

THE BIBLE TEACHER

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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

What Happens After One Dies?

Does man live after his earthly life is over? Or does death end all of man's existence? What does the Bible teach? God is the Creator of man. Since God is Spirit (John 4:24), and in the beginning He had created man after His own image (Genesis 1:26, 27)), man, therefore, is both body and spirit or soul. God had first formed man of the dust of the ground, that is, man's body was made from the earth, and then, in that form of the earth or dust, God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul or being (Genesis 2:7). Man, therefore, is a spirit being, dwelling in a mortal body. When man dies, it is not the end of his existence. The spirit of man never dies, because the spirit is immortal. What is called death, is in fact separation of the soul or the spirit from man's body. Death does not mean cessation or complete annihilation of a person. James 2:26 says, "the body without the spirit is dead." The body dies, not the spirit. It is the body of man that goes to the grave or crematorium not the spirit. Where does the spirit go? The spirit returns to God. Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, "Then the dust will return to earth as it was," that is, at death, "and the spirit will return to God who gave it."

When the Bible says that at death man's spirit returns to God, it does not mean that the spirit goes to heaven, since God is in heaven. But it does mean that the spirit of every person who dies goes to live in the place God has appointed for the departed

spirits, where they will live until Christ comes back on the day of resurrection and judgment of all (John 5:28, 29; Acts 17:30, 31). No one, therefore, after death, enter into heaven or into hell. Where are the dead then?

In Luke chapter 16:19-31, Christ told the story of two men who once lived. One of them was very rich, and the other was very poor. In the course of time both men died. Christ in this narration taught that when the rich man died, his body was buried, but his spirit entered into the state of misery where he found himself in great torment. But, on the other hand, when the poor man died, he immediately entered into the state of blessedness where he was in great comfort. Both of them were in their conscious existence, as they knew what both of them were experiencing. The rich man was there, because he was wicked on earth, and the poor man was there where he was, because he was righteous on earth. Also, we learn from the story of the rich man and Lazarus that both of them were in a place called "Hades." Luke 16:23 says, about the rich man, "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." Both men were in Hades. The word "Hades" is a Greek word, (The New Testament of the Bible was written in Greek), and means, "the unseen or invisible world of the departed spirits."

Although, the rich man and Lazarus both were in Hades, they were not, however, in the same place or section. Because when the rich man had requested that Lazarus be sent over to him that he may dip the tip of his finger in water so that he may cool the rich man's tongue as he was tormented in the flames, his request was rejected and he was told that there was a *great gulf fixed* between them, "so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us." (Luke 16:26). Hades, the unseen and the invisible abode of the departed souls, according to the Bible, is divided into two sections or compartments. One is "Paradise" where the righteous are, and the other is "Tartarus" the abode of the wicked. "Paradise" primarily means "a place or state of bliss, a pleasure garden." (Revelation 2:7). Tartarus, on the other hand, means "the place of woe and punishment." (2 Peter 2:4).

Let us observe, when Christ died on the cross, His body was buried in a tomb, but His spirit went into Paradise in Hades. To

the penitent criminal, just before His death, Jesus had said, "today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43). Therefore, after death, Christ's spirit went into Paradise, and so did the spirit of the criminal. Three days later when Christ's body was raised, His spirit came out of Paradise to reunite with His raised body, and He lived again on earth for forty days before ascending back to the Father in heaven. Christ's spirit did not stay in Hades, and neither did his body perish in the grave. When the apostles began to preach the gospel of Christ, after His death, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven, Peter therefore told the large crowd of his Jewish audience, quoting from the book of Psalms concerning the Christ, what the prophet had said about Him: "For you will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption." (Acts 2:27, 31). Both Christ and the criminal had entered into Hades after their death. And as Christ had promised the criminal, they both were in Paradise in Hades. But only Christ's spirit came out of the Hades and His body was raised. The spirit or the soul of the penitent criminal is still in Hades, and his body remains in dust, and the same is true of all others, both the righteous and the wicked, who have died, their spirits remain in Hades, either in Paradise, if righteous, or in Tartarus, if wicked, and their bodies in the dust (Genesis 3:19), and will continue to be there until the day of resurrection and judgment of all when Christ will appear. (John 5:28,29).

