 29	The “Trial” of Jesus	
	Lesson 53 What Is Truth?	119
	<i>Don’t be sidetracked. The truth is a person ...Jesus.</i>	
Event 30	The Crucifixion of Jesus	
	Lesson 54 God’s Love and Justice Intersect.....	121
	<i>At the cross His justice was satisfied and His love fulfilled.</i>	
	Lesson 55 The Wrath of God Poured Out on Jesus for You	123
	<i>The incredible meaning of propitiation.</i>	

CHAPTER 11 – HE HAS RISEN!

Event 31	The Burial of Jesus	
	Lesson 56 The Resurrection – Fact or Fiction?	127
	<i>Proof of the resurrection.</i>	
Event 32	The Resurrection of Jesus	
	Lesson 57 The Significance of the Resurrection – Part 1	129
	<i>What if Jesus did not rise from the dead?</i>	
	Lesson 58 The Significance of the Resurrection – Part 2	131
	<i>Men made new – the death of the old man.</i>	
	Lesson 59 Inspired by the Resurrection	135
	<i>Because of the resurrection, all things are possible.</i>	
Event 33	Post-Resurrection Appearances	
	Lesson 60 Final Words	137
	<i>Before departing, Jesus explains the divine plan.</i>	

CHAPTER 12 – HIS FOLLOWERS – YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND FOREVER

Event 34	The Coming of The Spirit	
	Lesson 61 The Coming of the Spirit	139
	<i>The Holy Spirit and the mystery of the Trinity.</i>	
	Lesson 62 The Mystery of the Church	143
	<i>The Body of Christ.</i>	
Event 35	His Followers Through the Ages	
	Lesson 63 The Church – A Work in Progress	145
	<i>Don’t reject Jesus based upon the witness of the Church.</i>	
	Lesson 64 The Final Goal of the Grand Story	147
	<i>Worshippers from every nation.</i>	
	Lesson 65 Your Part in the Grand Story	151
	<i>A challenge to complete the Great Commission.</i>	

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Knowing God – How to begin a personal relationship with God	155
Growing in God – The basics of growing in your relationship with God	159
The Miracles of Jesus – A listing of the recorded miracles of Jesus	163
The Model Prayer – The teaching of Jesus on prayer.....	165

Ask & Reflect

- Some people hear only what they want (or need) to hear...and some do not want to hear anything at all. Consider a few of the things that might keep someone from listening, and really hearing from God:

Pride – the need to be in control

Lifestyle – behavior we intuitively know is unacceptable to God, but do not want to change

Woundedness – painful experiences from our past that keep us from trusting others

- What else might keep a person from listening to, and really hearing, the truth of God?
- How would you answer the question, “What is the purpose of life?” Or more specifically, “What is the purpose of *your* life?”

Decide & Do

Another Bible verse reads: “*And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart*” (Jeremiah 29:13).

Regardless of where you are in your journey with God, this verse is for you. You may be asking questions about the existence of God, or you may already consider yourself a believer, but you want to know God more intimately. He promises to be found when we search wholeheartedly for Him.

As you begin this study, be prepared to let God show you who He is, and to discover new things about God and yourself. Determine that you will “*search for Him with your whole heart,*” and write a purpose statement to that effect:

As I begin this study of The HOPE, I will...

¹ Dr. Hugh Moorhead, *The Meaning of Life* (Chicago Review Press, December 1988). Dr. Moorhead, a philosophy professor at Northeastern Illinois University, once wrote to 250 of the best-known philosophers, scientists, writers, and intellectuals in the world, asking them, “What is the meaning of life?” Their responses are published in this book.

But what if someone lifted your blind-fold and you could see clearly the goal at the other end of the field? That goal would serve as a reference point by which you could set your course. You could walk in a straight line and not be misled by the voices all around you. Many have set the course of their life toward a goal without ever reaching it; or after reaching it, have discovered that it was not what they thought. Like the traveler in a strange land, in the journey of life we need a reference point that has been tested and proven trustworthy by many others, one that will not disappoint.

- In your life, do you have a trustworthy reference point for your soul? One by which you can set the course of your life, and correct your direction if necessary?
- If so, what is that reference point?
- What are the main influences (voices) that have shaped your views about God, i.e. voices from childhood, family, teachers or educators, friends, role models or heroes?

Decide & Do

In the Bible we find a verse in the book of Proverbs that says, *“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”* (Proverbs 14:12).

Take an inventory this week of the voices in life that have beckoned you their way. Were they reliable, trustworthy, and safe to follow? If not, why did you follow? Take time to process where your views about God have been shaped and by whom.

Today’s lesson on our need for a reference point was not just an abstract exercise. It is very true that your perception determines your path, and your path determines your destiny. Take care in choosing the way you will go. Your choice will have significant, eternal consequences.

There is another verse that says that God’s Word (the Bible) is *“a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path”* (Psalm 119:105). The remaining lessons for this week will offer reasons to make the Bible your reference point as you journey through life. Decide not to rush through these sections. Set aside the time you need to consider carefully what you will read. You’ll be glad you did.

¹Robert Schleip, *The Dominant Leg* (<http://www.somatics.de/DominantLeg.htm>). Retrieved October 2, 2006. Robert Schleip summarizes an article by Simone Kosog from the science section of the ‘Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin’ 1999.

The Uniqueness of the Bible – Part 1

Introduction Lesson 3



Observe & Consider

The Bible is the most quoted, most translated, most published book in human history, completely unique in its creation, content, and accuracy.¹ And while the uniqueness of the Bible does not irrefutably prove that it is the revelation of God, when one truly considers the nature of this book, it takes more faith to believe that it was simply written and compiled by humans than to believe that it is a work of God. Let's think about this.

The Bible is unique in its diversity and harmony.

Written over a span of 40 generations and about 1,600 years, by more than 40 authors from varying walks of life, on three continents (Asia, Africa and Europe) and in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), the Bible is unlike any other book in the world. It includes history, poetry, prophecy, law, parables and preaching, and covers a broad range of subject matter (including hundreds of controversial topics) from the nature of God to the origin of man.²

Considering this diversity, one might expect at least some conflict or inconsistency in the content and themes presented in the Bible, and yet...

- The Bible centers around one complete epic story featuring one extraordinary character.
- The Bible addresses numerous topics and themes throughout the text with incredible harmony and resolution. (For instance, the paradise lost of the first book of the Bible becomes the paradise regained of the last book of the Bible. The access to the Tree of Life, which was closed in the first book of the Bible, is opened forevermore in the last book of the Bible.)

Like the instruments in a symphony, each writer of the Bible is quite different from the others. When you hear an orchestra playing with flawless harmony, you naturally assume that it is being directed by an accomplished conductor. Why should we think any differently in regard to the Bible, which is far more complex in content and scope than any symphonic score?

The Bible is unique in its textual reliability.

Because original manuscripts rarely (if ever) exist for the world's most important ancient literary works, the question must be asked of any ancient book, "Do the earliest copies in existence accurately convey the content of the original document?" Scholars consider several factors when determining what is known as textual reliability. These include:

- The method by which copies were made
- The time between the earliest known copy and the original manuscript
- The number of early copies in existence
- The comparative consistency of the earliest copies

Measured by these standards, there is no other book in the world that even comes close to the textual reliability of the New Testament of the Bible.³ Note in Table 1 at the end of this lesson.⁴ that those who made the earliest copies of the New Testament were either contemporaries of, or only a few generations removed from, the original writers. Notice also the number of copies that were made within that period of time. The difference between the New Testament of the Bible and other ancient works is astounding.

Unlike the New Testament, there is no abundance of early copies of the Old Testament of the Bible. So, when one considers the textual reliability of the Old Testament, it is important to understand the method by which these ancient manuscripts were copied.

The copying process⁵ itself was reserved for a special group of people in Jewish culture known as scribes. Scribes were professional penmen who copied manuscripts using a strict systematic process to achieve the highest accuracy possible. For example:

- The scribes were not allowed to copy sentence-for-sentence or even word-for-word. They copied letter-for-letter.
- A scribe had to copy the original page so that the exact number of words on the page remained unchanged. If an original page had 296 words, then the page being copied must contain the same 296 words.
- Each line on a new page had to be the exact length as the line on the old page. If the first line on the original page had nine words, the first line on the copy page had to have nine words.
- After each page was copied and checked by another, still a third person would check to verify that the middle letter on the copied page was the same as the middle letter on the original.
- If a single mistake was made, the copy was destroyed.

These steps ensured that copies of Old Testament manuscripts accurately conveyed the content of their originals. As is the case with the New Testament, no other ancient manuscript in the world surpasses the textual reliability of the Old Testament.

Ask & Reflect

- Does the information you have studied today change the way you view the Bible?
- If so, how? If not, why not?
- What would it take for you to look at the Bible in a different way, or perhaps to see something you've not yet seen? (This question is for those who are already familiar with the Bible as well as those who are not.)

Decide & Do

Today's lesson was a little longer than most of the lessons in this study. If you didn't feel that you were able to digest all of the information here, set aside some time to come back to it.

For Further Study

- Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Thomas Nelson, HERE'S LIFE PUBLISHERS, San Bernardino, Ca, 1972.

Table 1 – Uniqueness of the Bible

Author	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	No. of copies
Caesar (Gallic Wars)	100–44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,000 yrs.	10
Plato (Tetralogies)	427–347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,200 yrs.	7
Tacitus (Annals)	100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1,000 yrs.	20
Pliny the Younger (History)	61–113 A.D.	850 A.D.	750 yrs.	7
Thucydides (History)	460–400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,300 yrs.	8
Suetonius (De Vita Caesarum)	75–160 A.D.	950 A.D.	800 yrs.	8
Herodotus (History)	480–425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,390 yrs.	8
Sophocles	496–406 B.C.	1000 A.D.	1,400 yrs.	193
Catullus	54 B.C.	1550 A.D.	1,600 yrs.	3
Euripides	480–406 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1,500 yrs.	9
Demosthenes	383–322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1,300 yrs.	200
Aristotle	384–322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1,400 yrs.	49
Aristophanes	450–385 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,200 yrs.	10
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs.	643
New Testament	40–100 A.D.	125 A.D.	25 yrs.	over 24,000 (5,300 ancient Greek; 10,000 Latin Vulgate; over 9,300 other)

¹*All-Time Best Selling Books and Authors*. (Internet Public Library, © 1995–2006 The Regents of the University of Michigan). (<http://www.ipl.org/div/farq/bestsellerFARQ.html>). Retrieved November 13, 2006.

²Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict, Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*, Revised Edition.

(© Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972, 1979. Published by Here's Life Publishers, San Bernardino, CA, 1972, Chapter 1, pp. 15–24).

³Ibid, pp.39–65.

⁴Ibid, pp. 42.

⁵Ibid, pp.53–56.

The Uniqueness of the Bible – Part 2

Introduction Lesson 4



Observe & Consider

In Lesson 3, we considered the Bible's diversity and harmony and its textual reliability – two attributes that make it unique among all the books in the world. Today we will consider two more things that truly separate the Bible from any other book and give it credibility as the most reliable reference point that one could have in the journey of life.

The Bible is unique in its historical accuracy.

Historical accuracy is yet another factor to consider in determining the reliability of an ancient text. In other words, "Do archeological findings substantiate what is recorded in the text?" In the case of the Bible, the answer is clear.

- "...it may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries."

– Dr. Nelson Glueck

(*Rivers in the Desert*, p. 31)

- "...archaeology has confirmed countless passages which have been rejected by critics as unhistorical or contradictory to known facts...yet archaeological discoveries have shown that these critical charges...are wrong and that the Bible is trustworthy in the very statements which have been set aside as untrustworthy...we do not know of any cases where the Bible has been proved wrong."

– Dr. Joseph P. Free (*Archaeology and Bible History*, pp. 1, 2, 134)

The Bible is unique in its prophetic record.

Before considering the Bible's prophetic record, it is important to understand what distinguishes the prophets of the Bible from other so-called prophets. According to the book of Deuteronomy in the Bible, the test of a true prophet of God was 100% accuracy. If one who called himself a prophet did not pass this test, the penalty was death.¹ Now that is motivation to represent God accurately!

It is amazing to discover that there are more than 1,800 prophecies in the Bible.² Many of these prophecies were fulfilled in the lifetime of the prophet who gave them. Still more have been fulfilled since the writing of the Bible. Many prophecies are yet to be fulfilled. To this day, no Biblical prophecy has ever been proven false!

In the Old Testament of the Bible more than 300 prophecies exist which were specifically fulfilled by Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New Testament.³ In his book *Science Speaks*, mathematician Peter Stoner calculated the mathematical probability of one person fulfilling only 8 these 300-plus prophecies. The result was 1 in 10 to the 17th power, or 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.⁴

Stoner illustrates this number by supposing that "we take 1017 silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say "This is it." What chance would he have of getting the right one? The same chance the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man."⁵

When Stoner calculated the probability that any one man might fulfill 48 prophecies, the result was 1 in 10¹⁵⁷. That's 10 with 156 zeros after it!⁶ Just imagine the improbability of one man fulfilling the 300-plus prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus. There wouldn't be enough pages in this study guide to contain all the zeros in the probability factor. In reality, without divine involvement, it would be an impossibility for one man to fulfill all of these prophecies on the basis of chance.

Ask & Reflect

- The statement was made previously that when one truly considers the nature of the Bible, it takes more faith to believe that it was simply written and compiled by humans than it does to believe that it is the work of God.

Do you agree with this statement? If not, why? If not, how do you explain the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible?

- In Lesson 1 we dealt with the question of life's purpose. In Lesson 2 we dealt with our need for a reference point to find our way in the journey of life. In Lessons 3 and 4, we've considered several reasons why the Bible is a trustworthy reference point for life unlike any other.

If your reference point for life is something other than the Bible, how does it compare with the Bible?

Decide & Do

Recall from Lesson 2 the statement that your perception determines your path, and your path determines your destiny. What you choose to trust in as your reference point in life is critical.

Psalm 119:105 says that God's Word is "*a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.*" If you still have unanswered questions about whether or not you can trust the Bible as your reference point in life (the lamp to light your path and guide your way), then decide today to do whatever is necessary to resolve the questions you are dealing with. Make a list of your questions, and then seek the counsel of a pastor or Bible teacher to explore them further.

For Further Study

- Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*, Revised Edition. (© Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc. HERE'S LIFE PUBLISHERS, INC, San Bernardino, Ca, 1972).
- Ron Ritchie, *The Messianic Prophecies* (Discovery Publishing Company, Palo Alto, CA, 1993). (<http://www.pbc.org/library/series/8205>). Retrieved October 5, 2006.

¹ Deut. 18:20.

² J. Barton Payne's *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (© New York: Harper & Row, 1973) lists 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 prophecies in the New Testament, for a total of 1,817. These encompass 8,352 verses.

³ Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*, Revised Edition. (© Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc. HERE'S LIFE PUBLISHERS, INC, San Bernardino, Ca, 1972, p. 144.

⁴ Peter Stoner in *Science Speaks* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963). [This title is currently out of print. (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0802476309/abundanlifeher0c>)]. Referenced in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell, 1979 edition, pages 166,167.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

The Greatest Story Ever Told

Introduction Lesson 5



Observe & Consider

At heart, we are storytellers. Most of us have been in situations where a story is told, and then someone else responds by telling a related story of their own, which evokes a similar response from yet another person. And on it goes. We are all drawn to the power of a great story, and even more, we desire to identify with and enter into a story greater than our own.

In fact, some sociologists say that the essential quest of humankind can be understood as a search for “metanarrative” or “metanarra.”¹ This term refers to a grand story or archetypal account or ideology in which other stories find their meanings. Regardless of culture or rank or station or occupation, man quite naturally searches for some story in which all other stories find their meaning...a story in which we ourselves find our meaning.

Throughout time, people have derived meaning and purpose from stories handed down to them through culture or religion. But in the late 19th century a worldview called modernism² emerged, claiming that those kinds of traditional “metanarra” are no longer relevant to our modern world. Modernism sought to replace the “old” religious values and stories with the arguments of reason or the findings of science. These, the modernists said, would define for us the meaning and purpose of our lives, thus creating the new “metanarra.”

Modernism, however, has failed to deliver a grand story from science or reason, and we now live in a world that is often called “post-modern,”³ a world which denies the existence of any grand story at all!

Still, even in our post-modern world, people are drawn to stories that give meaning to life. Having bought the post-modern lie that there is no grand story, many people settle, instead, for lesser stories. These lesser, personalized stories bear titles like,

“The World According to Me,” or “What I Need to Live Happily Ever After.” They center on an individual’s family or career, and how these areas of life should be lived out. In our world, there are as many smaller stories as there are different kinds of people. This endless fragmentation contributes to what we call “relativism,”⁴ the idea that truth is simply whatever is true for you.

Many people view the Bible simply as 66 separate books containing wise writings and good stories (loosely connected at best), which may or may not reveal something about God and His involvement in the affairs of man. But the Bible is so much more. It is in fact The Grand Story by which every other story is defined. It is not only the story in which humankind finds its meaning and purpose; it is the story in which you and I can find our meaning and purpose.

Ask & Reflect

Think about your story – the story you envision for yourself.

- Who is the main character? What happens? What is the point of the story?
- Whether we are aware of it or not, we all have a story that we inhabit. It is why we get up every day and do what we do. Perhaps you envision a long story that plays out through the rest of your life. Perhaps you can only envision a story for this day.
- What is the story you envision for yourself in order to be fulfilled in life? Is your story part of a greater story?
- How would you describe the greater story? How much control do you have over the outcome of your story?

Decide & Do

Suppose two people viewed a beautiful sculpture in an art museum, and they each studied the sculpture from a different angle. If they were to describe what they saw, their accounts would naturally be different, even though they were looking at the same sculpture.

Over the past few days, we have looked at the Bible from many different angles. We've seen it as a book unlike any other in terms of its composition and public impact. We've seen it as a book that can, without a doubt, be trusted as our reference point in life. And we've considered the Bible as The Grand Story in which you and I can find our meaning and purpose.

There is yet one more angle from which to view the Bible.

The Bible book of 2 Timothy says that the entire Bible is "inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). The word "inspired" is translated from the Greek word "theopneustos"⁵ in the earliest manuscripts. This word literally means "God-breathed." According to this verse, the Bible is not just a book about God; it is the very word of God. It claims to be God Himself speaking ...to you and me.

In light of this claim and all that we have considered about the Bible so far, ask yourself, "What if God were to appear and speak to me tonight? Why would He even take the time to do that? How would I respond? What would I be inspired to do or be?"

God is speaking to you, through the Bible. How will you respond?

For Further Study

- Art Lindsley, *C. S. Lewis on Postmodernism*. This article originally appeared in the Spring 2002 issue of *Knowing & Doing*, © The C. S. Lewis Institute, 2002. (<http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/pages/resources/publications/knowingDoing/2002/LewisPostmodernism.pdf>). Retrieved on November 14, 2006.
- Stan Wallace, *The Real Issue: Discerning and Defining the Essentials of Postmodernism*. (© Leadership U, 1995–2006). (<http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri9802/wallace.html>). Retrieved November 14, 2006. This article addresses the essential properties of the postmodern way of thinking.
- Bob Hostetler, *Who Changed the Cultural Channel?* (© The Navigators, Discipleship Journal, 2006). (<http://www.navpress.com/EPubs/DisplayArticle/1/1.129.3.html>). Retrieved November 14, 2006.
- Donald Macloud, *The Inspiration of Scripture*. (http://www.ouruf.org/d/cvt_inspiration.pdf). Retrieved from the Reformed University Fellowship website on November 14, 2006.

¹Wikipedia®, *Metanarrative*. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metanarrative>). Retrieved November 14, 2006.

²Todd Kappelman, *The Breakdown of Religious Knowledge*. (© Probe Ministries, 1996–2006). (<http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/breakdown.html>). Retrieved November 14, 2006. "What constitutes truth? The way we answer that question has greatly changed since the Middle Ages. This essay provides an overview of three areas in philosophical thought, with their impact on Western culture: premodernism (the belief that truth corresponds to reality), modernism (the belief that human reason is the only way to obtain truth), and postmodernism (the belief that there is no such thing as objective truth)."

³Wikipedia®, *Postmodernism*. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism>). Retrieved November 14, 2006.

⁴Wikipedia®, *Relativism*. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relativism>). Retrieved November 14, 2006.

⁵Strong's Greek Dictionary, *Theopneustos*. (<http://strongnumbers.com/greek/2315.htm>). Retrieved November 14, 2006.

The Attributes of God

Chapter 1 Lesson 6



Before there was anything, before time or space or physical matter, there was God...One who is far beyond our ability to fully comprehend or describe. Through His story, we find that God is Spirit without a beginning or an end. He is complete within Himself, lacking in nothing. He is all knowing and all wise. He is perfect in every way. He is not limited by anything.

– The HOPE, Chapter 1

Observe & Consider

The Bible reveals truth about God in two ways. One way is by demonstration: recording God's action and interaction with the world and humankind. Another way is by declaration: making direct statements or claims about the nature and character of God.

Consider the following Bible verses that support the excerpt from The HOPE quoted above.

- Before There Was Anything, There Was God
“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:16–17)
- God Is Beyond Our Ability to Fully Comprehend
“Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable.” (Psalm 145:3)
“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” (Romans 11:33)
- God Is Spirit
“God is spirit...” (John 4:24)
- God Is Eternal – He Has No Beginning or End
“Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” (Psalm 90:2)
“...And Your years will not come to an end.” (Psalm 102:27)
“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Timothy 1:17)
- God Is Complete within Himself, Lacking in Nothing
“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.” (Acts 17:24–25)
- God Is All Knowing and All Wise
“...His understanding is infinite.” (Psalm 147:5)
“...for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts” (1 Chronicles 28:9)
“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.” (Isaiah 40:28)

- God Is Perfect – He Is Holy

In Matthew 5:48, God is described as “perfect.” This attribute of God is closely related to another attribute of God: He is holy. The makers of The HOPE video chose to use the word perfect rather than holy because it is a term that is more commonly understood. However, by understanding the word holy, we are able to understand just how perfect God is.

The word holy literally means to be set apart, or unlike any other.¹ Not only is God perfect, but in His perfection He is beyond comparison to any other.

“Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness...?”
(Exodus 15:11)

“There is no one holy like the Lord, Indeed, there is no one besides You.” (1 Samuel 2:2)

“...there is none like You, and there is no God besides You.” (2 Samuel 7:22)

“O Lord, there is none like You, neither is there any God besides You” (1 Chronicles 17:20)

“For You alone are holy.” (Revelation 15:4)

- God Is Not Limited by Anything

He Is More Powerful than Anything

“You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You.” (Jeremiah 32:17)

“You can do all things.” (Job 42:2)

“With God all things are possible.”
(Matthew 19:26)

- He Is Not Limited by Time or Space

Sometimes the question is asked, “How, or when, did God begin?” It can be difficult to think of a being that is beyond time and space. But that is who God is. Time and space are created things. God is everywhere at the same time for all time.

“Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him ...Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” (Jeremiah 23:23, 24)

“If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there.”
(Psalm 139:8)

“...With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”
(2 Peter 3:8)

- He Is in Complete Control

“Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth.” (Psalm 135:6)

“...for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”
(Revelation 4:11)

“He does whatever He pleases.” (Psalm 115:3)

“...according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.” (Ephesians 1:11)

“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)

Ask & Reflect

- These Bible verses only scratch the surface as we attempt to understand something about the character of God. Considering His attributes as listed above, what has been confirmed for you about God? What did you discover that was new?
- Driving into a large city, we can usually spot the tallest buildings first. From a distance they appear small, but when we drive past them they are like giants towering over us. This is a matter of perspective. The closer we are to something, the larger it appears. How close are you to God? How big is He to you?

Decide & Do

The Bible book of James says, “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you*” (James 4:8). Drawing near to God is a choice we must make. If this is your desire, how will you determine to do so? (Refer to the “Knowing God” section at the end of the Study Guide.)

For Further Study

- John Piper, *Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord of Hosts*. (© Desiring God Ministries, 2006; from a sermon dated January 1, 1984). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1984/419_Holy_Holy_Holy_Is_the_Lord_of_Hosts/). Retrieved November 15, 2006.

¹Holy. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/holy>). Retrieved November 15, 2006.

Ask & Reflect

- Do you believe that Paley's illustration of the watch and the watchmaker can be applied to the creation and the Creator? Why or why not?
- In light of the Romans 1:20 verse on the previous page, what are some examples in nature that seem to you to reveal God's attributes, power, and nature?

Decide & Do

Many people have said that they feel closest to God in the midst of nature, in the mountains perhaps, or by the seashore. Sadly, this is as much of God as some will ever experience. Others miss seeing God because they begin to worship the creation (the mountains, the ocean, the heavens), rather than the Creator! And although glimpsing God through creation can be awesome, those fleeting experiences pale compared to the joy and satisfaction of knowing God Himself in a personal way.

Determine never to settle for only a reflection of God as one might receive from nature. Don't be satisfied with anything less than an intimate personal knowledge of the Creator Himself. As J. I. Packer says, "A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about him."¹

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1993).

Creation – Part 2

Chapter 1 Lesson 8



*According to His story, God spoke all of creation into existence. By His Word He made everything out of nothing...
According to His story, God created the heavens, the earth, and every living thing in six days.*

– The HOPE, Chapter 1

Observe & Consider

Even among those who believe that the world was created by God, there are different interpretations of the creation account found in the Bible. However, among the predominant Biblical views there is also agreement on many key concepts. After reading the preceding excerpt from The HOPE video, let's consider a few of these concepts.

First, because God is all powerful, not limited by anything, He can create however He chooses, even simply by speaking. This concept is clearly presented in the Bible:

*“Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.”
(Genesis 1:3)*

“...by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed.” (2 Peter 3:5)

Secondly, God made everything that is, out of nothing. Think about that. When we humans create, we must utilize or draw upon things that existed before us. When we “create” we are really “re-creating.” But God, who created from nothing, is creative in the ultimate sense:

“...God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.” (Romans 4:17)

Third, God created the whole world in six days. We find this concept clearly presented in the Bible:

“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them ...” (Exodus 20:11)

While students of the Bible have long debated the meaning of “six days,” the assertion that God made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them clearly contradicts the notion that the world is simply the result of a natural evolutionary process.

Evolutionists disagree. They argue that the world was not created by a designer, but evolved from its simple organic beginnings to the complex system of life we know today. But this idea defies a fundamental law of physics: the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that in a closed system everything tends toward entropy (decay).¹ This technical-sounding declaration basically says that without the intervention of an outside influence or force, everything in the natural world doesn't improve over time – it eventually falls apart!

To make this even clearer, let's revisit Paley's watchmaker illustration from Lesson 7.

Suppose you were walking in a field and you came upon a little pile of watch pieces. Evolution might suggest that one day these random pieces would assemble themselves into a finely-tuned timepiece. Or perhaps they would become a car. The watchmaker metaphor would suggest that without the intervention of a designer those pieces would never just fall together into a working watch. According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, we would expect those watch pieces to eventually rust and crumble into dust!

Simply put, the notion that this world is the result of a natural evolutionary process asks us to believe that over time, simple things somehow developed

into far more complex things. The Second Law of Thermodynamics tells us to expect just the opposite!

What's more, the Bible tells us that God is actually holding the world together now. We find this in Colossians 1:17: "*And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*" Nuclear science has determined that the smallest particles of an atom spin at incomprehensible speeds, but it has yet to find an explanation for what keeps the atom from spinning apart. In Colossians 1:17, the Bible claims that God is the One who holds all things – even the smallest atoms – together.

Ask & Reflect

- Considering the attributes of God we have studied this week, do you find it difficult to believe that God could have created the entire world in the manner described in the Bible? Why? Why not?
- It has been said that our view of the creation account in the Bible will determine our view of the rest of the Bible. How might this be true? If the biblical creation account is not true, then what would that say about God?

Decide & Do

Some people have difficulty accepting the creation account of the Bible. After all, it does seem to defy natural law, and it requires belief in a creative Being whose handiwork can be seen, but whose face cannot. Such belief requires faith, but it does not require blind faith. As we work our way through this study guide and consider and examine the Bible, we will learn that biblical faith is not unreasonable, and it is far from blind.

We have taken a significant amount of time in this study to understand why the Bible is trustworthy. Establishing this gives weight to what the Bible says about the attributes of God. And through what we have learned about the attributes of God, we can better understand how such a God could create the world and everything in it, just as the Bible says He did. This understanding of God's character and nature doesn't eliminate the need for faith, but it does eliminate the need for blind faith.

Many people reject or dismiss the claims of the Bible because they encounter them out of context, without having laid a foundation for faith. The purpose of this study guide is to create a context for understanding the claims of the Bible, to build a foundation for faith, precept upon precept. If you encounter things in this study that are difficult to understand or believe, don't immediately dismiss them. Instead, ask God to strengthen the foundation of your faith, and strive to know Him as He is revealed in His Word.

¹ Wikipedia®, *Second Law of Thermodynamics*. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Law_of_thermodynamics). Retrieved November 15, 2006.

Creation of Adam & Eve – Part 1

Chapter 1 Lesson 9



Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

– Genesis 1: 26–27

And on the sixth day, after God had created everything else, He formed the first man out of the dust of the earth. Then He breathed life into the man and the man became a living being. God called him Adam. And from the very flesh of the man, God created the first woman. Adam called her Eve. And Adam and Eve were different from all of creation, for God created them in His own image.

– The HOPE, Chapter 1

Observe & Consider

Notice from The HOPE excerpt and the Bible verse above that man was created “*in the image of God*.” What does it mean to be made in God’s image? To answer this question people often cite characteristics in humans that are similar to the characteristics they attribute to God. These might include the capacity to be creative, to reason, to make choices, communicate, and experience complex emotions.

Some would argue that certain animals display (to some extent or another) many of these same “God-like” characteristics. They would say (rightly or wrongly) that the primary distinction between humans and animals is not one of essence or nature, but rather one of degree, and that humans are only more highly developed (or evolved) animals. Yet the Bible says that “*God created man in His own image*,” a distinction not given to any other creature.

Genesis 2:7 offers some important insight in this issue:

“Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

Notice from this verse that after forming man’s physical being from the dust of the ground, God “*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being*.” The Hebrew word (nephesh) translated here as “being” may also be translated as “soul.” Soul refers to the nonphysical or nonmaterial part of a person. Some people believe that animals, too, have “souls.” Whether that is the case is not the point here. What’s significant is that – according to the Bible – the way in which man received a soul is entirely unique to man. He received it directly from God Himself!

