

Each Monday Morning

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# MEETING JESUS



BIBLE STUDY COURSE BY  
RICHARD "RUSTY" DAVID RUTHERFORD

# Meeting Jesus Each Monday Morning

## *A Year-Long Study in Following Jesus as Your Lord and Savior*

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. Let wicked people abandon their ways. Let evil people abandon their thoughts. Let them return to the Lord and he will show compassion to them. Let them return to our God because he will freely forgive them. **Isaiah 55:6-7**

Written and taught by

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Columbus, Texas

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## Notes on This Bible Translation and My Editorial Insertions

The Bible translation used in this study is the *GOD'S WORD* translation (GWT), made by Bible scholars and English teachers at Concordia University in Indiana. The GWT translation is an attempt to make the English text of the Bible developed in the 1500's more readable to modern Americans by keeping sentence structure short and direct. I have used this translation in my teaching since 1996 and have found it very accurate.

It is not a paraphrase, but it has retranslated the oldest manuscripts into modern American English at about newspaper level using "closest natural equivalence". The Bible is meant by God to be understood. Therefore, using modern language is essential. So enjoy this translation that aims to say what God says simply and directly.

I love the King James Version and so when there are variances in the GWT, I may insert within the Bible text the original transliterated Hebrew or Greek word in **10-point bold-face type** followed by an English word to help better understand the meaning of the passage. English words added to aid in understanding are also in 10-point type but are not in bold. Lastly, if the original Hebrew or Greek word appears in the Bible 10 times or less, I may also indicate how often it appears (e.g., 10x or 2x, etc.). Here's an example from John 11:33 and the raising of Lazarus involving three Greek words:

<sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who were crying with her were deeply moved *embrimaomai*—groaned 5x *pneuma*—spirit and troubled *tarasso*—agitated.

This has shown me that the GWT translation is remarkable for finding the right meanings to phrases that are often difficult to translate.

## Notes on Font Usage

All text is in the Big Caslon font. Scripture text is in regular **14-point**. If I have inserted parallel Scripture quotations, they are also in regular **14-point**, but are slightly further indented (.08) than the main Scripture text and are enclosed by brackets [ ]. All Scripture citations are in **12-point bold face**. All my comments and questions to think about are all in regular 12-point.

## Author's Preface



Since God encountered me that morning in December 1988, my life has been dramatically changed. Most of the time I didn't understand what was going on until much later. But two years later, I went to Second Baptist church, took a course on *Prayer Life*, then *Master Life*, and then *Bible Guide*. Now I began to understand what had happened on that December morning.

I began teaching the wonderful Baptist discipleship course, *Master Life*. For two years I taught it at the Baptist church but then returned to the denomination I had been raised in, the Episcopal church. From 1994 to 2014, I developed and wrote my own courses on discipleship and the Bible at Saint John the Divine Episcopal Church, and for three years at Chapelwood Methodist Church, both in Houston, Texas. All this was done while working in the Oil Patch.

Since then, I have taught a home Bible study in Columbus beginning in 2005 with the same people, Sunday school at the local Columbus, Texas Episcopal church, and several studies with friends who travel to Columbus to study with me.

God has truly blessed me with many friends as we studied the Bible together. Since my retirement in 2002, writing courses on the Bible books, studies of heroic Christians, and teaching a home Bible study has been my vocation. Now, as I have attained 81 years of age, I am returning to rewrite a course on discipleship, the first course I taught at Saint John the Divine in 1994.

## The Design of This Study

This study is designed to give you something to think about at the beginning of each week of this coming year. The sessions are short, usually only three pages. The intent is to teach you

how to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, using his own words. God sent his Son Jesus to earth in human form to give us revelation about his plans for our lives. God calls us to have a close, personal, intimate relationship with himself.

Please do not read ahead. Consider each short writing as an entire week's study. Use the study to develop questions on how to apply these thoughts to your life. Then pray to God discussing with him what changes you want to make to your life. God loves you and wants you to grow in relationship with him. Hopefully this study will direct you to the Scripture verses for answers.

## Using This Study to Develop Your Spiritual Life

Always remember, this is designed to be a one-year course. Modern Americans want to get to the bottom line and not want to walk on the journey to get to the destination the author intends. So if you want the bottom line, here it is:

God has created you as his loving child. As his Creator and parent, he wants you to enjoy the wonderful plan for the next year he has planned for you.

Simple, isn't it.

But most of us still aren't satisfied with spending more than a few hours to complete each week's session. I encourage you, however, if you want to get the most out of this book, you are going to have to slow down and enjoy your spiritual journey. When you think about and answer the questions, your answers should go deep. They should be based on a profound thinking about the question presented. Take five days to complete each week of this study.

Sometimes, other questions I have not presented will occur to you. Then I would suggest going to [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org). Ask any question you wish. I have found this website to be very helpful.

If you want to do additional work, then I suggest you read the books of Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, Hebrews, 1-2 Peter, 1-2 John, and Revelation in that order. If that is not enough, read 1-2 Samuel for the story of David, Israel's greatest hero. You might go to my website. [www.accessthebible.org](http://www.accessthebible.org)

Please enjoy the journey. You are engaging in what can be the most important study of your entire life.

Shalom in Jesus,

**Rusty**



## Introduction

### The Apostle Peter Tells Us God Knows Us and Chose Us to Be the Disciples of Jesus

From Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. To God's chosen people who are temporary residents in the world and are scattered throughout the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. God the Father knew you long ago and chose you to live holy lives with the Spirit's help so that you are obedient to Jesus Christ and are sprinkled with his blood. May God's good will and peace fill your lives. **1 Peter 1:1-2**

Peter begins his letter by stating how God chose believers and gave them a new birth. We will talk more about the details of this later.

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has given us a new birth because of his great mercy. We have been born into a new life that has a confidence that is alive because Jesus Christ has come back to life. We have been born into a new life which has an inheritance that can't be destroyed or corrupted and can't fade away. That inheritance is kept in Heaven for you since you are guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time. **1 Peter 1:3-5**

The new birth God has given us enables us to have faith in God and to have a relationship with him. He has transformed us from an old life of hating God and doing things our own way into a new life of believing and trusting God, the Creator of Heaven and earth, of listening to his Holy Spirit leading us in the path that God has chosen for our life. This is called **justification** or the **justifying grace** that has come from God.

Peter is writing to disciples of Jesus a little more than 30 years after Jesus died on the cross in Jerusalem in 30 AD. These mainly Gentile Christians are being persecuted by the people in these cities because they will not participate in festivals honoring the worship of the pagan gods of the cities who protect the city from fires, earthquakes and plagues prevalent in the city.

Christians are called Atheists because of their unbelief and could be deprived of their jobs, homes, possessions or even exiled from the city because they were not good citizens. Artesians and workmen had to belong to trade organizations each of whom had their own pagan god. When a Christian refused to participate, usually they were expelled from the organization.

These cities also competed with each other to honor the Roman Emperor who could raise or lower the taxes of the city. They built temples and statues of the Emperor to honor him and held festivals in his honor particularly on his birthday or the celebration of a military victory. Again, Christians would not participate and so they invoked the wrath of the citizens of the city.

Peter encourages the faithful:

You are extremely happy about these things, even though you have to suffer different kinds of trouble for a little while now. The purpose of these troubles is to test your faith as fire tests how genuinely gold is. Your faith is more precious than gold, and by passing the test, it gives praise, glory, and honor to God. This will happen when Jesus Christ appears again. **1 Peter 1:6-7**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Only 30 years after Jesus died, Christians were already being persecuted for not following the standards of Roman society of Hellenism. Romans spoke Greek and followed the Greek gods which the Romans gave different names. How could Christians adapt to this society in a way that God would accept?
2. The chief official in the Roman Empire at this time was the Roman Emperor Nero. This dictator considered himself a god. Romans would swear allegiance to him saying: Caesar is Lord. Christians refused and said: Jesus is Lord. When Christians refused to offer incense and swear that Caesar is Lord before a judge, they could be killed or executed. What was a Christian to do in this case?
3. Peter was living before the First Jewish Revolt of 66-70 AD when the Romans totally destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple, killed thousands of Jews and enslaved many others sending them to the mines or to Rome to serve as slaves. How do you think things became for Jews and Christian Gentiles in Mesopotamia where these Roman Province cities were located after this revolt occurred?

HINT: The Revelation of Jesus Christ was written about 20-30 years later by the prophet John who was exiled for his faith to the island prison of Patmos. The theme of the book is: *Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.* **Revelation 2:10**

4. How does Peter's advice apply to Christians living in 21st century America?

## Week 1

### God Has Chosen You to Live Holy Lives

Because you are children who obey God, don't live the kind of lives you once lived. Once you lived to satisfy your desires because you didn't know any better. But because the God who called you is holy, you must be holy in every aspect of your life. Scripture says:

Be holy because I am holy. **Leviticus 20:26**

So if you call God your Father, live your time as temporary residents on earth in fear. He is the God who judges all people by what they have done and he doesn't play favorites.

Peter is urging Christians not to live lives like the pagans do. Christians are called to live lives like their Savior Jesus did. They are to be humble, gentle, and non-violent *loving God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving their neighbors as themselves.* **Mark 12:30**

Realize that you weren't set free from the worthless life handed down to you by your ancestors by a payment of silver or gold which can be destroyed. Rather the payment that freed you was the precious blood of Christ, the Lamb.

He was known long ago before the world existed but for your good he became publicly known in the last period of time. Through him you believe in God who brought Christ back to life and gave him glory. So your faith and confidence are in God. **1 Peter 1:14-21**

Peter is saying a great deal about Jesus here. He is repeating John the Baptist who said: *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.* **John 1:29.** Jesus died on the cross so that *whosoever believes in him will not die* spiritually *but will have Eternal Life.* Eternal life is the transformed life believers live after they have been given the new birth by God.

Jesus, the Son of God, existed before Creation was created as the second person of the Triune God but God the Father sent him to earth in 5 BC. He lived on earth and ministered in Israel for 3 ½ years from 26 to 30 AD. The Jewish religious leaders did not like what he said accusing him of being a false prophet. They took him to the Roman Governor Pontus Pilate who

executed him for sedition against Rome for claiming to be the King of the Jews without authorization from the Roman Senate.

He was crucified on a cross the day before the Jewish Passover and died. His body was placed in a tomb where it lay for three days. On the third day, some female disciples went to the tomb after the Sabbath day and found the tomb empty. An angel told them that God had raised Jesus from death to life. That night Jesus appeared to his disciples in bodily form and then appeared only to them for the next 40 days.

During his ministry, Jesus claimed that he would return a second time to earth in glory with the holy angels and bring believers at that time with him to Paradise where they would receive new resurrection bodies, appear before Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment, and then be escorted by Jesus to the New Jerusalem in the New Heaven and the New Earth where they would live eternally. This is the great hope that Peter preached.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Peter is telling believers that just as Jesus suffered and died but rose to glory, they likewise might suffer and die. However, like Jesus, they would rise to glory and would be given new resurrection bodies and live with Jesus forever. How great an encouragement was this to believers as portrayed in the history of the early church in the Book of Acts?
2. What events of Jesus' life does Peter emphasize as an encouragement to believers who fear they might be physically killed? Why does he do this?
3. Peter writes this letter as he stands on trial before the Emperor Nero. What is Peter testifying by writing this letter?

## Week 2

### Jesus Left You an Example So You Can Follow His Footsteps

God called you to endure suffering because Christ suffered for you. He left you an example so that you could following in his footsteps. Christ never committed any sin. He never spoke deceitfully. Christ never verbally abused those who verbally abused him. When he suffered, he didn't make any threats but left everything to the one who judges fairly.

Christ carried our sins in his body on the cross so that freed from our sins, we could live a life that has God's approval. His wounds have healed you. You were like lost sheep. Now you have come back to the Shepherd and Bishop of your lives. **1 Peter 2:21-25**

Who will harm you if you are devoted to doing what is good? But even if you suffer for doing what God approves, you are blessed. Don't be afraid of those who want to harm you. Don't get upset. But dedicate your lives to Christ as Lord.

Always be ready to defend your confidence in God when anyone asks you to explain it. However make your defense with gentleness and respect. Keep your conscience clear. Then those who treat the good Christian life you live with contempt will feel ashamed that they have ridiculed you. After all, if it is God's will, it's better to suffer for doing good than for doing wrong.

This is true because Christ suffered for our sins once. He was an innocent person but he was brought to life through his spirit. **1 Peter 3:13-18**

Turn all your anxiety over to God because he cares for you. Keep your mind clear and be alert. Your opponent the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion as he looks for someone to devour. Be firm in the faith and resist him knowing that other believers throughout the world are going through the same kind of suffering.

God, who shows you his kindness and who has called you through Christ Jesus to his eternal glory, will restore you, strengthen you, make you strong

and support you as you suffer for a little while. Power belongs to him forever.  
Amen. **1 Peter 5:7-11**

Peter goes on his letter to further describe how Jesus acted during his three and one-half years of ministry in Galilee and Judea with short forays into Gentile territory north and east of Israel. Jesus was gentle, kind, and non-violent.

Although he was bitterly attacked by the Pharisees, a lay-led para-religious group, and accused of working miracles by submitting to the Devil, he patiently attempted to reason with them. Although he was bitterly attacked by the Jewish religious leaders in the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem and accused of blasphemy, he merely stated that one day they would *see him sitting at the right hand of God Almighty and coming on the clouds of Heaven*. **Matthew 14:62**

Although he was crucified by Roman soldiers on a cross, he prayed to God his Father:

Forgive them. They don't know what they are doing. **Luke 23:34**

Peter tells believers to stand up for their faith and give their witness for Jesus whenever they are called upon to do so. But they should do it with gentleness and respect for the other person. Remember that if you physically die, you will immediately go to be with Jesus in Paradise as was the thief on Jesus' right hand. Jesus told him:

Today you will be with me in Paradise. **Luke 23:43**

If you have fear, turn it over to God. The Devil is prowling through this world seeking who he can tempt to rebel against God, his enemy. God will give you strength as you suffer for him in this world. You are helping to bring God's Kingdom to earth as it is in Heaven.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why are disciples asked to act like Jesus? Wasn't Jesus the Son of God as well as the Son of Man?
2. While we are freed from the guilt of our sins, we are still tempted to sin. What did Jesus accomplish for us by his death on the cross?
3. Peter says Jesus suffered for our sins once. Jews were used to being forgiven of their sins each year on the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur. Why did Jesus only have to provide his body as a sacrifice once?
4. Why does God continue to allow the Devil to tempt believers to sin?

## Part I

# The Very Basics of Our Existence

This is what the Lord says: I the Lord made everything. I stretched out the Heaven by myself. I spread out the earth all alone. **Isaiah 44:24**

I am the Lord and there is no other. I make light and create darkness. I make blessings and create disasters. I the Lord do all these things. **Isaiah 45:6-7**

The Lord created the Heavens. God formed the earth and made it. He set it up. He did not create it to be empty but formed it to be inhabited. **Isaiah 45:18**

I made the earth and created humans on it. I stretched out the Heavens with my own hands. I commanded all the stars to shine. **Isaiah 45:12**

Remember the first events because I am God and there is no other. I am God and there's no one like me. From the beginning I revealed the end. From long ago I told you things that had no happened saying: My plan will stand and I'll do everything I intended to do. **Isaiah 46:9-10**

Before God created Creation, the three members of the Triune, the three-in-one God, cut a Covenant called the **Covenant of Redemption**. In this Covenant, God the Father agreed to send God the Son to earth in human form, to minister to the inhabitants of Israel and to die on the cross as an atoning sacrifice to reconcile wicked humans to God and allow them to have a close personal relationship with him.

Then God created Creation. He created the Heavens and the earth to extend his glory. He created everything so that everything would reflect his glory back to him – the mountains and the seas, the trees and the deserts, the birds, fish, and animals. Then he created humans to reflect his glory back to him in everything they said and did. He created humans in the image of God himself, male and female.

He placed the humans in a garden to farm the land and to take care of it. **Genesis 2:15**. And he gave the man one single command.

You are free to eat from any tree in the garden. But you must never eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil because when you eat from it, you will certainly die. **Genesis 2:16-17**

One simple command. But God had also given humans the ability to obey him or to disobey him. And the humans disobeyed God. As a result, God sent the humans out of the garden into the world so they wouldn't eat from the Tree of Life and he uttered a curse.

God has created Creation perfect. He said that *it was very good*. **Genesis 1:31**. But the human beings disobeyed God and as a result, they became hostile to God and often chose to do things their own way instead of the way that God had planned for them to do in their lives.

Time passed. Humans became violent. *All day long their thoughts were on nothing but evil*. **Genesis 6:5**. But there was one man who loved God named Noah and he followed God's plan for his life. So God allowed Noah to build an ark and take his family inside with a selection of the animals. Then God allowed

all the deep springs to burst open. The sky opened and rain came pouring down on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights. **Genesis 7:10**

The flood continued for forty days. Every creature on dry land, every living breathing creature died including humans. Only Noah and his family were left together with the animals in the ark. After the end of 150 days the water decreased and the ark came to rest. Noah and his family left the ark. And God made a Covenant with Noah:

Never again will all life be killed by floodwaters. Never again will there be a flow that destroys the earth. **Genesis 9:11**

But it didn't take long before the descendants of Noah's three sons again rebelled against God by attempting to build a tower that would reach the sky. God saw this and said:

They are only one people with one language. This is only the beginning of what they will do. Now nothing they plan to do will be too difficult for them. Let us go down there and mix up their language so that they won't understand each other. **Genesis 11:6-7**

And so the humans were scattered all over the earth. These humans were separated from God and did not know God. They build pagan images of birds, animals and creeping things and worshiped them. But again, God found another man like Noah. His name was Abram whom God later called Abraham. And as with Noah, God made a Covenant with Abraham:



Leave your land, your relatives, and your father's home. Go to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you, I will curse. Through you every family on earth will be blessed. **Genesis 12:1-3**

Abraham did as he was told. He took his wife Sarah and his nephew Lot and their servants and left his home in Haran and went to Canaan. There Abraham built an altar and worshiped the Lord. **Genesis 12:7**. God had a plan for Abraham's life and Abraham followed that plan.

But before we continue to follow Abraham's life, we first want to describe what God has revealed about himself to us in his revelation, in his Bible.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. We have learned that God created Creation to extend his glory. How do trees extend God's glory? How do lions extend God's glory? How do humans extend God's glory?
2. When God created humans, *he made them in the likeness of God and blessed them*. **Genesis 5:1-2**. What does this mean?
3. Why did the first humans, Adam and Eve, disobey God?
4. Even though humans disobeyed God, why did God put them out of the garden with a curse?
5. Why didn't all humans remember God and want to resume a relationship with him?
6. What was God's purpose in beginning a relationship with humans again starting with Noah?
7. What was God's purpose in beginning a relationship with humans again with Abraham?

## Week 3

### Who Is God, the Holy Trinity?

But to us there is but one God, the Father. Everything came from him and we live for him. There is only one Lord, Jesus Christ. Everything came into being through him and we live because of him. **1 Corinthians 8:6**

Turn to me and be saved all who live at the ends of the earth, because I am God and there is no other. I have bound myself with an oath. A word has gone out of my righteous mouth that will not be recalled: Every knee will bow to me and every tongue will swear allegiance. It will be said of me: Certainly, righteousness and strength are found in the Lord alone. All who are angry with him will come to him and be ashamed. **Isaiah 45:22-24**

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God and the Word was God. He was already with God in the beginning. Everything came into existence through him. Not one thing that exists was made without him. He was the source of life and that light was the light for humanity. The light shines in the dark and the dark has never extinguished it. **John 1:1-5**

God rescued us from the power of darkness and has brought us in the Kingdom of his Son, whom he loves. His Son paid the price to free us which means that our sins are forgiven.

He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. He created all things in Heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. Whether they are Kings or lords, rulers or powers – everything has been created through him and for him. He existed before everything and holds everything together. He is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, the first to come back to life so that he would have first place in everything.

God was pleased to have all of himself live in Christ. God was also pleased to bring everything on earth and in Heaven back to himself through Christ. He did this by making peace through Christ's blood sacrificed on the cross.

Once you were separated from God. The evil things you did showed your hostile attitude. But now Christ has brought you back to God by dying in his physical body. He did this so that you could come into God's presence without sin, fault, or blame. **Colossians 1:13-22**

We who have the Spirit, the first of God's gifts, also groan inwardly. We groan as we eagerly wait for our adoption, the freeing of our bodies from sin. At the same time, the Spirit helps us in our weakness because we don't know how to pray for what we need. The Spirit intercedes for God's people the way God wants him to. **Romans 8:23, 26-27**

God is a mystery. He is a self-existent being needing no one but himself. He is the best there is so he wants to spread his glory by creating Creation. He created human beings so that they can have a personal relationship with him. The apostle John explains:

We belong to God. The person who knows God listens to us. Whoever doesn't belong to God doesn't listen to us. That's how we can tell the Spirit of Truth from the spirit of lies. **1 John 4:6**

We have known and believe that God loves us. God is love. Those who live in God's love live in God, and God lives in them. God's love has reached its goal in us. So we look ahead with confidence to the Day of Judgment. **1 John 4:16-17**

No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. We know that we live in him and he lives in us because he has given us his Spirit. **1 John 4:12-13**

God wants to have a relationship with all human beings. God loves us. That is why he created us. And we reflect his glory back to him when he has a relationship with him and live our lives consistent with the plan God has developed for our lives.

