

*In the Storms of Life,
Do We Have a Shelter?:
Basics of the Christian Faith*

By Glover Shipp

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Order From
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P.O. Box 72
Winona, MS 38967
Phone: 662-283-1192
E-Mail: choate@WorldEvangelism.org
Website: WorldEvangelism.org

Acknowledgments

I am greatly indebted to Betty Choate for publishing this and other books I have written. Even after her beloved husband's death, she has carried on his legacy of Christian publications. She is very conscientious in editing and formatting the titles she publishes. I am also indebted to my long-time colleague Don Vinzant, for motivating me to put together this manuscript.

Publisher's Statement

We offer this first of two volumes, **In the Storms of Life, Do We Have a Shelter?**, written by Glover Shipp, a proven soldier of the cross. Sadly, we were not able to print the manuscript as early as we would have liked, and brother Shipp will not read it in bound form because he has gone to his eternal reward after a lifetime of service to God. In addition to years of personal ministry in the States, he was also a long-term missionary in Brazil for 18 years. **There's No Nut Like a Brazil Nut** tells that story. **Separate for Me** is another mission study, and **The Pilgrims** is brother Shipp's "missionary life in cartoon". **His Hand or No Hand** is a study on the evidences that show that there is a God who made all that exists.

There is sadness at the thought that brother Shipp will not see volumes 1 and 2 of **In the Storms of Life** in print, but there is happiness in the thought that his love for God and deep knowledge of His word will live on for many years to come and will continue to bear fruit for eternity. May God bless you as you read and then live by the message in these pages.

Betty (Mrs. J.C.) Choate

November 1, 2017

Dedication

This work is offered as a living sacrifice to our Lord, who made our life in Him possible. It is also offered to the younger generations, with the prayer that they may read it and come to understand better what they should believe and why.

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“I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge
in the shelter of your wings” (Psalm 61:4).

Introduction

What we know and why we know it are important matters, especially in our day of casual attitudes toward historical facts and beliefs, both secular and spiritual. “What good is history?” some ask. “I am only interested in right now!” To such a mindset, historian George Santayana wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (Santayana, *The Life of Reason, Volume 1*, 1905). Many American people, especially younger people, are ignorant about all of history, especially the history and important documents of our country. Take your own survey and see how well you fare on this:

1. What nations controlled the future U.S. prior to our independence?
2. When did our founders declare our independence and from what country?
3. What was a famous battle of our war for independence?
4. Who was commander-in-chief of our military forces?
5. About when was our constitution framed? What preceded it as a governing document?
6. Can you name one of the rights listed in the Bill of Rights?
7. Who were our first three presidents?
8. What was the Louisiana Purchase? What territory was gained and from what country?
9. What famous speech began with these words, “Four score and seven years ago ...”? What occasioned it?
10. What was “the war to end all wars?” When was it fought and where?

(Answers at end of the Introduction.)

Across the board, our nation is largely illiterate about its own history. In many other nations this would be somewhat true, also. The same illiteracy is true about Bible documents and doctrines. If we were to take a poll among Christians on these subjects, how would it turn out? Let’s test it:

1. Is the Bible really true and its doctrines important? (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalm 19:7-11).
2. What was the first case of Bible doctrine written down? By whom?
3. In what language were the Ten Commandments probably written?
4. According to Jesus, what was the first and greatest commandment? The second? (Matthew 22:37-40).
5. At the end of his life Joshua set up a memorial stone. What was its significance? (Joshua 24:25-28).
6. What did the Lord say about marriage and divorce in the Bible? (Genesis 2:24; Proverbs 2:12-19; Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5; Ephesians 5:22-33).
7. What are some basic requirements for sincerely following God? (Matthew 22:37-40; Micah 6:8; James 1:27).
8. How many churches or bodies did Jesus establish? (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 4:4-6; Acts 20:28). How does one enter that body? (John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38, 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Peter 1:23).
9. Will God really judge all of us and send some to Heaven and some to Hell? (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 20:11-15).
10. What are our true purposes in being Christians? (Matthew 28:19-20; James 1:27; Matthew 6:33; Galatians 5:22).

How did you do on these little quizzes? Well, I hope. But many people would strike out on both. Today there is little interest in history or doctrine. Our age is one of diversity, relativity and political correctness, with no room at all for firm laws or doctrines. A TV interviewer asked Anne Graham Lotz, daughter of Billy Graham, “Are you one of those who believe that Jesus is exclusively the only way to heaven?” He added, “You know how mad that makes people these days!”

Without hesitation she answered, “Jesus is not exclusive. He died so that anyone could come to Him for salvation.”

What a great response, but not the one the interviewer wanted! Writer Joe Stowell commented on this. “Christianity is not an exclusive club limited

to an elite few who fit the perfect profile. Everyone is welcome, regardless of color, class or clout” (*Our Daily Bread*, Oct. 2007, 4).

Of course, salvation is more than just confessing faith in Christ. It involves faith, repentance, being buried with Christ in baptism, and then living a life of servanthood, dedicated to Him, and walking in His steps by obeying Him.

He gave us commands to obey, and they are not something we can regard or disregard at will. They are not just spiritual suggestions. In *Pirates of the Caribbean 1*, Barbossa was a captain who bent the rules of the Pirates’ Code. When challenged, he explained, “I think of them more as suggestions.” This is the mentality today: *God’s rules are merely spiritual suggestions and not to be taken literally or obeyed without question*. Some believe that the only value in the Bible may be found in the teachings of Jesus, or perhaps only in the Sermon on the Mount. God’s Word says this about such a spirit:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

“Then (when we are mature in the faith) we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14).

“I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ ... ” (Colossians 2:1-2).

“ ... and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me” (1 Timothy 1:10).

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).

“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound

doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Timothy 4:3).

With this attitude very much prevalent today, it is no wonder that doctrine is no longer emphasized, despite Paul’s frequent injunctions about sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:6,13,16, 5:27, 6:2-3; 2 Timothy 3:16; Titus 1:9, 2:1,7,10). This mentality goes back at least to parents and teachers who are not all that concerned about obedience to any law, to say nothing about obedience to God’s law. It goes back to the contemporary mindset of inclusiveness, in which all ideas and doctrines have equal value and no one should question the faith or doctrine of others. In fact, “No one should even care about doctrine. Doctrine is too judgmental. It is not contemporary — too old-fashioned by far. I know what I believe and I don’t need some book or preacher telling me what to believe!”

Louis Rushmore responds to such notions in these words:

“There is nothing and no circumstance more sadly impotent than a defective biblical hermeneutic (correct analysis of doctrine). This is so because failure to properly understand and correctly apply God’s Word to one’s life probably will affect one’s earthly pilgrimage adversely and definitely will affect one’s eternity adversely. Only a proper biblical hermeneutic can adequately order one’s life on earth and adequately prepare one for eternity. We cannot overstate the importance of ascertaining correctly the biblical hermeneutic, since we do not get another-go-around-in-another-life to do a better job next time handling aright the Holy Word of God” (Rushmore, *Gospel Gazette Online*, December 2008, p. 1).

Israelite fathers were to teach God’s ordinances to their children, beginning with their father Abraham (Genesis 18:18-19; Exodus 13:14-16; Proverbs 22:16). Christian fathers were to have the same responsibility (Ephesians 6:4). I think this is where the breakdown almost always begins — parents set a bad example, quit believing (or at least are inconsistent in their faith) and certainly fail to transmit their faith to their children.

It is late in the game, but perhaps not too late, to emphasize sound doctrine in our homes, classes and sermons. Rick Warren, of the well-known Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., led countless churches and people to follow a seeker-friendly pattern of worship and work. Now he and the church announce that they have been wrong and are going back to preaching sound theology. We must take a stand on what is faithful and true

in Scripture. This book is intended to remind us of what we believe about sound theology, the work and worship of the church, the Christian life and moral values. We will be accused, I am sure, of being legalists for seeking to follow sound doctrine, but so be it. A highly-ranked Presbyterian professor asked a seminary class he was teaching why they weren't practicing what Romans 6 teaches about baptism. What we believe, if bathed in Scripture, is important. *Seeking for an anchor for our souls* will be the recurring theme in each chapter of this book. I pray that we will all take its messages to heart and be ready, always, to give an answer to those who ask us what we really believe and why we believe it (1 Peter 3:15).

We face intensely devastating storms of life in today's world. We can only be prepared for them if we know what we believe from God's Word and why we believe it.

You will note that the book is divided into major topics, such as God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Heaven and Hell, Angels, Satan and demonic beings. Several chapters will be included under each topic. A second volume will pick up, the Lord willing, with The Word of God and will continue through the Kingdom, the Church, the Christian Life and Ethics Issues. I had intended to include a section on Christian Evidences, but my publisher suggested that the material on evidences be developed into a separate book, which I have titled, *God's Hand or No Hand?*

Answer key, U.S. history

1. England, France and Spain
2. 1776, from England
3. Bunker Hill or any one of several others
4. George Washington
5. 1787, ratified in 1789
6. Freedom of religion, of the press, speech, assembly, etc.
7. George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson
8. The purchase by the U.S. Government from France of a huge portion of future central U.S.A.
9. Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg. He was dedicating the Gettysburg Military Cemetery during the Civil War.
10. World War I. Fought primarily in France, Germany, Poland and into Russia, from 1914-1918.

Answer key, Bible knowledge

1. Yes, as indicated by the passages cited.
2. When the Lord told Moses to write down His decree about the Amalekites (Exodus 17:14).
3. Paleo, or primitive, Hebrew.
4. Love the Lord and love your fellow humans.
5. It would be a witness against God's people, if they were unfaithful to Him.
6. One man with one woman for life. Divorce was permitted under the Law of Moses, because of the hardness of the Israelites' hearts. However, Jesus returned us to God's initial intent for marriage, permitting it only in the case of adultery.
7. Did you read the passages and note these requirements?
8. One church — one body. We enter that body through a spiritual rebirth by means of the water of baptism and the power of the Holy Spirit.
9. What do you think these passages say?
10. Love God and keep His commandments. Love your neighbor as yourself, sacrifice your life to the Lord's cause, strive to convert others to Christ wherever they may be, remain faithful even in the face of death, care for the fatherless and the widows, be persistent in prayer and worship, gather with fellow Christians to praise God and partake of Christ's Supper ... and the list goes on and on.

Part 1

God

Chapter 1
God of Our Fathers
(Genesis 3:1-6)

Introduction

Did you know that our nation has a national anthem, separate and apart from The Star-Spangled Banner? It is “God of Our Fathers” and begins like this:

God of our fathers, whose almighty hand
Leads forth in beauty all the starry band
Of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,
Our grateful songs before thy throne arise.
— Daniel C. Roberts and George William Warren

This God of our fathers is the same God worshiped since the dawn of human existence. He is the God worshiped by Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, all of the Old Testament prophets, Ezra, Nehemiah, John the Baptist, all of Christ’s apostles and the early Christians. He is the God worshiped by those who followed in their footsteps and the God worshiped today all around the world in countless tongues and cultures. This is the God in whom we trust (as stamped on our money), the God invoked in our founding documents and the God called upon at the opening sessions of the U.S. Supreme Court and Congress. This is the God to whom we cry when calamity hits us.

Just who is this God in whom we trust? Is He a kind of Santa Claus up in Heaven, to dole out goodies to us? Is He a kind of broker, to protect our investments? Is He a doctor, to care for our every ache and pain? Is He a severe father, ready to punish? Just who is He?

Some of God’s characteristics

Who is this God whom we worship and obey? The Bible gives us clear answers to this question. Following are some of His characteristics:

• **God is all-powerful (or omnipotent)**

God’s power is seen in creation (Genesis 1-2; Jeremiah 51:15; Romans

1:20). Paul argues in Acts 17:22-31 that all humans should see that God created everything. In Romans 1:18-20 Paul says that those who do not believe in the eternal creative God have no excuse, because He has made His power clear to us.

The book of Psalms declares God's power (Psalms 8, 19:1-6,29, 62:11, 66:7, 147:5). To see the majesty of His creative power, seek out a location on the high plains, in the desert or mountains and just contemplate the night sky scrolled out above us, with the planets and thousands of visible stars looking down at us, as if they were pinpoints in the canopy of heaven, letting God's light shine through to us. The universe grows larger each year, as astronomers probe out in the infinity that is space. We are certainly little potatoes in comparison to the vastness and complexity of space.

Yet, space is not all there is to the creative hand of God. I live in Oklahoma, where the four seasons are pronounced. Talimena Scenic Skyway in Eastern Oklahoma is a national treasure of beautiful mountains and brilliant fall foliage. Each spring our land bursts forth with Redbuds and other flowering trees and plants. Have you ever carefully examined a flower? We have a Clematis plant surrounding our mailbox. It has exquisite shades of white, pink and violet. There are thousands of kinds of flowers, each unique in its own way and each with its own delicate or robust shades of blossom.

Animal life is complex and extensive. The earth's mineral resources are nearly endless. The Lord placed all of this here to portray His creativity. I was standing one day on a catwalk near the Devil's Throat of mighty Iguazu Falls, at a point where Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil meet. Those of us there were being drenched by the spray and overwhelmed by the roar of the waters. A Brazilian gentleman near me asked, "How can one not believe in God, when He left such a calling card as this?" How indeed?

God's power is seen everywhere. In 2008 Hurricane Ike drowned much of Galveston and Houston, Texas, with a storm surge of 25 to 50 feet in height, downpours of rain and devastating winds. I remember a tornado that swept through the southern part of Oklahoma City and suburban towns, leveling nearly everything in a two-mile-wide swath. Certainly, our God can unleash power in the natural world that we cannot even imagine.

A homiletics writer in the *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 8, page 215, notes:

"To see law everywhere and God nowhere would be enough to crush us. To see God everywhere working by law inspires rest and joy: our Father is at the helm."

- **God’s power is seen in Jesus (John 14:8-13; Romans 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 1:24; Hebrews 1:1-4).**

Our Creator God sent a special facet of His Being to earth in the form of a human. The conception of Jesus was, in itself, a divine miracle which sidestepped the normal process of conception. Mary’s question to the Angel Gabriel, “How can this be?” shows the impossibility of this event without the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus told Philip that He and the Father are one. Those who saw Jesus working here on earth saw the Father. Jesus has all of the power of God at His command, for He is the exact image of the Father. There was no limit to the miracles He could perform. In Luke 8:22-25 Jesus calmed a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee. His disciples were amazed, asking, “**Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him.**” He could multiply food, bring sight to the blind, raise the dead ... All of this was due to the power of God unleashed in Him.

Jesus even creates and sustains the universe through His power (Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-4). He is the mainspring of all that is. He creates, blesses, judges and cancels out governments and their leaders, as we see in the case of King Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel or of King Saul in 1 Samuel 13.

God’s power can be seen especially in the raising of Jesus from the dead. Through this event Jesus has all supremacy. He was declared with power through His resurrection to be the Son of God.

- **God is all-knowing (omniscient)**

Hebrews 4:13 describes His capacity to know all things: Nothing in all of creation is hidden from Him. Everything is revealed to Him, to whom we must give account of our lives and actions.

God has knowledge that no human can have (Mark 13:32). Despite many predictions about the end of time or the events leading up to it, no one can ever know when these things will occur. The count-down calendar is in the hands of the Lord exclusively. Are we in the end times? When someone recently guaranteed to me that we are in the end times right now, my answer was that we have been in the end times ever since Christ was raised from the dead and returned to the Father. We are in the last age — the Christian age. Therefore, we should act as if today were the last moment before the end of the world. According to Jesus’ warning in Matthew 24:36-44, since we do not have God’s calendar in our hands, we need to be ready each day

for the end of time. We are to beware of those who claim that some war, earthquake or other calamity is a sure sign that the end is coming; or those who claim to be a new prophet or Christ. Jesus says in Matthew 24:4-8 that, despite all of these traumas that plague our world, the end is not yet.

God's understanding is unsearchable (Isaiah 40:28). His ways are past finding out (Romans 10:33-36). No matter how much genius we expend in trying to understand God, He remains a mystery to us. The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than the greatest strength of any human (1 Corinthians 1:25). Paul's statement here is not that God is foolish, but that even His simplest thoughts and actions are far above those of mere human beings, even our brightest.

• God is omnipresent. He knows everything and is everywhere (Psalm 139:1-16).

How can God be everywhere at once? Because He is God, this is not difficult at all. In Psalm 139 David reminds us that God knows us, perceives our thoughts and is familiar with all our ways. (This sounds like national surveillance, but on a far more powerful level.) Wherever we go, the Lord is there. He knows us from conception. He knows when we will die. He knows our heartaches, frailties and illnesses. In today's language, He is awesome!

• However, there is something God cannot do (Hebrews 6:18; James 1:13).

What? Are there things an omnipotent God cannot do. Yes! First, He cannot lie. It is beneath his nature to lie about anything. Nor can He be tempted or tempt anyone.

So where is the shelter?

Every characteristic of God discussed in this chapter is seen in Daniel 2:19-23, 27-38 — His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. God's power has provided for all of our physical and spiritual needs. Because He is God, He has every right to expect our submission and obedience (2 Peter 1:3-4, 8-11). It is a foolish person, indeed, who attempts to play games with God, to second-guess Him, or to attempt to elevate himself or herself to a god-like status. Our only safe and reasonable recourse is to bow to Him in submission and obedience.

Chapter 2

God Is Good

(Psalm 73)

Introduction

People of great power can do pretty much anything they want, within legal limits and sometimes outside of legal limits. When such power is in the hands of evil, it becomes a frightening reality. We see this in the lives and actions of dictators, and often, other political figures and business people. But when the power is in the hands of good people, it can be a benefit and comfort.

The goodness of God is one of His attributes. Jesus tells us that only God is good (Mark 10:18). We are to give thanks to the Lord, for He is good (Psalm 107:1). God is praised for His goodness (Psalm 31:19). Hosea prophesied that his people would return trembling to God because of His goodness (Hosea 3:5).

The importance of God's goodness

The goodness of God is a foundational truth that every Christian should embrace. It is prominent in the opening chapters of the Bible. Everything God created was good (Genesis 1:4,10,18; 1 Timothy 4:4). It is hard to believe that spiders, mosquitoes, venomous insects and animals, rats and mice, thistles and thorns are good, but they all serve a purpose in God's omnipotent plan.

The goodness of God is in part the sum total of all of His attributes. The Lord allowed Moses to see His goodness when Moses asked to see Him (Exodus 33:10). We cannot separate what is good from God. Without Him there can be no real goodness.

- God alone is good (Psalm 16:2; Matthew 19:16-17).
- God is the source of everything that is good (James 1:17).
- God does not withhold good from His children (Psalm 84:11).
- We cannot separate “good” from “God.” Our society and our

schools need to take note of this. We cannot teach values without teaching about God (1 Peter 1:16). One major international city is attempting to legislate good, without any reference to God. It is ultimately doomed to failure, for true goodness comes only from God.

Our eternal destiny is determined by our decision to be, or not be, truly good in God's sight (John 5:28-29; Romans 3:1-26; Titus 3:3-7). Apart from the divine revelation of Scripture, we cannot recognize true goodness. It cannot be understood apart from knowing God and seeing life from His perspective.

God's Goodness defined in Psalm 73

Asaph, the creator of this psalm, dealt with the true meaning of good and of the goodness of God. Asaph thought that, because God was good to Israel, His blessings would continue to flow to all "good" Israelites while the contrary, the unrighteous would suffer many difficulties. There is an element of truth in this, but it was not altogether true.

Asaph's problem was due to his distorted perspective. First, he was envious of the wicked, frustrated over their success. He did not hate their sin; he envied them (vs. 3). He was self-righteous. He looked on himself as better than they, and even better than he really was. He deserved God's blessings, because his "righteous living" deserved them (vss. 13-14).

Asaph viewed his suffering as coming from God, who was punishing him for being godly. He was consumed with self-pity over the injustice of it all.

He wrongly supposed that the wicked are always healthy and wealthy, never experiencing the difficulties of life. He thought that all who prosper were arrogant, daring God to know or care about what they were doing. He believed that the wicked flaunted their wickedness and were blessed. The righteous, on the other hand, practiced good and were punished for it. Asaph even considered joining the wicked (vss. 10-14).

The turning point in the psalm is verse 15. Up to this point he thought that the goodness of God meant health and wealth for the true believers, just as some televangelists preach today. When the psalmist came into the "sanctuary of God," he was able to understand the final destiny for the good and the evil. Those who seemed to be doing so well were actually in great peril (vs. 17). Their feet were on a slippery slope. Soon they would face God's judgment. Their payday for sin might not come in this life, but it would surely come (vss. 18-20).

How foolish Asaph had been, to think the wicked would get away with their sin (vs. 22). He now saw them in their true light, and also saw his own relationship with God in its true light. He now had the bright hope of God's glorious presence, now and for all eternity (vss. 23-26). He now saw the wicked as arrogant and attempting to be independent of God. He also saw his own struggles as being a gift from God for his own good. His struggles had led him into a deeper intimacy with God, and thus were worth all of the distress he had suffered.

Finally, Asaph saw that good means far more than physical prosperity. It means intimacy with God as the highest good. Whatever interferes with our nearness to God is evil. Whatever draws us into a deeper fellowship with God is good. Paul's suffering brought him nearer to God (Philippians. 3:10). Our chastening is not only evidence of our sonship, but also of God's working in us for good (Romans 8:28; Hebrews 12:1-3).

So where is our shelter?

We believe that the goodness of God is a trait which applies to the entirety of His nature. Those who tell us that God wants only to bless us with healing and prosperity in this life are false teachers. Suffering is often the means by which we come to know and rely on God more completely.

The goodness of God is best seen in Jesus. He and His Gospel are good news, indeed. The goodness of God is a foundational truth that shapes our perspective toward Him and His dealings with us. May God grant that His goodness become a truth that we really embrace, one from which we view all of the events in our lives.

Chapter 3

God Is Holy

(Isaiah 6:1-5)

Introduction

There are two types of facts:

1. Facts that give information — the sky is blue, grass is green.
2. Facts that demand a response — it is cold, therefore we will wear a coat when going outside.

Although the atheist denies it, the agnostic doubts it and the unconcerned ignores it, God’s holiness is a fact. Though the fact that **God is Holy** gives us very important information, even more important, it demands a response.

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

When we hear the words, “be holy in all your conduct,” words that certainly sound like a command, a very common response might be, “I am a sinner, therefore I can’t be holy.” A good friend of ours has never accepted Christ. One day he said, “I know where I’m headed.” He has become more mellow as he ages, but has done nothing that I can see to prepare for answering to God for his life.

All of us face a challenge, not just to accept the fact of God’s holiness, but to respond to that fact by holy living. There are basically two ways in which we must respond to God’s holiness:

- Attitude – respect, reverence, godly fear.
- Action – obedience, holy living.

What do we mean by saying that God is holy?

God is holy in character

We can ignore, defy, criticize or reject God, but that doesn't change His character. Two passages picture a heavenly scene, each one ending with the same affirmation that God is holy.

- Isaiah was allowed to see a vision of Heaven. He **“saw the Lord high and lifted up.”** He saw angels crying out to one another, **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: The whole earth is full of his glory”** (Isaiah 6:1-5).
- The apostle John was worshiping on the Lord's Day when he saw a vision of God on His throne and heavenly beings worshiping Him. Their continuous song was, **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”** (Revelation, chapter 4).

The word “holy” is repeated three times. This repetition conveys the concept that God is absolute in His holiness. He isn't just holy on one occasion or in some circumstances, but in every situation. He doesn't learn to be holy. He is holy by very nature.

God is holy in uniqueness

The classical meaning of the word “unique” is used here, meaning, “One and Only.” In Revelation we note that, among all of those present, there is only one who occupies the throne, and that one is God.

In Deuteronomy we read, **“Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in Heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other”** (Deuteronomy 4:39).

God's uniqueness is seen in both Isaiah and Revelation. In Isaiah, God is on a throne. Only one can occupy a throne. His glory spreads from His throne throughout Heaven and the earth. In Revelation, God is described as One **“who was and is and is to come.”** God is unique in that He is holy.

God is holy in purity

God is pure in character (1 John 1:5). Darkness signifies sin and evil. God is the very opposite of evil. He is pure. He is pure in his actions (James 1:13). It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18). He cannot be tempted by evil (James 1:13). God's very nature is sinless. He cannot participate in anything that is evil. His words and commands are pure (Psalms 12:6, 19:8). There is neither falseness nor error in His words.

God is holy in goodness

Paul says that we are to consider the goodness of God (Romans 11:22).

His goodness should prompt us to be good in turn. James says that every good and perfect gift is from above; from the father of lights (James 1:17).

God will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11). Sometimes what we want is not good for us, so we have no promise of receiving it. Sometimes the Lord has other plans for us, perhaps far different from those we imagine or expect. We need to be receptive to them.

God is the good Lord, who understands and knows His people. He exercises loving kindness, judgment and righteousness (Jeremiah 9:24). We can understand the goodness of God by observing Jesus (John 14:9, Acts 10:3). God's compassion, mercy and kindness were clearly demonstrated by Jesus.

God is holy in justice

We have considered God's goodness. Now let us consider His severity (Romans 1:22). We like the concept of God's love and mercy, but it is more difficult to accept His severity. It is easy to forget or even deny God's justice. To see only His goodness turns Him into a different god than the God of the Bible. He is always a God of justice, as well as of love and mercy (Psalm 33:5).

People object to the concept that God will punish, saying that this denies His natural goodness. However, God's utter goodness must punish evil. He would not be a just God if He acted otherwise. He would be like the mother on TV recently whose totally unruly child disrupted everything at school. When he was punished by the principal, the mother threatened a lawsuit, saying, "I have never punished my child and you have no right to do so."

A good parent would have punished unruly behavior. In our family as I was growing up, if we got into trouble at school, we got into even more trouble at home. Were our parents just in punishing us? They would have been unjust if they had simply ignored our misbehavior.

God will bring every work to judgment (Acts 17:30-31). Absolutely the only way in which to escape the fire of judgment is to turn to Him and continue in His goodness. We *will* receive goodness from Him (Romans 11:22).

So where is our shelter?

When Isaiah saw the wonderful scene of God in His glory in Heaven, he

cried, **“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts”** (Isaiah 6:5).

The humble person will realize his or her sinfulness, but can approach our holy God as a repentant sinner. God will share His holiness, cleansing us from all sin and bringing us to obedient service. Yes, service. God’s grace doesn’t extend to the person who does nothing to obey and/or serve Him.

He who has called us is holy. Therefore, we believe that we must be holy in all of our conduct (1 Peter 1:15-16). This is a tall order, but we must grow in faith, be serious and self-controlled, keep focused on the real goal for our lives and be obedient, turning away from the evil which increasingly surrounds us everywhere.

Chapter 4

God Is Beyond Our Ways

(Romans 11:33-36)

Introduction

The Discovery Channel, *Discover Magazine* and the *Smithsonian Magazine* do an excellent job of portraying the magnitude and grandeur of the universe. The frontiers of space are being pushed outward constantly, as powerful space telescopes probe farther and farther, with still no end in sight. They do a less than accurate job, however, of describing the source of all things. It all goes back, they say, to a Big Bang that first concentrated infinite energy and then for some reason it exploded, scattering elements and gases far and wide, culminating in the formation of galaxies.

Sounds good, but there is one big fly in the ointment of that soup out of which came everything. The fly is, “From where did all of this energy come? How was it created? Who created it?” Scientists stumble over that, rationalizing that it just happened by chance. Origin-of-life expert professor Walter Bradley observed about the theory of spontaneous generation of all that exists:

“I think people who believe that life emerged naturalistically need to have a great deal more faith than people who reasonably infer that there’s an Intelligent Designer” (Strobel 2004:42).

It is my prayer that we will all come to see God as truly infinite, creative, eternal and ever beyond our thinking and ways. Yet, through Christ, our great High Priest, God is very much approachable.

God’s infinite nature and creativity

“Infinite” is described in the dictionary as “lacking limits or bounds; extending beyond measure or comprehension; without beginning or end; endless; vast; immense.”

When we speak of God, then, we see Him as being far greater than we can even comprehend. Therefore, we mere human beings will never be able, until eternity begins, to visualize God. Yuri Gargarin, the first man into

space, came back and reported that he hadn't seen God up there. This is no wonder, for no human has ever seen God. Moreover, he wasn't looking for God. If he had, he would have seen in the immensity of the universe before him that a Great Creator had to have been behind all of that. God's dimension is far beyond ours. We cannot even describe Him adequately, except for seeing Him through His creation and through His Son Jesus (Psalm 8; John 14:8-11; Romans 1:18-20). In figurative terms, Jesus bears the DNA imprint of His Father.

God's creative power is infinite. Recently I viewed on the History Channel a story about our sun. Apart from affirming that it is billions of years old, which cannot be proved one way or the other, the scientists involved gave us a powerful course on the nature of the sun. It is our original fusion furnace. As it burns, it fuses hydrogen and oxygen, to release vast amounts of energy, but also recreates these elements, to give us an unending source of heat and light. It is just the right star, a yellow dwarf, to make possible life on the earth. If the earth were closer to the sun, it would melt. If it were farther away, it would be lifeless and a frozen wasteland. All of the earth's movements are precise and predictable. Can this even begin to be accidental?

Speaking of the sun, it is one tiny star in a galaxy of 200 to 400 billion stars. The Milky Way is only one galaxy of many in our "local group." Some of these apparently have their own planets. And how many galaxies are there? Astronomers estimate some 200 billion in the known universe, with probably many more that cannot yet be seen, due to the lack of telescopic power until now to reach them. The heavens indeed declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1-6). When David created this psalm, on a clear night he could see no more than a few thousand stars, yet he was in awe of them and of the God who created them.

On a clear night (increasingly difficult to come by in our polluted atmosphere and city lights) out in the desert or on a high mountain, we can only see with the naked eye essentially the same stars that he saw. Yet, they still give us a sense of awe. (If we live in the Southern Hemisphere, the stars that can be seen form an entirely different galactic map, one that in many ways is even more impressive than that of the Northern Hemisphere.)