God spoke the world into existence. He formed the material part of the first man out of dust. But the human soul was not so much created as it was imparted. From the dust of the ground God fashioned Adam’s physical body, but his soul was God-breathed. This divine impartation or infusion is the source of man’s capacity to create, reason, communicate, make choices, and experience complex emotions in the likeness of God.

When God breathed “the breath of life” into man, He transferred something that caused him to be made in the very image of God! This divine breath is what

separates humans from all the rest of creation – and this is what gives incredible value to every man or woman.

Ask & Reflect

A piece of paper money has no value in and of itself. Its value is derived from the fact that it represents something valuable, usually gold or silver that is stored safely in a treasury vault. The paper money is, in a sense, the printed “image” of that gold or silver. Likewise people – all people – have value because they are made in the image of the God whose value is so great that it simply cannot be measured. Many people believe their value and worth are based on things like performance, wealth, fame, looks, etc. But according to the Bible, we are all valuable because we are made in the image of God.

- Is there something other than God that causes you to feel valuable? What would happen to your sense of personal worth if that thing were taken from you?
- Human history is full of examples of man’s inhumanity to man: war crimes, genocide, terrorism, etc. What difference would it make if every person on earth believed that every other person on earth had immeasurable value having been made in the image of God?
- How would a person’s self-image be affected if he really believed that he was made in the image of God?
- What difference does (or should) it make to you to know that you are made in the image of God?

Decide & Do

Read the following words from Psalm 139:13–17.

*“You created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully
made; your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!”*

Although the phrase “self-image” never appears in the Bible, the truer image (or understanding) a person has of God, then the better or truer image they will have of themselves. When we truly understand that God made us (as we read in Psalm 139), and that everything God does is perfect (Deuteronomy 32:4), then we will most certainly have a positive self-image. The starting point for a good self image is a good God-image. Determine to increase your understanding of the One who made you, and in so doing better understand yourself!

Creation of Adam & Eve – Part 2

Chapter 1 Lesson 10



He did not create them to be gods. But as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so Adam and Eve were created to reflect the light of God.

– The HOPE, Chapter 1

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

– Westminster Catechism,
Shorter Version, Written in the 1640's

Observe & Consider

In the previous lesson we considered the truth that man was created in the image of God. In this lesson we will consider God's purpose for creating man. There are many verses in the Bible that, if studied in total, would help us understand God's purpose for creating man. However, there is not just a verse that singularly sums up this subject, at least not in a manner that would satisfy most Bible scholars.

There is, however, a document containing a statement that attempts to sum up what the Bible says about God's purpose for creating man. This document is known as the Westminster Catechism, and the statement to which we are referring appears above. This statement is widely accepted among Bible scholars as accurate, and it provides a point of reference as we consider what The HOPE says about God's purpose for creating man.

Without a doubt, the brightest visible object in our world is the sun. It is so bright that gazing directly at it can cause irreparable damage to our eyes. Yet God's brilliance is immeasurably greater than even that of the sun. In 1 John 1:5 we learn that God is pure, undiluted light. And in Exodus 33:20 we are told that His glory is so great no man can look directly at God and live! So how can people behold the glory of God if He is so intensely brilliant that no man can look directly at Him and live?

Recall that Romans 1:20 teaches we can learn of God from the world He has created. The HOPE excerpt above draws upon this Biblical principle in comparing the relationship of the sun and moon to that of God and man.

The HOPE video says God did not create man and woman to be "gods" themselves, but to reflect the light of God as the moon reflects the light of the sun. When a man truly considers the light that shines from the moon, he must ultimately consider its source, the sun. In this way, the moon draws attention to the brilliance of the sun. When we reflect the light of God in our lives, we cause others to consider His glory. In other words, we glorify Him, which brings us back to the purpose of man as stated in the Westminster Catechism (Matthew 5:16).

To take this line of thought a step further, consider that the moon "does" what the moon "does" not as the result of effort, but because of its unique relationship to the sun. If the moon could manufacture its own light, then it would take glory from the sun. But because the moon is incapable of producing light, the sun really gets all the glory.

Some people try to generate light (glory) for God, but like the moon we are not the source of light. That is why we read in John 15:5, "*apart from Me you can do nothing.*" However, also like the moon, our capacity

to reflect His light is the direct result of our personal relationship with Him. Bringing glory to God is not so much a matter of what we do for Him, but rather what He does as a result of our relationship with Him.

Ask & Reflect

- Do you have the kind of relationship with God that enables you to reflect His light and glorify Him?
- Is your relationship with Him growing more and more intimate, so that you might be more and more effective (and reflective) in showing His glory to the world around you?

Decide & Do

If you were unable to answer the first question positively, go to the Knowing God section of this study guide.

Prayerfully read and consider the steps explained in this section, then follow them without delay. If you are not ready to move forward in your relationship with God, then simply ask Him to make you ready.

One modern day Bible scholar has modified the above statement from the Westminster Catechism to say that the purpose of man is to glorify God by (instead of and) enjoying Him forever.¹ Are you enjoying God today? If not, you should be. Perhaps you need to stop and refocus on what is really important.

For Further Study

- John Piper, *God Created Us for His Glory*. (© Desiring God Ministries, 2006; from a sermon dated July 27, 1980). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1980/238_God_Created_Us_for_His_Glory/). Retrieved November 15, 2006.

¹ John Piper, *Worship: The Feast of Christian Hedonism*. (© Desiring God. From a sermon delivered September 25, 1983). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByTopic/85/406_Worship_The_Feast_of_Christian_Hedonism/). Retrieved November 14, 2006.

Two Trees – Two Ways

Chapter 2 Lesson 11



And out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... And the Lord God commanded the man saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."

– Genesis 2: 9, 16–17

In the middle of the garden, there were two trees. One was the tree of life, the other, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told Adam he could eat from any tree in the garden, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he must not eat, for when he does he will surely die.

– The HOPE, Chapter 2

Observe & Consider

Thus far in God's story, we've witnessed much drama, but no conflict. God created Adam and Eve and placed them in a beautiful garden where they had all they needed. But two trees stood in the midst of the garden. One tree yielded life, the other death; first a spiritual death, and ultimately a physical death.

Bible scholars throughout history have considered the meaning of these two trees. Most agree that the trees represent two entirely different approaches to God.¹ The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is thought to represent man's attempt to reach and please God through human effort – often by acquiring knowledge, or trying to do what is right. The Bible says the end of this approach is death.²

However, the tree of life is, according to theologian John Calvin, a reminder to man that "he lives not by his own power, but by the kindness of God; and that life is not an intrinsic good, but proceeds from God."³ The tree of life represents the life-giving favor which flows from God – favor we do not merit and cannot earn, but can only receive in humility and thanksgiving.

In the previous lesson, we considered that the purpose of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. We concluded that our fulfillment of this purpose is not so much a matter of what we do for Him, but rather what He does as a result of our relationship with Him. If you think that the theme of this lesson is similar to that one, you're right. The contrast between dependence on self and dependence on God is a theme that appears often throughout God's story.

Ask & Reflect

Why do people strive so in life and in their relationship with God? Why do so many choose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil rather than the tree of life? Often it is because they have never heard the good news of God's life giving favor that you are hearing now. Or perhaps they have heard, and are unwilling or unable to receive from God. Even those who truly desire to know and follow God can fall into the trap of eating from the tree of knowledge.

As you consider the two trees from today's lesson, ask yourself, "From which tree have I been eating?"

Decide & Do

Eating from the tree of life begins with a personal relationship with God. If you do not yet have the kind of intimate, personal relationship with God that allows you to confidently trust His goodness toward you in this life and beyond, take time now to visit the Knowing God section of this study. God wants you to know Him, and has made a way for that to happen.

If you already have a personal relationship with God, but you have fallen into the trap of living life in your own strength, then take some time now to identify those things that are keeping you from trusting God, those areas in which you are striving in your own strength. Go to the Growing in God section for additional help.

¹ Watchman Nee, "The Choice That Confronted Adam" from his book *The Normal Christian Life*. Copyright Angus Kinnear 1961, Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne, England. (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/nee/normal.xi.iii.html>). Retrieved October 4, 2006.

² Romans 8:5–13

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.1.2

Willing To Be Made Willing

Chapter 2 Lesson 12



Adam was given the freedom to choose, a freedom central to God's purpose. For man was created to love God and to be loved by God. And love is not truly love without the freedom to choose love. So Adam had a choice, to taste the fruit, or not; a choice with a consequence, life or death.

– The HOPE, Chapter 2

Observe & Consider

From the moment God told Adam not to taste of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam was confronted with a choice. Much has been written on the seemingly great tension between the ideas of God's sovereignty (or control) over this world and man's responsibility (or freedom) to make choices.¹

Some say that God determines the destiny of every person; others say that man is a free moral agent who by his own choices determines his destiny. The fact is that both ideas seem to be taught in the Bible. For example, in Joshua 24:15 Joshua exhorts the Hebrew people: "...choose for yourselves today whom you will serve ...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

And, in John 15:16, Jesus says to His closest friends and followers, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain ...*"

This study guide is not meant to exhaustively examine and resolve the tension between God's control and man's choice. That theological argument lies beyond our scope. However, it may be helpful for you to reflect upon the following thought from those who have prepared this material.

Ask & Reflect

If you asked a hundred people to explain how they came to know God, you would probably not find many who would say they were so intelligent that they found their way to God, but rather that God found them. What's more, some of these same people would probably tell dramatic stories about how they first rejected God before finally coming to know Him!

Asking a large number of people about their spiritual journey might not bring you any closer to resolving the age old theological tension between God's control and man's choice. However, it might bring you to a conclusion similar to this: We are all free to reject God, but no one really finds God apart from His divine intervention in the course of our life.

Decide & Do

Perhaps you've sensed a desire or leading to begin a personal relationship with God, but so far, you have been reluctant to do so. Or perhaps you already know God, but you struggle with an issue, a situation in which you can either choose for Him, or not. Remember, refusing to choose is not really an option. If your choice is not for God, it is against Him.

No matter what your situation, even if you feel that you are unable to choose for God, you are at least able to ask Him to help you to choose.

Are you willing to be made willing? If not, ask Him to make you so.

¹ John Piper, *A Response to J. I. Packer on the So-Called Antinomy Between the Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility*. (This article is dated March 1, 1976. © Desiring God, 2006). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1976/1581_A_Response_to_JI_Packer_on_the_SoCalled_Antinomy_Between_the_Sovereignty_of_God_and_Human_Responsibility/). Retrieved November 10, 2006. Piper addresses this issue as follows: "Therefore, in order to see how God's sovereignty and man's responsibility perfectly cohere, one need only realize that the way God works in the world is not by imposing natural necessity on men and then holding them accountable for what they can't do even though they will to do it. But rather God so disposes all things (Eph. 1:11) so that in accordance with moral necessity all men make only those choices ordained by God from all eternity.

One last guideline for thinking about God's action in view of all this: Always keep in mind that everything God does toward men – his commanding, his calling, his warning, his promising, his weeping over Jerusalem, – everything is his means of creating situations which function as motives to elicit the acts of will which he has ordained to come to pass. In this way He ultimately determines all acts of volition (though not all in the same way) and yet holds man accountable only for those acts which they want most to do."

Ask & Reflect

- How do you see or perceive God today? Do you see Him like the angry boss or the police officer we considered at the beginning of the lesson? Do you see Him as a loving father or a friend? How do you perceive God at this very moment? Think about it before you respond.
- Where did this picture of God come from? How will it affect the way you respond to God today?
- Would you say that you are experiencing the love of God in your life at this moment? Why or why not? What experiences in your past contribute to your present experience?

Decide & Do

The questions above deserve more than a few minutes' consideration. Perhaps you should commit whatever time is necessary to ponder these questions and work through your response. You might even want to journal your thoughts.

Ask God to show you how your picture of Him might be distorted. Ask Him to paint for you a picture that is true. And remember, such a masterpiece could take a lifetime – and it would be time well spent!

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

From these Bible passages we see that God created us – and that He created us for a purpose.

- Can you think of anything more satisfying than to fulfill the very purpose for which you have been made?
- What can we learn from Satan’s example? He too was created by God for a purpose, but he rebelled against God and sought to pursue his own plan.
- Why would a person say to God, “I do not want to be the person that you have made me to be”?

Decide & Do

If you have been wrestling with God’s plan for your life, then you might have some heart-to-heart business to transact with your Creator. His plan for you is always better than any other as this verse from Jeremiah reassures:

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11).

If you don’t yet have a clue concerning His purpose for your life, then begin by asking yourself, “How well do I know Him?” You see, knowing your purpose in life starts with knowing the One who gives you a purpose. If you’ve never taken the step to know Him personally, then take some time now to read or re-read the material written for you in the Knowing God section at the end of this study.

Perhaps you already have a fairly good idea of God’s purpose for your life, but you’re not finding fulfillment or satisfaction in it. Maybe you are even running away from that purpose out of fear or pride. Don’t make the same mistake that Satan made. God has something to teach you. Seek to grow in your relationship with God, and as you delight yourself in Him, *“He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it”* (Psalm 37:4–5).

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Victor Books, A Division of Scripture Press, Wheaton, Illinois, 1988, pp. 141–143).

Ask & Reflect

Throughout the Bible, God reminds us that He not only has a plan for the world, but He has a plan for every person in it, as well. Are there situations in your life that look like the backside of a needlepoint? Regardless of how things may appear from the “backside” view, God has a plan for your life, and that plan looks entirely different from His perspective. And God’s perspective is what we see when we read the Bible.

The Bible promises that “*God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28). God has a plan for you,² and not even Satan has the power to alter God’s plan. Opposition will almost surely come, but for those who follow God, the Bible says “*Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world*” (1 John 4:4).

Decide & Do

Are you looking at life from the “backside of the needlepoint?” Get into God’s Word, the Bible, and begin to discover the beautiful picture that God wants to create with your life.

From Romans 8:28 we saw that “*God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*”

How’s your love relationship with God? If you love Him, then this verse is for you. Ask God to show you anything that might be hindering your relationship with Him. If He reveals something that has come between you, ask Him to help you remove it.

¹ Revelation 19:20

² Ephesians 2:10

The Beautiful Side of Evil

Chapter 3 Lesson 16



Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.’ And the serpent said to the woman, “You surely shall 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.”

– Genesis 3:1–5

And so it was one day as Eve was walking in the garden near the tree of knowledge that Satan spoke to her. She was without fear, for fear had not yet come into the world. Satan asked her about the forbidden fruit. He questioned God’s warning and His motive toward man. Eve listened and began to doubt God. She considered the fruit and ate. Then she gave the fruit to Adam, and he ate. And immediately, they were aware of their nakedness and they were ashamed.

– The HOPE, Chapter 3

Observe & Consider

The section of The HOPE we are now considering is described in greater detail in Genesis 3. Notice from the Bible passage above that Satan appeared to Eve and spoke to her as a serpent. Yet Eve, unlike you or I might be, was not frightened by this serpent. Let’s consider why that might have been so.

First, up to this point in God’s story we see no indication that fear even exists in the world God has created. The first recorded manifestation of fear is in Genesis 3:10, after Adam had disobeyed God. And from Genesis 9:2 we might conclude that up until that time, animals did not fear man (or at least their fear of man was minimal). Imagine the mindset of Eve at this time, never having encountered anything that would evoke fear!

Secondly, let’s consider the way in which Satan presents himself. The word that is translated as serpent in the Genesis passage comes from the Hebrew word *nachash*¹, which literally means, “shining one.” Ezekiel 28:12–18 describes Satan as an exceptionally beautiful creature. 2 Corinthians 11:14 says that “*Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.*” From these verses it is evident that evil does not always appear to be evil.

We usually associate the idea of evil with something that is sinister, dark, and threatening. But in reality, evil often comes in nicely wrapped packages. Satan probably looked very beautiful to Eve. And what could be wrong with listening to counsel from a beautiful creature of God? After all, isn’t gaining knowledge a good thing?

Sometimes we can choose a way that seems good to us and to those around us. But really, what may seem to be a good way may not be God’s way at all. The word iniquity is used often in the Bible. A root definition of the word *iniquity*² is “the perversion of good.” Iniquity is one of Satan’s primary tactics. He doesn’t have to launch an all out frontal assault to keep us from God. Sometimes he just subtly alters or twists the truth.

Ask & Reflect

- Can you think of people, things, or situations in your life that appeared to be one thing, but when you became more familiar with them, you saw them differently? Does that help you to understand the issue we are dealing with today?
- In Lesson 2 we looked at a Bible verse that says, “*There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*” (Proverbs 14:12). When you must choose a way, how do you know if it is God’s way, or a “beautiful” way of death?

Decide & Do

You might remember from Lesson 14 that “Knowing your purpose in life starts with knowing the One who gives you a purpose.” We come to know God’s way by coming to know Him in a personal and intimate way.

When the United States Treasury Department trains its agents to recognize counterfeit currency, it doesn’t have them study fake money. Rather, agents spend an incredible amount of time becoming intimately familiar with the real thing. They view, handle, and examine real money so much that when they encounter a counterfeit, it is immediately obvious.³

Have you ever actually read through the entire Bible? In a sense, the Bible is God’s autobiography. Should we not study His story with as much or greater attention than a treasury agent studies currency? Make a commitment to regular Bible study and begin to know God through His word.

For Further Study

- Ray C. Stedman, “The Enticement of Evil” from his series *Understanding Man* (Message No. 4, Catalog No. 314, January 28, 1968). (<http://www.ldolphin.org/RCSgenesis/0314.html>). Retrieved October 4, 2006

¹ John MacArthur, *Satan: What Is He Like? Part 2*. (© 1997, Grace to You). (<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/1355.HTM>). Retrieved October 4, 2006. “He [Satan] appears as an angel of light. Most interesting, nachash was the Hebrew word that was used to speak of him as a serpent. That word really has two meanings; to hiss or whisper, and it also means to shine. He is the hissing, shining one.”

² D. Miall Edwards, *Iniquity*. (© Bible.org, 2005). (<http://net.bible.org/dictionary.php?word=Iniquity>). Retrieved October 4, 2006.

³ Gary H. Strauss, *The Real Thing*. (© Questia Media America Inc., 2006). (<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&se=gglsc&d=5002480464&er=deny>). Retrieved November 20, 2006. “It is commonly understood that when currency agents are trained to recognize counterfeit bills, they do not spend time examining and becoming familiar with the vast array of the best samples of the counterfeiter’s art. Rather, they spend many hours developing an intimate acquaintanceship with “the real thing,” to quote a familiar advertising phrase. Literally, every “jot and tittle” are scrupulously examined and pored over to the point that agents develop an indelible and finely detailed mental image of both sides of the various bills that make up the U.S. Treasury issue. Having developed such a thorough knowledge of even the most minute details, they are prepared to spot the incredibly subtle variations from the standard of perfection, “the real thing.” No aspect of these bills is ignored. Thus, when these agents encounter a counterfeit bill, a careful examination can typically result in the ready identification of the fake item, even though its degree of match with the real might be so close that most who regularly use these bills would never suspect the truth.”

Ask & Reflect

Is there an area in your life where you have been hesitant to trust God?

Whenever God asks you to trust Him, you can be certain that He has revealed all you need to know about Him in order to do so. He may not have revealed all that you want to know, but He has revealed all that you need to know.

Before Eve's encounter with Satan, she accepted what God told her about the tree of knowledge. And why shouldn't she? She was operating from the simple yet profound belief that because God is God, whatever He says should be accepted. Notice that Satan doesn't entice Eve to question if God is really God, but rather if He is really good. When we acknowledge and respond to God as God by trusting and obeying Him, we will discover His goodness. If we wait until obedience no longer requires faith and trust, we may never obey.

Decide & Do

From this story in the Bible, we can draw two very practical applications.

- Do not engage or entertain evil.² You will not win. Eve jumped right into an engaging conversation with Satan, and into his trap. Satan was far too crafty for Eve, and he is too crafty for us as well.
- Ask yourself, "Am I waiting for God to show me more about who He is before I trust Him in a certain area?" If so, perhaps you should take a step of faith. "*And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*" (Hebrews 11:6).

For Further Study

- Bob Deffinbaugh, Th.M., "*Satan's Part in God's Perfect Plan.*" (© bible.org, 2006). (http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=186) Retrieved September 27, 2006. More on Satan: his fall, his character and conduct, Eve's adversary in the Garden.

¹ Genesis 3:1-4

² Matthew 9:4; 2 Timothy 2:22

Decide & Do

If you allow Him to do so, God will free you from the power of sin, and one day from the presence of sin entirely. But the choice is yours. You must accept His answer to the problem of sin, confessing that you cannot overcome it in your own power. There is no other cure but God's. He offers it to everyone as a gift. Have you received God's gift?

Please understand that a gift is not a gift until you've received it. God's gift and how to receive it are described in great detail in the Knowing God section at the end of this study guide.

For Further Study

For an in-depth study of sin as a spiritual disease, consider reading the following resources:

- Dr. Bill Gillham, "The Power of Sin" from the November 1988 issue of *Discipleship Journal*. (<http://www.lifetime.org/get/equipped/dj-read/not-the-sin-nature/>) Retrieved October 6, 2006.
- John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. (<http://research.yale.edu:8084/divdl/adhoc/text.jsp?objectid=3154&page=31>) Retrieved October 6, 2006. "Declaring that all of us died in Adam, Paul at the same time plainly testifies that we are infected with the disease of sin."
- William Perkins, *The Art of Prophecy* (1592, repr. Banner of Truth Trust, 1996, 54–55). As quoted by R. Scott Clark (Associate Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, Westminster Seminary California), *Classical Covenant Theology – Part 1: On Law and Gospel*. (<http://public.csusm.edu/guests/rsclark/LawGospel.html>)

Retrieved October 6, 2006. "The law exposes the disease of sin, and as a side-effect, stimulates and stirs it up. But it provides no remedy for it. However the gospel not only teaches us what is to be done; it also has the power of the Holy Spirit joined to it."

- John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley, 14 Volumes, 5:449* (Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishing House, 1986). As quoted by Earl Robinson, *Wesleyan Distinctives in Salvation Army Theology*. (http://www.salvationist.org/extranet_main.nsf/vw_sublinks/8E93913570C2699B80256F16006D3C6F?openDocument). Retrieved October 5, 2006. "The preaching of the gospel, on the other hand, is the offer of a physician for the disease of sin. Wesley said: 'It is absurd ...to offer a physician to those that are whole, or that at least imagine themselves to be. You are first to convince them that they are sick; otherwise they will not thank you for your labor.' "

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (© Victor Books, a Division of Scripture Press Publications, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois, 1988, p. 212).

"Indeed, it might be a good idea to define it [sin] thus: sin is missing the mark, badness, rebellion, iniquity, going astray, wickedness, wandering, ungodliness, crime, lawlessness, transgression, ignorance, and a falling away."

² Billy Graham, "When Having It All Isn't Enough" from the June 2004 issue of *Decision* magazine. (http://www.bgea.org/DMag_Article.asp?ArticleID=1). Retrieved October 5, 2006.

Shame and Blame – The Fruit of Sin

Chapter 3 Lesson 19



Before Adam and Eve ate of the fruit – *And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*

– Genesis 2:25

After – 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. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” And the man said, “The woman whom Thou gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

– Genesis 3:7–13

Then she gave the fruit to Adam, and he ate. And immediately, they were aware of their nakedness and they were ashamed. Something terrible had happened. Something had changed ... Adam and Eve tried to hide from God, and to get rid of their shame by covering themselves with leaves. But this did not work, for their problem was not outward, but inward. Shame is the result of sin, and sin was at work in them like a poison.

– The HOPE, Chapter 3

Observe & Consider

Before eating the forbidden fruit, there is no indication that Adam and Eve had ever known shame¹ (Genesis 2:25). After they disobeyed God, they saw their nakedness and for the first time felt exposed and vulnerable. So they tried to cover themselves. Then they tried to hide themselves from God. Why? Because they were afraid. They may have been afraid of God’s response, but they were actually hiding themselves from the only One who could really help them, the very One they needed the most.

It is very interesting that God would ask, “Where are you?” God is all knowing. He knew where Adam and Eve were hiding. But His question was not just rhetorical. He was bringing Adam and Eve face to face with the result of their sin. The question “Where are you?” takes on a much greater meaning if applied to them more than their physical location. They were at a desperate place, and God’s question was like holding up a mirror. They needed to recognize the seriousness of their situation.

Notice what happens next, when they are “found.” Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames Satan. Shame was one of the first fruits of sin, and blame was a direct result.

Ask & Reflect

As was the case with Adam and Eve, shame can keep us from dealing honestly with an issue and from getting the help we need to resolve the issue. Shame can make a person want to withdraw, or even hide, which only makes matters worse. And then there often comes blame: “It’s his fault that I’m in this situation.” This is known as a victim mentality. The danger in this thinking is that it becomes an excuse to avoid personal responsibility, either for getting into the situation or getting out of the situation. A “victim” often believes the situation cannot change.

Unchecked shame and blame can become a vicious cycle. This cycle can be triggered by things as small as minor incidents at home or in the work place, or by major life struggles such as an addiction or a broken relationship. However it begins, the cycle usually continues until something or someone moves us to do a reality check, bringing us face to face with the question, “Where are you?” And we realize that if we remain in that place, it is not because we are a victim, but because we are choosing to do so.

Perhaps you should set aside some time to ask yourself the following questions. Or better yet, allow God to ask, “Where are you?” in regard to these questions.

- Do I have shame? What is the cause? (Even if it is only minor, most people have experienced shame at some time in life. And if shame exists, the underlying issue is not resolved. Something so small as an unkept promise or a little white lie can produce shame.)
- Am I withdrawing or avoiding something or someone because of shame?
- Am I blaming anyone for anything in my life when I should be accepting responsibility for my own actions? Sometimes people even blame God for a difficult situation (i.e. “This is just my lot in life.”), when in reality God really wants to lead them to a better place.

Decide & Do

Today’s subject matter may be difficult to deal with. But please understand that the writers of this material would not have visited the subject of shame without the deepest conviction that God has the complete and absolute answer to the problem. In fact, what was true with Adam and Eve is true with us today. God is the only One who can resolve the problem of shame.

If you have visited the sections at the end of this study, then you know that God completely dealt with the cause of shame, which is sin, at the cross of Jesus. Shame can be a problem for those who are following God as well as those who do not yet know Him. Whatever your situation may be, if you are dealing with shame, then don’t put off dealing with God. Visit the sections at the end of this study, and allow God to visit you.

For Further Study

- *Shame from a Biblical Perspective* (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA, 2006). (<http://www.intervarsity.org/ism/article/503>) Retrieved October 5, 2006.
- *Life Recovery Bible*, New Living Translation. According to the Amazon.com blurb, “Designed for both the Christian who is seeking God’s view on recovery and the non-Christian who is seeking God and answers to recovery, the Life Recovery Bible will lead readers to the source of true healing—God himself. The features of this best-selling Bible were brought together by two of today’s leading recovery experts, David Stoop, Ph.D., and Stephen Arterburn, M.Ed.” (<http://www.amazon.ca/Life-Recovery-Bible-Nlt-David-Stoop/dp/084233341X>). Retrieved October 5, 2006.
- Bruce Thomas, *The Gospel for Shame Cultures: A Paradigm Shift*. For further reading in more depth on this area of shame and the gospel, this article appeared in the July 1994 Evangelical Missions Quarterly. (<http://guide.gospelcom.net/resources/shame.php>). Retrieved October 5, 2006.

¹ *Shame [Definition]*. (© Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2006). (<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/shame>). Retrieved October 19, 2006.

Before There Is a Problem, God Has the Solution

Chapter 3 Lesson 20



And the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life; and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

– Genesis 3:14–15

And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

– Genesis 3:21

Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the Garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life.

– Genesis 3:23–24

So God made for them garments of animal skin. This was an acceptable covering. But it was only a partial remedy, for it did not take away the sin...and though they could not understand it at the time, it was a picture of the price God would ultimately pay to free humankind from sin. God sent Adam and Eve out from the garden, lest they eat from the tree of life and walk the earth forever, never knowing life as it was meant to be. As for Satan, God pronounced a judgment on him. And in that judgment we find God’s first promise, that one day, through a descendent of Eve, God would send a deliverer to defeat Satan forever.

– The HOPE, Chapter 3

Observe & Consider

Often in life, we must hear the bad news before the good news means something to us. The first four lessons in Chapter 3 dealt with some ugly stuff – Satan and sin. But in this, the final lesson of the chapter, we turn a corner. This section shows us (as we shall see throughout this study) that God has a beautiful plan that will not be thwarted.

Before going further, be sure you’ve read the preceding lines from The HOPE and the verses from the Bible. Then, let’s consider some key points in each set of verses.

Genesis 3:14–15 – Here we read about the judgment that God pronounced over Satan. In the final part of this judgment, God says something that may not make complete sense at this point, but its meaning will become increasingly clear as we move through His story. God is speaking of someone who will come from the seed of the woman. He will be bruised by Satan, but the bruise will not be fatal. Satan, however, will suffer a more severe bruise from this promised one, a bruise to the head. Further into God’s story, we will learn that this one, whom The HOPE calls the Deliverer, will one day free the world from Satan, sin and death. In the Bible He is also known as the Christ and the Messiah. In Romans 16:20 (and in other verses), we read of His victory over Satan, “*And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet ...*”

Genesis 3:21 – Even though God promised an ultimate victory, Adam and Eve still had to deal with their shame. The covering they made was not adequate, so God made them another one and they accepted it. This provision addressed the immediate problem of their shame. It also foreshadowed the complete and final covering for the sin of mankind that God would ultimately provide through the promised Deliverer ...a covering that would also require a death.

Genesis 3:23–24 – Finally we see that God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden, away from the tree of life, and He posted angels at its entrance to keep them from returning. This appears to be a tragic ending to what could have been a wonderful story. But consider what would have happened had Adam and Eve returned to the tree of life and eaten. They would have lived forever in bondage to the sin that infected them, and God's plan for humankind would have been thwarted, something that God would not allow! Even in judgment, God is merciful.

What we have considered in today's lesson is a preview of God's plan to free humankind from Satan and the curse of sin forever. When we arrive at the final page of God's story, we will understand that God had this plan even before creation. In other words, God had the solution even before there was a problem.