There is only one God. But God exists in three co-equal persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost as the King James Version has it. In the next session, we will talk about God the Son in more detail.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. God reveals his existence to us in three ways. First there is **general revelation**. In his Creation, God reveals his love for all things by making everything in his Creation beautiful and varied:

The Heavens declare the glory of God and the sky displays what his hands have made. One day tells a story to the next. One night shares knowledge with the next without talking, without words, without their voices being heard Yet their sound has gone out into the entire world, their message to the ends of the earth. **Psalm 19:1-4**

Second, there is **special revelation**. God has spoken to humans, and they have written it down in a book, the Bible.

The teachings of the Lord are perfect. They renew the soul. The testimony of the Lord is dependable. It makes gullible people wise. The instructions of the Lord are correct. They make the heart rejoice. The command of the Lord is radiant. It makes the eyes shine. **Psalm 19:7-8**

Finally, there is direct revelation. God speaks to us individually. It is not normally an audible voice, but we know that it is God speaking:

Who can notice every mistake? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep me from sinning. Do not let anyone gain control over me. Then I will be blameless and I will be free from any great offense. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts from my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. **Psalm 19:1-14**

Why does God use these three different methods of revealing himself?

2. God reveals a great deal about his Creation. But there are still mysteries we cannot understand. Why is that? Perhaps Isaiah gives us a clue:

My thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways, says the Lord. Just as the Heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts. **Isaiah 55:8-9**

Why does God prevent us from understanding all the aspects of himself and his Creation?

3. We can envision God best when we think of Jesus because God gave Jesus two natures. God gave Jesus an additional human nature when he sent him to earth to be born of a human woman. We can best relate to Jesus because he is human. But Jesus never stopped being God. Why did God give Jesus a human nature?
4. The Holy Spirit is a genuine mystery. When people talk about the Spirit, they usually describe his power. So some think of the Spirit as a power rather than as a person. But Paul tells us not to grieve the Holy Spirit **Ephesians 4:30** and Jesus also describes him as a person:

However the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything. He will remind you of everything I have ever told you. **John 14:26**

5. Why is it important for us to always keep in mind that God loves us?
6. Why do human beings want to do things their way rather than the way that God has planned for their lives?
7. What happens when human beings disobey God?

## Week 4

### Who Is Jesus, God's Son?

Although he was in the form of God and equal with God, he did not take advantage of this equality. Instead, he emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant, by becoming like other humans, by having a human appearance. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, death on a cross.

That is why God has given him an exceptional honor – the name honored about all other names – so that at the name of Jesus everyone in Heaven, on earth and in the world below will kneel and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. **Philippians 2:6-11**

In the first session, we talked about a **Covenant of Redemption** where the three persons of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit cut a Covenant in which the Father would send the Son to earth to minister to the people of Israel and to die on the cross as an **atonement sacrifice** for the sins of wicked humans in order to restore them to a personal relationship with God.

This happened in 5 BC when the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary of Nazareth with a human boy who was named Jesus. We call this the **incarnation**. But Jesus, even though he had a human nature remained the Son of God. His human nature was in addition to his deity which he had from before Creation and will always have. How, then, was Jesus able to experience everything human beings experience? The Scripture above says he emptied himself. This means he voluntarily restrained himself from using his supernatural powers of God to be all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere present.

Instead, when he needed to do a miracle, he prayed to God his Father and sent the Holy Spirit who empowered him. God does this today with us and there are some do perform miracles today. The Author to the Hebrews explains:

Jesus was made a little lower than the angels but we see him crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death. Through God's kindness he died on behalf of everyone. **Hebrews 2:9**

Therefore, he had to become like his brothers and sisters so that he could be merciful. He became like them so that he could serve as a faithful High

Priest in God's presence and make peace with God for their sins. Because Jesus experienced temptation when he suffered, he is able to help others when they are tempted. **Hebrews 2:17-18**

We have a High Priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way that we are but didn't sin. **Hebrews 4:15**

During his life on earth, Jesus prayed to God who could save him from death. He prayed and pleaded with loud crying and tears. And he was heard because of his devotion to God. Although Jesus was the Son of God, he learned to be obedient through his sufferings. After he had finished his work, he became the source of eternal salvation for everyone who obeys him. **Hebrews 5:7-9**

Jesus was always fully human and fully divine. Two heresies arose early in the church. One was the Jesus was only God and merely acted as a human. This is called Docetism. The other was the Jesus was only a man, never divine. This is what the Jews who crucified him believed. And it is believed by many people today. The incarnation is indeed a mystery,

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. When you read the synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – how do Jesus' disciples first perceive him? List the time when he first realizes that Jesus is God.
2. Read the Gospel According to John Chapter 1. When do Jesus' disciples recognize that he is God? Why are the disciples' perceptions of the identity of Jesus so different in this Gospel compared to the synoptic Gospels?
3. Where in Scripture does Jesus proclaim that he is one with God?
4. Where was Jesus after he died on the cross?
5. When you read the Gospels, Jesus is constantly going to a desolate place and praying to God. Why did Jesus pray so much?
6. What human attributes of Jesus do the Gospels portray?
7. Why did Jesus say on the cross: *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* **Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46**

## Week 5

### Why Did God Choose a Particular People to Reveal Himself to the World?

We left off in our history of God and humans with God calling Abraham out of his home in Haran to a land I will show you. This is Canaan, a tiny strip of land between the continents of Asia and Africa, in places 50-60 miles wide between the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian desert and 120 miles long from Dan to Beersheba.

It is an unusual land, not easily defended from invaders with a varied elevation and climate with portions below sea level and others with hills and mountains rising above sea level. But it is mostly lush with ample areas of growing food except in the south which is mostly desert.

At the time Abraham came to Canaan there were seven people groups, some living in cities. Abraham general stayed away from the cities grazing his flocks and herds like the Bedouin Arab tribes do today.

Abraham built altars at Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and Beersheba where God spoke to him. These later became famous religious sites. Abraham was 75 years old when he came to Canaan and had no descendants. But God said to him:

I'm going to give this land to your descendants. **Genesis 12:7**

God eventually gave Abraham two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. God chose Isaac to carry on the promise. Isaac then had two sons, Esau and Jacob. God chose Jacob to carry on the promise. Jacob's name was changed to Israel by God. Israel means: *He who struggles with God and men -and you have won.* **Genesis 32:28**

Jacob had twelve sons who were called the Sons of Israel. In his old age, there was a famine in Egypt. Joseph, a son of Jacob had been taken captive to Egypt but through God's Providence, the Pharaoh or King of Egypt made him his Prime Minister. So Joseph invited his father Jacob to come to Egypt to live.

The Israelites lived 400 years in Egypt. But they were foreigners. The Pharaoh eventually didn't trust them, so he kept them busy with forced labor. The Israelites called out to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and God responded by sending Moses to ask Pharaoh to allow them to leave Egypt. Pharaoh was reluctant to allow these captive people to leave so God sent ten plagues on Egypt. The last plague killed Pharaoh's first-born son. So at last Pharaoh allowed them to leave.



But instead of returning to Canaan, God led the Israelites by Moses to Mount Sinai where they spent a year learning about God, receiving his Towrah or Law and building a Wilderness Tabernacle to worship him in. Then, organized in their twelve tribes, they began traveling to Canaan. They reached it in eleven days and send spies to scout out the land. The spies reported the land was lush full of milk and honey, but the cities had large walls and giants lived in the land. So the people refused to enter the land. **Numbers 13:31-33**

God was angry and decreed that the entire generation of Israelite warriors who had left Egypt must die. For the next 40 years, the Israelites would wander in the wilderness until these warriors died with the exception of two, Joshua and Caleb. Then Moses would lead the Israelites into the Promised Land of Canaan. Forty years later, the Israelites returned to the border of Canaan by the Jordan River and for one month, Moses taught the people their history as recorded now in the Book of Deuteronomy.

You are a holy people who belong to the Lord your God. He chose you to be his own special possession out of all the nations of the earth. The Lord set his heart on you and chose you, even though you didn't outnumber all the nations on earth. You were the smallest of all nations. You were chosen because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors.  
**Deuteronomy 7:6-8**

Then Moses died. God appointed Joshua as Moses' successor and he led the Israelites, over 600,000 warriors and their families across the Jordan River into Canaan. Because of God's power given to them, the land was conquered. Joshua died and left no successor. The Israelites were led by their twelve tribal leaders. But these leaders died also.

So the Israelites turned away from worshiping God and worshiped the idols of Canaan and the pagan nations around them instead. God then sent enemies against them. When the people cried out to God for help, God sent them judges, charismatic leaders who led them to defeat the enemies. But the people sinned and rebelled against God again. For over 200 years this went on until there came a prophet named Samuel.

At this time the Philistines, a sea people who had come from Greece through Crete, lived along the seacoast of the Mediterranean Sea. They were a military savvy people who lived in five city-states. They knew the use of iron and chariots while the Israelites only had cooper swords and bows and arrows. So they harassed the Israelites constantly. Growing weary of this, the people asked Samuel to ask God for a King who would lead them. Samuel reluctantly was led by God to anoint Saul from Benjamin as Israel's first King. But Saul disobeyed God and **YHWH** – God's personal name – led Samuel to anoint David King of Israel.

David, however, had to serve an apprenticeship first. David was very different from Saul. He loved God and wrote poems and songs about him from very early in his childhood. God sent David first to Saul's court as his musician to drive away the headaches Saul was having. But David soon became a military leader for Saul and consistently with Saul's son Jonathan defeated the Philistines. But Saul grew jealous of David and drove him away from his court.

Not satisfied with that, Saul chased David around the Judean desert so that David finally left Israel and became a vassal of a Philistine King. But the Philistines soon killed Saul and three of his sons. Saul's general made the one surviving son Ish-baal King of Israel. David then went to Hebron and was anointed King by his tribe of Judah. Then there was civil war for six years.

Ish-baal was killed and David then became King of all Israel. He defeated the Philistines soundly and the nation had peace. David located the Ark of the Covenant, Israel's holiest religious object that had been in the Wilderness Tabernacle and brought it to his new capital of Jerusalem where he placed it in a new Tent. There he worshiped God.

David then wanted to build a temple for God, but God said he would build a house for David. God made a unilateral Covenant with David that his descendant would always be on the throne of Israel.

Your royal house will remain in my presence forever. Your throne will be established forever. **2 Samuel 7:16**

From that time on, the Kings of Judah, David's descendants, ruled Israel until 586 BC when the Babylonians took the last Judean King into captivity. Although the captivity ended after 70 years and the Judeans returned to Israel, they never had another descendant of King David on the throne.

So they looked for God to send them the promised King whom they called their Messiah.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why did God select the Israelites as his Chosen People?
2. Why did God select the younger sons as the Children of the Promise rather than the older sons?
3. Read **Exodus 32:1-33:22**. Why did the Israelites, while God was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandment from God, did the Israelites built a Golden Calf Idol? How was Moses able to keep God from destroying his Chosen People?
4. Moses sums up all his teaching in the Book of Deuteronomy when he says:

I call on Heaven and earth as witnesses today that I have offered you life or death, blessings or curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants will live. Love the Lord your God, obey him, and be loyal to him. This will be your way of life and it will mean a long life for you in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. **Deuteronomy 30:19-20**

How are the commands of this verse applicable to us today as disciples of Jesus Christ?

5. Why are the pagan gods of Canaan and the surrounding nations more attractive than **YHWH**, the one true God?
6. Why didn't God appoint a successor leader to Joshua?
7. Why was Zerubbabel, the last descendant of King David in **1 Chronicles 3:17-19**, never made the King of Israel?. HINT: Read **Zechariah 6-9**

## Week 6

### Who and What Is a Disciple?

Tie up the written instructions. Seal the teachings among my disciples *limmuwd*. I will wait for the Lord who hides his face from the descendants of Jacob. I will hope in him. I am here with the children that the Lord has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord of Armies, who lives on Mount Zion. **Isaiah 8:16-18**

This is the only verse in the Hebrew Bible where the Hebrew word *limmuwd* is translated *disciples*. The word appears five times in the Hebrew Bible where it is translated *learned* **Isaiah 50:4**; *taught* **Isaiah 54:13**; *used* **Jeremiah 2:24**; and *accustomed* **Jeremiah 13:23**. Yet the Greek word *mathetes* translated *disciple* or *disciples* appears in Matthew 7:19, Mark 4:23, Luke 3:7, John 7:43, and Acts 28:23. The New Testament is indeed a book of discipleship.

But the Hebrew Bible uses the word servants *'ebed* for the word *disciple*, a word that appears 800x in the Hebrew Bible.

Since the text is on discipleship primarily in a New Testament context, here we look at what Moses and Isaiah say about genuine servants of God.

Listen Israel: The Lord is our God. The Lord is the only God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. Take to heart the words I give you today. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you're at home or away, when you lie down or get up. Write them down and tie them around your wrist and wear them as headbands as a reminder. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

Israel, what does the Lord your God want you to do? He wants you to fear him, follow all his directions, love him, and worship him with all your heart and with all your soul. The Lord wants you to obey his commands and laws that I'm giving you today for your own good. **Deuteronomy 10:12-13**

Today I'm giving you the choice of a blessing or a curse. You'll be blessed if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I'm giving you today. You'll be cursed if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God, if you

turn from the way I'm commanding you to live today, and if you worship other gods you never knew. **Deuteronomy 11:26-28**

Today I offer you life and prosperity or death and destruction. This is what I'm commanding you today. Love the Lord your God, follow his directions and obey his commands, laws, and rules. Then you will live, your population will increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you're about to enter and take possession. **Deuteronomy 30:15-16**

Isaiah tells us why God chose Israel as his Chosen People and what work he had for them.

You are my witnesses, says the Lord. I have chosen you as my servant so that you can know and believe in me and understand that I am the God who has done this. No god was formed before me and there will be none after me. I alone am the Lord and there is no Savior except me. I have revealed it to you and I have announced it to you. There was no foreign god among you. You are my witnesses that I am God, declares the Lord. **Isaiah 43:10-12**

What does God want Israel to witness? Early in his Vision Isaiah says:

In the Last Days, the mountain of the Lord's House will be established as the highest of the mountains and raised above the hills. All the nations will stream to it.

Then many people will say: Let's go to the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways so that we may live by them. The teachings will go out from Zion. The Lord's Word will go out from Jerusalem. **Isaiah 2:2-3**

God's plan was for Israel, a small nation living on a tiny but strategic isthmus of land between Asia and Africa, to witness to the nations who were passing between the two continents. The nations would see God blessing his Chosen People as they were living holy lives in the land he had given them. They would want this blessing for themselves and so they would go to Jerusalem or Mount Zion to learn about **YHWH** and his ways.

This was God's dream, but it depended on God's blessing Israel. If the people were not living holy lives, how could God bless them. He wanted to but he couldn't because they were worshiping strange foreign gods, not him. Yet God says:

But you are my servant Israel, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the descendant of Abraham, my dear friend. I have taken you from the ends of the earth and called you from its most distant places. I said to you: You are my servant. I've chosen you. I haven't rejected you. Don't be afraid because I am with you. Don't be intimidated. I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will support you with my victorious right hand. **Isaiah 41:8-10**

What did God want Israel to tell the nations?

A shoot will come out of the stump of Jesse and a branch from its roots will bear fruit. **Isaiah 11:1**

The world will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord like water covering the sea. At that time the root of Jesse will stand as a banner. The nations will come to him. His resting place will be glorious. **Isaiah 11:10**

He will raise a banner for the nations to gather around. He will gather the outcasts of Israel and bring together the scattered people of Judah from the four corners of the earth. **Isaiah 11:12**

Israel was to tell the nations that the Messiah, the Anointed One from the line of King David would come and establish his throne on His Holy Mountain of Jerusalem. He would bring peace to the earth. So the Jews waited and waited. But the Messiah would not come for 1,000 years after God made his Covenant with King David.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. A disciple is a learner. Define the relationship between the disciple and his master.
2. In the Hebrew Bible, God calls his followers servants. Is this the same as being called a disciple? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean to love God? Or what does it mean not to love God?
4. Why is loving God the basis for all the commandments that God gives to Israel?
5. Why does God curse people?
6. What does a witness for God testify about?
7. How would Jews describe the Messiah and what he would do?

## Part 2

# The Basic Disciplines of a Disciple

Then Jesus called the crowd to himself along with his disciples. He said to them: Those who want to follow me must say no to the things they want, pick up their crosses, and follow me. Those who want to save their lives will lose them. But those who lose their lives for me and the Good News will save them. **Mark 8:34-15**

If people come to me and are not ready to abandon their fathers, mothers, wives, children, brothers, and sisters, as well as their own lives, they cannot be my disciples. **Luke 14:26**

In the same way, none of you can be my disciples unless you give up everything. **Luke 14:33**

Jesus did call people to follow him, but he placed certain conditions for following him. They must be totally devoted to him above anyone, even members of their family. They must give up all of their possessions, ranks, and titles. They must give up their self-esteem and even their physical lives if necessary. But most of all, they must follow Jesus and obey his words.

Jesus' words in the Gospels are very important. When I first returned to the church after a 32-year absence, I took out my old King James Bible and keyed all of the words in red, the words of Jesus, into my 1982 IBM XT computer. Then I printed them out and read them over and over meditating on what they meant. This was the beginning of my further life-long Bible study.

Many years later I composed a daily devotional called Immersing Yourself in the Words of Jesus. A good friend named Rick told me that reading this induced him to start attending my Daily Bible studies.

This is what Jesus told his disciples about the importance of his words:

### **Jesus Said That His Words Have Eternal Significance**

The earth and the Heavens will disappear but my words will never disappear. **Matthew 24:35**

### **Jesus Said His Disciples Should Never Be Ashamed of Speaking His Words**

If people are ashamed of me and what I say my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of those people when he comes with the holy angels in his Father's glory. **Mark 8:38**

### **Jesus Said that His Words Are Spiritual Life**

Life is spiritual. Your physical existence doesn't contribute to that life. The words that I have spoken to you are spiritual. They are life. **John 6:63**

### **Jesus Said His Words Would Judge Unbelievers on the Last Day**

Those who reject me by not accepting what I say have a judge appointed for them. The words that I have spoken will judge them on the Last Day. **John 12:48**

### **Jesus Says that God the Father Has Told Him to Say Each Word He Speaks**

I have not spoken on my own. Instead, the Father who sent me told me what I should say and how I should say it. I know that what he commands is Eternal Life. Whatever I say is what the Father told me to say. **John 12:49-50**

### **Jesus Says that Those Who Love Him Will Do What He Says**

Jesus answered him: Those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them and we will go to them and make our home with them. A person who doesn't love me doesn't do what I say. I don't make up what you hear me say. What I say comes from the Father who sent me. **John 14:23-24**

### **Jesus Tells His Disciples the Holy Spirit Will Help Them Remember Jesus' Words**

I have told you this while I'm still with you. However, the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything. He will remind you of everything that I have ever told you. **John 14:23-26**



## **Jesus Says That If His Disciples Live Out His Words in Their Lives, They Can Pray with Confidence Jesus Will Accept Their Prayers**

If you live in me and what I say my words live in you, then ask for anything you want, and it will be yours. **John 15:7**

## **After Jesus Has Risen on Easter, He Tells Them What He Foretold in the Scriptures Has Come True.**

Then he said to them: These are the words I spoke to you while I was still with you. I told you that everything written about me in Moses' Teachings, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to come true. Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. **Luke 24:44-45**

## **Jesus Commissions His Disciples to Be His Witnesses**

He said to them: Scripture says that the Messiah would suffer and that he would come back to life on the third day. Scripture also says that by the authority of Jesus people would be told to turn to God and change the way they think and act so that their sins will be forgiven. This would be told to people from all nations, beginning in the City of Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. **Luke 24:46-48**

## **Jesus Tells His Disciples to Wait in Jerusalem Until He Gives Them the Holy Spirit**

I'm sending you what my Father promised. Wait here in the city until you receive power from Heaven. **Luke 24:44-49**

These seven pericopes demonstrate the importance Jesus placed on the words he spoke. The words Jesus speaks are the very words of God. These words are equal to the words spoken by God as reported in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus spoke Scripture as he spoke to his disciples on earth. Jesus said that his words are spiritual life itself. **John 6:63**

This is the first discipline of a disciple: To learn the words of Jesus, to study them, and to integrate them into our life and obey them.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Reflect back what was said about the life of Christians living in the cities in the Roman provinces of Mesopotamia 30 years after Jesus died and rose from the dead. How did Jesus warn them that as his disciples they must keep the faith even if they were killed for their faith?
2. The Greek word *nikao* translated overcomer appears in **Luke 11:22; John 16:33; Romans 3:4; 12:21; 1 John 2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4,5; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 5:5; 6:2; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7**

NOTE: I found this by going to [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)

How do these authors use the word to encourage Jesus' disciples facing persecution in the late first century AD?

3. What does it mean to deny yourself? **Mark 8:34-35**
4. Jesus was being very counter cultural when he said that family obligations must not interfere with the work of a disciple. Family obligations such as attending marriages or funerals were considered a high priority in Jewish society. Explain what Jesus means.
5. The Gospels relate a story of a young man who came to Jesus asking how he could obtain Eternal Life. **Mark 10:17-22; Matthew 16-22; Luke 18:18-23**. Jesus told him to sell all he had, give the money to the poor, and then follow him. Is Jesus saying all his disciples must do this?
6. What is a good example of how the Holy Spirit enables us to remember the words of Jesus?
7. What Scripture says that the Messiah would suffer and come back to life on the third day?
8. Jesus said: *If you love me, you will obey my commandments.* **John 14:15**. What commandments did Jesus give his disciples?