On earth there are between 1.7 and 1.9 million known species of life, with many more yet to be catalogued. God is infinite in the number and variety of species that exist. Built into each one is a barrier against cross-mating between species. This, in itself, speaks against evolution.

We know that there is evolution within species, but not between species. Many animals within a species have changed in some ways. For instance, the horse has changed (often by human intervention) from small wild horses to many kinds of horses — tiny ponies to powerful Clydesdales.

Built within individual species is a drive to reproduce and thus to survive. Good examples are the fight salmon go through to return to where they were spawned and to reproduce there, or the trials penguins in Antarctica go through to reproduce and protect their young in that harsh environment. The film, “March of the Penguins,” illustrates this graphically. The annual migration of fish, whales, birds and butterflies is truly amazing. How do they know where to go? How do they know how to navigate? It was built into them and is all a part of God’s plan for their survival.

I recently watched a spider span a 20-foot distance between our front porch and a tree. In the middle of the initial strand it constructed a very symmetrical web of ovals and radiating strands. How could it do this? Did one of its early ancestors decide, “I think I will invent something new and will call it a web?” God knows how the spider builds a web. Psalm 8 speaks of fish swimming in the paths of the sea. Even in David’s days seafarers knew that fish followed migratory patterns.

In Job 38-41 the Lord asked Job a long series of questions about His creation and creatures — the vast expanses of the earth; the source of the seas, rain and ice; the constellations; wild animals and birds ... Job could not answer and many of these questions still remain unanswered. God is truly infinite in wisdom and creative capacity. The more we learn about His creation, the more there is to learn.

God is eternal

“Eternal” means “before time or place, perpetual, age-lasting.” Deuteronomy 33:27 speaks of God as being our eternal refuge — He is always present to provide us with safety and security. His everlasting arms are there to catch us. This was part of Moses’ final benediction to an Israel facing an unknown land, hostile nations and fortified cities, words of reassurance to the Israelites. And, of course, they should be for us as well. We face an unknown future, fraught with wars, terrorism and many other dangers. Yet, God’s everlasting arms are still there to shelter us.

In 1 Timothy 1:17 Paul says that God is the King eternal, immortal, invisible and the only God there is. No other “god” is legitimate, not even “Allah”, who does not compare to the God of the Bible.

Since He is all-wise and eternal, He can offer us both eternal salvation and eternal life. In Hebrews 5:9 we find that God is the author of eternal salvation through Christ. In His sacrifice on our behalf, Christ provided for us eternal redemption, precisely according to God's plan, which He ordained from before the creation. He also offers us eternal life, as we read in 1 John 2:25. But there is a catch to this gift: We must remain in the Father and the Son.

God is beyond our ways

Isaiah 55:8-9 says that the Lord's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor the Lord's ways our ways. They are vastly higher than our thoughts and ways. When we attempt to make Him just our "Daddy" or our "Big Brother," we diminish Him to our size. He must be held in reverent awe at all times (Leviticus 12:28, 19:30). What happened when Moses struck a rock, to bring forth water, when God had said to speak to it? (Numbers 20:5-13). What happened to Nadab and Abihu when they used common fire, instead of sanctified fire in their censers (Leviticus 10:1-2)? In the next verse the Lord said, **"Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of the people I will be honored."**

When we approach God in worship and prayer, and also in the Lord's Supper and the singing of hymns, this should be done with reverence, as we honor our holy God. Muslims show much more reverence for "Allah" than we show for the Lord. They approach their worship with washed hands and their shoes off, and then go through a series of bowings and lying prostrate on the floor.

We like the idea that God is longsuffering, tender, compassionate and loving, but we don't much like the idea that He is also severe when severity is called for (Romans 11:22). We must never forget that we must worship God with thanksgiving, reverence and awe, **"for our God is a consuming fire"** (Hebrews 12:28-29). Those who believe that God is only loving and never punishing often attempt to take advantage of Him. How might they go about this? By doing as they please, on the assumption that the Lord will not lift a punishing hand against them.

God is forever beyond our poor ability to fully grasp His nature. His ways will never be our ways. When we try to bend His ways to fit ours, we are in for a rude shock.

So where is our shelter?

When we look out over the Grand Canyon, the Arches National Park,

Yellowstone, Yosemite, the giant Sequoias and Redwoods, Mt. McKinley, Iguazu or Victoria Falls, or other mighty demonstrations of God's creative force, how can we possibly shrug them off as mere accidents of nature? Paul said in Acts 17 that we are without excuse, if we do not believe in and respect God, for He left us countless proofs of His nature in creation. Knowing this, however, is only part of the picture. No one can know about Jesus without help, as the Ethiopian official asked Philip, **“How can I, unless someone guides me?”**

In the midst of everything about us that is temporary, at best, we have an eternal God in the Heavens who knows us by name and cares for us, so much so that He has provided for our salvation and eternal life. He has promised to hear our prayers. He has promised to guide and bless us, if only we will turn to Christ and obey Him.

We serve a God who is far beyond us in wisdom, knowledge and ways. He must always be approached reverently. The next time we gather for worship, let us enter quietly and respectfully, not gossiping, talking about our trips, work, friends, enemies, athletic teams, health problems or where we are going to eat lunch. God is holy and must be approached in holiness — and no place more so than in corporate worship.

Chapter 5

God Is Near to Us

(Acts 17:24-28)

Introduction

How can God be remote and infinite, and still be near? Perhaps it is like a good parent, who is in the eyes of children, infinite in knowledge — that is, until they reach their teen years. Then they know more than their parents. I once guest-lectured a high school class about the archeological dig in Israel where I had served on two successive trips. One boy commented afterward, “I’m finally glad to meet someone who knows more than I do.”

It is a paradox of all that God is, for Him to be far and yet near, infinite and yet concerned about every aspect of our lives; beyond our ways, yet very familiar with them. The famous old hymn says it well:

... And He walks with me
and He talks with me,
and He tells me I am His own.
— C. Austin Miles

Although He is judge of all the earth, He does not sit up in Heaven with gavel in hand, ready to sentence us daily for our sins. He is patient with us, says Peter, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). He prefers to walk by our side as a loving father, rather than punish us. However, we need to remember that, again as a loving father, He can and does punish.

The nearness of God to the patriarchs

It began in Eden, where the Lord walked in the garden with Adam and Eve, until they sinned (Genesis 3:8-10). Then they discovered that their loving God was also a punishing God and they feared Him.

Later on, Enoch walked with God for 300 or more years (Genesis 5:21-24). He was so much in God’s company here on earth that the Lord took him miraculously to Heaven without seeing death.

Noah was blameless among the people of his day, and he too walked with

God (Genesis 6:9). He was so righteous in thought and action that Lord decided to spare him and his family from the great cleansing flood He would bring on the earth.

Abraham, too, walked with God, except for a couple of lapses over his wife. The Lord God said to him:

“Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing” (Genesis 12:1-2).

This blessing extended even to Abraham’s becoming the earthly ancestor of Christ. What a blessing, indeed! He would be the father of a great nation, would inherit through his descendants a great land and would produce through his offspring the Savior. The Lord talked with him various times, including the case of his being ordered to sacrifice his son Isaac, and in the case of his nephew Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Isaac, his son, and Jacob, his grandson, walked for the most part in God’s shadow. When Jacob fled from his home in southern Canaan to Haran, in Mesopotamia, he experienced the dream of a ladder reaching to Heaven, with angels ascending and descending it. His response was, **“Surely the Lord was in this place, and I was unaware of it ... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven”** (Genesis 28:10-22).

The Exodus and God’s nearness

In Exodus and following, we find Moses receiving direct verbal instructions from God (Exodus 3:1-4:17, 5:22-6:13, 13:1-16, 19:1-20; 20:1-26, and many other such passages). On only one occasion did Moses violate God’s commands, when he struck a rock, rather than speaking to it, as he had been instructed to do (Numbers 20:9-13). This act of rebellion against God’s word lost him the right to enter the Promised Land.

The exodus was not just a time when God freed captive Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. It was a time when God set Himself apart from all other “gods” (especially the gods of Egypt) and when He set apart the Israelites from the Egyptians (Exodus 9:4-6, 11:7). He distinguished Israel by His presence (cf. Exodus 33:15-16). Deuteronomy reads, **“What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?”** (Deuteronomy 4:7-8).

The great dilemma was that the Israelites were stubborn and sinful. His presence as a holy God would prove to be dangerous because His holiness required Him to deal with sin (cf. Exodus 33:1-5). This sinful people simply could not survive in the presence of a holy God.

There was only one way a sinful people could possibly dwell in the presence of God, and that was by grace. God could dwell in the midst of a sinful people because He is a God who forgives sin. It was not yet clear exactly how this forgiveness would be accomplished, but the Mosaic covenant foreshadowed it (see Colossians 2:16-17).

The Law of Moses defined what was pleasing and displeasing to God, what was clean and unclean (or defiling) to the nation. Avoiding defilement was impossible, but the Law also made provision for transgression. The Mosaic covenant introduced the Tabernacle and the sacrificial system, whereby God could dwell in the midst of a sinful people, but only by being separated by the barriers of the tabernacle. Only the Levitical priests were allowed to draw near to God as they performed the religious rituals of the nation. Only by the shedding of blood could the people approach their God in worship. This whole system foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah, the **“Lamb of God,”** whose shed blood would cleanse men from their sins.

God’s nearness in the times of the Psalms and Prophets

In spite of the distance the Israelites were required to keep from their God under the Law, the people of God looked forward to a future day when they would enter into an intimate communion with God. This was symbolically represented by a meal, first anticipated in Exodus, and then frequently referred to in the Psalms (see Exodus 24:9-11; Psalms 23:5-6; 27:4).

It would be wrong to conclude that enjoying the presence of God was just a future hope for the Old Testament saints. Psalm 73 speaks of God’s presence in the midst of affliction. Asaph, after considerable agony over the prosperity of the wicked, came to understand that the ultimate blessing in life is not prosperity or the absence of pain, but the presence of God, even if that becomes real to us in poverty or in pain (Psalm 73:25-28).

Psalm 139 is David’s expression of his enjoyment of God’s presence in his life. It is one of the great psalms, one in which we find great comfort.

The prophets spoke of the time when God would draw near to His people to save them from their sins, and dwell with them in intimate fellowship. The prophets exposed the hypocrisy of those Israelites who feigned nearness to

God but whose hearts were distant (see Isaiah 29:13).

Mere ceremonial righteousness was not enough. Men would not experience nearness to God until they understood true religion. True religion was to possess and practice the character of God, to live out the character of God in our conduct, rather than to repetitiously carry out rituals and meaningless professions (Isaiah 58:1-12).

The prophets warned that if the people of God did not repent, profess and practice true righteousness, then they would find God drawing near to *judge* rather than to *save* (Malachi 3:5).

God is ever near in the sense that He sees and hears what we are doing, and He will deal accordingly (Jeremiah 23:24-27). Those who repent and trust in God's Messiah are promised a God who is near, dwelling in the midst of the New Jerusalem (Ezekiel 48:35).

God's nearness in the Gospels

Our Lord drew near to save His people in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, His name was Immanuel, meaning "**God with us**" (Matthew 1:23). The New Testament writers made it clear that Jesus was God in the flesh to save us (Matthew 1:23; John 1:1-18; 1 John 1:1-3, 4:12-13; Hebrews 1:1-3, 2:1-4). Some were drawn to Jesus as the Savior, but others rejected Him and did not want Him around (Mark 5:17; Luke 4:28-29). At the cross of Calvary, the crowds yelled, "Away with Him!" They were more comfortable with a murderer than with the Prince of Life (Luke 23:18).

God's nearness in the Epistles

It is the writer to the Hebrews who makes so much of the superiority of Christ to the Old Testament sacrifices. The Old Testament system could not remove our sins. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that provides forgiveness of sins and enables us to enter into the presence of God with confidence (Hebrews 4:16, 7:19, 25, 10:1, 19-22).

Not only does the blood of Christ remedy the problem of our sin, allowing us to "draw near" to God, it also remedies the breach in our relationship with fellow Christians (Ephesians 2:11-22 and especially v. 17).

Heaven is the place where the saints enjoy God's presence (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; Revelation 21:2-3, 22:3-5).

Hell, on the other hand, is the place where those who rejected the presence

of God in their lives are eternally separated from Him (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 6:15-17, 20:11-15).

Principles concerning God's nearness (His Omnipresence)

This is certainly not a complete study of the doctrine of divine omnipresence, but here is a summary of a number of principles taught in the Scriptures on this important and comforting doctrine.

- God is omnipresent in His creation, for He is ever mindful of all that is happening everywhere. He is constantly aware of injustice, sin and unfaithfulness. His eyes are ever watchful; His ears are always attentive to our cries, especially those of the oppressed and penitent (see 2 Chronicles 16:9; Psalm 34:15; Proverbs 5:21, 15:3; Amos 9:8; Zechariah 4:10; 1 Peter 3:12).
- God's chosen people are drawn near to Him and thereby distinguished as His own (Numbers 16:5; Psalm 65:4; Exodus 33:16; Deuteronomy 4:7; Proverbs 18:24).
- God is always present with His chosen ones (Psalm 139:7-12). He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). God's presence is not only *among* His people but is now *in* His people, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Psalms 51:11, 139:7; John 14:17-18, 23, 16:7-15).
- God is present with us through His Word (Deuteronomy 30:14; Psalm 119:151).
- God is especially near to us at certain times. He is ever near us in "time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). He is near when we confess and forsake our sins (Psalm 76:7; Isaiah 59:2; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18). He is near the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18; Matthew 5:3ff.; 2 Corinthians 7:6). He is with us (even with only two or three of us) when we exercise corporate worship in His name (Matthew 18:20). He is with us as we carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). He is with us when we are being disciplined by Him (Hebrews 12:3-13). He is near when we call upon Him in truth (Psalm 145:18). He is near when we treat Him as holy (Leviticus 10:3). He is near to us when we "draw near" to Him (James 4:8).

So where is our shelter?

You may have observed that many Christians have embraced a false set

of standards for determining the presence of God in their lives. Some televangelists (and others) teach that the test of God's presence in your life is health, wealth, and material success in life. This chapter should have indicated otherwise. God is near the brokenhearted, the oppressed, those carrying a heavy burden of grief, debt or personal problems with others, and not necessarily just the beautiful people whose lives seem so "blessed."

Let us examine our hearts to see if we really want to be near Him. The ancient Israelites were terrified by God's presence and urged Moses to tell the Lord to get away from them. If our desire to be near Him is like that of Israel, it is little wonder that we have no great yearning for Heaven. If we are far from God, our desires are distorted at best, and likely destructive. Sin separates us from God. The solution to our lostness from God's presence is simple: repent and turn to Him in obedience.

This should inspire us to "practice the presence of God." Practicing the presence of God is living each day as though God were present — which He is! Let us remember that our conduct, our sharing of the Gospel, our service are always conducted before Him who is ever present (Jeremiah 17:16; John 1:48; 2 Corinthians 2:17, 4:2, 7:12, 8:21, 12:19). And let us look forward to that day when our Lord returns to this earth to take us to live forever in the presence of God.

Chapter 6

God Is Light

(1 John 1:5-7)

Introduction

The principal aim of every Christian should be to live a life worthy of the Lord, one that will please Him — bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God, as well as in intimacy with Him.

Why does it make us feel strange when we speak about intimacy with God? J. I. Packer talks about how we view God:

“... knowledge that Christians today largely lack: and that is one reason why our faith is so feeble and our worship so flabby. We are modern men, and modern men, though they cherish great thoughts of man, have as a rule small thoughts of God. When the man in the Church, let alone the man in the street, uses the word ‘God’, the thought in his mind is rarely of divine majesty. A recent book was called, ‘Your God Is Too Small.’ Today, vast stress is laid on the thought that God is personal, but this truth is so stated as to leave the impression that God is a person of the same sort as we are – weak, inadequate, ineffective, a little pathetic. But this is not the God of the Bible. He has us in His hands; but we never have Him in ours. Like us, He is personal; but unlike us, He is great.”
(source)

Let us strive to learn more about God, who is much too large to fit into our tiny hands. Let us dedicate ourselves to building a spiritual intimacy with our Creator. He has given us everything we need to know him more fully.

References to God as Light in the Old Testament

Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines light as “something that makes vision possible.” In light, we see more clearly than in darkness. In darkness, we have a hard time focusing and defining objects. Light helps us to see. If we apply that to God, it is simply that He helps us see more clearly. These verses help us see the nature of God as light.

Exodus 13:21: **“By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or by night.”** God in this passage creates light so that the Israelites could make their travels safely.

Psalms 27:1: **“The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear.”** Light is a powerful metaphor applied to God in the Old Testament. In this passage David, the Psalmist, describes the power of God.

Psalms 36:9: **“For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.”** It is only in relationship with God that one’s life is illuminated.

Psalms 43:3: **“Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.”** Here light is linked with divine revelation.

Psalms 89:1: **“Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord.”** Light is defined as the presence of God.

Isaiah 2:5: **“Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”** God’s people are called to walk in the light of the Lord.

Isaiah 60:19-20: **“The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, And your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.”** The prophet promises that one day God himself would live among men, to replace the sun as their “everlasting light.”

In the Old Testament, how is light applied to the Lord?

In Exodus 13:21, God is used as light to describe how He provides for His people. For all of time, God’s light has been a beacon among the rough tides of life to those who love Him and keep His commandments.

In Psalm 27:1, God is called David’s light and salvation. The rest of this Psalm describes God’s power and His presence in His people’s daily lives. God is a light that never fades. While walking through a home supply store, I was amused by the different claims for light bulbs and their longevity. Each one promised more hours, a stronger light, and increased money savings. Eventually, however, all of them fail; but God, never. I can know He is always there, shining brightly for me.

Psalm 36:9 talks about how we see light through God's light. There is no substitute for building a close relationship with God through the study of His Word and spending time with Him in prayer.

In Psalm 43:3, David speaks of God sending His light to guide him and to bring him to the Holy Mountain. God's light in this verse is directly related to His divine revelation. To truly see the Light, obviously we need God.

Isaiah 2:5 and 60:10-20 refer to Light as the presence of God — the everlasting light — a light that never fades or goes out, one on which we as humans can always count. Today, and for always, God is our light.

And finally, Isaiah 42:6-7 refers to the coming Messiah being a light for the Gentiles — a Messiah who would open eyes that are blind and set captives free; a Messiah who would be the Light that helps the world to see.

References to God as Light in the New Testament

Most passages in the New Testament that refer to light use Christ as the example. No other explanation is needed than to look at what the Bible says in John 14:9-10 and 8:12.

In looking at the idea of God as Light, we must recognize that God has a relationship with us through the Word, who was born in the flesh as Jesus, the Christ (John 1:1-3; 14:9-10).

In John 8:12, Jesus refers to Himself as being the light of the world. Whoever follows Him will walk in light and not in darkness. In Scripture, darkness stands for sin, evil and death. Light stands for holiness, goodness and life. Arthur Pink simply states: “‘God is light’ means that He is the sum of all Excellency” (Pink:91).

An in-depth look at 1 John 1:3-10

John the Apostle begins by focusing our attention on living in fellowship with God. If we look at John's life, we can see that he has experienced a close relationship with God. He desires for us to have that same kind of relationship.

If we are to experience true fellowship with God, we must realize that He is light, and that **“in Him is no darkness”** at all (v. 5). To understand this passage we have to understand one main characteristic of light. Where there is light, nothing is hidden or misrepresented. In the light, everything is exposed for what it really is. Then to have fellowship with God, we must **“walk in the light”** (v.7). We must live our life with God in total honesty and openness.

With this principle of **“Walking in the Light”** established, John introduces the topic of sin. Sin disrupts our fellowship with God. We cannot have fellowship with God if we pretend that we do not sin. When we are honest about our sins and confess them to God, He **“is faithful and just to forgive our sins”** (v. 9). If, however, we lie to ourselves and claim **“we have no sin”** (v. 8), we are walking in darkness and have no fellowship with God.

“Walking in the light” (v. 7) does not mean that God expects us to live a wholly sinless life. John says that if we are walking in the light, Christ’s blood **“cleanses us from all sin.”** If we were truly sinless, we would not need Christ’s spiritual cleansing on a daily basis. John also says that those who claim to have no sin deceive themselves and the truth is not in them (verse 8). It is only by being honest about our sins and sinful thoughts that we open ourselves up to God’s transforming power.

How does seeing God as Light help us to be better Christians?

Light is essential for growth and nourishment in both plants and animals. In our Christian walk. Light is also essential for our growth and nourishment. Since we have defined God as Light, then He is essential each and every day. We must search for the Light (God), we must be willing to accept the Light (God), we must be willing to let the Light (God) nourish us each day, and finally, we must let our Light (God) shine so that others may come to know Him through us.

The power of God’s light is difficult to fathom, but in His power is love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness and comfort. When we fully see God as Light, we are seeing all that He is. We can realize that He is absolutely essential to our existence.

God’s Light helps us to see more clearly our own lives. Have you ever been in complete darkness? The darkness I am thinking of is in an underground cave. If all of the lights are turned off, you literally cannot see your hand right in front of your face. If we define darkness as sin in a spiritual sense, then the world is full of darkness. Only with God as our Light, can we truly see how essential He is and how truly intense is the darkness enveloping those who refuse His light or who do not even know about it.

So where is our shelter?

We have many examples in the Bible of people who saw the Light of God, but chose to turn away from it. It must be a voluntary choice to accept God as our Light, but this acceptance must be followed by a life of action, of walking in His light.

It is essential for our Christian lives that we view God as Light. If we are honest with ourselves and God, our lives can be so fully blessed by God's Light. If we truly believe that God is Light, we will want to tell the whole world about Him.

Matthew 5:14-16 says, **“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”** We must learn about God as Light, so we too can be a light to the world, reflecting His light in our lives and actions.

If sin is Darkness and God is Light, how can we dedicate our entire lives to walking in the Light? Not all of us can close up shop and move to a remote village or a teeming city to do mission work, but each of us can decide today that we are going to walk in the light of God.

Chapter 7

God Is Patient

(Psalm 86:15, Exodus 34:6, Galatians 5:22-26,
1 Peter 3:20, 2 Peter 3:8-9)

Introduction

Generally, we are not a patient people. Whether it is in traffic, at the post office, in a restaurant, on the phone or looking for something in the mail, we don't like to wait! Author John Ortberg said, "We tend to be in a horn-honking, microwaving, Fed-Ex mailing, fast-food eating, express-lane shopping hurry." However, God is patient (1 Peter 3:20) and the fruit of His Spirit manifested in the lives of people includes patience. Therefore, if we are to truly reflect the nature and character of God, we too should be patient. This chapter will explore the patience of God, discuss a biblical perspective on patience and offer practical counsel for letting patience be displayed in our life.

What the Word says about patience

While many of us struggle with being patient, we must always realize that we are made in the image of a patient, compassionate God.

"But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Psalm 86:15).

If we want to understand God's patience, one of the best places to look is in His relationship with Israel of the Old Testament. God's people were about as exasperating as anybody could be, and it was never more evident than when Moses lingered on Mount Sinai as he received the law from God. Because it took him longer than the people anticipated, they got edgy and demanded that Aaron make new gods to lead them to their promised land.

This was inexcusable! God had performed one miracle after another to deliver them from their bondage and bring them to this place, yet they turned their backs on Him when He did not meet their expectations. That would be enough to try anyone's patience, and it certainly tried God's. He was ready to pull the plug on the Israelites for their hard hearts and disobedience, and that's when Moses prayed that God show mercy ... again!

Moses got a glimpse of God as He proclaimed His very nature “ ... **the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness**” (Exodus 34:4-9).

But God’s patience is very evident even before His formal relationship with Israel. Remember when God commissioned Noah to build an ark (Genesis 6-8)?

How long did it take Noah to build the ark? We know Noah was 500 years old when his sons were born (Genesis 5:32) and we know he was 600 years old when he entered the ark (Genesis 7:6) with his wife, married sons and daughters-in-law. Therefore, there is a potential time period of 100 years or so in which Noah built the ark.

Why would God wait so long to send the flood? (1 Peter 3:20)

Noah was not just a carpenter. He was also a “**preacher of righteousness**” (Does this sound like someone in the New Testament?). When Noah wasn’t hammering and building, he was preaching, and my guess is that he was preaching the same sermon over and over — “**Repent!**” (2 Peter 2:5).

One reason why God “waited patiently” for Noah to build the ark is because He was allowing the wicked, unrighteous people opportunity to hear Noah’s preaching and repent.

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

“Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation ... ”
(2 Peter 3:15a).

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

When God’s patience wears thin

The fact that “long-suffering” (patience) used in the Bible is defined as a delay in the expression of God’s wrath or judgment implies that eventually His long-suffering will end and His wrath will be displayed. There comes a time when God’s patience with willful, rebellious sinners will run out and He will judge them.

For in just a very little while, **“He who is coming will come and will not delay...”** (Hebrews 10:37; see also Matthew 25:31-32). Are you — or is someone you know — taking advantage of God’s patience, either abusing it or seeking it through repentance, prayer and renewed dedication to Him?

In **One Church from the Fence**, Wes Seelinger writes:

“The intensive care waiting room is different from any other place in the world. And the people who wait are different. They can’t do enough for each other. No one is rude. The distinctions of race and class melt away. All people there are carrying a burden of love and concern. Everyone there knows that loving someone else is what life is all about.”

It is too bad that we walk away from the hospital crisis and turn back into our impatient selves, perhaps even by the time we get out into traffic. “That signal light takes forever,” we mutter. Or, “Move it, dummy!” “Why is traffic so slow, when I’m in a hurry?” “Watch out, you idiot!” “You promised that my repair job would be ready today. What do you mean, ‘It’s been delayed?’” “I want to talk to the manager.” “You didn’t pay that bill like I asked you to. Now we’ll be late with it.” “Kids, if you don’t stop that this instant, you will go to bed without dinner!” “The preacher got onto my case this morning and I’m mad!” “I don’t know why they use that song leader. I don’t ever like the hymns he chooses.” And on and on it goes ...

So where is our shelter?

It is very clear from biblical examples that God is patient, long-suffering and slow to anger. As Christians made in His image and in the process of allowing Him to transform us more into the image of His son, we too should demonstrate the virtue of patience.

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12).

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2).

Being patient with people who exasperate us is not easy, and it is certainly something we cannot do consistently through our own strength. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness ...” (Galatians 5:22).

Chapter 8

God Isn't Two-faced

(Malachi 3:6; Ephesians 37-11;
Hebrews 1:10-11, 13:8; James 1:17)

Introduction

On the surface, God's unchangeable nature seems easy to understand. But as we begin to dig a bit deeper, how do we reconcile God's willingness to hear and answer prayer with His being immutable? God understands when grace, mercy, justice, vengeance, wrath and anger are appropriate. Understanding this begins with looking at the Scriptures to gain a better understanding of what God's unchangeable nature really is. Ultimately we find that God is consistent.

We are constantly frustrated by the inconsistency of those around us and even the inconsistency we find in ourselves. In God we find a constant, consistent being on whom we can always depend for all the attributes we are studying. (The following material is adapted from a study on God prepared by Brent Keck, adult education director of the Edmond, Okla., Church of Christ.)

Definition of terms

The following definitions and synonyms of unchangeable and immutable have been taken from dictionary.reference.com.

un·chang·ing

adj. Remaining the same; showing or undergoing no change: unchanging weather patterns; unchanging friendliness.

im·mu·ta·ble

adj. Not subject or susceptible to change.

Examples of God's immutability

When we examine the Greek words used in James 1:17, the phrase "not two sided" or "not two-faced" fits the idea represented. Note what these verses are teaching about God's consistent will:

- Ephesians 3:7-11: It has been God’s purpose (plan) to redeem mankind from sin through Christ, predating the creation (Ephesians 1:4). God’s plan is bigger than you and I and it goes on irrespective of our individual acceptance or rejection of it. However, it is always there for us to accept, if we are willing to do so.
- Malachi 3:6: Sin is what separates people from God. This is explained in the book of Malachi as the sins of Israel are expounded. The sons of Jacob are not consumed because of God’s promise.
- 2 Peter 3:9: **“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”**
- James 1:17: God cannot be tempted and does not tempt. Temptation starts with our own desires which lead to sin and death. What does come from God are **“every good and perfect gift.”** These are truths that are part of the changeless nature of God.
- Hebrews 1:10-12: This is a quote of Psalm 102:25-26 that contrasts the temporary nature of the world with the eternal nature of God. Should we depend on things of this world when we can depend on the eternal God? (Matthew 6:19-21).
- Hebrews 13:8: Jesus Christ is our perfect high priest. We should remember our godly heroes of faith (Hebrews 11) and follow their examples. In this context we should remember that Jesus Christ does not change, so we should not be led away by “diverse and strange” teachings.

God’s response to sin is consistent; He cannot tolerate it. Sin separates us from God and it’s only through the cleansing blood of Christ that we can be made presentable to him (John 14:6; 1 John 1:7).

Ever since sin entered the world, God’s desire has been for humans to repent, as we read in Ezekiel 18:32: **“For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!”** Again we read the words of Jesus: **“For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it”** (John 12:47).

Human logic can lead people to take certain characteristics of God, such as love, grace and mercy, and disregard jealousy, vengefulness, anger, wrath and justice. It is only through an understanding of where sin leaves us in our relationship with God that we can truly come to appreciate what John 3:16 means: **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”**

God’s ability to relent

In Exodus 32, we are told about the children of Israel, under the leadership of Moses’ brother, Aaron, worshipping a golden calf. In verses 7-14 we have a conversation that occurred between Moses and God:

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” I have seen these people,’ the LORD said to Moses, ‘and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.’

“But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. ‘O LORD,’ he said, ‘why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, “It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth”? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: “I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.”’ Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.”

Another passage we can look at is about Hezekiah. In 2 Kings 20 we read that King Hezekiah was near death and the prophet Isaiah was sent to him by God to tell him to prepare to die. Hezekiah prayed fervently to God. In response to his prayer, 15 more years were added to his life.