Ask & Reflect

- What do the verses we have considered in this lesson teach us about God?
- Is there something in your life that seems hopeless? Do you think that God is surprised by your situation, or could it be that He already has a plan to deliver you?

Decide & Do

Much of what we have seen in this section will take on greater meaning as we continue in God's story. Some people give up too soon on God and His plan for their lives. Hold on to what you have learned about God so far. Don't give up on God just because you can't see how God is going to work out your situation. Be confident that God has a plan!

How Quickly Sin Spreads

Chapter 4 Lesson 21



And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

– Genesis 4:8

Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence.

– Genesis 6:11

As the descendents of Adam and Eve increased, so also, sin increased.

– The HOPE

Observe & Consider

The science fiction movie *Alien*¹ told the story of a group of space travelers who came upon a planet that was inhabited by a vicious alien life form. After a terrifying encounter with the “alien,” it seemed that the crew might escape calamity and resume their journey unscathed. On the surface things appeared somewhat normal, but in reality the alien life form had invaded the body of one of the crew. And as the crew was having a meal together, when it was least expected, the alien life form which had been incubating inside the infected crew member ripped open his chest from the inside and burst across the screen.

As horrific as this cinematic illustration may be, it is not nearly so terrible as the “alien” power called sin that has infected mankind. Adam and Eve left the garden to try once again to fulfill God’s original directive to them to “*be fruitful and multiply*” (Genesis 1:28). But they were infected with sin, and though things “appeared somewhat normal,” they weren’t. Not even one generation passed before the ugliness of sin burst onto the scene. Adam and Eve’s firstborn son, Cain, savagely murdered his younger brother, Abel.

Within 11 generations (as listed in Genesis 5), the earth “*was corrupt in the sight of God, the earth was filled with violence*” (Genesis 6:11). And God “*was grieved in His heart*” (Genesis 6:6).

As we consider the way sin so quickly spread in the world, let’s look at a simple illustration. Most people are familiar with dominos, little rectangular tiles with different numbers of dots on the face of each tile. And if you are familiar with dominos, then you have probably seen people line them up like little pillars all in a row. When the first domino is toppled, it sets off a chain reaction toppling the next domino, and so on and so on.

One of the largest displays of dominos ever to be toppled involved over 3.8 million dominos. It took 100 builders working 8 hours a day for 3 months to create the domino display. The display incorporated over 51 different interlinked projects; each one very complex and delicately balanced. Once the first domino was toppled, the chain reaction spread quickly in every conceivable direction. In a very brief matter of time, all that was left was a huge mess!

God created a world that is infinitely more complex, more interdependent, and more delicately balanced than that domino display. But like that display, even the smallest wrong move has the potential to send ripples of consequence throughout the creation for all time. It has been said that the smallest sin against an infinite God has infinite consequences.²

Ask & Reflect

Though the two illustrations we've considered fall short of reality, they do help us understand how sin increases. Even though everything may appear to be normal on the surface, if left unchecked, the smallest sin can grow and spread at an alarming rate, bringing destruction to everything it touches. This we also see from the Bible verses we visited today, which, unlike the illustrations, do not fall short of reality.

Does what we've considered today affect your view of the seriousness of sin? If so, how?

Now imagine that you were in charge of toppling that domino display, and just at the very moment you tipped the first domino, the person in charge of the exhibit said, "Wait, not yet!"

What could you possibly do? If there was a solution, it would have to be something that could: 1) outdistance the problem, which was spreading at an alarming rate and 2) reverse the damage that had already been done. Such a solution might be humanly impossible.

The problem of sin in the world is even more complex and desperate than the dilemma described in this illustration. Yet we too need a solution to sin that can outdistance the problem and reverse its effects. Thankfully God has provided such a solution.

Decide & Do

If you have not fully considered your own tendency to sin and your inability to keep from sinning, consider it now. Sin is a "global" problem that is manifested personally. Once asked to comment on "what is wrong with the world," British Author G.K. Chesterton responded, "I am."³

Read the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 7:15–25 to see how he expressed the same idea, and discover what he believed to be the solution for his sin.

¹ *Alien*, Directed by Ridley Scott, Produced by 20th Century Fox and Brandywine Productions Ltd., 1979.

² Edward Payson, *Our Sins, Infinite in Number and Enormity* (Sermon No.7). (http://www.pbministries.org/articles/payson/the_works_vol_2/sermon_07.htm) Retrieved October 6, 2006. "...we must acknowledge that our wickedness is great, and our iniquities infinite, –absolutely numberless. It is further necessary to show, that our sins are infinite, not only in number, but in criminality; that every sin is, in fact, infinitely evil, and deserving of infinite punishment. It is so, because it is committed against an infinite being, against God, a being infinitely powerful, wise, holy, just and good." Payson uses Job 22:5 as the basis for this sermon: "*Is not your wickedness great, And your iniquities without end?*"

³ Scott Phillips, *Front Page Reflection*. (Reformed University Fellowship of Tennessee Tech University, 2006). (<http://orgs.tntech.edu/ruf/pages>). Retrieved December 19, 2006.

Now couple this view of an emotional God with one who is perfect and all-knowing. God knew He was going to hurt this deeply as a result of creating man, and He did it anyway. And not only that, He did it exactly the way He intended to do it. But why would God do such a thing?

In Lesson 13 we studied the love of God and concluded that God does nothing that does not somehow involve His love. And in Lesson 15 we saw that God has a perfect plan: one that will ultimately result in a world without evil. We may not be able to completely answer the question about why God was willing to take on such pain, but we can know that the answer has something to do with His incredible love and His perfect plan.

Ask & Reflect

God is so great and so far beyond anything we can comprehend that it might be difficult to imagine how we could do anything that would grieve Him as deeply as He was grieved when He looked on the evil in the world. But recall the statement from Lesson 21, that even “the smallest sin against an infinite God has infinite consequences.” Could we not also conclude that even the smallest sin grieves God in ways we can’t comprehend?

- Does it change the way you view God to think of Him as having emotions? If so how?
- What does it mean to you that God was willing to create mankind even though He knew the pain He would take on as a result?

Decide & Do

Some people go through life ignoring God all together. Some simply try to live up to what they think God requires of them. But some people want more. They want to know and bless the very heart of God. The better you know someone, the better you are able to know what causes joy in their heart. How well do you know the heart of God? Do you know Him well enough to know what brings joy to Him? If not, express to Him your desire to know Him better and to bring joy to Him.

For Further Study

- William A. Simmons, *Grief, Grieving*. (From Baker’s *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 1996 by Walter A. Elwell). (<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/bed.cgi?number=T313>). Retrieved October 6, 2006.

¹ *Lexicon and Strong’s Concordance Results for ‘el (Strong’s 0413)*, from The Blueletter Bible, 1996–2002. (<http://www.blueletterbible.org/cgi-bin/strongs.pl?book=&chapter=&verse=&language=H&strongs=0413>). Retrieved on October 6, 2006.

Safe Even Through Judgment

Chapter 4 Lesson 23



But there was a man named Noah who followed God. And God gave Noah detailed instructions to build a huge boat, called an ark. Then, God sent a male and female of every kind of animal to enter the ark. And after Noah and his family were inside the ark, God closed the door. Then God made it rain for forty days and nights, flooding the whole earth and destroying everything that lived on the earth. For one hundred and fifty days water covered the earth. But Noah and his family, and the animals, were safe in the ark. When the water finally subsided, the ark came to rest on a mountain, and the animals went their own way. And so it was that Noah and his family escaped God's judgment of evil in the world; not because they were without sin, but because they believed God.

– The HOPE, Chapter 4

Observe & Consider

The story of Noah is nothing short of amazing. Skeptics call it a fable. Yet in ancient civilizations from every region of the world, stories of a global flood abound. H.S. Bellamy in *Moons, Myths and Men* estimates that there are over 500 flood legends worldwide.¹

In the Bible this story is found in Genesis, Chapters 6–9. Volumes have been written on these chapters, but for the sake of our study today we will focus on three subjects.

1. The judgment of God – the result of His holy character

In the previous lesson, we saw from Genesis 6:6 that God was deeply grieved over the sin of mankind. In Genesis 6:7 we read of God's intent to “*blot out*” man from the face of the earth. At first, one might think that God's intention to blot out man in verse 7 was motivated by His grief in verse 6. It might appear that God, becoming disappointed with man, somehow lost His patience. But is that really true?

We humans are often disappointed when our expectations are unmet. But God, who is not limited by the dimensions of time and space, knows the future (see verses in Lesson 6).

What He expects is what happens. What happens is what He expected. So how could God be disappointed?

And what about God losing His patience? As we study the Bible we find that it is God's amazing patience that actually delays judgment (2 Peter 3:9). Judgment comes when God appoints it, not a second before or after (Acts 17:31). His judgment wasn't based upon grief, disappointment or loss of patience. The aspect of God's character that requires judgment is nothing more or less than His holiness.

God is holy, righteous and just. He cannot sin, nor can He accommodate sin. If God were to allow sin, He would cease to be holy. God must either judge sin or violate His own character.

2. The faith of Noah – the one thing that set him apart

As we studied in Lesson 18, the sin that entered the world through Adam spread to every person that has ever lived. That includes Noah. So, if the people of Noah's day were judged because of their sin, how is it that Noah (who had also been infected with sin) was spared?

In Lesson 20 we learned of God's promise to send a Deliverer who would one day free man from Satan, sin, and death. Whether or not Noah understood the meaning of this promise, one thing appears to be true of Noah: he honored God as God. From his actions, we know that Noah trusted God as his Deliverer. His trust was manifested in his obedience. It was Noah's faith in God that set him apart (Hebrews 11:7) from others of his day.

3. The provision of God – the only way to be saved

Recall that when Adam and Eve sinned, God provided a covering for them. So also, God provided for Noah by showing him how to build an ark that would cover his family from the deluge that destroyed the world. No one else in the world survived the flood. Only God's provision was able to save Noah and his family. There was no other way of salvation.

In the Bible, the book of 2 Peter compares the sinfulness of our world today with that of Noah's day. 2 Peter 3:9 tells us why God has delayed judgment of our world. It is because He is "*patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.*" The word "repent" literally means to rethink, or to change one's mind.² God has not yet judged our world because He wants to give people the opportunity to rethink their ways and to trust in Him.

God is patient, but we must not take His patience for granted. God's judgment of sin may or may not be immediate, but it is inevitable. His holy character demands it. "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap*" (Galatians 6:7).

Ask & Reflect

If we studied the Bible verses that detail the genealogy of Noah, we could deduce that Noah worked on the ark at least 70 years!³ Now, consider also that the Bible gives no record of rain prior to the flood. According to His story, the plants of the earth were watered by a mist that "*used to rise from the earth*" (Genesis 2:6). Think about it! Noah worked on a boat for at least 70 years in expectation of a flood, something that no man had ever seen.

- What do you imagine the people of Noah's day thought about his 70 year "ark project?"
- Do you ever get discouraged in the face of adversity when you don't reach your goals in a timely manner?
- What do you think you would have done if you had been in Noah's situation?
- What is your response to 2 Peter 3:9?

Decide & Do

If God is asking you to do something, be like Noah. Trust and obey! If He is asking you to "rethink" some area of your life, don't put it off.

¹ H. S. Bellamy cited in the article *Flood Legends from Around the World*, Northwest Creation Network. (<http://www.nwcreation.net/noahlegends.html>). Retrieved October 6, 2006.

² Blue Letter Bible. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words for Repent, Repentance.* 1996–2002. (http://www.blueletterbible.org/cgi-bin/new_choice.pl?string=Repent%2C+Repentance&live_word=Repent%2C+Repentance&choice=VT0002364&Entry.x=51&Entry.y=13). Retrieved November 9, 2006.

³ *How Long Did It Take Noah to Build the Ark?* (© Copyright 2002–2006 Got Questions Ministries). (<http://www.gotquestions.org/Noahs-ark-questions.html>). Retrieved October 6, 2006.

Still, after radically trusting God and having experienced His faithfulness as they did, Noah's family failed to do what God told them to do. Either they didn't listen carefully or they listened, but didn't obey. You've probably heard the saying that there is safety in numbers. Perhaps they stayed together because they were afraid. Whatever their reason, they disobeyed God. They did not attempt to fill the earth.

From today's lesson, consider that:

- God wanted Noah and his family to prosper and “fill” the earth (Genesis 9:1). That was the way to discover God's blessing. But the way to blessing may not have looked to them like a blessing. The people feared being “scattered” across the earth (Genesis 11:4). The difference between “filling” the earth (as God commanded) and being “scattered” across the earth is primarily one of perspective: one of choosing or being forced.
- They wanted to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4). That prideful motivation sounds a lot like the attitude that led to Satan's downfall (Lesson 14).
- Even though they didn't want to follow God, they still wanted to get to heaven. But they wanted to do it their way – by building a tower (Genesis 11:4).

Ask & Reflect

- Why do you think that Noah and his family failed to follow God's instructions after having seen and experienced so much with God?
- Can you think of a situation where the thing God asked of you did not look like a blessing at first, but that is what it turned out to be in the end?

- What would you say to someone who wants to get to heaven, but they want to do it their way instead of God's way?
- Can you identify at all with Noah's spiritual “regression?” Do you feel that there was a time when you trusted God more radically than you do today? Why? If so, what happened?

Decide & Do

In the previous lesson you were encouraged to trust and obey God like Noah did when he built the ark. But as we consider the rest of Noah's life, we see a clear warning. Don't stop trusting and obeying. If you are slacking off spiritually, don't wait to address the issue.

The people of Babel built a tower to get to heaven. Similarly people throughout history have built their own ways or religions to get to heaven.² There is only one way to heaven ...and that is God's way.

For Further Study

- Jimmy Williams, *Why a Moral Life Won't Get Us to Heaven* (Probe Ministries, 1998). (<http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/moralife.html>). Retrieved October 9, 2006.
- *World Religions Index Table on Major World Religions* (Probe Ministries, 1995–2006). (<http://www.leaderu.com/wri-table2/table2.html>). Retrieved October 9, 2006. This site provides a more comprehensive exploration of the beliefs of major world religions across a grid of subjects (such as God, Man and the Universe, Salvation and the Afterlife, Morality, and Worship). Links to data on Biblical Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Primitive Religion.

¹ *How Long Did It Take Noah to Build the Ark? How Long Was Noah on the Ark?* (<http://www.gotquestions.org/Noahs-ark-questions.html>). Retrieved October 8, 2006.

² *How Major Religions View Salvation and the Afterlife*. (Probe Ministries, 1995–2006). NOTE: Taken from: *The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error 2*. Compiled by Steven Cory. (Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. Moody Press, 1986). (<http://www.leaderu.com/wri-table2/salvation.html>). Retrieved October 8, 2006.

The Beginning of the Nations

Chapter 4 Lesson 25



And they said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

– Genesis 11:4

Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

– Genesis 11:9

The number of Noah’s descendents increased greatly, but they remained as one people. They did not fill the earth as God commanded. Instead they built a city. Then they built a tower reaching to the heavens. God was not pleased. So God confused their language. Immediately there were at least 70 groups of people who could not speak with each other. Then God scattered these groups around the earth. And this was the beginning of the languages and nations of our world.

– The HOPE, Chapter 4

Observe & Consider

Recall from the previous lesson that when Noah and his family left the ark, God blessed them and told them to fill the earth (Genesis 9:1,7). However, instead of filling the earth, Noah’s family gathered in one place and built a city. And then they proceeded to build a tower that would reach into heaven (Genesis 11:4). Their motive was to make a name for themselves and to keep from being scattered abroad over the face of the earth.

In Genesis 11:5–9 we see God’s response to their disobedience. He confused their language so that they did not understand one another’s speech. Bible scholars do not agree on the exact amount of time between the flood and the building of the tower of Babel. But from the record we have in Genesis 10, we could conclude that there were 70 family units at the time of the tower of Babel.¹ So when God confused their language, Bible scholars estimate that there were as many as 70 different languages being spoken. It must have been complete chaos!

Work on the tower came to an abrupt halt and the people were scattered across the earth. (Genesis 11:9)

Recall also from the previous lesson that we contrasted God’s mandate to *fill* the earth (Genesis 9:1) with the people’s fear of being *scattered* across the earth. As a result of disobeying God, the very thing they were trying to avoid in Genesis 11:4 (being scattered) is the very thing that happened in Genesis 11:9 (they were scattered).

Now, all of this may have seemed like a big confusing mess, but as we’ve already seen numerous times in God’s story, He has a plan! And what appears to be a step backward in that plan is often really a step forward, if we see it from God’s perspective.

Before God confused the languages, the whole earth spoke the same language and used the same words (Genesis 11:1). The introduction of multiple languages and the scattering of the people marked the beginning of the nations as we know them today. By the way, a nation in the Biblical sense of the word is not a geographic country, but a people group that is distinct from other people groups by virtue of language, culture, tribal affiliation, etc.² Today there are thousands of nations in the world.³ And if we were to skip to the end of the Bible, we would see that the

culmination and climax of God's story brings us to a heavenly scene (Revelation 7:9) in which people from every nation are gathered to worship God and to enjoy Him!

Prior to the story we've studied today, the nations did not even exist – but one day people from every nation on earth will be gathered in unity to worship God! Unity! The world longs for it. Olympic ceremonies in all their grandeur offer just a hint of it. The “religions” of the world often promote it. The United Nations works for it. But the world has never been able to achieve it. Only God can bring unity to the diversity of a complicated, sin infected world! And when He does, it will demonstrate how great He is!

Ask & Reflect

The last thing the people of Babel wanted was to be scattered across the face of the earth. But in order to accomplish His purposes, God had to radically rearrange their lives. As we have seen, His ultimate purpose is to bless all those who follow Him, and bring glory and honor to Himself.

- What might God be rearranging in your life?
- Are you co-operating with God by trusting and following Him?
- Or (like the people who built a tower to reach heaven) are you trying to achieve blessing on your own terms?

Decide & Do

God may do some dramatic things to redirect your path in life, but ultimately He will never override your will to make you choose to cooperate with His plan. He does not want you to be a little robot who mechanically and mindlessly marches in sync with His plan. Nor is He trying to make you into a super human who on your own always makes the right choice, the same one He would have made.

Life with God is like a dance. God desires to express Himself through you, not in spite of you. As you follow His lead, you experience a beautifully choreographed life that helps others to see who He is. Ask God today to show you how you are doing at following His lead. Then ask Him to help you get into intimate unison with His every move.

For Further Study

- John Morris, *What Happened at the Tower of Babel?* (© The Institute for Creation Research, 2006). (<http://www.icr.org/article/519/2/>). Retrieved October 9, 2006.
- Rick Wade, *The Sovereignty of God.* (© Probe Ministries, 2004). (<http://www.probe.org/content/view/875/77/>). Retrieved October 10, 2006. This article explores the mystery of God's sovereignty and man's will.

¹ Henry M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science, Part 4, Chapter 15– Babel and the World Population: Biblical Demography and Linguistics.* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984). (<http://www.ldolphin.org/morris.html>). Retrieved October 9, 2006.

² Claude Hickman, *What Is a People Group?* (<http://www.thetravelingteam.org/2000/articles/pg1.shtml>).

Retrieved October 8, 2006. “In the New Testament, the Greek word for “nations” is the word “ethne.” We get our word ethnicity from it. It means something like an ethnic group. The idea is much more specific than the political nation–states we think of such as Indonesia, Turkey, or Nigeria. An anthropologist would call this “ethne” a “People Group.” A people group is the largest group within which the gospel can spread without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance due to culture, language, geography, etc.”

³ *Global Summary.* (Joshua Project, A ministry of the U.S. Center for World Mission, PO Box 64080, Colorado Springs, CO 80962 USA) (<http://www.joshuaproject.net/index.php>). Retrieved October 9, 2006.

Abraham – A Man Who Walked by Faith

Chapter 5 Lesson 26



Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

– Genesis 12:1–3

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

– Hebrews 11:8

From among the nations of the earth God called out a man, who is known to us as Abraham. God told Abraham to leave his home and go to a land He would show him. Abraham did as God said, taking all his people and possessions. God promised that Abraham would possess this land, and become the father a great nation. And through him, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. It was a peculiar promise, for Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had no children of their own. But Abraham obeyed God just the same, and led his people to the land of Canaan.

– The HOPE, Chapter 5

Observe & Consider

In the previous lesson we saw how God brought about the nations of the world. We also learned that God’s plan will ultimately bring unity and blessing to the nations and glory to God. In this lesson we will consider an event that marks a very significant step toward that end.

From among all the nations God called out one man named Abraham. We can only imagine how it went when Abraham told Sarah what he heard from God.

Abraham: *We’re going to pack up and leave our home.*

Sarah: *Why would we do that?*

Abraham: *Because God said so.*

Sarah: *Why would He do that?*

Abraham: *Because God is going to make me the father of a great nation, and He is going to bless all the nations through me.*

Sarah: *But we don’t even have children.*

Abraham: *I know.*

Sarah: *And neither of us is young.*

Abraham: *I know.*

Sarah: *So where are we going?*

Abraham: *I don’t know.*

Abraham had nothing on which to base his actions... nothing but his faith in God. But he took the step that God told him to take. And today, Abraham is known as the father of three of the world’s major religions: Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.¹ He is without question one of the most significant figures in all of history. His name appears in the Bible over 260 times, often as an example of a man of great faith.

From this story, observe two things about Abraham’s faith:

1. God was the initiator of Abraham’s faith walk. God told Abraham to journey from his home and that He would make him the father of a great nation and a blessing to all the nations. Abraham did not dream up the idea and then say, “If I believe it enough (or work hard enough for it), then it will come to

pass.” Hebrews 11:1 tell us that faith is “*the conviction of things not seen.*” Abraham had a conviction from God about a future he could not see. That is Biblical faith. He received a promise from God; he believed it; and he acted upon it.

2. Abraham responded to God one step at a time. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says that those who trust in God “*walk by faith not by sight.*” A walk requires one step at a time. Although Abraham had a conviction from God about where his faith journey would end (as a blessing to all nations), he didn’t have any idea how it would all unfold. Abraham knew only the next step that God was calling him to take – to leave his home and journey to another land.

Ask & Reflect

- What similarities do you see between the faith of Noah (Lesson 23) and the faith of Abraham?
- If you were in Abraham’s place, how do you think you would have responded to God’s call? Why?
- What does it take for someone to respond to God the way that Abraham responded to God?

Decide & Do

Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we were created by God for “*good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*” Notice from this verse that God is the One who prepares the good work beforehand. It begins with God. Like Abraham, we don’t dream up our purpose, and it certainly is not our role to make it come to pass. Our role is to walk in it, like Abraham, one step at a time.

In order for Abraham to hear the call of God, he had to be listening. And you can’t recognize His voice if you don’t know Him. For more on knowing God, go to the Knowing God section at the end of this study guide.

If you believe that God has called you to do something (i.e., prepare for a career, look for a new job, etc.), don’t worry about the end goal. Ask God to show you the first step, and then by faith, take it.

For Further Study

- M. G. Easton, *Abraham*. (Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1897). (http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/dictionaries/dict_meaning.php?source=1&wid=T0000054). Retrieved from GospelCom.Net on November 10, 2006.
- Dr. Charles Stanley, *What Is Faith?* (© In Touch Ministries, 2006. From The Charles Stanley Handbook for Christian Living, © Thomas Nelson Publishing, Nashville, Tennessee, 2006). (http://www.intouch.org/myintouch/exploring/bible_says/faith/faith_150026.html). Retrieved October 10, 2006.
- John Piper, *The Faith of Noah, Abraham and Sarah*. (© Desiring God Ministries, 1997). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1997/1001_The_Faith_of_Noah_Abraham_and_Sarah/). Retrieved October 10, 2006.

¹ *Abraham*. (<http://www.answers.com/topic/abraham>). Retrieved October 10, 2006.

Whom Does God Consider Righteous?

Chapter 5 Lesson 27



And He took him (Abram) outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

– Genesis 15:5–6

Now Abraham and Sarah lived in Canaan for a long time, but they remained childless. Again, God spoke to him saying that his descendants would be like the stars of the heavens...too many to count. Abraham believed God, and God counted his faith as righteousness.

– The HOPE, Chapter 5

Observe & Consider

In the previous lesson we saw how Abraham responded in faith to God’s calling and promise. God called Abraham to leave his home and journey to an unknown land, and promised that He would make Abraham the father of a great nation. Today’s lesson looks at Abraham several years after that initial step of faith, and still Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were childless! Again God speaks to Abraham, promising that his descendants would be like the stars—too many to count (Genesis 15:5). Abraham had no evidence that he would have even one child, let alone a multitude of descendants. But Abraham believed God, and God reckoned (or counted) it (his faith) to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). This verse is one of the most important in the Bible, for it sums up the basis by which a man can be right with God, and have a relationship with God.

The word “righteousness”¹ has to do with law, morality and justice. In Biblical terms, one who is righteous is without guilt. He is perfect or “right” in relation to the law. However, if you flipped the pages of your Bible to Romans 3:10, you would read that, “*There is none righteous, not even one.*” Abraham was infected with sin, just as every person since Adam (see Lesson 18). If we were to more closely examine Abraham’s life, we would see clearly that he was far from perfect.

Only God is perfect! He alone is holy and righteous! And because God is holy and righteous, He cannot tolerate or overlook sin. Sin violates the character of God and ultimately He must judge it. Simply put, sin drives a wedge between God (who is sinless) and man (who is sinful).

The word “reckon”² (or “credited” or “counted” as some translations read) could be considered an accounting or a mathematical term. If God were to do an audit of Abraham’s righteousness based on Abraham’s merit, he would be found lacking. But because he believed in God, Abraham was credited by God with a righteousness that was not his own.

To better understand the concept of being “reckoned righteous” consider the story of a judge who served during the great American depression.³ One night a man was brought into his courtroom. The desperate man had been caught stealing bread to feed his starving family. As the man explained his story, the judge felt sympathy for him, but the law left the judge no option. I’ve got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions. Ten dollars or ten days in jail. Then, moved by compassion, the judge reached in his own pocket and pulled out ten dollars to pay the fine.

The man who stole the bread could have rejected the kindness of the judge and gone to jail. But he didn't. He depended on the judge to do something for him that he could not do for himself. And by so doing, the man was considered (or reckoned) "right" in relation to the law. Similarly Abraham stood as a sinful (guilty) man before God (as do all men). But Abraham believed in God. Abraham trusted God to do for him what he could not do for himself. And by trusting, Abraham was reckoned right in relation to the Law.

Recall from our study of Adam and Eve in Lesson 20 that God promised to one day send a Deliverer who would conquer Satan, sin, and death forever. Abraham didn't need to know how God would ultimately save him from the consequence of sin. But he did know that God was the only One who could save him from the consequence of sin.

Ask & Reflect

- The man who stole bread would have been a fool not to allow the judge to do for him what he could not do for himself. But many people try to do for themselves what only God can do for them, namely be right with Him on their own merit. Why is this? Why would someone even think they could be good enough on their own to be right with God?
- From the passages we have considered today, we can see that God not only wanted to bless Abraham, but that He also wanted to provide everything Abraham needed in order to walk in that blessing. What does this say to us about God?

Decide & Do

In the Bible book of Ephesians there is a verse that reads, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast*" (Ephesians 2:8–9). The "saving" this verse speaks of is a salvation from the consequence of sin. This salvation is a gift, not something we could ever hope to earn or merit. Like Abraham, we can trust God for the gift of salvation. Unlike Abraham, we can know how God accomplished it. If you have not already visited the Knowing God section at the end of this study, don't delay in going there.

Ephesians 2:8–9 deals specifically with salvation from sin. But really, there are many things that only God can do for us, things we cannot do for ourselves. Read Psalm 127:1–2, then ask God to show you if there is something you are trying to do on your own, that in truth only He can do. Be like Abraham or the man before the judge— receive what God wants to give you.

¹ Definition of the Word "Righteous" from the *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*. (<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/righteousness>). Retrieved October 10, 2006.

² Definition of the Word "Reckon" from Answers.com. (<http://www.answers.com/topic/reckon>). Retrieved October 10, 2006.

³ Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. (© Multnomah, 1990, pp 91–2; online at SermonIllustrations.com). (<http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/grace.htm>). Retrieved November 10, 2006.

Beware of Pursuing God's Will without God

Chapter 5 Lesson 28



Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

– Genesis 16:1–2

But how could God's promise to Abraham be fulfilled? For Sarah to have a child seemed impossible. Rather than waiting on God, and His timing, Sarah gave her servant Hagar to Abraham, and Hagar gave birth to a child named Ishmael. Eventually, just as God had promised, Sarah also bore a child from Abraham. They called him Isaac. And Sarah became bitter toward Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham was distressed.

– The HOPE, Chapter 5

Observe & Consider

In previous lessons we've seen Abraham's faith in God, and in God's promise to make him the father of a great nation and to bless all the nations through him. Today's lesson looks at Abraham ten years after God first made that promise (Genesis 12:1–3). Abraham's wife Sarah is about 75 years old, and still she has not born Abraham a child! So Sarah gives up what is a wife's most cherished privilege, the right to her husband's undivided affection, and she offers her maid, Hagar, to her husband that he might have a child by her and thus fulfill the will of God. And of course Abraham could have said no, but he didn't.

Not only does Sarah's foolish act create turmoil within her marriage, but the epic conflict and human tragedy that has resulted from Sarah's foolishness is still being felt today. Hagar's son, Ishmael, would become the father of the Arab nations of our world, and the son that Sarah would later conceive would become the father of the nation of Israel. Hardly a day goes by that the news media does not cover some violent incident related to the Israeli – Arab conflict and the dispute over the right to the land that God promised to Abraham.¹

Before continuing, recall that in our study of God's story we have observed a recurring theme. What appears from our perspective to be a disastrous event is often a necessary part of God's higher plan to accomplish His eternal purposes. For example, in response to the arrogance of the people at the tower of Babel, God confused their language. The result was chaos, and God scattered the people across the earth. But this was also the beginning of the nations as we know them today. And ultimately God will bring glory to Himself and blessing to humankind by doing something only He can do, namely bringing the nations together to live in perfect unity and peace with God and each other.

The event we are considering today has evolved into one of the greatest conflicts in human history. Depending on your background, this conflict could easily be perceived as a struggle between those who are right and those who are wrong, between "good people" and "bad people." But really, it is much deeper than that. As we shall see in the next lesson, God is still in control and He will use this situation to His glory! As we move on, remember these two great truths: 1) God will populate heaven with people from every nation,² and 2) the real enemy behind every conflict is Satan.³

Ask & Reflect

It is easy for us to ask “How in the world could Sarah do such a thing?” But Sarah had no idea of the far reaching consequences of her action. And lest we be too hard on Sarah, we should consider the thinking that led to Sarah’s action, for we have probably all entertained similar thoughts at one time or another.