## Week 7

### Believing God

After John had been put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee and told people the Good News of God. He said: The time has come and God's Kingdom is near. Change the way you think and act and believe the Good News. **Mark 1:14-15**

The people asked Jesus: What does God want us to do? Jesus replied to them: God wants to do something for you so that you will believe in the one whom he has sent. **John 6:28-29**

Jesus said to them: You're from below. I'm from above. You're from this world. I'm not from this world. For this reason I told you that you'll die because of your sins. If you don't believe that I am the one, you'll die because of your sins. **John 8:23-24**

The Jews surrounded him. They asked him: How long will you keep us in suspense? If you're the Messiah, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them: I've told you, but you don't believe me. The things I do in my Father's name testify on my behalf. However, you don't believe because you're not my sheep. **John 10:24-26**

Don't be troubled. Believe in God and believe in me. **John 14:1**

Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? What I'm telling you doesn't come from me. The Father, who lives in me, does what he wants. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Otherwise, believe me because of the things I do. **John 14:10-11**

Jesus uses the word *believe* many times. The word *believe* appears in Matthew 7x, Mark 11x, Luke 5x but in John 46x. In the Epistles, Paul uses *believe* 27x, James 1x, Peter 2x, and John 3x.

Jesus' first words in his earthly ministry are: *Repent* of your sinful life, live a holy life as God desires, *and believe the Good News* – the Gospel that God has sent his Son to earth to die for your sins and thus reconcile you to God so you can have a relationship with him. This is the Gospel Jesus proclaims in **Mark 1:15**.

In Matthew, Jesus says:

Turn to God and change the way you think and act because the Kingdom of Heaven is near. **Matthew 4:17**

Jesus will speak of the *Kingdom of Heaven* 31x in Matthew while the *Kingdom of God* is mentioned in the Gospels 53x – 31x by Luke and 15x by Mark. Jesus will speak of *Eternal Life* or *Everlasting Life* 27x in the Gospels.

In substance, these three phrases mean the same thing. Living in Eternal Life or living in the Kingdom of God is believing and trusting that God is playing an active role in your life through the Holy Spirit's leading and that you are committed to living a holy life obeying the commands of Jesus.

Jesus summarizes this by saying:

The most important commandment is: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. So love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second most important commandment is this: Love your neighbor as your love yourself. No other command is greater than these. **Mark 12:29:31**

Jesus wants his disciples to believe in his identity as the Son of God and that he speaks the very words of God. He also wants them to believe that God sent him to earth to reconcile believers to himself so that they can live the holy lives God wants them to live. He wants them to obey the words that he speaks as these words came from God himself.

Believing in Jesus means trusting in him together with the Holy Spirit that God will reveal to you the plan he has for your life and that you will obey this leading as you live your life in a holy manner. Belief is both faith and commitment to action.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. John the Baptist in **Matthew 3:2** and Jesus in **Matthew 4:17** preached the exact same message. How were their ministries the same and how did they differ? Were they both calling people to do the exact same thing?
2. How could the Pharisees become *a sheep of Jesus*?
3. When Jesus asks his disciples to believe that *he is in the Father*, what is he asking them to believe?

4. What is the difference in believing *about* Jesus and believing *in* Jesus?
5. Read the story of Jesus and Nicodemus. **John 3:1-20**. What is it that Nicodemus learned after speaking to Jesus?
6. Identify the verses where Jesus says that he is God.
7. What does it take to believe in Jesus? How does faith come to a person?

## Week 8

### Worshiping God

The Pharisees and the experts in Moses' Teachings the scribes asked Jesus: Why don't your disciples follow the traditions taught by our ancestors? They are unclean because they don't wash their hands before they eat. Jesus told them: Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites in Scripture:

These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is pointless because their teachings are rules made by humans.  
**Isaiah 29:13**

You abandon the commandments of God to follow human traditions. **Mark 7:5-8**

Jesus told her: Believe me. A time is coming when you Samaritans won't be worshiping the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You don't know what you're worshiping. We Jews know what we're worshiping because salvation comes from the Jews.

Indeed, the time is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. The Father is looking for people like that to worship him. God is a spirit. Those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. **John 4:21-24**

When we worship God, he must be the center of our attention, not us.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us. **1 John 4:10**

We love because God loved us first. **1 John 4:19**

Bishop Robert Solomon, whose book [Following Jesus in a Fallen World](#) gave me the idea for this study, emphasizes that God in Jesus was seeking the Samaritan woman, not the other way around. In worship, we thank God for seeking us, calling us, convicting us, justifying us, and sending his Holy Spirit to lead us on our journey of sanctification. In our spiritual lives, God does most of the work, not us. Our worship should reflect this.

This is why the hymns of Charles Wesley are so powerful. My favorite hymn of his is *Jesus, Lover of My Soul*. Here is the first verse.

Jesus, lover of my soul,  
Let me to Thy bosom fly,  
While the nearer waters roll,  
While the tempest still is high:

Hide me, O my Savior, hide,  
Till the storm of life is past;  
Safe into the haven guide;  
O receive my soul at last.

We should praise God for who he is and what he has done for us. Singing about how we praise God or how we want to praise is not right. Because the Book of Psalms has so many phrases praising God, it is not wonder many of the best hymns incorporate many Biblical phrases and words in their lyrics.

One of my favorite psalms praising the identity of God is **Psalm 24** by King David. This may have been sung as David carried the Ark of the Covenant into his new capital of Jerusalem in a majestic procession **2 Samuel 6:1-19** :

The earth and everything it contains are the Lord's.  
The world and all who live in its are his  
He laid its foundation on the seas  
and set it firmly on the rivers.

Who may go up the Lord's mountain?  
Who may stand in his holy place?  
The one who has clean hands and a pure heart  
and does not long for what is false  
or lie when he is under oath.

This person will receive a blessing from the Lord  
and righteousness from God his Savior.  
This is the person who seeks him,  
who searches for the face of the God of Jacob. *Selah*

Lift up your heads you gates.  
Be lifted you ancient doors  
so that the King of Glory may come in.

Who is this King of Glory?  
The Lord, strong and mighty.  
The Lord, heroic in battle.

Lift up your heads you gates.  
Be lifted you ancient doors  
so that the King of Glory may come in.

Who then is this King of Glory?  
The Lord of Armies is the King of Glory. **Psalm 24:1-10**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why is it always a good idea to always pray *The Collect for Purity* before worshipping God? Almighty God, unto you all hearts are opened, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name. Amen. Book of Common Prayer.
2. Jesus told us we must only worship God as he wants to be worshiped, never the way we want to worship him. Jesus told us to *worship God in spirit and in truth*. What does this mean?
3. King David wrote 73 of the 150 psalms. His last psalm in the book is Psalm 145, a song of praise to God. List all the things David praises God for.
4. How does worship help us grow closer in relationship with God?
5. Let's imagine you take time to plan out one hour of worship to God. What elements might you include, how long for each, and explain why the element is included?
6. Why is it that any worship service but include a statement of the Gospel?
7. Look up the Aaronic Blessing in **Numbers 6:24-26**. Why is this an appropriate ending for a worship service?



## Week 9

### Praying with God

But I tell you this: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.  
**Matthew 5:44**

But I tell everyone who is listening: Love your enemies. Be kind to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who insult you.  
**Luke 6:27-28**

When you pray, go to your room and close the door. Pray privately to your Father who is with you. Your Father sees what you do in private. He will reward you.

When you pray, don't ramble like the heathens who think they'll be heard if they talk a lot. Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

This is how you should pray: O Father in Heaven, let your name be holy. Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us our daily bread today. Forgive us as we forgive others. Don't allow us to be tempted. Instead, rescue us from the Evil One. **Matthew 6:6-13**

That's why I tell you to have faith that you have already received whatever you pray for and it will be yours. **Mark 11:24**

Whenever you pray, forgive everything you have against anyone. Then your Father in Heaven will forgive your failures. **Mark 11:25**

Ask and you will receive. Search and you will find. Know and the door will be opened for you. Everyone who asks will receive. The one who searches will find and for the one who knocks, the door will be opened. **Matthew 7:7-8**

Even though you're evil, you know how to give good gifts to your children. So how much more will your Father in Heaven give good things to those who ask him? **Matthew 7:11**

I will do anything you ask the Father in my name so that the Father will be given glory because of the Son. If you ask me to do something, I will do it. **John 14:13-14**

If you live in me and what I say lives in you, then ask for anything you want, and it will be yours. You give glory to my Father when you produce a lot of fruit and therefore show you are my disciples. **John 15:7-8**

You didn't choose me, but I chose you. I have appointed you to go, to produce fruit that will last, and to ask the Father in my name to give you whatever you ask for. **John 15:16**

So far you haven't asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive so that you can be completely happy. **John 16:24**

Jesus had a great deal to say about prayer. And Jesus is portrayed in the Gospels as praying every time he could. He would often go off to a desolate place where he could be alone with his Heavenly Father. Sometimes, he would pray all night. Luke records Jesus prayed all night before choosing his twelve disciples whom he named apostles. **Luke 6:12-13**

Jesus taught his disciples how to pray in a model prayer and what not to do. And he gave a concrete example of the proper attitude for prayer:

Two men went into the Temple courtyard to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed: God, I thank you that I'm not like other people! I'm not a robber or a dishonest person. I haven't committed adultery. I'm not even like this tax collector. I fast twice a day and I give you a tenth of my entire income.

But the tax collector was standing at a distance. He wouldn't even look up to Heaven. Instead, he became very upset, and he said: God, be merciful to me a sinner.

I can guarantee that this tax collector went home with God's approval, but the Pharisee didn't. Everyone who honors himself will be humbled but the person who humbles himself will be honored. **Luke 18:10-14**

Perhaps the most dramatic moment of Jesus praying came in the Garden of Gethsemane just before he was arrested by the Sanhedrin. Jesus had gone deep into the garden accompanied by only three of his disciples: Peter, James and John. He went apart from them and prayed:

Father, if it is your will, take this cup of suffering away from me. However, your will must be done, not mine. Then an angel from Heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. So he prayed very hard in anguish. His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. **Luke 22:42-44**

What was the source of Jesus' anguish? God the Father told his Son that while Jesus was hanging on the cross, he would feel in his human form that he was separated from his Father while he was being made sin for the world. Jesus had never been separated from his Father before and this prospect was causing him deep anguish.

Later, just before he died on the cross, Jesus called out plaintively:

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? **Matthew 27:46**

We should remember, as I mentioned before, that one of the reasons Jesus prayed to God so often is that he could only perform miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit working in him. Although Jesus always remained the Son of God, on earth he restricted himself to his second human nature. Jesus confirmed this when he said to his disciples:

I can guarantee this truth: Those who believe in me will do the things I am doing. They will do even greater things because I am going to the Father. I will do anything you ask the Father in my name so that the Father will be given glory because of the Son. If you ask me to do something, I will do it. **John 14:12-14**

## **THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

1. Prayer is communication with God. We listen to God, and we talk to God. Are there any instances in the Gospels where God speaks to Jesus?
2. Examine the Lord's Prayer that really should be called the Disciple's Prayer. It is a model prayer, although we all pray it often. Explain each element of the prayer and why it is important. Then paraphrase this prayer.
3. One of the hardest things Jesus gave his disciples to do is to pray for their enemies. How is our attitude toward our enemy changed when we pray for them?

4. In his Parable of the Unjust Judge **Luke 18:1-8**, Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray earnestly expecting that God would answer their request. But then after saying this Jesus asked: *When the Son of Man comes, will he really find faith on the earth?* Why did Jesus ask this question?
5. In his Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Jesus indicated the proper attitude of our prayer – that of humbleness. Why then do so many teach that we should struggle with God in prayer?
6. Jesus taught that we should have so much confidence in our prayer – that we should have faith and not doubt – that *we could say to a mountain: Be thrown into the sea.* **Matthew 21:21**. Is this really possible or is it hyperbole?
7. Why don't most of us want to pray? Prayer meetings are the least attended church services.
8. I have found one of the best ways to begin my prayer is to repeat the Episcopal Confession of Purity:

Almighty God, unto you all hearts are opened, all desires known, and from no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit so that we may perfectly love you and magnify your holy name. Amen.

Why does this prayer put us in a wonderful attitude to begin speaking to God?

## Week 10

### Living in a Fallen World Guided by the Holy Spirit

The standards of the Spirit, who gives life through Christ Jesus, have set you free from the standards of sin and death. It is impossible for us to do what God's standards demand because of the weakness our human nature has. But God sent his Son to have a human nature as sinners have and to pay for sin. That way God condemned sin in our corrupt nature. Therefore we, who do not live by our corrupt nature but by our spiritual nature, are able to meet God's standards in Moses' Teachings. **Romans 8:2-4**

Certainly, all who are guided by God's Spirit are God's children. **Romans 8:14**

As a result, I live in a relationship with God. I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I now live I live by believing God's Son who loved me and took the punishment for my sins. **Galatians 3:19-20**

Since Christ suffered physically, take the same attitude he had. A person who suffered physically no longer sins. That way you won't be guided by sinful human desires as you live the rest of your lives on earth. Instead, you will be guided by what God wants you to do. **1 Peter 4:1-2**

Jesus not only wanted his disciples to believe in God but also to live holy lives. This also what people were committing to John the Baptist when he immersed them in the Jordan River. They were repenting of their wicked way of living and repenting or turning around and living the way God wanted his Chosen People to live as Moses taught in Deuteronomy, loving God and loving their neighbor.

The biggest problem humans have is that they sin even after they are converted. Paul expressed this problem when he said:

I know that God's standards in Moses' Teachings are spiritual, but I have a corrupt nature, sold as a slave to sin. I don't realize what I am doing. I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do what I hate. I don't do what I want to do but I agree that God's standards are good. So I am no longer the one who is doing the thing I hate but sin that lives in me is doing them.

I know that nothing good lives in me. That is, nothing good lives in my corrupt nature. Although I have the desire to do what is right, I don't do it. I don't do the good I want to do. Instead, I do the evil that I don't want to do. Now, when I do what I don't want to do, I am no longer the one who is doing it. Sin that lives in me is doing it.

So I've discovered this truth. Evil is present with me even when I want to do what God's standards say is good. I take pleasure in God's standards in my inner being. However, I see a different standard at work throughout my body. It is at war with the standards my mind sets and tries to take me captive to sin's standards which still exist throughout my body.

What a miserable person I am. Who will rescue me from this dying body? I thank God that our Lord Jesus Christ rescues me. So I am obedient to God's standards with my mind, but I am obedient to sin's standards with my corrupt nature. **Romans 7:14-25**

We will cover the details of our conversion process in the next part. But here let us merely say that in the justification process by God we are transformed radically. While we have had a conscience to tell us right from wrong from the day we were born, this is amplified by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives when we are born again.

We will be tempted to sin and rebel against God all the days of our life on earth. But the Holy Spirit serves as a guide to help and encourage us to live a holy life as God has planned for our lives. As we continue to listen to his still small voice or gentle whisper, we develop good habits for living that are consistent with God's teachings. But it is a struggle as Paul relates.

Yet with the Holy Spirit's help *we can be more than conquerors through him that loves us.* **Romans 8:37**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. When we are justified by God and given the Holy Spirit, we are transformed as Paul says into *a new creature*. **2 Corinthians 5:17**. What is the difference in our attitudes and actions?
2. Although we are still tempted to sin after we are converted, it seems easier to stay on God's path because of the Holy Spirit. What does he do?

3. *The Holy Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Romans 8:16.*  
How does this help us to avoid sin?
4. How do we demonstrate our love for God?
5. How is our prayer life enhanced by the work of the Holy Spirit? See **Romans 8:26-27**.

## Part 3

### What God Does for Us

As he was going along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were throwing a net into the sea because they were fishermen. Jesus said to them: Come, follow me. I will teach you how to catch people instead of fish. They immediately left their nets and followed him. **Mark 1:16-17**

As Jesus went on a little farther, he saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat preparing their nets to go fishing. He immediately called them. They left their father Zebedee and the hired men in the boat and followed Jesus. **Mark 1:19-20**

Jesus went to the seashore again. Large crowds came to him and he taught them. When Jesus was leaving, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting in a tax office. Jesus said to him: Follow me. So Levi got up and followed him. **Mark 2:13-14**

Jesus now has five followers. This is the same number of followers the Jewish Talmud says Jesus had. It says their names were Matthai, Naqqai, Netzer, Buni, and Todah. The Gospel According to John says the names of Jesus' first five followers were Andrew, the Beloved Disciple, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel. Andrew and the Beloved Disciple had been disciples of John the Baptist who had sent them to Jesus. **John 1:35-51**

Later, Jesus chose his Twelve.

At that time, Jesus went up a mountain to pray. He spent the whole night in prayer to God. When it was day, he called his disciples. He chose twelve of them and called them apostles. They were Simon, whom he called Peter and Simon's brother Andrew; James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, son of Alphaeus; Simon, who was called the Zealot; Judas, son of James, whom some call Thaddeus and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. **Luke 6:12-16**



God is a seeker. He calls human beings to be in relationship with him and to reflect his glory. We learned previously that God called all the descendants of Abraham to be his Chosen People and to inherit the Holy Land first called Canaan and then Israel. This is why Isaiah can say to Israel:

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. Let wicked people abandon their ways. Let evil people abandon their thoughts. Let them return to the Lord and he will show compassion to them. Let them return to our God because he will freely forgive them. **Isaiah 55:6-7**

This is what John the Baptist was doing. He was calling the people of Israel now called Jews to repent or turn away from their wicked way of life and turn to the holy way God wants his Chosen People to live. **Matthew 3:1-6**

But Jesus went further than John the Baptist. Jesus also called Gentiles to follow him. Jesus and his disciples went east across the Sea of Galilee into Gentile territory where Jesus exorcised 6,000 demons from a man. The man wanted to leave with Jesus and stay with him.

Instead, Jesus told the man: Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been to you. **Mark 5:19**

This man became the first Gentile missionary of Jesus.

God calls us in the same way. And God calls each of us in a different way, often in ways in which we are unaware. Here is the way God called me:

I was raised in a godly home by Christian parents. But when I was 15, I told my parents I didn't want to go to church anymore. My father was sad at my decision, but he said: You will come back. I will pray for you every day.

In my junior year in college, I read a book by Thomas Merton called New Seeds of Contemplation. In the book was a phrase that stuck in my mind. I continued to read books by Merton for the next 24 years.

But in 1988 when I was 47 years old, a co-worker started talking to me about Jesus and suggested I listen to a radio program called "Car Pool". On this show, a father and son discussed the Book of Revelation and at the end, the son gave an altar call telling how one could accept Jesus as the Lord and Savior. My father had died about one year before and I missed him, so the program appealed to me.

Then came a personal family crisis and I felt very alone. I didn't have a job and my savings were almost gone. I felt useless and very lonely. So I knelt down beside my bed and said: Lord, if you can do something with this useless life, I'll follow you and do what you say.

Immediately, I felt huge arms reach down and hug me. I felt like Jesus had accepted me as his child as Merton has written and Ralph Neighbors, Jr., on the radio program had promised. I have never looked back and have followed Jesus and taught the Bible ever since.

Now this will not happen to everyone in this same way. God treats us each individually. This really happened and it radically changed my life for the better. I am so grateful.

In the next sessions under this heading, we will examine the steps God takes us through on the spiritual journey.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. One of the classic stories in the Bible is God's call of Samuel. Read it in **1 Samuel 3:1-21**. How did Samuel know it was God speaking to him?
2. How did Jesus know who to call as his disciples?
3. Did anyone in the Bible ever refuse a call of Jesus to be his disciple? Who?
4. Thomas Merton was a rebellious young man who still was called by God. He was a wonderful writer and God used him to write many books. His autobiography is called The Seven Storey Mountain and was a best seller. God took a short phrase and stuck it in my mind. In the same way, God allows the words of the Bible to literally jump off the page. Has this ever happened to you?
5. God has a plan for each of our lives developed even before we were born. He wants us to follow that plan so he calls us in many different ways. When we finally accept his call, he begins to reveal that plan through his Holy Spirit. But he doesn't tell us the entire plan in advance. Why not?
6. God's plan for each of his human creatures is that we reflect his glory back to him. How are you doing that today?
7. God said to the Judeans while they were in captivity in Babylon:

I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. They are plans for peace and not disaster, plans to give you a future filled with hope. Then you will call to me. You will come and pray to me, and I will hear you. When you

look for me, you will find me. When you wholeheartedly seek me, I will let you find me. **Jeremiah 29:11-13**

Even though God had sent all the Judeans into captivity and had allowed the Babylonians to tear burn down their beloved Jerusalem and their Temple, God still called his Chosen People to repent of their wickedness and turn back to him. God's greatest quality is his *cheed*, his loving kindness, and he always keeps his promise:

The Lord is a merciful God. He will not abandon you, destroy you, or forget the Covenant he made to your ancestors that he swore he would keep. **Deuteronomy 4:31.**

What evidence do we have that we can have faith this is true?

## Week II

### The Prevenient Grace of God

Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites with this blessing before he died. He said: The Lord came from Sinai like the sun. He appeared like sunshine from Mount Paran. He came with thousands of his holy ones. On his right was a raging fire for them.

You certainly love your people. All your holy ones are in your hands. They bow at your feet to receive your instructions. Moses gave us these teachings. They belong to the assembly of Jacob. The Lord was King of Jeshurun when the leaders of the people assembled together with all the tribes of Israel. **Deuteronomy 33:1-5**

There's no one like your God Jeshurun. He rides through the Heavens to help you. In majesty he rides through the clouds. The eternal God is your shelter and his everlasting arms support you. He will force your enemies out of your way and tell you to destroy them.