Do these passages contradict the verses stating that God does not change?

So where is our shelter?

We need to keep in mind that God is all-knowing. God had cause to do what He said, but he knew the heart of Moses and Hezekiah; he knew how they would respond. Ultimately, the events as they transpired fit into God's eternal plan and purpose, perhaps in ways we do not understand.

“Change” was the buzz word in the 2008 presidential race. Never mind that presidents cannot effect much change because of all of the obstacles they face in Congress and in the bureaucratic system, as well as the “good ol’ boy” mentality in Washington. About the only things that change rapidly are technology and the weather. Computers or handheld devices which are new today are already ancient by next year. Today’s weather can change even in a few minutes. Our employment or unemployment can change overnight. Our health can suddenly deteriorate. Our homes can be leveled by a fire, tornado or hurricane. A loved one dies in a tragic accident. Our investments or mortgages can turn sour. All of this, and much more, can suddenly change. We can take consolation in the fact that we have an anchor in an unchanging God, a God who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Chapter 9

God Is Just

(Deuteronomy 32:4, Job 4:17, Isaiah 45:21, Romans 3:26,
Romans 2:16, 2 Timothy 4:1)

Introduction

The implications of the justice of God go against the grain of the popular concept of God as portrayed by the religious world today. For many, the love of God overshadows all other characteristics of the Divine One. How can the God of love punish people who were created in His image? We will examine some passages that declare God as just, define the meaning of just, consider the implications of having a just God, and attempt to relate our findings to our daily lives.

On God's justice

What is the meaning of "just?" It implies that God is holy, or righteous, as written in Deuteronomy 32:4: "...**just, lawful, righteous (man).**" This helps us understand that there is no imperfection in God, and that His holy nature makes it impossible for there to be any blemish in His character.

This brings the question of the righteousness of God in forgiving mankind. Romans 3:26 discusses this point in detail. Who observes God's character?

- The spiritual world (Ephesians 3:10, 6:12).
- The whole creation watches God (Romans 8:22).
- Mankind (Job 4:17).

Justice always demands that evil be punished. God does not overlook sin, but demands that every transgression receives a just reward. God is a perfect judge.

Implications of God's being just.

God cannot have fellowship with that which is unjust. Man is declared to be a sinner (Romans 3:10, 23). For God to have fellowship with sinful humanity, either He must become unholy or human beings must find a means of justification.

God, being just, must do two things:

- Punish the wicked. The Bible reveals that the wicked will be punished (Revelation 20:11-15). In the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), both received after death their just reward, Lazarus safe in Paradise, the rich man tormented in Hades or Gehenna. We know that this took place in the abode of the dead prior to the final resurrection and judgment, because the rich man's brothers were still alive on earth, something which could not happen after the final judgment.
- The faithful ones are welcomed into the joys of the Lord (Matthew 25:34).

How can God be just and forgive humans of sin? The penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Someone had to pay the price for our sins. God gave His Son as that price — as the perfect sacrifice for sin; the Sinless for the sinner (Romans 3:21-26).

What about God's being Judge? (2 Timothy 4:1)

God is all-knowing. Therefore, only He can be the perfect judge. He knows the inner thoughts and intentions of mankind (Hebrews 4:13). We cannot know the mind of our fellow humans. We cannot even know all of the deeds of our fellow humans.

God never relinquished to man the obligation or right to be the final judge (Romans 12:19). We are incapable of rendering perfect judgment. Many jury trials today end in hung juries or in wrong decisions. This is one reason why there are appellate courts. DNA findings now bring about the reversal of former decisions, proving that human court decisions can be flawed.

If we were the final judge, in God's place, we might be too severe in punishment or too lenient on the guilty. Some may be worthy of greater rewards or greater punishment than we would grant with our limited knowledge.

So where is our shelter?

Understanding that God is just gives us a greater appreciation of the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf.

- God's being just requires Him to fellowship only that which is pure (or made pure).

- Knowing that God must punish wickedness helps us to do all we can to resist the influence of Satan.
- Understanding that God is just causes us to seek His will in regard to acceptable worship.
- God desires worship that is in spirit and truth (John 4:23). God seeks worship only from those who are submissive to Him, serving Him in spirit and according to His truth.
- Understanding that God is just should cause us to treat others justly (Matthew 7:1ff, 18:23-25).

God is just. He cannot make a mistake in dealing with us. The forgiveness offered to mankind is possible only because someone else paid the penalty on our behalf. God will judge all people, great and small, on that day when all nations are gathered before Him. The universe will see the righteousness of God when cleansed sinners are taken into the eternal city to live with Him forever. The spiritual beings will praise the holiness of God when those who were cleansed and made holy are gathered before the throne of glory. Mankind, created in the image of God, made perfect through the blood of Jesus, will be the beneficiary of the rewards of the just God. We can all enjoy blessed assurance, knowing that God will be the final judge of our lives.

In my unpublished novel, **The Gabriel Files**, a closing scene has Satan arguing with Christ over the justness of a flawed human being received into the heavenly realm. The Evil One cries that it is highly unjust for the Lord to take to Himself a sinful human. “You cannot do this!” he bellows.

“I can and I will,” answers the Lord. “See, here. His name is written in my blood in my book of life. I have bought him. He is mine.” The only hope we have as sinners is of a gracious God washing us in the blood of Christ.

Part 2

JESUS

Chapter 10

Is Jesus Lord or What?

(Matthew 8:23-9:34; Mark 5:24-34; Luke 8:22-56, 9:57-62)

Introduction

Christian professor, scholar, and writer F. LaGard Smith says, rightly, that “it is one thing for a man to teach what he claims is truth; it is quite another thing to demonstrate one’s authority to claim that truth.” Jesus had compassion on those needing His help, but this wasn’t the only reason why He performed miracles. He performed mighty works to prove that He was the Son of God and Messiah, and to verify that the kingdom of God was coming with power. He demonstrated His divine power over nature, the spirit world, death and disease, not to show off, entertain or gain a personal following. He healed out of compassion and the need to authenticate His message.

On the other hand, I have seen supposed divine healers who made a great show of what they were doing, becoming famous and wealthy in the process. Among all of the “healers” of today, not a one can restore a missing limb, bring sight to the totally blind or raise someone from the dead. Their “healings” tend to be the kind that are difficult to prove or unprove. Examples: Someone claims to have suffered an undiagnosed disease and is suddenly cured, or someone claims to have had migraine headaches, but no longer has them, thanks to a “divine healer.”

Now let us look at some of Jesus’ genuine miracles and the factors involved in each:

Miracles over nature (Matthew 8:23-27)

- **Changing water to wine** (John 2:1-12). This was the miracle that launched Jesus’ career, which He did reluctantly, due to His mother’s manipulating Him into it. The wine ran out at a wedding feast (since they often went on for a week) and Jesus changed water into better wine than had been served at the beginning. The banquet host questioned the bridegroom about this sudden new supply of wine, because normally the best wine was served early and then later during the feast they could serve

cheaper wine. In this miracle, Jesus revealed His divine glory, and some disciples who were present put their faith in Him.

- **Calming the storm** (Matthew 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25). Jesus' disciples were taking Him by fishing boat across the Sea of Galilee. Tired, Jesus lay down in the stern on a cushion and slept. Then a terrible storm arose, nearly swamping the boat, which can be typical of that sea. Fearful, the disciples awakened Jesus and asked Him if He cared that they drowned. Strange question! Surely they should have known that God would not permit His Son to drown, but fear does strange things to us. Jesus got up, rebuked the waves and immediately the sea became calm. Then He rebuked the disciples, asking, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Would we have acted any better in the same circumstances? They couldn't believe totally, even after seeing this miracle, asking, "Just who is this, anyway?" And did you notice that Jesus was tired, tired from healing, tired from teaching, tired from the many demands on Him. While in His earthly body, He suffered tiredness, stress, disappointment, anger, love and empathy.

- **Feeding the 5,000** (Matthew 14:15-21). Jesus was teaching a multitude in a remote location beyond the Sea of Galilee. After He had taught His followers many things, it was late in the day. His disciples wanted to release the crowd, so it could scatter out and find food in some village. Jesus asked Philip, "Where are we going to buy food for this multitude?", testing him. Philip, like us, looked at the situation and could only see dollar signs. "Eight months' wages could not buy more than a bite of bread for each one." Aren't we like Philip? "Construct a new meeting place? Why, we can never pay for it!" "Add more missionaries? Budget won't permit it!" Budgets are good as a tentative plan for the year, but they are bad if they dictate how much we can do for the Lord. In this case Andrew and a little boy came to the rescue with five loaves and two fish, more than enough for Jesus to feed everyone — 5,000 men plus women and children — with 12 baskets of food left over! The crowd's reaction was partially on track, commenting that this must be the "Prophet" who was to come. But then they wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him king. Free food for life!

- **Walking on water** (Matthew 14:23-27). Jesus had left the crowd and headed into the mountains. The disciples were told to embark for Bethsaida. When it was dark, a strong wind came up and made the rowing very difficult. During the fourth watch of the night, Jesus appeared walking on the water. (This was the Roman system of four night watches, each

of three hours, beginning at evening and going until morning, so Jesus appeared sometime between 3 and 6 A.M.) The disciples had made little progress against the storm and were worn out. They saw Jesus coming toward them and were terrified, thinking He was a ghost. He spoke to them and calmed them. Brash Peter wanted to try walking on water and almost drowned. He was strongly reprimanded for his lack of faith. When Jesus and Peter got into the boat, the wind ceased. Even after the miracle that day of the loaves, the disciples were still amazed.

Power over the spirit world (Matthew 8:28-34)

Jesus and the disciples then crossed the sea to the region of the Gerasenes or Gadarenes, to the east of the sea. They were met by a demon-possessed man who lived among the tombs (caves or small family crypts above ground). He was superhumanly powerful, so that not even chains could hold him. He called himself, “Legion,” meaning in Latin “a multitude”. He hosted many evil spirits. This was the case of the spirits being sent into a herd of swine (good riddance, according to the Jews), which went crazy and plunged over a cliff into the sea. Word got around fast, and the people of the area ran out to see what had happened. There was the former insane man now sane and dressed. Instead of receiving Jesus, they feared Him and begged Him to leave them. How many today are so uncomfortable over any mention of Jesus that they avoid it at all costs! The healed man wanted to follow Jesus, but was told to go to his own people with the story of his cleansing. He did so, throughout all of Decapolis, the region of 10 Greek cities. There is nothing like a first-person story.

Jesus’ power to work miracles

Recently the Catholic Church declared a deceased American nun to be a saint, because of two miracles she supposedly performed after she died. Both cases involved deafness. There is no hint in the Bible of such power of a deceased person, nor is a person a saint because of claimed miracles performed. According to the New Testament, a saint is a Christian — one who is called to be holy (1 Corinthians 1:1-3).

Jesus’ miracles were genuine, very visible and instantaneous. They didn’t always depend on the faith of the person healed, which is what some religious groups claim is essential for healing. No one doubted the authenticity of His miracles. All knew He had performed a great sign, but many were unwilling to attribute this to God. Jesus proved His lordship through not only His authoritative teaching, but also through His miracles.

Jesus' power over sickness

In Matthew 9:20-22, Jesus was in the midst of a dense crowd. A woman who had hemorrhaged for 12 years was at the end of her financial and emotional rope. She was desperate and ready to try anything. She had spent all of her money on doctors, but just got worse. When she saw Jesus, she managed to work her way through the crowd and touched the hem of His cloak, believing that even the slightest contact with Him would heal her. Immediately she was healed. Jesus realized that power had gone from Him and asked who had touched Him. The woman was frightened and finally confessed. Jesus told her that her faith had healed her.

In Luke 13:10-17 Jesus healed a stooped woman who didn't even seek to be healed. No faith was mentioned in this case. In John 9:1-41 Jesus healed a blind man who didn't even know who He was. There is no hint of his having faith. After he was healed he wanted to know who the Son of Man was, that he might believe.

In Mark 2:1-5 Jesus healed a paralytic. Those who lowered him through a roof had faith, but there is no suggestion that he necessarily had faith.

Jesus had total power over any kind of infirmity — blindness, deafness, leprosy, paralysis and all others. Since He was Lord of Heaven and earth, creating the universe and maintaining it, no illness could withstand His power.

Jesus' power over death

The most overwhelming of all His miraculous powers was that over death. He never went through a cemetery raising the dead, but raised several people, none of whom could have had any faith in Him in the grave.

In Mark 5:35-43 Jesus raised Jarius' daughter. A synagogue ruler had a very ill 12-year-old daughter. The ruler was extremely concerned, so he begged Jesus to come and heal her. Apparently he had no notion that Jesus could raise her from the dead. When the ruler was informed that his daughter had died, Jesus told him to believe. Taking Peter, James and John with Him, he went with the parents into the room where the body lay. He just took her by the hand and told her to get up. She did so and they were all amazed. As He did on other occasions, He told them not to divulge what had transpired. He must not have wanted the sensationalism that would follow.

In Luke 7:11-17 Jesus raised the only son of a poor widow. In those days

his death would have meant her total loss of financial security. In this case Jesus just touched the coffin and told the man to get up. He didn't even tell the mother to believe. Moved by compassion, He simply raised the son to life.

In John 11:1-44 Jesus brought back to life His close friend Lazarus. Not even Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary, believed that He could raise Lazarus. They lamented that if He had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Although in the tomb for four days, he was called out by Jesus and immediately returned to life.

So where is our shelter?

Jesus never used His divine powers to show off or to attract a large following. Some of His miracles were done in secret.

He used His powers to prove that He was from God. All were instantaneous and complete. There was no playing mind games, no magic, no sorcery — just straightforward power over the natural and supernatural. Was He and is He the Son of God? Certainly. He even had power over His own death and resurrection. Heed what the centurion presiding over the death of Jesus said: **“Surely this was the Son of God”** (Matthew 27:54). If a pagan military leader could say this about Jesus, surely we, too, can say it!

Chapter 11

Jesus, Forever God, and also Man

(Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 1:1-5)

Introduction

Just who is Jesus? In answer to this question, countless people have characterized Him as only a good man, a great example, a prophet, a fraud, one god among many ... However, He is far more than just a good man, a great prophet, or one of many gods. He is both God and, through His birth here on earth, a man. He is Co-creator and Sustainer of all that is. He is Savior, Redeemer, Advocate, Mediator, eternal Lord and Judge. As they say in TV advertising, “But there is more”:

Some of Jesus’ titles in the Bible

- All-powerful (Revelation 1:8)
- Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End (Revelation 2:16)
- Amen (Revelation 3:14)
- Bread of Life (John 6:35)
- Bridegroom (Luke 5:34-35)
- Chief Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6)
- Christ (John 11:17)
- Co-Creator (John 1:3)
- Counselor (Isaiah 9:6)
- Door of the Sheepfold (John 10:7)
- Eternal Father (Isaiah 9:6)
- Faithful Witness (Revelation 3:15)
- Firstborn (Romans 8:29)

- Good Shepherd (John 10:11)
- Head (Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 1:18)
- High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-15)
- Holy or Saint (Revelation 3:7)
- Husband (2 Corinthians 11:2)
- I AM (John 8:58)
- Intercessor (1 John 2:1)
- Judge (Revelation 19:11)
- King of Kings, Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16)
- Lamb of God (John 1:29)
- Life (John 1:4, 14:6)
- Light (John 1:4-5, 8:12)
- Lion (Revelation 5:5)
- Lord (Acts 2:36)
- Master or Teacher (John 3:2)
- Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5)
- Messiah (Acts 2:36)
- Morning Star (Revelation 22:16)
- Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- Peace (Ephesians 2:14)
- Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)
- Rabbi, Rabboni (John 3:12, 20:16)
- Redeemer (Ephesians 1:7)
- Resurrection and Life (John 11:23)
- Root (Isaiah 11:10; Revelation 5:5)
- Sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10)
- Servant (Mark 10:45)
- Son of God (John 11:27)

- Son of Man (Matthew 16:27)
- Sovereign (Revelation 3:14)
- Sustainer (Colossians 1:15-17)
- Truth, Truthful (John 14:6; Revelation 3:7)
- Vine (John 15:1)
- Word (John 1:1-2, 14)

This is a truly amazing list of titles given to Jesus. How important can He be? We will begin by considering Jesus as all-powerful, co-creator and sustainer of the universe.

Jesus as co-creator of the universe

There is no limit to the power of Jesus over all things in the universe. In order to place His creative power over the vastness of space, Internet sources on the number of galaxies estimate currently that there may be anywhere between 100 billion to 200 billion galaxies, each containing millions of stars or suns. Dr. Simon Driver, astrophysicist with the Australian National University, speaking at the General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union meeting in Sydney in 2003, said that there are an estimated 70 sextillion stars. This is about 10 times as many stars as grains of sand on all the world's beaches and deserts. However, more and more powerful telescopes are finding entire groups of galaxies heretofore unknown but to the divine Creator; such is the Galileo, a new telescope soon to be in use, which will be 10 times more powerful than the Hubble Space Telescope.

In comparison to the universe, Planet Earth is a tiny speck; yet on it our Lord has lavished great creativity, water, air, minerals, provision for sustaining all animal and human life, and everything else that exists here. Has He done so for any other planet? No one knows for certain, but astronomers know that Centauri in Andromeda is the right kind of sun to have the potential to support life on its planets 2 and 3.

Returning to our globe, how many species and sub-species of plant and animal life exist? There are eight categories of plant types and thousands of species and sub-species. There are five categories of animal life, again with thousands of species and sub-species, the variety and complexity of which is staggering. Yet our Lord knows and cares for them all.

Proofs of Jesus' creative power

How do we know all of this about Jesus? First, in Genesis 1:26 the use of the plural ("Let us") indicates that the *Godhead* created mankind and not just God *alone*. Second, in John 1:1-4 we read:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men."

Then in John 8:58 Jesus told Jewish leaders, **"Before Abraham was born, I am!"** This caused immediate teeth-gnashing on the part of those leaders, for only deity could be referred to as **"I Am."** His very words, which were true, nonetheless, sealed His death sentence. They believed that He had usurped the holy name for God and applied it to Himself. They had to stop this, to their thinking, blasphemous imposter!

Speaking of the pre-existence and creative work of Jesus, Paul wrote in Colossians 1:15-16:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him."

All things that exist were created by Jesus, working heart-to-heart and hand-in-hand with His Father. They all have a purpose, even though it is difficult to understand the purpose for poison oak, fire ants, scorpions, poisonous snakes, cockroaches and a host of other plants and creatures of a poisonous or at least obnoxious nature. As Adam and Eve were ordered to care for the Garden, so we are to respect and care for our planet, which we haven't done so well up till now.

Jesus as sustainer of all things

Jesus not only set the galaxies in order and the sun, moon and planets in their trajectories, the earth to spinning and all that is on the earth to exist and reproduce, but He also acts as the maintainer of His creation. We know that everything about us must be maintained. Our car, house, and yard need constant attention and we can't sit back and wait for the Lord to fix what went wrong. Windex, of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* fame, cannot fix everything, nor can WD40 or duct tape.

Likewise, our universe must be maintained. Back to Colossians, we find Paul saying in 1:17, **“He (Jesus) is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”** He is the super glue that keeps the universe functioning as intended. He is the mainspring that keeps everything timed. He is the cornerstone upon which the world was framed.

So where is our shelter?

Is Jesus all-powerful? Imagine a molecular scientist challenging the creative power of the Godhead, stating that he could take the same elements out of which a human is made and create from this “dirt” a new creature. He begins gathering up a mound of earth. “What are you doing?” asks God. “Getting some dirt from which to extract the elements for creating a human.” ”No, you don’t!” answers God, “Get your own dirt.”

We cannot create something from nothing, nor can we build a new planet and form everything on it. We creatures cannot say to God, “Why have you made me like this?” or, “Why don’t things run more according to my liking?” Jesus is all-powerful, not only spiritually, but also in every other realm of life. Our only response to our creative Lord is to bow before Him and acknowledge His power and authority.

Why do we believe that Jesus is Co-Creator and Maintainer of all things? Because the Bible is clear on this, and moreover, we see His hand in all that exists, not only in its complexity, but also in its continuation day after day, year after year. Why do we believe that He is all-powerful? Because it takes a powerful hand, indeed, to keep this universe functioning in a precise manner.

Chapter 12
Jesus, the Word
(John 1:1-5, 14)

Introduction

Most books of antiquity began with a prologue, as does John in 1:1-18. The prologue presents the case for what follows. **Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible** describes well the nature of this prologue:

“John begins his Gospel with a tremendous statement about Jesus Christ: on these truths his whole case rests. In him (the Word) God speaks to man. He is the most perfect and complete expression of the person of God we can ever know. He is far and away above all humanity — God’s executive in creation. When God spoke in creation, His Word brought life itself into existence. And it was this Supreme Being who became man — the man we know as Jesus Christ. His life shone out — and still shines — against the darkness of a world which failed to recognize Him. But to individuals who give Him their allegiance He makes available all of God’s grace. And He makes a new, transformed life possible” (p. 534).

John’s prologue places Jesus as existing from before the creation of the universe and being directly involved, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in all that was created. Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters. That passage places the Spirit at work in the creation. The Godhead knows all of the galaxies, myriads of them, and even knows the stars by name (Psalm 147:4). The Godhead knows all plants, animals, and humans. So the setting was Heaven itself, where this amazing creative Force was at work and where Christ had already been made the *logos*, or living Word, of God Himself.

Jesus as the Logos of the Godhead (John 1:1-2, 14)

In Greek, the “Word” as used here is *logos*, which means more than mere words. Plato and Aristotle had a concept of words being divine; having a life that goes beyond their letters. To them the idea was philosophical —

that of reason as the controlling principle of the universe and manifested by speech. We know the power of words and how they can affect us. Daniel Webster, as I recall, said that “The twenty-six letters of the alphabet are powerful little soldiers that go out to battle, either to kill or to make peace.” James says that **“the tongue is a fire; with it we praise God and with it we curse other people”** (James 3:1-12).

John’s use of the expression Word immediately connects Jesus with Heaven. He places Jesus as co-creator of the universe and its mainspring, or sustainer. **“Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made”** (John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17).

Jesus as the Incarnate Word

“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). John testifies that he has **“seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** John the Baptist also testifies about the true nature of Jesus, the one whom he had identified (vs. 15).

This has to have been one of the greatest miracles of all time — that the Word of the eternal Godhead would condescend to give up everything, to come down to earth and live among us. Can you imagine the owner of the universe and the resident of Heaven’s eternal palace coming here to be born in a stable and grow up in an humble home? Then, for 3-plus years of His public ministry He didn’t even have a home (Matthew 8:20). God lived here and walked in our shoes. He suffered temptation, tiredness, grief, disappointment, ridicule, a terrible beating and finally an excruciating death on the cross — all for us sinners!

In this way He could show that He understand us, to be a perfect High Priest over His house, which house we are (Hebrews 3:6). He knows our weaknesses. He approaches the Father on our behalf, as our Mediator and Advocate.

Jesus the Word in His message

The Book of John is filled with messages given by Jesus in specific situations — with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the multitude He fed with bread and fish, His disciples ... He taught people how to live before God, generally by using applications they understood well. He taught the essence of what it means to know God’s will and obey it. He cut through the traditional overlays, to get to the heart of the original message and its intent. In this way, He stripped away all of the traditions the rabbis and scribes had added to the Law. For instance, instead of caring for one’s elderly parents, Jewish men often gave that money to the temple treasury.

They were violating one law to fulfill another. They tithed a tenth of the herbs from their gardens, but failed to show justice, mercy, and faith. Jesus revealed the original intent of God’s plan for humanity, such as in the case of marriage and divorce. From the beginning, He said, divorce was not intended, but God had permitted it for a time because of the hard hearts of His people. But in the new Christian age, He taught us to return to the original nature of marriage (Matthew 19:3-9).

Jesus the Word in His example

Jesus set a perfect example in every respect. There was an air about Him that was commanding and authoritative, yet not harsh, except against the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. His authority can be seen in His messages (Matthew 7:28-29). When He served, it was as an humble slave (John 13:1-17). Washing the feet of guests was the task of the lowliest of slaves. He was patient. He was angry for just cause (Matthew 21:12-13). He forewent food, to share spiritual food (John 4:31-38). When he was criticized and persecuted, He didn’t respond in kind (Isaiah 42:1-4, 53:7; John 18:19-24, 33-37). He suffered torture and pain quietly. He forgave His enemies (Luke 23:34).

When Jesus said, “Do this!”, He had already done it. When He said, “Be this!”, He had already been that. He expects us to walk in His footsteps (1 Peter 2:21). They are not impossible steps to follow, because He strode them before us. The following poem describes well His walking with us:

Footprints in the Sand

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.

Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,
other times there was one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of
my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I
could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord,

“You promised me, Lord, that you would walk with me always.

But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life
there has been only one set of footprints in the sand.

Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?"

The Lord replied, "The times when you have seen only one set of footprints in the sand were when I carried you."

— Mary Stevenson

Jesus the Word in Heaven and the Judgment

Jesus is still the living Word. He calls Himself the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 21:6, 22:13). Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last. This is fitting, since He is the divine Word from the beginning and has the last say in the judgment. On that final day, it is He who will judge us (Revelation 19:11-14). His word will prevail and His judgment will be final. There will be no Appellate Court and no retrials.

So where is our shelter?

This stirring prologue in John rings with truth, authority, and majesty. It places Jesus before creation, involved in creation and in its ongoing functioning. It places Him on earth as the God-man — the perfect balance between the divine and the human. He was, is, and will be the final Word — in its heavenly aspect, in His service, message, example and justice. What a wonderful Word is He!

Chapter 13

Jesus, the Lamb of God

(John 1:29-34)

Introduction

Sheep are interesting creatures. Except for rams, they are defenseless, so must be guarded and protected. They are easily spooked. They fear dark places and turbulent water. They cannot be driven, but must be led. However, they will only follow a person they know. When they hear his voice, they come to him. They were well known in pastoral Israel. David was a shepherd, as were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob's sons, Moses, David, Amos and other Old Testament figures. Hence references to sheep and shepherding, such as in Psalm 23.

Sheep, and especially lambs, are considered docile and innocent. Perfect lambs were indicated by God to be sacrificed, with their blood to be sprinkled on the door frames of their houses, as protection against death (Exodus 12). Then the lamb was to be eaten, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, to celebrate the first Passover.

Sheep played an important role in the Mosaic system of sacrifice (Leviticus 1:10-13, 3:6-11, 4:32-35). A lamb represented purity. Jesus on the cross was prefigured by Isaiah as a lamb led to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7).

John's encounters with Jesus

Jesus had appeared at the Jordan the day before and was baptized by John the Baptist, who only reluctantly did as Jesus requested. John knew who He was and felt unworthy to even untie his Lord's sandal laces. Upon Jesus' baptism, God's voice spoke from Heaven and the Spirit descended on Him. Now, on this second day, when Jesus reappeared, John said to those present, "**Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world!**" He identified Jesus as the One who would come after him and be greater than he. John recognized his role: to announce and prepare for the coming of the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 3:1-3). John would diminish in importance as Jesus increased. Yet, his task was vital and his work was honored by Christ (Matthew 11:11).

Jesus the perfect Lamb of God (John 1:29-36)

Jesus is identified in John 1 as the Lamb of God. He is also referred to as our Passover Lamb in 1 Corinthians 5:7 and as the Lamb of God in Revelation 5:6-8, 13; 6:16, 7:9ff; and 12:11 — an echo of the Passover lamb in Exodus and the references to Jesus as a lamb in Isaiah 53:7,12.

Originally the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed by each Israelite family, its blood sprinkled on the door frame of the house and its meat eaten in haste just before the exodus from Egypt. In later times, this sacrificed lamb took on significance as an atonement for sin. In Leviticus 16, a sacrificed lamb did have something to do with atonement. However, in Hebrews 10:4-9 we read that the blood of animals did not have power to cleanse permanently from sin. Only the blood of Christ could accomplish that.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:7 that we are to keep the new Passover with the wine which represents Christ's blood and the bread, which represents His body. And, he says, we are to keep the feast with the bread of sincerity and truth. (In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 he elaborates on this matter as it relates to the Lord's Supper.)

Jesus the Lamb who takes away our sins (John 1:29)

The original Passover lamb took away death from Israelite homes. The final Passover Lamb removes our sin and eternal death, if we just apply His blood.

What about those who reject it? Could an Egyptian family, believing in what God had decreed, have sprinkled the blood of a lamb on its door frames and been spared death? Yes, it could; but the Egyptians did not and they suffered the consequences, just as we today, if we ignore Christ and fail to obey Him.

So where is our shelter?

John the Baptist always pointed to Jesus. By revelation he announced that Jesus was the true and final Lamb of God. Some believed it and followed Jesus. Many others did not and died in their sins. We have the same choice today. What a blessing to know that our sins can be washed away and be continually removed by the blood of Christ!

Chapter 14

Son of God — Son of Man

(John 1:1-21, 3:22-36)

Introduction

Jesus has always been an enigma. During all of His ministry He was a mystery. To the Establishment's way of thinking, He hadn't come from the right place. Bethlehem had been prophesied as the birthplace of the Messiah (Micah 5:2). Yet, as the religious leaders saw it, He came from Galilee, a countrified province of mixed races, and from Nazareth, a little town of low repute (John 1:43-46). Therefore, they concluded, He could not possibly be the Messiah. He had gone through no rabbinical school. He had not been taught by the greatest rabbi, Gamaliel. He just didn't fit their conception of the long-promised Messiah nor their teaching, filled as it was with countless traditions and interpretations of the law. He taught with authority and absolute insight, so they challenged His authority (Luke 20:1-2). He saw through their traditions and duplicity, which deeply offended them (Luke 20:20-26).

The people looked for a king — a direct descendant of David — who would lead them in battle against the hated Roman occupiers of their land. They saw Jesus' power and attempted to take Him by force and place a crown on His head (John 6:14). But when He didn't meet their expectations, they turned from Him. Some even accused Him of blasphemy and having a devil (John 10:19, 31-33).