Sarah knew what God had promised, but she probably wondered what part of His promise depended on her. You’ve probably heard the saying, “God helps those who help themselves.” Well this might sound like a conscientious, responsible attitude. But really, that kind of perspective is a breeding ground for self will as opposed to God’s will. And once you start down the road of self determination, it is not difficult to justify your actions and believe that you’re doing right.

You can almost imagine how some people might have actually seen Sarah’s actions as noble and self-sacrificing. Besides, what she proposed was not that uncommon in the polygamist culture in which Sarah and Abraham had made their home. And up to this point God had only said that the promised heir would come through Abraham (Genesis 15:4). It was not until later that God said His promise to Abraham would be fulfilled through a son born to Sarah (Genesis 17:15–19).

- Could you see yourself doing the same thing that Sarah and Abraham did? Why or why not?
- What do you think of the saying “God helps those who help themselves”? Do you agree or disagree?
- Can you think of a situation where you knew that something had to be done, but you wrestled with knowing the difference between your part and God’s part?

Decide & Do

It is significant to note that up to this point in God’s story, Sarah is actually called Sarai, and Abraham is called Abram. Because of time constraints, The HOPE does not highlight this. But in the Biblical account, after the birth of Ishmael, God changes their names (Genesis 17:5, 15). The literal meaning of Sarai is “contentious woman.” The meaning of Abram is “exalted father.” But at the proper time, God changed their names. Sarah means “princess” and Abraham means “fruitful father” or “father of a multitude.”

A “contentious woman” might manipulate and connive to get things done. But a “princess” has the privilege of allowing her father, the king, to do things for her. Some people seem to make things happen by their own effort. But only God can make a person “fruitful” (Psalm 127:1–3).

Abraham (Abram) and Sarah (Sarai) knew God’s will, but apart from God’s supernatural work in them, they didn’t know His way. If you are looking for God’s way, ask Him to show you, and then wait for Him. Don’t take matters into your own hands. Beware of pursuing God’s will without God.

For Further Study

- Dr. Charles Stanley, *Discovering God’s Will*. (© In Touch Ministries, 2006). (http://www.intouch.org/myintouch/exploring/bible_says/God_Will/index_129456.html). Retrieved October 10, 2006.

¹ *Timeline: A History of the Land*. (From the April 15, 2002 Issue of The Baptist Standard; © 2006 by Baptist Standard Publishing Co). (http://www.baptiststandard.com/2002/4_15/pages/mideast_timeline.html). Retrieved November 16, 2006. Although this timeline does not extend past the year 1993, it nonetheless overviews the centuries of unrest in the Middle East.

² Revelation 7:9.

³ Ephesians 6:12. Revisit Lessons 14–17 of this Study Guide.

promised He would, He came to the oppressed and the afflicted...to those who seemed to be lost in a sub-plot...to the Hagar of this world.

Ask & Reflect

- What does it mean to you that God was concerned for Hagar? Whom do you identify with most in this story? Why?
- If this drama were to unfold in a community like yours, how do you think people would look upon Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac? Who would be viewed as a victim? Who would be seen as honorable?

Decide & Do

When we are confronted with situations as heated and polarized as the Arab–Israeli conflict,⁴ it is easy to stereotype people and to take sides. But resist that temptation. God sees every person as an individual. And as we have learned thus far in our study, we must all come to God on the same basis – by humble faith in His provision for sin.

The incredible complexity and deep–rooted hostility that defines the Arab–Israeli conflict may appear to be hopeless. But one day through the promised Deliverer, God will make all things right. According to His story, He will bring a lasting peace where man cannot achieve it. And when He does, He will be glorified and honored!

If you are in a situation where you feel like a “throw-away” character in someone else’s story, then meditate on this. Just like Hagar, you may be harshly treated by another individual, but no one can rob you of your own personal relationship with God. That is yours and yours alone!

For Further Study

- *El Roi – God Who Sees. Precept–Austin Website.* (http://www.preceptaustin.org/el_roi_-_god_who_sees.htm). Retrieved October 10, 2006. Studies on the names of God can be accessed on this site.

¹Genesis 16: 2,5, 6

²Genesis 16:10

³Genesis 16:13

⁴For more information on the Israeli–Arab conflict, the following link may prove to be helpful: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab-Israeeli_conflict. Retrieved October 10, 2006.

refined by fire to remove impurities and make it pure, Abraham had been refined by God through the years by the fires of his faith walk. There was no question with God as to whether or not Abraham would do well on this test. This was not a risky experiment. God knew exactly what Abraham had become: a man who put God first, before everything, even his own son. God knew Abraham's identity, and this test would simply reveal it! Abraham's life is a testimony to what God can accomplish in a person who is willing to follow wherever He leads. This story dramatically shows forth Abraham's faith for the world to see ...and God is glorified as a result.

Of course, as with any story in the Bible, there are many precious insights and object lessons to be found. And as we shall eventually see in our study of God's story, the ram that God Himself provided to take the place of Isaac is profoundly prophetic of God's promised Deliverer who would Himself free the world from sin.¹ Like the covering that God provided for Adam and Eve, and the ark that God provided for Noah, this provision from God is one more reminder that we cannot save ourselves. "*He only is my rock and my salvation*" (Psalm 62:2).

Ask & Reflect

- How did you feel about this story after first seeing it in The HOPE or reading it in the Bible?
- Did you think it was strange that God would ask this of Abraham? Why or why not?
- If you were in Abraham's situation, what would you have done? Why?
- As with Abraham,² God always prepares us for the tests He brings into our lives. Are you facing a test? Can you see yet how He has prepared you? How might God use this test to reveal what He has built into your life?

¹John 1:29

²Hebrews 11:17

³Genesis 22:6-8

Decide & Do

As they were walking to the place of offering, Isaac asked his father, "*Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*" Abraham answered, "*God will provide for Himself the lamb.*"³ But as they approached the altar, there was still no lamb. And as Abraham bound his son on the altar ...there was still no lamb. And even as Abraham took his knife and stretched out his hand ...still there was no lamb! Then, just before Abraham was about to slay his son, God stopped him and showed him the ram that He had placed in the thicket.

How could Abraham be so confident as to state that "*God will provide for Himself the lamb*"? In his years of walking by faith Abraham learned a very important principle: God will always provide everything we need to do whatever He calls us to do, no matter how difficult it seems. And He will never compromise His character or ask us to compromise ours in the process.

Is God asking you to do something that seems very difficult? If He is, then He will provide what you need to do it. Continue walking by faith with God. Allow Him to make you the kind of person that recognizes His voice and has the faith and confidence in Him to obey.

For Further Study

- BibleGateway.com, a ministry of Gospel Communications International, provides online commentaries for many passages of scripture. Read their commentaries on the testing of Abraham as follows:
 1. God commands Abraham to offer up Isaac – (<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/?action=getCommentaryText&cid=18&source=2&seq=i.1.22.1>)
 2. Abraham's faith and obedience to the Divine command – (<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getCommentaryText&cid=18&source=2&seq=i.1.22.2>).
 3. Another sacrifice is provided instead of Isaac – (<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getCommentaryText&cid=18&source=2&seq=i.1.22.3>).

God's plan is bigger than any one person. Perhaps reading this helps you to understand how Abraham could be so confident when he said to Isaac, "*God will provide for Himself the lamb.*" Abraham had seen the end at the beginning. He knew that the preservation of Isaac was essential to the fulfillment of God's promise. In a sense, the rest of his life was simply a matter of realizing what God had already revealed.

In the remainder of this chapter we will see how God filled in Abraham's vision. You may have heard the saying, "God is in the details." Well hopefully by the end of this chapter, as we look at the details, we will see great evidence of God's presence and power!

Ask & Reflect

- Should it make a difference to know that God has a detailed plan for this world and all the people in it?
- Recall that when God gave Abraham a vision of the future, Abraham saw the end at the beginning. Through the promises in the Bible, God shows every person who trusts in Him the end of his life story. We know that a life of faith in God ends with Him in heaven. How should this knowledge affect us?
- Despite God's promises, do you ever worry about the future? Why?

Decide & Do

When God makes a promise, He will do whatever needs to be done to bring it to pass. He will move individuals and even nations if need be. In light of this truth, determine to discover the hundreds of promises in God's Word that are written for those who trust in Him, and learn to trust and rest in His promises, knowing that He is always faithful to His Word.

For Further Study

- Dr. Charles Stanley, *God's Promises*. InTouch Ministries. (http://ww2.intouch.org/site/c.7nKFISNvEqG/b.1034467/k.9C8E/Gods_Promises.htm). Retrieved October 11, 2006.

¹Matthew Slick, *Covenant*, Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry. (<http://www.carm.org/doctrine/covenant.htm>). Retrieved on October 11, 2006.

²Review Lesson 6 of this study guide.

- were exalted by God after a season of suffering (see Genesis 41:41–43, Philippians 2:9–11).
- forgave those who harmed them (see Genesis 45:1–15, Luke 23:34).
- were sent by God to save many (Genesis 45:7, Matthew 1:21, Mark 10:45).
- understood that God turned evil into good (see Genesis 50:20, Romans 8:28).

As we study the lives of Joseph and the promised Deliverer, we see another similarity, one that allowed all the similarities listed above to be manifested. Both Joseph and the promised Deliverer were submitted to a purpose that was not their own. They understood that their lives were part of a greater plan, and they co-operated with that plan. In John 6:38, the words of the promised Deliverer are recorded, *“I have come down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”*

In Joseph we recognize the evidence of a purposeful divine influence guiding the events of his life. Like a leaf that has fallen into a great river, Joseph’s life was moved by the powerful flow of a divine current. And with each event that came into his life (even the difficult ones), Joseph submitted to that flow rather than resisting it. God used Joseph’s life to accomplish exactly what He had planned beforehand, bringing good to Joseph and to others, and glory to Himself.

Ask & Reflect

- From Joseph’s life, what can we learn about God and about our relationship with Him?
- Why do you think God would orchestrate Joseph’s life to have so many similarities with the life of God’s promised Deliverer?
- God creates every person with a purpose (Ephesians 2:10). In retrospect it is not difficult for us to recognize the purpose of Joseph’s life, but what about Joseph himself? Do you think that Joseph always understood the purpose of his life, or the reason for the events that came into his life?

Decide & Do

You may not yet know the purpose of your life or the things that come into your life, but you can know the One who gives purpose to your life. And like Joseph, in every circumstance you can submit to the flow of His divine current in your life.

Do you know God like Joseph knew Him? Are you confident of His guiding presence? If not, then go immediately to the Knowing God section at the end of this study guide.

Has God brought a difficult circumstance into your life? If so, follow the example of Joseph. See it as an opportunity for God to work in and through you, bringing good to you and others and glory to Himself. For *“God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28).

For Further Study

- Barbara Rainey, *No Cinderella Story*. (FamilyLife.com Articles, 2006). (http://www.familylife.com/articles/article_detail.asp?id=1126) Retrieved October 12, 2006. *“I acknowledged at the very beginning my submission to God’s will for my life...In the aftermath of these two unexpected parts of God’s plan for my life...”*

¹Some of this listing was suggested by “Parallels between Joseph and Jesus,” *Life Application Study Bible: New International Version*. (Tyndale House Publishers, 1997).

Moses – Never Too Late for God

Chapter 6 Lesson 33



Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law ...And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed ...God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” ...Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. And the Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey ...”

– Exodus 3:1–8

Moses fled to the desert, and he lived there as a shepherd for forty years. Then one day, God appeared to Moses in a fire in the midst of a bush, yet the bush was not consumed. And God spoke to Moses from the bush. God told Moses to return to his people and lead them out of Egypt. God promised to be with him.

– The HOPE, Chapter 6

Observe & Consider

In the first lesson of Chapter 6, we learned of the very specific vision that God gave to Abraham. God told Abraham that:

- His descendents will be strangers in a land that is not their own.
- They would be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.

Then, in Lesson 32, we saw how God used Joseph to save his family (Abraham’s descendents) from the famine in their own land by allowing them to live in Egypt (a land that was not their own). In Egypt, Joseph’s family increased in number and was eventually enslaved and treated harshly by the ruler of Egypt. During this time they became known as the Hebrew people. At one point, the ruler of Egypt ordered the death of every son born into a Hebrew family. One Hebrew child was spared, however, when his mother placed him in a basket in the river that ran by the palace of the princess. The princess found the boy, took him in as her own and named him Moses.¹ He was raised as a prince of Egypt...

but he had been born a Hebrew, and he never forgot it.

One day when Moses was about 40 years old, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, so he killed the Egyptian. Fearing for his life, Moses fled into the wilderness. There he married a shepherd’s daughter and lived in that place for another 40 years.² It is at this point that our current lesson opens. The descendents of Abraham have been enslaved in a foreign land, just as God had said. And at 80 years of age Moses is about to encounter the covenant-making God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Think about it, as a prince of Egypt Moses received everything that wealth and power could provide. Still he recognized the plight of his people (Exodus 2:11). With his influence, he might have helped his people like Joseph did. But when Moses killed the Egyptian, everyone turned against him, even his own people. With all of his potential seemingly squandered, Moses went into hiding in the wilderness.

Many people see in Moses' life a metaphor for their own spiritual journey. For the first 40 years of his life, Moses was well schooled in the ways of the world. But when he tried to get things done his way apart from God, he failed miserably. Whatever God was building into (or taking out of) Moses during his time in the wilderness, a few things seem obvious. After 40 years in the wilderness, there appears to be an absence of any selfish ambition in Moses to seek wealth, power, or fame, or even the need to do something significant (like deliver his people from slavery). He did not desire to have or do what would have been important in the world he had come from. In the wilderness Moses was weaned from the ways of his former world.

Moses probably began the day of his burning bush experience with the mindset that he would live out the rest of his life in the wilderness ...in obscurity. After 40 years in that place, Moses might have thought his life was on the shelf. Little did he know that his best days were just about to begin! At the burning bush, God gave Moses a graduation ceremony very different from the ones he might have had in the finest schools of Egypt. In a sense, God was saying that Moses was finally ready to do what he had been created to do all along. Moses was now ready to do it God's way rather than man's way. He had always been a man of great ability, some of it natural and some it acquired through his upbringing in Egypt. But now Moses was ready to submit his strengths to God rather than using them independently from God.

As we shall soon see, Moses goes on to deliver the Hebrew people from slavery and to lead them for 40 more years, ultimately becoming one of the most important figures in human history.

Ask & Reflect

- For Moses the wilderness was more than a location; it was a place in his soul where he could not (and did not need to) depend on the things that defined his identity in Egypt. In the wilderness he could avoid real challenge ...and failure. In a strange way, it was an uncomfortable place and

a comfortable place at the same time. He could have become stuck there had God not intervened. Have you ever been in a similar place? If so, explain.

- A person's weakness can often cause them to depend on God. But a person's strength can lead them to think they don't need to depend on God. When this occurs, our greatest strength can become the greatest detriment to our spiritual life. Can you think of an area of strength in your life, one in which you find it easy to operate without depending on God?
- What do you think God would have you learn from the life of Moses?

Decide & Do

If you can identify with the story of Moses, if you feel that you've blown your opportunity to be what God wants you to be, if you feel like you are "on the shelf," then be encouraged by the life of Moses. God is the One who determines when we are ready to do what He is calling us to do, and He is the One that prepares us to do it, sometimes by leading us to the wilderness.

It is never too late for God to use you! Be ready when He says it is time to go.

For Further Study

- Sandy Sheppard, "Wilderness Survival: Rich Lessons from a Season of Suffering." (Discipleship Journal, The Navigators, NavPress, July/August 1998). (<http://www.navpress.com/EPubs/DisplayArticle/1/1.106.10.html>). Retrieved October 13, 2006.
- *Scriptures for the Desert, a sidebar to the article above*. (<http://www.navpress.com/EPubs/DisplayArticle/1/1.106.10.1.html>). Retrieved October 13, 2006.

¹Exodus 2:1–10.

²Exodus 2:11–23

Each of these “provisions” from God reveals something about the promised Deliverer. For those who trust in God, the promised Deliverer will be like a covering to shield them from the consequences of sin. He will be like an ark to carry them safely through judgment. He will give Himself for them in the same way that the ram in the bushes was given by God for Isaac. And like the Passover lamb, His blood will be over them to save them from eternal death.

Ask & Reflect

- As we consider the “provisions” of God listed above, it seems clear that He has gone to great lengths to help us understand who and what the promised Deliverer will be to those who trust in God. What do these examples reveal about God’s promised Deliverer?
- As we shall see in a coming lesson, the promised Deliverer will be called, by some, the Lamb of God. What are your thoughts concerning God’s instructions for the Hebrew people to take an unblemished lamb into their house, live with it long enough to become attached to it, and then to slay it so that its blood would protect them from death?
- The value of something can be measured by the price that someone is willing to pay for it. And the seriousness of a problem is often measured by the lengths to which one is willing to go to find a solution. Imagine what must have gone through the minds of the children in the family when the father slayed the Passover lamb. They could have seen this as nothing more than a horrifying act. Or they could have realized that the seriousness of this act was directly proportional to the seriousness of the need it was satisfying. How might this relate to the promised Deliverer’s mission to conquer Satan, sin and death forever?

Decide & Do

Moses’ instructions to the Hebrew people may have seemed strange at the time. The same may have been true when God instructed Noah to build the ark to prepare for something called a flood. In view of that fact that rain had not yet occurred on the earth, it is easy to see why people mocked Noah. However, in view of the judgment that ensued, these instructions don’t seem so bizarre.

Is God asking you do something that seems strange by the standards of the world around you? If so, then be like Noah, Moses and the Hebrew people. Trust and obey God. He will protect you and bless you.

For Further Study

- *Passover*. (Jews for Jesus, 2006). (<http://www.jewsforjesus.org/judaica/passover>). Retrieved October 13, 2006.
- Moishe Rosen and Ceil Rosen. *Christ in the Passover*, (Moody Bible Institute, 1978). (http://www.amazon.com/Christ-Passover-Moishe-Rosen/dp/0802413897/sr=8-32/qid=1158163699/ref=sr_1_32/102-1316407-0306557?ie=UTF8&s=books). Retrieved October 17, 2006. Book Description from Amazon.com: A best-selling title from the ministry of Jews for Jesus, *Christ in the Passover* is now revised with an updated appendix. It is written for Jews, messianic believers, and Gentiles curious about the connection between the ancient holy day of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ, and for missionaries evangelizing to Jewish people. A comprehensive and convincing look at how the Passover is fulfilled in Christ.

¹Exodus 7-11.

- They would be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.
- Ultimately God would judge the nation in which they are enslaved.
- After God's judgment, Abraham's descendants would leave that nation with wealth.
- Abraham's own life would end in peace at an old age.

With today's story, everything God told Abraham had come to pass. Those who had listened to (and believed) the story of Abraham that had been handed down from generation to generation must have been looking forward to this day. They were no less surprised when God parted the sea, but they may have been a little less anxious, knowing that God had promised to deliver them and that everything else God had promised up to that point had come to pass.

Ask & Reflect

- Why do you think that God would allow the Hebrew people to be released from Egypt and then be pursued by the Egyptian army? (Hint – Read the Exodus 14:31–15:3 passage quoted at the beginning of this lesson.)
- God prepared a way for the Hebrew people when there did not appear to be a way. Has God ever prepared a way for you when you did not see a way? If so, explain. What was your response? Was it similar to that of the Hebrew people as cited in Exodus 14:31–15:3?
- If indeed there were Hebrew people who took heed of God's very specific promise to Abraham, can you see how they might have been confident that God would save them from the Egyptians? Can you see how studying God's promises for you in the Bible could give you more confidence in Him?

Decide & Do

The Bible chapters that detail this story (Exodus 14 and 15) are full of lessons for us. Set aside some time to read these chapters and to ponder what you've read.

In Exodus 14:14 we read, "*The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.*" Certainly there are times to fight or speak out, but for the Hebrew people this was not one of those times. God had designed this situation to make a statement. If the Hebrew people could have done something to save themselves (which they couldn't), then people through the ages would say, those Hebrew people were really remarkable. But God designed a dilemma that only He could resolve and for which He alone could be praised.

If you want God to receive glory from your life, then be prepared for trials. He may very well allow an obstacle in your life that only He can overcome. In fact, the greater the obstacle, the more He is glorified when He overcomes the obstacle. And if He is calling you to be silent, then let Him fight for you. Like the Hebrew people you will discover that "*The Lord is a warrior*" (Exodus 15:3) who can make a way when there appears to be no way!

For Further Study

- Adrian Rogers, *Promises of God*. (Love Worth Finding Ministries, 2006). (http://www.lwf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=dis_PromisesOfGod). Retrieved October 17, 2006.

¹Exodus 7-11.

The Law – A Sacred Trust, A Holy Calling

Chapter 7 Lesson 36



And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”

So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. And all the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do!” And Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord.

– Exodus 19:3–8

From Egypt, God led the Hebrew people to a mountain in a desert called Sinai. It was here God said that if the Hebrew people obeyed Him, then they would be blessed as His treasured possession, and they would represent Him to all the nations of the earth. The people said they would do whatever God asked. And so it was, with lightning and thunder, and smoke and fire, God descended upon the mountain. And Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. On tablets of stone, God wrote laws by which to live and be blessed. He gave them to Moses to give to the Hebrew people. It was a sacred trust, a holy calling. For these laws were the ways of God.

– The HOPE, Chapter 7

Observe & Consider

What an honor! What a responsibility! Through trials and miraculous triumphs, the Hebrew people had been set apart from all the nations of the earth to enter into a covenant with God. This covenant was centered around the Law that God gave to the Hebrew people through Moses on Mount Sinai. Known as the Ten Commandments, this Law is recorded for us in Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21. In this covenant God promised that if the Hebrew people obeyed His Law, then they would become His people and He would bless them. If they disobeyed His Law, then He would punish them. The blessings and curses associated with this covenant are detailed in Deuteronomy 28.

While this covenant is primarily defined in terms of the Hebrew people and their relationship to God, the ultimate significance of this covenant extends to the entire world. In the Exodus 19 passage quoted above, God promises that if the Hebrew people obey Him, then they will be to Him “*a kingdom of priests.*”

Basically, a priest is an intermediary between God and man. A priest leads people to God and is God’s representative to people.

The Law represented the ways and the will of God for man. As the Hebrew people obeyed the Law, they represented the will and ways of God to the world around them. And as they faithfully represented God by obeying His Law, God promised to bless them so that the world would know what God is like! Simply put, God’s covenant is not only about the Hebrew people being blessed, it is about the world seeing God through the faithfulness of His people.

If you remember our study of God’s covenant with Abraham in Lesson 31, you may be wondering how what we are studying today is actually a covenant. In the lesson on Abraham we defined a covenant as an unconditional, irrevocable promise from God. In the covenant we are considering today, the Hebrew people are promised blessing “if” they obey. Their

blessing is not unconditional. It is based upon their obedience. Yet this is still a covenant because no matter how many times the Hebrew people may fall short of God's Law, they will always be blessed when they return to God and obey. God will never reach the point that He "writes them off." In this sense we could say that the covenant is the unconditional, irrevocable promise of God to bless the Hebrew people if they obey and to punish them if they disobey – but never to disown or abandon them!

Ask & Reflect

- If you read the Biblical narrative carefully, you will see that the Hebrew people agreed to enter into the covenant with God (Exodus 19:8) before they had received the Law (Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21). In other words, they committed to do whatever God asked before they actually knew what He was going to ask. Why do you think they would do this?
- Would you be willing to commit to whatever God might ask of you before you knew what that might be? Why or why not?
- The New Testament teaches that everyone who trusts in and follows the God of the Bible is a priest (1 Peter 2:9) and an ambassador (Ephesians 6:20) of God. Like the Law given to the Hebrew people, this calling is a sacred trust. Are you ready for this trust? Explain.

Decide & Do

The Hebrew people were quick to accept God's offer to enter into a covenant with Him, but they had a very clear picture of God. Not only had God delivered them from Egypt, but in the days after that miracle, they had seen additional miracles as they journeyed through an unfamiliar land:

- Exodus 13:21 – God led them in a pillar of fire by night and in a cloud by day.
- Exodus 16:13–15 – God provided a daily portion of a bread-like food called manna.

- Exodus 17:6 – God provided water from a rock.
- Exodus 17:9–13 – God gave them favor to conquer an army.

God proved Himself again and again to the Hebrew people. He proved Himself to be God, and He proved Himself to be good! As a result, they were ready to say yes to God, no matter what He asked.

We too can know about the miracles of God and become familiar with His provision and promises by studying His Word, the Bible. The Bible is the very picture of God that He wants us to see! It records everything the Hebrew people experienced ...and so much more! If you want to see God in action, then become a student of His Word.

For Further Study

- *Covenant in the Bible*. (Preceptaustin, 2006). (http://www.preceptaustin.org/covenant_in_the_bible.htm). Retrieved October 18, 2006. This site provides in Table form a summary of the foundational biblical truths of various Biblical Covenants.
- John Piper, *Why the Law Was Given, A Sermon Given November 15, 1981*. (© Desiring God, 2006). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByTopic/11/320_Why_the_Law_Was_Given/). Retrieved October 18, 2006.
- Philip Yancey and Brenda Quinn, *Meet the Bible: A Panorama of God's Word in 366 Daily Readings and Reflections* (Zondervan, 2000).
- *The Bible Gateway, A Searchable Online Bible*. (<http://www.biblegateway.com>). Retrieved October 17, 2006. The Bible Gateway is a tool for reading and researching scripture online — all in the language or translation of your choice! It provides advanced searching capabilities, which allow readers to find and compare particular passages in scripture based on keywords, phrases, or scripture reference.

If we jump forward to the New Testament (Hebrews 10:4), we will see that while these offerings “covered” sin, they did not take away the sin. What’s more, we also see that a time will come when things hidden will be revealed (1 Corinthians 4:5 & 3:13). In other words, things covered will be uncovered, and every person’s deeds will be revealed, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 20:12).

The offerings made by the Hebrew people to atone for sin have been likened to a promissory note. When a man borrows a large amount of money, the lender may require him to sign an agreement (a promissory note)³ to repay the money by a certain time. The note does not take away the debt, but it does allow the man to go about life as usual until the time that final payment is due and the debt is satisfied. Similarly, these offerings allowed the Hebrew people to continue living in a right relationship with God. They did not remove sin, but they offered a temporary solution for the problem of sin until that time when the promised Deliverer would take away sin forever (John 1:29). These offerings pointed to a time when one perfect offering would become the final payment that completely cancels the debt of sin!

Ask & Reflect

- The Bible says that God’s Law is good (Romans 7:12, 1 Timothy 1:8). Does the thought of God’s Law (or laws in general) evoke a good feeling or a bad feeling in you? Why?
- For most people, the idea of sacrificing animals is offensive. But consider that the magnitude of a medical treatment is often proportional to the disease that is being treated. For instance, a person with cancer might undergo chemotherapy. A person with a damaged heart might undergo by-pass surgery. No one would undergo these kinds of treatments unless their disease warranted it.

A sinful act is not just a mistake; it is a violation of God’s Law, and therefore a violation of God Himself. The power of sin that dwells in every person is not just a bad attitude; it is a dark power that will bring death unless it is dealt with. Taking the life of an animal may seem extreme to some, but the problem of sin is even more extreme. How do you feel about God’s instructions to the Hebrew people to offer animal sacrifices as an atonement for sin? Explain.

Decide & Do

Read Exodus 29–30. Consider that the Hebrew people continually had to offer sacrifices to atone for sin in order to maintain a right relationship with God. But for those who trust in the work of the Deliverer, the matter of sin is settled once and for all. If you’ve never trusted in the Deliverer, then go immediately to the Knowing God section at the end of this study guide. If you have already placed your trust in the Deliverer to deal with your sin, then read Exodus 29–30, prayerfully thanking God for Him and what He has done for you!

For Further Study

- Lehman Strauss, *The Atonement of Christ*, by Lehman Strauss. (© bible.org, 2006). (http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=658). Retrieved October 18, 2006.

¹Easton, Matthew George, *Atonement*. (Easton’s Bible Dictionary Online, 1897; accessed on the Christian Classics Ethereal Library website). (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/easton/ebd2.html?term=atonement>). Retrieved October 18, 2006.

²*Atonement (kaphar)*. (Hebrew Lexicon – Word Studies, Ancient Hebrew Research Center, 2006). (http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/27_atonement.html). Retrieved October 18, 2006.

³*Promissory Note*, defined by Wikipedia, 2006. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Promissory_note). Retrieved October 18, 2006.

Decide & Do

Ideally, a person would find balance in the very middle of the continuum between the extremes of legalism and license. Perhaps that center point of balance could be defined by the term liberty.³ A person with true liberty before God is a person who is free to revere the Law as the holy and righteous standard of God (Romans 7:12) and at the same time free from being bound to it as a means of being made right with God.

Liberty is God's goal for every one of His followers. If you tend toward the license side of the continuum, then set aside some time to study the Law of God, particularly the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21). If you tend toward the legalism side of the continuum, then devote some time to the study of Romans 6, 7 and 8, or the book of Galatians. Ask God to use your study of His Word to liberate you to a right relationship to the Law and to Himself!

For Further Study

- *Frequently Asked Questions about the Bible: In the Bible we read about "the law." What does this mean, and are we supposed to keep "the law" today?* (International Bible Society, 2006). (<http://www.ibs.org/bibles/about/17.php>). Retrieved October 18, 2006.
- Richard L. Mayhue, *Legalism: Does It Lead to True Righteousness?* (CrossMap.com, Pastoral Resources, August 20, 2005). (<http://pastors.crossmap.com/article/legalism-does-it-lead-to-true-righteousness/item46.htm>). Retrieved October 18, 2006.
- John MacArthur, *Liberty in Christ – What Is Christian Liberty?* (BibleBulletinBoard.com, 2006). (<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/sg1667.htm>). Retrieved October 18, 2006.
- Ray C. Stedman, *What Are Bodies For?* (Discovery Publishing Company, A Ministry of Peninsula Bible Church, 1995). (<http://www.raystedman.org/1corinthians/3585.html>). Retrieved October 18, 2006.
- John Niles, *Legalism, License, or Liberty?* (The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2004 posted this article which first appeared in Fellowship Magazine, June, 1998). (<http://www.christianity.ca/faith/bible-studies/2003/06.004.html>). Retrieved October 18, 2006.