So Israel will live securely. Jacob's spring will be left alone in a land of grain and new wine. Dew will drip from Israel's skies. You are blessed Israel. Who is like you, a nation saved by the Lord? He is a shield that helps you and a sword that wins your victories. Your enemies will come crawling to you and you will stomp on their backs. **Deuteronomy 33:26-29**

God loves every creature he had created from the smallest ant to the great Hippopotamus. But with man, King David says:

When I look at your Heavens, the creation of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place – what is a mortal that you remember him or the son of man that you take care of him?

You have made him a little lower than yourself. You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him rule what your hands created. You have put everything under his control: all the sheep and cattle, the wild animals, the birds, the fish, whatever swims in the currents of the seas.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth. **Psalm 8:1-9**

David is absolutely amazed as how God honors the human creatures he has created. God honors us by giving us revelation about himself and about how we should live in his world. There is general revelation, special revelation, and direct revelation. God is always working among us even if we don't know it. He works in people even if they deny he exists or reject his counsel. *God is love.* **1 John 4:16.** And his love is greater than anything. He will never love us more or any less than he loves us now.

God's constant love to us is called prevenient grace or grace before the event. God calls everyone to himself. The apostle Peter tells us:

Dear friends, don't ignore this fact. One day with the Lord is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord isn't slow to do what he promised, as some people think. Rather, he is patient for your sake. He doesn't want to destroy anyone, but he wants all *pas* people to have an opportunity to turn to him and change the way they think and act. **2 Peter 3:8-9**

Look at it this way. At the right time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for ungodly people. Finding someone who would die for a godly person is rare. Maybe someone who would have the courage to die for a good person. Christ died for us while we were still sinners. This demonstrates God's love for us. **Romans 5:6-8**

John Wesley used the picture of a house to describes the way of salvation. First God uses **prevenient grace** to call us to his home. Then there is the porch he convicts us with **convicting grace** of our need for him. Then there is the door. When we go through the door, where God opens this door and allows us to enter the house. This is called **justifying or pardoning grace**. Once inside the house, we grow closer to God in relationship and holy living. This is called **sanctifying grace**.

Paul describes this prevenient grace of God when he says:

God's anger is revealed from Heaven against every ungodly and immoral thing people do as they try to suppress the truth of their immoral living.

What can be known about God is clear to them because he has made it clear to them.

From the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly observed in all that he has made. As a result, people have no excuse. They knew God but did not praise and thank him for being God. Instead, their thoughts were pointless, and their misguided minds were plunged into darkness. **Romans 1:18-21**

Even though human beings reject God still loves them and calls them to himself. Remember my testimony of conversion described in a previous session. It took from 1964 to 1988 -- 24 years - before I returned to God. All that time God was working in my life.

He knew I liked good writers, so he placed a book of Thomas Merton in my hands. He had me listen to a co-worker as he talked about his relationship with Jesus. He knew I missed my Dad so he had me listen to a radio program where a father and son talked. He reminded me that God accepted me in spite of my years of rebellion in the pastor's altar call.

And he allowed failing to have a job, minimal savings, and a family tragedy to bring me to my knees.

God did all this. The only thing I did was to ask his forgiveness and commit to follow him.

God's prevenient grace is available to everyone at all times.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. The United Methodist Book of Discipline (2004) defines prevenient grace as: the divine love that surrounds all humanity and precedes any and all of our conscious impulses. This grace prompts our first wish to please God, our first glimmer of understanding concerning God's will, and our first slight transient conviction of having sinned against God. God's grace also awakens in us an earnest longing for deliverance from sin and death and moves us toward repentance and faith. Write a shorter definition in your own words.
2. John Wesley in his sermon *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* #85, he said: Prevenient grace causes the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light of his will, and the first transient conviction of having sinned against him. Describe the way God has used prevenient grace in your life.

3. Many people view our early life as a dark world. If the world is so dark, why did God create his Creation so beautiful with many unique and exotic creatures and with such gorgeous mountains, valleys, rivers, and streams?
4. God included human beings in his Creation. Why did he do this?
5. Is prevenient grace the same as common grace available to all?
6. One person has said that God has given all men a prevenient grace that results in a universal healing of total depravity by the grace of God through the atoning work of Christ. This, in turn has alleviated, though not fully, the corruption of inherited depravity. Do you agree?
7. The patriarch Jacob dreamed a dream in which he saw a ladder going up to Heaven with angels going up and coming down. Then God spoke to him. When Jacob awoke, he said: *Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it.* **Genesis 28:16**. What does it take to make one realize that God is working in your life?

## Week 12

### The Convicting Grace of God

One of the criminals hanging there insulted Jesus by saying: So you're really the Messiah, are you? Well save yourself and us. But the other criminal scolded him saying: Don't you fear God at all? Can't you see that you're condemned in the same way that he is? Our punishment is fair. We're getting what we deserve. But this may has done nothing wrong.

Then he said: Lord, remember me when you enter your Kingdom. Jesus said to him: I can guarantee this truth: Today you will be with me in Paradise. **Luke 23:39-43**

God's **prevenient grace** makes us ready to receive the **convicting grace** that leads to repentance. This grace was in effect when John the Baptist called the Judeans to be baptized in the Jordan River. John preached:

Turn to God and change the way you think and act *matanoeo*—repent because the Kingdom of Heaven is near. **Matthew 3:2**

Jesus preached exactly the same message:

From then on, Jesus began to tell people: Turn to God and change the way you think and act because the Kingdom of Heaven is near. **Matthew 4:17**

Before John baptized a person by immersion in the Jordan River, the person told John that they were committed to change and live a holy life as God had commanded in Moses' Teachings or *Towrah*. Then John baptized them.

When Jesus died on the cross, he enabled all humans to be reconciled to God despite the fact that we allow sin to ruin our lives. **2 Corinthians 5:18**. Because of what Jesus has done, God can give us the gift of salvation by justifying us. But first we need to accept that we need his gift. This is what convicting grace does. We need to accept the fact that we rebel against God. This is very hard for most of us to do.

We are separated from God because of our sin. But Jesus by his sacrifice of himself reconciles us to God:



But Christ came as a High Priest of the good things that are now here. Christ went through a better, more perfect tent that was not made with human hands and that is not part of the created world. He used his own blood, not the blood of goats and bulls for this sacrifice. He went into the Most Holy Place and offered this sacrifice once and for all to free us forever. **Hebrews 9:11-12**

Brothers and sisters, because of the blood of Jesus we can now confidently go into the Holy Place. Jesus has opened a new and living way for us to go through the curtain into the Holy of Holies. The curtain is his body. We have a superior priest in charge of God's House. We have been sprinkled with his blood to free us from a guilty conscience and our bodies have been washed with clean water. We must continue to come to him with a sincere heart and strong faith. We must continue to hold firmly to our declaration of faith. The one who made the promise is faithful. **Hebrews 10:19-23**

We can never underestimate what Jesus has done. The sins of Jews were forgiven once a year in the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur where the High Priest sacrificed one goat and put its blood on the Ark of the Covenant. He placed his hands on the second goat, the scapegoat, that was then sent out into the desert to die.

But Jesus gave his own body, he became the scapegoat and died making one sacrifice for all time. This sacrifice of Jesus was a high price for God to pay. We can never forget this.

Thinking about the high price Jesus made enable us to see ourselves as we really are and commit to change from a life of self-centeredness to a life pleasing to God which reflects his glory back to him.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Describe repentance.
2. Review the story of the Prodigal Son. **Luke 15:11-32**. What did the Prodigal Son repent of? What should the older son have repented of?
3. Why is it so difficult for people to admit that they sin and rebel against God?
4. Read the story of Zacchaeus. **Luke 19:1-10**. What did this Director of Taxes repent of?
5. Jews find it very hard to repent. Normally the Hebrew Bible says that God repents. Why is this so?

## Week 13

### The Justifying Grace of God

You were once dead because of your failures and sins. You followed the ways of this present world and its spiritual ruler. This ruler continues to work in people who refuse to obey God. All of us once lived among these people and followed the desires of our corrupt nature. We did what our corrupt desires and thoughts wanted us to do. So because of our nature, we deserved God's anger like everyone else.

But God is rich in mercy because of his great love for us. We were dead because of our failures but he made us alive together with Christ. It is God's kindness that saved you. God has brought us back to life together with Christ Jesus and has given us a position in Heaven with him. He did this through Christ Jesus out of his generosity to us in order to show his extremely rich kindness in the world to come.

God saved you through faith as an act of kindness. You had nothing to do with it. Being saved is a gift from God. It's not the result of anything you've done, so no one can brag about it. God has made us what we are. He has created us in Christ Jesus to live lives filled with good works that he has prepared for us to do. **Ephesians 2:1-10**

Prevenient Grace and Convicting Grace prepare us for Justifying Grace. This is a work that God alone does in us. John Wesley in his picture of the house sees justification as opening the door to the house. God gives us the gift of faith in Jesus and transforms us into a new Creature **KJV**, as Paul puts it.

Whoever is a believer in Christ is a new creation. The old way of living has disappeared. A new way of living has come into existence. **2 Corinthians 5:17**

Now that we have God's approval being justified by faith, we have peace with God because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done. **Romans 5:1**

Since Christ's blood has now given us God's approval, we are even more certain that Christ will save us from God's anger. If the death of his Son

restored our relationship with God while we were still his enemies, we are even more certain that because of this restored relationship, the life of his Son will save us. **Romans 5:9-10**

God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. **Romans 5:5**

How amazing this is. At the moment of my conversion, when those huge hands reached down and hugged me, I felt a serious change in my attitude toward life. Instead of being depressed, I was joyful. I walked into the kitchen and saw the sun shining and the birds singing. I had a new confidence that God would help me recover and get a job. The joy I felt is really indescribable. All I can say is that it was wonderful. I felt like a new person.

But can we say now that our salvation is now finished? No. God has opened the door but now we must live in God's House. **Justifying grace** provides that **sanctifying grace** can now begin.

In the same way continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. It is God who produces in you the desires and actions that please him. **Philippians 2:12**

Being saved through justification is only the start of another process called sanctification we will discuss in the next section.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Define justification in your own words.
2. What is justification a gift of God, something only God can do?
3. When God justifies us, we are saved. Why can't we just sit down now and relax? Why do we have to go on a journey of sanctification?
4. One person describes **justifying grace** as *turning toward a new future*. Comment on this.

## Week 14

### The Sanctifying Grace of God

Heaven and earth and everything in them were finished. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing. On the seventh day he stopped the work he had been doing. Then God blessed the seventh day and set it apart as holy sanctified it because on that day he stopped all his work of Creation. **Genesis 2:1-3**

Remember the Day of Rest the Sabbath by observing it as a Holy Day. You have six days to do all your work. The seventh day is the Day of Rest – a Holy Day dedicated to the Lord your God. You, your sons, your daughters, your male and female slaves, your cattle, and the foreigners living in your city must never do any work on that day. In six days the Lord made Heaven and earth, and the sea, along with everything in them. He didn't work on the seventh day. That's why the Lord blessed the day he stopped his work and set this day apart as holy. **Exodus 20:8-11**

To be sanctified is to be set apart. God set apart the seventh day as a Day of Remembrance. We should remember that God made Creation because he loved us and we should love him in return and be grateful for the Creation he has given us to live in. Later Moses added:

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God used his mighty hand and powerful arm to bring you out of there. That's why the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Day of Rest as a Holy Day. **Deuteronomy 5:15**

On the Sabbath Day, Christians should remember the great sacrifice Jesus made on the cross to reconcile us wicked humans to God.

[Jesus said:] And for their my disciples sake I sanctify myself, that they may also be sanctified in the truth. **John 17:9 KJV**

Jesus, who makes people holy sanctifies, and those who are made holy sanctified both have the same Father. That is why Jesus isn't ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. **Hebrews 2:31**

In this passage **Psalm 40:6-8**, Christ first said: You did not want sacrifices, offerings, burnt offering, and sacrifices for sin. You did not approve of them. These are the sacrifices that Moses' Teachings require people to offer. Then Christ says: I have come to do what you want. He did away with sacrifices in order to establish the obedience God wants. We have been set apart as holy sanctified because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do by sacrificing his body once and for all. **Hebrews 10:8-10**

You are partners with Christ Jesus because of God. God has become our wisdom sent from God, our approval, our holiness sanctification, and our ransom from sin redemption. **1 Corinthians 1:30**

After God has called us, convicted us of our sin, justified us as righteous, he leads us on a journey of sanctification. We have been on the porch of the house, entered through the door, and now live in the house. How are we to live in God's House. We are to be holy as he is holy.

The Lord spoke to Moses: Tell the whole congregation of Israel: Be holy because I, the Lord your God, are holy. **Leviticus 19:1**

Be my holy people because I, the Lord, am holy. I have separated you from other people to be my very own. **Leviticus 20:26**

Because you are children who obey God, don't live the kind of lives you once lived. Once you lived to satisfy your desires because you didn't know any better. But because the God who called you is holy, you must be holy in every aspect of your life. Scripture says: Be holy because I am holy. So if you call God your Father, live your time as temporary residents on earth in fear. **1 Peter 1:14-17**

John Wesley views God's sanctification of us as God restoring us to the fullness of the image of God he first created Adam and Eve with. **Genesis 1:27**. Like justification, this sanctification is a gift of God. **Ephesians 2:8**

Wesley lived life like a Christian before he was actually converted to be a Christian. After he was converted, he became concerned that many members of the Church of England called themselves Christians but didn't act like Christians. They were Almost Christians rather than Altogether Christians.

So he not only preached conversion to faith in Jesus Christ, he preached living holy lives. He organized people into classes where they were taught how to live holy lives as God desired. This was his focus. He wanted to improve the Church of England and never separate from it. He was a faithful priest in the church all his life.

James, the Lord's brother and the first Bishop of the Jerusalem church, placed great emphasis on holy living. He asked:

My brothers and sisters, what good does it do if someone claims to have faith but doesn't do any good things works? Can this kind of faith save him? Suppose a believer, whether a man or a woman, needs clothes or food and one of you tells that person: God be with you. Stay warm and make sure you eat enough. If you don't provide for that person's physical needs, what good does it do? In the same way faith by itself is dead if it doesn't cause you to do any good things works. **James 2:14-17**

Our journey with Jesus through the way of sanctification leads us on to partial perfection where we sin less and less, to await the day when Jesus returns again and brings us home to glory with him.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. How seriously should we take the Seventh Day, the Sabbath, the Day of Rest? What should be our purpose in observing this day?
2. How is it possible to become too legalistic in observing the Sabbath and lose the value God has given us in creating this day?
3. In Jesus' day, observation of the Sabbath was held strictly by the Pharisees, a lay group committed to observing the rules of the Towrah strictly. They even made up a series of 39 rules for things a pious one could not do on the Sabbath. Together with circumcision and reading the Towrah, the Pharisees attempted to hold together Jewish identity against the rising tide of Hellenism. But Jesus ignored their rules. Why did he do this?

4. In the 700s BC, the prophet Isaiah counseled people to observe the Sabbath:

Blessed is the one who keeps the Day of Rest – a Holy Day from becoming unholy and his hands from doing anything wrong. **Isaiah 56:2**

5. **Psalm 92** is called a Psalm for the Sabbath Day. Read this psalm and list things that are appropriate to be thought of or done on this day:

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to make music to praise your name, O Most High. It is good to announce your mercy in the morning and your faithfulness in the evening on a ten-stringed instrument and a harp and with a melody on a lyre.

You made me find joy in what you have done, O LORD. I will sing joyfully about the works of your hands. How spectacular are your works, O LORD. How very deep are your thoughts.

A stupid person cannot know and a fool cannot understand that wicked people sprout like grass and all troublemakers blossom like flowers only to be destroyed forever.

But you, O LORD, are highly honored forever. Now look at your enemies, O LORD. Now look at your enemies. They disappear, and all troublemakers are scattered.

But you make me as strong as a wild bull, and soothing lotion is poured on me. My eyes gloat over those who spy on me. My ears hear the cries of evildoers attacking me.

Righteous people flourish like palm trees and grow tall like the cedars in Lebanon. They are planted in the LORD's House. They blossom in our God's courtyards. Even when they are old, they still bear fruit. They are always healthy and fresh. They make it known that the LORD is decent. He is my Rock. He is never unfair. **Psalm 92:1-15**

6. John Wesley believed that God's sanctifying grace was more powerful than sin so he gathered Christians into small groups for mutual support and encouragement as they lived into their Christian faith. They confessed their sin, watched over each other, encouraged each other and sought to love God and love their neighbors as themselves. How does this reflect the attitudes in the early church?

The disciples were devoted to the teachings of the apostles, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. **Acts 2:42**

7. God's sanctifying grace transforms us more and more into the image of God's Son. **Romans 8:29**. Charles Wesley expresses in his hymn: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling:

Finish then thy new creation,  
Pure and sinless let us be,  
Let us see thy great salvation,  
Perfectly restor'd in thee;  
Chang'd from glory into glory,  
Till in Heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before thee,  
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

However, we are always under construction until Jesus comes. How does the concept of sanctification remind us that we will be tempted by sin until we are in the New Jerusalem with Jesus?



## Part 4

# Spiritual Fruits We Receive from God

But the spiritual nature produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There are no laws against that. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their corrupt nature along with its passions and desires. If we live by our spiritual nature, then our lives need to conform to our spiritual nature. We can't allow ourselves to act arrogantly and to provoke or envy each other. **Galatians 5:22-26**

During our journey of sanctification, the Holy Spirit provides us with the fruits of the Spirit. These fruits and the gifts of the Holy Spirit equip believers for ministry. How can we tell if we have been converted? Examine if your life contains these fruits. Jesus said:

You shall know them by their fruits. **Matthew 7:16**

Jesus was talking about false prophets. You shall identify them as a false prophet by their lifestyle. So it is with Christians. We are to live our faith with as much integrity as possible and to celebrate the Christian faith we find in other.

But remember that sanctification is an ongoing process and all of these fruits in their full extent will not occur in us at once.

## Week 15

### Love, Joy, Peace

We begin with looking at love. Love is a choice, a way of living that impacts how we live our daily lives. It has nothing to do with romantic love. We deliberately choose to conduct ourselves in loving ways and always seek the welfare of others. This sort of love is dependent on the giver's character, not their emotion. In expressing this love in our lives, we would never exercise our own freedom if that action might harm another person in some way.

Jesus taught his disciples the two greatest commandments:

The most important is: Listen Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. So love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second most important commandment is this: Love your neighbor as you love yourself. No other commandment is greater than these. **Mark 12:29-31**

Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment:

I'm giving you a new commandment. Love each other in the same way that I have loved you. Everyone will know that you are my disciples because of your love for each other. **John 13:34-35**

I have loved you in the same way the Father has loved me. So live in my love. If you obey my commandments, you will live in my love. I have obeyed my Father's commandments and in that way I live in his love. I have told you this so that you will be as joyful as I am and your joy will be complete. Love each other as I have loved you. This is what I'm commanding you to do. **John 15:9-12**

Love each other. This is what I'm commanding you to do. **John 15:17**

Jesus gave this command three times. That's how important he considered it. Paul used the word love  $\rho\alpha\gamma$  in his letters. He said:

So these three things remain: faith, hope, and love, these three. But the best one of these is love. **1 Corinthians 13:13**

Be alert. Be firm in the Christian faith. Be courageous and strong. Do everything with love. **1 Corinthians 16:13-14**

All of Moses' Teachings are summarized in a single statement: Love your neighbor as you love yourself. **Galatians 5:14**

We now come to joy. Joy is a feeling of gladness that can exist in our lives regardless of our circumstances. There are always some elements in our lives that we can delight in. Joy should be the hallmark of a Christian.

Peter really gets excited when he talks about Jesus' return:

Although you have never seen Christ, you love him. You don't see him now, but you believe in him. You are extremely happy with joy and praise that can hardly be expressed in words [joy inexpressible KJV] as you obtain the salvation that is the goal of your faith. **1 Peter 1:6-7**

Dear friends, don't be surprised by the fiery troubles that are coming in order to test you. Don't feel as though something strange is happening to you but be happy as you share Christ's sufferings. Then you will also be full of joy [glad with exceeding joy KJV] when he appears again in his glory. **1 Peter 4:12-13**

Then there is peace that could be categorized in two ways. There is the peace that exists in the absence of war and violence. Then there is an inner peace that can exist despite what is happening in our lives. The world doesn't offer much peace. Fear destroys peace. Hatred destroys peace. Envy destroys peace. Greed destroys peace, as is apparent with panic buying.

Paul talks that great inner peace:

Always be joyful in the Lord. I'll say it again: Be joyful. Let everyone know how considerate you are. The Lord is near. Never worry about anything. But in every situation let God know what you need in prayers and requests while giving thanks. Then God's peace, which goes beyond anything we can imagine, will guard your thoughts and emotions through Christ Jesus. **Philippians 4:4-7**

# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Jesus says:

I'm leaving you peace. I'm giving you my peace. I don't give you the kind of peace that the world gives. **John 14:27**

I've told you this so that my peace may be with you. In the world you'll have trouble. But cheer up. I have overcome the world. **John 16:33**

How does the peace of Jesus differ from that of the world?

2. Jesus says:

I have loved you in the same way that the Father has loved me. So live in my love. If you obey my commandments, you will live in my love. I have obeyed my Father's commandments and in that way I live in is love. I have told you this so that you will be as joyful as I am, and your joy will be complete. **John 15:9-11**

In that hour the Holy Spirit filled Jesus with joy. Jesus said: I praise you Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, for hiding these things from wise and intelligent people and revealing them to little children. Yes Father, this is what pleased you. **Luke 10:21**

Describe the joy of Jesus.

3. The apostle John says:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent his Son to be the payment for our sins. Dear friends, if that is the way God loved us, we must also love each other. **1 John 4:10**

How does this verse help us understand God's plan for our lives?