Even His own closest disciples misunderstood His nature and mission. And they were still far from understanding the nature of His kingdom. After all His teaching and His resurrection, they still asked Him if He would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6).

Not long after the church began, false teachers arose, claiming that the resurrection had already occurred and that Jesus could not have been born and lived as a human — He only appeared to be human. They also taught that He did not die on the cross, but that, at the last moment, someone else was substituted for Him. This doctrine is called Docetism, which

soon morphed into Gnosticism, a doctrine holding that only a select few were privileged to have secret knowledge about the true Jesus, His nature and teaching. Paul and John especially argued against such heresies. John called them antichrists (1 John 2:22-23). Confusion over Christ continued unabated in following centuries. Some elevated Mary to be His equal (or even above Him), as Mother of God and Mediatrix between Christ and human beings. Some explained Him as being sacrificed anew daily. Some, such as Muhammad, made Him no more than a prophet. And some, such as the Buddhists, consider Him to be one of many gods. To many today He is only a divine principle, not God in the flesh. Yet the Bible tells us clearly who He really is — Son of God and Son of Man.

Jesus the Son of God

In John 1, Jesus is presented as the Son of God (John 1:14,18,34). He is therefore much more than a prophet or even an exemplary human being. He is the only Son of God, in the sense of His divine lineage. Psalm 2:7 quotes God's decree regarding His Son — **“You are my Son, today I have become your Father.”** Then, in verse 12, He adds, **“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.”** In Colossians 1:15-20, Paul powerfully declares Christ to be this preeminent Son.

Why is it so important that He be the Son of God? If He were not, then He was only human and therefore would have no power to save us, or even to be raised from the dead. How can God have a Son? This has nothing to do with procreation, but with position. Jesus said that He and the Father are one (John 10:30). While here as a man, He was in the Father and the Father in Him (John 10:38). He left all the glories of Heaven for awhile, to be God's Son here on the earth, and then returned to His former glory with the Father (John 17:1-5).

Jesus the Son of Man

It was absolutely essential that Jesus be human, as well as being divine. Hebrews 2:16-18 tells us that He had to be made like His brothers in every way, that He might make atonement for our sins. He suffered as we suffer. He was tempted as we are tempted. In fact, He was tempted in every way, yet overcame and remained sinless (Hebrews 4:14-15).

Carrying this thought further, Jesus went through every stage of growth, from birth to death. He walked the dusty trails of Israel, in the heat and cold, the sunshine and rain. He had no real home after beginning His ministry

(Matthew 8:20). He became tired, disappointed, deceived, betrayed. He experienced deep sympathy, extreme agony and pain, especially in His scourging and crucifixion.

He was a man's man, capable of driving merchants out of the temple courtyard. (This was a cozy commercial arrangement between the priests and the merchants.) Although He was meek and gentle, He could also be angry. He could best all of His enemies with arguments they could not answer. Even some of His enemies acknowledged that He was extraordinary and some leaders recognized that He was a great rabbi blessed by God (John 3:1-2). He gave up so much to become human (Philippians 2:5-11).

So where is our shelter?

The greatest event of all time occurred when God came to earth — when the divine Word became flesh, walking in our shoes, being tempted as we, suffering intensely and willingly giving up His life as a man, to bring us redemption.

But that isn't all. He returned to life and went back to the Father. A song has Him declaring, "I will rise again. There's no power on earth to keep me in the ground." In Heaven He labors for us, maintaining the universe in order, preparing a place for us, acting as our mediator and high priest, and eventually, our judge. We can receive no greater honor than to hear His, **"Well done, good and faithful servant."** Paul expresses well our glory in Christ in Ephesians 2:4-10.

Chapter 15

Jesus, Provider of Spiritual Rebirth

(John 3:1-21)

Introduction

The Spanish explorer Ponce de León supposedly searched far and wide for a fountain of youth, one that would reverse his aging process. Many others have attempted to find a magic formula that would renew our bodies. The latest about which I recently heard is called Vivix. It purports to clean all of the body's cells and thus rejuvenate them. If it really does that, I want a gallon immediately. But it may be like many prior cure-alls — failing to live up to all of the hype.

We would all like to at least slow down the march of time, which tramples over us continually. There is a huge business in cosmetic surgery and other means of reducing the lines and the fat content of the body. They at least reduce our pocketbooks and make a few people wealthy.

The only permanent means of renewing our lives is through Christ and the new birth He offers us.

Jesus' nighttime visitor

In the Book of John, chapter 3, we read the story of Jesus at a time when He was in Jerusalem. There He had a nighttime visitor, Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin and a prominent figure in religious and civil affairs. Two things can be observed here: First, Jesus had already created quite a stir in the entire country with His teaching and miracles. This Nicodemus recognized, seeing Him as at least a great rabbi, blessed by God. Second, Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night. This was highly unusual because there were no street lights and walking around at night in a city was potentially dangerous. People just didn't get out at night, except for a rare special event. Why did Nicodemus search out Jesus at night? He was at least a secret admirer of Jesus, but possibly didn't want that to be known by the powers-that-be. Or perhaps Jesus was so surrounded by

people during the day that there was no opportunity except at night to have a private conversation with Him. So here they were, our Lord in the flesh and a leader of the Jews, perhaps on the flat roof of some residence having a heart-to-heart.

Discussion on the new birth (John 3:1-21)

Nicodemus was forthright in his praise of Jesus, noting that He had to be a great rabbi (teacher), because no one could do what Jesus was doing if God were not with him. Apparently, Nicodemus was not yet ready to confess Jesus as Messiah and God's Son. He was like a lot of others who even today respect Christ, but never confess His name as Lord and Savior.

Jesus ignored Nicodemus's praise and went right to the point He had in mind. Nicodemus was elderly, as a member of the ruling council, so would have realized he didn't have many more years ahead of him. The average male lifespan was no more than about 45-50. He may have been older, but was still facing the end of his life. Jesus had a way of cutting to the chase, as He did here. He offered to Nicodemus (and to us) the true fountain of youth — a rebirth. If we want to draw others to Christ, we need to start where they are, with their interests and concerns. "Sock them in the eye!" doesn't work well in the realm of evangelism (nor in other realms, either).

Jesus had Nicodemus's interest immediately, when He said, "**I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again**" (verse 3). This confused Nicodemus, who asked how this could be; could an elderly man return to his mother's womb to be born?

Jesus answered, "**No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit**" (verse 5). What did He mean by this? He was talking about a spiritual rebirth by means of the water of baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit. Some have tried to explain this away by saying that the water here refers to the water in a mother's womb. Not so! Jesus was talking about an action which comes separate and apart from physical birth. He said that flesh (the human body) gives birth to flesh (a new human body), but the Spirit gives birth to a new person. If water itself has some magical power to save us, then there is no spiritual birth involved. It is merely a matter of being dipped in water. Unless this new birth involves the Spirit, as well as water, the baptismal act is no more than a stillbirth.

By then, Nicodemus was more confused than ever, asking, "**How can this be?**" (verse 9). Jesus scolded him for his lack of understanding. As

a teacher in Israel, he should have perceived what Jesus was saying, but didn't. Jesus then asked him, **“I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?”** (verse 12).

Jesus continued with one of the great faith-building verses in the Bible: **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”** (verses 14-16).

Jesus was referring, first, to His being lifted up on the cross. Just as Moses lifted up the brass serpent to save his people from the bites of poisonous snakes, so Jesus would be lifted up, to save us from Satan's poisonous influence and our resulting sins. But we must believe in Him, which results in confessing our faith in Him, repenting of our sins and being baptized into Him. This entire process is offered to us by our loving God, but if we turn from it, there is no forgiveness and no eternity with Him.

Jesus went on to talk about Light coming into the world. We will talk more about this in a later chapter. Suffice it to say here that He was talking about Himself. Many people have always shied away from Jesus, because He is light and they much prefer darkness.

So where is our shelter?

We will never understand fully the wonder of the New Birth. All we can do is to take advantage of this divine gift and share its wonder with others. It is a gift for sinners, which means that babies and young children, not yet conscious of sin, are exempt from it. It is a gift offered to sinners, people like you and me. It is a gift offered freely. But we must be willing to live up to its terms. The New Birth is conditioned on our accepting and obeying its terms.

We don't know if Nicodemus was ever born again or not. We do know that he honored Jesus highly by partnering with Joseph of Arimathea to bury His body. This was a daring public act of “coming out of their allegiance closet” for both men, as they declared their loyalty to Jesus' memory. We today know more than they about the true nature of Jesus and are therefore more responsible to Him. How would we respond to Jesus, if we were there in Nicodemus's or Joseph's sandals?

Chapter 16
Jesus and Living Water
(John 4:10-14)

Introduction

Water is essential to all life. Even in deserts there must be enough moisture to sustain acacias, palm trees, cacti, sagebrush, tumbleweeds and other hardy plants. Some trees run their tap root deeply into the ground in search of water. Desert flowers may be dormant for years, but when a good rain comes along, the desert is a riot of color.

Droughts are a scourge that can destroy almost all life. They may occur in many regions, but most often in semi-desert or desert regions. Water is such a valuable commodity that people and nations may be wiped out by droughts or by enemies intent on gaining their water sources. In Bible days it was a cause for celebration when a new well produced water (Genesis 21:25-31, 26:17-22, 32-33).

Do you remember water witches, men or women who cut willow branches to form an inverted “Y” shape. They would then walk along and when the willow bent toward the ground, water was supposedly there. Geologists are modern water witches, attempting to locate new water sources and drill for water at likely spots.

Our son David built a mountain home in California. He had to dig down a long way before he found a good water supply. It has served him for 16 years, even with our well-over 30 people present on the day of our 60th wedding anniversary celebration. He did warn some of our teenagers, though, not to take half-hour showers.

We can agree that water, along with oxygen, hydrogen and nitrogen, is essential to life. Jesus taught us that it is also essential to spiritual life.

Jesus in despised Samaria

The Lord and his disciples were in the middle of Samaria. Just being there was audacious on His part, as we shall see. They had stopped at noon at Sychar, a village between Mts. Gerizim and Ebal, at a spot where Jacob

dug a well. Jesus rested by this well, while the disciples went into the village to buy food. While He sat there, a Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus asked her for a drink. This shocked her, because Jews and Samaritans were not on speaking terms. In fact, Jesus' presence there was a surprise to her, for Jews traveling between Judea and Galilee normally would descend a steep trail down to the Jordan Valley, proceed along it until they were past Samaria, and then make the climb back up to the hill country.

The Samaritans were a mixed race, descending from peoples all over the Assyrian Empire. When Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 721 B.C. (2 Kings 17:24), the people there were deported and replaced with foreigners. They suffered greatly, so Assyria sent them a priest who taught them a strange form of the Israelite faith using only the Torah (first five books of the Hebrew Bible), provided priests that were not of the tribe of Levi and built a temple on Mt. Gerizim. A small colony of Samaritans still lives there and maintains a temple and animal sacrifices to God. The Jews considered them unclean and avoided them at all costs.

But Jesus paid no heed to prevailing cultural prejudices. He walked straight through Samaria more than once. So here he was in a hostile land, asking for water from a Samaritan woman — a free-wheeling woman who had had five husbands and was at the moment cohabitating with yet another man. She would have fit in well in today's world.

Jesus the source of living water

When the woman expressed surprise at His being there and asking her for water, He went right to the point, using her need for water to tell her about living water — water that would permanently quench spiritual thirst, water that would well up in her to bring her eternal life. Notice again how Jesus used natural situations to draw spiritual applications.

Of course, the woman wanted this water, thinking it to be some kind of powerful H₂O. If she just had it, she would never again have to trudge out to the well to draw water. Her material mind caused her to miss the point entirely, just as people often do today.

When Jesus revealed her innermost secrets to her, she assumed that He was a prophet, so she asked him a theological question about where to worship God — on Mt. Gerizim, where the Samaritans worshiped, or in Jerusalem, where the Jews worshiped. Jesus responded that the time was coming that the true worshiper would go to neither site, but would worship

God anywhere. However, to be acceptable to God, this worship had to be in spirit and in truth. This is a great lesson in itself. Is it possible to worship God in spirit, but not in truth? Or in truth, but not in spirit? Both are essential, if our worship is to be accepted by God. We must heed both the letter and the spirit of God's call to worship.

Meanwhile, the disciples returned to the well and were astounded! Jesus was conversing with a Samaritan woman, of all people. Scandalous! They asked Him to eat something, but He told them that He was already eating. What was His food? To do the will of His Father.

When the woman understood that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah, she raced back to town with this sensational news, even forgetting her water jug. In town she became a one-woman evangelist. Many of the townspeople came out to hear Jesus and invited Him to stay with them. He remained there for two days — another taboo broken! — with many of the Samaritans coming to believe in Him.

So where is our shelter?

Water makes up most of our body and some of us store up too much of it, or we allow ourselves to become water-depleted. I was working on a cattle ranch in Eastern Oregon one summer during my college years. It was very hot and dry. I became dehydrated and had to spend the night in a hospital to have my body re-hydrated.

While water is essential to survival, the Water of Life is vastly more essential. The water Jesus offers us is Himself and His teachings. If we dwell in Him and His Word, the refreshing water He gives us becomes an artesian well, bubbling up to prepare our hearts for eternity — and not just for eternity, but bubbling over into the thirsting souls of others. On their own, they may be dying of spiritual thirst, but do not know how to draw, without help, the water Jesus provides. His water is more than sufficient for us, so we can readily share it with parched lives about us, just as Jesus did.

We need to remember that it is essential to begin where people are and then apply spiritual lessons from their own situation. He could have condemned the woman's loose life or her religion that missed the mark. But instead, he sensitively showed her the better way. There is no better example to follow than His in our contacts with other people.

Chapter 17

Jesus, the Bread of Life

(John 6:25-59)

Introduction

Bread appears to be the common staff of life throughout the world, coming in all shapes, sizes and flavors. It is made of wheat, oats, rye, barley, rice, potatoes and other grains or flours. I have eaten bread from Nepal, India, China, Japan, Singapore, Kenya, Nigeria, England, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Austria, Russia, Ukraine and from all over the Western Hemisphere. The variety is truly amazing. In Israel, breads normally are matzos, flat and somewhat tasteless. French, Italian and Greek breads are marvelous.

In Brazil the breads are delicious, but contain no preservatives. Therefore, they don't stay fresh for many hours, requiring daily trips to the nearest bakery. A favorite request from beggars at our door was, "pão velho," which means "old bread" (from the day before). Bread is definitely universal. As was customary with Jesus, in John 6, He used this universal staple to drive home a spiritual lesson.

Feeding a multitude

Jesus had crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. A great crowd followed Him, for His reputation as a healer was well known. Jesus went up a hillside and sat down. When He saw the multitude approaching, He asked Phillip, "**Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?**" This was a test, which Phillip failed by answering, "**Two hundred denarii (eight months' salary) would not buy enough bread for each one to have only a bite.**" Andrew, always the servant, offered, "**Here is a boy with five barley loaves and two small fish, but how far can they stretch?**" Barley was the lowliest of grains. Barley loaves were the least expensive and tended to be tough and dry. The small fish would have been either dried or salted, to preserve them.

Jesus then had the crowd sit down in small groups — 5,000 men, plus who knows how many women and children (Matthew 4:21). This was a matter

of organizing the mob into orderly units, to be more efficiently served. Then He took the bread and fish, blessed them and had the disciples distribute them. All ate until their hunger was satisfied. The disciples then gathered up 12 baskets of leftovers. This was long, long before our contemporary lack of concern for wasting our resources. Like in His earlier turning water to wine, Jesus was able to manipulate, or better, multiply atoms He had created in the beginning — an astounding miracle!

The crowd was amazed! No more working for bread! This prophet could feed his people free of charge. At last they had the great messianic ruler they had longed for, so they attempted to take Him by force and make Him king (John 6:15). He refused their demand and withdrew into the hills.

Jesus the Bread of Life (John 6:25-66)

The crowd, frustrated, dispersed and converged on Capernaum in search of this elusive messiah. When they found Him, their first question was, **“Rabbi, when did you get here?”** (a typical question, strangely, that people ask at a lectureship or conference).

His answer was blunt: **“You only seek me because you want another free lunch!”** Once I created a tract on “The Tiger’s Free Lunch.” It explained how people in the far east capture tigers. They assemble a cage, leaving the door open and placing in it an animal. When a hungry tiger comes along, he slips into the cage for his “free lunch,” only to be trapped. The lesson was, “There are no free lunches!” People today constantly seek a fortune for which they don’t have to work — a government handout (or currently, a bailout), a lottery win, skimming off company cash for their own profit, insider trading in the stock market ... Sooner or later, however, we must pay for these “freebies.”

Jesus told His audience not to work for bread that spoils, but for bread that endures to eternity. Did He mean to say that we should not earn our food? Not at all! He meant that our emphasis in life should be to seek the spiritual bread that He provides (Matthew 6:25-34). It takes a lifetime to get our priorities straight and quit worrying about all of the lesser things of this life.

The one bread essential to eternal life is Jesus. It is He who is the Bread of Life — who gives life to the world. Yet, how relatively few people really hunger for this Bread of Life?

In their wandering in desert regions for 40 years, God’s people gathered manna, which they formed into a kind of bread. Yet, said Jesus, even this

divinely-provided bread didn't help them spiritually, for they all died. Only Jesus could give them His flesh — spiritual bread that would save them from eternal death.

Those hearing Him interpreted His words literally, apparently blinded to their spiritual significance. This is nothing new. People have always failed to discern spiritual, allegorical or symbolic language. Some of His listeners — even among His disciples — failed to understand the meaning of His words. Jesus explained again, clearly, **“The words I have spoken are spirit and life.”**

Disappointed and confused, many of His disciples left Him. This must have been disappointing for Him. People upon whom he had lavished so much teaching and so many miracles, when the going got tough, the weak disappeared. When He asked the Twelve, **“Do you want to leave, too?”**, impetuous Peter spoke up, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”**

So where is our shelter?

Sometimes, as in this case, Peter had it right. His was a profound answer. To whom shall we go, except to Jesus? A Jewish rabbi recently wrote in *The Daily Oklahoman* that there are many roads that lead to God. He is dead wrong! There is only one way, as we shall examine later, that leads to life. There is only one spiritual bread — Jesus and His Word. How we feed on them, or fail to do so, is critical to our long-term future. Isaiah 55:1-2 asks, **“Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fares.”** That says it well, so let us heed it.

Chapter 18

Jesus, the Light of the World

(John 1:4-9, 3:19-21, 8:12, 9:5, 12:35, 46)

Introduction

Almost all living creatures need light for survival. We lost a house plant recently because apparently it was not getting enough light. Our present largely-indoor society is starved for sunlight, so some pay for time at a tanning salon. Sunlight is important, within reason, for our physical health.

Light represents not just physical illumination, but also illumination in all realms of learning. “Ah, the light comes on!” we say when we have a new insight. In a course I am taking on music theory, almost daily I have these moments of illumination (along with moments of confusion). One purpose of learning is to shed light on some matter. In this chapter our investigation is on light as symbolic of truth and revelation of God’s will.

Light vs. darkness

Unless we walk in God’s light, we are doomed to walk in darkness. Walking in darkness physically can be dangerous. When I visited the fabled ruins of Petra in Jordan, my son and I were in a hotel room near the narrow chasm that leads to Petra. Our room was totally dark. I had to get up once during the night and forgot that there was a step upward between the sleeping and kitchen areas. Guess what? I tripped with a crash that brought my son to, ready to do battle against an intruder.

Walking in spiritual darkness can be even more dangerous. In John 3:19-21, Jesus told Nicodemus, “**This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.**” Jesus’ teaching here is in legal terms — “This is the verdict!”

Many people still love darkness, because their deeds are evil. They hate the light — of being exposed — and will go to great lengths to cover up their

misdeeds. Of course, the world rationalizes evil, turning it into shades of grey, or even white, rather than black. Abortion, homosexuality, adultery, drugs, spousal abuse, cheating in business or governmental affairs ... the list goes on and on. Much movie and TV fare glamorizes such behavior.

Light is in total contrast to darkness. Jesus added to Nicodemus, **“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God”** (John 3:21). Psalm 27 says that **“the Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear?”** When the light of God shines upon us, we have no cause to fear anyone or anything.

Jesus the Light of the World

Our Lord said clearly in John 8:12, **“I am the light of the world.”** This is another of His **“I am”** statements. Every time He used such an expression, Jewish leaders saw red. They reserved such words for God alone (Exodus 3:14). Yet Jesus continued to use them: **“Before Abraham was, I am,” “I am the bread of life,” “I am the water of life,” “I am the way, the truth and the life,” “I am the Good Shepherd,” “I am the resurrection and the life.”**

In this instance He declared Himself to be the true light of the world, not physically but spiritually — God’s final spiritual illumination. In John 1:4 we read, **“In him was life, and that life was the light of men.”** The next verse says that the light shines in darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. This is very much true today. Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, most Jews and a host of other religious groups, some even in Christendom, do not understand, or do not accept, the true nature and teaching of Jesus.

Yet, He remains as the only true and final light sent to the world. He illuminates every sector of life. Nothing can be hidden from His light (Hebrews 4:13).

He tells us that if we sincerely follow Him, we will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12).

So where is our shelter?

We have a clear choice. We can either stumble along in spiritual darkness or we can walk safely in the light. Christians choose to walk in the light, but not alone. We walk with Jesus and with one another (1 John 1:7). We, too, are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16). Our light, however, does not originate with us. It is reflected light.

Lighthouses, when in vogue, used many-faceted mirrors to reflect a concentrated light outward. We are to reflect the light of Jesus so strongly that others will praise God for us. Some will even want to find the source of that light and walk in it with us. We are to be transformed into the likeness of Christ (Romans 8:29).

Nathaniel Hawthorne once wrote a story about a unique rock formation in New Hampshire, The Old Man of the Mountain, which in recent years has collapsed. Hawthorne's story, *The Old Stone Face*, is about a man living near that formation who over the years came to look much like it. That could be our story. As we grow older in Christ, we come to look and act more and more like Him, who is our Light. Isaiah 60:1 talks about the need to **“arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.”** We shine, because the Lord shines *upon* us and *in* us.

Chapter 19

Jesus, the Good Shepherd

(John 10:1-18)

Introduction

Sheep are essentially helpless creatures. Because of this, they spook easily. They are a constant prey of wild animals. They fear turbulent water and storms. Therefore, they are in constant need of an attentive and caring shepherd. They depend on their shepherd for protection, nourishment, water and a safe place in which to sleep. Sheep recognize their shepherd's voice and will respond only to his or her call. They will not listen to the call of strangers. In fact, they will run from them.

Shepherding was so well known in Bible days that everyone could picture references to shepherding and to sheep. On almost any day they could look out on the hillsides and see shepherds tending their flocks. Again, Jesus used shepherding to draw attention to some important components of His life and teaching.

Healing a blind man

Jesus had just healed a man born blind. This amazed the blind man but frustrated the religious leaders. They attempted to undermine what had happened and grilled both the man and his parents about this matter. Jesus accused them, the spiritual shepherds of Israel, of being spiritually blind. Then He launched into a discourse about His being the only true Shepherd, in contrast to those useless leaders of the flock.

Good shepherds and bad

In John 10, Jesus talked first about good and bad shepherds. Bad shepherds are those with an agenda: They don't enter the sheepfold by the gate or door, but climb in some other way, to do as much deceiving and damage as possible. They don't belong to the Good Shepherd, Jesus, for they enter His fold by devious means. Their aim is to draw off as many sheep as possible, away from the fold. Paul warned the Ephesian elders, **"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not**

spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

This occurred in following decades and centuries, and it still occurs. I recall a young man in our work in Brazil who became a leader of the teens. Eventually, however, he influenced the teenage boys to follow him into Kung Fu, both a martial arts regimen and a religious philosophy. Almost overnight several young men left us under his influence. On another occasion a charismatic man came our way and showed signs of becoming a good leader in the church. However, his idea of church was almost that of a monastic order. He succeeded in splitting the congregation and leading a group away with him. What Christ said about bad shepherds still holds true. These are strangers whose voice the sheep should not heed. Yet, some are deluded and follow a false shepherd, who thus creates his own flock by thievery. He is not there to care for the sheep but to bolster his own power over the sheep. Jesus said that such people are thieves and robbers.

He also talked about hirelings — those not willing to risk their lives to protect the flock. Their lack of concern means that when the going gets tough, they get going — in the opposite direction. The true shepherd, on the other hand, comes into the sheepfold legitimately. The guard knows him, so opens the door. The sheep recognize him, for he is their life.

Jesus the Good Shepherd

In every way, Jesus portrayed the characteristics of a good shepherd. He was willing to provide for His sheep, to protect them and even to die for them. He would expend no limit of time and energy to save even one lost sheep. To illustrate his care for the sheep, in Luke 15 Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep: Ninety-nine were safely in the fold, as each head was counted as it entered. But wait a minute! One was missing. So the shepherd went out in search of it until he found it, placed it on his shoulders and returned in triumph to the fold. A beautiful song about the “Ninety-and-Nine” tells how Jesus, the Good Shepherd, crossed deserts, deep canyons and dangerous streams in search of His lost sheep until He found it.

As our Good Shepherd, Jesus provides us with food and water (His Word), protection (His grace and continual care), guidance (His walking with us through this life and into eternity) and life itself (everything we need for our spiritual nourishment). He provides hope for the resurrection (through His resurrection), mediation before the Father (as our Advocate) and other aspects of His concern and care.

Jesus the Door of the sheepfold

Our Lord is not only our Good Shepherd, but also the Door of the sheepfold. He is the protector of the flock. He controls who enters and leaves the sheep pen. Not just any sheep or sub-shepherd can enter the sheepfold, but only those recognized by Him as being legitimate. As He declared, **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven”** (Matthew 7:21). Many, perhaps ignorantly, claim to be His sheep, but have never been spiritually born into His flock. Therefore, they are not His sheep and will be barred from His sheepfold.

Nor can anyone enter who claims to be another shepherd. The world is full of false shepherds who prey on Christ’s flock, who lead them astray to other pastures and sheepfolds, often for their own glory or financial gain. Some televangelists have become extremely powerful and wealthy from the gifts of their followers. Some claim to have received a “new” revelation and succeed in gaining millions of followers. There is only one Shepherd and one sheepfold. Unless we follow this Shepherd, we are lost both now and eternally.

Jesus the Shepherd of other sheep

Our Lord said in John 10:16 that He had other sheep that were not of the Jewish sheepfold. This began to be fulfilled in Acts 8 and 10, when the door of His sheepfold was opened first to Samaritans and then to Gentiles. There was then but one flock and one Shepherd. This sounds very exclusive, but it isn’t. Jesus and His fold are available to everyone of every race, tongue and nationality. We today, non-Jews, are recipients of that blessing (Acts 28:28). God shows no favoritism, but accepts people of every nation who fear Him and do what is right (Acts 10:35). ***Pure Christianity is the most inclusive religion in the world.*** However, it still has only one door of entrance — **through Christ, the door and way to the Father.**

So where is our shelter?

Jesus is the only supreme Shepherd offered by God to the world today. This Shepherd is ready to receive into His fold all who obey Him. Yet at the same time He is our Judge, excluding the robbers and self-serving shepherds, as well as all who refuse to enter His fold or who wander away from it and fail to return to Him.

Chapter 20

Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life

(John 11:1-44)

Introduction

A young man was passing a cemetery and saw a wealthy man being buried in his Cadillac. The youth whistled, “Man, that’s living!” Would you say he had a warped view of life and death?

One day every one of us will pass through the gates of death. Some try to avoid thinking about the end of their life by pretending it will never happen. Others arrange to have their bodies frozen, hoping for a time when their fatal malady might have a cure. Younger people, especially, believe that they are invincible, but they are not. Their at-times dangerous life style will only hasten their death.

Our only hope for life beyond our one short page of human history is in Christ, who offers us life eternal.

Lazarus is dead

Among Jesus’ closest friends were Lazarus, Martha and Mary, who lived in Bethany, a village over a ridge from Jerusalem, on the backside of the Mount of Olives. Word came to Jesus that His friend Lazarus was gravely ill, but instead of hurrying to Bethany to heal him, Jesus tarried where He was. Finally He journeyed there, arriving four days after Lazarus had died. Stopping outside of the village, He awaited the drama of what would happen next to unfold. He knew in advance what would occur, but intended to teach a vital lesson in the process.

The final resurrection

The situation appeared hopeless. Lazarus, probably a young unmarried man, was dead. If only Jesus had arrived sooner, He could have healed His friend. But He had not come in time. No one could picture the possibility of the Lord’s bringing him back to life, especially so long after his passing.

Upon rushing out to greet the Master, Martha's first words were, **"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but even so ... "**

Jesus' answer was, **"Your brother will rise again."**

Martha responded, **"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."**

The Old Testament says very little about the resurrection. Job had questioned the matter when he asked, **"If a man dies, will he live again?"** (Job 14:14). But then he became certain that he would rise again, affirming, **"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes ... How my heart yearns within me!"**

David said of his baby son who had just died, **"I will go to him, but he shall not return to me"** (2 Samuel 12:23).

The Lord told Daniel in Daniel 12:13, **"As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."**

Evidently, understanding of the resurrection developed more over a period of time, through inspired revelation. In Jesus' day, Martha believed in it, as did the Pharisees, but the Sadducees did not (Matthew 22:23-32). Jesus put them in their place, telling them, **"God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."**

So, many at that time apparently had some understanding about a general resurrection, although there were arguments against it. Jesus talked about the resurrection and judgment in Matthew 24-25. It was Paul, more than any other, who described the resurrection in detail in 1 Corinthians 15 and in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 2 Thessalonians 1. Revelation 20-22 also deals with the matter of the resurrection, judgment and eternal life.

Jesus raises Lazarus

What did Jesus say to Martha about resurrection? **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"**

"Yes, Lord," she answered, **"I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."**

What did this answer imply? That He had all power and authority? Surely, but could He raise Lazarus?