¹*Legalism (theology)*. (© Wikipedia, 2006). (<http://www.answers.com/topic/legalism-theology>). Retrieved October 18, 2006.

²*License*. (© Answers Corporation, 2006). (<http://www.answers.com/topic/license>). Retrieved October 18, 2006.

³*Liberty*. (© Answers Corporation, 2006). (<http://www.answers.com/topic/liberty>). Retrieved October 18, 2006.

From Blessing to Bondage

Chapter 7 Lesson 39



For over a thousand years, the Hebrew people attempted to live as God had commanded them. But many times they drifted away from God, sometimes even following false gods. When they did not turn back to God, He would discipline them, often by sending a foreign nation to invade their land and rule over them. The Hebrew people would then acknowledge their unfaithfulness, and call to God for deliverance. God would then raise up a leader to free the people from their oppressors. And the people would renew their commitment to live according to the ways of God. From blessing to bondage to blessing to bondage, over and over, again and again, the Hebrew people had been called to show the world what God was like. But because of the sin that infected the world, they could not walk in the ways of God without falling.

– The HOPE, Chapter 7

Observe & Consider

As we delve into this lesson, it is important to keep in mind that The HOPE is a summary overview of the Bible. An 80 minute video could not possibly cover the entire Bible. The HOPE excerpt above describes what happened over a period of more than a thousand years. During this time numerous kings and prophets made their mark on Hebrew history. Their stories are recorded in many books of the Bible. However, if you had to describe this period of time in one paragraph, the excerpt above would be an accurate one.

This excerpt describes a cycle that was repeated often in the history of the Hebrew people. One writer has described this cycle as follows:

from faith to obedience
from obedience to blessing
from blessing to abundance
from abundance to selfishness
from selfishness to judgment
from judgment to bondage
from bondage to brokenness
from brokenness to faith ...¹

After the Hebrew people saw the miracles of God in their Exodus from Egypt, they had the faith to obey God. They were quick to commit to whatever God asked of them. God promised to bless them when they obeyed, which He did. In fact they were blessed to abundance. And so the cycle began, and continued for centuries.

This cause and effect progression is not only descriptive of the Hebrew people; it can apply to any nation or individual in relationship with God.

Notice that there is a differentiation between blessing and abundance. Abundance usually means having more than we need. From God's perspective, having more than we need brings the responsibility to use our surplus to glorify God by blessing others. To do anything less is selfishness. In the case of the Hebrew people, judgment followed selfishness. There is a verse in the New Testament (Hebrews 12:6) which tells us that God disciplines those whom He loves. God's judgment of the Hebrew people was motivated by His love for them. His judgment often resulted in bondage to another nation, which brought them to place of brokenness and an awareness of their need for God!

Ask & Reflect

- Can you think of any specific situations with nations, groups of people, or individuals in which the cycle identified above has occurred? Explain.
- The critical shift in this cycle is from abundance to selfishness. Have you seen this shift in your own life? How do you think it might be avoided? Explain.
- Where would you place yourself in this cycle? Explain.

Decide & Do

Think about the step of obedience in this cycle we have been considering. Faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). We can ask God for faith, but we can't manufacture it. Brokenness is an overwhelming awareness of our insufficiency apart from God. We can resist God's work in our lives to break us, but we cannot break ourselves. Every step in this cycle, other than obedience, is something that God does for us or to us. Obedience on the other hand is man's responsibility.

Consider the real meaning of obedience. There is a verse in 1 Samuel 15:22 which reads, "*to obey is better than sacrifice.*" There is a difference between sacrifice and obedience. A sacrifice can be an act of obedience, but it can also be something else. A person can make a sacrifice on his own initiative when he chooses, where he chooses, and how he chooses. It is possible for a person to make a sacrifice that God never asked him to make.

Obedience is different. Obedience is always the only appropriate response of man to God. True obedience is something that begins in the heart. Obedience brings blessing. Obedience is the only thing that will prevent abundance from producing selfishness.

Consider your place in the cycle that defined the Hebrew people for so many years. Wherever you are, respond to God with obedience from the heart.

For Further Study

- John Piper, *The Pleasure of God in Obedience*. (© Desiring God. Sermon delivered March 29, 1987). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1987/588_The_Pleasure_of_God_in_Obedience/) Retrieved October 19, 2006.

¹Fred Carpenter, *GENERATION, Personal Study Guide*. (© Mars Hill Productions, 1997, page 10).

The Source of Unshakable Hope

Chapter 7 Lesson 40



In the Garden of Eden, God promised to send a Deliverer. Through Hebrew prophets, God gave hundreds of promises concerning this Deliverer, who would one day conquer Satan, sin and death forever. In the temple, the smoke from sacrifices ascended day after day, year after year, generation after generation, giving the Hebrew people a constant reminder of humankind's need for the Deliverer. But when would He come? How would He come? By now, some must have wondered if He would come at all.

– The HOPE, Chapter 7

Observe & Consider

Today's lesson marks the midway point in the story of The HOPE. Thus far we have considered many Biblical truths and events. Just as God intended, this has set the stage for what is to come. Looking back we have dealt with:

- Why the Bible can be trusted as God's revelation to man (Lessons 3 and 4)
- What the Bible says about God – Who He is and what He is like (Lesson 6)
- What the Bible says about man – created in image of God but separated from God by sin (Lessons 9 and 10)
- God's purpose for man – to love God and to be loved by God (Lesson 13)
- The nature of sin and its effect upon man and his relationship to God (Lessons 18 and 19)
- What the Bible says about Satan and the war he wages against God and man (Lesson 14)
- God's promise to send a Deliverer Who will conquer Satan, sin, and death forever (Lesson 20)
- How the nations of our world came to be (Lesson 25)
- How God called out a man, Abraham, through whom He promised to bless all nations (Lesson 26)

- How God's promise was kept alive through Abraham's descendents (Lesson 31)
- How from Abraham's descendents God formed the Hebrew people, through whom He would send the Deliverer and fulfill His promise to bless all nations (Lesson 32)

All of these events and truths are recorded in the first five books of the Bible. These five books (known by the Hebrew people as the Torah) were carefully compiled and painstakingly preserved prior to the time period covered in our current lesson (approximately 400 B.C. to 1 A.D.). See Lesson 3 to review Hebrew methods of guarding the accuracy of copies of the Bible.

Throughout the Torah there is a central recurring theme regarding the mission and ministry of God's promised Deliverer, whom the Hebrew people called the Messiah. This central theme is foreshadowed by hundreds of prophecies and numerous stories from the Bible. We have considered some of these in our study of The HOPE:

- The animal skins that God provided as a covering for Adam and Eve (Lesson 20)
- The ark that carried Noah safely through the judgment of the world (Lesson 23)
- The ram that God provided to Abraham as a sacrificial substitute for his son (Lesson 30)

- The blood of the Passover lamb over the doors of Hebrew families to keep away death (Lesson 34)
- The instructions God gave the Hebrew people to make offerings to atone for (cover) sin (Lesson 37)

Each of these stories profoundly illustrated how God would someday do for man what man could not do for himself: provide freedom from sin and walk in a right relationship with God forever. One might think that with all the revelation available to the Hebrew people, they would have been diligently watching for the promised Deliverer. But that was not the case.

Historians tell us that during the time period covered by this lesson, formal religion was at an all time high, and spirituality was at a low.¹ While some were indeed looking for the One promised in scripture, most were simply looking for a political deliverer who would free them from foreign rule and improve their lives. How could their focus have shifted away from the hopeful expectation of the Deliverer foretold in the sacred texts?

Most historians and Bible students attribute this shift in part to the influence of the Hebrew religious leaders who added hundreds of laws to “the Law” that was given by God. In Deuteronomy 12:32, God said, “*Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.*” It is not difficult to see how, over time, this kind of influence could cause the Hebrew people to change their focus and lose their vision. We should all learn a lesson from their example.

Ask & Reflect

- Looking back over what you have learned in the first half of our study, ask yourself how it has affected your view of God, and your relationship with Him.
- As we considered in Lesson 5, today’s “post-modern”² world rejects the idea of a grand story that explains this world and our purpose in it. This post-modern view leads to relativism,³ the idea that we all need to come up with our own story that explains the world and how we fit into it, and that every story is equally valid and true. What would you say to the post-modernist who says there is no grand story that explains the world we live in and our purpose in it?

Decide & Do

The lesson we should learn from the Hebrew people during this period of their history is really very simple and straightforward. Do not neglect God’s Word and do not add to it! There is a verse in Romans 15:4 that says it as well as it can be said, “*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*” If you want a hope that cannot be shaken in a world of relativism, then be a student of God’s Word. Let His Word shape your view of the world around you and your purpose in it.

¹Ernest R. Martin PhD., *The Intertestamental Period*. (This article was written in 1986; Transcribed and Edited by David Sielaff, June 2002; © Associates for Scriptural Knowledge, 1976–2006). (<http://askelm.com/doctrine/d020601.htm>). Retrieved October 19, 2006.

²*Postmodernism* [A Definition]. (Public Broadcasting Service, 1995–2206). (<http://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/gengloss/postm-body.html>). Retrieved October 19, 2006.

³*Relativism* [Definition, etc.]. (Answers Corporation, 2006). (<http://www.answers.com/topic/relativism>). Retrieved October 19, 2006. For insights into how relativism can be refuted: Matthew J. Slick, *Relativism*. (Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, 2003). (<http://www.carm.org/cut/relativism.htm>). Retrieved October 27, 2006.

Even for those who can embrace the amazing method of God's arrival, there is still something very odd about the manner in which He came. He came quietly, in obscurity. When a political candidate decides to run for election, he (or she) often hires a public relations firm to "represent" him. The goal is to create momentum for the campaign by creating as much visibility and public interest as possible. The same is true of an entertainer preparing to go on tour, or for a movie that is about to go into distribution. The press releases and the hype begin flying.

God's promised Deliverer arrived with no fanfare or publicity. In an earthy sense, the audience for this event was small – just some shepherds and few barnyard animals. This is the event by which western civilization measures time (BC and AD),² and yet it went unnoticed by most of the people of that time and place. In the spirit realm, however, a celestial audience of angels gave a heavenly ovation as the eternal God entered time and space! (Luke 2:13).

Ask & Reflect

- Have you ever been asked to arrange for the arrival of a "VIP?" If so, how did your plans for the arrival of that person differ from God's plan for the arrival of His Son?
- Why do you think that God did not bring the promised Deliverer into the world in such a way that the whole world would have known it?

Decide & Do

Beware of preconceived ideas about how you think God is going to do something or how He might show up in your life. Remember, His ways are not our ways.

Joseph and Mary could not find a bed in an inn because there was no room for them. Bethlehem was very crowded and full of activity that evening. Many people missed the fact that something of eternal significance was happening in their midst. They missed it not because they were doing bad things, but because they were doing their own thing – unaware that God was in their midst.

Like the coming of the Deliverer, God may intend to do something significant in your life, but He may choose to do it in a completely unexpected way. If you are not looking for it, you may not see it. Be ready for God to do the unexpected in your life!

For Further Study

- John Piper, *The Word Became Flesh*. (A Sermon Given December 24, 1989, © Desiring God, 2006). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1989/703_The_Word_Became_Flesh/). Retrieved October 25, 2006.

¹*The Big Religion Chart*. (© ReligionFacts Website, 2004–2006). Comparison of 25+ world religions. (http://www.religionfacts.com/big_religion_chart.htm). Retrieved October 26, 2006.

²Marshall Brain, *How Time Works*. (How Stuff Works Inc., 1998–2006). (<http://people.howstuffworks.com/time7.htm>), Retrieved October 25, 2006.

How Could Jesus Be Born Without Sin?

Chapter 8 Lesson 42



...just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...

– Romans 5:12

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.

– Genesis 3:15

God's plan was unfolding. But who could have ever imagined it would happen like this? From the ancient promises of God, one might have considered that to overcome sin, the Deliverer would be without sin, just as God is without sin. But who would have expected that the Deliverer, promised by God throughout the ages, would be God Himself in human form?

– The HOPE, Chapter 8

And through Adam, sin would be passed down from generation to generation, infecting all humankind to this very day.

– The HOPE, Chapter 3

Observe & Consider

In the previous lesson we said that we would revisit the issue of a holy God putting on flesh. How could a sinless God enter this sin infected world as a human and yet remain sinless? First, let's deal with why this is important, and then we'll deal with how it is possible.

As we see from the Chapter 8 HOPE excerpt above, in order for the Deliverer to free mankind from sin, He would need to be sinless Himself. This line from The HOPE summarizes the truth of a key theological doctrine. The Deliverer had to fulfill the Law in order to be the mediator and reconciler between God and man. In order to fulfill the Law, He had to be without sin.

Many verses in the Bible state that the Deliverer was without sin (Hebrews 4:15, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:5). But how is this possible? Repeatedly in our study of The HOPE we have read about the sin that has infected all mankind (see Chapter 3, Lesson 18). And from Romans 5:12 above we read that *“just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all*

men, because all sinned.” How then could the Deliverer be born of a human and not be infected with sin? Let's consider two possibilities.

First, we must acknowledge that if God can do whatever He pleases, then He could certainly have miraculously protected Jesus from being polluted by sin while He was inside Mary's womb.¹

Second, we must consider carefully Romans 5:12. Notice that the verse says that *“through one man sin entered the world”* and so death spread to *“all men.”* The verse does not say through *“one man and one woman”* sin entered the world. Sin entered the world through Adam, not through Eve. It was Adam, not Eve, who passed sin on to their descendents.² Perhaps this is why in Genesis 3:15, God promises that the One who will bruise (literally “crush”) Satan on the head will be One who comes from the seed of woman, not from the seed of man.

It is a known fact that certain traits, disorders, and diseases are transmitted only by fathers, or only by mothers.³ Similarly, it is possible that sin (the power of sin, not the act of sin) is passed down from generation to generation to every person through the father, not the mother. In the case of Jesus, through a miraculous conception by the power of the Spirit, God was His Father, and so Jesus was without sin. Despite what some religions teach, this would explain why Mary did not have to be sinless in order for Jesus to be born sinless. As a woman, her sin would not have been passed on. The Bible says that every person that has ever lived has sin (Romans 3:23, Romans 3:10)...except Jesus! (2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 John 3:5, Hebrews 4:15).

Ask & Reflect

- Why was it necessary for the Deliverer to be sinless? The fact that the Passover lamb had to be unblemished (Exodus 12:5) foreshadowed the fact that the Deliverer would be unblemished by sin (1 Peter 1:19).
- Have you ever thought about how, unlike every other person that has ever lived, Jesus could be born without sin? Can you see why this is a difficult concept for some to accept?

Decide & Do

Often when people cannot understand how God could do something, they resolve the conflict in their minds by compromising the truth. Some religions say that God could not possibly become a man without becoming tainted by sin. They view this concept as an abomination, and they reduce Jesus to nothing more than a prophet. Others say that in order for Jesus to be sinless, Mary would have to have been sinless. But as we can know from the Bible, 1) God did take on human form in the body of Jesus (Colossians 2:9), and 2) Mary was not sinless (Romans 3:23). And as we have also seen in this lesson, upon closer examination of the scripture, there is a way to explain the sinlessness of Jesus without having to compromise the truth.

The lesson here is simple. Never compromise the truth of scripture in order to resolve what appears to us to be a contradiction in scripture. Rather, dig deeper into His Word and ask Him to give you understanding.

¹*What Is the Immaculate Conception?* (Got Questions Ministries, © 2002–2006). (<http://www.gotquestions.org/immaculate-conception.html>). Retrieved October 27, 2006.

²Matthew J. Slick, *If Jesus is God in the flesh, why did He not inherit original sin?* (© Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, 1996–2006). (http://www.carm.org/questions/Jesus_sin.htm). Retrieved October 27, 2006.

³*Genetic Counseling*. (Medindia Health Network Pvt Ltd, 2006). (<http://www.medindia.net/patients/patientinfo/geneticcounseling-print.htm>). An additional reference is Richard M. Lebovitz, *Natural Selection in Family Law: Legal Cases and Materials*; 3.7. Maternal transmission of citizenship. (Biojuris, 2005). (<http://www.biojuris.com/natural/3-7-0.html>). All retrieved October 27, 2006.

Jesus as a Child – Fully Human and Fully God

Chapter 8 Lesson 43



And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

– Luke 2:40

And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

– Luke 2:47

And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: “Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased.”

– Mark 1:10–11

As a boy, Jesus grew in strength and wisdom. Even the Hebrew teachers were amazed at His understanding of the things of God. And when Jesus spoke of God, He called Him Father! The grace of God was upon Jesus, and He had favor with those who knew Him.

– The HOPE, Chapter 8

And when Jesus came up from the water, the Spirit of God descended upon Him. And a voice came from Heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

– The HOPE, Chapter 8

Observe & Consider

Not much is known about Jesus as a boy or as a young man. Thirty years passed from the time of His birth to the beginning of His public ministry, and the Bible says little about those years. As the Son of God, He was unlike other people. As the Son of Mary, He was not unlike every person that ever lived. So what was it like to grow up as God in human form? We are left with many questions.

What was it like to be the Creator of the universe, and yet depend upon the creation the same as every other child nursed as an infant? What were His first words? Was there ever a time when the children were choosing sides to play a game, and He was left out? How did He feel? When He hit those awkward years of pimples and puberty, did He feel awkward? Was there ever a young girl who thought Jesus was cute? How did He handle that? Was there ever a bully who tried to intimidate Him? How did He handle that?

Somehow, it would be easier for us to dismiss those years, to skip over them, but Jesus didn't skip them. He experienced them, and He experienced them fully. From the verses above, there are some specific things we can know about the Son of God as He grew up and became a man.

We know that even as a boy, Jesus had a thirst for the things of His heavenly Father. The passage above from Luke 2:47 took place in the temple. Joseph and Mary had taken Jesus to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, an event that foreshadowed the sacrifice Jesus would ultimately make to conquer sin and death. Somehow Jesus had become separated from His parents. After three days His parents finally found Him in the temple dialoging with the religious leaders of the day. The Bible says that people were “*amazed at His understanding and His answers.*” And when His mother scolded Him for causing His parents to worry,

Jesus answered, “*Did you not know that I had to be in my Father’s house?*” (Luke 2:49).

About 18 years passed in obscurity from the incident in the temple to the baptism of Jesus cited in Mark 1:10 above. We’ll spend more time dealing with Jesus’ baptism in the next lesson, but for now pay special attention to the words of His heavenly Father as Jesus came out of the water, “*Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased.*”

We must not miss the fact that these words were spoken before Jesus began his three years of public ministry which changed history forever. These words were spoken before He preached a single sermon; before He performed a single miracle; and before He accomplished His most significant work to conquer sin and death and to reconcile man to God. And yet, His heavenly Father could say that in Him He was well pleased!

God the Father was pleased, not so much because of all the things Jesus had done, but because of who He was ...or perhaps more accurately stated, whose He was! For those individuals who feel that God loves and accepts them based upon their performance, this should speak volumes.

Ask & Reflect

- Are you the least bit uncomfortable thinking of Jesus as a young teenager with a cracking voice and a newly-surfaced pimple? Why or why not? Explain your feeling about this.
- Is it a new thought for you that God the Father was pleased with Jesus before Jesus did any of the amazing and significant works that are recorded in the Bible? Do you think God’s pleasure in you is dependent upon your performance? Why or why not?

Decide & Do

Later in His adult life Jesus told a story about a servant that was faithful to invest and multiply the resources entrusted to him by his master who was leaving on a long journey. Upon his return the master said to his servant, “*Well done good and faithful servant. Because you were faithful in a few things, I will put you in charge of many.*”¹

In this story, the performance of the servant mattered. It was the basis for the master’s approval upon his return. Like the master in this parable, God’s “well done” for us will be based on what we have done ...or more accurately stated, what we have allowed Him to do through us as we faithfully obey Him.

Even so, as we have seen in today’s lesson, God’s love for us is based not on what we do for Him, but on who we are ...or more accurately, whose we are. If you belong to Him, then rest in the truth that God loves you and is pleased with you because you are His. If you’re not certain whether you belong to Him, then go immediately to the Knowing God section of this study and resolve the issue ...forever!

For Further Study

- David Humpal, *Jesus as a Young Boy*, Luke 2:21–52. (Verse by Verse Studies in the Gospel, 1998). (<http://www.elite.net/~ebedyah/PastorsSite/gospels/luke2-21-52.htm>). Retrieved October 27, 2006.

The following resources address the issue of God's approval and performance-based acceptance:

- Dr. Bill Gillham, *Polar Positions in God's Word*. (© Lifetime Guarantee Ministries, 1979). (<http://www.lifetime.org/get/equipped/dj-read/polar-positions/>). Retrieved October 27, 2006.
- Dr. Bill Gillham, *A,B,C,D,F or Pass/Fail?* (© Lifetime Guarantee Ministries, 1980). (<http://www.lifetime.org/get/equipped/dj-read/pass-fail/>). Retrieved October 27, 2006.
- Dr. Bill and Anabel Gillham, *The Life Video Series. How to Let Christ Live His Life in and Through You*. (© Mars Hill Productions and Lifetime Guarantee Ministries, 1996). (http://www.mars-hill.org/media/christian_growth/christian_set.htm). Retrieved October 27, 2006.
- Dr. Jerry Bridges, *Gospel-Driven Sanctification*. (© 2003, Modern Reformation Magazine, May / June 2003 Issue, Vol. 12.3). (<http://www.modernreformation.org/jb03gospel.htm>). Retrieved October 27, 2006.

¹Matthew 25:14–28

The Baptism of Jesus

Chapter 8 Lesson 44



Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?” But Jesus answering said to him, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he permitted Him. And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”

– Matthew 3:13–17

Proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven was near, John called the people to live according to the ways of God. When people accepted John’s challenge to live for God, they participated in a practice called baptism, in which they were covered with water. This was done to express purification and commitment to live according to God’s laws. And so it was one day, that Jesus came to John. Knowing who Jesus was, John asked to be baptized by Him. But the time for baptism in the name of Jesus had not yet come, and Jesus was baptized by John. And when Jesus came up from the water, the Spirit of God descended upon Him. And a voice came from Heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

– The HOPE, Chapter 8

Observe & Consider

The practice of baptism¹ as observed in this lesson had its roots in the washings that God instructed the Hebrew people to do for the purpose of purification (Leviticus 16:26, 28; 22:6, Numbers 19:7, 19). Jesus, however, did not need to be purified. Perhaps this is why John, who knew Jesus from childhood, tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized and said to Him, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?” (Matthew 3:14).

So if purification was unnecessary, what was the purpose of this baptism in the life of Jesus?

Most theologians agree that at least three things were accomplished by this event: identification, anointing and confirmation.² In regard to identification, many believe that Jesus, the One who came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17), was identifying with John’s call to righteousness – to live according to the ways of God. Some, however, see yet another identification taking place in this event.

As Bible teacher Dr. H. A. Ironside put it, “We are like paupers who have accumulated so many debts that we cannot pay them. These are our sins. These tremendous claims are made against us, and we cannot possibly meet them. But when Jesus came, he took all these mortgages and notes and agreements we could not meet and endorsed them with His own name, thereby saying that He intended to pay them, He would meet them. This is what His baptism signifies, and is why Jesus said to John the Baptist, ‘...it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness’ (Matthew 3:15). He declared His intention to meet the righteous demands of God by undertaking Himself to pay the debts of men.”³

In baptism, Jesus was not only identifying with God in regard to righteousness, He was identifying with you and me in our need for righteousness. Jesus came to offer Himself as our substitute in fulfilling the righteous requirements of God. This substitution began with His baptism and was completed at the cross.

The anointing in this event comes as the Spirit descends upon Jesus as a dove (Matthew 3:16). An anointing is an empowering from God to accomplish a specific mission. Jesus is about to step into three years of public ministry, culminating in an unparalleled act of suffering and sacrifice in order to conquer Satan, sin and death. Jesus was anointed for this very purpose.

The confirmation of Jesus was manifested in the Father's voice from heaven above: "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased*" (Matthew 3:17). As we saw in the previous lesson, this confirmation was not the result of all the miraculous works that Jesus had performed up to this point, because there were none. This confirmation was the result of who He was (or whose He was), and His willingness to walk in that relationship.

Ask & Reflect

- Is baptism something that you are familiar with? If so, then how? If not, what do you think about it?
- Have you ever been baptized? What did it mean to you at the time?
- What are your thoughts about Jesus identifying with you through baptism? What does it mean to you personally that He would do such a thing?

Decide & Do

In this lesson you have seen that Jesus identified with you in His baptism. Have you identified with Him? You should not limit your interpretation of this question to baptism. Baptism is an important public expression of your personal identification with Jesus. But have you personally identified with Jesus, His purpose in your life and the world around you? If not, that is where you need to start.

When you identify with Jesus by committing and entrusting your life to Him, then the Father will empower you to do exactly what He has created and is calling you to do. And as He empowers you, He will also confirm to you that He is pleased you are walking in a right relationship with Him. His confirmation may only come as a still small voice in your heart, rather than an audible voice from heaven, but it will come.

Remember, following Jesus begins with identification. Have you identified yourself with Him? If not, then don't delay. Go immediately to the Knowing God section at the end of this study, and carefully consider the Father's great invitation to you to be His son or daughter.

¹What is baptism? The process of baptism is very simple. The one to be baptized begins by standing, sitting, or kneeling in some water. Another Christian then lowers him/her under the water and then brings him/her back up out of the water. Some literally call this "immersion." Some faiths sprinkle water on people instead of immersing them.

²Ray C. Stedman, *The Servant Who Rules*. Exploring the Gospel of Mark. Volume One: Mark 1–8. (Discovery House Publishers, © 2002 by Elaine Stedman). (<http://www.raystedman.org/mark/mark1.html>). Retrieved October 27, 2006.

³Dr. H.A. Ironside, as quoted by Ray C. Stedman in his book, *The Servant Who Rules. Exploring the Gospel of Mark. Volume One: Mark 1–8*. (Discovery House Publishers, © 2002 by Elaine Stedman). (<http://www.raystedman.org/mark/mark1.html>). Retrieved October 27, 2006.

Ask & Reflect

- Today's lesson covers a concept that may be new to you. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
- In general, how do you look at tests? When you encounter a test in life, do you view it with anxiety or fear that you may fail? Or do you view it as an opportunity to prove who and what you are? Explain.

Decide & Do

In the world of higher education, there are certain post-graduate programs to which it is extremely difficult to gain admission. Yet once a candidate is admitted, the entire program is geared to ensure that the candidate will successfully complete the program.

While qualification for admittance into the post-graduate programs described above is extremely difficult, qualification for a relationship with God is even more difficult. It requires perfection, which of course is humanly impossible! That is why Jesus came to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. However, once you have trusted in God's provision for you and entered into an intimate, eternal relationship with Him, then God will do whatever it takes to transform you into the person He intends you to be. This truth is supported by Philippians 1:6, "*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*"

If you do not have the confidence that this is true, then consider that one of two things may be at work in your life: 1) perhaps you've never really placed your faith in God's promised Deliverer, or 2) you may have, but you don't yet understand how secure your relationship is in Him.

If you feel that the first option describes you, then go immediately to the Knowing God section at the end of this study and read again what God has already done on your behalf. If you feel that the second option describes you, then prayerfully read and meditate on the following verses and ask God to show you just how secure your relationship is in Him! John 6:47, John 6:40, John 10:28–29, Romans 8:1, Romans 8:29, Romans 8:39, 1 Corinthians 1:8, 1 John 3:14.

¹*Does God Tempt Us to Sin?* (© Got Questions Ministries, 2002–2006). (<http://www.gotquestions.org/God-tempt-us-to-sin.html>). Retrieved October 27, 2006.

²Ibid.

Called to Follow Jesus

Chapter 9 Lesson 46



And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him. And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. And they immediately left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

– Matthew 4:18–22

And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-gatherer; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

– Matthew 10:1–4

After resisting Satan, Jesus came out of the wilderness in the power of the Spirit. Soon, people began to follow after Jesus. Most of these followers were common, ordinary people. But they saw something very uncommon and extraordinary in Jesus. Some left the security of their livelihoods to be with Jesus. Some of these were fishermen, to whom Jesus said, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” From those who followed Him, Jesus chose an inner group of twelve. These became known as His disciples, and for nearly three years, they traveled with Him and learned from Him. They began to see the world through His eyes. As with everyone who follows Jesus, these men were being prepared for something far beyond anything they could imagine.

– The HOPE, Chapter 9

Observe & Consider

After resisting the temptation of Satan, Jesus came out of the wilderness in the power of the Spirit. He was ready for His earthly ministry. It wasn't long before people started following Him. From among these followers, Jesus eventually chose a smaller group who became known as His disciples.¹ Jesus lived with these men. Day after day He taught them, by word and example. He invested His life in their lives. He shaped their souls. And through this inner circle of men, God started a work and a movement (namely, the Church) that is literally unparalleled in all of history.

Now if you were going to assemble a group to start such a movement to change the world, then you might look for some extraordinarily gifted and accomplished people. But once again, we see that God often does things very differently from the way we would do them. The men that Jesus called to be among His inner circle were not the most educated or influential men that He could have found. By all appearances these were common ordinary men. Several of them were fishermen. One was a tax collector. And one was a revolutionary. But Jesus saw the potential in each of them, and ultimately God used them to give birth to something very remarkable, something that is alive today and will live for eternity.

Ask & Reflect

- When you consider the disciples of Jesus, do you think of them as common men or great men? Explain.
- Many classic paintings of the apostles portray them as almost super humans.² Why do you think this is?
- As in the case of the disciples, God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Do you think God might use you to do extraordinary things? Why or why not?

Decide & Do

Although they may not have been exceptional men in human terms (education, wealth, power, etc.), there is one thing that sets the disciples apart from other men. They were willing to make themselves completely available to Jesus. They chose to spend their lives with Jesus.

If you want to be used of God, then take a lesson from the disciples and make yourself available to Him. God values availability more than ability. If you make yourself available to Him, then He will use you. It is that simple.