On the day Christ will come back, death and Hades will be no more, (Revelation 20:14), and bodies of all the dead will be raised from the dust; the resurrected new bodies will be different (1 Corinthians 15:35-38), they will be immortal and incorruptible, and all of this will take place in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:50-54). After the resurrection and judgment the righteous will enter heaven and the wicked will enter hell to live there forever. (Matthew 25:46). The righteous will enter into eternal life in heaven, and the wicked will enter into everlasting punishment in hell. Man is a spiritual eternal being, created in the image of God, and therefore, like God man will exist forever. However, remember, no one is going to spend eternity in heaven or in hell. Because eternity is not like a currency note or bill that can be spent. Eternity is unending. There is also a marked

difference between Hades, and heaven and hell. Hades is temporary, and will be cast in the lake of fire on the day of judgment (Revelation 20:14). Heaven and hell, on the other hand, are everlasting and eternal (Matthew 25:46). In Hades only spirits enter, but in heaven and in hell both spirit and body will enter (Matthew 10:28). Just as the joy of heaven will be eternal so will be the punishment of hell.

In conclusion: this life on earth is the only life each one of us have. We can choose now where we want to live in the next life in eternity forever. After this earthly life will be over, there will be no second chance. This is as serious as it can get to be. There is no Purgatory, as some would want to imagine and believe. Like the rich man in Jesus' narrative was told to remember, "that in your life time you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented" (Luke 16:25). Each person in this life now has the opportunity to choose for oneself where one want to live in eternity after the life of this world is over.

Be Not Deceived

J.C. CHOATE

From time immemorial, Satan has used religion as an avenue of deception. He changed God's words to deceive Adam and Eve in the Garden, and he changes God's words today, accompanied by lying signs and wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9), to deceive the masses. Be wary and be forewarned.

The Lord's Word warns again and again that we be not deceived. To be deceived means that one has been misled, lied to, that he has been taught and has accepted false doctrine. Since we have the Scriptures to read and study, you wouldn't think that a person could easily be deceived, but he can be.

Jesus said, "*Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many*" (Matthew 24:4,5). Just imagine people today being deceived by impostors claiming to be the Christ or the Messiah! We would not think that intelligent people would fall for such lies, but many do.

Paul warned, *"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? **Be not deceived**; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9,10). **"Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners"** (1 Corinthians 15:33).*

Writing to the Galatians, Paul said, *"**Be not deceived**; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:7,8).*

The Ephesians were warned, *"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:14). **"Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience"** (5:6).*

Paul reminded the Thessalonians, *"**Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition**" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). He wrote to Timothy, **"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived"** (2 Timothy 3:13).*

James wrote, *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, **deceiving your own selves**" (James 1:22). Then John was inspired to write, **"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us "** (1 John 1:8).*

From these passages of Scripture, and others that could be given, we learn that it is possible to be deceived, misled, and for a person finally to be eternally lost because of deception.

- **One can deceive himself.** He can do something, or believe something, so much that he convinces himself it is right, whether it is or not. Many centuries ago the prophet Obadiah wrote in verse 3, *"The pride of your heart has deceived you."*
- **One can allow himself to be deceived by others,** as Paul warned in Romans 16:17,18: *"...note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them, for they who are such*

do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." Perhaps the listener has so much confidence in a preacher or teacher that he convinces himself he is being taught the truth, even though it contradicts what the Bible says.

- **One may be deceived by a popular false doctrine.** Often the error goes back for many years, and it has been so widely taught and believed that it seems more true than the Word of God itself, which it actually contradicts. The warning of Paul in Romans 16:18, concerning the "*smooth words and flattering speeches which deceive the hearts of the simple*" should keep all on their guard.
- **One may be deceived by following the majority.** A man may reason that it would not be possible for so many to be wrong, but he forgets what Jesus said in Matthew 7:13,14: "*...wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.*"

There are so many ways to be deceived when it comes to the plan God has made for our salvation, the church, acceptable worship, the kind of life He wants us to live, the certainty of the return of Christ and the judgment that will follow, and even eternity itself. Man-made teachings are generally accepted as **truth**, while the actual truths as revealed in the Scriptures may be rejected as error — simply because so many have heard men's lies more than they have heard God's truths! We plead with one and all to follow only God's Word in matters of the soul.

It is a sad fact that many "good" people tell themselves that God will overlook their failure to obey Him, on the grounds that they **did not know** what the Bible taught. They have **deceived themselves**. God has not promised to save us on the basis of ignorance but on the basis of faith and obedience.

Message To The Church At Sardis ***(Rev. 3:1-6)***

THOMAS R. DOHLING

The message to the church at Sardis is found in Revelation

3:1-6. To them, Jesus presents himself as "He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars" (3:1), signifying that He has the fullness of the Spirit and implies His infinite power.

At the outset Jesus says: "I know." He always knows what each church and individual Christians are thinking, saying, feeling, and doing. He lets the Christians at Sardis know (3:1) that He is aware of—

- Their Works;
- Their having a name;
- Their being alive;
- That they are in fact dead.

Jesus knows all about the church at Sardis. He notes some of their good points here. However, everything is not what they seem. They are working, they have a name, they appear alive, but "you are dead" says the Lord. The church appears to be physically alive, but it is spiritually dead.