Then Martha went to call Mary. When she arrived, she had the same comment as that of Martha. When Jesus saw her and others weeping, He was so deeply moved that He, too, wept, not out of incompetence or frustration, but out of sheer empathy with those who were grieving.

Jews present noted how much he had loved Lazarus, but added, **“Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man from dying?”** They didn’t have nearly enough faith in Christ’s power.

At the tomb, Jesus ordered, **“Take away the stone.”** Burial places were often cut into rocky hillsides. Within them, rock shelves lined the walls. On these the dead were placed, after having been wrapped in strips of linen and with a separate head covering. Spices and aromatic herbs and oils were placed within the wrappings. The tomb entrance was sealed with a massive wheel-shaped stone, which was rolled down into a trough. The stone would be rolled aside with difficulty.

Martha objected to removing the stone. **“But, Lord,”** she said, **“by now there will be a bad odor, because he has been there for four days.”**

Jesus asked her, **“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”**

They then rolled away the stone. Jesus prayed, **“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for those standing here, that they may believe that you have sent me.”** Then He shouted, **“Lazarus, come out!”** Immediately he waddled out, wrapped like a mummy.

Reactions to this miracle

Many people then put their faith in Jesus. Some, however, hurried to the officials, telling them all. The officials then called a meeting of the Sanhedrin, manufacturing an excuse to execute this upstart. This has always been true. If you don’t like the message, kill the messenger. They even planned to kill Lazarus, to hide the evidence of this earthshaking miracle.

So where is our shelter?

Where would we be without Jesus? We would have no hope of salvation and, therefore, no hope of eternity. Our hope for the resurrection is based not only on the words of Jesus, but also on His resurrection. This, says Paul in Acts 17:31, is the proof of His divinity — His resurrection.

Jesus is not only the Life now, but the Life in the resurrection and on into eternity. He gives us reason for living now, reason for facing the end in confidence, and reason for believing in the eternal world to come.

If in this world we do not believe in God or Christ, we have no hope. If we believe in Christ, but not in the resurrection, Paul says that we are **“of all men the most miserable”** (1 Corinthians 15:19). Our faith and knowledge rest on the hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2). As the Master Card slogan says, “Priceless!” Eternal life in Christ is priceless, indeed.

Chapter 21

Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life

(John 14:1-13)

Introduction

Rabbi Denman wrote recently in his column in *The Daily Oklahoman*, “There are many ways that lead to God.” This is a popular notion in our day of pluralism and inclusiveness. These many ways or “truths” include the liberal way of Unitarian-Universalist theology that incorporates all religions and doctrines. It even celebrates Druid special days. These ways include the very exclusive Muslim faith, the flexible Buddhist faith and a host of other views on how to do religion.

Christianity is actually very inclusive, in that people of all races, nations, cultures, languages or prior beliefs may come to Jesus. However, it is exclusive in that Jesus proclaimed only **“one way, one truth and one life.”**

The setting behind this statement by Jesus

As Jesus approached His death on the cross, He prepared His disciples for this traumatic event by comforting them. He told them in John 14:1-4,

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

It is interesting that Jesus talked about preparing a place in Heaven for His disciples. Jesus is a divine architect. Judging by these words, Heaven wasn’t yet ready for His followers. He had to go finish building it.

It is also interesting that He had such concern for His followers. He gave them words of comfort that they would soon need. We don’t need to be troubled over the economy, wars or other matters that try our souls.

Concerned, yes, but troubled, no. If we believe in and follow Jesus, we need to fear nothing, because He is with us continually.

Jesus the way (John 14:6)

Solomon wrote long ago, **“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death”** (Proverbs 14:12). This passage indicates that our ideas may make sense to us but are not necessarily correct. Have you ever made a wrong turn while driving, believing you were right, but before long found out that you were wrong? Once while driving from Texas to California, I wanted us to take in some famous landmark. I turned off the Interstate on a narrow paved road. It took us to a dirt road and then a trail. Margie was upset because I hadn’t asked someone for directions. What man does? Galileo was in deep trouble with church leaders because he announced that the earth was round, rather than flat. His way turned out to be right, while that of officialdom turned out to be wrong. Yes, our ideas may make sense to us, but in the end they may lead us to death, not life.

When Jesus talked about His being **“the way,”** this was in the singular, meaning **“one way only.”** His is not just the *best* of many, but the *only* way. That limits our choices to one only, if we want to follow Jesus to Heaven. In Hebrews 10:19-22, the writer calls this the **“new and living way”** through Christ’s body, sacrificed for us. He paved the way to Heaven with His blood. He laid down His life to dedicate this way. If we are going to our home here, there are several streets that can lead us to it, but if we wish to go to our heavenly home, there is only one access street.

Jesus the Truth

A neighboring church recently conducted a series of lessons on “grey areas” — moral values that have been watered down. Our legislators and courts today are watering down moral and spiritual values. Now Connecticut joins Massachusetts in legitimizing gay unions, calling them marriage. Throughout most of history, marriage has been the legal union of one man with one woman. Now this true traditional definition of marriage has been perverted. The same thing is happening in other moral realms, as well.

“We must adapt to our times,” some argue. They add, “Our Constitution is a ‘living document,’ one which must be adjusted as we go along, to meet changing circumstances.” Others say that the Bible is adjustable. It must be adapted to our changing life styles. All of this is a flimsy argument, trampling on the faith and feelings of God-fearing individuals and turning our society more and more hedonistic.

Jesus still tells us that He is the Truth. He is the One Truth, just as He is the One Way. His truth vastly out-trumps all other “truths.” His is the truth by which we are measured today and by which we will be measured on the Last Day. It is not a case of what *we* think or how *we* feel about His Word, but what His Truth says.

Jesus the Life

The media tell us that the latest food, diet, medicine, TV show, movie, book or clothing style fad is what we really need right now. We can be glamorous, successful and even wealthy by calling that 800 number right now! But Jesus tells us not to worry about our life, our food, our body, our clothes ... Why not? If we are His children, He will clothe and feed us. If we seek Him, His Kingdom and His righteousness first, He will see to our care. In Him we have no reason to fear or worry.

Our life does not consist of the abundance of our possessions, our clothing, home, cars, popularity or prestige. It doesn't consist of athletic ability, talent in any of the arts or other gifts. Our physical life, says James, **“is a mist (or vapor) that appears for a little while and then vanishes”** (James 4:14).

True life is that which is eternal in its dimension and destiny. True life is found only in Jesus. He warns us, **“No one comes to the Father except through (or by) me”** (John 14:6).

So where is our shelter?

If we really want to have life — abundant life, life to the full (John 10:10) — we can find it only in Jesus. If we want to be on the right course for the only life we have now, it must be in following Jesus and His truth.

It's a sinking feeling to be lost. We had just moved into the house we have occupied for a record 19 years. Many of the streets in our area curve in every direction. I decided to try them out for my morning jog. Would you believe I ran several extra miles over the same course before I finally found my way out of the maze?

How prone we are to chart our own course, but it only leads to lostness. Jesus still tells us, **“I am the way, the truth and the life ... ”** His is the only way, truth and life that can lead us safely to eternity.

Chapter 22

Jesus, the True Vine

(John 15:1-17)

Introduction

We lived for several years in the Fresno, California, area, in the heart of Thompson Seedless grape country. I learned several lessons while there about viticulture. One was that I never want to pick grapes for a living — heat, dust, bees ... Another was that the vines had to be pruned severely during their dormant season, because grapes only grow on new branches or canes. As soon as the cuttings were severed from the vine, they began to die. Later they were gathered up and burned. The next season's vines had to be cultivated, fertilized and irrigated. Finally, the grapes had to be cut at the right time, when they were ready to let go of the vines.

Ancient Israel, along with other nations around the Mediterranean Sea and eastward, grew grapes. They were valuable to eat raw, to eat as dried fruit or to use in making wine. As He generally did, Jesus used a process known by all — that of viticulture — to teach important truths. What were some lessons He taught?

The Passover scene

Jesus was with His disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem, keeping the Passover. He knew that this would be His last feast with them, so He was preparing them for His crucifixion. He washed their feet, the task of a slave. While partaking of the feast of the Passover Lamb, eating the bitter herbs and unleavened bread, and drinking the Passover fruit of the vine, He introduced to them His new Passover Celebration, the Lord's Supper.

Then He taught them various important lessons about how He was the true vine of God, rather than Israel. That nation had been the Lord's special vine or vineyard (Psalm 80:8-18; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 15:1-8, 19:10; Hosea 10:1). He had planted it and lovingly cared for it, so that His Son could be born as a descendant of Abraham and David.

Now, in fulfillment of God's plan, and Jesus had become the vine through which spiritual fruit would be produced and His faithful followers would

be the branches, made up of people of all nations. He warned the disciples in advance that the world would hate them, just as it hated Him; that their grief over His death would turn to joy upon His resurrection; and that the Holy Spirit would come to comfort, strengthen and guide them. He closed the session with a lengthy prayer for Himself, His disciples and all believers (John 17). Then He and His band of disciples left for the Garden of Gethsemane.

The nature of vines and branches

What is the function of the trunk of a grapevine?

- It reaches down deeply for nourishment and moisture.
- It supports the branches.
- It takes nourishment to the branches.
- They, in turn, are expected to produce fruit.

A vine is useless without productive soil and a gardener giving it the proper attention. It is useless without branches. Likewise, the branches are dead without the vine. Both are essential to the process of bearing fruit. However, there must be a spark of life there and a vine free of disease or parasite, if it is to produce. We had a great producing apricot tree that suddenly was stricken with some disease and died, so we supposed, and was cut down. But, surprisingly, the next spring from that “dead” trunk came new life — several small branches. Someday it may again bear fruit.

Jesus the True Vine

Twice Jesus said in John 15 that He is the “**true vine**,” the vine that is real or genuine. What does He mean by this? He may have had in mind the Lord’s Supper, which He had just instituted, or the vines carved on the temple gates, symbolizing Israel. But now He was talking about Himself, contrasting Himself with false vines. It is possible for false vines to grow and appear to flourish. We have one in our side yard. It is a grapevine, but produces no grapes — only sour little balls. There are many people on the world scene who present themselves as God’s true vine, but their fruit eventually shows them up as false.

Jesus is the true vine of God. He is the only one who transfers spiritual nourishment from God’s soil and hand to His followers. God, He said, is the gardener or vinedresser. He prepares the soil, furnishes its nutrients, cultivates and irrigates, so that the vine can be prolific in its fruitfulness.

A well-tended vine produces an amazing amount of fruit. So God's well-tended spiritual vine produces much fruit, if the branches are doing their part.

Jesus is the only vine planted today by God. To emphasize this fact, He repeated it (verses 1 and 5). There is no source of spiritual nourishment other than Jesus. I heard this week on the car radio about a woman who had disgustingly left all faith in God, due in part to the untimely death of her brother and in part to her revulsion over God's ordering Abraham to sacrifice his son. She went to a priest for help, but didn't receive much help. He told her that she must have faith first and then read the Bible through eyes of faith. He had it backwards. Paul says that faith comes, not independently, but by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Now she looks on the Bible as false, on faith as false, and on God as non-existent. I became sad when I heard her story, knowing that, unless she makes a radical change in her attitude, she is utterly condemned by the very God she denies. She can produce absolutely no fruit, because she has cut herself off from the Vine.

We are the branches

Jesus devoted much of this teaching about God's vineyard to the branches — we, His followers. He said, **“If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing”** (John 15:5). The Christian can do nothing without Christ, but can do all things through Him (Philippians 4:13). The responsibility of the branch is to abide in the vine. **“Abide”** signifies remaining loyal to Christ and His purpose for our lives. If anyone does not remain in Him, that person is cut off, withers away, is gathered up and burned. This is a logical sequence. Once we are cut off from the Lord, we lose all of our spiritual guidance and nourishment. We are then worth nothing spiritually and are therefore collected by the Lord and punished.

Then Jesus said something very encouraging. If we truly abide in Him, grow in His faith, pray through Him and believe that He hears us, we can ask of Him and our requests will be heeded. I have a problem with this, because many times I have prayed sincerely and even in tears for the Lord to spare the life of a fellow Christian, only to watch that person die. Once in Brazil, a 25-year-old intern from Abilene Christian University saved two girls from drowning in a rip tide at Recife, Brazil. They were saved, but he died. I prayed for an hour, as we tried to revive him. I prayed in the ambulance all the way to the hospital. He never came back to us, even

though I prayed fervently, never doubting that the Lord could revive him, if He so desired. I don't know why it turned out in this way, but obviously, the Lord willed it to be so. His passing did cause some others to look at their lives and turn to the Lord.

God is glorified in the Son (John 13:31-32) and is glorified in our fruit-bearing in Christ's cause. God's work is only complete when we continue to bear much fruit. If Christ dwells in us, it is only natural that we bear much fruit.

So where is our shelter?

Jesus is our only connection to the Father. He is the only channel of spiritual nourishment that we have. If we are to be fruitful at all in this life, it is through our connection with Him. He expects us to bear much fruit. How do we go about doing this?

Chapter 23

Jesus, Our Intercessor

(John 17)

Introduction

There are times when we desperately need an intercessor. Although he didn't yet know it, Lot needed someone to intercede for him, his family and city (Genesis 18:16-33). Abraham became that intercessor. Moses interceded for Israel when God was ready to destroy the people for their rebellion (Numbers 14:10-25).

Boaz interceded for Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 4:1-12). Samuel interceded for Israel (1 Samuel 12:16-25).

In our own history, the story of John Smith and Priscilla Mullins shows intercession at work. John Alden became an intercessor for Smith, who wanted to marry Priscilla. In that case Smith's plan backfired, because she responded to the intercessor: "Speak for yourself, John Alden."

Those being tried for some crime or lawsuit have the right to an intercessor — a defense attorney. TV is filled with law firms offering their services to victims of suits, accidents, injuries and other difficulties. Even the best defense attorneys do not always win their client's case, however.

With Jesus as our Great Intercessor, there is never any losing the case. That places Him far above all of the defense attorneys in the world put together.

The first Lord's Supper

Jesus had completed celebrating the Passover and had used elements from it to establish His new covenant with humanity — His sacrificed body as the final Passover Lamb, to protect us from eternal death, the bread of the Passover to symbolize His body hung on the cross for us, and the wine of the Passover to symbolize His blood shed on our behalf.

Then, before His little band's departure for the Garden of Gethsemane, He entered into a long intercessory prayer. Let's analyze it.

Jesus prays for Himself (John 17:1-5)

The first thing He did was look Heavenward. Oh, my! He didn't bow His head! He submitted totally to His Father. In a country in which everyone is (supposedly) equal, we find it difficult to be submissive to any authority. Far above us in glory, the Son still submitted to His Father's will. He realized that the time for which He had prepared, not only in this life but also down through the eons of time, had finally come.

Jesus had been given all authority by God. For what purpose? That He might give eternal life to all those whom the Father had given Him. He even explained what eternal life is, for the benefit of the disciples and not for his own benefit. Eternal life begins with knowing the One True God and Jesus, whom He had sent to the world.

He asked God to glorify Him, so that He might glorify His Father. Whatever He did was for God's glory, just as whatever we do is for God's glory and not our own. He had brought glory to God by completing the work He had been sent to earth to do. What a wonderful eulogy that, hopefully, can be said of us at our funeral. Paul said it in these words: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith . . ." (2 Timothy 4:7). Jesus then finished the portion of the prayer for Himself by asking God to glorify Him in the ordeal He was soon to face, with the glory He had had with the Father from before the creation of the world.

Jesus prays for His disciples

Our Lord knew that His coming ordeal would be a time of great stress and temptation for the disciples, so He prayed specifically for them. He knew they would be desolate and would hide from the authorities. For their sakes:

- He had revealed the Father to them. In John 14:8 Philip had asked Jesus to show the Father to them. For that Jesus scolded him: "He who has seen me has seen the Father."
- They had accepted and obeyed His word.
- They finally realized that Jesus had come from God, although later they still had doubts about Him.
- He prayed for them because they were God's property.
- He was returning to the Father, but leaving them behind to fulfill His work.

- He asked the Father to protect them by the power of God’s name, so that they might be one, just as the Father and Son are one.
- Jesus had protected them and none was lost, except for Judas Iscariot, who was doomed to destruction because he had allowed Satan to lead him to betray Jesus..
- Jesus prayed that they might have the full measure of His joy. Joy is an attitude of the heart, surpassing the trials of this life.
- The world already hated the disciples because they belonged to Christ and were no longer of the world. A true follower of Jesus is first and foremost a citizen of another world, that of Jesus (John 18:36). We are different and this difference should show. A comment by Roman officials attempting to destroy Christianity was, “Look how they love each other.” Love outside of family and eros (erotic love) was unknown in the world of Jesus’ day. Yet, here were people not related and not addicted to sex who loved each other, even to the point of giving their lives to save the life of another Christian.
- Jesus prayed that the disciples not be taken from the world, but rather, that they be protected from Satan.
- He prayed that they would be sanctified (set apart) by God’s truth — His word. He was sending them into the world, but before that, He would sanctify Himself in what was to follow, so that they might be sanctified.

Jesus prays for all believers

He asked God to care for those who would come to believe through the message of the apostles. He prayed that all might be one, just as He and the Father are one. Through their loving unity, the world might come to believe that the Father had sent His Son to the earth. One of the principle proofs of the authenticity of our faith and of the church is our total unity with Christ and with each other. One of the worst travesties of our age is the terrible division that exists in Christendom — far more than with any other religious system. And often in individual congregations there is division, something which should never occur.

He prayed that the disciples might eventually be with Jesus and to see His glory, which God had given Him out of love, even before the world was created. I try to write hymns about Heaven, but words are inadequate to

describe a place that is spiritual and not material, and Beings that are far above anything we can imagine here. A song I have on tape has a majestic voice shouting out in Heaven to the assembled saints: “All Rise!” We do that here on earth at weddings and funerals. We do it to show honor to celebrities or authorities, even judges. How much more will we rise up in Heaven before the throne of God!

Finally, Jesus would continue to make His will known to His followers. How? Through the guidance of the Spirit and His inspired word. He wanted to be in them in a personal way, even after He was gone. We are never alone, for Jesus is with us and in us, if we remain in Him.

So where is our shelter?

What a marvelous and moving prayer this was! And it was primarily for the benefit and strengthening of His followers, who would suffer in extreme for their faith in Him.

Jesus is our great High Priest, not according to the Mosaic Covenant, nor the order of Aaron, Moses’ brother, but according to a higher priesthood, that of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:1-10, 7, 8). Aaron offered sacrifices for himself and then for the people. Jesus offered Himself, to be our sacrifice, atonement and eternal High Priest. He thus is our only and final Intercessor and High Priest.

Chapter 24

Jesus, Our Sacrifice

(John 18-19, Hebrews 10:1-18)

Introduction

Sacrifice to God (or gods) dates back to the dawn of human life. Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to the Lord (Genesis 4:1-5). Abel's was accepted by God; Cain's was not. Why? It may have been a matter of attitude or faith, or even ignoring divine instructions not recorded for us.

Noah offered a sacrifice upon leaving the ark (Genesis 8:20). Abraham's, Isaac's and Jacob's journeys were punctuated by burnt offerings. Under the Law of Moses the Israelites were required to bring to God regular offerings of animals, grains and other blessings of their harvest. They were also required to sacrifice animals as sin offerings.

This practice was not limited to God's people, however. All ancient peoples offered up sacrifice to their gods. Archeologists have found numerous signs of worship and altars among all people groups. Some contemporary groups still offer animal sacrifice. On the steps of a cathedral in Guatemala is a stone altar on which Indians arriving at the cathedral offer a rooster to their indigenous god before entering the cathedral. The purpose of sacrifice in many cases of pagan worship was and is to placate the gods or to obtain favors from them.

No animal sacrifice has ever been sufficient to remove sin from our lives. In reality, one final and spotless sacrifice was made for humanity — that of Jesus, the perfect Passover Lamb, offered to the Father on our behalf (Hebrews 10:1-18). No other blood sacrifice is valid or necessary today. The only sacrifice expected of us is that of our own lives in His service (Romans 12:1).

In the darkness of Gethsemane

Jesus and His chosen disciples had participated in the annual Passover, in celebration of Israel's deliverance from death. God's people were to keep this feast in perpetuity, sacrificing and eating an unblemished lamb,

eating bitter herbs, to represent their arduous slavery in Egypt, unleavened bread, to represent purity, and wine (Exodus 11:1-10, 12:1-30). Jesus took the bread, giving it a new meaning as symbolizing His body, soon to be sacrificed for our sins as protection against spiritual and eternal death, and the wine, symbolizing His blood soon to be shed to cleanse us from sin, giving them new life as His Holy Supper.

Jesus then led His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He prayed agonizingly to be delivered from the terrible agony of the cross if this were the Father's will. However, He added that God's will be done. The disciples, however, were overcome by sleep as He poured out His heart to God.

Then all of the hush of the night scene in the Garden was shattered by the arrival of a mob to arrest Him for His supposed blasphemy, claiming to be the Son of God.

Jesus' sacrificial act

It was on the night before the preparation for the Passover Sabbath, an especially holy moment for the Jews, when Jesus was imprisoned. He was first taken to the house of Annas, the legitimate descendant of Aaron and the rightful high priest who had been deposed by the Romans. He was replaced by Caiaphas, his son-in-law and not a legal priest at all. Annas was still considered by the Jews their real high priest, so Jesus stood before him first and was then taken to Caiaphas, who would lead the group of Jewish officials in their official complaints against Jesus before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

Pilate was an unpredictable sort who despised the Jews but still tried to curry their favor as a means of staying in office. Why did they feel compelled to take Jesus to Pilate, whom they hated? Because the Romans had prohibited them from enacting the death sentence. In order to have Jesus executed officially, they had to convince Pilate to issue the death sentence. When he found that Jesus was a Galilean, he sent Him to Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee. Herod was pleased to finally meet this miracle-working upstart, but found no adequate reason to hold Him and possibly didn't want to take any action, so sent Him back to Pilate.

Pilate was not in a good mood. It was early morning when he was called out of the Tower of Antonia, his Jerusalem fortress headquarters. The Jewish leaders did not want to ritually pollute themselves by entering a Roman facility. What hypocrisy! They didn't mind convicting an innocent

man, but were scrupulous about avoiding becoming ceremonially unclean. Pilate didn't wish to hear this case and had even been warned by his wife to have nothing to do with Jesus. He tried diligently to release this prisoner, but to no avail. The Jewish leaders threatened to blackmail him if he didn't cooperate. So finally, he gave in and sent Jesus to His death, but first washed his hands, literally, of the whole matter.

Roman soldiers, sadistic sorts, abused Jesus in every way, even scourging Him almost to death. They then forced Him to carry His own cross, or perhaps only the crossbeam, down into a valley and up a hill to Golgotha, "The Place of the Skull," where they crucified Him between two thieves. They probably stripped him naked and pounded rough iron nails (like railroad spikes) into His wrists and ankles, where they would hold securely. In fact, a skeleton has been found with a spike still through the ankle.

The condemned were then left to the elements, pain and thirst, as well as the taunts of the ever-curious crowd of onlookers. The strong could survive up to a week of intense pain, hunger, thirst, ridicule ...

The Jewish leaders wanted the legs of the three broken, to hurry up their death, since it was against their law to leave a hung person over the Sabbath.

Again, hypocrisy. They were so concerned about the details of the Law, yet never hesitated to condemn an innocent man. The reason for breaking their legs was to make it impossible for the sagging condemned to continue lifting themselves up on their feet in order to breathe.

But Jesus was already dead, carrying as He did the weight of the world's sins on His shoulders. He died of a broken and abandoned heart just six hours after being nailed to the cross.

Jesus our Passover Lamb

In dying on the cross, Jesus became our permanent and eternal Passover Lamb, offered up to God to protect us from spiritual death (1 Corinthians 5:7-8; 1 Peter 1:18-21).

Revelation has much to say about Jesus as our sacrificed Passover Lamb. In fact, 29 times He is given this title, beginning in Revelation 5:6 and ending in Revelation 22:3. In Revelation 5:6-13 John saw a Lamb standing in the center of God's throne. The living creatures and elders fell down to worship Him, singing a new song, "You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased

men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation ... ”
In Revelation 7:14 it was said that the robes of the saints had been made white by the Lamb’s blood. Finally in chapters 19-22, the great marriage supper of the Lamb and His bride, the church, takes place. According to Revelation 21:27, only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life will be admitted to this feast.

So where is our shelter?

Why did Jesus die? He could have saved Himself by calling up 12 legions of (12,000) angels to protect Him, if He so desired (Matthew 26:53-54), yet He did not do so. He gave Himself up voluntarily to death. He died as our blood sacrifice — as our Passover Lamb — perfect, pure and holy. We deserved to be on that cross, because of our sins; but He took our place, to cleanse us from our sins. We owe Him everything. He bought us at an enormous price. Therefore, we are to glorify and serve Him, because we are His (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Chapter 25

Jesus, Our Risen Savior

(John 20-21)

Introduction

Many people have dreamed of an afterlife. In fact, this dream seems to be built into the psyche of almost everyone. Job asked, for example, “If a man die, will he live again?” (Job 14:14). The ancient Egyptians embalmed their rulers and nobility, with the belief that they would cross the Nile into another world. Their remains were placed in a series of coffins, the innermost gold-covered, surrounded by riches of all kinds and elaborate wall paintings, but to no avail. Almost all of the tombs were robbed. Mummies that have been discovered made no such journey to another place, traveling only to some museum.

Qin (Chin) Shi Huang, founder of China’s first dynasty in 221 B.C., ordered that his army be depicted in 8,000 full-size terracotta warriors, 130 chariots and some 670 horses, along with an as-yet-unopened mausoleum. He did this to guarantee himself an imperial guard and palace in his resurrected life.

The Druids and others from northern Europe had elaborate rituals to help their dead return to life. The Greeks laughed at the idea of a resurrection from the dead (Acts 17:16-34). African tribes and their descendants in the New World, as did the Hindus, developed an intricate system of supposed reincarnations.

Interestingly, the Jews were divided on this subject. Actually, very little is said in the Old Testament about the resurrection. The Pharisees believed in it, while the Sadducees did not (Acts 23:8-9). Long before, Daniel had been given the promise of his resurrection at the end of time by God’s angel (Daniel 12:13). Earlier yet, Job, not even an Israelite, affirmed a resurrection (Job 19:25) and David seemed to understand this concept (2 Samuel 12:22-23).

Jesus’ statements about the resurrection

Our Lord had said various times that He would suffer much and be killed,

but that He would also be raised from the dead (for instance, Matthew 27:63). He had clearly prophesied that He would die, be buried and then be raised, using the sign of Jonah as proof: As Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man would be three days and nights in the heart of the earth, before being raised again (Matthew 12:38-40). There is considerable speculation over how long Jesus was in the tomb. If He died on Friday and was raised on Sunday, that is not a period of three full days. No problem! The Jews and others of ancient times calculated partial days as full days, so Friday, Saturday and Sunday were involved, thus totaling three days.

We still do that. For example, “See you in three days,” does not necessarily mean 72 full hours. It means some time during the third day. We know Jesus was in the sepulcher over the Sabbath, symbolizing the death of the Sabbath. Then He was raised early on the First Day, symbolizing a new day of celebration, rather than the Sabbath, for His followers.

Also, Jesus reminded the Jews that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — a living God for ancestors still alive in the Beyond (Matthew 22:32). Jesus’ transfiguration proved life beyond this one, as He conversed with Moses and Elijah in their eternal dimension (Matthew 17:1-8).

With this many proofs of His upcoming death and resurrection, why did the disciples still doubt? Jesus had raised the dead. Surely by God’s power He could be raised. Yet, they were uncertain and fearful. Thomas refused to believe that their Lord had been raised until he actually saw and touched the wounds from His crucifixion (John 20:24-25). And even after the resurrected Jesus appeared to them, some still doubted (Matthew 28:17). Incredible! Yet, don’t people still doubt, and even deny that Jesus was raised and has returned to Heaven?

Events surrounding the resurrection

Their Messiah-King was dead. All of the hopes of the disciples were shattered. What should they do now? They huddled together, well hidden, perhaps for mutual support and protection.

Yet, very early on the First Day (Sunday), some were busy. While men were fearful, women were boldly going to the tomb to further embalm the body of their beloved Lord. This had already been done by Joseph and Nicodemus, but who could trust a man to be thorough enough? Or perhaps, the men’s haste in burying Jesus before sunset on the Sixth Day, the beginning of the Sabbath, had prevented thorough embalming.

A major question the women had was, “Who will roll away the stone?” It would have been so large and heavy that only several male hands could move and secure it. However, when they arrived there, they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. This must have been a real shock for them. And there were angels present, who announced to them that Jesus had risen, just as He had said He would.

The women then rushed back into town to share this astounding announcement with the eleven. Peter and John ran to the tomb to check this out. But Peter entered first and found the grave clothing laid to one side. Evidently prior to their visit to the tomb Mary Magdalene had remained there, when Jesus appeared to her, making her the first disciple to see the risen Lord.

Jesus shortly appeared to all of the Eleven except Thomas. A week later He appeared to all of them, including Thomas. Then He met them in Galilee, where they were fishing. He told them that from that time onward they would fish for men (John 21:1-14).

Other witnesses to the resurrected Lord

Besides the Eleven and Mary Magdalene, Jesus appeared to Cleopas and another disciple on the way to the village of Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to Peter, apparently alone, to His half-brother James, to more than 500 disciples at once and finally, to Paul himself (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). I have often wondered why He didn't appear to Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas, the Roman officers, the Sanhedrin ... That would really have been a traumatic shock for them. Jewish officials did their best to deny His resurrection, bribing the guards at the tomb to spread the rumor that the disciples had stolen away Jesus' body (Matthew 28:11-15). His resurrection meant His divinity and this they refused to accept.

The Bible clearly teaches that cases must be verified by the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6). Did Jesus have two or three witnesses to His resurrection? I count from Scripture at least 516 eyewitnesses (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). That should have sufficed for all time that He really was raised from the dead, but many still deny the fact.