For Further Study

- John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*. (W Publishing Group, A Division of Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee, 2002). To quote the back cover: “This book...brings you face to face with the disciples as you’ve never seen them before. You’ll walk in their shoes. You’ll understand their doubts and hopes. And you’ll hear the power of Jesus’ words in a whole new way. The message of Twelve Ordinary Men is clear. If Christ can accomplish his purposes through men like these, imagine what He has in store for you!” (<http://www.amazon.com/Twelve-Ordinary-Men-John-MacArthur/dp/0849917735>). Retrieved October 9, 2006.
- *The Call. How God Used One Young Girl to Influence a Generation for the Cause of Christ*. (© Mars Hill Productions, 1995). This video tells the story of Sherri Howard, who in 1985 was the first student to start a student-led Bible study in her high school in Wichita, Kansas. By the end of the school year, there was a student-led Bible study on every campus in Wichita!
- *Who Were the Chosen Twelve?* (© BibleNet. Net, 1996–2001. (<http://www.biblenet.net/library/study/12disciples.html>). Retrieved November 1, 2006. A brief overview of Jesus’ twelve disciples.

¹Bible Encyclopedia, *Disciple*. (ChristianAnswers.net, a Ministry of Films for Christ/Eden Communications, 2006). (<http://christiananswers.net/dictionary/disciple.html>). Retrieved October 31, 2006.

²Compare these earlier paintings of Christ and His disciples that were downloaded from The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s website (http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/gallery.asp) with these more recent renderings: (http://christcenteredmall.com/stores/art/disciples_of_jesus.htm). (Christ-Centered Art, 2006. Web pages copyright © 1998–2006 by Christ-Centered Mall, Inc.). Retrieved October 31, 2006.

do them. However, if you had terminal cancer one day, and then the next day it was gone, that would be completely contrary to the laws of nature. A miracle defies natural explanation because it defies natural law.

The Bible records 35 miracles performed by Jesus during His three years of public ministry. These miracles range from walking on water to raising people from the dead. To see a listing of these 35 miracles go to the section on the Miracles of Jesus at the end of this study guide. But keep in mind that these are only the miracles that are recorded. The Bible also says that there are many other things which Jesus did; so many that if they were written in detail the world could not contain the books! (John 21:25).

A primary purpose (if not the primary purpose) of the miracles recorded in the Bible was to serve as signs that confirmed the presence or revelation of God. This is true of the miracles of God in the Old Testament as well as the miracles of Jesus. The miracles of Exodus 7–11 confirmed that Moses was speaking for God. In the New Testament, Jesus said that His miracles proved who He was and that God the Father sent Him (John 5:36). Jesus performed miracles so that people might believe He was who He said He was. As you consider the miracles of Jesus, do you believe?

Ask & Reflect

- Do you agree with the Biblical definition of a miracle as stated above? Why or why not?
- Does it make a difference in the way you view Jesus to know that He came with profound teaching and miraculous works? Explain why you answered “yes” or “no.”

Decide & Do

Jesus performed miracles so that people might believe in Him. But in some situations Jesus did not perform a miracle because He knew they would not believe. Their hearts would not be receptive even with a miracle. “*And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief*” (Matthew 13:58).

People sometimes reason that if God would only do something in their lives, then they would believe. But God has already done something. He sent His son, and He came performing miracles so that we might believe. In Mark 9:23, Jesus said, “*All things are possible to him who believes.*” We may want God to prove Himself, but according to these words, a believing heart comes first.

Take some time to read through the recorded Miracles of Jesus which are listed at the end of this study guide. Ask God to teach you about Himself as you read through them.

For Further Study

- Ken Palmer, *The Sermon on the Mount*. (© Life of Christ, Ken Palmer, 1998–2006). (<http://www.lifeofchrist.com/teachings/sermons/mount/default.asp>). Retrieved November 1, 2006. “This is the greatest sermon Jesus ever preached. The Lord’s prayer, the beatitudes, and the golden rule are in this sermon.”
- John Piper, *Jesus Is Precious Because His Biblical Portrait Is True, Part 2*. (© John Piper, Desiring God, 2006). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1982/333_Jesus_Is_Precious_Because_His_Biblical_Portrait_Is_True_Part_2/). Retrieved November 1, 2006. A sermon delivered by John Piper on February 14, 1982.

¹Ken Palmer, *Parables of Jesus Christ*. (© Life of Christ, Ken Palmer, 1998–2006). (<http://www.lifeofchrist.com/teachings/parables/>). “A parable is an earthly story with a spiritual truth.”

²*Miracle* [LAT. *miraculum*, from *mirari*, to wonder. (© Net Industries, Online Encyclopedia, 2006; originally appearing in Volume V18, Page 572 of the 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica). (http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/MIC_MOL/MIRACLE_Lat_miraculum_from_mira.html). Retrieved November 1, 2006.

³*Miracles of Jesus – Man on a Mission*. (© AllAboutJesusChrist.org, 2002 – 2006). (<http://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/miracles-of-jesus.htm>). Retrieved November 1, 2006.

⁴John–Erik Stig Hansen, *Do Miracles Occur?* (©John Visser, Into the Wardrobe: A C. S. Lewis Website, 1994–2006). (<http://cslewis.drzeus.net/papers/miracles.html>). Retrieved November 1, 2006.

Ask & Reflect

- Do you imagine you would have been any different than the people who sought after Jesus for healing? Why or why not?
- Do you see any parallels between this story and the way people approach Jesus in our time? Explain.
- Read and meditate on the verses below. What do they say about those who would seek God and the gifts He gives?

Decide & Do

It is not wrong to seek help, healing or blessing from God. In Matthew 7:9–11 we read, “*Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will he give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!*”

As our heavenly Father, God loves to bless. In fact, He receives glory when He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The main question we should ask after today’s lesson isn’t whether or not it is good to seek blessing from God. The main question we should ask is whether we are seeking the blessing over the One who blesses.

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.”

– Matthew 6:33

“Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart.”

– Psalm 37:4

¹Ray Stedman, *The Dimming of the Light*, from his sermon series The Servant Who Rules. (© Discovery Publishing, a Ministry of Peninsula Bible Church, 1974). (<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/3307.html>). Retrieved October 18, 2006.

The Greatest Miracle of All

Chapter 9 Lesson 49



And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?” And immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Arise, and take up your pallet and walk?’ But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.”

– Mark 2:5–11

But of all the things that Jesus did, the thing that seemed to anger them the most was when He told people their sins were forgiven. For only God has the authority to forgive sin.

By claiming to do what only God could do, Jesus was in fact claiming to be God, an act that, according to Hebrew law, was punishable by death.

– The HOPE, Chapter 9

Observe & Consider

When it comes to the subject of miracles, the documentation of the miracles of Jesus is in a class by itself. There are, however, others in history who have (or have been said to have) performed miracles. This not only includes other characters in the Bible, but also the founders of other religions.

But there is one miracle though that no other person in the Bible and no other founder of a major world religion can claim: the forgiveness of sin. Jesus actually told people their sins were forgiven (Matthew 9:2, Mark 2:5, Luke 5:20, 7:47). The basis for the forgiveness that He offered is what Jesus would ultimately accomplish by His death and miraculous resurrection.

Most of the Hebrew religious leaders were infuriated that Jesus would say “*Your sins are forgiven*” for only God can forgive sin. By claiming that He had the authority to forgive sin, Jesus was in fact claiming to be God. He knew it – and so did they. And because these religious leaders didn’t believe that Jesus was God, they considered His words as blasphemy:

speaking evil of or against God, or making the claim to be God.¹ Blasphemy was an offense punishable by death (Leviticus 24:16).

As we saw in Lesson 47, Jesus performed miracles to prove He was God (Mark 2:10). But Jesus forgave sins because He was God. Consider how this great miracle is different from any other. The forgiveness of sins is the miracle that:

- Meets the greatest need – Because sin and separation from God is man’s greatest problem, restoration and reconciliation to God is man’s greatest need.
- Has the greatest impact – Physical healing is temporary. Forgiveness of sins results in eternal life. It is the miracle that lasts forever!
- Fulfills the greatest purpose – Jesus said He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). The fulfillment of this purpose accomplishes God’s highest good and brings Him the greatest glory.

- Required the greatest price – It required the death of God’s Son.
- Is available to the greatest number of people – “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13).

Ask & Reflect

- Why do you think that the religious leaders of His day had such a problem with Jesus? Do you think it was only because, in their minds, He committed the sin of blasphemy, or do you think there was something more?
- Do you think that people in Jesus’ day were more impressed with observable miracles than with the miracle of forgiveness? What about today? Why?

Decide & Do

God’s forgiveness of sin through His Son Jesus is a miracle in which every person can share, both by receiving it, and telling others about it. If you’ve never received God’s forgiveness of sin, if you don’t know for certain that your sins are forgiven, then go immediately to the Knowing God section at the end of this study and honestly consider what you read there. God is knowable – and He wants to be known!

If there is no doubt in your mind that you have received God’s forgiveness, you know what true freedom feels like. Never forget there are people all around you who have never experienced that. Every person in the world needs God’s forgiveness ...whether they know it or not.

In a sense, we are all like starving beggars in need of the bread of forgiveness. If you have received God’s forgiveness, then you have found and tasted this bread. Shouldn’t you tell others where they can find it too? Jesus said to them, “*I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst*” (John 6:35).

For Further Study

- Oswald Chambers, *The Forgiveness of God*. (© My Utmost for His Highest Daily Devotional, RBC Ministries, 2006). (<http://www.rbc.org/utmost/index.php?day=20&month=11>). Retrieved November 1, 2006.
- John F. MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*. (© John F. MacArthur, Crossway Books, A Division of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, 1998). From an excerpt on p. 18: “... then, are the basic truths underlying the Christian doctrine of forgiveness: God is the one who must accomplish forgiveness of sins; it is not possible for the sinner to earn his ...” Also includes contributions from Charles H. Spurgeon, and Alexander MacLaren. (http://www.amazon.com/Freedom-Power-Forgiveness-John-MacArthur/dp/0891079793/sr=1-33/qid=1162420339/ref=sr_1_33/102-6866998-7379368?ie=UTF8&s=books).

¹Merrill Unger, R.K. Harrison, Howard Vos, Cyril Barber. *Blasphemy [A Definition]*. (Unger’s New Bible Dictionary, 2006). “BLASPHEMY (Gk. ... Sometimes, perhaps, “blasphemy” has been retained by translators when the general meaning “evil-speaking” or “slander” might have been better (Psalm 74:18; Col. 3:8). ... There are two general forms of blasphemy: (1) Attributing some evil to God, or denying Him some good that we should attribute to Him (Leviticus 24:11; Romans 2:24). ... (2) Giving the attributes of God to a creature—which form of blasphemy the Jews charged Jesus with (Matthew 26:65; Luke 5:21; John 10:36).”

Here is how Lewis himself concluded his argument: “We are faced, then, with a frightening alternative. This man we are talking about either was (and is) just what He said, or else a lunatic, or something worse. Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend; and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God. God has landed on this enemy-occupied world in human form.”³

Who do you say that Jesus is – liar, lunatic or Lord? That is the most important question you will ever answer.

Ask & Reflect

- What are your thoughts about the argument set forth by C.S. Lewis? Do you agree or disagree with his logic? Why or why not?
- Why do you think that some see Jesus simply as a great man, but nothing more?

Decide & Do

If you have never answered the question asked by Jesus, “*Who do you say that I am?*”, then don’t wait until it is too late. As this lesson has shown us, Jesus did not leave us with a multitude of options. Not to decide is to decide. Settle things once and for all by going to the Knowing God section at the end of this study. Ultimately, we must believe His claim to be the Son of God, or we must reject it. If we believe it, then we must bow down and worship Him. Deepen your walk by going to the Growing in God section of this study.

¹C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. (© Macmillan Publishing Co, New York, NY, 1952, pp.55–56).

²Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter*. (© Tyndale House, 1977). This classic by a Master Apologist is still consistently one of the top titles in apologetics! McDowell gives readers insights into the events surrounding Christ’s life, asking whether they could all be explained by coincidence. He asks the hard questions about the reliability of biblical records, psychological profiles of disciples and apostles (would they die for a lie if the stories are not true?), and whether or not Jesus can be considered simply a good man who spoke some wise words.

McDowell is also well-known for another quote from this book, one that is applicable to this lesson: “Why don’t the names of Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius offend people? The reason is that these others didn’t claim to be God, and Jesus did.”

³C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. (© Revised edition, New York, Macmillan/Collier, 1952, p.55 ff.).

The Good Thing or the God Thing?

Chapter 10 Lesson 51



For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.” But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.

– Mark 9:31–32

From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.” But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.”

– Matthew 16:21–25

He began explaining to His disciples the true nature of His mission. He told them that soon He would be given over to the religious leaders and killed. Three days later He would rise from the dead. His disciples heard what He was saying, but they could not bring themselves to embrace the full meaning of His words.

– The HOPE, Chapter 10

Observe & Consider

As the end of His earthly ministry neared, Jesus began telling His disciples that soon He would suffer and die, and three days later rise from the dead. From the Mark 9 excerpt above, “they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him,” it is clear that His disciples had no place in their thinking for what Jesus was saying. And what’s more, His words were so hard for them to handle that they feared to ask for an explanation.

The response from Peter in the Matthew excerpt above is even more dramatic. Peter didn’t simply fail to understand, but boldly rejected what Jesus was saying. “*God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.*” Peter is saying “*God forbid it*” to Jesus, who is God! Jesus responds to Peter so strongly that it is almost startling. “*Get behind Me, Satan ...you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.*” Jesus was essentially saying that Satan himself was working through Peter to protest God’s will in action.

Jesus then spoke words that apply not only to Peter, but to everyone who wants to follow Jesus, “*If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.*”

What a contradiction to our natural way of thinking! If you want to save your life, you’ve got to give it up for His sake. This statement challenges the hearer to go far beyond simply acknowledging that Jesus is the Christ (the Deliverer), the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:16)! The challenge here is complete abandonment to His will.

Throughout Hebrew history God reiterated His promise to send a Deliverer who would one day free humankind from Satan, sin and death; who would one day secure the promised blessing for all nations. Jesus was now saying that the road to that blessing

was charted through unthinkable suffering and loss. Of course, we want the blessing. But how many of us are willing to trust Him to take us where we do not naturally want to go in order to receive it?

Ask & Reflect

- Why do you think it was so hard for the disciples to accept what Jesus was telling them ...that soon He would suffer and die and then three days later rise from the dead? If you were one of the disciples, how do you think you would have responded?
- When you encounter a difficult trial, what is your first response? Are you likely to respond to Jesus as Peter did (“*God forbid it*”), or do you have a different response?

Decide & Do

We must not look at every difficult thing in our lives as if something has gone wrong. Yes, there may be trials in our path that God does not intend us to go through. Jesus told his followers that with faith, they could move mountains (Matthew 17:20, 21:21, Mark 11:23). There are times when God wants us to exercise faith, trusting Him to remove or resolve the trial before us. It would be foolish to endure a trial that God wants us to trust Him to remove.

On the other hand there are some trials God allows into our lives which He does not intend to remove. In Peter’s case (Matthew 16:21–25), no amount of faith would have removed the trial that Jesus was about to go through, or the difficulties the disciple would face as a result. It was all part of God’s purpose, even though Peter could not see it at the time. Peter wanted what he thought was the good thing; Jesus wanted the “God thing.” If Peter could have known and understood the glorious, eternal purpose of what was about to happen to Jesus, he would have received it, and perhaps even welcomed it.

In James 1:2–4 we read, “*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*”

Often we do not know the purpose of a trial when we first encounter it. But we can be certain that if God allowed it into our lives, then there is a purpose. And because God is in control, the ultimate purpose is our good and His glory! If God gives you the faith to trust Him to remove or resolve that trial, then by all means, do so. Just be sure you not playing games with yourself by manufacturing a faith that is not from God.

If God is calling you to follow Him through a trial, then be assured that He will give you the grace to endure it, and the ultimate purpose will be both good for you and glorifying to God!

For Further Study

- Rick James, *Unmasking Life’s Trials*. (© Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 2004–2005). (<http://grow.campuscrusadeforchrist.com/library/journey/trials.html>). Retrieved November 2, 2006.
- Walter Chantry, *Take Up Your Cross*. (© The Reformed Reader, 1999–2006). (<http://www.reformedreader.org/rbb/chantry/takeyourcrossenglish.htm>). Retrieved November 2, 2006.

The Lamb of God Celebrates Passover

Chapter 10 Lesson 52



And when the hour had come He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, “Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.” And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”

– Luke 22:14–20

And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”

– Matthew 26:26–28

And so it came to pass, that Jesus, whom John called the Lamb of God, went up to Jerusalem, to observe Passover... Jesus gathered His disciples to celebrate Passover. Taking the Passover bread, Jesus broke it and said, “This is my body, which is given for you.” Then He took the wine, which represented the blood of the Passover lamb, which had been placed over the entrances of the Hebrew dwellings. And He said, “This is my blood which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”

– The HOPE, Chapter 10

Observe & Consider

Recall from Lesson 34 that God instructed the Hebrew people to institute an annual celebration called Passover so that they would remember how He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. When the ruler of Egypt refused to let the people go, God sent death to every first-born child in the land, but He “passed over” those in a dwelling with the blood of a lamb over the entrance. They were “covered by the blood.” Many Hebrew people traveled great distances to observe Passover in Jerusalem, the main city of their land. Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus took His disciples to Jerusalem to observe Passover.

According to the Biblical account (Exodus 12:5-8, Numbers 9:11-12), the Passover meal included three essential food items: roasted lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Each of these elements was meant to remind future generations about what God

had done to deliver their forefathers from bondage in Egypt.¹

The lamb would remind them of the unblemished lamb that had to be slain, and its blood placed on their doorposts so that death would “pass over” those inside. The bitter herbs would remind them of slavery under the Egyptians. The unleavened bread had a double meaning. First, because this bread did not require time to rise, it reminded the Hebrew people of their hasty departure from Egypt (Deuteronomy 16:3). Second, with leaven being a Biblical symbol for sin and corruption, this bread would remind them of a life that was not ruled by sin. Against this backdrop of rich history and imagery, Jesus gathered His disciples for a Passover meal and then proceeded to give a radically new spiritual meaning to this sacred tradition.

As the unblemished Passover lamb was slain to deliver the Hebrew people, so also the One who John the Baptist called the Lamb of God would offer His sinless body to deliver mankind ...and as He said this, Jesus offered the bread. As the blood of the Passover lamb covered the Hebrew families, so also the blood of Jesus would cover all those who seek refuge in Him from the penalty of sin ...and as He said this, Jesus offered the wine. Just as God in the Old Testament told the Hebrew people to always keep the Passover tradition, so also Jesus told His disciples to “*do this in remembrance of Me.*” What Jesus instituted that evening is known today as communion, the Lord’s Supper, or the Lord’s Table. In 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, we see this is something Jesus intended His followers to observe with regularity until His return.

The symbolism and drama of what we’ve considered in this lesson is incredible. Once again, we see that the Bible is not just an amazing collection of wise sayings and spiritual truths. It is the most remarkable story ever written. Think of it—the One who wrote this story wrote Himself into it as the central character and then submitted Himself to the plot, even to the point of death! And though the end of this story has already been penned, its plot is still unfolding today. Even as you read these words, God is offering you a part in this grand, eternal story.

Ask & Reflect

- Try to put yourself in the place of the disciples when Jesus offered the bread as His body and the wine as His blood. What might they have been thinking and feeling? Would the imagery He evoked have seemed strange to you?
- If you celebrate communion, the Lord’s Supper, or the Lord’s Table, what is it like for you? Is it a sacred time or a routine ritual? Explain.
- If the Bible is the greatest story ever written, and if it is still unfolding today, then do you see yourself as a character in the story? Why or why not?

Decide & Do

Not one bit of instruction is given in the Bible for the celebration of Christmas, yet Christmas is one of the most celebrated traditions in the world. Most people approach Christmas with great anticipation. The celebration we have studied today is described in three of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and in other verses of the New Testament. This sacred tradition was instituted by Jesus Himself as a rich and timeless drama in which only those who follow Jesus are privileged to participate. Let the significance and symbolism of this tradition invoke reverence, respect, and anticipation in you as you observe it.

For Further Study

- Arthur L. Farstad, *The Lord’s Supper*. (© Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Spring 1991– Vol.4:1, 2005). (<http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1991i/Farstad.html>). Retrieved November 2, 2006.
- John Piper, *Why and How We Celebrate the Lord’s Supper*. (A sermon delivered by John Piper on August 13, 2006. © Desiring God, 2006). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2006/1774_Why_and_How_We_Celebrate_the_Lords_Supper/). Retrieved November 9, 2006.
- Preston Gillham, *A Celebration Unlike Any Other*. (© Lifetime Guarantee Ministries, 1997–2006). (<http://www.lifetime.org/get/equipped/dj-read/celebration/>). Retrieved December 1, 2006.

¹Margot R. Hodson, *Passover – Sacrificed for Us*. (©A Feast of Seasons, Kregel Publications, 2001 in the USA). (<http://www.hodsons.org/Afeastofseasons/id18.htm>). Retrieved November 2, 2006.

to ask a question he thought could not be answered. Many who stand face to face with Jesus' claims do exactly the same! They may sense there is something remarkable about Jesus, but they won't really come to grips with who He is and with their responsibility to honestly engage Him. Instead they respond with a question such as, "Well if God is good then how...?" or "Does that mean everyone who doesn't believe like this is going to hell...?" And so on and so on. Perhaps we can't really know whether someone is asking a sincere question, or just putting up a smoke screen. But more often than not, the real question at hand is the same one that the governor was dealing with: What do you do with Jesus and His claims?

We often think of truth as something that is factual and accurate. In today's relativistic world, some would say that truth is whatever is true to you (see Lesson 40). In John 14:6 we read that Jesus said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.*" In this verse Jesus is saying that truth is not wrapped up in a principle, an idea or a fact; truth is embodied in a person, and He is that person. What an irony! The governor is asking "*What is truth?*" and all the while truth is standing right in front of him.

Ultimately Pilate gives in to the demands of the Hebrew religious leaders to decide the fate of Jesus, or so they think. Jesus is really in complete control of His own fate. (See John 10:17–18). Once he delivers Jesus to His death, the governor symbolically washes his hands of the matter (Matthew 27:24). But once you encounter Jesus, can you really ever wash your hands of Him?

Ask & Reflect

- Can you think of a situation in which someone avoided the issue at hand by attempting to engage you in a diversionary discussion? Do you think that the governor's question ("*What is truth?*") was sincere? Why or why not?
- This lesson makes the point that truth is not embodied in an idea or a fact, but rather in the person of Jesus. Does this affect your view of Jesus? If so, then how?

Decide & Do

In the end, there is only one question that every person must answer: "What will you do with Jesus?" (Acts 4:12). If you have already answered that question and you have placed your faith in Him, then be mindful of smokescreens when you are talking with others about Him. If Jesus really is who He says He is, then the answers to those "smokescreen" questions, as important as they may be, shouldn't change one's response to Jesus.

If you've never decided what you will do with Jesus, then be aware that you can't sidestep the question forever like the governor tried to do. Every person must answer. If you're ready now, then go immediately to the Knowing God section at the end of this study.

For Further Study

- Matthew J. Slick, *What Is the Truth?* (© Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, 2003). (<http://www.carm.org/cults/truth.htm>). Retrieved November 2, 2006.
- Daniel W. Jarvis, *Proof for Absolute Truth.* (© Absolute Truth Ministries, 2003). (<http://www.absolutetruth.net/truth/>). Retrieved November 2, 2006.

Ask & Reflect

- Although words cannot fully describe or capture the meaning of the cross of Jesus, what does the cross mean to you? Sometimes putting our thoughts into words can help our understanding.
- In Galatians 6:14, the apostle Paul wrote that the only thing he would boast in is the cross of Jesus. Why do you think he wrote this? What do you think he meant?

Decide & Do

After reading this lesson and its opening excerpt, one could view the “dilemma of divine proportions” as God’s dilemma. But God, being God, is never in conflict with Himself. With Him there is no dilemma. The dilemma is ours, and it is one of divine proportions, meaning that only God could solve it. And that is what He did at the cross.

At the cross of Jesus the two great forces of God’s love and justice have been forever reconciled. But each of us must personally, by faith, go to the cross to appropriate that reconciliation in his or her own life. For those who reject the cross, these two great forces will remain forever unresolved. Have you been to the cross? If not, then go immediately to the Knowing God section at the end of this study and read more.

For Further Study

- John Piper, *Christ Died for our Sins That We Might Die to Sin*. (A sermon delivered by John Piper on June 26, 1994. © Desiring God, 2006). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1994/878_Christ_Died_for_Our_Sins_That_We_Might_Die_to_Sin/), Retrieved November 9, 2006.
- John Piper, *The Hour Has Come for the Son of Man to be Glorified*. (A sermon delivered by John Piper on March 31, 1985. © Desiring God, 2006). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1985/484_The_Hour_Has_Come_for_the_Son_of_Man_to_be_Glorified/). Retrieved November 9, 2006.
- John Piper, *I Thirst*. (A sermon delivered by John Piper on April 5, 1985. © Desiring God, 2006). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1985/485_I_Thirst/). Retrieved November 9, 2006.

¹A. W. Tozer, *Gems from Tozer: Selections from the Writings of A. W. Tozer*. (Christian Publications, June, 1969, Chapter 7). “The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it.”

From this verse we see what will someday happen to this world and all of its works—it will all be burnt up. Ultimately, God isn't trying to preserve or rescue this sin infected world; He is creating a new one (Revelation 21:1). But as much as God is angered by sin in this world, this verse also tells us Jesus is not slow about His promise (to return and to judge the world), but He is patient because He wishes that none should perish. In other words, as intense as His anger is over sin, His love for people is even more intense.

Though His judgment of this world may not be immediate, it is imminent and inevitable.¹ And it will be terrible. And this brings us back to the point of today's lesson.

In each of the Bible verses quoted at the beginning of this lesson, you'll find the word, "propitiation." Simply put, this word means that all of God's wrath for the sin of this world was poured out on Jesus and satisfied at the cross.² Theologian J.I. Packer says that propitiation is "the heart of the Gospel," and that it is key to understanding the Bible in general.³

For those who have placed their trust in Jesus, the implication of propitiation is nothing less than incredible. It means that though God's anger will one day be poured out on those who reject Him, He will never be angry at those who have placed their faith in Jesus. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, He may discipline you because He loves you (Hebrews 12:6,10), but He will never again be angry at you because Jesus took it all on the cross.

Ask & Reflect

- Have you ever been angry at someone? Have you ever said or thought, "I can't believe he did that to me?" Do you think God (who knows everything before it happens) ever thinks such a thought?
- Human anger is usually triggered by a wrong suffered, often unexpectedly. God's anger is more intentional than that. He not only knows about every sinful thing we have done, He knows about every sinful thing we will do in the future.⁴ Knowing this, do you believe God ever thinks, "I can't believe he did that"?
- Because of Jesus' work on the cross, God's anger over your future sinful acts is already propitiated (satisfied). Do you have difficulty believing this? Why or why not?

Decide & Do

Peace with God (Romans 5:1) is a priceless gift. But as we have considered in previous lessons, a gift is not yours until you receive it. It is entirely possible to be convinced that you are going to heaven because you really believe that Jesus paid for your sins, but at the same time to feel that God is angry at you for something you have done. Some gifts are harder to receive than others, not because the one giving the gift is making it hard, but because we are making it hard. Feelings don't change quickly or easily. But over time, what we feel will be changed by what we know. If you struggle to experience peace with God, if it is hard for you to believe that God is never angry with you, then memorize and meditate on the Bible verses cited at the beginning of this lesson. Study them in context of the verses that surround them. Ask God to make His truth come alive in you. He will do it because He is faithful to His Word.

For Further Study

- John Piper, *Jesus Christ Is an Advocate for Sinners*. (From a sermon delivered on February 10, 1985; © 2006, Desiring God). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1985/477_Jesus_Christ_is_an_Advocate_for_Sinners/). Retrieved November 8, 2006.

¹2 Peter 3:7 – “But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”

²J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*. (InterVarsity Press, 1973, p.167). Packer quotes John Murray's definition of propitiation (from his book *The Atonement*) as follows: “The doctrine of propitiation is precisely this: that God loved the objects of His wrath so much that He gave His own Son to the end that He by His blood should make provision for the removal of this wrath. It was Christ's so to deal with the wrath that the loved would no longer be objects of wrath, and love would achieve its aim of making the children of wrath the children of God's good pleasure.”

³Ibid. p. 172. Packer writes: “A further point must now be made. Not only does the truth of propitiation lead us to the heart of the New Testament gospel; it also leads us to a vantage-point from which we can see to the heart of many other things, too. When you stand on top of Snowdon, you see the whole of Snowdonia spread out round you, and you have a wider view than you can get from any other point in the area. Similarly, when you are on top of the truth of propitiation, you can see the entire Bible in perspective, and you are in a position to take the measure of vital matters which cannot be properly grasped on any other terms. In what follows, five of these will be touched on: the driving force in the life of Jesus; the destiny of those who reject God; God's gift of peace; the dimensions of God's love; and the meaning of God's glory. That these matters are vital to Christianity will not be disputed. That they can only be understood in the light of the truth of propitiation cannot, we think, be denied.”

⁴Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. (Edited by R.K. Harrison, Howard Vos, and Cyril Barber; Originally published by Moody Press, 1988). “OMNISCIENCE. The divine attribute of perfect knowledge. This is declared in Psalm 33:13–15; Psalm 139:11–12; Psalm 147:5; Proverbs 15:3; Isaiah 40:14; Isaiah 46:10; Acts 15:18; 1 John 3:20; Hebrews 4:13, and in many other places. The perfect knowledge of God is exclusively His attribute. It relates to Himself and to all beyond Himself. It includes all things that are actual and all things that are possible. Its possession is incomprehensible to us, and yet it is necessary to our faith in the perfection of God's sovereignty. The revelation of this divine property like that of others is well calculated to fill us with profound reverence. It should alarm sinners and beget confidence in the hearts of God's children and deepen their consolation (see Job 23:10; Psalm 34:15–16; Psalm 90:8; Jeremiah 17:10; Hosea 7:2; 1 Peter 3:12–14). The Scriptures unequivocally declare the divine prescience and at the same time make their appeal to man as a free and consequently responsible being.”

The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?

Chapter 11 Lesson 56



...as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow; and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. And the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said.”