So our Lord admonishes them to "*be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God*" (3:2). What a terrible evaluation! Even what they have "are ready to die." Although they were doing something for the Lord, Jesus did not find their "works perfect before God." Apparently they are just going through the motions of serving the Lord and their hearts are not really in it.

Jesus therefore reminds them "how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent" (3:3). If they failed in this, Jesus says, "I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you" (3:3). Judgment and destruction will be swift and sudden.

Our Lord makes a note of "a few names in Sardis" who have not soiled or dirtied their garments [garments stand for character]. These are the faithful few who are living according to the Lord's will and have guarded themselves against sin. To these faithful few the Lord promises, "They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy" (3:4).

Jesus concludes His message to the church at Sardis with a promise to those who are faithful: "*He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father*

and before His angels" (3:5).

Lesson: Faithful overcomers in the church shall be "clothed in white garments" since their sins have been blotted out (cf. Matt.13:43: "*Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*"). Their names will always be in "the Book of Life." Our Lord "will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

Achieving Success In Life (Part 1)

CLEM THURMAN

We live in an era when "success" has become a kind of "god" to be worshiped. I suppose that, to some extent, all of us get caught up in the pursuit of it. It is a tragedy, however, that so many people, longing for success in life, do not really know what constitutes success. Nor do they know the necessary ingredients for a successful life. In the long ago, God said to Joshua, "*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate thereon day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success*" (Josh. 1:8).

But what shall be the standard of success? What constitutes success? Quite often a coach and player disagree on what makes a good play. Parent and child often disagree on what will make for "success" for the child. Seemingly, most folk measure success in money, but this is most certainly a phantom standard. The rich of today are often destitute tomorrow. Let us see if we can find a better standard than that.

Solomon, in explaining what this life is all about, listed the various things which had been his: riches, wisdom, pleasures, accomplishments. But he then declared, "*Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity*" (Eccle. 12:8). What, then, is man's purpose, and how can we achieve success? He answers, "*This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man*" (Eccle. 12:13). To achieve real success in life, we must realize the very purpose of life.

But what are the ingredients that make for success in this life? What must we do to achieve real success in our lives? In this article, and in following two in next issues of this magazine we will explore this from the word of the Lord.

A Life of Faith

The noted atheist, Col. Robert Ingersol, stood at the graveside of his brother and said, "Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights, we cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry." Other atheists have made similar statements. "I am taking a fearful leap into the dark" (Hobbs). "Dreary, dreary; all is dark" (Gibbon). That is the forlorn despair that is characteristic of those who have no faith in God nor in eternity.

Contrast the above with statements of the apostle Paul: "*For I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day*" (2 Tim. 1:12). He could say that because of His life in Christ: "*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me*" (Gal. 2:20). And near the end of his life, Paul wrote, "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain . . . But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better*" (Phil. 1:21-23). Paul wasn't afraid of death, for he had faith in the Lord to sustain him beyond!

A successful life must be based on faith: faith in God (Heb. 11:6) and faith in Jesus Christ (John 8:24). But the successful life is also based on faith in one's self! Too many times we hide behind the excuse, "I can't." But Jesus said, "*All things are possible to him that believeth*" (Mark 9:23). All of us have seen examples of "underdog" teams winning the big game because they believed in themselves and each other. But we don't just believe in our own abilities and our own strengths. We believe in Christ working in us. Paul wrote, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me*" (Phil. 4:13). When we really believe in God and Christ, then we can depend on His promise, "*God works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (Phil. 2:13). If God

works in us, we cannot fail! As the Bible says, *"We are more than conquerors through him that loved us"* (Rom. 8:37).

A Life of Obedience.

When God told Joshua, *"Then thou shalt have good success"* (Josh. 1:8), it was based on the premise that he would seek the will of the Lord and do it. Obedience is the natural result of faith. Look at the great servants of God, as they are found in Heb. 11. *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice . . . By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death . . . By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark . . . By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed"* (vs. 4,5,7,8).

Many today would disparage the necessity of obedience, believing that "faith alone" is enough, or that God will find a way to save all of us, anyway. But each of those in Heb. 11 (above), and the others listed in that chapter, believed God and did what He told them. That same principle must be at work in our lives today, *"Ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness"* (Rom. 6:17-18). And for that reason, Peter declared, *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth"* (1 Pet. 1:22). The only way to please God, and achieve success in life, is to obey Him.

It is said of Jesus, *"Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered"* (Heb. 5:8). And as we *"follow in his steps"* (1 Pet. 2:21), we will also obey. The Lord said, *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven"* (Matt. 7:21).