Our hope in the resurrection

Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we have the glorious hope of our own resurrection. Paul said, in fact, that the resurrection is pivotal to our faith:

“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ was raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God that he raised Christ from the dead ... If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men” (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

It was hope in the resurrection that enabled Christian martyrs to face the lions, crucifixion or being burnt alive. It is still that hope that causes us today to face calmly our own death or that of a loved one.

So where is our shelter?

Our belief system includes three essential elements: Jesus’ death, His burial and His resurrection. If He had not offered His life as a sacrifice for our sins, we would have no hope beyond this moment of our lives. But praise God, He is risen and ever intercedes for us.

Chapter 26

*The Absolute
Preeminence of Christ*

(Colossians 1)

Introduction

The hymn, “Words Are Not Enough,” expresses well the feeling of its creator. Words are truly not enough to describe the majesty, power, words, works and example of Christ. Yet, Paul does an admirable job of it, despite the fact that the holy and spiritual nature of his Lord is above all human comprehension.

Having completed his salutation and prayer for the Colossians, Paul now shares a hymn exalting Christ. In fact, this may indeed be an early Christian hymn, perhaps even written by Paul:

He is the image of the invisible God,
The firstborn over all creation.
For by him all things were created,
Things in heaven and on earth,
Visible and invisible,
Whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;
All things were created by him and for him.
He is before all things,
And in him all things hold together.
And he is the head of the body, the church;
He is the beginning of the firstborn from among the dead,
So that in everything he might have the supremacy.
For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,
And through him to reconcile to himself all things,
Whether things on earth or things in heaven,
By making peace through his blood,
Shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

Christ above and over all of creation.

- He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Here we see that when we look at Jesus, we are looking at the invisible God, as John 14:6-11 tells us. We see in Jesus the attributes of God Himself. He is the firstborn of the Father. “Firstborn” in this context does not mean a literal birth, but rather, His position as the legitimate and authoritative heir of His Father.

- In Him all things were created, even the invisible things the Gnostics love to think about. Christ is pre-existent, being in the beginning with God (John 1:1). He is eternal, and therefore, He is before all things. His creation includes the universe, which is so vast that it takes our breath away. Every year astronomers expand by light years their understanding of the universe, but still have only begun their quest. Now they have built the largest telescope ever designed. It is called Magellan and is 10 times more powerful than the Hubble Space Telescope. It will open up to view galaxies, suns and planets never before seen, as well as to clarify all of the galaxies already identified.

- In Him all things hold together. In the analogy of a fine Rolex watch, He is the mainspring by which all things in the universe function. Ponder the timing of the universe. To reach any of the other planets, plotters of a space vehicle’s trajectory must know precisely where that celestial body will be at a given moment, even though the ship may not reach there for years. They can determine this because the movement of the planets is precise, just as is that of the Earth. Astronomers know centuries into the future when a comet will reappear. Meteorologists know precisely how many minutes of daylight are gained or lost each day. The daily tides are known to the minute well in advance, as are the phases of the moon. Since Jesus holds all things together, this is one reason why we can call Him the mainspring of the universe. His mathematics are impeccable.

- Not only is He the timer of all that exists in the universe, He also controls nature. Each species produces precisely according to its kind, unless its cells have been tampered with by human genetic engineers. The normal gestation period of each species is well established. Every spring, “dead” plants and trees come back to life, go through their summer cycle and then prepare again for winter. Except for occasional temporary aberrations in this schedule, we can know approximately each year when the seasons will occur, whether they be four in temperate zones or two in the tropics.

To illustrate the balance of nature, which cannot be accidental, we’re having a plague of moles this year, destroying our yard. I understand

that they are after grubs, but how did they know that there would be an abundance of June bugs this summer in our yard, bugs which produce the grubs on which moles dine?

The incarnate Word, whom we know as Jesus Christ, co-created and maintains the universe in order. He knows the stars by name. He knows all living creatures. He knows the rocks and rills, the templed hills, the seas and the firmament above the earth.

Head over all things redemptive

- Not only is Jesus the head over all of creation, but also the One through whom God’s redemptive plan came. He is the first-born from the dead — the first to be raised in the new Christian age. This was done so that He might be authenticated as God’s Son and have the pre-eminence in the Christian age. He says in Matthew 28:18 that all authority had been given to Him in Heaven and on earth. His authority had been granted by God Himself.
- In Him the fullness of God dwells. There is no need for other christs, other redeemers, other prophets. Jehovah God is complete in Him.
- Through Him God reconciles all things to Himself. All we like sheep have gone astray, says Isaiah 53:6, but Jesus became our Great Shepherd, leading us back to the Father. We follow a trail of blood — the shed blood of our Savior — back home, our sins having been washed away in His blood. This is not only true at our baptism, but daily thereafter:

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Parallelism in this hymn of praise

Jewish poetry and hymnody were built around parallelisms. Parallelisms were of different types, but served the purpose of providing reinforcing or contrasting statements. Let us imagine that there are two sets of parallel ideas in the song, Part A and Part B. The song would therefore be a set of parallels in this manner:

A1 — Who is the image of the
invisible God, first-born
of all creation.

B1 — Who is the beginning,
the first-born from the dead.

A2 — For in Him all things
were created,
in heaven and on earth.

B2 — For in Him all the
fullness of God
was pleased to dwell.

A3 — All things were created
through Him and for Him.

B3 — And through Him
to reconcile all things to Him.

This entire argument refutes the doctrines of the Gnostics. Secret wisdom was not created by God to be known by only a few select people, nor was it the purpose for all that exists. God's purpose is found only in Christ, because in Him alone the world is reconciled to God. This purpose can be seen by all and is for all.

Christ and the Church

Paul has shown that Christ is head over all of creation. It is He who gives it order, who causes it to be cosmos, not chaos (Hebrews 1:3). Remember that, according to the Gnostics, Sophia's son was a child of chaos. Paul is presenting just the opposite: Christ is Lord of order, not chaos.

- Just as Christ is head over all things in the universe, even so He is head over all things that pertain to the Church, His new creation. In so doing, he declares the church to be vitally important, a fact which the heretics are undermining in Colossae and which many today are undermining. To insist, "Jesus yes, the church no" is to undermine the Head who presented to Himself a body, the church. It is to undermine the Bridegroom who prepared for Himself a Bride, the church. In both Colossians and Ephesians he relates Christ to the Christian as Head to body, an essential relationship. Jesus is first and foremost. In the Hebrew this is "rosh", translated into the Greek as "chief". It is by His power that the body is incorporated, strengthened and perfected. The source, then, of life for both the universe and the church is Christ.

- As a body, just as Christ is one, so the church is one. Individual Christians are members of that body and therefore members of each other. Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 12. The church, being a body, is not an organization nor a hierarchy. It is not a world episcopate or a regional presbytery. It is a living organism. We, as Christians, are not isolated bits of atoms, only accidentally connected to each other. We are bound to each other by our nucleus, our powerful Lord and Savior.

The authority of Christ

Christ has all authority, given to Him by the Father (Matthew 28:18). It cannot be shared. To honor any other being spiritually, equal to, or even below Christ, is to dishonor our Head. And to cut ourselves off from the Head or His body is to die spiritually. Jesus says, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4).

The authority of Christ is demonstrated by His resurrection. This is the most crucial point of all history. His death and resurrection make redemption possible and create the church as a body of the redeemed from the entire earth. This is the major point at which Christianity and Islam can never be reconciled, because Islam denies both the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. This is Paul's message to Colossae and to us — Jesus died for all of humanity. He was raised from the dead to give all humanity hope of a resurrection and life eternal.

The purpose of God is to make Christ preeminent in all things. There is no room for competing doctrines and mediators. Everything that God is dwells in His Son.

Paul now says that through Christ God reconciles all things in Heaven and on earth through Christ's blood. To the Jews His death is a scandal and to the Gentiles it is a laughing stock (1 Corinthians 1:23). After all, gods don't behave in such a weak, shameful manner. Yet, it did happen. It is a historical fact, attested by disinterested Roman officials. It was a divinely planned sublime act, not a philosophical principle.

Everything is out of tune with God — in a state of confusion. Christ brings it back into harmony. The world is inhabited by many evil powers. It is fractured into constantly warring groups and individuals. Christ brings the world back to peace, if we but give Him the chance to do so.

So where is our shelter?

The Colossians had been estranged or alienated from God, hostile, warring, doing evil, just as people today who do not follow Christ. We all know of shocking cases of humans turned into animals by their lust, hate and revenge. It is our fault that we got into such a mess (Isaiah 59:1-2). Our sins have separated us from God's light and salvation.

But now the Colossian Christians have been reconciled in Christ's body of flesh by His death. False teachers are saying that since the flesh is evil, Christ could not have come in the flesh. He only appeared to be a human. Paul says just the opposite.

Now the Colossians are presented to God holy, blameless and irreproachable. They are without blemish or defect. This, however, is conditional. They only have these blessings if they continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not drifting here and there from the anchor of their hope.

Chapter 27

The Eternal Priesthood of Christ

(Hebrews 7)

Introduction

Jewish people, both in ancient times and now, have loved plays on words. These subtle meanings are lost in translation into other languages, simply because there is no way in which to adequately convey in another tongue the interplay of words in the original. Try out puns or other plays on words on someone who speaks another language. Even if you explain their meaning, the translation loses its original impact.

The same is true for acrostics, the first letter of each line forming part of a word vertically. Once a well-known guest missionary to Europe was to preach for us in Brazil and I was to translate for him. The first thing he said about his sermon was that it would be acrostic. I said, “I can’t translate that.” He asked, “Didn’t you say you could translate for me?” “Yes, but I can’t translate an acrostic.” Well, he went right ahead with his sermon, but the letters I put on the board behind him spelled out nothing in Portuguese.

Melchizedek, a play on words (Hebrews 7:1-3)

A good example of a play on words is the case of Melchizedek, a type of Christ and His priestly forebearer. In Genesis 14:17-20 the text mentions this mysterious man, who was king of Salem. His name is fascinating, because the Hebrew word *melek* means king and the expression *tsede* means justice. Together, these words form the expression, king of justice. He was also king of Salem (later Jerusalem) which is in the Hebrew *shalom*, or peace. Thus, Melchizedek was a king of justice and peace, prefiguring the nature of Christ.

Not only was he a king; he was also a priest. This is the only case prior to Jesus where the Bible mentions both roles combined. Melchizedek not only ruled, but also interceded with God. Later, King Saul was condemned by Samuel for attempting to combine the two roles (1 Samuel 13).

The third important factor about Melchizedek, says Hebrews 7, is that he was without beginning or end. That is, his genealogy and death are not mentioned (not necessarily that he was never born nor died). Both of these aspects of a person's life were vitally important to Jews, for they established the individual's legitimacy, especially in the case of priests (Nehemiah 7:61-65). Here was a great priest of God who had no recorded genealogy. Yet he is claimed in Hebrews to have been made like the Son of God, in order to serve as a figure of the eternal priesthood of Christ, who was also without beginning or end. According to Psalm 110:4, the priesthood of Melchizedek would continue forever in the person of Christ.

The superiority of Christ's priesthood (Hebrews 7:4-10)

Melchizedek was a formidable being, because even Abraham paid him homage, giving him a tenth of the spoils of war. What does this say about the relative importance of the two men? The Mosaic priests had the right to receive a tithe from their Israelite brothers. But Melchizedek, who was not under the Mosaic system, received a tithe from the father of the Jews, Abraham. Not only this, Melchizedek blessed Abraham. It is obvious that only the superior could bless the inferior. Thus, by Jewish reasoning, the priest Melchizedek was superior to Moses. By extension, then, Jesus, the priestly heir of Melchizedek, is superior to the priests of the Mosaic system, who were heirs of Abraham. If mortal humans received a tithe from other mortals, much more does Christ have a right to receive our offerings and lives, as our eternal High Priest.

Two priesthoods, one temporary, the other eternal (Hebrews 7:11-19)

The Levitical priesthood was temporary. If it had been perfect, there would not have been any necessity for another priesthood. But it wasn't perfect. It was composed of men subject to weakness, sin and death. Verse 18 says, clearly, that the Mosaic system was weak and temporary. Laws, in themselves, perfect no one. Where there is law, there is always transgression of it. Human beings will always find a way, through ignorance, indifference, stubbornness or weakness, to break law. We all do. Have we ever knowingly exceeded the speed limit while driving? Have we ever stretched the truth? Have we ever spoken evil of others? As a comedian said recently about our secret sins, "You know who you are!"

The priesthood of Christ is eternal. Our Lord was not qualified to be a priest after the Levitical order, for physically He was of the tribe of Judah, not Levi, and Judah could not produce Levitical priests. Thus, the priesthood

of Christ did not proceed from the law of carnal commandments, but from the hand of God. The priesthood of Christ is eternal, not carnal, because he is a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

Christ our perfect and only priest (Hebrews 7:20-28)

God vowed that His Son would be a priest forever. Popes, the high priests of the Catholic system, die and their position is transmitted to others. The high priests of Mormonism, of Buddhism or any other religion, die; but Christ is able to save whoever approaches Him in faith and obedience, because He lives forever to intercede for faithful Christians, wherever or whenever this Christian may be. Being perfect and eternal, He is the testator or guarantor of a superior covenant. He is able to save whoever approaches Him in faith and obedience, because He lives forever to intercede for us.

Our high priest is holy, without blame or blemish, separated from humans and higher than the Heavens. He does not need to offer His life each day as a sacrifice for sin, as the Catholic church teaches in its masses. He did this once for all time (Hebrews 9:28). In the Christian system, when He died on the cross, this once-for-all sacrifice is able to cleanse us daily from our sins (1 John 1:7).

So where is our shelter?

How great is our high priest, Jesus, who passed through the veil that separated us from the eternal presence of God! He is in Heaven, interceding continuously for us, His weak followers. And it is a good thing that he does this, for where would we be without this daily intercession on our behalf?

Chapter 28

*King of Kings,
Lord of Lords*

(Revelation 19)

Introduction

The key question in all of history may be, “Is Jesus Lord or not?” Almost all Jews in the world say He is not. Muslims say He is not. Spiritists say He is an evolved spirit. Hindus and Buddhists include Him as one of many gods, but not the Lord of lords. A large majority of the people in the world have little or no opinion about Jesus, even if they have heard of Him.

When Jesus asked His disciples who they believed He was, Peter answered that He was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). This is the real answer to the question. Jesus is God’s Anointed, Messiah, Savior, Redeemer, High Priest forever, Advocate and Judge. Revelation 19 resonates with the cry that He is Lord of all and over all.

A hallelujah chorus (Revelation 19:1-8)

The word “hallelujah” comes from the Hebrew and means literally, “praise to God (hallelu + yah or jah, meaning praise to Yahweh or Jehovah). It is used in Psalm 106:48 and only in this chapter in the New Testament.

A great multitude shouts out in what appears to be a chant or song. Broken down into its elements, this praise includes:

- Salvation, glory and power belong to God.
- True and just are His judgments.
- He condemned the great prostitute who has corrupted the earth.
- He has avenged on her the blood of His saints.
- The smoke from her destruction rises forever.

The 24 elders and four living creatures join this angel chorus. They worship God on His throne and add their amen and hallelujah to the chorus.

Another voice speaks out from Heaven, saying, “Praise God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, both small and great.” We have much to learn about praising God, don’t we? Revelation is a good source for a praise vocabulary, as is the Book of Psalms.

Now a great multitude joins this speaker. The sound of the multitude is like that of rushing waters or loud lightning. I have stood at Niagara Falls and at Iguassu Falls on the border between Brazil and Argentina. The roar of water is deafening. We have all seen lightning strike perhaps feet from us. It almost cracks the sky open. These are small descriptions of the awesome sound coming from Heaven. The multitude shouts:

- Hallelujah! Our Lord God Almighty rules.
- Let us rejoice and be glad in this. He rules over the nations of men. Whatever happens will always turn out for His purposes and glory (Daniel 4:17).
- Let us give Him the glory.

The Lamb’s wedding feast (Revelation 19:9-10)

It is wedding time. The Lamb and His Bride are to be joined eternally in marriage. The Bride is ready, dressed in fine, bright, clean linen. The Lamb is our Lord. The Bride is His church (Ephesians 5:22-33). The white clothing represents purity. The church cannot dare be stained with the world and its sins. It must be a holy and pure church, without spot, wrinkle, blemish or anything else that stains it. The fine linen here represents the righteous acts of the saints.

The angel now tells John to write that blessed are those who receive a wedding invitation. This wedding is heavenly. Those who overcome the great persecution are prepared for it. We frequently receive such invitations on a human level. Sometimes we can accept and sometimes we cannot.

I was asked to conduct a wedding once in Colorado, but we were to be away at the time, so I had to decline, to my regret. No one, however, who declines the wedding invitation of Christ should dare to do so, yet countless people do to their eternal loss.

The angel authenticates this revelation by announcing that these are the true words of God. John is so overwhelmed by all this that he falls before the angel to worship him. The angel forbids it, because he is merely a fellow servant with Christians. John is told to worship God, not humans or angels (Colossians 2:18). Yet they are worshiped. The Catholic Church

worships various angels, as well as Mary and thousands of “saints.” How did Jesus answer Satan in Matthew 4:10? “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”

The spirit of prophecy is seen in the testimony of God, as well as of the angel and of God Himself. This is the Word followed by the saints, many of whom will die confessing the name of Jesus.

The rider on the white horse (Revelation 19:11-17)

Now John sees Heaven opened and standing before him is a white horse, symbolizing victory. The rider is Faithful and True, terms that describe Jesus. Other descriptions include:

- He judges with justice, as in a court of heavenly justice.
- He wars against evil, not by flesh and blood, but spiritually.
- His eyes are like blazing fire, bringing intense light of understanding and judgment.
- On His head are many crowns, symbolizing His victory over the kingdoms of men. When a ruler won out over another ruler, he took the crown of the defeated king and placed it on his own head (2 Samuel 12:30, for instance). Jesus wears the crowns that rightfully belong to Him.
- He wears a name that only He knows. No matter how much we know about Jesus, there is much that we will never know in this life. We can't even understand fully the magnitude of His love and atonement for us.
- He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood. This refers probably to the blood of martyrs that has been shed and that will be shed for Christ's cause.
- His name is the Word of God, an echo of John 1:1, where Jesus is called the divine Logos, or living Word.
- He leads a heavenly army dressed in pure white and riding white horses, again a sign of victory.
- Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He is not only a sweet, loving Shepherd, but also an avenging, victorious and judging king, ruling powerfully with a scepter of unbreakable iron.

- He treads the winepress of God's wrath or judgment.
- He wears a sash bearing these words: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is eternal and supreme over all of the earth's rulers.

An angel's summons and a call to war (Revelation 19:17-21)

This angel calls for the faithful to gather for a great feast, at which they will eat of the flesh of mighty men, horses and their riders, and all people. This symbolizes the victory of the church over the entire earth.

The beast, the kings and their armies still do not give up. They come together to fight against the rider (Jesus) and His army.

But the final outcome is certain. The beast and false prophet are captured. The prophet has deluded many peoples with his false signs — all those who have been marked as the beast's possession. The beast and the prophet are thrown into the lake of burning sulfur. The rider kills all of the others who have fought against Him and the carrion birds devour their flesh, symbolic of their complete destruction.

So where is our shelter?

As we face all of the evils in this world, we can take heart, because Jesus will triumph over it. Human religions are nothing to Him. Post-modernism is nothing. Political correctness is nothing. The agendas of those pushing immoral behavior are nothing. Terrorism and persecution are nothing. Wars are nothing. We are winners, if we are on His side. This was tremendous comfort to Christians facing death for their faith. And it should be to us, no matter what happens in the future.

Part 3

*The Holy Spirit —
Partner in Creation, Guidance of
God's People, Revelation and the
New Birth*

Chapter 29

Nature of the Holy Spirit

(Genesis 1:2, John 14:9, Romans 8:27, 1 Corinthians 2:10)

Introduction

The Holy Spirit is a very neglected, misunderstood and controversial subject. Just to mention the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God conjures up images of the unusual or paranormal. The term has become almost equivalent to an emotional experience; for instance, tongue-speaking. Some religions, such as Unitarian-Universalist, Christian Science, Islam and others, deny the Spirit totally, charging that we who believe in the Holy Spirit are polytheistic. This is due to a misunderstanding of and/or false use of the word “trinity,” which word never appears in the Bible. God is always one, but in three manifestations or beings, just as water is one, but appears in three forms. (Use of the word “Holy Ghost” in the King James Version is unfortunate for people today, because “ghost” carries a different meaning now than it did in the 1600s, when that version was first published.)

We in the church, reacting against the excesses of Pentecostalism and the more recent Charismatic Movement, have relegated the Spirit to a shadowy, temporary essence during the time of Christ and on until the New Testament was completed in written form in about 100 A.D. We seldom teach about the Holy Spirit, not realizing that He has functioned from before the creation of the universe, was active throughout the Bible, is still involved in every conversion and dwells in the heart of every true Christian.

The eternal nature of the Holy Spirit

Some people have the mistaken idea that the Holy Spirit originated during the ministry of Jesus or on the day of Pentecost. However, the first mention of the Holy Spirit is in Genesis 1:2: “... the spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” He is mentioned throughout both the Old and New

Testaments. He is one with the Father and the Son, a third manifestation of the Godhead. This means that He is eternal. He has always worked and continues to work to the end of time and beyond.

The personality of the Holy Spirit

The Spirit is not simply a force, such as some religions teach, but rather, a being, whom we might call a “person;” not a human person with flesh and bones, but a divine person. He is described as having feelings, attributes, behavior and characteristics. The Greek for Spirit (pneuma) in Romans 8:16 can be either neuter or masculine, but the fact that the Spirit bears witness with our spirits indicates more than a neutral force.

The Spirit is referred to as “He” 13 times in John: 15:26, 16:7,8,13,14. The Spirit calls Himself “I” in Acts 13:2. The Spirit speaks (Acts 10:19, 13:2; 1 Timothy 4:1). The Spirit teaches (John 14:26). He has a mind (Romans 8:27). He is able to love (Romans 15:30). He searches our hearts (1 Corinthians 2:10).

The Holy Spirit as one person or facet of the Godhead

- Who has directed or taught the Spirit of Jehovah? (Isaiah 40:13).
- Where shall I go from your Spirit? (Psalm 139:7).
- They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit (Isaiah 63:10).
- See also Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 36:27, Genesis 6:3, Psalm 51:11 and 104:29-35, and Nehemiah 9:20, for other indications of the Spirit’s nature.

These passages show that the Spirit has emotions and activities distinct from those of God the Father. The Spirit can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). He is more than a force. He has feelings. He can be lied to (Acts 5:3,9). He can be resisted (Acts 7:51). He can be despised (Hebrews 10:29). He can be blasphemed (Matthew 12:31). Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit “ ... is a malignant, persistent, willful rejection of the Holy Spirit linked with an imputing to the Holy Spirit hellish purposes ... ” (H. Leo Boles).

References to the Spirit in New Testament books

The work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament was predicted several times in the Old Testament. Beginning with the events surrounding the conception and birth of John the Baptist, the Spirit’s functions are revealed in a far greater way than in the Old Testament. There are approximately 264 references to the Spirit in the New Testament.

He is referred to 12 times in Matthew, 6 times in Mark, 18 times in Luke, 23 times in John, 57 times in Acts and 132 times in the remaining books. He is prominent in the book of Romans. Only Philemon and 2nd and 3rd John have no mention of the Spirit.

Names of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

Both the Hebrew and Greek names for the Spirit mean “wind.” The Hebrew is “ruach” and the Greek is “pneuma”. So He is really a Holy Wind or Breath, not just in a human sense, but an invisible being penetrating all of life, even the heart.

He was given many different names in the Old Testament. Among these are:

- The Spirit
- The Spirit of God
- The Spirit of Jehovah
- The Spirit of the Lord
- The Holy Spirit

Names given in the New Testament to the Holy Spirit:

- The Spirit (Romans 8:13)
- The Spirit of God (Romans 8:14)
- The Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9)
- The Spirit Himself (Romans 8:16)
- The Spirit of God’s Son (Galatians 4:6)
- The Spirit of the Father (Matthew 10:20)
- The Spirit of Truth (John 14:15-17)
- The Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25)
- The Comforter (John 14:26)

Figures for the Holy Spirit in the New Testament

- A dove (Matthew 3:16)
- Anointing oil (1 John 2:20-21)
- A seal and earnest of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14)

- Water and Living Water (John 4:11, 7:37-39)
- Baptized in the Holy Spirit or in His name and by His authority (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:5)
- Source of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12)

So where is our shelter?

There is much more to the Holy Spirit than we have imagined. We have been guilty of little thought or study given to Him. Pentecostals and Charismatics give Him much attention, but primarily only in the realm of the miraculous, such as healing and tongue-speaking. There needs to be much more balance between our position of ignoring and/or relegating the Spirit to the background of our theology, and that of those who emphasize miraculous gifts and ecstatic behavior attributed to the Spirit in this current age.

Chapter 30

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

(Genesis 1:2, Deuteronomy 34:9, 2 Samuel 23:1-7,
Daniel 4:8, Micah 3:8)

Introduction

The Holy Spirit is not mentioned frequently in the Old Testament, but does appear from Genesis through Zechariah. In fact, He is referred to in about 394 passages in the Old Testament. He is not described as fully as He is in the New Testament. He is called a “wind” or “breath” (*ruach*). Several of His functions are described in the Old Testament. We will look at these.

How the Spirit functioned in the Old Testament

- Involved in creation

Genesis 1:2: “The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters.” The Spirit was involved in creation, along with Jesus (Genesis 1:26 — *Elohim*, “Let us,” John 1:1-3, 14). The Spirit was the “order-bringer” in creation. He brought order out of chaos (Psalm 104:30). He adorned or set in order the heavens (the cosmos, as indicated in Psalm 26:13). Working with God, He gave life to humans (Job 33:4).

- Indwelling

He is said to have indwelt in Joshua in Deuteronomy 34:9, Daniel in Daniel 4:8 and Micah in Micah 3:8. Erroneously, we think of the Spirit as dwelling in faithful people only in New Testament times, but as these passages indicate, He dwelt in faithful people in the Old Testament as well.

- Empowerment

Numbers 11:24-30 — Moses empowered by God’s Spirit to lead and teach.

Exodus 31:3, 35:30 — Bezalel received special abilities from the Spirit.

Numbers 11:25-29 — 70 elders, and especially Eldad and Medad, were empowered by the Spirit.

Numbers 23-24 — The Spirit spoke through Balaam.

Deuteronomy 34:9-12 — Moses given exceptionally great power by God through His Spirit.

Judges 3:10 — The Spirit came upon Othniel.

Judges 6:34 — The Spirit came upon Gideon.

Judges 11:29 — The Spirit came upon Jephthah.

Judges 13:25, 14:6, 16:20 — The Spirit stirred Samson.

1 Samuel 16:13 — The Spirit came upon David with power.

Zechariah 4:6 — “Not by might nor power, but by my Spirit.”

- The Spirit revealed God’s will.

Genesis 41:16-38 — Pharaoh’s dreams were revealed to Joseph.

- The Spirit spoke through people.

1 Samuel 10:6, 10 — The Spirit spoke through Saul and he was a changed man.

2 Samuel 23:1-7, Psalm 51:11,13 — The Spirit spoke through David.

2 Chronicles 15:1 — The Spirit came upon Azariah and the Lord spoke through him to King Asa.

Nehemiah 9:30 — God’s Spirit admonished the people.

Isaiah 61:1-3 — The Spirit came upon Isaiah and he was especially anointed by the Lord.

Ezekiel 2:2, 8:3 — The Spirit came into Ezekiel, lifted him up.

Ezekiel 37:1 — Ezekiel was led by the Spirit.

- The Spirit creates life.

Job 33:4 — “The Spirit of Lord made me, gave me life.”

Psalm 104:30 — The Spirit creates animal life, renews the earth.

Ezekiel 37:13-14 — The Spirit brings new life to the spiritually dead.

- The Spirit has influence on character

Deuteronomy 34:9 — Joshua was given the spirit of wisdom through the laying on of Moses' hands.

- The Spirit can be taken away from us.

Psalm 51:11 — “Do not cast me away from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.”

- The Spirit is everywhere.

Psalm 139:7 — “Where can I go from your Spirit?”

- Jesus would be empowered by the Spirit, who would speak through Him. — Isaiah 11:2, 42:1, 61:1.
- The Spirit would be in God's people — Ezekiel 36:27.
- The Spirit would be poured out on all people — Joel 2:28-29.

So where is our shelter?

Those who believe the Spirit only became active on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and ended His work when Revelation was completed are wrong. The Spirit has been active from creation onward, guiding, empowering, filling people, creating and sustaining life. Throughout the history of Christianity the Holy Spirit has indwelt genuine Christians, giving them guidance, understanding, strength and delivering their prayers to the Father.

Note that some who received special empowerment of the Spirit were not necessarily saintly people. Look at the life of Samson, for instance. Look at King Saul, on whom the Spirit descended at the beginning of his kingship, but later was replaced by a spirit of evil. Or look at David, who had the Spirit of God, but who committed two enormous sins. Others, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, were saintly people whose life and messages were greatly enhanced by the guidance of the Spirit. God used and uses people for His purposes even though we may not at all be worthy of His attention.

Chapter 31

*The Holy Spirit
in the Gospel Accounts*

(Matthew 3:16, 12:15-21; Luke 3:1-6, 4:18-21; John 3:34)

Introduction

Many references to the Spirit are found in the Gospel accounts, beginning with events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus. The Spirit is shown at work in the life and ministry of Jesus, as well as in the promises He made to His followers regarding the Spirit. The Spirit is described in various ways in the Gospel records.

The Holy Spirit in John the Baptist and his parents

When the pregnant Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, the Spirit filled Elizabeth and she witnessed to the nature of Jesus (Luke 1:41-42). When John was born, his father Zechariah was filled with the Spirit and prophesied about him and about Jesus (Luke 3:1-6). He predicted that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Luke 3:16-17).