– Matthew 28:1–6

On the morning of the third day after Jesus had been crucified, a group of women went to visit the tomb. They were not the first. Earlier that morning, an angel of God descended from heaven. The soldiers guarding the tomb were struck with fear, and the angel moved the stone that sealed the entrance. The tomb was empty! Just as He promised, Jesus had risen from the dead!

...Over the next forty days, Jesus physically appeared to many people. With some He walked and talked. With others He shared a meal. In one instance, He appeared before more than five hundred people.

– The HOPE, Chapter 11

Observe & Consider

How important is the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus? The Apostle Paul wrote that if Jesus has not been raised from the dead, then our faith is worthless! (1 Corinthians 15:17). In upcoming lessons we gain a deeper appreciation of Paul’s powerful statement as we consider the significance of the resurrection. But let’s start by examining the overwhelming evidence that the resurrection of Jesus actually occurred, and that it was not just a fabrication or a myth as some skeptics claim.

Volumes have been written on this subject, but for the purpose of our study, we will consider four areas of evidence:

- **The Empty Tomb** – Jesus had said publicly that He would rise from the dead. Knowing this, the Hebrew religious leaders feared that someone might try to steal His body and then start a resurrection rumor. So they convinced the governor to post soldiers at the grave site and to place an official seal on the tomb

(Matthew 27:62–66). The governor’s soldiers were highly motivated to guard the tomb, for they knew that if they failed to obey orders the punishment could be death. Breaking a government seal was also punishable by death – and yet the tomb was empty!

- **The Eye Witnesses** – The Bible records numerous encounters that various people (including His inner circle of disciples who knew Him better than most) had with the resurrected Jesus (Matthew 28:9–10, 16–20; Mark 16:12–18; Luke 24:13–43; John 20:14–18, 26–29; 21:15–23). On one occasion Jesus appeared to a group of 500 people at once (1 Corinthians 15:6).
- **The Response of the Disciples** – Even in light of the empty tomb and eyewitnesses, some argue that the account of Jesus’ resurrection was a carefully designed conspiracy. But that argument loses its strength when you consider the passionately committed lives of His disciples after the resurrection. Many of

those who followed Jesus, including all but one of His twelve disciples, were martyred for their steadfast belief in Him. More than any others, these men would have known if the resurrection was a hoax. Yet they were boiled in oil, sawed in half, crucified upside down, thrown to lions and speared to death. Some men are willing to die for what they believe is true, but only a madman or a fool would die for what he knew was a lie.

- **The Testimony of Experts** – In a court of law, experts are often called upon to evaluate evidence. Throughout time countless scholars have weighed in on the evidence for the resurrection and concluded it to be a fact of history. As stated above, volumes have been written on this subject. As an example, consider the following quote from Thomas Arnold, Royal Professor of Modern History at Oxford and author of the book, *History of Rome*: “I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.”

Ask & Reflect

- Do you think the evidence presented above is enough to establish the resurrection as an historical fact? Why or why not? If you think not, then what do you believe would establish it as fact?
- What more could God have done to give us enough evidence to believe that Jesus rose from the dead?
- Are there things you accept as fact today for which you have less actual evidence than exists for the resurrection of Jesus? Why have you chosen to believe these things?

Decide & Do

One of the disciples, Thomas, had difficulty believing that Jesus had risen from the dead. Thomas told the other disciples that he would not believe until he actually touched the wounds of Jesus. Then Jesus appeared and gave Thomas the opportunity to do just that. Thomas responded, “My Lord and my God!”

Most Bible scholars believe that Thomas went on to Persia and from there to India preaching about God’s promised Deliverer, Jesus. Some believe that he went as far as China. It is also believed that Thomas was martyred in India after having led many to faith in Jesus.¹

Thomas was a man who doubted. But after being convinced, he gave himself completely to the cause of Jesus. Are you convinced about Jesus? If so, how have you responded to Him?

Many people have had (or still have) doubts about Jesus. Some like Thomas are sincere, and they just can’t believe in their heart what their mind rejects. Others, however, are just hiding behind what they call doubt in order to avoid dealing with what they know is true. If either one of these describes you, then know that the starting place for any skeptic is the same. Be honest with God! Thomas was honest about his doubt, and God met him where he needed to be met.

“...you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13)

For Further Study

- Josh McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*. (© Josh McDowell Ministries, 1992; © online Leadership U, 1995–2006). (<http://www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/josh2.html>). Retrieved November 27, 2006.
- Matthew J. Slick, *Resurrection Chronology*. (© Matthew J. Slick, 1996–2003). (http://www.carm.org/diff/table_resurrection.htm). Retrieved November 30, 2006.

¹William McBurnie, “Thomas” from his book *The Search for The Twelve Apostles*. (© 2006 BiblePath.Com, 2006). (http://216.239.51.104/search?q=cache:jL_9hwOWlv8J:www.biblepath.com/thomas.html). Retrieved November 27, 2006.

The Significance of the Resurrection – Part 1

Chapter 11 Lesson 57



And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

– 1 Corinthians 15:14–19

Observe & Consider

In the Bible passage above, the Apostle Paul makes a very strong statement about the significance of the resurrection. Carefully dissecting this passage, Paul says that if Jesus has not been raised from the dead, then at least six things are true:

1. our proclamation of Jesus and the message of Jesus is in vain (v.14)
2. our faith in Jesus and the message of Jesus is unfounded, and thus worthless (v.14,16)
3. those who proclaim Jesus are liars and witnesses against God – basically blasphemers (v.15)
4. we are still hopelessly in bondage to the power of sin (v.16)
5. we are all doomed to die, and death will forever separate us from our loved ones (v.18)
6. we are pitiful people if we hang our hopes on, and live our lives according to, a lie (v.19)

Bible scholars since the time of Paul have emphasized that what Jesus accomplished on the cross has meaning only if it was followed by His resurrection! In this lesson, and the next, we'll consider the significance of the resurrection by looking at Paul's argument in greater detail.

All of Paul's preaching was based on who Jesus claimed to be, as it was revealed to him and the other apostles (Jesus' inner circle of disciples).

Numerous times Jesus claimed that three days after His crucifixion, He would rise from the dead.¹ If Jesus spoke falsely about this, then everything He said was suspect, and worse, He could not be God because God cannot lie.

From this it follows that if we place our faith in a lie, then not only is our faith in vain and worthless, but we are pitiful people to have done such a hopeless thing. Throughout time, people have made great sacrifices, endured terrible hardships, and suffered brutal deaths for their faith in Jesus.² If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then it was all for nothing! What's more, believing such a lie not only turns people into pathetic victims, it makes them villains as well.

If Jesus is not who He claimed to be, then those who proclaim Him are guilty on two counts. As we have seen above, they are guilty for leading others astray, and they are also guilty for violating God. Recall from Lesson 49 that the Hebrew religious leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy when He claimed to do what only God can do, namely forgive sin. Blasphemy is basically speaking evil of God or against God, or claiming to be God. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then those who proclaim Him are basically participating in the sin of blasphemy.

Implicit in all this is something that has not yet been mentioned, but is deeply significant. If Jesus is discredited, then Satan is victorious, and his power in the world remains unbroken.

Now just in case this line of thinking has become a little too dark for you, realize that this is exactly the effect Paul was trying to achieve in 1 Corinthians 15:14–19. If Jesus did not conquer death, then all hope is lost! But praise God Almighty, Ruler of Heaven and Earth, Jesus has risen! If it would be helpful to you, review the previous lesson on the proof of the resurrection, and let what you read sink in.

Ask & Reflect

- Do you think that too much is being made of Paul's argument regarding the significance of Jesus' resurrection? Why or why not?
- No other founder of any faith, other than Jesus, has risen from the dead. From your experience, when people discuss world religions, does this truth usually enter into the dialogue? Why or why not?
- Has this lesson influenced your perspective on the resurrection in any way? If so, explain how.

Decide & Do

1 Peter 3:15 says that we should always be “*ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverenc ...*” Of course, the hope that is in us is Jesus, but as we have seen, this hope hinges on His resurrection. If you are a believer in Jesus, then be prepared to explain why your belief in His resurrection as fact is reasonable.

If you remain a skeptic regarding the resurrection of Jesus, then return to the previous lesson, and consider some of the information listed below under For Further Study. You owe it to yourself.

For Further Study

- Bob Deffinbaugh, *The Significance of the Resurrection*. (© bible.org, 2006). (http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=547). Retrieved November 28, 2006.
- *The Resurrection*. (© Campus Crusade for Christ, Canada, 1997–2002). (<http://www.face.org/jesus/muscle.html>). Retrieved November 28, 2006.
- *What Does Paul Say About the Resurrection of Jesus Christ?* (© AllAboutJesusChrist.org, 2002–2006). (<http://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/what-does-paul-say-about-the-resurrection-of-jesus-faq.htm>). Retrieved November 29, 2006.
- *Jesus' Resurrection*. (© AllAboutJesusChrist.org, 2002–2006). (<http://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/jesus-resurrection.htm>). Retrieved November 29, 2006.
- Andrew Knight, *Unforgiven: An Easterless World*. (© Lifetime Guarantee Ministries, 1997–2006). (<http://www.lifetime.org/get/equipped/egrace-read/138/>). Retrieved December 1, 2006.

¹Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; Matthew 17:22–23; Mark 9:31; Matthew 20:17–19; Mark 10:32–34; Luke 18:31–34; John 2:19–21; John 16:16–23; Matthew 12:40

²John Fox (1516–1587) and William Byron Forbush, Editor. *Fox's Book of Martyrs, A history of the lives, sufferings and triumphant deaths of the early Christian and the Protestant martyrs*. (© Christian Classics Ethereal Library). (<http://www.ccel.org/f/foxe/martyrs/home.html>). Retrieved November 29, 2006.

The Significance of the Resurrection – Part 2

Chapter 11 Lesson 58



...and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

– 1 Corinthians 15:17

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.

– Romans 6:4–7

...having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

– Colossians 2:12

Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

– 2 Corinthians 5:17

Observe & Consider

In the previous lesson we considered what the Apostle Paul wrote about the resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:14–19. In this lesson we will continue our study of the resurrection, starting with one verse from that passage. From verse 17 above, we read that if Christ was not raised from the dead, then we are still in our sins. Let's dig deeper at this precise place.

Recall from Lesson 18 that sin has infected every person since Adam. Now some people have the idea they can rid themselves of sin by living a good life, by becoming an increasingly better person. This is not what the Bible teaches. According to the Bible, the only way to deal with sin is to judge it and put it to death (Romans 8:13), and that is what Jesus accomplished by His death on the cross.

Now notice from Romans 6:5–6 above, that in some sense, when Jesus was crucified, you (your old self) were crucified with Him. As you think about this concept, it may be helpful to keep in mind that

because God is not limited by time and space, what God accomplishes in time and space is not limited by the ordinary constraints of time and space. Hence, in some way, though you might not fully grasp it now, Jesus took you with Him to the cross, even though you had not yet been born.

Also, it is important to note that when the Bible uses the term old self (or old man), it is referring to who you were before trusting Jesus to pay for your sin and reconcile you to God. In other words, "old self" refers to who you were as a person under the penalty and the power of sin. So as we carefully read verses 6 and 7, we see that your old self was crucified together with Christ so that "*your body of sin might be done away with,*" so that you "*should no longer be a slave to sin,*" but rather be "*freed from sin.*" God deals with sin by taking you (your old self) to the grave. And continuing with verse 7, "*He who has died is freed from sin.*" It is a good thing to be freed from the power of sin, but it is not good if we remain dead in a grave. That is why the resurrection is so important!

Notice from Romans 6:5 and from Colossians 2:12, that not only were we crucified with Jesus, but we were also raised with Him—raised to walk in “*newness of life*” (Romans 6:4)! And from 2 Corinthians 5:17, we find that that if we are in Christ (having found our refuge in Him), then we are new creatures; old things have passed away! If you have been raised with Jesus, then your old self (who you used to be) is still in the grave, and you have been made a new person with a new identity in Christ!

Now you may be thinking, “But wait a minute, I still struggle with sin. How can this be if I died to sin?” The Apostle Paul deals with this question in depth in Romans 7–8. Very basically Paul explains that there is still sin in your flesh (Romans 7:18–23), but you are no longer hopelessly subject to its influence (Romans 8:12). You are now free to live victoriously over sin by the power of God in you. And this is possible because of the resurrection!

The resurrection we have studied in Romans 6:4–6 is basically a spiritual resurrection; one in which having been made dead to sin, we are then made alive to God (Romans 6:11). The Bible also teaches that one day all those who trust in Jesus will have a literal physical resurrection in which they receive a brand new body like His (1 Corinthians 15:50–53) that is not corrupted with sin. This resurrection body will be capable of living forever in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:40–44). Again, this is made possible by the resurrection of Jesus who has gone before us!

So how significant is the resurrection? To summarize, it was the cross that freed us from the penalty of sin. But it was our spiritual resurrection with Jesus that freed us from the power of sin. And it will be our physical resurrection because of Jesus that ultimately and finally frees us from the presence of sin!

Ask & Reflect

- Has this lesson helped you to better understand the meaning of our opening verse, 1 Corinthians 15:17? If so, explain how. If not, try to explain where your understanding falls short.
- Has your view of the significance of the resurrection changed after these past few lessons? Explain.

Decide & Do

This lesson contained a lot of spiritual “meat.” If you haven’t quite digested it, then keep chewing! Read it again, prayerfully. Set aside some time to read through Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8. Study the material on the recommended links below. The truth that is before you has the power to free you in ways you never knew were possible!

For Further Study

- John Piper, *But Christ Has Been Raised, You Are Not Still In Your Sins* (A Sermon Dated Easter Sunday, April 3, 1994). (© Desiring God Ministries, 2006). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1994/870_But_Christ_Has_Been_Raised_You_Are_Not_Still_In_Your_Sins/). Retrieved November 29, 2006.
- Ray C. Stedman, *Romans* (Series 1). (© Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church, 1962–1963). (<http://www.pbc.org/library/series/4518>). Retrieved November 30, 2006. For an in-depth study of Romans, this series of sermons by Ray C. Stedman should prove invaluable, especially as those on Romans 5–8 relate to this lesson.
- Bill Gillham, *We're Totally Forgiven*. (© Lifetime Guarantee Ministries, 1997–2006). (<http://www.lifetime.org/get/equipped/dj-read/totally-forgiven/>). Retrieved December 1, 2006.
- Bill Gillham, *The World's Best Kept Secret*. (© Lifetime Guarantee Ministries, 1997–2006). (<http://www.lifetime.org/get/equipped/dj-read/best-kept-secret/>). Retrieved December 1, 2006.
- Bill Gillham, *Lifetime Guarantee*. Harvest House Publishers, 1993.

Inspired by the Resurrection

Chapter 11 Lesson 59



Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

– 1 Peter 1:3

...with God all things are possible.

– Matthew 19:26

After making certain that Jesus was dead, the soldiers allowed His body to be taken down from the cross. By the end of the day, His body would be laid in a tomb, which would be sealed with a very large stone. At the insistence of the religious leaders, soldiers would be posted to guard the tomb. For those who loved Jesus, this was a time of great confusion and loss.

On the morning of the third day after Jesus had been crucified, a group of women went to visit the tomb. They were not the first. Earlier that morning, an angel of God descended from heaven. The soldiers guarding the tomb were struck with fear, and the angel moved the stone that sealed the entrance.

The tomb was empty! Just as He promised, Jesus had risen from the dead!

– The HOPE, Chapter 11

Observe & Consider

The past few lessons have dealt with some “meaty” teaching about the resurrection of Jesus. Now, let’s take what we’ve considered in those lessons, and make it very personal. Reading the account from The HOPE above, and considering what you have already learned, try to put yourself in the place of those who loved Jesus. *For those who loved Jesus, this was a time of great confusion and loss.*

Jesus had filled His follower’s hearts and minds with many hopes and dreams. This wasn’t just a popular religious leader that was being buried in the tomb; this was the One who had given meaning and purpose to every aspect of their lives. When He died, something in them died as well. Their reason for living was buried behind the huge stone that sealed the entrance to His tomb.

Have you ever experienced the death of your dream of something that inspired and gave meaning to your life? Perhaps someone told you your dream was impossible, or the circumstances of your life changed or became so difficult that you could not see any way to follow your dream. Whatever changed, when it did all hope of your dream seemed dead.

Of course, we know as we read on in the resurrection account that Jesus was raised, and so were the hopes of those who loved Him! But beyond all the theology, beyond all the historical proof of its reality, there is something profoundly personal about the resurrection of Jesus. Because of the resurrection, we can know that with God nothing is impossible! No matter what anyone says, no matter how difficult your circumstances, even if your dream appears to have died...with God nothing is impossible! Jesus’ resurrection from the dead brings hope to the discouraged heart!

Ask & Reflect

- Have you ever experienced the death of a precious dream? What did that dream mean to you? Why did it die? How did you feel when it died? How do you feel about it today?
- Is there anything in your life that is unfinished – something for which you have given up hope? While not every dream we dream, or hope to which we aspire, is from God, this world is not a friendly place for even the dreams and aspirations that God places in our hearts. Sometimes a dream must die, so that when it is resurrected, we will know it was from God, and He will be glorified. Is there something in your life that needs to be resurrected? What might it be?

Decide & Do

After what you've read in this lesson, you might need to set aside some quiet time and ask God to speak to your heart. Perhaps the dreams God placed in there have been so deeply buried that you've lost sight of them altogether. You may have given up or forgotten – but remember: no tomb is so great that it can contain God's resurrection power! Allow that power to roll away the weight of your doubt or fear, and resurrect the dreams He gave you. Pray that God's reality might become your reality.

If it might be helpful, consider making the following prayer your own:

Almighty Father,
I have seen your power displayed in the resurrection of your only Son Jesus. You are truly the God of the impossible. Death and loss are heart breaking, but Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat fall to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed, but if it dies, it produces many seeds"* (John 12:24). What seems hopeless and final to me may not look the same to you. I have lost _____, but because you are the God of the resurrection, I have not lost hope in you. It is because of your great love that I am here praying this prayer. Your mercies never fail; they are new every morning. (Lamentations 3:22–23) I ask you to resurrect in my life those things that will give you glory! I will see Jesus' empty tomb as a reason to hope, and keep on placing my faith in you every day of my life.

For Further Study

- Ray C. Stedman, *The Living Hope*. (© Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church, 1995). (<http://www.raystedman.org/misc/3565.html>). Retrieved December 1, 2006.
- Max Lucado, *He Still Moves Stones*. W Publishing Group, 1993, 1999.

Final Words

Chapter 11 Lesson 60



Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

– Luke 24:44–49

He opened their minds to understand the events that had taken place in light of all that had been spoken through the prophets from ages past. He explained that for the forgiveness of sins, it was necessary that He suffer death and rise again. And He spoke of the Kingdom of God, saying that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him. Now the time had come for Jesus to go to the Father, and prepare a place in heaven for all those who love Him. Jesus promised His followers that soon the Spirit of God would come and empower them to share His truth and love and forgiveness with the whole world. After saying this, Jesus left them and ascended into the clouds.

– The HOPE, Chapter 11

Observe & Consider

When we sense that time may be short we often choose our words more carefully. For this reason, final words are likely to be more important, even life changing words. In the brief time after His resurrection and before His ascending to heaven, Jesus spent precious time with His followers. During that time, He explained:

- What had happened to Him – Jesus explained that His death and resurrection were all part of the plan that had been foretold in God’s Word. It was necessary that He die for the forgiveness of sin.
- What would happen next to them – On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that He would go to the Father to prepare a place for them in heaven (John 14:2–3). But He also promised to send another, One from the Father whom He called the Helper (John 14:16–20). As the time for Jesus’ departure drew near, Jesus reiterated the promise He made to His disciples: to send this One who is in fact the Spirit of God and who is known in the Bible as the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17, 33; 4:31; 5:32).
- What His followers should keep on doing until they are reunited with Him – Jesus told His followers that until He returned they were to share the truth of what they had witnessed with the whole world, with people from every nation.

In the next and final chapter of our study, we will look more closely at Jesus’ promise to send the Holy Spirit, and His instructions to share His truth with the whole world. But in this lesson, it is fitting that we should conclude our study of His death and resurrection by examining it in the context of God’s grand plan.

First, notice in verses 44 and 45 of Luke 24 that everything Jesus said and did was the fulfillment of all that had been written of Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Now some skeptics have said that because Jesus knew the ancient writings, He simply orchestrated His life to fulfill them. A person might orchestrate an event or two, and perhaps even arrange his death, but recall that Jesus fulfilled hundreds of prophecies (review Lesson 4). And what’s more, a mere mortal could hardly orchestrate his own resurrection! When Jesus

“opened their minds to understand scripture,” there was no doubt that He was the central character!

Also, consider that none of this simply “happened” to Jesus. As ugly as His death was, Jesus was never a victim. Neither the Hebrew religious leaders nor the foreign governor can be blamed for the death of Jesus. Jesus Himself asserted that no one could take His life, but that “*I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again*” (John 10:18). If anyone can be blamed for the death of Jesus, it is you and I, and every person ever born with sin and in need of a Savior!

Ask & Reflect

- Do you view the Bible and the story of Jesus in a new light as a result of this study of The HOPE? If so, can you explain how your perspective has been affected?
- Consider that if you were the only person in the world with sin, then your sin would have been enough to send Jesus to the cross, and He would have been willing to go. Do you see yourself as a character in God’s grand story? Why or why not?

Decide & Do

We are nearing the end of our study. You will not likely go through this material (at least in the context of this study) again. If there is anything you want to revisit for further consideration, set aside a time to do that soon. If you have any unfinished business with God as a result of what you have learned during this study, don’t put it off. Resolve to settle it with Him, and seek whatever guidance you may need to do so.

For Further Study

- John Piper, *Irrevocable Joy*. (© Desiring God Ministries, 2006 — From a sermon delivered March 26, 1989). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1989/671_Irrevocable_Joy/). Retrieved December 2, 2006.

The Coming of the Spirit

Chapter 12 Lesson 61



And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

– John 14:16–20

And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language.

– Acts 2:1–6

...we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.

– Acts 2:11

Not many days after Jesus has ascended to heaven, His followers were gathered together. Suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a rushing wind filling the whole house. They saw what appeared to be tongues of fire, which came to rest on each person. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and began speaking in languages other than their own. Just as Jesus had promised, His followers were not alone, for His very presence was being manifested in them by the Spirit of God filling them.

– The HOPE, Chapter 12

Observe & Consider

On the eve of His crucifixion Jesus promised His disciples He would not leave them as orphans. He told them that the Father would send the Helper, the Holy Spirit (John 14:16), who would be with them forever. On the fiftieth day (the Pentecost) after His resurrection, Jesus' promise was fulfilled. The Holy Spirit came and filled the followers of Jesus.

In Genesis 1:26 God speaks of Himself in a plural form. “Let us make man in our image.” In Matthew 28:19 Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” These verses (and many others¹) speak to a truth that is clearly taught in the Bible, though not necessarily explained. God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4), and He is

three-in-one. He is not one God with three parts. He is not three distinct Gods existing in community. God is three-in-one. This truth is known as the doctrine of the Trinity, and though it is supported by scripture it remains a mystery to the human mind.

Just as the Bible speaks of the Father and the Son as God, so also it speaks of the Holy Spirit as having the attributes of God:

- Eternal – having neither beginning nor end (Hebrews 9:14)
- Omnipotent – having all power (Luke 1:35)
- Omnipresent – being everywhere at the same time (Psalm 139:7)

- Omniscient – understanding all matters (1 Corinthians 2:10, 11)

Although He is God, manifesting all the attributes of God, the Holy Spirit does not draw attention to Himself. Rather most theologians would say that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to mediate or manifest (make known) the person and presence of Jesus Christ in God the Father. In John 14:9, Jesus said, “*He who has seen me has seen the Father.*” The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus (John 15:26) and Jesus reveals the Father.

In 1 John 4:16 Christ states that God is love. Consider that to be expressed, love must have an object. Some have argued that God created man as the object of His love. This was not necessary, because from eternity past, the triune God had an object of love within Himself! In fact, one theologian has described the Trinity as an infinite explosion of love and life from one to the other!² Think about that...an eternal explosion.

The Holy Spirit who came to fill the followers of Jesus equipped them to enter into and participate in that intimate, eternal fellowship that exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus was describing when, in the final verse of the John 14 passage above, He said, “*In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*”

After His followers were filled with the Holy Spirit, they went out in power and proclaimed the wonders of God in a heavenly tongue, and everyone who heard them understood in their own language. That was the Holy Spirit making Jesus known, and the Holy Spirit is still making Jesus known today!

Ask & Reflect

Many analogies have been used to attempt to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. Some 20 years ago, a seminary professor shared an analogy with his students, comparing the Trinity to a book which has length, width, and thickness. The length is not the book’s width; the width is not the book’s thickness. These three dimensions can be described separately, yet they are connected together. If you remove one dimension, you are no longer describing a book.³ In the same way, the triune God has three separate members that are connected together, and if you try to remove one you no longer have God.

Certainly no single analogy can enable us to completely fathom the incredible mystery of the Trinity. But analogies can be helpful. Does this illustration help you to understand the Trinity? Why or why not? How would you help someone understand the mystery of the Trinity?

Decide & Do

As the Apostle Paul begins the closing comments in the book of Romans, he writes (Romans 15:13), “*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*” Clearly God does not expect us to live a life that honors Him in our own strength. He wants us to rely on the Holy Spirit. How are you doing in your walk with God? Are you weary? Jesus said, “*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). Moment by moment, by faith, trust God the Father to manifest the presence of Jesus in and through you by the power of the Holy Spirit. Allow the Holy Spirit to fill you constantly.

For Further Study

- Jorge Atencia, *Witnesses Experience the Presence and Power of God the Holy Spirit* (Urbana 96 – Exposition: Acts 2). (© InterVarsity Christian Fellowship / USA). (http://www.urbana.org/_articles.cfm?RecordId=681). Retrieved December 8, 2006.
- Mike Oppenheimer, *What Is the Trinity?* (© Let Us Reason Ministries, 2006). (<http://www.letusreason.org/Trin7.htm>). Retrieved December 8, 2006.
- Paul Kroll, *The Holy Spirit Is the Personal Presence of God Himself*. (© 2004 Worldwide Church of God). (http://www.wcg.org/lit/God/presence.htm#_ftn2). Retrieved December 11, 2006.
- *Who Is the Holy Spirit?* (© EveryStudent.com, a site developed by Campus Crusade for Christ, International). (<http://www.everystudent.com/forum/hspirit.html>). Retrieved December 8, 2006.
- John Piper, *How Can We Be Clothed With Power?* (© Desiring God Ministries, 2006). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/4/654_How_Can_We_be_Clothed_with_Power/). Retrieved December 11, 2006.

¹Genesis 3:22; Genesis 11:7; Isaiah 6:8; 2 Corinthians 13:14.

²Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*. Orbis Books, 2000, p.15.

³Harold Wilmington, *Wilmington's Bible Study Library 1 & 2: The Doctrine of the Trinity*. (ChurchPlantingVillage.net, © North American Mission Board, SBC, 2000–2007). (<http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/atf/cf/{087EF6B4-D6E5-4BBF-BED1-7983D360F394}/01thedoc.pdf>, p.9). Retrieved December 11, 2006.

As we compare the metaphor of a physical body to the relationship between Jesus and His Church, consider these two truths:

1. All the parts of a body are necessary to form a complete functioning unit. If any member of the body is weak or missing, the entire body suffers.
2. It is only in the context of a functioning body that each member discovers his or her identity. Just as a finger cannot fulfill its function apart from the hand, so a follower of Jesus will never know (walk in) his or her identity in Jesus apart from a right relationship with the Body of Jesus.

Ask & Reflect

- Which of the five metaphors concerning Jesus and His relationship to the Church is most meaningful to you? Why?
- Do you feel that you are a vital part of His body? Why or why not?
- What can you do to become more vitally related to His body?

Decide & Do

The global Church is a manifestation of local churches in communities around the world. It is not the purpose of this study guide to promote a particular denomination, but rather to emphasize the Biblical mandate for followers of Jesus to be faithfully involved in a local church (Hebrews 10:25).

It is the responsibility of every follower of Jesus to:

- Find a church that clearly teaches: a) faith in Christ Jesus as the way to know God and receive eternal life, and b) the Bible as the Word of God.
- Find out how you can serve the body so that God can use you and grow you.
- Be faithful in your commitment to a local church.

For Further Study

- Ray C. Stedman, *EPHESIANS: The Calling of the Saints*. (© Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church, 1967). (<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/0250.html>). Retrieved December 11, 2006.
- *Church*. (Wikipedia, 2006). (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church>). Retrieved December 11, 2006.

The Church – A Work in Progress

Chapter 12 Lesson 63



Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

– Ephesians 5:25–27

Observe & Consider

Have you ever known anyone whose reason for rejecting Jesus was that, “the Church is just full of hypocrites”? It is a common sentiment. When you consider some of the weird things going on in the Church today or when you consider Church leaders who have not been good examples of Jesus followers, it is not difficult to see why people are turned off by the Church. But is that a good reason to reject Jesus?

In the world of music, classical composers like Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven are considered to be masters. It is enthralling to experience one of their works performed by a world class symphony. However, when a fifth grade orchestra attempts to perform the same work, the results are dramatically different. No one judges the genius of Bach when the fifth grade symphony falls short of perfection. It is almost expected. But when the Church falls short of perfection, many people question the value of following Jesus.

The person who rejects Jesus because of the Church needs to be aware of two things. First, Jesus is perfect regardless of how well the Church represents Him. And two, just because Jesus has not yet “perfected” the Church, or those who make up the Church, doesn’t mean that He is not able to do so, or that He won’t. The Church is a work in progress.

Jesus will see to it that ultimately the Church will be without “*spot or wrinkle or any such thing*”– that she “*should be holy and blameless.*” Like a child entering the teenage years, the Church may appear rough and unpolished. But every breathtaking bride was once an awkward adolescent. Some day the Church will be made ready to be the bride of Christ Jesus (Revelation 19:7). And as the Bible teaches (Revelation 22:5), she will reign with Him forever!

Ask & Reflect

- Have you ever heard anyone say that the Church is full of hypocrites? What do you think about that statement?
- What is your personal experience with the Church? Has it generally been good or bad? Explain why you answered as you did.