A successful life is built on the foundation of obedience to God. As Jesus put it, *"If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). The successful life is not built on the basis of doing what we want, for: *"I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"* (Jer. 10:23). God created us, and He knows what is best for us that we might achieve happiness and success.

A Life of Dedication

To succeed, as individuals, we must be dedicated to

something greater than ourselves, dedicated to a worthy cause—dedicated to God. The apostle Paul wrote of his dedication in these words: *"Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ . . . Brethren, I count not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before. I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil 3:7-8,13-14).

That is real dedication! The apostle Paul had been persecuted and had faced all manner of difficulties for the cause of Christ. He had been beaten, whipped, put in jail, shipwrecked, stoned and was in constant peril (2 Cor. 11:23ff), but he said, *"Our light affliction, which is for the moment"* (2 Cor. 4:17). When Paul was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time, he stopped to meet with the brothers in Christ in Caesarea. The prophet Agabus there foretold he would be arrested and put in chains in Jerusalem, and the brothers begged him not to go. *"Then Paul answered, What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Acts 21:13).

That kind of dedication made Paul a great servant of Jesus Christ, and enabled him be a real success in life. A dedicated life, a life of dedication to the Lord and His service, will make you a real success. So, determine to live a life of faith in God and in Christ, living in constant obedience to His will, and dedicating yourself to that kind of noble life. That will bring you, as God said, *"Good success."*

Saved From What?

JOHNNY RAMSEY

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Jesus promised salvation to those who believe the gospel and are baptized. Have you ever wondered what it is that we are saved from? Salvation is truly a blessed and joyous relationship.

The very word brings happiness to our souls. Some of the finest spiritual songs extol the splendor of redemption. Jesse Pounds wrote these glorious words:

*Soul, a Savior thou art needing,
Soul, a Savior waits for thee;
Hear His words of tender pleading,
Hear His gracious, "Come to me."*

Would it not be tragic indeed if there were no possibility of being saved from this old wicked world? What if the hope of cleansing from sin were absolutely beyond the realm of possibility? *"Without hope and without God in the world"* (Eph. 2:11-12), would be our portion here below! An unknown penman challenges our attention with thoughts that bring us face to face with Jesus:

*I knelt in tears at the feet of Christ,
In the hush of the twilight dim,
And all that I was, or hoped or sought,
Surrendered unto Him.
Crowned or crucified—my heart shall know
No King but Christ, Who loved me so!*

But what would be our plight if Golgotha had never been? The blood shed at the cross gives us hope for salvation otherwise unobtainable.

Through obedience to the gospel plan of redemption (Rom. 6:16-18), we can be saved from sin. The Redeemer came *"to seek and to save the lost"* (Luke 19:10) and to deliver us from bondage of death (Heb. 2:14). He gave Himself for the iniquities of the whole world (1 John 2:2) and became the One Who died for all (2 Cor. 5:14). The Lord Jesus Christ is *"able to save to the uttermost"* (Heb. 7:25) as God's grace is found in Him unto eternal glory (2 Tim. 2:10).

Not only does obeying the truth free us from sin, it also saves us from being separated from our Maker. The prophet Isaiah clearly speaks of the loneliness and sorrow that sin produces: *"Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear"* (Isa. 59:2). Ultimately, were it not for the sacrifice of Jesus our Lord, we would experience eternal separation from the Creator (Rev. 20:14-15; 2 Thes. 1:7-9). To be ransomed from a devil's hell is one of the richest blessings which Christ brings.

We also are saved from Satan's snare, when we receive and obey the Holy Scriptures (James 1:21-22). The Tempter desires our condemnation (Luke 22:31) and lays traps to capture our very souls (1 Tim. 3:7). He is clever and tenacious and often successful (2 Cor. 2:11; 11:3). But fortunately Christ is more powerful (1 John 3:8; 4:4). To be saved from condemnation and darkness through acceptance of the simple way of salvation makes Christianity most appealing (Acts 13:38-39). When we resist the devil (James 4:7) and draw near to God, this life and the one to come is made more beautiful immediately.

Virgil, who wrote some thirty years before Christ, spoke of the hopeless nature of oppressed people when he cogently stated, "There is but one safe thing for the vanquished: Not to hope for safety!" Conversely, regardless of the external circumstances, servants of the Savior are always victorious and triumphant (2 Cor. 2:14). Verily, we are *"more than conquerors through Him that loved us"* (Rom. 8:37).