4. Peter says God has given us high value promises and we share in the divine nature.

Because of this make every effort to add integrity [virtue KJV] to your faith, and to integrity add knowledge, to knowledge add self-control, to self-control add endurance [perseverance KJV], to endurance add godliness, to

godliness, add Christian affection [brotherly kindness KJV], and to Christian affection add love. If you have these qualities and they are increasing, it demonstrates that your knowledge about our Lord Jesus is living and productive.

If these qualities aren't present in your life, you're short-sighted and have forgotten that you were cleansed from your past sins. Therefore, brothers and sisters, us more effort to make God's calling and choosing to you secure. If you do keep doing this, you will never fall away. Then you will also be given the wealth of entering into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **2 Peter 1:5-11**

What is Peter advising his disciples to do?

5. Paul seems to be using hyperbole when he says:

Pay your debts as they become due. However, one debt you can never finish paying is the debt of love you owe to one another. The one who loves another person has fulfilled Moses' Teachings. The commandments: Never commit adultery, never murder, never steal, never have wrong desires, and every other commandment as summed up in this statement: Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Love never does anything that is harmful to a neighbor. Therefore, love fulfills Moses' Teachings. **Romans 13:8-10**

Paul says that if a person loves another person they are fulfilling the commands of the entire Law of Moses. Is this true? What else does God command?

6. At the end of his High Priestly Prayer, Jesus says:

I have made your name Father known to my disciples and I will make it known so that the love you have for me will be in them and I will be in them. **John 17:26**

What does Jesus mean when he says this?

## Week 16

### Patience, Kindness

The seeds that were planted on good ground are people who also hear the Word. But they keep it in their good and honest hearts and produce what is good despite what life may bring *hypomone* [bear fruit with patience KJV] **Luke 8:15**

This is the first time the Greek word *hypomone* appears in the Bible. It refers to patient endurance, keeping faith in Jesus despite persecution. It is not a passive word. It reflects the believer's assurance that if they are killed, they will immediately go to be with Jesus in Paradise as was the good faith at the cross. **Luke 23:43**

Christians also need patience as they wait for Jesus to return at his Second Coming. Most Christians in the first century anticipated Jesus to return in their lifetimes. James, the Bishop of the Jerusalem Church says:

Brothers and sisters be patient until the Lord comes again. See how farmers wait for their precious crops to grow. They wait patiently for fall and spring rains. You too must be patient. Don't give up hope. The Lord will soon be here. Brothers and sisters stop complaining about each other or you will be condemned. Realize that the judge is standing at the door. **James 5:7-9**

Christians also need patient endurance when they are persecuted for their faith. This became more and more important as the first century advanced. As more and more people became Christians, pagans were threatened by them and persecuted them even killing many of them in cruel ways.

Brothers and sisters follow the example of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. They were patient when they suffered unjustly. We consider those who endure to be blessed. You have heard about Job's endurance. You saw that the Lord ended Job's suffering because the Lord is compassionate and merciful. **James 5:7-1**

My brothers and sisters be very happy when you are tested in different ways. You know that such testing of your faith produces endurance [patience KJV].

Endure until your testing is over. Then you will be mature and complete, and you won't need anything. **James 1:2-3**

Jesus warned in all three synoptic Gospels of the time of persecution. So he encouraged his disciples to keep their faith and not disown him.

If people are ashamed of me and what I say in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of those people when he comes with the holy angels in his Father's glory. **Mark 8:38**

Be on your guard. People will hand you over to the Jewish courts and whip you in their synagogues. You will stand in front of governors and Kings to testify to them because of me. But first, the Gospel must be spread to all nations. Brother will hand brother to death – a father will hand over his child. Children will rebel against their parents and ill them. Everyone will hate you because you are committed to me. But the person who endures *hypomone* to the End will be saved. **Mark 13:9-10, 12-13**

The prophet John exiled on the island of Patmos for preaching the Gospel, writes the Revelation of Jesus Christ to encourage his parishioners in the seven churches in the Roman Province of Asia to be faithful. Jesus says:

Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life. **Revelation 2:10**

If anyone has ears, let him listen. If anyone is taken prisoner, he must go to prison. If anyone is killed with a sword, with a sword he must be killed. In this situation, God's holy people need endurance [patience] and confidence. **Revelation 13:9-10**

There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the Beast or its statue. In this situation, God's holy people, who obey his commands and keep their faith in Jesus, need endurance. **Revelation 14:11-12**

John the prophet encourages his people to be *overcomers nikao* – a word that appears 15x times in the Revelation of Jesus Christ as well as in Romans and in I John. John wrote his book believing that every Christian in his churches would be martyred.

**Kindness** is the God's Word translation of God's *checced*, God's most prevalent attribute. This word appears 248x in the Bible, 127x in the Psalms.

The Greek has three words for kindness: *philadelphia* meaning *brotherly love* 6x; *philanthropia* meaning *love for man* 2x; and *chrestotes* meaning *goodness, kindness or gentleness* 10x. Only Paul uses *chrestotes*.

As holy people whom God has chosen and loved, be sympathetic, kind, humble, gentle, and patient. Put up with each other and forgive each other if anyone has a complaint. Forgive as the Lord forgave. Above all, be loving. This ties everything together perfectly.

Also let Christ's peace control you. God has called you into this peace by bringing you in one body. Be thankful. Let Christ's Word in all its wisdom and richness live in you. Use psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to reach and instruct yourselves about God's kindness. Sing to God in your hearts. Everything you say should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. **Colossians 3:12-17**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Luke says that *patient endurance* is important for Christians if they are to bear good fruit for Jesus. The sower sows the seeds of the Gospel but most of it doesn't produce fruit for God because people are preoccupied with the things of this world. What do Christians have to do to produce good fruit as Jesus requires of his disciples? **John 15:1-8**
2. In **John 15:18-16:4**, Jesus told his disciples they would be hated by the world and be persecuted because people not only hate Christians, but they also hate God the Father and Jesus. Yet Jesus tells his disciples they must still witness for him as the Holy Spirit witnesses for him. How will the Holy Spirit help disciples in their witnessing for him? See **Mark 13:11; Matthew 10: 19-20; Luke 21:13-15**.
3. In the Book of Revelation written at the end of the first century when Christians were called *atheists* for refusing to worship the Roman gods of the cities or participate in worship celebrations for the Roman Emperor, many were killed. They could have denied their faith and saved their lives. Why did so many of these Christians accept physical death rather than deny Jesus? Would this be true of Christians today?
4. The Bible speaks principally of God's kindness or grace toward us. The apostle is amazed at God's love:

We love because God loved us first. **1 John 4:19**



Locate the verse in Romans 5 where Paul says exactly the same thing.

5. Peter says:

Therefore, your minds must be clear and ready for action. Place your confidence completely in what God's kindness will bring you when Jesus Christ appears again. **1 Peter 1:13**

Describe what God's kindness will bring you when Jesus returns.

## Week 17

### Goodness, Faithfulness

The Lord came down in a cloud and stood there with him and called out his name the Lord. Then he passed in front of Moses calling out: The Lord, the Lord, a compassionate *rachuwm* and merciful *channuwn* God, patient *'arek*-slow *'aph*-anger, always *rab* faithful *'emeth*, and ready to forgive *rab*-abundant *checed*-goodness *'emeth*-truth. He continues to show his love *checed* to thousands of generations forgiving wrongdoing, disobedience and sin. He never lets the guilty go unpunished, punishing children and grandchildren for their parent's sins to the third and fourth generation. **Exodus 34:5-7**

This is God's fullest expression of himself giving his attributes. Notice which attribute is mentioned twice. It is his *checed*, his loving kindness or goodness. He is always faithful and keeps his promises especially his Covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David. Notice the word *'emeth*. It can mean both *faithful* and *truth*. This word *'emeth* appears 127x, the most in the Psalms 37x.

Keep in mind that the Lord your God is the only God. He is a faithful *'aman* God who keeps his Covenant and is merciful *checed* to thousands of generations who love him and obey his commands. But he sends destruction to pay back anyone who hates him. He never takes long to pay back anyone who hates him. **Deuteronomy 7:9-10**

The word *'aman* also means faithful and truth and appears 108x in the Bible, again the most in the Psalms 17x. The words *'emuwn* 5x and *'emuwnah* 49x also are translated faithful. The word *'emuwnah* appears most in the Psalms 22x.

O Lord, your mercy reaches to the Heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God, your judgments are like the deep ocean. You save people and animals O Lord. Your mercy is so precious, O God, that Adam's descendants take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They are refreshed with the rich foods in your house and you make them drink from the river of your pleasure. Indeed, the fountain of life is with you. In your light, we see light. **Psalm 36:5-9**

I will sing forever about the evidence of your mercy, O Lord. I will tell about your faithfulness to every generation. I said: Your mercy will last forever. Your faithfulness stands firm in the Heavens. You said: I have made a Covenant with my chosen one. I swore this oath to my servant David: I will make your dynasty last forever. I built your throne to last throughout every generation. **Psalm 89:1-4**

Here the word faithfulness appears 5x times in this Psalm. Ethan the Ezrahite sings of the Messiah, the Covenant God made with King David that his throne would last forever. **2 Samuel 7:16**

In the New Testament, Jesus looks for faithful servants or disciples to spread his message of redemption throughout the entire world. He tells parables about faithful servants to impress us with this quality:

Who then is the faithful and wise servant? The master will put that person in charge of giving the other servants their food at the right time. That servant will be blessed if his master finds him doing his job when he comes. I can guarantee this truth: He will put that servant in charge of all his property. **Matthew 24:45-47**

His master replied: Good job. You're a good and faithful servant. You proved that you could be trusted with a small amount. I will put you in charge of a large amount. Come and share your master's happiness. **Matthew 25:21**

The writer of To the Hebrews compares the qualities of Moses and Jesus:

Look carefully at Jesus, the apostle and High Priest about whom we make our declaration of faith. Jesus is faithful to God who appointed him in the same way that Moses was faithful when he served in God's House. Jesus deserves more praise than Moses in the same way that the builder of a house is praised more than the house. After all, every house has a builder but the builder of everything is God.

Moses was a faithful servant in God's household. He told the people what God would say in the future. But Christ is a faithful Son in charge of God's

household. We are his household if we continue to have courage and to be proud of the confidence we have. **Hebrews 3:1-6**

Many people are confused by the Revelation of Jesus Christ that the prophet John wrote about the future. The book contains many analogies and symbols as God revealed things to John that he saw and heard but couldn't really explain in words. Yet God told John to write these words everyone can understand:

The one sitting on the throne said: I'm making everything new. He said: Write this: These words are faithful and true. It has happened. I am the A and the Z, the beginning and the end. I will give a drink from the fountain filled with the water of life to anyone who is thirsty. It won't cost anything. Everyone who wins the victory *nikao*-overcomes will inherit these things. I will be their God and they will be my children. **Revelation 21:5-7**

This last sentence is the promise of the Everlasting Covenant.

He said to me: These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord God of the spirits of the prophets has sent his angel to show his servants the things that must happen soon. I'm coming soon. Blessed is the one who follows the words of the prophecy of this book. **Revelation 22:6-7**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. We should never underestimate God's *checed*, his loving kindness. This prominent quality of his supersedes his justice, his power, and magnificence. God's *checed* enabled him *to love us before we loved him. And he sent his Son Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners.* How is God's *checed* related to his faithfulness?
2. It took 1,000 years from the time God promised King David he would send his Messiah or Anointed One for God to send His Son to earth being impregnated in the virgin Mary of Nazareth. Yet God kept his Covenant promise. Jesus promised his disciples to return to earth *when he comes with the holy angels in his Father's glory.* **Mark 8:38.** In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, Jesus says three times: *I am coming soon.* **Revelation 22:7, 12, 20.** When will he be faithful and come?
3. List ten people in the Bible who were faithful to God. Did any of these ever stumble and fall?
4. Who said this?

And when she was baptized and her household, she besought us saying: If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay here. And she constrained us. **KJV**

5. Paul said this to Timothy. What does it mean?

If we have died with him. We will live with him. If we endure, we will rule with him. If we disown him, he will disown us. If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful because he cannot be untrue to himself. **2 Timothy 2:11**

6. After God allowed the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, in 586 BC, a prophet, perhaps Jeremiah wrote:

The reason I can still find hope is that I keep this one thing in mind: The Lord's mercy. We were not completely wiped out. His compassion is never limited. It is new every morning. His faithfulness is great. It is good to hope and wait silently for the Lord to save us. **Lamentations 3:21-25,26**

How does this express great faith in God's faithfulness?

## **EXTRA CREDIT**

God's promise of the Everlasting Covenant: *I will be your God and you will be my people.* appears throughout the Bible in:

**Genesis 17:7-8; Exodus 6:7; 19:5-6; 29:45-46; Leviticus 11:45; 22:33; 25:38; 26:12, 44-4; Numbers 15-48; Deuteronomy 4:20; 29:12-13**

**Jeremiah 31:33; 32:38; Ezekiel 37:23; Zechariah 13:9**

**2 Corinthians 6:16; Revelation 21:3**

Why doesn't this promise appear in the Gospels?

## Week 18

### Gentleness, Self-Control

Gods' divine power has given us everything we need for life and for godliness. This power was given us through knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and integrity virtue KJV. Through his glory and integrity he has given us his promises that are of the highest value. Through these promises you will share in the divine nature because you have escaped the corruption that sinful desires lust KJV cause in this world.

Because of this make every effort to add integrity to your faith. And to integrity add knowledge. To knowledge add self-control temperance KJV. To self-control add endurance patience. To endurance add godliness. To godliness add Christian affection brotherly love. And to Christian affect add love charity KJV.

If you have these qualities and they are increasing, it demonstrates that your knowledge about our Lord Jesus Christ is living and productive. If these qualities aren't present in your life, you're short-sighted and have forgotten that you were cleansed from your past sins. Therefore, brothers and sisters, use more effort to make God's calling and choosing of you secure.

If you keep doing this, you will never fall away. Then you will be given the wealth of entering into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore, I will always remind you about these qualities, although you already know about them and are well-grounded in the truth that you now have. **2 Peter 1:3-12**

Peter is telling us these qualities are given to us by God. All are gifts of God. By examining if you possess these gifts, you can tell if God has given you the Holy Spirit. Godliness is the realization of God's abiding presence, the fruit of which are reverence and trust. Self-control or temperance may be seen as restricting liberty of action, but Christians see it as service to God which leads to perfect freedom.

In the same way that some value aggression so as to be a self-made person, a Christian humbly and in a gentle non-assertive way looks to God to give what he needs, especially these spiritual qualities.

The High and Lofty One lives forever, and his name is holy. This is what he says: I live in a high and lowly place. But I am with those who are crushed and humble. I will renew the spirit of those who are humble and the courage of those who are crushed. **Isaiah 57:15**

The Greek word *chrestotes* appears 10x in the Bible and is translated *goodness, kindness, gentleness* or *integrity*. Jesus says of himself:

Come to me, all who are tired of carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Place my yoke over your shoulders and learn from me because I am gentle *praos*-meek and humble *tapeinos*-lowly. Then you will find rest for yourselves because my yoke is easy and my burden is light. **Matthew 11:28-30**

James, the half-brother of Jesus who administered the Jerusalem church, says we should not be friends of this world but be friends of God for the Spirit that lives in us wants us to be God's own. To do this God gives us grace:

God opposes arrogant people but he is kind to humble people. **James 4:6** quoting **Proverbs 3:34**.

Peter parallels James when he says:

Young people, in a similar way, place yourself under the authority of spiritual leaders. Furthermore, all of you must serve each other with humility, because God opposes the arrogant but favors the humble. **Proverbs 3:34**. Be humbled by God's power so that when the right time comes he will honor you. **1 Peter 5:5-6**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Pictures of Jesus usually show him as a gentle person with people crowding around him. When he was handed over to the Roman Governor, he was described as a lamb going to the slaughter. One Gospel portrays Jesus answering only one question asked him by the Roman Governor and then remaining silent until he was hung on the cross. **Luke 23:1-34**  
When was Jesus assertive?

2. Why does Jesus want his disciples to be gentle and humble as he is?
3. Peter tells us to add specific spiritual qualities to our faith. How can we do this if these are really gifts of God?
4. Compare Paul's nine gifts of the Spirit to Peter's seven spiritual qualities. How are they different?
5. God says through Isaiah the prophet:

I will pay attention to those who are humble and sorry for their sins and who tremble at my Word. **Isaiah 66:2**

Describe a person who trembles at God's Word. Is this the same thing as having *the fear of the Lord*?

6. A woman normally convinces a man to do what she wants by gentle persuasion rather than by aggression. Why is she so effective at this?
7. Spiritual disciplines are means of self-control. Explain.



## Part 5

# Jesus' Greatest Sermon: I AM the Bread of Life

In the Gospel According to John, Jesus preached a sermon in a synagogue in Capernaum after feeding the 5,000. The people asked him: Rabbi, when did you get here? Jesus answered them:

I can guarantee this truth You're not looking for me because you saw miracles. You are looking for me because you ate as much of those loaves as you wanted. Don't work for food that spoils. Instead work for the food that lasts into Eternal Life. This is the food the Son of Man will give you. After all, the Father has placed his seal of approval on him. **John 6: 26-27**

The people asked Jesus: What does God want us to do? Jesus replied to them:

God wants to do something for you so that you believe in the one whom he has sent. **John 6:29**

The people asked him: What miracle are you doing to perform so that we can see it and believe in you? What are you doing to do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the desert. Scripture says: He gave them bread to eat. Jesus said to them:

I can guarantee this truth. Moses didn't give you bread from Heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from Heaven. God's bread is the man who comes from Heaven and gives life to the world. **John 32-33**

They said to him: Sir, give us this bread all the time. Jesus told them:

I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never become hungry and whoever believes in me will never become thirsty. I've told you that you have seen me. However, you don't believe in me.

Everyone whom the Father gives me will come to me. I will never turn away anyone who comes to me. I haven't come from Heaven to do what I want to do. I've come to do what the one who sent me wants me to do. The one who sent me doesn't want me to lose any of those he gave me. He wants me to bring them back to life on the Last Day.

My Father wants all those who see the Son and believe in him to have Eternal Life. He wants me to bring them back to life on the Last Day. **John 6:35-40**

The Jews began to criticize Jesus for saying: I am the Bread that came down from Heaven. They asked: Isn't this man Jesus Joseph's son? Don't we know his father and mother. How can he say now he came down from Heaven? Jesus responded:

Stop criticizing me. People cannot come to me unless the Father who sent me brings them to me. I will bring these people back to life on the Last Day. The prophets wrote: God will teach everyone. Those who do what they have learned from the Father come to me. I'm saying that no one has seen the Father. Only the one who is from God has seen the Father. I can guarantee this truth: Every believer has Eternal Life.

I am the Bread of Life. Your ancestors ate *phago* the manna in the desert and died. This is the Bread that comes from Heaven so that whoever eats *phago* it won't die. I am the Living Bread that came from Heaven. Whoever eats *phago* this bread will live forever. The bread I will give to bring life to the world is my flesh *sarx*. **John 6:43-51**

The Jews began to quarrel with each other. They said: How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Jesus told them:

I can guarantee this truth: If you don't eat *phago* the flesh *sarx* of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you don't have the source of life in you. Those who eat *trogo* my flesh *sarx* and drink my blood have Eternal Life and I will bring them back to life on the Last Day. My flesh *sarx* is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat *trogo* my flesh *sarx* and drink my blood live in me and I live in them.

The Father who has life has sent me and I live because of the Father. So those who feed *trogo* on me will live because of me. This is the Bread that came from Heaven. It is not like the bread your ancestors ate *phago*. They eventually died. Those who eat *trogo* this Bread will live forever. **John 6:53-58**

Jesus said this while he was teaching in a synagogue in Capernaum. **John 6:59**

## Comment on the Sermon

This is not a long sermon. However, it is perhaps one of the most powerful sermons Jesus ever gave. Jesus' main theme is that people must believe that he is the Son of God come down from Heaven.

And through that belief, they must develop a personal relationship with him. Jesus describes this relationship as having fellowship with him as Jews had table fellowship with their friends. In this society, a Jew only ate with a person he enjoyed being with and it was considered one of the most intimate of social contacts.

When a person believes in Jesus, they are converted or transformed, and God gives them the ability to believe in Jesus. He also gives them the Holy Spirit to actively work in them. This is Eternal Life.

Jesus changes the word *eat phago* to *trogo* meaning *to munch* or *to crunch* in the way an animal eats. He does to show that this is an actual physical relationship and not just a symbolic one. In the same way, he commands them to eat his flesh *sarx* rather than his body *soma*. Jesus is driving home the point that the personal relationship with him must be genuine and intimate, not casual.

Jesus also makes the point that a person cannot believe in him unless God enables the person to do so. God sees the motives within a person's heart while a human being does not have the ability to always know their motives.

## Jesus Speaks to His Disciples After the Sermon

When many of Jesus disciples heard him, they said: What he says is hard to accept. Who wants to listen to him anymore? Jesus was aware that his disciples were criticizing his message. So Jesus asked them:

Did what I say make you lose faith? What if you see the Son of Man go where he was before return to Heaven? Life is spiritual. Your physical existence doesn't contribute to that life. But some of you don't believe. **John 6:61-64**

Jesus knew from the beginning those who wouldn't believe and the one who would betray him. So he added:

That is why I told you that people cannot come to me unless the Father provides the way. **John 6:65**

Jesus' speech made many of the disciples go back to the lives they led before they followed Jesus. So Jesus asked the Twelve apostles:

Do you want to leave me too? **John 6:67**

Simon Peter answered Jesus: Lord, to what person could we go. Your words give Eternal Life. Besides, we believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. Jesus replied:

I chose all twelve of you. Yet' one of you is a devil. **John 6:70**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Some people attempt to connect this with Jesus' words at the Last Supper when he said:

Take this. This is my body. This is my blood, the blood of the Covenant. It is poured out for many people. **Mark 14:22, 24**

Why is this not a connection with this sermon?