Decide & Do

As we have studied, those who trust in Jesus are made righteous “in Him.” But nowhere in the Bible is it taught that those who have been made righteous in Him will be able to consistently walk out that righteousness 100% of the time. Every follower of Jesus is a work in progress, learning to express outwardly what Jesus has accomplished inwardly. And there is not a better place to grow than in the Church. That is how He designed it to be.

If you have not yet decided to follow Jesus because you are hung up on the condition of the Church, then take your focus off the Church and turn it to Jesus. Weigh the claims of Jesus based upon the life and character of Jesus Himself.

If you are already a follower of Jesus, but have become frustrated with, or even hurt by, the Church, don't give up on it. God didn't give up on you as the object of His love! The Church needs you, and as we studied in the previous lesson, you will never know (walk in) your identity in Jesus apart from a right relationship with the body of Jesus.

For Further Study

- Matt Slick, *Questions and Objections to Christianity, Part 3*. (© Matthew J. Slick, Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, 1996–2006). (http://www.carm.org/40_objections/40-3.htm). Retrieved December 11, 2006.
- *QUESTIONS, Answers to Tough Questions: What about all the hypocrites I see who call themselves Christians?* (© Global Media Outreach and Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 1993–2006). (<http://www.greatcom.org/resources/toughquestions/tq11/default.htm>). Retrieved December 11, 2006.

Observe & Consider

There is not a subject more unpleasant to discuss than hell. But if hell is real, nothing is more unloving than to avoid speaking of the reality. Hundreds of passages in the Bible deal with the subject of hell. Jesus spoke more about hell than all the other writers of scripture. Hell is real, and Jesus clearly wanted to warn people so that people might avoid spending eternity there.

Concerning this subject we should be aware that: 1) hell was created not for man, but for Satan and his angels (Matthew 25:41), and 2) it is not so much that Jesus sends people to hell as that they choose to go there by rejecting God's salvation through Jesus (John 12:48). The truth is that every person ever born would go to hell had Jesus not paid the penalty for their sin and they not received God's invitation to receive what Jesus did on their behalf. Or to look at it another way, Jesus is what heaven is all about, so if a person rejects Jesus, he is in effect rejecting heaven.

The distance and contrast between eternity with Jesus and eternity apart from Jesus could not be greater. Nothing compares. From 1 Corinthians 2:9, we know that what God has prepared for those who love Him is too wonderful for us to even comprehend. But from the other verses above (and many more in the Bible) we can know that those who love Him will be prepared to dwell in a new heaven and a new earth where they will reign with Him (Revelation 22:5) and glorify Him (Psalm 86:12) forever!

In the beginning of our study we learned that the Bible is the meta-narrative, the grand story which explains every other story.¹ The Bible puts all of human history into context. And as we near the conclusion of our study, we see that the purpose of it all is to bless man so that God might be blessed and glorified forever. The goal of the grand story is His glory. As theologian John Piper puts it, "The final goal of all things is that God might be worshipped with white-hot affection by a redeemed company of countless persons from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."² Is that your goal?

Ask & Reflect

Some people want to go to heaven because they see it as a place where their deepest longings will finally be fulfilled. They imagine that they will be happy forever. But if John Piper has correctly summed up God's goal in this world, then heaven has an eternal purpose, and it is not to provide what we somehow missed during our earthly existence. Yes, in heaven our deepest longings will be fulfilled, and we will be happy, but not necessarily according to what we think will make us happy in this world. Every citizen of heaven will somehow be fulfilled by giving themselves to the purpose of glorifying God forever! Ask yourself:

- Is God's glory what I long for?
- Is God who I long for?
- If not, then why not? What, if not Him, do I long for? Who, if not Him, is the object of my desire?

Decide & Do

We are very near the end of our study together. If you are not certain of your eternal destination, but you want to be, then go immediately to the Knowing God section at the end of this study and read and consider it carefully. Don't put it off. Eternity may be closer than you think.

If you do know Him, but you want to know more about heaven, then consider a study in one of the resources listed at the bottom of this page. You don't have to wait to learn about eternity.

For Further Study

- Randy Alcorn, *In Light of Eternity*. Waterbrook Press, 1999. The author challenges us to live our lives in light of eternity, and helps us realize that what we really crave is found there.
- Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2004. This book provides us with a thoroughly researched biblical description of heaven. Many of us have serious questions about heaven, and also some not-so-serious questions. Alcorn addresses these issues and helps us to develop a greater understanding and deeper longing for our eternal destination.
- Ted Dekker, *The Slumber of Christianity: Awakening a Passion for Heaven on Earth*. Nelson Books, 2005. The author challenges believers, asking us to wake up from our bored slumber and remember our central hope. His goal is to ignite our passion for the exotic and pleasurable eternal inheritance that God has planned for those of us who will inherit His kingdom in heaven.
- Dr. Bill Gillham, *False Notions*. (© Lifetime Guarantee Ministries, 1997–2006. This article originally appeared in the October, 2000 issue of Discipleship Journal). (<http://www.lifetime.org/get/equipped/dj-read/false-notions>). Retrieved December 8, 2006.

¹Review Lesson 5.

²John Piper, *There Is No Greater Satisfaction!* (© Young Disciples of Jesus, 2005). (<http://ph.ydjesus.org/template/article.htm?code=yd&id=3190>). Retrieved December 8, 2006.

Now consider 2 Peter 3:9 (above). The “*promise*” in this verse is the promise that Jesus made to return, ushering in all He has planned for His followers. From this verse we see that Jesus is not slow about His promise, but that He doesn’t want anyone to perish. As bad as this world may be, as much suffering as there is, Jesus loves people so much that He is willing to delay the end so that someone might come to Him in faith, for when He returns it will be too late.

Matthew 24:14 and 2 Peter 3:9 define the breadth and depth of the Great Commission, showing us that Jesus has a passion for nations and individuals. So when will He return? Jesus said, “*no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone*” (Mark 13:32). That day is hidden from us, but we know it will not come until: 1) every nation has received a witness of the Gospel and 2) the last person who will trust in Jesus has done so.

In the past decade the Church has made unprecedented progress in taking the Gospel to the unreached nations of our world. But there are still those who have not yet heard. God longs for the day that He will pour out His blessing on those who long for Him (Isaiah 30:18). But that day will not come until the Great Commission is fulfilled.

Ask & Reflect

- Do you long for the day when Jesus will return to fulfill what He has promised for those who love Him? Do you long for Him?
- What are you doing to help complete the Great Commission?

Decide & Do

Let’s close our study by revisiting the words of John Piper on the subject of the Great Commission, or to use his term, missions. According to Piper,

*“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. The glory of God is the ultimate goal of the church – because it’s the ultimate goal of God. The final goal of all things is that God might be worshipped with white-hot affection by a redeemed company of countless persons from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. When the kingdom finally comes in glory, missions will cease. Missions is penultimate, worship is ultimate. If we forget this and reverse their roles the passion and the power for both diminish.”*²

Worship then is the motivation for missions, and the worship God intends will not be complete until the Great Commission is completed. Every follower of Jesus is called to help complete the Great Commission, not just “professionals” like pastors or missionaries. You may not be called to go to an unreached nation, but you can and should support and pray for others who are called to go. And you can certainly share Jesus with those in your sphere of influence. We don’t know the last nation to be reached before His return. Nor do we know the last person to be reached. That person could live in a distant land, or in your own neighborhood.

Find out what you can do to help fulfill the Great Commission in your sphere of influence and around the world. Ask God to open your eyes to work that is reaching the nations with the Gospel. Finally, consider making a list of ten people in your sphere of influence who need to know Jesus. Start praying regularly for the salvation of each person on that list. Pray also that God would orchestrate the time and place for you to share your faith in Jesus with each person.

You will grow in your relationship with God as you participate with Him in what He is doing in the world. If you choose not to participate, He will still get the job done by raising up someone else. As we have seen in our study of The HOPE, He is sovereign and His plan will not be thwarted. But as we have also seen in our study, the one who is willing to say yes to God is truly blessed. Remember as you go with God, you will grow in God. May God bless you so that you may be a blessing to Him and to the world around you!

For Further Study

- *Joshua Project*. (© Joshua Project, A Ministry of the U. S. Center for World Missions, 2006). (<http://www.joshuaproject.net/>). Retrieved December 11, 2006. The mission and passion of Joshua Project is to identify and highlight the people groups of the world that have the least exposure to the Gospel and the least Christian presence in their midst.
- The Traveling Team at <http://www.thetravelingteam.org/>. This website, although targeting college students, is a great place to check out the Biblical basis of missions, as well as to walk one through God's heart for the world from Genesis to Revelation – a wealth of mission related resources. Retrieved December 11, 2006.
- *Finish the Job* (VHS). © Mars Hill Productions, 1998. "A missionary doctor's passionate plea to trust God to do whatever it takes to complete the task of taking the gospel to every tongue, tribe and nation."
- *The Great Commission – The Great Adventure*. (© AllAboutJesusChrist.org, 2002–2006). (<http://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/the-great-commission.htm>). Retrieved December 11, 2006.
- John Piper, *Tell How Much the Lord Has Done for You!* (© Desiring God Ministries, 2006). (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/4/422_Tell_How_Much_the_Lord_Has_Done_for_You/). Retrieved December 11, 2006.

¹John Piper, *There Is No Greater Satisfaction: A God-centered Motivation for World Missions*. (© Mission Frontiers, January–February, 1998). (<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/1998/0102/jf984.htm>). Retrieved December 11, 2006.

²Ibid.

Knowing God

How to Begin a Personal Relationship with God



How to Begin a Personal Relationship with God

Think about it...a personal relationship with the creator of the universe! What an awesome opportunity! Read through the following information to understand some of the issues that are basic to establishing a personal relationship with God. Take your time with this and ask God to give you understanding with each point.

CONSIDER THESE TRUTHS

CHECK IT OUT

1. About God

Bible Verses

a. **He is Holy.** He is more awesome than anything or anyone you know! He is absolutely righteous.

Isaiah 2:2
Psalm 99:3
Revelation 15:4

b. **He is Love.** His love is perfect. He loves you. He wants the best for you.

1 John 4:16
John 10:10

c. **He is the Creator.** God created everything, including you; therefore He knows what is best for you. He has also created laws (guidelines to live by) for your good and His glory.

Colossians 1:16
Psalm 139:13
Joshua 1:8
Psalm 1:1–3

2. About You & Me

a. **We all have sinned.** The first man ever created, Adam, disobeyed God, and because of Adam's disobedience, a deadly spiritual disease called sin entered the world. As Adam's spiritual descendants, we have all been infected with sin. And, like Adam, we have all sinned against God by breaking His laws.

Romans 5:12
Romans 3:23
Isaiah 53:6

b. **Sin must be judged.** Because God is Holy and Righteous, He cannot accept or ignore sin. To do so would violate His character and corrupt His nature. The penalty for sin is separation from God and death.

Romans 2:5–6
Romans 6:23
Isaiah 59:2

c. **We cannot “make-up” for our sins by becoming a better person or doing good things.** Any sin against an infinite God has infinite consequences. Man cannot “work out” a solution that can “outdistance” the problem of sin. Only God can do that. Review Lesson 21 if necessary. Man's greatest need is not to become better, but to become new (Lesson 58).

Romans 8:3–4
1 Peter 1:18–19

3. God's Provision

a. **Because God loves you so much,** He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for your sin. Jesus died on a cross to rescue you from sin and its consequences. But death could not defeat Jesus, and three days after He was laid in a tomb, Jesus rose again.

Romans 5:8
Ephesians 2:4–6

b. **Through Jesus' death and resurrection,** God offers you:

2 Corinthians 5:15

- **Forgiveness** – No barriers between you and God. Acts 13:38
Ephesians 1:17
- **New Life and a fresh start** – Through the Holy Spirit, He gives you His very Life. He will lead you into all truth and give you power over sin. John 3:3–8
2 Corinthians 5:17
John 16:3;
Galatians 5:16
- **Purpose** – God has a plan for your life, and desires that you discover your destiny. Ephesians 2:10
- **Eternal Life** – You will live with God forever. John 3:16
- **And more than you can imagine!** 1 Corinthians 2:9

4. Your Decision

- a. **Salvation is a gift.** What God offers you through Jesus is a gift. And though it is free, it was quite costly to obtain. It cost God more than we could ever understand. It cost God His Son. Ephesians 2:8
Romans 6:23
2 Corinthians 9:15
- b. **A gift is not yours until you receive it.** You cannot earn a gift, and it cannot be forced on you. But a gift is not yours until you choose to receive it. You receive God's gift through faith, by trusting Him. You may begin a personal relationship with God by praying the following simple prayer. John 1:12
John 5:24
Romans 10:8–9

“Dear God, I have been separated from you by my sin. I thank you, Lord Jesus, for dying in my place to rescue me from the penalty and power of sin. I am ready to give you control of my life. Forgive me, fill me with your Holy Spirit, and make me the person you want me to be. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

If you prayed to God to forgive your sin and placed your trust in His Son Jesus, it is important to let someone know. You may contact someone from The HOPE response team at 1–800–NeedHim.

Here are some important things you need to know about your new life in Christ!

1. Because you have believed and confessed, you are saved! (Romans 10:9–10)
2. These are the wonderful things that have happened to you:
 - You have been born again; this means you are a new creation in Christ! (1 Peter 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:17)
 - The Holy Spirit of God now indwells you forever so you can have a personal relationship with Him and He can empower you to follow Him as your Lord! (1 Corinthians 3:16; Romans 8:10–11; 1 Corinthians 6:17)
3. The angels of Heaven are now rejoicing in the decision you have made and we are rejoicing with them. (Luke 15:10)
4. Because there was nothing you did to earn your salvation (it is a gift from God), there is now nothing you can ever do to lose your salvation. (Ephesians 2:8–10; John 10:28)
 - You are sealed with His Holy Spirit and guaranteed eternal salvation. (Ephesians 1:13–14; Ephesians 4:30; 2 Corinthians 1:21)
 - God's Holy Spirit will now testify to your spirit that you are His child and that you will be with Him forever. (Romans 8:16–17)
5. It is very important for you to grow in your new relationship with Jesus Christ. Growth in your relationship comes through talking to God continually and reading His Word, the Bible, daily. It also comes through meeting with other Christians for fellowship, worship, encouragement, accountability, Bible study and service. Meeting together with other Christians like this is called the church. You need to find and attend a church that believes and teaches the Bible.
6. It is now important for you to rejoice with others in the decision you have made, both Christians and non-Christians. In the next 24 hours, try to tell at least 5 people about your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Finally, there are basic things you need to do to grow in your relationship with God. Visit the **GROWING IN GOD** section to learn more.

Growing in God

The Basics of Growing in your Relationship with God



Coming into a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ is a wonderful beginning – but it is just that: a beginning. While it may be the end of the journey called “coming to faith,” it is only the start of another journey that might be called “growing in God.” The apostle Paul claimed that “knowing” Jesus Christ was the great goal of his life. He said, *“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”* (Philippians 3:10–11). Paul saw growing in God as an undertaking that would consume him until death ushered him into God’s very presence!

So how do we come to know our great, saving God, and to grow in Him? There are many ways, but time has shown that a few are key. Our knowledge of Him cannot help but grow as we study his Word, communicate with Him in prayer, share life with other believers, tell others about what God has done for us, and follow Him daily in faith and obedience. We’ll examine each of these briefly in turn.

1. Study God’s Word

You would never expect a child to grow into a healthy adult without proper nourishment. Children eat to grow. Likewise, the Word of God is the spiritual food that nourishes every growing Christian. The apostle Peter encouraged Jesus’ followers to, like newborn babies, *“long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord”* (1 Peter 2: 2–3). Just as there are many styles of eating – there are also many ways to “take in” God’s life-giving Word. Consider these to begin:

- Reading your Bible daily. Many plans exist for reading a portion of the Bible each day. If you are a new follower of Christ, you might begin by reading a few verses of the gospel of John daily until you have finished the book. Then move to another gospel (Matthew, Mark or Luke), or one of Paul’s “missionary” letters like Ephesians or Philippians. You might also find a “devotional” Bible which selects portions of scripture for you to read daily, and includes thoughts to consider on that particular passage.
- Reading through the whole Bible. Some Bibles are published with guides for reading the Bible through in a systematic way. If your Bible does not contain such a guide, you can easily find one. Several are available at the following link:
<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2012/12/27/reading-the-bible-in-2013/>.
- Discovering God’s Word is filled with promises for you. Memorize and meditate on His promises. Again, some Bibles will have at least a partial listing of God’s promises in their reference section. Others are available at no charge: <http://bible.org/article/selected-promises-god-each-book-bible>
- Studying the Bible in a group. Studying God’s Word together with other Christians is a wonderful way to grow in insight and in community. Seek out a leader in a Bible-believing church in your area and ask about group studies that might be available to you.

In every instance, the emphasis on Bible study should not be simply academic, or study for study’s sake. You are studying not to gain “head knowledge” but to know more deeply and fully the God whose saving plan has included you. You are a part of His story now!

2. Communicate with God

Prayer is simply communication with God – and it is so important. It may seem at times like one-way communication, but it is not. Prayer involves speaking to God and listening for His voice in return – as He speaks through His Word, through His servants, and through the still, small voice of His Holy Spirit. Through prayer we thank God for His goodness to us, confess our sins, praise Him for who He is, and make requests of Him. It is in regular prayer that we grow in our relationship with God and mature in our faith. The Bible says we should pray about everything, and that we should pray “without ceasing.” Truly, nothing is too small to take to God in prayer. He is the Lord of all life.

- Get in the habit of spending time each day with God. Learn to listen as well as to speak. Some people call this time with God a “quiet time” – but it may not be quiet at all. You may pray aloud, sing praises, or read aloud prayers from scripture during this time. The important thing is to set aside a time for God that will not be compromised, even if it is just a few minutes of undistracted focus every morning or evening.
- Keep a prayer journal. Recording your prayers can help you see how God has led you, and to praise Him for His faithfulness in giving not just what you ask him for – but what you truly need. Be sure and share answered prayer with others, too. God’s faithfulness to you can be used to build someone else’s faith as well!
- Study what Jesus taught about prayer in The Model Prayer at the end of this study. When Jesus’ disciples said “Lord, teach us to pray,” this is what Jesus offered in response. Many people say this prayer in a rote, or routine way – hardly thinking of what the words mean. As you study this prayer, consider each part of it, and what it says about God’s constant care and concern for you.
- Train yourself to maintain a running dialogue with God throughout the day. Some call this “practicing the presence” of God. Simply remind yourself that God is with you all day, every day – and that you are free to speak with Him about anything, at any time.

3. Fellowship with Other Believers

As we have studied, when a person comes to Christ, he or she becomes a part of His Body, the Church. Just like a physical body, every member of this spiritual body has a specific purpose, a special identity. And just as a finger cannot fulfill its function apart from the hand, so an individual Christian will never fully know and experience his or her identity apart from relationship with a local church body. Fellowship is essential to Christian growth, and we are warned against forsaking it (Hebrews 10:24–25). In community or fellowship with other believers we learn things about God and ourselves that may not be learned in any other way.

- As you begin your journey of faith, find a church near you that clearly teaches: a) faith in Christ as the way to know God and receive eternal life, and b) the Bible as the Word of God.
- Find out how you can serve the Body through that local church so that God can use you and grow you.
- Be faithful in your commitment to a local church. Not only do you need the church – your church needs you!

4. Share Your Faith with Others

When a tree that was created to bear fruit stops bearing fruit, its fruitlessness is a strong indication that the tree is not healthy. Just as a healthy tree bears fruit, so a healthy Christian bears fruit by sharing the life-giving truth of Jesus with others. The life that God has given you will become eventually stagnant if you keep it to yourself, and never speak of it to others. As you pass on what God has given to you, He will fill you afresh. Sharing your faith is vital to the Christian life – not out of guilt – but out of joy and enthusiasm for His saving goodness to you.

- Ask God to help you make a list of people with whom He would have you share your faith. Begin praying now for the right time to do so in each case.
- Look for daily opportunities to share. Ask God, “Have you prepared this person to hear what I have to share?” Be willing to take a risk. The results could be more exciting than you know.
- Familiarize yourself with the Knowing God section of this Study, so that you may comfortably be ready to give an account for the hope that others will surely see in you (1 Peter 3:15).
- Practice sharing your faith journey in a simple, conversational manner. You never know when God will give you the opportunity to tell your story!

5. Learn to Trust and Obey God by Depending on God

It has been said that all true knowledge is the result of obedience; everything else is just information. If you really want to know and experience God, then you must trust and obey Him—depending on the Holy Spirit whom you have received from God. Obedience for Christians is not optional. Although our sins are forgiven, we may not continue to deliberately sin with impunity, presuming upon the grace of God. We can be sure that God will not give us more revelation and understanding until we have been faithful with that which He has already given.

As we trust and obey God, we are changed more and more into His likeness. This is called “sanctification,” and it is the intended result of salvation for every man and woman. God’s goal is that “Christ would be formed” in His sons and daughters (Galatians 4:19) – and this process is not automatic, but rather the result of what one writer has called “a long obedience in the same direction.”

How do we participate in this process of sanctification?

- Learning God’s Word. The Bible is the primary way that Christians learn how to obey God. We read it both to learn from it, and to be supernaturally changed by it – because it is a living book with the power to change us! (1 Timothy 3:16–17)
- Spending your time alone with God, ask Him to show you any area of your life in which you are not obedient to His Word. If there are areas with which you struggle that seem to routinely get the better of you, seek the counsel of an older, wiser Christian who may be able to walk with you in your struggle and hold you accountable.
- Learning to listen and respond to the Holy Spirit of God on a moment by moment basis. This is a practice that grows easier with time, but you can and must begin to know and respond to the One that Jesus called “the Comforter,” and whom He sent to walk beside us.
- Trusting Christ to complete what He has begun. In the same way that you, by faith, trusted in Christ for your salvation, learn to trust in the Holy Spirit for the power to obey God on a moment by moment basis. The just are not only saved by faith, the just live by the faith that saved them! (Philippians 1:6)

The Miracles of Jesus

A Listing of the Recorded Miracles of Jesus



- Turning water into wine (John 2:1–11)
- Healing a nobleman's son (John 4:46–54)
- Delivering a man in the synagogue from demonic spirits (Mark 1:21–28; Luke 4:31–37)
- Healing Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29–31; Luke 4:38–39; Matthew 8:14–15)
- Filling the first of two nets of fish and the calling of His first disciples (Luke 5:1–11)
- Cleansing a leper of his disease (Mark 1:40–45; Matthew 8:1–4)
- Healing a paralytic (Mark 2:1–12; Matthew 9:2–8; Luke 5:17–26)
- Healing the man at Bethesda (John 5:1–15)
- Healing a man with a withered hand (Luke 6:6–11; Matthew 12:9–13; Mark 3:1–5)
- Healing the Centurion's servant (Luke 7: 1–10; Matthew 8:5–13)
- Raising the widow's son from the dead (Luke 7:11–16)
- Casting out a dumb and blind spirit (Luke 11:14–26; Matthew 12:22–32; Mark 3:22–30)
- Calming a storm (Mark 4:35–41; Matthew 8:18–27; Luke 8:22–25)
- Healing a man possessed by demons at Gadara (Mark 5:1–20; Matthew 8:28–33; Luke 8:26–36)
- Healing a woman with an issue of blood (Mark 5:25–34; Matthew 9:18–26; Luke 8:40–56)
- Raising Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:21–43)
- Healing two blind men (Matthew 9:27–31)
- Casting out a demonic spirit (Matthew 9:32–34)
- Feeding 5,000 (+) with five loaves and two fish (John 6:1–14; Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:32–44; Luke 9:10–17)
- Walking on water (Matthew 14:22–33; John 6:15–21; Mark 6:45–52)
- Delivering the Syrophenician's daughter from demon possession (Matthew 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30)
- Healing a deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:31–37)
- Feeding another 4,000 (+) (Mark 8:1–10; Matthew 15:32–39)
- Healing the blind man of Bethsaida (Mark 8:22–26)
- Casting demons out of a lunatic boy (Mark 9:14–29; Matthew 17:14–21; Luke 9:37–42)
- Pulling a coin from the mouth of a fish (Matthew 17:24–27)
- Healing a man born blind (John 9:1–41)
- Healing a woman with an 18-year infirmity (Luke 13:10–17)
- Healing a man with dropsy (or edema) (Luke 14:1–6)
- Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1–46)
- Cleansing ten lepers of their disease (Luke 17:11–19)
- Healing blind Bartimeaus (Mark 10:46–52)
- Withering the fig tree (Mark 11:12–26)
- Healing Malchus' ear (Luke 22:49–51; John 18:10)
- Filling a second net of fish (John 21:1–12)

The Model Prayer

The Teaching of Jesus on Prayer



If you wanted to learn how to pray, who would you choose for a teacher? In Matthew 6:9–13, you can find a model prayer given to you by Jesus Himself. It was not given simply to recite, but to teach you how to pray. It has been called “the true pattern for all prayer.” Each verse in this prayer identifies an important dimension of prayer.

“Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed (Holy) be Thy name.” – verse 9 (word added)

The starting place for prayer is God Himself. Begin prayer by setting your heart and mind on who God is, rather than on yourself and your circumstances. It will affect everything that follows. Jesus begins His model for prayer by bringing together two truths that seem so opposite it is almost inconceivable they could be spoken in the same breath. God is your Father. He loves you with a passionate, perfect, tender, unconditional love. God is also Holy. His glory and majesty are so intense, that even the host of angels surrounding His throne must cover their eyes and feet so as not to be overcome by His presence (Isaiah 6:2). Prayer involves both extreme intimacy and reverence.

A five-star general, the highest ranking officer in the military, may be known by many people. Most of them stand to attention and salute when he walks by. But his beloved (his wife, his children, etc.) know him intimately and can barge in on him at any time. There are many people who know about God, but as His children, we have direct access to our Father. Through prayer we can enter His throne room at anytime ...and we can know that He longs for us to be there!

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews. 4:16).

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “*Abba (literally Daddy)! Father!*” (Romans 8:15, explanation added).

We have all been created with a profound need to be fathered. For many, that need has never been met. A father is one who protects and provides for his children. With wisdom and love, he guides them and prepares them to flourish in life. God desires to father you. Before reading on, think for a moment what it means to have God, the Holy, All Powerful, Creator and Ruler of everything, as your Father. Respect Him and receive His love.

“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.” – verse 10

Because He is God, your heavenly Father knows what is in your heart. He knows what you are going to say before you say it. So why pray? The ultimate purpose of prayer (and of every created thing) is to glorify God. Through prayer, you have the incredible privilege of participating in God’s awesome eternal plan. Prayer is not about getting God to do something He does not want to do. Prayer is a means by which we appropriate (take possession of, lay hold of) God’s will. Prayer is a means by which God ushers His will into this world.

Jesus said that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). If you take Jesus at His word, then apart from Him we cannot even pray. Recall that by His word, God spoke the world into existence (Psalm 33:6, 9). As you become intimate with God, study His Word, walk in obedience, and listen in prayer, the Holy Spirit will use you in prayer to speak His will into this world. *“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”* Realize that God’s will is perfect and good (Romans 12:2), and that He is able to do exceedingly more than you could ever ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). In a way, what is available to you through prayer is like a special expense account with unlimited funds. An expense account is defined as an arrangement by which all expenses are paid to fulfill a certain task, which in this case is Kingdom business. Many of us hardly ever draw on that account, and when we do, the amount is meager compared to what is there for us. Many submit requests for funds, but are denied because the request is not in line with the purpose for which the account is intended. Discover how to appropriate all that God has for you through prayer!

You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives ... (James 4:2–3).

“Give us this day our daily bread.” – verse 11

When you give your life to God, you are no longer your own. You belong to Him, and your well being is His responsibility. He is your Father, and He promises to provide what you need to live the life He has called you to live (Psalm 37:25, Philippians 4:19). It has been said that God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s provision. That statement is most often applied to ministries, but it is equally applicable to people.

But why the “daily” part? For one thing, depending on God for your daily needs keeps your relationship with Him current and fresh. It also helps you to see a clear relationship between your need and His provision. Keep in mind that the ultimate purpose of prayer is not to get things or to get things done. It is to glorify God. However, when you pray in a specific manner concerning a specific need and that prayer is answered in a specific way, then God becomes more real to you and to those around you who know what He has done. He receives glory, and you grow in your understanding of His character, His nature, and His ways.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication (petition) with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6, emphasis added).

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” – verse 12

One writer has observed that, “As bread is the first need of the body, so forgiveness is of the soul ...it is the entrance into all the Father’s love and all the privileges of children.” Based on the work of Christ on the cross, God offers the gift of forgiveness for every sin you have ever committed or ever will commit. But for a gift to become yours, you must receive it. You enter into God’s forgiveness when you trust Christ as your Savior. You continue to walk in the freedom and blessing of His forgiveness as you confess your sins and as you forgive those who have sinned against you.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matthew 6:15).

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” – verse 13

As verse 11 leads you to pray for your physical need, and verse 12 the need of your soul, so verse 13 teaches you to pray for your spiritual need. 1 Peter 5:8 reminds you to “*Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*” But you need not be fearful for 1 John 4:4 reminds you that “greater is He (The Holy Spirit) who is in you than he (Satan) who is in the world” (descriptions added).

God offers you every spiritual resource you need to defeat the enemy. And as it is with God’s provision for your body and soul, you may appropriate these spiritual resources through prayer. Notice that in verses 10–13 the pronouns are plural. Pray not only for your needs, but also the needs of others. Praying for others is called intercession. Think about it – many of your friends are even now being stalked by our adversary; some are being held captive by evil spiritual forces. Through prayer you have the privilege of participating in their rescue!

“For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.” – verse 13

Verse 13 does not appear in all translations of the Bible. However, for the purpose of this study guide, consider that this verse is a powerful proclamation which praises God. And praise is certainly the appropriate response for one who has just been blessed by intimate fellowship with God.

In Exodus 33 we read about a dialogue between Moses and God that took place after the nation of Israel had been incredibly dishonoring to God. Moses had a lot to speak with God about. At the conclusion of their conversation, Moses told God that he did not even want to go forward unless the presence of God went with Him. After concluding your time of prayer with God, you would not want to go on without a sense of His presence either, would you?

The Bible teaches that God inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). When you praise God, you are inviting Him to manifest His presence in your life, and the powers of darkness will flee because they cannot stand the presence of God.

“Amen.”

The word “amen” literally means “so be it.” In the words of one writer, “To add ‘amen’ to our prayer is like the judge striking his desk with the gavel, proclaiming, ‘It is done.’ ”