Christianity even saves us from ourselves! Where the Lord Jesus rules, selfishness cannot dwell (Luke 9:23). What a blessing it is to be delivered from the ego-centered lifestyle that captivates billions of the earth's dwellers. The elder brother mentality of Luke 15, wherein personal pronouns occupy centre state, is truly a miserable existence. Being redeemed by the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:19) means that we have been saved to serve. This provides meaning, depth and direction to a life previously overwhelmed by shallow, earthly emphasis. When we attempt to guide ourselves, we miss so many verdant pastures the Creator would like to show to us (Jer. 10:23).

Salvation in Christ also delivers us from the sting of death (1 Cor. 15:54-57). From the moment we enter the Lord, and thus partake of a quality of life that is of eternal consequence (John 17:3), we eagerly look forward to that place where *"the wicked cease from troubling and the weary be at rest"* (Job. 3:17). Therefore, when this earth is rolled up like an old garment and cast aside (Heb. 1; 2 Pet. 3:11), the loyal followers of the Prince of Peace shall know assuredly that salvation in the Lord was truly the pearl of great price. When the Master promised, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16), He opened up vistas of beauty and joy forevermore.

The Second Coming Of Christ

WILLIAM WOODSON

The Lord's Supper is observed with an awareness, among other reasons, that thereby we "*show the Lord's death till he come*" (1 Corinthians 11:26). How very significant is this realization that we look backward to the body and blood of the Lord and that we also look forward to His coming again.

It is remarkable that the second coming of Christ has been the occasion of confusion and uncertainty. As one listens to or reads from some advocates of views concerning this event, there are numerous confusing words and ideas which are presented. Consider for a moment the following: *The Rapture, The Tribulation, The Time of Jacob's Trouble, The Two Resurrections, The Time Clock of the Lord*, etc. Such terms as the rapture, the time clock of the Lord, and the two resurrections are not found in the Bible; the theory which gives meaning to these terms is not taught in Scripture. There is little wonder that such views produce confusion.

The Bible, though, does not confuse us concerning the Lord's return. Note these brief statements concerning this vital theme:

1. Jesus promised that He will come again (John 14:3). This promise was echoed at the time of the Lord's ascent (Acts 1:11); at this return "*every eye will see him*" (Revelation 1:7).

2. The time of the second coming is not revealed. No signs of it have been recorded for us to use in seeking to set its date, whether soon or late. Jesus said, "*But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only*" (Matthew 24:36). He repeated that no one knows the hour of the coming of the Lord (Matthew 24:42, 44; 25:13). Assured of its reality, we wait in patience and hope for this fulfillment of Christ's word.

3. The resurrection of the dead will be at the time of the Lord's return, stated in several verses to occur at the "*last day*." Jesus said He will raise the dead on "*the last day*" (John 6:39,40,44,54). This will be the time of what Paul calls the "*last trump*" (1 Corinthians 15:52). Also, the judgment, said Jesus, will be at "*the last day*" (John 12:48).

4. At the Lord's return, all will be gathered before Him

for the judgment (Matthew 25:31ff). Paul stated that at the Lord's return "*Then cometh the end*" (1 Corinthians 15:24). The destiny of those who hear the voice of Christ calling the dead from the graves will be determined by whether they have been righteous or unrighteous in this life. Of this, Jesus spoke concerning "*the hour that is coming*" (John 5:28-29).

These clear words concerning the coming of Christ, the last day, and the hour of the resurrection do not provide or allow for an elaborate scheme of human device concerning a supposed rapture, two resurrections of the dead, a thousand-year reign on earth, or a host of other purported teachings concerning His return. Better by far to rest content with the clear truth of the revealed Word.

Do You Know God Exists?

ED ALLEN

Let me ask you a few questions I have been forced to ask myself these last few months, "How strong is your fundamental Bible knowledge? Do you **know** God exists? If your friend, coworker, family member or your neighbor asked you to **prove** God exists, could you do it? Do you **know** the Bible is God's message to man? Or has your knowledge of these facts been torn at, worn away and eroded to the point where maybe the Bible is just a 'good book'?"

Does God exist? How's that for question number one? A great question. God most assuredly exists, and we should be able to prove it to any and all who would ask us to do so! The Bible is His message to us and to all mankind, and that is a **proven fact** that is indisputable by any rational being. Let me stop here and define what I mean by "rational". By "rational" I mean someone who has the ability to reason. A person may be rational and still arrive at a wrong conclusion because of poor judgment or a lack of information upon which to base one's conclusion. However, when one can arrive at a conclusion using logic and reason, that person is said to be "rational".

Now, does God exist? This is a question man has asked

since our very beginning, but it is a question one can answer rationally. It was Descartes who said "*I think, therefore I am.*" That is just a fancy way of saying "we exist". Man is here. Do you know anyone who believes that we do not exist? We aren't talking about God, yet just us. Rational people will admit that they exist. If we *are*, there must be something or someone that caused us to be.