2. Read the story of the people receiving the manna in the wilderness in **Exodus 16:1-36**. How is this bread different from Jesus? How is this bread like Jesus?
3. Describe Eternal Life or Everlasting Life. When does a person receive Eternal Life?
4. Why did the ancestors of the Jews die while people of who believe in Jesus live?
5. Where in the Bible is the verse the people quoted to Jesus: He gave them bread from Heaven to eat?
6. If these people saw Jesus feed 5,000 people why do they now ask him for another miracle?
7. What is so hard for Jesus' disciples to understand that they stopped following him?

## Week 19

### The Beatitudes: Jesus' Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5:1-6:28

#### The Beatitudes

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them:

Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually helpless [pure in heart KJV]. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them.

Blessed are those who mourn. They will be comforted.

Blessed are those who are gentle [meek KJV]. They will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for God's approval [righteousness KJV]. They will be satisfied.

Blessed are those who show mercy. They will be treated mercifully.

Blessed are those whose thoughts are pure. They will see God.

Blessed are those who make peace. They will be called God's children.'

Blessed are those who are persecuted for doing what God approves of. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, lie, and say all kinds of evil things about you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because you have a great reward in Heaven. The prophets who lived before you were persecuted in these ways. **Matthew 5:3:12**

Jesus is describing what he sees developing in his Twelve disciples. He blesses them for denying themselves, picking up their cross, and following him. **Matthew 16:24**. We see in them the fruits of the spirit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. **Galatians 5:22**

These Twelve are certainly not perfect. Often, they do not understand what Jesus is saying. At times, they are very self-concerned. But they are determined to follow Jesus and be his disciples,

to learn from him. And Jesus is patiently shaping them into the image of himself by modeling for them what God wants a disciple to be. They themselves will become models for us.

Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by pointing to the standards of living he has established for his disciples. He begins with being pure in heart, echoing God's statement in Isaiah:

The High and Lofty One lives forever, and his name is holy. This is what he says: I live in a high and holy place. But I am with those who are crushed and humble. I will renew the spirit of those who are humble and the courage of those who are crushed. I've seen their sinful ways, but I'll heal them.

I'll guide them and give them rest. I'll comfort them and their mourners. I'll create praise on their lips: Perfect peace to those both far and near. I'll heal them, says the Lord. Isaiah 57:15, 18-19

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. The first beatitude sets the scene for all the others. Why is being pure in heart the ground for discipleship of Jesus?
2. Jesus stresses his disciples must be humble and meek. How counter-cultural this is. Jesus was always non-violent in contrast to the Zealots in Israel who wanted to get rid of the Roman invaders of God's Holy Land. How did Jesus accomplish so much by not being aggressive?
3. Jesus was not afraid to hold himself up to his disciples as a model. This was certainly not being meek. How could he do this?
4. Being *poor in spirit* means that a person is humble enough to learn from God and permit the love to God to change us. Isaiah said of the Servant of YHWH:

The Almighty Lord will teach me what to say so I will know how to encourage weary people. Morning after morning he will wake me to listen like a student. The Almighty Lord will open my ears. I will not rebel nor will I turn away from him. Isaiah 50:4-5

Dallas Willard in his book The Divine Conspiracy called Jesus' disciples apprentices. How is this an appropriate concept for discipleship of Jesus?

5. The word *righteousness* only appears 6x in Matthew, 1x in Luke and 2x in John. Define this term. Why should Jesus' disciples hunger and thirst for righteousness?

6. Can anyone really have pure thoughts? Why or why not?
7. Read **John 15:18-16:4**. Why do people persecute Jesus' disciples?

## Week 20

### Jesus' Most Difficult Teachings in the Sermon on the Mount:

#### Jesus Teaches How to Deal with Anger

You have heard that it was said to your ancestors: Never murder. **Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17**. Whoever murders will answer for it in court. But I can guarantee that whoever is angry with another believer *adelphos*-brother [without a cause KJV] will answer for it in court. Whoever calls another believer an insulting name will answer for it in the highest court. Whoever calls another believer a fool will answer for it in hellfire Gehenna of Fire.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that another believer has something against you, leave your gift at the altar. First go away and make peace with that person. Then come back to offer your gift.

Make peace quickly with your opponent while you are on the way to court with him. Otherwise, he will hand you over to the judge. Then the judge will hand you over to an officer who will throw you in prison. I can guarantee this truth. You will never get out until you pay every penny of your fine. **Matthew 5:21-26**

Anger is one of the most difficult emotions we have to deal with. Jesus said several times that before worshiping God, a person should be reconciled to any person they have a conflict with. Only then should they worship God.

Yet righteous anger was shown by Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus pronounced seven woes on them in public. **Matthew 23:13-38**. He was particularly incensed at their devotion to the ceremonial law and their lack of devotion to the moral law – their focus on outward action and lack of inward motivation toward God. He said:

But you have neglected justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These are the most important things in Moses' Teachings. You should have done these things without neglecting the others. You blind guides. You strain gnats out of your wine, but you swallow camels.



How horrible for you, scribes and Pharisees! [experts in Moses' Teachings] You hypocrites! You clean the outside of cups and dishes. But inside they are full of greed and uncontrolled desires. You blind Pharisees. First clean the inside of the cups and dishes so that the outside may also be clean. **Matthew 23:23-27.**

## Jesus Teaches on Loving Your Enemies

You have heard that it was said: *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.* **Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21.** But I tell you not to oppose an evil person. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn your other cheek to him as well. If someone wants to sue you in order to take your shirt, let him have your coat too. If someone forces you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to everyone who asks you for something. Don't turn away anyone who wants to borrow something from you.

You have heard it that is was said: *Love your neighbor* **Leviticus 19:18,** and hate your enemy. But I tell you this: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. In this way you show that you are children of your Father in Heaven. He makes his sun rise on people whether they are good or evil. He lets rain fall on them whether they are just or unjust.

If you love those who love you, do you deserve a reward? Even the tax collectors do that. Are you doing anything remarkable if you welcome only your friends? Everyone does that. That is why you must be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect. **Matthew 5:38-48**

In expanding the expression *love your neighbor* to include *hate your enemy*, Jesus may have been referring to God's command to completely erase any memory of the Amalekites from the earth.

The Lord said to Moses: Write this reminder on a scroll and make sure that Joshua hears it too. I will completely erase any memory of the Amalekites from the earth. Moses built an altar and called it: The Lord Is My Banner. He said: Because a hand was lifted against the Lord's throne, he will be at war with the Amalekites from one generation to the next. **Exodus 17:14-16**

Samuel said: Even though you don't consider yourself great, you were the head of Israel's tribes. The Lord anointed you Saul King of Israel. The Lord sent you on a mission: He said: Claim those sinners, the Amalekites for me by destroying them. Wage war against them until they're wiped out. 1 Samuel 15:17-18

But the greater part of Jesus' command is to love and to pray for our enemies. Jews attempted to reduce Jesus' universal command to love everyone by asking: But who is my neighbor? Jesus' reply was to give a parable where a Samaritan, people the Jews considered at best only half-Jews and at worst considered them Gentiles or dogs, helped a Jew on the Jerusalem-Jericho road who was robbed and beaten by robbers. **Luke 10:25-37**. Jesus considered a neighbor anyone God plants in a person's way.

Showing love to everyone was Jesus' mandate. We are to suppress giving back anger and hate but allow kindly emotions to spring forth by praying for our enemies so that God will help them change their attitudes toward us. Performing this praying action also enables our hostile emotions from arising within us. We cannot hate a man if we pray for him, and we cannot pray for him if we hate it.

This is a blessed possibility Jesus opens for us. Certainly, it is a hard ideal to aim for but how it revolutionizes our life when we do it. The mark of a genuine Christian is one who is able to do this consistently.

Jesus applied this teaching to his time. Most Jews hated the Roman conquerors in first century Israel. Roman law required a Jew to assist a Roman soldier by carrying his pack for one mile. Jesus said to carry it two miles. How difficult was this for most Jews to do.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Many people teach that Jesus did not teach or follow the Mosaic Law in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. But in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus not only taught many of the principles in the Mosaic Law but stated a higher form of obedience than the Law provided. Give some examples.
2. Why does Jesus say not to attempt to worship God with hate in your heart?
3. How did Jesus diffuse his anger against Peter when Peter rebuked him for saying that the Messiah would die in Jerusalem? **Matthew 16:22-23**

4. If we give away everything, we own to everyone who asks, what will we have left? We would be naked. It seems Jesus is asking us to do something that is impossible. How can he command this?
5. How difficult it is for us to choose to pray for our enemies. What are the best arguments we can give ourselves to do this?
6. When does Luke report that Jesus prayed for his enemies?
7. Jesus said there is a very good reason for his disciples to forgive others:

If you forgive the failures of others, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failures.  
**Matthew 6:14-15**

How does praying for your enemies compliment this saying of Jesus?

## Week 21

### True Wealth: Treasure in Heaven

Stop storing up treasures for yourselves on earth where moths and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. Instead store up treasures for yourselves in Heaven where moths and rust don't destroy and thieves don't break in and steal. Your heart will be where your treasure is. **Matthew 6:19-21**

No one can serve two masters. He will hate the first master and love the second or he will be devoted to the first and despise the second. You cannot serve God and wealth. **Matthew 6:24**

#### A Wealthy Man Refuses to Follow Jesus

As Jesus was coming out to the road, a man came running to him and knelt in front of him. He asked Jesus: Good Teacher what should I do to inherit Eternal Life? Jesus said to him: Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: Never murder. Never commit adultery. Never steal. Never give false testimony. Never cheat. Honor your father and mother. **Exodus 20:12-17; Deuteronomy 5:16-21**

The man replied: Teacher, I've obeyed all these commandments since I was a boy. Jesus looked at him and loved him. He told him: You're still missing one thing. Sell everything you have. Give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in Heaven. Then follow me.

When the man heard that, he looked unhappy and went away sad, because he owned a lot of property. **Mark 10:17-22**

#### Jesus Teaches His Disciples Why Wealthy People Have Trouble Becoming His Disciples

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples: How hard it will be for rich people to enter God's Kingdom. The disciples were stunned by his words. But Jesus said to them again: Children, how hard it is to enter God's Kingdom. It is easier for a camel to go through a needle than for a rich

person to enter God's Kingdom. This amazed his disciples more than ever. They asked each other: Who then can be saved?

Jesus looked at them and said: It's impossible for people to save themselves but it's not impossible for God to save them. Everything is possible for God.  
**Mark 10:23-27**

### **John the Apostle Tells Why Wealth Keeps People from God**

Don't love the world and what it offers. Those who love the world don't have the Father's love in them. Not everything the world offers – physical gratification, greed, and extravagant lifestyles – comes from the Father. It comes from the world and the world and its evil desires are passing away. But the person who does what God wants lives forever. **1 John 2:15-17**

Temptations of life in this world constantly assault us whether it is prosperity or adversity, from riches to poverty, honor or reproach, pleasure or pain, from the persons in this world, or from the things that are in this world. There is a real inconsistency between the love for this world and the love for God.

We have a choice to follow our corrupt nature which pursues the carnal things of this world or our spiritual nature which pursues invisible and Heavenly things. The Holy Spirit leads us to pursue spiritual things but the temptation to love the things of this world is still there. That temptation will not leave us until we live in the New Jerusalem with God and the Lamb.

The temptation for comfort and possessions is strong. But these can become an idol if we put our love for them before our love for God and his Kingdom. Wealth is a powerful temptation and can distract us as we attempt to continually protect them. Jesus doesn't want his disciples to be distracted. He wants their minds to be focused on producing fruit for God's Kingdom

## **THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

1. Jesus warns us about possessions becoming our master instead of him. How do possessions take control of our lives?
2. Jesus told a young man who wanted to inherit Eternal Life to sell all his possessions and then follow him. We wonder how this man learned about the phrase *Eternal Life* or *Life Eternal*. Jesus only used the phrase 13x in the Gospels: In Matthew 3x, Mark 1x, Luke 1x, and John 8x. Is there an equivalent phrase in the Hebrew Bible? The first specific mention of life after death appears in Daniel:

Many sleeping in the ground will wake up. Some will wake up to live forever but others will wake up to be disgraced forever. **Daniel 12:2**

3. Was Jesus really being fair to the young man to tell him to sell all his possessions? Why couldn't he keep his wealth and still be a disciple of Jesus?
4. Why are Jesus' disciples stunned when Jesus says it will be difficult for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God? They were all poor and most people in Galilee had very few possessions. Most Jews felt people were wealthy because God was blessing them.
5. Why shouldn't we love the world? Didn't God create a beautiful Creation? Why does the apostle John say we shouldn't love the world?
6. Moses speaks about the Lord blessing his people with material goods:

In any case, there shouldn't be any poor people among you because the Lord your God will certainly bless you in the land that he is giving you as your possession. **Deuteronomy 15:4**

The Lord will give you plenty of blessings. You will have many children. Your animals will have many offspring. Your soil will produce many crops in the land the Lord will give you, as he swore to your ancestors. **Deuteronomy 28:11**

Why shouldn't disciples have material possessions? What does this prevent them from doing?

7. What are the greatest blessings God gives us?

## Week 22

### The Narrow Gate and the Foundation Rock of Faith

#### The Narrow Gate

Enter through the narrow gate because the gate and the road that lead to destruction are wide. Many enter through the wide gate. But the narrow gate and the road that lead to life are full of trouble. Only a few people find the narrow gate. **Matthew 7:12**

Not everyone who says to me: Lord, Lord will enter the Kingdom of Heaven but only the person who does what my Father in Heaven wants. Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we force out demons and do many miracles by the power and authority of your name? Then I will tell them publicly: I've never known you. Get away from me you evil people. **Matthew 7:21-23**

Someone asked him: Sir, are only a few people going to be saved? He answered: Try hard to enter through the narrow door. I can guarantee that many will try to enter but they won't succeed. After the homeowner gets up and closes the door, it's too late. You can stand outside, knock at the door and say: Sir open the door for us. Then you will say: We ate and drank with you. But he will tell you: I don't know you are. Get away from me, all you evil people.

Then you'll cry and be in extreme pain. That's what you'll do when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets. They'll be in God's Kingdom, but you'll be thrown out. People will come from all over the world and will eat in God's Kingdom. Some who are last will be first and some who are first will be last. **Luke 13:22-30**

The strait or narrow gate is the way of faith, trust, holiness, and obedience. Remember that Jesus said:

I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. **John 14:6**

No one can short cut the way to having a relationship with Jesus. It is disturbing to hear that *only a few can be saved*. God says through his apostle Peter:

Dear friends, don't ignore this fact. One day with the Lord is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord isn't slow to do what he promised as some people think. Rather he is patient for your sake. He doesn't want to destroy anyone. He wants all people to have an opportunity to turn to him and change the way they think and act. **2 Peter 3:8-9**

But it is not surprising that Jesus says that only those who do the will of his Father will enter the Kingdom. This is the narrow gate of entrance. Many people want to do things their own way. But coming to faith means a person submits to God's will for their life. They commit to trust God to guide their life and to love God and their neighbor as God desires. They commit to obey the words of Jesus. Jesus promises:

Those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will go to them and make our home with them. **John 14:23**

This is Eternal Life. Immediate relationship with God. It begins at conversion and carries on throughout a person's physical life and beyond into eternity. And it carries a continuing commitment to live a holy life as God desires through God's program of sanctification as led by the Holy Spirit.

## **Jesus Ends His Sermon Saying a Person Who Follows His Words Will Have a Solid Foundation to Their Life**

Therefore, everyone who hears what I say and obeys it will be like a wise person who built a house on rock. Rain poured and floods came. Winds blew and beat against the house. But it did not collapse because its foundation was on rock.

Everyone who hears what I say but doesn't obey it will be like a foolish person who built a house on sand. Rain poured and floods came. Winds blew and struck the house. It collapsed and the result was a total disaster. **Matthew 7:24-27**

It is the spirit that quickens, the flesh profits nothing. The words I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life. **John 6:63 KJV**



# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Jesus finishes his Sermon on the Mount saying there is a way of life that results in continual Eternal Life – a personal relationship with God through Jesus. The early church spoke of early teaching called **The Two Ways**: The Way of Life and the Way of Death. This was developed from Moses' teaching at the end of Deuteronomy:

Today I offer you life and prosperity or death and destruction. This is what I'm commanding you today: Love the Lord your God, follow his directions, and obey his commands, laws, and rules. Then you will live, your population will increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you're about to enter and take possession of. **Deuteronomy 30:15-16**

What does the Way of Life consist of? Describe the Way of Death.

2. Why are the narrow gate and the road that leads to life full of trouble?

3. Jesus said:

Pointing with his hand at his disciples: Look, here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does what my Father in Heaven wants is my brother and sister and mother. **Matthew 12:49**

How did Jesus' disciples know the will of God? How do we know the will of God? How does one become Jesus' brother?

4. Why does Jesus say only a few people find the strait gate?

5. Jesus said that people simply associating with him or even doing miracles, prophesying or exorcising demons in his name will not enter the Kingdom of God. What more must they do?

6. What is the rock that people must build their lives upon?

7. How can we remember Jesus' words? See **John 14:26**. How is this done?

## Part 6

### When We Wander in the Wilderness

O God, when you went in front of your people, when you marched through the wilderness, the earth quaked and the sky poured in the presence of the God of Sinai, in the presence of the God of Israel.

You watered the land with plenty of rain, O God. You refreshed it when your land was exhausted. Your flock settled there. Out of your goodness, O God, you provided for oppressed people

Thanks be to the Lord who daily carries our burdens for us. God is our salvation. Our God is the God of victories. The Almighty Lord is our escape from death.

You kingdoms of the world, sing to God. Make music to praise the Lord. God rides through the ancient Heaven, the highest Heaven. Listen! He makes his voice heard, his powerful voice. Acknowledge the power of God. His majesty is over Israel and his power is in the skies. God, the God of Israel is awe-inspiring in his holy place. He gives strength and power to his people. Thanks be to God. **Psalm 68:7-10, 19-20, 32-35**

After God delivered Israel from Egypt, he led them with his pillar of cloud to Mount Sinai where they spent one year. God gave them his Ten Commandments and they built the wilderness tabernacle containing the Ark of the Covenant, a symbol of God, where he talked with Moses. Then then traveled eleven days north to Kadish Barnea just south of the promised land of Canaan.

Here they camped while they sent twelve spies into the land to see what it contained. The spies reported the land was lush but filled with people, some of whom were giants. They lived in cities with high walls. Two of the spies voted to immediately enter the land as God was with them but ten of the spies were afraid and counseled to return to Egypt. The people sided with the ten spies and talked about stoning Moses. **Numbers 14:10**

God suddenly appeared. He decreed that because of the lack of faith of these 600,000 Israelite warriors, all of them – except the two who believed God, Joshua and Caleb –all would die as they wandered in the wilderness for the next forty years. **Numbers 14:28-32**

As they wandered in the wilderness led by God's pillar of smoke, although they rebelled again and again, they were constantly aware that God was with them. His pillar of smoke was there in the day and his pillar of fire was there in the night.

All of us in our physical lives wander in the wilderness. If we believe and trust in God, however, his Holy Spirit provides us with a guide to living in this world.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. When God told the Israelites that all the warriors over 20 years old would die in the next 40 years, that meant that about 15,000 men would die each year.

The census taken at Mount Sinai gave the following numbers of warriors in each tribe. Reuben 46,500; Simeon 59,300; Gad 45,650; Judah 74,600; Issachar 54,400; Zebulun 57,400; Ephraim 40,500; Manasseh 32,200; Benjamin 35,400; Dan 62,700; Asher 41,500; Naphtali 53,400. This was a total of 603,550. **Numbers 1:21-45**. The number of firstborn males from the tribe of Levi was 22,273. **Numbers 3:43**

This means that the equivalent of warriors in an entire tribe would be wiped out in a little over 3 years. What was the effect of this knowledge of frequent death on the attitude of these Israelites?

2. In the Bible, people frequently went out into the wilderness to meditate with God as they were quite alone except for the wild animals. What did God want his Chosen People to learn in those 40 years with him?
3. What were the most important things the Israelites learned by God giving them manna, quails, and water from the rock?
4. Why did God have his people build a Wilderness Tabernacle before they left Mount Sinai?
5. In the wilderness people can get lost quite easily. What kept the Israelites from becoming lost?
6. Moses was 80 years old when he led the Israelites out of Egypt. How was this old man able to walk in the wilderness over the rough terrain?
7. What do we do to keep from getting lost in the wilderness of the world?

## Week 23

### God Calms Our Fears

#### Psalm 27 by King David

The Lord is my light and my salvation. Who is there to fear? The Lord is my life's fortress. Who is there to be afraid of?

Evildoers closed in on me to tear me to pieces. My opponents and enemies stumbled and fell. Even though an army sets up camp against me, my heart will not be afraid. Even though a war breaks out against me, I will still have confidence in the Lord.

I have asked one thing from the Lord. This I will seek: to remain in the Lord's House all the days of my life in order to gaze at the Lord's beauty and to search for an answer in his Temple. He hides me in his shelter when there is trouble. He keeps me hidden in his tent. He sets me high on a rock. Now my head will be raised above my enemies who surround me.

I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy in his tent. I will sing and make music to praise the Lord. Hear O Lord when I cry aloud. Have pity on me and answer me. When you said: Seek my face, my heart said to you: O Lord, I will seek your face.