The Holy Spirit at work in Jesus

The Holy Spirit played a significant part in the life of Jesus. His work in Christ's life began long before Jesus was born. Many Old Testament prophecies predicted in detail who He would be, where He would be born and other facts about His life. For instance:

- He was to come in the "latter days," at the end of the Mosaic dispensation (Isaiah 2:2).
- He would come before the destruction of the Second Temple (Malachi 3:1).
- He was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- He was to be born in the tribe of Judah (Genesis 12:3; Hebrews 2:16, 7:4).
- He was to be in the family line of David (Isaiah 11:10).

- He would come riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).
- He was to be a wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7).
- He would be filled with the Spirit and would judge the nations (Isaiah 42:1-4).
- He would be condemned and would die for our sins (Isaiah 52:13-53:12).
- The people would look on the one whom they had pierced (Zechariah 12:10-11).
- He would die, but His body would not see corruption. Rather, He would be raised from the dead (Psalm 16:10).

The Holy Spirit's role in the conception and birth of Jesus

- Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-20).
- Simeon, an aged devout man, was moved by the Spirit. Entering the temple courtyard, he took the baby Jesus in his arms and prophesied about Him (Luke 2:25-35).
- Anna, an elderly widow, was a prophetess who lived in the Temple area. She also spoke prophetically about the baby Jesus (Luke 2:36-38).

The work of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Jesus

- The Spirit descended on Him at His baptism (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32-33).
- The Spirit was with Him during His temptation (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12).
- Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14).
- Jesus was full of the Spirit, given to Him without measure (Luke 4:1; John 3:34).
- The Spirit was with Jesus in His work (Matthew 12:15-21).
- The Spirit aided Him in casting out demons (Matthew 12:28).
- Christ preached by the Spirit (Luke 4:18-21).
- Christ rejoiced in the Spirit (Luke 10:21).

- Christ gave commands by the Spirit (Acts 1:1-2).
- Jesus offered Himself in death through the Spirit (Hebrews 9:14).
- The Spirit helped Christ in His resurrection (Romans 1:4; 1 Peter 3:18).
- By the Power of the Spirit He ascended to Heaven (Acts 2:29-36).
- The Spirit, therefore, was with Jesus in His conception, birth, life, work, death, resurrection and ascension.

What Jesus promised about the Holy Spirit.

- He would send another Comforter, to be with us and in us forever, the Spirit of truth (John 14:16-17).
- This Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would be the apostles' teacher (John 14:25-26).
- The Spirit would bear witness of Jesus (John 14:26-27).
- The Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:7-11).
- The Spirit would guide the apostles, reveal what was to come and glorify Christ (John 16:12-15).
- The apostles were to remain in Jerusalem until they received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).
- The apostles were to baptize in the name of (or by the authority of) the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20).
- The Spirit would be involved in the new birth (John 3:5).
- The Spirit gives life (John 6:63).
- The Spirit promised to all Christians after Jesus was glorified (John 7:38-39).

So where is our shelter?

The Holy Spirit was intimately active in all that Jesus did and said. He was involved in Jesus' conception, birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. He promised that we would not be spiritual orphans, but that the Spirit would be involved in our conversion and Christian life. Therefore, we should respect and nourish the Spirit's presence and work in our lives.

Chapter 32

The Holy Spirit in Acts

(Acts 1:5-8, 2:1-4, 2:38, 4:8, 5:9, 6:3, 8:17-29, 9:18, 10:44, 12:24, 13:9, 13:52, 15:7-8, 19:6, 21:10)

Introduction

The Holy Spirit is mentioned some 61 times in the Book of Acts alone. Acts might even be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit working through the apostles and other early Christians. These can be divided into various categories. As we read these, let us ask ourselves these questions:

- What does the passage really say?
- What does the passage mean in its context?
- Was it intended for all people, all Christians, just the apostles or just the early Christians?
- What does it mean to me and to others? How should I share it?

Passages about the Holy Spirit categorized in Acts

- Source of revelation — Acts 1:2, 1:16, 4:25, 11:28
- Promised to the apostles — Acts 1:4 (See also John 14:16.)
- Apostles to be baptized with the Holy Spirit — Acts 1:5
- Apostles empowered, filled with the Spirit, witnessed through the Spirit — Acts 1:8, 2:4, 2:33, 4:8, 4:31, 5:32, 13:9-10, 15:28
- All flesh to have access to the Spirit — Acts 2:17-18. Gentiles received the Spirit — 10:45,47, 11:15, 15:8
- The Spirit offered as a gift — 2:38, 19:6
- The Spirit would bring seasons of refreshing from the Lord — 3:19, 13:52
- The Spirit gave special commandments, wisdom — 1:2; 6:3,5, 10; 21:4,11
- Some lied to the Spirit — 5:3,9,32

- Some resisted the Spirit — 7:51
- Stephen filled with the Spirit — 7:55
- Some baptized believers had not received the Spirit, in the sense of gifts of the Spirit — 8:15, 16; 19:2
- Gifts of the Spirit imparted by laying on of Apostles' hands — 8:19
- Transmission of these powers died with the death of the apostles — Acts 8:14-19
- Simon the sorcerer wanted to buy this power — 8:19-20
- The Spirit sent out Philip, Peter, Paul and Barnabas — 8:29, 39; 10:19-20, 11:2, 13:4
- The Spirit forbade the direction Paul was taking — 16:6-7
- The Spirit bound and testified to Paul — 20:22-23
- The Spirit made some to be elders or bishops — 20:28

Variety of the Spirit's functions in Acts

A wide variety of revelations and functions of the Spirit in Acts provided special guidance to the apostles and other leaders in the church. This was necessary in the church's infancy, before the written New Testament was available as a guide. First-century Christians had only letters from the apostles in their hands, possibly along with Old Testament texts. Special gifts were given to guide early Christians in the development of the church and to authenticate the truth they were teaching, but only through the laying on of the hands of the apostles. Those who received these gifts could not transmit them, as we see in Acts 8. Philip the evangelist went to Samaria to preach, converting a large number of people. However, since he was not an apostle, he was unable to pass on to these new believers any special powers of the Spirit. When the apostles Peter and John arrived there, they could confer on other Christians gifts of the Spirit.

This situation of diminishing use of special gifts of the Spirit was mentioned by early church fathers in the next generation after the apostles. Polycarp, an elder and eventual martyr, commented that these powers no longer existed in the church.

Why not? Because by then all of the New Testament had been written and could serve as a guide for Christians. They no longer needed miraculous

revelations of God's will. They were beyond the church's infancy, so these temporary gifts were no longer available.

So where is our shelter?

All Christians then and now were baptized by the authority of the Spirit, who is directly involved in conversion (John 3:5). All received then and now the general gift of the Spirit — that is, His indwelling. We cannot be born again without God's Spirit, nor can we live successfully as Christians without His indwelling. We can, however, live and serve well without any of the temporary special gifts early Christians received. We don't need to raise the dead, restore sight to the blind, heal the lame or even speak in languages we have not studied. If we are filled with the Spirit, as we are supposed to be, we will think and act as Christians. Our lives, without miraculous powers, will reflect Christ and reveal His Word. This is what has been called, "The Gospel according to you" (meaning, according to how you live out Christ in your life). What we are speaks much louder than what we say.

So let us be true Christians and speak as true Christians, filled with God's Spirit.

Chapter 33

The Holy Spirit in Romans and Corinthians

(Romans 8; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20)

Introduction

We have further instructions about the Holy Spirit in Romans and the Corinthian letters, especially. In this lesson we will look at all three of these sources, summarizing what Paul says about the Spirit. Here we find practical applications in the church concerning His manifestations and use.

The Holy Spirit in Romans

The Spirit is described in various places in Romans, especially in Chapter 8. In Romans 6:8 Paul says that setting our mind on the Spirit is life and peace. In Romans 6:11 we read that the Spirit who raised up Jesus dwells in us and will also raise us up. We are re-created through the same Spirit which hovered over the waters of the original creation in Genesis 1:2.

Through Christ the law of the Spirit of life sets us free from the law of sin and death. The Spirit is directly involved in our being freed from sin and brought under the law of freedom in Christ (Romans 8:2).

We do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. That is, according to the Spirit's revelation of God's will and His guidance in our lives (Romans 8:4). Those who lived in accordance with the Spirit have their minds on what the Spirit desires (Romans 8:5). The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:6). We are controlled by the Spirit, if He lives in us. If we do not have the Spirit of Christ, we do not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9).

By the Spirit we put to death the misdeeds of our body (Romans 8:13). Those led by the Spirit are sons of God. The Spirit testifies with our Spirit that we are God's children (Romans 8:13-16). We have the firstfruits of the Spirit, as we wait for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23). The Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:26). The Spirit intercedes for us with groanings, in accordance to God's will (Romans 8:26-27). Finally, the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead will give life to our mortal bodies (Romans 8:11).

The Spirit in 1 Corinthians

The church in Corinth had all of the special spiritual gifts that God provided to the infant churches for their mutual strengthening and edification. However, they abused these gifts. Some felt that, since they had the gift of tongues (languages), they were superior to other Christians. Others felt that their gift of prophecy, or of wisdom, placed them among the super-Christians. Paul dealt with these abuses and called strongly for sound teaching and mutual love in relation to the Holy Spirit. Some mention of the Spirit is found in Chapters 3 and 6, but the major part of Paul's instruction about the Spirit and His gifts is found in Chapters 12 to 14.

We are God's temple collectively, with His Spirit living in us. We are His temple and it is sacred (1 Corinthians 3:16). Our actual human body is a temple of the Spirit. We were bought at a high price and must therefore honor God with our body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

No one speaking by the Spirit of God can say, "Jesus be cursed," nor say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).

There were different kinds of spiritual miraculous gifts, but the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4). Manifestations of the Spirit were provided for the common good. He gave them to each one, just as He determined to aid the church in its infancy, before the written word was completed (1 Corinthians 12:11).

We are all baptized by one Spirit into one body and given the one Spirit to drink (1 Corinthians 12:13).

The Spirit in 2 Corinthians

Christians are urged by Paul to grow in great tribulation, purity, understanding, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, sincere love, truthful speech and the power of God (2 Corinthians 6:4-7).

So where is our shelter?

The Holy Spirit is always one. He grants gifts as He determines, not as we determine. He is never the author of confusion, but of order. He is directly involved in our new spiritual birth. He builds up the church through His manifestations, for our mutual edification. He dwells in us, guides and controls us. Our bodies are temples of the Spirit. Therefore, we do not belong to ourselves. We were bought with a price and live by faith and the presence of the Spirit in our lives. Finally, we will be raised by the Spirit to enter the eternal dimension of our lives. Praise God for His Spirit. We ask His forgiveness for having neglected studying and appreciating Him as we should have done.

Chapter 34

The Holy Spirit in the Remainder of the New Testament

(Galatians 5:16-18, Ephesians 4:3-4, 1 Thessalonians 4:8)

Introduction

The Holy Spirit is mentioned in various ways throughout the New Testament. In this lesson we will review where and how He is mentioned from Galatians to Revelation, as well as how He functions. We will also look at how we can abuse the Spirit. We will group the references by topic, as far as possible.

The Spirit in Galatians through Revelation

- Source of the Spirit.
- Promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:2-5).
- Sent by God's Son (Galatians 4:6; 1 John 4:13).
- Eternal (Hebrews 9:14).

Unity of the Spirit

- Unity of the one Spirit (Ephesians 4:3-4).
- One spirit (Philippians 1:27).

Functions of the Spirit

- Word revealed by the Spirit (Ephesians 3:5; 1 Timothy 4:1; Ephesians 6:17; Revelation 2:7).
- We are born through the Spirit (Galatians 4:29).
- The Spirit dwells in us, quickens us, fills us (1 Thessalonians 4:8; James 4:5; 1 Peter 3:18).
- We are sealed with the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).

- We are led by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-18).
- We are given access to God by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:18).
- We are strengthened by the Spirit (Ephesians 3:16).
- Sanctified by the Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2).
- We are justified in the Spirit (1 Timothy 3:16).
- The Spirit is of Christ and of Truth (1 Peter 1:11; 1 John 4:16).
- The Spirit bears witness with our spirit (Galatians 4:29; 1 John 5:6, 8).
- The Spirit brings life (Revelation 11:11).
- The Spirit is a Spirit of glory (1 Peter 4:14).
- The Spirit yields fruit (Ephesians 5:9).
- The Spirit provides a habitation of God (Ephesians 2:22).
- Jesus was quickened or made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18). We, too, will be quickened by the Spirit (Romans 8:11).
- The Spirit-inspired word lives and cuts our hearts (Hebrews 4:12); human response to the Spirit.
- Remain firm in the Spirit (Galatians 3:2-5).
- Sow to the Spirit (Galatians 6:8).
- Have fellowship of the Spirit (Philippians 2:1).
- Worship God in the Spirit (Philippians 3:3).
- Love in the Spirit (Colossians 1:8).
- Obey the truth through the Spirit (1 Peter 1:22).
- Live according to God in the Spirit (1 Peter 4:6).
- Know the Spirit (1 John 4:2).
- Be in the Spirit (Revelation 1:10).
- Make supplication in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18).
- Grieve not the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).
- Quench not the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19).
- Do not spite the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:29).

The Spirit's invitation

“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’” God calls us through His Spirit to come unto Him and enjoy all of the blessings of living in Him (Isaiah 55:1).

So where is our shelter?

Did the Holy Spirit play a crucial role in all that went on in the Bible and in the entire creation? Did He have a significant place in the life of Jesus and the beginning and development of the church? Does He continue to play a crucial role in our lives? How can we become a better host for His presence in our lives? How can we grieve the Spirit? How can we quench the Spirit? How can we know that the Spirit is living and active in our life?

Chapter 35

The Holy Spirit Today

(Romans 8:16, 10:17; 1 Peter 3:18)

Introduction

They are wrong who say that the Spirit completed His work with the Book of Revelation. They are wrong who ignore the Spirit or who fail to understand His work in His Word and in our lives today. The Spirit has always been active and will continue to be until the end of time and throughout eternity. What, then, does the Holy Spirit do or not do today?

What does the Holy Spirit do today?

He still maintains the Word, keeping it alive, sharp and applicable to our lives (Hebrews 4:12). The Word penetrates our hearts and judges us. It is just as applicable today as it was when first given. Those who believe in the need for new revelations or who believe that the revelation we have is not adequate for today need to restudy the matter. When the new head of the Episcopal Church says that she believes homosexuals are born that way, and that a loving God will not condemn them, she is inventing a new “scripture.” When the Mormons or other religions announce that they have received a new revelation, they are wrong.

He still bears witness to the reality of the Godhead, the will of God, the teaching He gave us and to our spirits, that we are children of God (Romans 8:16; Hebrews 10:15; 1 John 5:6,8).

He is still involved in germinating faith, convicting us of sin and bringing about obedience in the new birth (Romans 10:17; John 3:5; Galatians 4:29). He still dwells in us, giving us spiritual life (Romans 8:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:8; James 4:5; 1 Peter 3:18).

We are sealed by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), led by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-18), given access to God by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:18), strengthened by the Spirit (Ephesians 3:16), sanctified by the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2), and justified in the Spirit (1 Timothy 3:16).

He still guides us (John 16:13; Acts 16:6-7). He still bears our prayers to

Heaven, interceding for us (Romans 8:26-27). He will raise us up on the Last Day, bearing our souls to Heaven (Romans 8:11). He still invites all peoples to come to the Lord (Revelation 22:17).

What does the Spirit not do today?

He does not work instantaneous miracles, such as healings, tongue speaking and raising the dead, despite the affirmations of some. We have all heard about those who claim to have raised someone from the dead but could not produce positive proof of this. The Apostles could transmit these powers to others, but they, in turn, could not transmit them (Acts 8:4-17). Early church historians confirmed this, saying that these special powers had disappeared with the death of those to whom they had been given through the apostles.

The Spirit does not bypass the Word to give us new revelations, or contradict what God, Christ and the Spirit have already revealed (Galatians 1:6-9). Many religions claim latter-day revelations, but these are not from God.

The Spirit will not save us apart from the Word, true conversion and baptism. The idea that some special visitation of the Spirit or some vision saves is contrary to clear Bible teaching.

How should we respond to the Spirit?

- Open our hearts to the Spirit-inspired Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21).
- Be a fit habitation for the Spirit; a good host for His presence. Respect and guard His presence in our lives (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- Follow His guidance (John 16:13).
- Never ignore or resist Him (Acts 7:51-53).
- Never attempt to change His inspired Word (Galatians 1:6-9).
- Never blaspheme the Spirit (Mark 3:29; Luke 12:8-10).

Blasphemy is any word or act that detracts from or denies the power and glory of God. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was brought up by Christ against the Scribes and Pharisees because they said that He was doing His mighty works by an “evil spirit,” or even Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons. Some even said that He was out of His mind. Jesus showed them how inconsistent their argument was. How could He cast out demons by the power of the Prince of Demons? He then warned them that what they

were saying was perilously close to blasphemy against the Spirit, who empowered Jesus. Apparently to blaspheme against the Spirit means to deny Him, refuse to listen to Him, ridicule Him or attribute to Him an evil nature. Jesus said that such behavior is unforgivable. It destroys all that the Godhead and the revealed Word stand for. Some commentators suggest that it means no forgiveness as long as the guilty party continues in his or her deadly path. Or it may be that such a sin is so perverse and so damaging that it cannot be forgiven. At any rate, it is extremely dangerous and such behavior risks losing one's soul for all eternity.

So where is our shelter?

In these chapters we have found that:

- The Holy Spirit is mentioned from Genesis 1:2 to Revelation 22:17.
- He worked in many individuals, some surprising, to perform specific assignments. He gave them special abilities.
- He dwelt fully in Christ throughout His ministry.
- He inspired and guided the prophets, apostles and other servants.
- He inspired the written Word.
- He was promised to us by Jesus, to live in us.
- He is involved in the process of conversion.
- He lives in the church, giving us understanding, wisdom and guidance.
- He intercedes for us.
- He will raise us up on the last day.

Is the Holy Spirit therefore absolutely essential to God's working in the world, in the church and in individuals? Certainly! I pray that we have come through this study to a better understanding of His vital role in our lives and that we will be better hosts for His presence.

Part 4

*Judgment,
Heaven and
Hell*

Chapter 36

And After that the Judgment

(Matthew 12:36-37, Acts 17:31, Romans 14:10-11)

Introduction

One of the worst places that I can think of to be is standing before a judge. Whether guilty or innocent, I would stammer and feel intimidated. Once I was a witness in an automobile/motorcycle accident. By the time the motorcyclist's attorney was through grilling me, I wasn't sure I had seen anything.

None of us likes to be judged on any matter. We don't much like to be held accountable. This begins with childhood, when we are quick to say, "Not my fault, Mommy! He (or she) made me do it."

Judges have considerable authority, but are not always right in their decisions, and neither are juries. That is why there are appellate courts. However, there is one judgment in which the judge is always right. I'm referring to the Final Judgment. The Bible says that it is an inescapable moment and the eternal Judge is the final authority.

Judgment an inescapable fact

God's Word is clear on the matter of individual judgment. Eventually, we must all face the music for our lives and deeds. After describing the righteous and how they prosper, Psalm 1:4-5 says,

"Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous."

Ecclesiastes 11:9 warns the young against following ways of their own desires, adding that God will bring them to justice:

"... follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment."

Jesus expanded on this theme of judgment, saying,

“ ... men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37).

This is serious business, indeed! Even our words that explode out of anger, revenge, frustration, a bad attitude toward others and frivolous thoughts will be judged on the Last Day. Show me a person who has never offended with his or her tongue, and I will say, “I seriously doubt that,” because all of us sin with our words.

In speaking to the Athenian philosophers, Paul told them that God had set a day on which He will judge the world with justice by the One He has appointed, proving this by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:31). Those white-bearded scholars evidently accepted the fact of a judgment, but rebelled against the fact of Jesus’ resurrection.

Paul wrote these words to the church in Rome:

“ ... we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: ‘As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me and every tongue will confess to God’” (Romans 14:10-11).

Every knee and every tongue? That includes each one of us, doesn’t it?

Again, he said,

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him, for the things done in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Peter talks about God’s holding the unrighteous for the day of judgment (2 Peter 2:9).

Finally, Revelation adds,

“... The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books” (Revelation 20:12).

Who will be judged?

Certainly, every human being in all history will be judged according to his or her deeds. Only those will be counted righteous who have believed and obeyed their Lord. Evidently, the level of judgment will be based on extenuating circumstances. One who has died never having heard of Jesus

will be judged far less severely than the one who has heard of Jesus and learned of His message, and yet has spurned Him and His Word. Jesus says that various cities and peoples of antiquity, especially those such as Nineveh, which repented at the preaching of Jonah, will be judged less harshly than the cities of Jesus' day which rejected His message to them (Matthew 11:20-24, 12:41).

Jesus said that we will all appear before His judgment bar, when He sits on His throne in heavenly glory. He will separate His sheep from the goats — His faithful from the unfaithful (Matthew 25:31-46).

When will the Final Judgment occur?

Some religious faiths have based much of their doctrine and appeal on announcing dates for the Lord's return. Those dates have all come and gone. Today they are emphasizing the imminent coming of the Lord; that we are living in the final days before the end. Some look at wars and other calamities as sure signs that the Lord will come almost immediately. In Matthew 14:6-8 Jesus warns us that there will be wars and rumors of wars, that nations will rise up against other nations and that there will be famines and earthquakes, but the end is still to come (Matthew 24:6-8). He, with all of His spiritual knowledge, said that neither He nor the angels knew the day or hour of judgment — only the Father. That day will come when least expected, which rules out trying to read into unusual and calamitous events a timetable for the end. It seemingly will come when there is every sign of peace and safety, rather than war and danger.

So where is our shelter?

Judgment is an incontrovertible fact. No one knows when it will occur or even many details about how it will happen. The Lord's calendar up in Heaven has the date circled in red. We don't know what that date is, but Scripture warns us to be ready daily for the Son of Man's return. Are we ready or are we so mired down by the cares and possessions of this world that we are poorly prepared?

Chapter 37

A Beautiful Place Called Heaven

(Matthew 6:19-21, Revelation 21)

Introduction

Mental pictures abound about the nature of Heaven. Some deny that it exists. One man I knew said that there is nothing at all after death; that when you are dead, you just decay into the elements from which your body came. “As far as I am concerned,” he added, “you can just toss my body out onto the street or onto a garbage dump.” I felt sorry for him, because he had no hope for the future, nor did he even want to hear about Heaven.

Others take the opposite tack, believing that Heaven is a literal and physical place. To Muslims, paradise is the eternal abode for those, by fate or martyrdom, whom Allah chooses to dwell there. Their paradise is a very physical place. The Muslim admitted to paradise will have 70 or 72 beautiful virgins to wait on him constantly. He will dress in the very best of garments. He will live in the lap of luxury. He will eat of the choicest of foods and drink the choicest of beverages.

To Mormons, the faithful will be married in Heaven and will enjoy all of the pleasures of perfect matrimony in that place. They will also have large families there, which is one reason why they have large families here, which will be transported as families to Heaven. To Hindus Heaven is Nirvana, a place of nothingness, in which the soul will merge with the cosmos.

To some Christians, Heaven is literal. If the Bible says its streets are paved with gold, then they will believe it will be so paved. If the Bible says that God’s eternal city is a mile wide, a mile long and a mile high, then it will measure exactly that. If huge precious stones stud its foundations and walls, they will be genuine and perfect stones. If the gates are great pearls, that is exactly what they will be. And so on about the River of Life, the Celestial Tree giving twelve kinds of fruits, the Great White Throne ...

How does the Bible really describe Heaven?

- A spiritual place

We human beings cannot visualize things of an eternal nature — neither Heaven nor Hell, God, angels, demons, Satan — except in human imagery. That is how they are described for us. We see Heaven as a place of glorious light and Hell as a place of fiery darkness. We see God as a grand old man with a long beard, iridescent and majestic. We see angels dressed in snow-white robes and with wings. We see Satan dressed in red tights, with a flowing black robe, two horns and some kind of pitchfork in his hand. Our image of all of this has been shaped by what we have seen in print, movies and other media. Actually, we have little or no idea of how God or Satan looks. Angels appear in the Bible as men, sometimes radiant in appearance. Satan's demons are not described in the Bible in terms of their appearance.

Heaven is described for us in God's Word, but again, in human imagery which is not to be interpreted as physical. Here are some of its characteristics, as pictured primarily in Revelation, a book filled with allegories.

- **Imagery about Heaven**

Matthew 6:19-21 describes Heaven as a secure place, where neither moths nor rust destroy, nor thieves break in and steal. Nothing impure can ever enter it (Revelation 21:27). It is like no place we know on earth. Here we experience constant decay, infestations by vermin, mold ... Our goods are stolen. We lose everything in a fire, earthquake, hurricane or tornado. Our clothes wear out. Just today my wife said she had to get rid of a favorite sweater because it was unraveling. Our frozen foods suffer freezer burn. Our fresh produce rots. Our tires wear out and our cars break down. Our appliances quit on us. Even our computers crash. And now, our investments tank ... That is life here on earth, but in Heaven all is safe. What we have stored up there is secure forever.

The patriarchs of Genesis looked for a better place or country — heavenly (Hebrews 11:16). They understood that they were pilgrims, just passing through as they lived in tents and moved from location to location. The soldier was erecting his pup tent and driving down its stakes. His sergeant ordered him, "Don't drive down the stakes so far! We'll be moving on in the morning." Nor should we drive so deeply the stakes of our material life, because we too will be moving on toward our eternal home.

God will no longer be remote, but will dwell with His people in Heaven (Revelation 21:3). Can you imagine the wonder of seeing God face-to-face and worshiping Him for all eternity?

There will be no more tears, death, crying or pain (Revelation 21:4). We know from this that Heaven is not like the earth, because here we suffer. My wife is still grieving over the loss of her mother. We both suffer continuing aches and pains. Just to be rid forever of all of this will be a blessing beyond measure.

Everything there will be new (Revelation 21:5) and will remain new forever. Whatever we obtain here is new for a very brief time and then it becomes used and subject to breaking down. Planned obsolescence is built into many electronic items. A computer that is new this year is archaic in a year or two. Not so there, where all is new.

Our thirst will be quenched by the spring of the water of life (Revelation 21:6).

I worked on a cattle ranch in Eastern Oregon one summer during my college years. It was tough duty, especially when I spent a day in the blistering sun building a fence. I ran out of water and was dying of thirst. In fact, dehydration set in and I spent a night in the hospital taking on injections of fluids. In Heaven this will never occur, because the water of life never runs dry.

The city of God (which may refer to the Lamb's Bride and not Heaven) is described in figurative terms as being 1,400 miles wide, 1,400 miles long and 1,400 miles high. The measurement was in stadia (12,000 stadia in each direction). Oklahoma City is to have a skyscraper 54 floors, or 925 feet, tall. That is a little wart in comparison to the height of Heaven's City. Bear in mind the 12,000 stadia. Anytime we see 12 or its multiples we can understand that this number signifies an absolute quality and not a literal number. Its walls are 200 feet thick (Revelation 21:15-17). The city shines with the glory of God and is clear as jasper (again, figurative language, because jasper is not clear, but multicolored. It has 12 gates (again, that symbolic number 12), named after the 12 sons of Jacob. Each gate is a single huge pearl. Studded in the foundations are precious stones of all kinds (Revelation 21:9-21).

There is neither a temple in the city, nor any illumination other than that of the Lord God and the Lamb are both its temple and its light (Revelation 21:22).

A great golden street runs through it. Down its middle flows the river of the water of life. The tree of life grows on either side of the river, producing a new crop of fruit each month. This cannot be a human-type golden street, because gold is too soft to serve as a street's pavement. The tree of life is like nothing on earth. We have a fruit tree that was grafted in such a way

that it was to produce four kinds of fruit. Not! It never produced more than two kinds of plum and now produces just one. Fruit trees, unless constantly meddled with, tend to revert to their natural state. This tree in Heaven is far different. It never changes and never fails to produce 12 (again, that magic number) kinds of fruit.

Who will be in Heaven?

Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will enter Heaven (Revelation 21:27). As is said in Revelation 22:14, only those whose robes are clean have a right to the tree of life and residence in the city. Note in Revelation 7:14 that the overcomers have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. This washing occurs initially in baptism and then continually during our faithful Christian lives (John 3:3-5; Romans 6:4; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 3:21; Revelation 1:5).

Who will enter Heaven? Only the faithful and pure. It is up to us to be cleansed and made pure, so that we can be admitted into the Lord's great Audience Chamber in Heaven.

So where is our shelter?

How beautiful Heaven must be! Words cannot even begin to describe that wonderful place, for it is in a dimension beyond our human senses. Yet, here is my attempt:

O God, I long to see your gates,
To dwell with You above.
I long to be in Heaven,
To feel your tender love.
O God, I long to be with You;
I long to dwell in peace.
I long to be in Heaven,
Enjoying sweet release.
No pain, no darkness, only light
For all eternity.
With You, my Holy Father,
Your wondrous face to see.
I long to be in Heaven;
I long your praise to sing.
I long to be in Heaven,
Where angels' anthems ring.
— Glover Shipp, 2008

Chapter 38

Is There Really a Hell?

(Ecclesiastes 12:7, Luke 16:19-31, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, Revelation 20:10-15)

Introduction

Hell is not a physical place! What? Do you mean there is no Hell? I'm saying that, despite Dante's *Inferno* and all of the gruesome scenes it portrays, Hell is not a literal or physical place, in the sense of being like a giant blast furnace here on earth. As with Heaven, it is a real place, but one which occupies a different dimension than any we know here on earth.

The only way in which we humans can understand something of Hell is through figurative or symbolic language. However, that is more than sufficient to warn us about that unimaginably horrible place.

Some confusion arises over the temporary abode of the dead and the eternal abode of the ungodly after the final Judgment. We will try to sort this out.