Consider Stonehenge. Stonehenge is a pile of rocks arranged in such a way as to indicate intelligent design. Have you ever heard anyone imply that Stonehenge just happened? That those rocks are where they are by accident or chance? Nope. No rational person would ever suggest that pile of rocks was placed there in that particular way by accident. Something as simple as a pile of rocks can indicate a designer, a maker, a creator. Yet, here we sit in our houses which we would never believe could have just happened, reading this article under artificial light which could not have possibly occurred by chance, taking advantage of two eyes and a brain that many people would suggest we obtained as sole recipients of the luckiest roll of the cosmic dice ever. *It just happened*, you see. Pure, dumb luck!

A house could never happen by chance, not in a million years. A car? No way. Your cell phone? Please! But you, your eyes, brain, lungs, skin, heart, etc. — these fantastic tools could have happened just by pure coincidence, dumb luck, blind chance! "Your need for a God Who created you makes you irrational," our society says. "We can't teach kids about God. God is too far-fetched. He's preposterous! Instead, we'll tell them we 'evolved' over million of years. " Yeah, that's **much** more rational..

You *think*, therefore **you are**. If you are, then you were made. If you were made, then there exists a **maker**. If you were created, then there exists a **creator**. If you were designed, then there exists a **designer**. This rational thought process is true of your house, your car, your furniture, your clothes, all of your belongings — and it is true of **you**. You exist, therefore there is One who caused you to exist. Logical, reasonable, rational, simple, and — above all else — **true!**

In this article we did not use the Bible to prove a **maker** exists. If you have a friend who doesn't believe in God, he certainly doesn't believe God wrote the Bible. Therefore, using the Bible

to prove to your friend that God exists is futile. But if your friend can use logic, He should have been able to follow this line of reasoning to its logical end, and he should have concluded: **There is a God!**

Can We Understand the Bible Alike?

R.C. SPEARS

The above heading is a misnomer. It is impossible for two people to understand anything and not understand it alike. We understand facts alike; we understand commands alike. It is **possible to misunderstand** a fact or a command, but our differences arise from our **misunderstanding** and not from our **understanding!**

There is a divine and inspired rule running all through the Bible that should be our guide in matters of religion. In Deuteronomy 29:29 we read, *"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."* Secret things belong to God; revealed things belong to us. Too many want to pry into the secret things, or to speak where the Bible does not speak, while they may have very little interest in the plainly revealed truths in God's word. Such is the perversity of human nature.

In 2 Timothy 4:1,2 we read where Paul charged Timothy to preach *the Word*. Timothy was not at liberty to speculate on the Word of God, but to preach it. We are not to preach our opinions, but the Word. We need to spend more time preaching the Word and not so much time preaching *about* the Word. *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God"* (1 Peter 4:11).

All religious people are willing to wear the name "Christian". We do not divide over this name. We understand this name alike. Where does the division arise? It comes from introducing religious ideas foreign to, and unknown to, the Bible.

Heaven belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, and all who get there will have done things in this life **His way**, and **not their own**. In John 12:48, Jesus said, *"He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I*

have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak."

Which Is Better—The Old Paths Or The New Ways?

CLYDE M. MILLER

If one desires to follow the Scriptures, one will find that the answer to the title question varies in regard to the situation at hand.

The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day accused Stephen of teaching that Jesus of Nazareth would "change the customs [rites] Moses handed down to us" (Acts 6:14 NIV), and indeed he had. In essence, they were saying the old is better than the new. Jesus had earlier indicted them for rejecting their own Scriptures by refusing to believe what Moses had taught concerning Him (John 5:36-44). And the New Testament book of Hebrews teaches that the Law was only temporary and was to last only until the time of the new way (Hebrews 9:10, "order" NIV, "the time of reformation" NKJV, NASB). Hebrews also uses "better" or "superior" at least five times to show that the new covenant under Christ is superior to the old covenant under Moses (Hebrews 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 12:23).

We must note, however, that this change was ordained by God and that the change was anticipated and prophesied in the Old Testament. Because Christ is the perfect mediator of the New Covenant, the new is obviously better than the old. These considerations do not justify the unscriptural changes being made in the contemporary churches today.

Jeremiah, in the 7th century B.C., begged his decadent people, the Israelites, to ask for the good/ancient paths, the good way, and walk in it in order to find rest for their souls. Yet, they answered, "We will not walk in it" (Jeremiah 6:16-17 NIV). God, therefore, threatened them with destruction in a foreign land.

The nation's attitude resulted in complete apostasy from God and led them into idolatry. For this, even in Jeremiah's day, they

were forced to flee to Egypt in order to escape the wrath of the Babylonian armies that had already taken most of Judah captive, including Jeremiah.