Do not hide your face from me. Do not angrily turn me away. You have been my help. Do not leave me. Do not abandon me, O God my Savior. Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will take care of me.

Teach me your way, O Lord. Lead me on a level path because I have enemies that spy on me. Do not surrender me to the will of my opponents. False witnesses have risen against me. They breathe out violence. I believe that I will see the goodness of the Lord in this world of the living.

Wait with hope for the Lord. Be strong and let your heart be courageous. Yes wait with hope for the Lord. **Psalm 27:1-14**

## Psalm 64 by King David

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. That is why we are not afraid even when the earth quakes or the mountains topple into the depths of the sea. Water roars and foams and mountains shake at the surging waves.

There is a river whose streams bring joy to the City of God, the holy place where the Most High lives. God is in that City. It cannot fall. God will help it at the break of dawn. Nations are in turmoil and kingdoms topple. The earth melts at the sound of God's voice. The Lord of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our stronghold. *Selah.*

Come see the works of the Lord, the devastation he has brought to the earth. He puts an end to wars all over the earth. He breaks an archer's bow. He cuts spears in two. He burns chariots. Let go of your concerns. Then you will know that I am God. I rule the nations. I rule the earth. The Lord of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our stronghold. *Selah.* **Psalm 46:1-11**

When we are afraid, we can look to our God who is always with us. Certainly, there are many stories in the Bible where the Israelites faced enemies as they traveled through the wilderness for those forty years of wandering. But I want to examine the story of Jesus' disciples on the Sea of Galilee when a storm suddenly broke out. The story is told in all three synoptic Gospels: **Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25.**

The Sea of Galilee is a small lake only 13 miles long and 8 miles wide, but it is 700 feet below sea level. There are hills surrounding the lake that can cause the air above the water to blow suddenly and strongly and cause a storm to quickly arise. Fishermen on the lake like Peter, Andrew, James, and John are well aware of these sudden dangerous storms and the damage they can cause.

That evening Jesus said to his disciples: Let's cross to the other side. Leaving the crowd, they took Jesus along in a boat just as he was. Other boats were with them.

A violent windstorm came up. The waves were breaking not the boat so that it was quickly filling up. But he was sleeping on a cushion in the back of the

boat. So they woke him up and said to him: Teacher, don't you care that we're going to die?

Then he got up, ordered the wind to stop, and said to the sea: Be still, absolutely still. The wind stopped blowing and the sea became very calm.

He asked them: Why are you such cowards *deilos*-fearful 3x? Don't you have any faith *pistis* yet?

They were overcome with fear *phobos phobos* and asked each other: Who is this man? Even the wind and the sea obey *hypakouo* him. **Mark 4:35-41**

This is a simple story and yet it is perhaps one of Jesus' greatest miracles. Luke ends the story saying: *What manner of man is this? For he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?* **Luke 8:25**

Some say: Certainly, these men must have sung this psalm in their synagogue in Capernaum that sailors value so much:

Let them tell in joyful songs what he has done. Those who sail on the sea in ships, who do business on the high seas have seen what the Lord can do, the miracles he performed in the depths of the sea

He spoke and a storm began to blow and it made the waves rise high. The sailors aboard ship rose toward the sky. They plunged into the depths. Their courage melted in the face of disaster. They reeled and staggered like drunks and all their skills as sailors were useless.

In their distress they cried out to the Lord. He led them from their troubles. He made the storm calm down and the waves became still. The sailors were glad that the storm was quiet. He guided them to the harbor they had longed for. Let them give thanks for the Lord for his mercy. He performed his miracles for Adam's descendants. **Psalm 107:22-31**

Perhaps Jesus' disciples knew this psalm. But does someone remember this psalm when they were actually in the danger? These disciples had seen these terrible storms before. And they probably knew the fishermen had died in them. And did they realize who Jesus really was?

At this point in the Gospel, they had seen Jesus exorcise a demon, heal Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, cure a leper, heal a man with a withered hand, and appoint his Twelve apostles. But this? Jesus issues a command to the wind and waves: Be still, and they obey him. How can a human do this?

Our lesson from this story however is that God calms the storms in our lives. Not simply the physical terrors we might face in the physical world, but also the terrors we have come to us in the night. Read **Psalm 88**.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. King David calls God his *Savior* four times in **Psalms 18, 25, 27, 51** or *God of my salvation* in the KJV. What does David mean by using this title for God?
2. The Israelites in the Bible talk a great deal about the sea usually describing troubles they are having. Most Israelites were not sailors. They left that to the Phoenicians who were great traders around the Mediterranean Sea. Why did the Israelites call Galilee, which was really a lake, the Sea of Galilee?
3. In **Psalm 18**, King David portrays God:

He spread apart the Heavens and came down with a dark cloud under his feet. He rode on one of the angels as he flew and he soared on the wings of the wind. He made the darkness his hiding place, the dark rain clouds his covering. Out of the brightness in front of him, those rain clouds passed by with hailstones and lightning. **Psalm 18:9-12**

Why is God portrayed in a storm if he brings peace to a storm?

4. Physical events such as earthquakes, storms, and droughts can bring great fear to us. We are completely helpless before them. How can our faith in the power of God bring calm to us?
5. Wars can also bring fear. Describe an event in the Bible where God stopped a war and brought peace.
6. In the story of Jesus stilling the storm, it appears as if Jesus is exorcising a demon when he commands the wind and waves to be still. Is this what is happening?
7. Why did Jesus' disciples fear they would die? Did they think Jesus would die also?

## Week 24

### Discouragement

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When may I come to see God's face? My tears are my food day and night.

People ask me all day long: Where is your God? I will remember these things as I pour out my soul: how I used to walk with the crowd and lead it in a procession to God's House. I sang songs of joy and thanksgiving while crowds of people celebrated a festival.

Why are you discouraged, my soul? Why are you so restless? Put your hope in God because I will still praise him. He is my Savior [help of my countenance KJV] and my God.

My soul is discouraged. That is why I will remember you in the land of Jordan, on the peaks of Hermon, on Mount Mizar. One deep sea calls to another at the roar of your waterspouts. All the whitecaps on your waves have swept over me. The Lord commands his mercy during the day and at night his song is with me – a prayer to the God of my life.

I will ask God, my Rock: Why have you forgotten me? Why must I walk around in mourning while the enemy oppresses me? With a shattering blow to my bones, my enemies taunt me. They ask me all day: Where is your God?

Why are you discouraged my soul? Why are you so restless? Put your hope in God because I will still praise him. He is my Savior and my God.

Judge me, O God and plead my case against an ungodly nation. Rescue me from deceitful and unjust people. You are my fortress, O God. Why have you rejected me? Why must I walk about in mourning while the enemy oppresses me?

Send your light and your truth. Let them guide me. Let them bring me to your holy mountain and to your dwelling place. Then let me go to the altar



of God, to God my highest joy and I will give thanks to you on the lyre, O God, my God.

Why are you discouraged my soul? Why are you so restless? Put your hope in God because I will still praise him. He is my Savior and my God. **Psalm 42:1-11; 43:1-5**

There are times when we all get discouraged. We have hopes for something, but they don't work out. We anticipate the best happening, but the worst we have feared comes instead. What are we to do?

As a believer, we have committed to God that we will follow his plan for our lives. And we are confident that God will accomplish that plan in us. Sometimes God tells us the result but not the details of the path we should follow to get there. Or sometimes we listen only to the result and not to the instructions. Or sometimes we think we know a better way to get the result.

In **Psalm 25**, King David asks God to lead him:

No one who waits for you will ever be put to shame. Do not let my enemies triumph over me. Make your ways known to me, O Lord and teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me because you are God, my Savior. I wait all day long for you.

The Lord is good and decent. That is why he teaches sinners the way they should live. He leads humble people to do what is right and he teaches them his way. Every path of the Lord is one of mercy and truth for those who cling to his Covenant and written instructions.

When then is this person that fears the Lord? He will be the one whom the Lord will teach which path to choose. He will enjoy good things in life and his descendants will inherit the land. The Lord advises those who fear him. He reveals to them the intent of his Covenant. **Psalm 25:3-5, 8-10, 12-14**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why is the Psalmist discouraged?
2. Why is the Psalmist comforted when he thinks of going to God's Holy Place?

3. God may tell us a goal he wishes us to accomplish and a way to get there. Why do we then think we are smarter than God and attempt to accomplish the goal our own way?
4. God had the prophet Samuel anoint David, the shepherd boy as King of Israel. **1 Samuel 16:13**. But Israel already had a King, Saul ben Kish of the tribe of Benjamin. Yet David waited until God made him King. David had opportunities to kill Saul, but he didn't. Why did David wait on God?
5. Read the life of King David in **1-2 Samuel**. Describe the times David was discouraged. What did he do to relieve his discouragement?
6. Why is waiting on God difficult? What is this a test of?
7. The writer of To the Hebrews encourages his readers:

Since we are surrounded by so many examples of faith, we must get ride of everything that slows us down, especially sin that distracts us. We must run the race the lies ahead of us and never give up. We must focus on Jesus, the source and goal of our faith. He saw the joy ahead of him so he endured death on the cross and ignored the disgrace it brought him. Now he holds the honored position – the one next to God the Father on the Heavenly throne. Think about Jesus, who endured opposition from sinners, so that you don't become tired discouraged and give up. **Hebrews 12:1-3**

Jesus calls his disciples to have faith to persevere in spite of challenges or difficulties. *In this world you will have trouble. But cheer up. I have overcome the world.* **John 16:33**. What does this mean?

## Week 25

### When in Doubt...

Open your ears to my teachings, my people. Turn your ears to the words from my mouth.

His people continued to sin against him, to rebel in the desert against the Most High. They deliberately tested God by demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God saying: Can God prepare a banquet in the wilderness?

True, he did strike a rock and water did gush out and the streams did overflow. But can he also give us bread or provide his people with meat?

When the Lord heard this, he became furious. His fire burned against Jacob and his anger flared up at Israel because they did not believe God or trust him to save them.

In spite of that, he commanded the clouds above and opened the doors of Heaven. He rained manna down on them to eat and gave them grain from Heaven. Humans ate the bread of the mighty ones and God sent them plenty of food.

He made the east wind blow in the Heavens and guided the south wind with his might. He rained meat down on them like dust, birds like the sand on the seashore. He made the birds fall in the middle of his camp, all around his dwelling place.

They ate more than enough. He gave them what they wanted but they still wanted more. While the food was still in their mouths, the anger of God flared up against them. He killed their strongest men and slaughtered the best young men in Israel.

In spite of all this, they continued to sin, and they no longer believed in his miracles. He brought their days to an end like a whisper in the wind. When

he killed some of them, the rest searched for him. They turned from their sins and eagerly looked for God.

They remembered that God was their Rock, that the Most High was their redeemer. They flattered him with their mouths and lied to him with their tongues. Their hearts were not loyal to him. They were not faithful to his Covenant.

But he is compassionate. He forgave their sin. He did not destroy them. He restrained his anger many times. He did not display all his fury. He remembered that they were only flesh and blood, a breeze that blows and does not return.

How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness. How often they caused him grief in the wilderness. Again and again they tested God and they pushed the Holy One of Israel to the limit. They did not remember his power – the day he freed them from their oppressor, when he performed his miraculous signs in Egypt, his wonders in the fields of Zoan. **Psalm 78:1,17-43.**

God's Chosen People doubted their God many times. When we read their story, it seems that they were rebellious of their God from the time they left Egypt until he allowed the Babylonians to remove them from the Promised Land 700 years later in 586 BC. Still, there were sometimes when they were happy and enjoyed and praised their God.

God knew that he was developing the character of his Chosen People as he led them through these challenges. In Egypt for 400 years, they had been virtual slaves. But they were *kept* slaves. Although they had to work hard, they were kept fed and given shelter and masters directed their lives. Now instead of working for masters, they had to work for themselves. And they had the freedom to choose not to obey their Master. This was a different kind of living.

So rebel they did. But God was patient with them. Again and again, he restored them when they went astray. So they learned that God was faithful to them. He had made a Covenant that the descendants of Abraham would be given title to the Promised Land. He had promised that Abraham's descendants would *bless all the nations of the earth*. **Genesis 12:3.** God would keep that promise.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why is God so loving and forgiving with his Chosen People? What verse in Deuteronomy says that God will never leave or abandon his people?
2. Read the story of God giving manna to Israel in **Exodus 16:1-36**. God gave them instructions about the manna. How did some people disobey these instructions?
3. Read **Numbers 11:1-35**. Here Moses doubts God. He asks God to kill him because God is giving him too much work to do. What does God do?
4. Why do the Israelites forget again and again that God can do anything even if they do not understand how he does it? But then God has to tell Abraham this. **Genesis 18:13**. He has to tell Moses this. **Numbers 11:23**. When did God have to remind you of this?
5. Perhaps one the worst demonstrations of the Israelites lack of faith was when they said: *Is the Lord among us or not?* **Exodus 17:7** What is even more horrible is when they returned to the same place later and again quarreled with the Lord. **Numbers 20:13**
6. Like the Israelites, we often doubt God's ability to handle a situation. What should we do then?
7. The priest Zechariah doubted the angel Gabriel's message that his wife Elizabeth would birth a son in her old age. **Luke 1:18**. What did the angel do?

## Week 26

### Living Water from the Rock

They weren't thirsty when he led them through the deserts. He made water flow from a rock for them. He split a rock and water gushed out. **Isaiah 48:21**

We are going to conclude this part with a discussion of Moses bringing water out of rock for the Israelites to drink. It is an important story because we are discussing in this part how we should act when we face challenges and difficulties. This is the first time God told Moses to bring water out of the rock as the Israelites were traveling from Egypt to Mount Sinai:

The whole community of Israelites left the Desert of Sin and traveled from place to place as the Lord commanded them. They camped at Rephidim but there was no water for the people to drink. So they complained to Moses by saying: Give us water to drink.

Moses said to them: Why are you complaining to me? Why are you testing the Lord? But the people were thirsty for water there. They complained to Moses and asked: Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Was it to make us, our children, and our livestock die of thirst?

So Moses cried out to the Lord: What should I do with these people? They're almost ready to stone me. The Lord answered Moses: Bring some of the leaders of Israel with you and go to where the people can see you. Take the staff you used to strike the Nile River. I'll be standing in front of you there by a rock at Mount Horeb. Strike the rock and water will come out of it for the people to drink

Moses did this while the leaders of Israel watched him. He named that place Massah [Testing] and Meribah [Complaining] because the Israelites complained and because they tested the Lord asking: Is the Lord with us or not? **Exodus 17:1-7**

The second time was when Israel was camped at Kadesh Barnea. They had returned here before going north along the east side of the Jordan River to meet King Sihon and King Og and conquer their kingdoms.

In the first month the whole community of Israel came into the Desert of Zin and they stayed at Kadesh. Miriam [Moses' sister] died and was buried there. Since the community was without water, they came together to confront Moses and Aaron.

The people complained to Moses and said: If only we had died when the other Israelites had died in the Lord's presence. Did you bring the Lord's assembly into this desert just to have us and our animals die here? Why did you make us leave Egypt and bring us into this terrible place? This is no place to plant crops. Even figs, grapes, and pomegranates won't grow here. And there's no water to drink.

Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Immediately they bowed down with their faces touching the ground and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. The Lord said to Moses: Take your staff, then you and your brother Aaron gather the community. Right before their eyes, tell the rock to give up its water. In this water you will give the community water from the rock for them and their animals to drink.

Moses took his staff out of the tent in the Lord's presence as he had been commanded. Then Moses and Aaron assembled the community in front of the rock and said to them: Listen you rebels. Must we bring water out of the rock for you? Moses raised his hand and hit the rock twice with the staff. Water came pouring out and all the people and their animals drank.

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron: You didn't trust me. You didn't show the Israelites how holy I am. So you will not bring this congregation into the land I'm giving them. This was the oasis of Meribah where the Israelites complained about the Lord and where he showed them he was holy. **Numbers 20:1-13**

How upset Moses was after this. He would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. He mentions this in Deuteronomy saying:

Then I pleaded with the Lord. Almighty Lord, you have only begun to show me how great and powerful you are. What kind of god is there in Heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and the mighty acts you have done? Please let me go over and see the beautiful land on the other side of the Jordan River – those beautiful mountains in Lebanon.

The Lord was angry with me because of you so he wouldn't listen to me. He said: That's enough out of you. Don't talk to me anymore about this. Go to the top of Mount Pisgah and look west, north, south, and east. You may look at the land, but you will never cross the Jordan River. Give instructions to Joshua. Encourage and strengthen him because he will lead these people across the Jordan River and he will help them take possession of the land you see. **Deuteronomy 3:23-28**

How sad this is. Moses is 120 years old, and he will soon die. However, Moses has been a faithful servant of God and God commends him to his brother Aaron and sister Miriam:

He said: Listen to my words: When there are prophets of the Lord among you, I make myself known to them in visions or speak to them in dreams. But that is not the way I treat my servant Moses. He is the most faithful person in my household. I speak to him face to face, plainly and not in riddles. He even sees the form of the Lord. Why weren't you afraid to criticize my servant Moses? The Lord was angry with them so he left. **Numbers 12:6-8**

This should be a great warning to us. God highly regards his servants, but they must respect and obey what he says. Jesus treats his disciples in the same way. He says they must obey his words.

Because water was in the Middle East is such a precious commodity, Jesus uses the picture of water as a life-giving resource to talk about the Holy Spirit. And he will distinguish between water in a cistern with living water as does the prophet Jeremiah:

Has any nation ever exchanged gods? Their gods aren't really gods. My people have exchanged their Glory for something that doesn't help them. Be horrified over this, Heaven. Be terribly afraid, declares the Lord. My people have done two things wrong. They have abandoned me, the fountain of life-



giving water. They have also dug their cisterns, broken cisterns that don't hold water. **Jeremiah 2:11-13**

The nation of Israel celebrated God giving them water – the early rains and the latter rains. In the last of the three annual pilgrim festivals, the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, on the eighth and last day of the feast, the High Priest in Jerusalem would go to the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher. He then carried it to the altar in the Temple in great procession with the people waving palm branches and singing:

With joy you will draw water from the springs of salvation. **Isaiah 12:3**

Jesus took this time to shout loudly to the people gathered there:

Whoever is thirsty must come to me to drink. As Scripture says: Streams of living water will flow from deep within the person who believes in me. **John 7:37-38**

The Lord will continually guide you and satisfy you even in sun-baked places. He will strengthen your bones. You will become like a watered garden and like a spring whose water does not stop flowing. **Isaiah 58:11**

This was not the first time Jesus spoke about living water. Earlier he had met a Samaritan woman who was thirsty for a new life. Jesus asked her for a drink. The woman replied: *How can you, a Jew, ask me for a drink?* Jesus replied:

If you only knew what God's gift is and who is asking you for a drink, you would have asked him for a drink. He would have given you living water. **John 4:10**

The woman asked him: *Where are you going to get this water?* Jesus replied:

Everyone who drinks this water will become thirsty again. But those who drink the water that I will give them will never become thirsty again. In fact, the water that I will give them will become in them a spring that gushes up to Eternal Life. **John 4:13-14**

Jesus compares the Holy Spirit he will pour out on his disciples on Pentecost to living water, so essential for life in the Middle East. God gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to everyone when they are given the gift of faith in Jesus.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. We began this section talking about wandering in the wilderness. In the same way the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before entering the Promised Land, we likewise wander in the wilderness before we believe in Jesus and God gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us in his plan for our lives. Why do we wait so long to seek God?
2. The Israelites in Egypt really didn't worry much about water. They had the Nile River constantly flowing past them. But in the land of Canaan, there were only a few streams in the hills and mountains. They had the Jordan River but that was on the eastern edge of the land and on the western edge was the salty Mediterranean Sea. Water was a precious commodity. So they had to be convinced that God would provide water for them when they needed it. How did God convince them?
3. What did Moses and Aaron do that got God so angry that he wouldn't allow them to enter the Promised Land?
4. Moses had a furious temper. He even once killed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. **Exodus 2:12**. How did he keep that temper in check for 120 years?
5. The Holy Spirit is active in Jesus' life at his baptism before he begins his ministry. What is the Gospel writer signifying by this?
6. Jesus mentions the Holy Spirit to his disciples for the first time in **Matthew 10:20** when he sends out his Twelve for the first time. Why doesn't Jesus explain the Holy Spirit more often before this? When does Jesus speak of the Holy Spirit for the first time in the other three Gospels?
7. Did the people understand Jesus when he spoke of living water at the Feast of Booths? Why don't they ask him questions about this? His disciples never asked Jesus about living water? Why is this? Why does Jesus only speak of the Holy Spirit to his disciples at the Last Supper?

# Part 7

## Keeping on the Way

Once God sanctifies us and we are baptized called **justification**, we begin our journey as a Christian in a newly transformed life of **sanctification**. During this journey, the Holy Spirit works in us to make us more like Jesus. We are different from other people in the world.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit begin to flow through us:

But the spiritual nature produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. **Galatians 5:22**

We become more like God, as he explained to Moses:

The Lord came down in a cloud and stood there with him and called out his name: The Lord. Then he passed in front of Moses calling out:

The Lord, the Lord, a compassionate and merciful God, patient, always faithful and ready to forgive. He continues to show his love to thousands of generations, forgiving wrongdoing, disobedience, and sin. He never lets the guilty go unpunished, punishing children and grandchildren for their parent's sins to the third and fourth generation **Exodus 34:5-7**

This is a continuing journey of developing those characteristics Jesus exhibited during his 33 years on earth in human form, as described in the four Gospels. At the end of our physical lives, we are carried up to Jesus in Paradise. This is called **glorification**.