Paradise and Hades

All of us die, as Hebrews 9:27 solemnly reminds us. There are two dates we must all keep — death and Judgment. After we die, says Ecclesiastes 12:7, our bodies return to the elements from which it came, but the spirit unto God who gave it. This departed spirit — where does it go after death? The Word tells us that it goes to one of two places, either Paradise or Hades. The word *hades* in Greek and *sheol* in Hebrew mean primarily the grave and not eternal hell, as they are sometimes translated. Another word often used is *Gehenna*, which comes from the Hebrew for “Valley of the Sons of Hinnom.” Tradition says that it was the place in which Canaanites sacrificed their children to the god Moloch. It thus became an accursed place, in which refuse was burned, its fire never going out. The expression has come to refer to Hell, an accursed place in which the eternal fire is never quenched.

Paradise and Hades are clearly distinguished in Luke 16:19-31, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man, who had lived a wasted

life, went to Hades, but the suffering Lazarus went to Abraham's bosom, symbolic of the security of Paradise. Lazarus was comforted and cared for, while the rich man was in torment. He pleaded for Lazarus to be sent to him to cool his tongue with water, but this was impossible, since there was a great chasm between the two places. Then the rich man requested that someone go back to earth to warn his brothers not to come to that place. This request too was denied. We know that these starkly different scenes were not in the dimension of time beyond the Judgment, because the brothers were still alive.

Key verses on Sheol, the interim abode of the dead

- Deuteronomy 32:22. God's wrath has kindled a fire that burns to the realm of death below.
- 2 Samuel 22:6. The sorrow of sheol compassed me about.
- Job 11:7-9. The mysteries of God are higher than the heavens, deeper than the depths of sheol, longer than the earth and wider than the sea.
- Psalm 9:17. The wicked return to sheol, all the nations that forget God.
- Psalm 16:10. God will not leave His promised Son in sheol.
- Psalm 139:8. If I make my bed in sheol, God is there.
- Isaiah 28:16-18. A precious cornerstone (Jesus) will be laid in Zion. Those who refuse Him will see their covenant with death (sheol) not stand.
- Jonah 2:2. Jonah cried out to God from the belly of sheol (the fish, symbolic of sheol).

Key verses on Hades

- Matthew 11:23. Capernaum would be brought down to the depths (hades).
- Matthew 16:18. The gates of hades (as in the original Greek) will not prevail against Christ's church, despite all persecution or setbacks.
- Luke 16:23. The rich man was in hades, a transitional place of torment awaiting final judgment. We know that this scene wasn't set in the final Hell, because this rich man wanted someone to go

warn his brothers not to go to that place.

- Acts 2:27, 31. God did not leave His Son's soul in hades.
- Revelation 1:18. Jesus holds the key of hades and death.
- Revelation 20:13-14. Death and hades delivered up the dead. They were then cast into the lake of fire.

So both destinies appear to exist during that period between death and the end of the world. Hades is something like the situation of a prisoner in a holding cell awaiting trial. Paradise is something like a vestibule for the faithful until they are admitted permanently into Heaven. Jesus told the repentant thief on the cross,

“... today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

Sentenced to eternal death in Hell

When a prisoner is judged guilty of a major crime, he or she may be sentenced to life in prison without parole. In like manner, the individual who is found guilty at Christ's Judgment Bar is sentenced to an eternity in Hell. It is a place for which rebellious, evil, unrepentant, unfaithful and unsaved souls have prepared themselves in this life. Judas Iscariot went to “His own place,” the destination for which he had allowed Satan to lead him. Once there, the condemned person has no appeal; no advocate to defend his or her case. Hell is the permanent forwarding address for such a person.

Hell described

Jesus described Hell as an eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). He said that the disobedient will weep and gnash their teeth, as they see the faithful admitted to Heaven but they, themselves, thrown out (Luke 13:28). Paul told the Thessalonians that the Lord would be revealed on the Last Day in blazing fire, punishing those who have not obeyed God with everlasting destruction, shut out forever from the presence of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10).

Passages on gehenna and tartarus

- Matthew 5:22. He who calls his brother a fool is in danger of gehenna. This comes from the valley of Hinnom, in Jerusalem, where refuse burned constantly. We had a Brazilian congregation for awhile in the area of Gehenna, a name we gave to a huge garbage dump that burned day and night.

- Matthew 10:28. Beware him who is able to destroy both body and soul in gehenna — the fires of hell.
- Matthew 23:15. Teachers of Jewish law and tradition made their disciples twice as much a child of gehenna as themselves.
- James 3:16. The tongue is a fire, setting the whole course of life on fire, and is itself set on fire of gehenna.
- 2 Peter 2:4. Angels who sinned were cast into tartarus (the only place in which this word is used) — a gloomy dungeon awaiting judgment.

So where is our shelter?

In English we throw around the word “hell” in a careless and profane way. Often we mean it as the bad place, but often it is used as just a curse word.

In Hebrew and Greek there were distinctions made between the abode of the dead and eternal Hell. We need to understand these distinctions. All who die go into a state of conscience existence, as in the case of the rich fool in Luke 16. They cannot change this transitional state, nor be purchased or prayed out of it. All of the dead await the final Judgment. Only those who are alive when Jesus returns will not experience death (1 Corinthians 15:20-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). What a comfort it is to know that we will not have died in vain, nor will remain dead forever, but, if we are faithful to Christ, we will be raised to live forever with Him. For us, death is not a sting or dreadful thing, but a victory, for we know what awaits us.

Revelation says that Satan and his minions will be thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where they will be tormented forever and ever (Revelation 20:10). Death and Hades, along with all whose names are not written in the Book of Life, will be thrown also into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). This burning, sulphuric lake will be unlike any we have ever seen, for it will never be extinguished. It will torment lost souls forever.

Does anyone in his or her right mind want to take the risk of going to eternal torment? I have a friend who is resistant to all things religious. He says, “I know where I am going . . . ” In other respects he is rational, but in this he makes no sense. I wish I could find a way to adequately warn him against the suicidal course he is taking.

Hell is real, even though it is not physical. We need to believe this, fear it and warn our families and friends to avoid going there at all costs.

Part 5

*Angels, Satan
and Demons*

Chapter 39

Are There Really Angelic Beings?

(Matthew 13:41-42, Luke 15:7-10,
1 Corinthians 4:9, Hebrews 1:14)

Introduction

Some say that God is dead. Others say that angels no longer function and that demons do not really exist. Some even question the existence of Satan. This is nothing new. The Sadducees of Jesus' day denied the existence of angels and demons.

Some even give unwarranted attention to spirit beings, attempting to call them down to aid us or to punish our adversaries. And some go to great lengths to obtain fetishes or secret formulas to guard them against demons.

However, after all the dust has settled from the arguments about spirit beings, there are still infallible truths about these beings. From Adam and Eve onward, the Bible clearly presents a case for Satan's existence and untiring efforts to destroy humankind. It also presents a case for the existence and work of both angels and demons. Let us take a look first at what it says about angels.

Dr. Paul Hiebert, my mentor on my doctoral work, said one time that the whole realm of angels and demons is what he calls "The excluded Middle Ground." Most of us believe in God and Christ, and we give a passing yes to Satan's existence, but we have little or no knowledge of the middle ground of angels and demons.

Why we should study about angels

Victor Knowles, in his book, **What the Bible Says about Angels and Demons**, notes,

"We should study angelology ... because it is a biblical topic and a helpful topic. To neglect the subject of angels is to rob ourselves of a great blessing" (Knowles 1986:23-24).

Knowles lists several reasons for studying about angels. To these I have added others:

- They are mentioned some 300 times in the Bible.
- They are above us in God's order of being. Psalm 8 says that God made human beings a little lower than the angels.
- They are interested in us. Luke 15:7, 10 say that the angels rejoice over one sinner who comes to repentance.
- They minister to us (Hebrews 1:14). Christians enjoy the daily ministering and caring of angels.
- They guard the church (1 Corinthians 4:9, 11:10; 1 Timothy 5:21).
- They will gather people from the four corners of the earth for the Lord's final judgment (Matthew 13:41-42; Mark 13:27).
- They transport our souls to God's care upon our death or at the end of the world, if we are still alive at that moment (Luke 9:26, 16:22; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Matthew 25:31). Whichever the case, we are in their care, as they carry us to our Father.
- In Heaven we shall be immortal like the angels (Luke 20:36).
- It is possible to entertain angels unaware (Genesis 18:1-16, 19:1; Hebrews 13:2).

Examples of the intervention of angels in human affairs

It would have been a memorable but shocking experience in Bible days to have been visited by an angel or angels. They appeared on special occasions to a variety of people. Here are some instances:

- Hagar was told by an angel to return to her mistress, Sarai (Genesis 16:7-14, 21:17-18).
- Abraham and Sarah were told that they would have a son (Genesis 18:10).
- Angels protected Lot from evil co-citizens of Sodom and forced him and his family to flee the city (Genesis 19:12-13).
- An angel told Abraham not to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:11-12).
- An angel spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-4).
- An angel counseled and warned the Israelites during their pilgrimage to the Promised Land (Exodus 23:20).

- An angel promised Manoah and his wife that they would have a special son, Samson (Judges 13:3-20).
- An angel guided Elijah (2 Kings 1:13, 15).
- An angel sent the prophet Gad to King David with a special message (2 Chronicles 21:18).
- An angel gave messages to the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 1:9-10).
- An angel appeared to Daniel (Daniel 8:15-16, 10:10-14).
- An angel revealed God's instructions to Joseph (Matthew 1:19-24, 2:13, 19, 20).
- A host of angels announced to the shepherds the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:9-15).
- Angels attended Jesus following His temptation (Matthew 4:10).
- Angels told the women at the empty tomb that Jesus had risen (Matthew 28:5-7; John 20:12).
- An angel sent Philip to the Gaza Road, to teach the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:36).
- An angel instructed Cornelius to send for Peter (Acts 10:3-7).
- An angel awakened Peter in prison and guided him safely out (Acts 12:7-8).
- An angel assured Paul that neither he nor his fellow shipmates would be harmed during a violent storm at sea (Acts 27:23-25).
- An angel revealed to John the revelation about Jesus (Revelation 1:1).
- John saw a host of angels worshiping and singing in Heaven (Revelation 5:11-12, 7:11-12).
- An angel told John what to write (Revelation 17:9).
- Angels are active throughout the Book of Revelation, revealing, punishing, praising, singing and prohibiting John from worshiping them. Angels are never to be worshiped (Revelation 22:8-10).

Michael, the Archangel

The most prominent of the angels is Michael, the Archangel. He is mentioned as having a major role in God's plans and human events (Daniel 10:13). According to Revelation 12:7-9, Michael and his heavenly

hosts fought against Satan and his angels, apparently at or before the dawn of time. Michael's "army" won, with Satan and his forces expelled from Heaven to the earth. Later we will study further about Satan.

Michael and Satan are eternal enemies. Michael disputed with Satan over the body of Moses (Jude 9). We don't know the circumstances, but can see clearly that neither Michael nor Satan ever gives up in their struggle over human beings.

In the perilous times preceding the return of Jesus, Michael will fight for God's people, protecting them from the final onslaught of Satan (Daniel 12:1).

Finally, Michael will add his voice to that of Jesus in announcing the Lord's return (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Gabriel, the Messenger

One angel in particular appears in the Bible as the chief messenger of God. He is Gabriel, the "man of God" who was entrusted with the most important communications from Heaven to earth.

His first recorded assignment was to interpret Daniel's vision of the two-horned ram and the one-horned goat (Daniel 8:1-27). His next appearance was in Daniel 9:20-27, in which he explained to Daniel the meaning of Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 weeks. In this case Gabriel announced to Daniel the eventual coming of Jesus the Messiah.

Other cases of God's messengers at work may at times have been Gabriel, but none is identified. Messengers talked with Hagar; announced to Abraham that he would have a special son, Isaac; that he was to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to God; told Abraham about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; warned Lot and his family to flee Sodom; spoke to Moses from the burning bush; guided and warned Israel during its wilderness trek; announced to Manoah and his wife that they would have a special son; gave instructions to Elijah; told the prophet Gad what to say to King David; and gave numerous messages to other Old Testament prophets.

In the New Testament Gabriel announced to Zacharias the coming birth of John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner (Luke 1:11-20).

Finally came the most important of all messages, which Gabriel carried to Mary, telling her that she would be the instrument for bringing into the world the Son of the Most High God, Jesus (Luke 1:26-38).

Gabriel may well have been the angel who appeared in a dream to Joseph in Matthew 1:18-21, and again in a dream in Matthew 2:13.

Do angels still operate today?

I cannot conceive that angels went back to Heaven permanently at the end of the Apostolic Age and had nothing more to do with the human race. That is tantamount to saying that the Holy Spirit returned to Heaven around 100 AD and has no part today in Christianity, the Church or Christians in general. What about His part, say, in conversion (John 3:5)? Does it continue today or did it cease at the end of the New Testament period?

I don't think I have ever seen an angel, even unawares. However, I have been on the brink of death five times and was saved by the grace of God each time. On three occasions I nearly drowned. I had polio. And then I was minutes late to catch an intercity bus in Brazil that ended up in a tragic crash down a deep ravine. What saved me? I don't know for sure, but I believe the Lord had a hand in it, perhaps through His angels (Hebrews 1:14). We do know that angels will be very prominent on the Last Day and in the Judgment (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

Knowles lists several things that angels do in this Christian era:

- They watch over the church (1 Corinthians 11:10).
- They rejoice when even one sinner repents and turns to God (Luke 15:10).
- They present our prayers to God (Revelation 8:3-4).
- They observe the church at worship (1 Corinthians 11:10). What do they see — worshipers or whisperers; singers or sleepers; participants or pew-sitters?
- They are interested in the entire redemption process (1 Corinthians 1:10-12).
- They witness the spiritual struggles of Christians (1 Corinthians 4:9). How careful we should be in our walk, for angels are watching us (Knowles 1986:105-109).

So where is our shelter?

Jesus said that the angels had always been active and always will be. They watch over the little children (Matthew 18:1-10). They will be the reapers at the great harvest at the end of time (Matthew 13:39). They monitor the church, rejoicing when sinners repent and turn to God. They witness our spiritual struggle. I don't know if I have a personal guardian angel, but all Christians have, at least in the corporate sense, guardian angels. They are to be honored, but never to be worshiped.

Chapter 40

The Raging Lion Is Still Loose

(Ephesians 6:10-12, 1 Peter 5:8)

Introduction

Just recently a half-breed lion-tiger, called a liger, considered a pet at a zoo, inexplicably attacked his keeper, killing him. Moral: Never turn your back on any carnivorous animal, no matter how tame it may appear to be.

Such savannah denizens as lions are extremely intelligent. I once watched a Discover show about lions. A pride of lions was stalking a herd of elephants. The lions knew they could not attack openly, because the elephants were too large and strong for them. What did they do? They waited until night, aware that elephants have poor night vision. Then they singled out a straggler and attacked it in force, finally bringing it down. Such a cunning strategy!

However, there is one kind of lion that is even more cunning and astute. I'm talking about Satan, that Old Enemy who "prowls about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). He is also known in the Bible as the Great Serpent (Revelation 12:9), the Accuser (Revelation 12:10), the Adversary (1 Peter 5:8), the Devil (Matthew 4:1), Lucifer (the Shining One, Isaiah 14:12), the Dragon (Revelation 20:2), and a false Angel of Light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

When did Satan first appear?

The first mention of Satan in the Bible is in Genesis 3, when, in the guise of a crafty serpent, he tempted Eve into eating the fruit of a tree called Knowledge of Good and Evil. God had given the first couple access to all of His blessings, but prohibited eating of that one tree. If they did, they would recognize evil and fall to it, robbing themselves of intimacy with God, their "paradise" on earth and unending life. They would also suffer hard labor, pain and misery in a greatly reduced life span.

The Old Serpent coiled around near Eve, asking her if it was true that God had forbidden them to eat from any tree in the garden. Did you catch that trick? He took a simple limitation and blew it totally out of proportion. Sounds like a political campaign, doesn't it? Each candidate accuses the other of lying and of "always saying bad things about me." Each candidate stretches the truth, makes promises that cannot be kept and puts words in the mouth of his opponent.

In this case Satan put words into God's mouth, but Eve corrected him. Then he began his subtle attack. "You've got to be kidding!" he might have said in today's terminology. "You will not surely die ... for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

That really got Eve's attention. "So, the fruit of that forbidden tree appears to be delicious. I really like the looks of it. And you say that it will also make me wise. So why not?" She took a bite of it and offered it to Adam, who also ate of it. Then suddenly they saw what they had never before seen. They were stark naked. They grabbed up some fig leaves and tried to cover their nakedness. But the damage was done. They had their garden home foreclosed on them. They had to get a job to provide their own food. They had to grow old, ill and die — all because Eve, being deceived, listened to the Evil One. And Adam was also guilty. He knew better, but ate the fruit, anyway.

Satan's three weapons

Strangely enough, Satan has only three weapons — pride of life, pride of the eye and lust of the flesh (1 John 2:16). These were the weapons he used on Eve and on Jesus, but in Jesus' case they failed totally. Satan tempted Him with physical desire (bread), the possibility of Jesus' becoming an earthly ruler over all kingdoms, and human pride — "If you are really God's Son, jump off of this building and prove it" (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus saw through Satan's weapons and turned them back on the Deceiver with passages from Scripture.

The same old three weapons — these are all he has, but he keeps using them successfully. His secret? He dresses them up in all kinds of attractive clothing. He arranges times when we are most vulnerable to attack us — times when we are despondent, tired, stressed out, grieving, put upon unfairly, defeated, ill ... He laid it on Jesus when the Lord had spent 40 days in prayer and fasting, and was therefore faint.

Other Bible examples of Satan's efforts to destroy us

The Old Devil appears early in the Book of Job, as he attempted to see righteous and wealthy Job destroyed for his integrity. His first try failed, but, as always, he tried again, taking away everything from Job except his wife. He even afflicted Job with terrible sores. Yet Job remained faithful to God and in the end received even more blessings than he had had earlier. Integrity does not depend on our situation in life, but on our being faithful in all circumstances. Paul said about his own circumstances, "... I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Philippians 4:12).

Satan stood up against Israel and incited King David to take an illegal census of the fighting men of the nation (1 Chronicles 21:1ff). The results were a plague that descended on the nation, killing 70,000 men. Satan's promptings were apparently an appeal to David's pride and they were successful. However, as always, pride went before destruction. The entire country suffered because of the king's stubborn attitude.

In the days of the prophet Zechariah, God's angel showed the prophet the high priest Joshua standing before the angel and Satan standing beside him to accuse the high priest. The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you!" (Zechariah 3:1-2). Any dedicated servant of the Lord can expect the Old Serpent to be right there, throwing stumbling blocks in his or her way.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said that some people "are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them" (Mark 4:15). Jesus saw this. For instance, the crowds that gathered around Him for free bread left Him, grumbling, when he began to teach a demanding sermon (John 6:41-42). Paul saw this. His attempts to convert Jewish leaders, as well as to convert philosophers in Athens, resulted in most of them turning a deaf ear. I have seen this in the mission field, where multitudes come out for a campaign, but most appear to be only curious and have no intention of absorbing the teaching being done.

Satan had an open door into the heart of Judas Iscariot, who was moved by some impulse (forcing Jesus' hand, personal financial gain ... ?) to betray his Lord. When Satan came into his heart like a malignant cancer, he proceeded on his fatal course (Luke 22:3-6).

Peter also succumbed to Satan's influence (Luke 22:31-34, 54-62), despite

Jesus' warning. In his case, his folly in denying Jesus was motivated by fear.

He repented with tears and, weeks later, was a stalwart proclaimer of Christ and His message.

Ananias and Sapphira allowed Satan to move in, wanting unmerited honor and lying about their generosity (or lack of it). They paid with their lives for their deception (Acts 5:1-11). Is it any wonder that great fear fell, not only on the church, but also on all who heard about this. If the Lord struck us down immediately when we sin, there would be fear today and a lot of funerals.

Is Satan alive and well today?

Any day's news in the paper or on TV makes it abundantly clear that Satan has a high level of control over our society. Apparently, he has countless of willing or unthinking hearts ready to receive him. This never has to happen, because the Lord provides us with more than sufficient armor as protection against his wiles.

The media takes the teeth out of the prowling lion, softening his image. It makes the devil a popular, fun-loving, naughty guy, who just wants to give you a good time. But just like a savage lion, the devil is not to be played with.

How to overcome Satan

“ ... be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:10-12).

So where is our shelter?

Eventually, Satan will get his just end, according to Revelation 20:10. Meanwhile, we must be alert daily against his wiles. We can slip so very easily. A pornographic scene or story suddenly passes by our eyes and we take it in. We are caught in a bind over some matter and, before we know it, we are lying, deceiving, or justifying our questionable behavior. Someone disappoints us and we turn on him or her. Another driver pulls some dangerous maneuver and we lay on our horn or shout. We see a pretty young thing and we lust after her. We seek revenge for a misdeed

against us. We let ourselves fall into body-destroying or immoral habits. We badmouth our president and other civil authorities. We gossip ... and the list goes on and on, as Satan gleefully claims more victims.

This is so foolish! In James 4:7 we read, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” We must be vigilant, constantly, because Satan is always sniffing around, awaiting an opportune moment to destroy us (Luke 4:13).

Here is a quote from an ancient Latin source, translated:

The Demon sneaks expertly
Tempting the honorable heart:
He sets forth trickery amidst praise, song and dance.
However amiably the Demon acts,
It is still worth less than the heart of Jesus.
The Flesh is tempted by sensuality;
Gluttony clings to our senses;
It overgrows, it encroaches, it stretches.
However appealing the Flesh is,
It is still worth less than the heart of Jesus.
Though the Universe may confer
Thousands upon thousands of praises,
They neither fulfill nor put out the desire of the heart.
However appealing the whole Universe is,
It is still worth less than the heart of Jesus.

Well said. The amiable trickster still captures souls by the millions. We must take off his mask and expose him for what he is — the ultimate deceiver; a liar and the father of lies.

Chapter 41

Satan's Demonic Forces

(Matthew 8:16, 25:41; Luke 8:36)

Introduction

Some very religious people see demons at work in almost every case of aberrant behavior or illness. At the opposite extreme are those who claim that Jesus destroyed all of the demons and their power, so that upon His resurrection, demons no longer existed or at least had no power over people.

Which point of view is correct? Did demons really disappear upon Christ's resurrection? When did they first appear in Scripture and when did they last appear? Let's find out.

Names for demons

Demons are given various names in the Bible. They are not only demons (Luke 8:26-30), but also the devil's angels, Satan's messengers (2 Corinthians 12:7) and evil spirits. They are not devils, as such, for there is only one devil, Satan, even though they may act like the devil. After all, they are his servants. In one case, they had a collective name, Legion, for they were many, all dwelling within one deranged person (Luke 8:26-31).

The source of demons

The Bible gives no clear treatment of demons and their source, yet it clearly teaches their existence. Theories abound as to their source: that they were fallen angels, that they belonged to some super race that existed in the early history of the world, or that they were the spirits of departed evil individuals. Take your pick, or add more, but none carries any biblical weight. We must simply accept the fact of their presence without knowing how they came to be.

The nature of these evil spirits

Knowles (1986:185) says,

“The basic nature of demons, according to the Bible, is two-fold:

(1) as to their actual state of being they are spirit; (2) as to their moral character they are unclean. Demons are unclean spirits.”

Jesus recognized them as spirit beings or spirits, as well as demons, using the terms interchangeably (Matthew 8:16). They are unclean and foul (Matthew 12:43 NIV; Revelation 18:2 KJV). They even fall into degrees of evil. Referring to an evil spirit cast out of a man, Jesus said,

“It goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go and live there” (Luke 11:26).

By nature demons are determined to possess humans and even to destroy them. Their desire to inhabit human souls is so great that, when confronted with losing their “home,” the Gadarene demons begged Jesus to send them into a herd of pigs, that apparently preferable to existing without a living host (Matthew 8:32; Mark 5:12; Luke 8:32).

Their destructive tendency is seen in their desire to injure and even destroy their human hosts. A demon-possessed man in Mark 1:26 was torn or shaken violently by his demon. The Gadarene demon-possessed man often cut himself. In Mark 9:14-28 a boy possessed by an evil spirit would gnash his teeth, foam at the mouth and suffer convulsions. At times the evil spirit would throw him into a body of water or into a fire, in an effort to destroy him. In Acts 19:16, a demon-possessed man jumped seven brothers and beat them so severely that they fled naked and bleeding.

Was demon activity limited only to the ministry of Christ?

Some believe that the activity of demons only occurred during the ministry of Christ, claiming that in His death, He conquered the evil spirits for all time. Is this true? No, for evil spirits flourished in Old Testament times and also during the early history of the church. In Acts we find the following instances of evil spirits or demons being cast out:

- The ill and those tormented by evil spirits were brought to the apostles and were healed (Acts 5:16).
- In Samaria Philip healed those with evil spirits (Acts 8:7).
- Paul cast out a spirit of divination from a girl (Acts 16:16-18).
- In Ephesus those afflicted with evil spirits were healed (Acts 19:11).
- Also in Ephesus, the seven sons of Sceva were severely beaten by an evil spirit (Acts 19:13-16).

- Paul said that the pagans offered their sacrifices to demons (1 Corinthians 10:19-22).
- Demons were very much alive in the days of James (James 2:19).
- Demons seek to separate believers from their Lord (Romans 8:38).
- We are to put on the whole armor of God, in order to fortify ourselves against Satan and His forces (Ephesians 6:10-18).
- In the latter times people would follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons (1 Timothy 4:1).
- In 1 John 4:6, John warns against seducing spirits.
- Revelation has many references to demons and evil spirits. In Chapter 18, for instance, fallen “Babylon” would be the haunt of demons.

So we have abundant evidence that from Acts through Revelation, demons were alive, well and bent on perverting the faith of Christians.

Do demons still exist?

This is like asking if Satan still exists. Few believers would deny his sly hand in all kinds of situations. We all should know that the whole world is under the control of the Evil One (1 John 5:19). Knowles sums up our present-day world in these words:

“How else can we explain the ungodly, unbelievable things that are going on? ... Satanism. Cults. Witchcraft. Pornography. Alcohol and drug abuse. Violence. Nudity. Illicit sex. Torture. Murder. Abortion. “Mercy” killings. Child abuse. Wife beatings. Parents killing children. Children killing parents. Mates killing mates ...” (Knowles 1986:297).

The list could go on and on ... Scams. Robbery. Purposeful deception. Lying. Cheating. Corruption in public office. Misuse of company or government funds. Sense of entitlement. Self-absorption. Revenge.

Just read the daily paper or watch the news on TV. Can you account for all of this perversion apart from the work of Satan and his minions?

During our 18 years in mission service in Brazil, which is rife with Spiritism and witchcraft, we have seen cases of behavior that appeared

to be exactly like those described in the New Testament. In my travels in Africa and Asia I have seen like behavior. Whether we want to admit it or not, demons still roam the earth doing the Raging Lion's bidding.

The end of Satan and his demons

The Bible predicts clearly Satan's end, along with that of his "angels" (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10). Hell was prepared primarily for the devil and his hosts. At the judgment they will be thrown into the fiery lake, but not only they. All who are disobedient to Christ will also be cast into the fire.

So where is our shelter?

What should we believe about Satan and his minions? If you doubt that demonic forces still operate in the world, just read or watch the news. Evil is so gross it can't help but be motivated by Satan and carried out by his evil agents, even called "angels" or "messengers" in the Bible text. No human being is totally exempt from the wiles of the devil and his cohorts. We must watch constantly because the Lion is still loose and so is his pride of demons. Our shelter, though, lies in the fact that he cannot enter where he is not allowed. We can resist the Devil and he will flee from us (James 4:7). God always makes a way of escape for His children, if we seek it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Chapter 42

Wrap-up and Applications

Introduction

This is the wrap-up chapter of Volume 1 on **In the Storms of Life, Do We Have a Shelter?** Our purpose has been to enable all of us to explain why we believe there are essential basic doctrines regarding God and His will for us, and to put them into practice. Now let us look back briefly at what we have studied in this text:

Review of each section

- God is the eternal Creator, our Heavenly Father, the God of our Founding Fathers, a God who is good, holy, beyond our ways, yet near to us. He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, loving and patient, yet our judge. He is always consistent, yet just.
- Christ is our Lord, forever God, but born as the Brother of man. He is the Word of God incarnate. He is the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the provider of spiritual rebirth, living water and bread of life. He is the light of the world, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the True Vine, our Intercessor, sacrifice and Risen Savior. He has absolute preeminence. He is our eternal High Priest and our King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Among all who have ever walked on this earth, He is absolutely unique.
- The Holy Spirit is God, one Person of the Godhead. He has a personality and a task that began at the creation and continues on until eternity. His work is seen throughout the entire Bible, as He guided individuals into God's will and revealed the future to them. He still functions in conversion and in the daily walk of Christians. He invites all to come to Jesus.
- At the end of time there will be a general resurrection and Judgment Day, when each individual will be judged according to our deeds (and more than our deeds; our thoughts and attitudes). This eternal court verdict on us cannot be appealed.

- There is a wonderful destiny awaiting the righteous — Heaven. This is an eternal place of rest, comfort and worship.
- For the unrighteous, there is also a place reserved — eternal Hell, the final abode of the devil and his angels — a place of fire and brimstone.
- Angels have always served God, acting as His agents and messengers, to do His will on the earth and in Heaven. They were active throughout the Bible and on into the eternal realm. Jesus will return with His angels on that Final Day.
- Satan, that Raging Lion, has gone about, to and fro on the earth, seeking whom he may devour. At the end of time he and his demonic forces will be thrown into the Lake of Fire.

As commentator Paul Harvey would have said it, “the rest of the story” is scheduled to follow this book with volume 2.

Meanwhile, remember that we have a shelter to which to flee when the storms of life strike us: “I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings” (Psalm 61:4).

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