As incredible as it seems, the Jews in Egypt declared they were better off when they worshiped the Queen of Heaven than when they worshiped only Yahweh (Jeremiah 44). Therefore, God threatened to destroy Egypt, including the Jews who lived there.

We can readily accept the fact that the new covenant is far better than the old, for divine authority so declares it. We must also accept the fact, however, that new ways in religion that constitute departures from divine authority are rebellion against God and will eventually bring impenitent apostates under the judgment of Almighty God. We hope and pray that today's apostates will listen, learn and return and so receive God's blessings.

David's Other Sin

ALICE CRAVENS MOORE

When one thinks about the life of David, his sin with Bathsheba always comes to mind. David's adultery was shocking enough, but his attempt to cover it up resulted in the death of Uriah the Hittite who was sent to the front line of battle by Joab, the commander of the army. Joab was acting on David's orders (2 Samuel 11:14-21). As terrible as that behavior was, David did something else that caused more chaos and a greater number of deaths. However, that sin is rarely mentioned in a sermon or discussed in a Bible class.

Because of his sin in numbering the people of Israel, David was responsible for the deaths of 70,000 men (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21). How is it then that Scripture tells us, "David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5 NKJV)? To be the source of the unnecessary death of any one person is terrible, but to cause the deaths of 70,000 people is unthinkable. Despite this, David was called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22).

What were the extenuating circumstances that caused God to mention one sin when he was summarizing David's life and not the other? Is there a lesson to be learned here? Why did God apparently "forget" a sin of such magnitude in which the deaths of thousands would result and "remember" David's sin of adultery and the murder of Uriah? Could it have something to do with David's mindset toward the two transgressions?

David and Uriah

In the first sin, that of adultery and murder, the prophet Nathan came to David and rebuked him through the use of a parable, convicting David of the heinousness of his sin. Rather than blatantly accuse David of his wrongdoing, Nathan described the theft of a little lamb from a very poor man. The individual who had done this was rich and had many flocks. David said such a man was worthy of death (2 Samuel 12:5), and when he realized he himself was that man, he had no choice but to acknowledge the evil he had done. David finally comprehended he could not rationalize or defend his behavior.

David had concealed his sin of adultery and murder for some time-long enough to marry Bathsheba and for a son to be born (2 Samuel 11:27). Would David have ever confessed that sin without the prodding of Nathan? Would David have acknowledged his transgressions as he did in Psalm 51 if the Lord had not sent Nathan to him (12:1)? David told God, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight" (Psalm 51:4).

Of course, every sin is against the Lord. But was it not true also that David had sinned against Uriah and perhaps against Bathsheba if she were not a willing partner (which is entirely possible; it would have been very difficult for a woman in that time and culture to say no to the king)? Why did David not admit to the scope of his sin? David's declaration was acceptable to God because Nathan told him, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Samuel 12:13). There would be repercussions for David. Although David had sinned secretly, one from his own household would sin publicly against him (vv. 11-12).

Perhaps God called to mind David's sin "in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5) without mentioning the deaths of the 70,000 because in the latter instance, the transgression was not

secret. It did not arise out of the lust of David's own heart. Could David's attitude have made a difference?

David and the 70,000

Concerning David's other sin, God was at work with His own plans because Scripture says, "Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah' " (2 Samuel 24:1). First Chronicles 21:1 gives another slant on the matter, "Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel." There is no contradiction here because God is in control and can use any means to accomplish His ends.

It is interesting that David's commander Joab tried to talk David out of taking the census (2 Samuel 24:3-4; 1 Chronicles 21:3-4). Why didn't Joab attempt to use his influence to prevent the murder of Uriah?

David's reaction to this other sin was totally different from his previous behavior. No cover-up was attempted, and he was almost immediately contrite. "And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O Lord take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.'" (2 Samuel 24:10). There was no need for a visit by a prophet with a parable.

However, there were consequences to be paid, as Gad the seer informed the king. When given three options as forms of punishment, David answered, "I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man" (2 Samuel 24:14). The end result was a plague that killed 70,000 men of Israel (1 Chronicles 21:14).

In the time between the commission of the sin concerning Uriah and the taking of the census, David's reactions to his own shortcomings changed. He realized the importance of voluntarily acknowledging his own sin and guilt and assuming responsibility for his actions. David also understood the need to look immediately to God for forgiveness and direction. If we can learn the same thing from David's other sin, it will be enough.

Atheists and the Problem of Evil

KIPPY MYERS

Without question, the argument against God's existence that seems to have affected people the most deeply, is the one commonly referred to as The Problem of Evil and Suffering. Here is one way that an atheist might state the problem: If God is all loving and all good, then he would not want us to suffer. If God is all powerful, then he would not allow us to suffer. But we do suffer. Therefore, the atheist concludes that there is no God (as the Bible describes him). This is the atheist's argument in a nutshell. I would like to make two brief points by way of response to this argument.

THIS WORLD'S PURPOSE

1. The atheist seems to assume that if God existed, then the purpose of human life would be happiness and health or something very much like that. But how does anyone come up with this idea? Nevertheless, a vast majority of people think the purpose of human life is enjoyment and personal fulfillment. What if that is not the purpose of this universe? If the atheist is wrong about this, then his argument has no power.

For example, let's say that you come to my house and you see a bowl of artificial fruit. You approach this plastic fruit, pick up an apple and try to take a bite out of it. "Yeow! This is horrible fruit," you complain. I try to tell you not to eat it, for it is not intended to be eaten. It is only supposed to look pretty. You try a banana this time. "Why can't I peel this banana? This is lousy fruit you have here. It doesn't even smell like fruit!" I repeat myself. This fruit is not supposed to be eaten or even smelled. It is only here to look good and I think that it accomplishes its task quite well. So, here we two stand, looking at the same fruit.

Each of us thinks that it has a different purpose. In keeping with the purpose that each of us has in mind, the fruit is a success to me, and a failure to you. The same is true with the purpose of the universe. I think that it is doing what God created it to do. The atheist thinks that it is a failure. But that is an assumption on his part which we must separate from him.

2. Can a finite human being stand in judgment of an

infinite God? For the sake of argument, I want to put this hypothetically for the atheist.

What if there were an infinitely wise being? Would any human really be in a position to question the way the infinite being does things? By the way, several of the speeches in the Book of Job deal with this question, (e.g., Job 9:1-3.)

In other words, if God really exists, and if he really has infinite (unlimited) knowledge, then he will obviously do some things with which we will disagree. Children have been known to disagree with their parents about matters like going to bed early on school nights. Teenagers might disagree with their parents about having to do their homework before watching television. But the reason that these younger ones disagree with their parents is precisely because they lack the sufficient information, foresight, and wisdom that the parents have. What makes the situation even worse is when the child not only does not know better than the parent, but they THINK they do. That can really start the sparks to flying! Of course, we would consider one a poor parent who gave in to a child's demands, simply because the child claimed to know better than the parent.

Thus, if God exists, then he knows what he is doing and no one on this planet is qualified to stand in judgment of him. They might think that they are, but people who lack the information, foresight, and wisdom for such decisions are exactly the ones who might think that they have it. Left to my own lights, I cannot grasp all of the details necessary to compose and run a universe. An atheist should admit that recognizing my ignorance, I am at least open to the possibility that an infinite God might exist and thus I am aware that by nature I am too limited to critique the way in which God might be running the universe. But like the child previously mentioned, some atheists think that they know more than they do, and that puts them at a disadvantage.

A GOOD QUESTION

With this in mind, a good question for an atheist making the argument from the problem of evil would be, "Could it possibly be the case that you are wrong in your views of what God should do or how things should be run?" Or, you could put the same question in different ways. Would an omniscient (all knowing) Being have to

agree with you on everything? Could an infinite Being disagree with you and be right? Or, the one I have used on occasion, "If you and an all knowing Being disagreed on something, who would be, right?" The best an atheist could logically say at this point is that with his present assumptions he disagrees with the way things are, but he would have to admit that if he had infinite knowledge, he might have to change his mind about it.

I think that this way of approaching the problem of evil and suffering is worth consideration. It doesn't make suffering any easier. It doesn't even prove that God exists. It merely calls attention to the fact that we cannot absolutely prove that God doesn't exist based on the existence of evil or suffering because of the position that we are in compared to the position that God is in (even if hypothetically for the atheist, as I have tried to state it here). No one can prove, for example, that God does not have a plan in light of which suffering will make perfect sense to us one day, when we have more information about it.

As Frank Hashey has said, "Compared to God, I live in a shoebox, seeing some or even most of the inside of that box, but totally ignorant of what is outside and how this box fits into that world outside." We Christians believe 1 Corinthians 2:15-16, which says that unless the Lord tells us what he wants us to know, "Who knows the mind of the Lord?" We also believe that God has given us some clues about why we are here. (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 7:13-14; Acts 17:27.) Does the unbeliever presume to know what God's thoughts would be?

I have made only two points in response to the atheist's argument from the problem of evil. We could also talk about the atheist's problem of defining evil, the role of free moral agency, the nature of a physical world run by physical laws, the underlying assumptions of the atheist's argument, and other crucial issues that arise from this argument against God. But (1) the purpose of the universe, and (2) the problem of being dogmatic about a topic for which you have insufficient information, are significant considerations.