While on earth we will experience many ups and downs, but Jesus through the Holy Spirit is always with us as Immanuel **Matthew 28:20** to help us, guide us, and comfort us.

## Week 27

### What Is True Repentance?

Have pity *chanan* on me, O God, in keeping with your mercy *cheeced*. In keeping with your unlimited compassion *racham*, wipe out my rebellious acts. Wash me thoroughly from my sin. I admit I am rebellious. My sin is always in front of me. I have sinned against you, especially you. I have done what you consider evil. So you hand down justice when you speak and you are blameless when you judge.

Indeed, I was born guilty. I was a sinner when my mother conceived me. Yet you desire truth and sincerity. Deep down inside you teach me wisdom. Purify me from sin with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear the sounds of joy and gladness. Let the bones that you have broken dance. Hide your face from my sins and wipe out all that I have done wrong.

Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a faithful spirit within me. Do not force me away from your presence and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore the joy of your salvation to me and provide me with a spirit of willing obedience.

Then I will teach your ways to those who are rebellious and sinners will return to you. Rescue me from the guilt of murder, O God my Savior. Let my tongue sing joyfully about your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will tell about your praise.

You are not happy with any sacrifice. Otherwise, I would offer one to you. The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. O God, you do not despise a broken and sorrowful heart. **Isaiah 57:15** Favor Zion with your goodness. Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will be pleased with sacrifices offered in the right spirit – with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings. Young bulls will be offered on your altar. **Psalms 51:1-19**

King David prayed this psalm after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. This is rare. Israelites do not readily admit their guilt. What is surprising is that David's son Solomon in his dedicatory prayer to God in the new Temple he built, mentions true repentance:

They may sin against you. No one is sinless. You may become angry with them and hand them over to an enemy who takes them to another country as captives, whether it is far or near. If they come to their senses, are sorry for what they have done, and plead with you in the land where they are captives saying: We have sinned. We have done wrong. We have been wicked.

If they change their attitude toward you in the land of their enemies where they are captives, if they pray to you toward the land that you gave their ancestors and the city you have chosen, and the Temple I have built for your name, then in Heaven, the place where you live, hear their prayer for mercy.

Do what is right for them. Forgive your people who have sinned against you. Forgive all their wrongs when they rebelled against you and cause those who captured them to have mercy on them because they are your own people whom you brought out of Egypt from the middle of an iron smelter. **1 Kings 8:46-52**

Israelites were taught in the *Towrah* what to do if they unintentionally sinned:

If one person unintentionally does something wrong, a one-year-old female goat must be sacrificed as an offering for sin. The priest will offer the sacrifice to make peace with the Lord and that person will be forgiven. But any native-born Israelite who deliberately does something wrong insults the Lord and must be excluded from the people. That person has despised the Lord's Word and broke the Lord's command. He must be excluded completely. He remains guilty. **Numbers 15:27-31**

This harsh command was amended by the ceremony at Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The High Priest would take two goats. The first goat was killed, and its blood was sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. The High Priest placed his hands on the second goat and recited all the sins of the nation. Then the scapegoat was sent out into the wilderness to die.

On this day Aaron will make peace with the Lord to make you clean. Then you will be clean from all your sins in the Lord's presence. This is the most important worship festival for you. You will humble yourselves. It is a permanent law. **Leviticus 16:30-31**

Repentance means more than simply feeling sorry for sin. It means that the person not only regrets what he has done but commits himself to not do it again. He promises to God to change his life and live the way God wants him to live. This is what people committed when John baptized people in the Jordan River in Jesus' day.

While the Day of Atonement cleansed people for all the sins they committed the previous year, it was good for only one year. They had to participate in this atonement each year. When Jesus came, he offered himself as one sacrifice for all time. *But now at the end of the ages, he has appeared once to remove sin by his sacrifice.* **Hebrews 9:26**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. When the prophet Samuel anointed David, *the Lord's Spirit came over David and stayed with him from that day on.* **1 Samuel 16:13.** David prays that God not take his Holy Spirit from him. **Psalms 51:11.** How did David know God had given him the Holy Spirit?
2. The phrase Holy Spirit first appears here. But the Bible speaks of God taking some of the spirit he had given Moses and giving it to Israel's leaders. **Numbers 11:25.** Are there other instances of the Holy Spirit working in people prior to King David?
3. To say: I did wrong, is very hard for most people. We don't want to admit we did wrong. But when we genuinely repent, to change the way we think and act as the God's Word translation puts it, we feel clean all over. Why is it so hard for people to repent?
4. How ironic that King Solomon talks about repentance in his prayer. Of all people, his actions later in life providing sites for sacrifice of foreign gods on the Mount of Corruption opposite Jerusalem certainly called for this. **2 Kings 23:13.** How did God punish King Solomon for doing this?
5. David was guilty not only for adultery but also of murder. Describe his involvement in the murder of Bathsheba's husband.
6. Why did Moses never seek God's forgiveness for the murder of the Egyptian?
7. What was the death of an innocent animal when a sinner sacrificed it supposed to impress on the sinner?

## Week 28

### When We Get Lost in the Swamp

Then Jesus said: A man had two sons. The younger son said to his father: Father give me my share of the property. So the father divided his property between his two sons. After a few days, the younger son gathered his possessions and left for a country far away from home. There he wasted everything on a wild lifestyle.

He had nothing left when a severe famine spread throughout that country. He had nothing to live on. So he got a job from someone in that country and send to feed pigs in the fields. No one in the country would give him any food and he was so hungry that he would have eaten what the pigs were eating.

Finally, he came to his senses. He said: How many of my father's hired men have more food than they can eat while I'm starving to death here? I'll go at once to my father and I'll say to him: Father I've sinned against Heaven and you. I don't deserve to be called your son anymore. Make me one of your hired men.

So he went at once to his father. While he was still at a distance, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son, put his arms around him and kissed him. Then his son said to his father: Father, I've sinned against Heaven and you. I don't deserve to be called your son anymore.

The father said to his servants: Hurry. Bring out the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fatted calf. Kill it and let's celebrate with a feast. My son was dead and has come back to life. He was lost but has been found. Then they began to celebrate.

The older son was in the field. As he was coming back to the house, he heard music and dancing. He called to one of the servants and asked what was happening. The servant told him: Your brother has returned home. So your

father has killed the fatted calf to celebrate your brother's safe return. The older son became angry and wouldn't go into the house.

His father came out and begged him to come in. But he answered his father: All these years I've worked like a slave for you. I've never disobeyed one of your commands. Yet you've never given me so much as a little goat for a celebration with my friends. But this son of yours spent your money on prostitutes. And when he came home, you killed the fatted calf for him.

His father said to him: My child, you're always with me. Everything I have is yours. But we have something to celebrate, something to be happy about. This brother of yours was dead but has come back to life. He was lost but has been found. **Luke 15:11-32**

Indeed, the younger son was in the swamp. For a Jew to have to feed pigs in order to live is to sink to the lowest level of living. That is obvious. But so is the older brother. Now the younger son has a good relationship with his Father. But the older son is still resentful toward the Father. He cannot forgive either his younger brother or his Father. He is indeed in a swamp.

What do we do when we are in a swamp? We review our situation, admit we are in a swamp, and instead of remaining in the swamp, take steps to get out. In this particular situation, the younger son repented of his actions and went home to live a new life with his father. How about the older son? He needed to repent of his jealousy of his brother and ask both the brother and the father to forgive him and live a new life of relationship with both his brother and his father.

How difficult this is to do? But with God's help by prayer and much soul searching, we can do this. In analyzing this story, we need to ask: Why did the younger son leave home? Was he jealous of his older brother as the firstborn son in that society usually received twice as much as the younger son in an inheritance and was favored over other sons in many ways? Or was he simply being self? The younger son may have had to forgive his brother in order to be in right relationship with him.

Repentance usually involves forgiveness. As we saw when Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount commanded us to forgive and pray for our enemies **Matthew 5:44** or forgive our brother seventy-seven times seven when they sinned **Matthew 18:22**, forgiveness was a high priority for Jesus



## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why, when the younger son asked his father for his inheritance while the father was still alive, not only Jewish listeners were shocked, but so were Gentiles. Why was this?
2. When the father divided his property between his two sons, this meant that all the property other than that given to the younger son was now the older son's property. So when the father killed the fatted calf, he was giving away the older son's property. And if the younger son stayed in the home, he would be living off the older son's property. Was this the reason the older son was angry?
3. Why is forgiveness so hard for us?
4. The first mention of forgiveness in the Bible is when Joseph's brothers tell Joseph that their father Jacob said to tell Joseph to forgive his brothers for selling him to the Ishmaelites. **Genesis 50:15-17**. Did Jacob really say this? How can you tell?
5. Words translated *forgive* appear 119 in the Hebrew Bible. The second time the word appears is when Pharaoh asks Moses to forgive him his sin. **Exodus 10:17**. Next, twice Moses asks God to forgive the Israelites. **Exodus 32:32; Numbers 14:19**. Joshua tells the Israelites God will not forgive their transgressions or their sins. **Joshua 24:19**. Abigail asks David to forgive her husband's attitude in **Samuel 25:28**, and forgive appears in the Psalms. **Psalm 25:18; 32:1; 85:2**. The word finally appears in **Isaiah 2:9 and 33:24**. Does this word appear more in the Bible than you thought it would?
6. Isaiah reports God says:

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near.  
Let wicked people abandon their ways. Let evil people abandon  
their thoughts. Let them return to the Lord and he will show  
compassion to them. Let them return to our God because he will  
freely forgive them. **Isaiah 55:6-7**

How often will God forgive someone?

7. Is there anyone God will not forgive? See **Matthew 12:31**

## Week 29

### When We Are Lost, There Is Always Help

In the year 609 BC, good King Josiah was killed by the Egyptian Pharaoh Neco II at Armageddon. The Pharaoh was going to help the Assyrians against the newly arisen superpower, the Babylonians. But the Pharaoh lost. On his way back to Egypt, he stopped in Jerusalem, appointed a new son of Josiah named Jehoiakim as King and took the reigning King Jehoahaz with him to Egypt.

In the year 605 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem, he made King Jehoiakim pledge allegiance to him as his vassal, looted the Temple, and took the prophet Daniel and some other young men to Babylon to train as administrators.

In the year 597 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar came again to Jerusalem. After a two-year blockade he entered the city. During the blockade, King Jehoiakim who had been disloyal to Babylon by intriguing with Egypt died and his 21-year-old son Jehoiachin became King. Nebuchadnezzar again looted the Temple, took the young King and his mother and the entire court, most of the priests, all the generals and soldiers, tradesmen and wealthy landowners and their families to Babylon. In all 10,000 men and their families including Ezekiel were deported to Babylon.

Ezekiel was 25 years old in training to be a priest. Now he could not be one. How long would he be captive in Babylon, 1,700 miles away from the Jerusalem Temple? Like the other Judeans, he asked himself the question: Would God abandon his people? Five years later, when he was 30 years old, the year he would be made a priest if he was in Jerusalem, God himself came to Babylon riding on a throne chariot carried by cherubim. Ezekiel tells us:

On the fifth day of the fourth month in my thirtieth year, while I was living among the exiles by the Chebar River, the sky opened, and I saw visions from God. On the fifth day of the month, during the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiakin 592 BC, the Lord spoke his Word to the priest Ezekiel, son of Buzi, in Babylon by the Chebar River. The power of the Lord came over Ezekiel.

As I looked, I saw a storm coming from the north. There was an immense cloud with flashing lightning surrounded by a bright light. The middle of the lightning looked like glowing metal. In the center of the cloud, I saw what looked like four Living Creatures.

## Four Living Creatures

They were shaped like humans but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight. Their feet were like those of calves and they glittered like polished bronze. They had human hands under their wings on each of their four sides. All four of them had faces and wings. Their wings touched each other. The Living Creatures went straight ahead and they did not turn as they moved.

Their faces looked like this: From the front, each creature had the face of a human. From the right, each one had the face of the lion. From the left, each one had the face of a bull. And from the back, each one had the face of an eagle. This is what their faces looked like. Their wings were spread out pointing upward. Each Living Creature had two wings with which they touched each other. The other two wings covered their bodies.

Each of the Living Creatures went straight ahead. They went wherever their spirit wanted them to go and they didn't turn as they moved. The Living Creatures looked like burning coals and torches. Fire moved back and forth between the living creatures. The fire was bright and lightning came out of the fire. The Living Creatures ran back and forth like lightning.

## The Wheels

As I looked at the Living Creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each of them. This is how the wheels looked and how they were made. They looked like beryl pale green gemstone. All four wheels looked the same. They looked like a wheel within a wheel. Whenever they moved, they moved in any of the four directions without turning as they moved. The rims of the wheels were large and frightening. They were covered with eyes.

When the Living Creatures moved, the wheels moved with them. When the Living Creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. Wherever the spirit wanted them to go, the Living Creatures went. The wheels rose with them because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. So whenever the Living Creatures moved, the wheels moved. Whenever the Living

Creatures stood still, the wheels stood still. And whenever the Living Creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose with them because the spirit of the Living Creatures was in the wheels.

### **The Living Creatures Supported a Dome Over Their Heads**

Something like a dome was spread over the heads of the Living Creatures. It looked like dazzling crystal. Under the dome, each Living Creature had two wings that were stretched out straight, touching one another. Each Living Creature had two wings that covered its body. When the Living Creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings. The sound was like the noise of rushing water like the thunder of the Almighty, like the commotion in an army camp. When the Living Creatures stood still, they lowered their wings.

### **A Throne Was Above the Dome**

A voice came from above the dome over their heads as they stood still with their wings lowered. Above the dome over their heads was something that looked like a throne made of sapphire. On the throne was a figure that looked like a human. Then I saw what he looked like from the waist up. He looked like glowing bronze with fire all around it. From the waist down, he looked like fire. A bright light surrounded him. The brightness all around him looked like a rainbow in the clouds. It was like the Lord's glory. When I saw it, I immediately bowed down and I heard someone speaking. **Ezekiel 1:1-28**

### **A Voice Speaks from the Throne**

He said to me: Son of man, stand up and I will speak to you. As he spoke to me, the Spirit entered me, stood me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

He said to me: Son of man, I am sending you to the people of Israel. They are a people from a nation that has rebelled against me. They and their ancestors have rebelled against me to this day. I am sending you to these

defiant and stubborn children. Tell them: This is what the Almighty Lord says. Whether these rebellious people listen or not, they will realize that a prophet has been among them.

Son of man don't be afraid of them or the things they say. Don't be afraid even though thorns and thistles are around you and you live among scorpions. Don't let the things they say frighten you. Don't be terrified in their presence even though they are a rebellious people. Speak my words to them whether they listen or not, because they are rebellious. But you, son of man, listen to what I say. Don't be rebellious like those rebellious people. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving to you. **Ezekiel 2:1-8**

### **Ezekiel Is Given a Scroll**

As I looked, I saw a hand stretched out toward me. In it was a scroll. He spread the scroll in front of me. There was writing on the front and back. There were funeral songs, songs of mourning and horrible things written on it.

The Lord said to me: Son of man, eat what you find. Eat this scroll. Then speak to the people of Israel. So I opened my mouth and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me: Eat this scroll I'm giving you and fill your stomach with it. So I ate it and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

### **God Tells Ezekiel He is Sending Him to a Rebellious People**

He said to me: Son of man, go to the people of Israel and speak my words to them. I am not sending you to a people whose language is hard to understand or difficult to speak. I am sending you to Israel. I am not sending you to nations whose language is hard to understand, difficult to speak, or whose words you do not understand.

If I send you to those nations, they will certainly listen to you. But the people of Israel will refuse to listen to you because they refuse to listen to me. All the people are very stubborn and hardheaded. Yet I will make you as stubborn and as hardheaded as they are. I will make you as hard as diamond,

harder than stone. Don't be afraid of them. Don't be terrified in their presence even though they are a rebellious people.

### **God Says: Tell Them: *This is What the Almighty Lord Says, Whether They Listen or Not***

He also said to me: Son of man take to heart everything I have spoken to you and listen closely. Go to the exiles, to your people. Whether they listen or not, tell them: This is what the Almighty Lord says.

Then the Spirit lifted me. And behind me I heard a loud thundering voice say: Blessed is the Lord's glory which left this place. I also heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures touching one another and the noise of the wheels beside them as well as a loud rumbling.

### **The Spirit Lifts Ezekiel Away to Tel Abib**

Then the Spirit lifted me and took me away. I went away feeling bitter and angry. The strong power of the Lord came over me. I went to Tel Abib to the exiles who lived by the Chebar River. I sat there among them for seven days. I was stunned. **Ezekiel 2:9-3:15**

### **God Commissions Ezekiel as His Prophet**

After seven days the Lord spoke his Word to me. He said: Son of man, I have made you a watchman over the people of Israel. Listen to what I say and warn them for me. **Ezekiel 3:16-17**

Ezekiel will never be a priest, but he will be God's prophet. Ezekiel will minister to the exiles. He will minister until the 25<sup>th</sup> year of their captivity 572 BC. For the next 20 years, he will minister until he is 50 years old. **Ezekiel 40:1**. For the first 11 years, Ezekiel will only speak God's words. Then when Jerusalem is captured and the city and its Temple are destroyed, he will speak his own words as inspired by the Lord's Spirit.

At the same the prophet Daniel is prophesying to the King of Babylon. Daniel and Ezekiel never speak to each other. Each prophet carries on his own ministry.

What is so important about this event is the God himself leaves Jerusalem, His Holy Mountain, and travels to Babylon where his people are. In Deuteronomy God says through Moses:

The Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not abandon you, destroy you, or forget the Covenant to your ancestor that he swore he would keep.  
**Deuteronomy 4:31**

What great love God has for his Chosen People even though they are rebellious. This carries on into the New Testament.

Christ died for us while we were still sinners. This demonstrates God's love for us. **Romans 5:8**

This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the payment for our sins. **1 John 4:10**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. How disappointed Ezekiel must have been for the first five years he spent in exile in Babylon. As the son of priest, he wanted to be a priest. But God had another plan for his life. While it was a hard ministry – where for the first six years until Jerusalem fell, people refused to listen to him – he was one of only two genuine prophets to the exiles. Why didn't God warn Ezekiel in advance of his mission for him?
2. Read the prophet Isaiah's encounter with God in the Temple in 740 BC in Isaiah 6:1-13. How are these calls the same? How are they different? Note in both God tells the prophets people will not listen to them.
3. What does the scroll Ezekiel is to eat represent? Why is he told to eat it?
4. What is the purpose of the wheels?. How are they related to the Living Creatures?
5. Why does God sent a prophet to people who won't listen? What good does this do?
6. Read Daniel's vision of four animals in **Daniel 7:1-8**. How are they like the four Living Creatures.
7. Read King David's **Psalms 18** which has a theophany of God. What does David say in this Psalm that tells us why God appeared to Ezekiel?

## Week 30

### The Light on Our Path

Your word is lamp for my feet and a light for my path. **Psalm 119:105**

But the path of righteous people is like the light of dawn that becomes brighter and bright until it reaches midday. The way of wicked people is like deep darkness. They do not know what makes them stumble. **Proverbs 4:18-19**

In the last session, we left the Chosen People in captivity in Babylon. They would be there for seventy years as predicted by the prophet Jeremiah from 605 BC until 535 BC. **Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10**. Daniel also knew this. **Daniel 9:2**. But God had promised through Isaiah 200 years in advance that after the punishment of captivity, God would lead his people home to Jerusalem.

Comfort my people. Comfort them, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and announce to it that its time of hard labor is over and its wrongs have been paid for. It has received from the Lord double for all its sins.

A voice cries out in the desert: Clear a path for the Lord. Make a straight highway in the wilderness for our God. Every valley will be raised. Every mountain and hill will be lowered. Steep place will be made level. Rough places will be made smooth. Then the Lord's glory will be revealed and all people will see it together. The Lord has spoken. **Isaiah 40:1-5**

Go up a high mountain, Zion. Tell the Good News. Call out with a loud voice, Jerusalem. Tell the Good News. Raise your voice without fear. Tell the cities of Judah: Here is your God. The Almighty Lord is coming with power to rule with authority. His reward is with him and the people he has won arrive ahead of him. Like a shepherd he takes care of his flock. He gathers the lambs in his arms. He carries them in his arms. He gently helps the sheep and their lambs. **Isaiah 40:9-11**

And so in 535 BC, the Judeans returned to Jerusalem led by Zerubbabel, the grandson of the last King of Judah, Jeconiah. There were 42,360 men and their families and 7,337 servants. **Ezra 2:64-65**. On the seventh month, they rebuilt the altar on its original site and celebrated the Feast of Booths. Each day and evening they offered the burnt sacrifices. Yet the foundations of the



Temple had not yet been laid. **Ezra 3:1-6**. In the second month of the second year, they began to build the Temple. **Ezra 3:8**

The idea of God being a light guiding God's people really began much earlier. When the Israelites left Egypt, God guided with a pillar of smoke by day and a cloud of fire by night. After the Israelites built the wilderness tabernacle at Mount Sinai, this pillar stood over the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. There God met with Moses to give him instructions for the people.

When they set off for Canaan, God led them by this same pillar. When they wandered in the wilderness, this same pillar went before them. Thus, they were always aware of God's presence in their midst.

In all of their travels, whenever the column of smoke moved from the Tent, the Israelites would break camp. But if the column didn't move, they wouldn't break camp. So the Lord's column stay over the Tent during the day and there was fire in the smoke at night. In this way, the Israelites could see the column throughout their travels. **Exodus 40:36-38**

In the New Testament, God guides his people by the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit may not be a visible light, he is a light to our minds and thoughts reminding us constantly of God's presence with us. Jesus said:

If you love me, you will obey my commandments. I will ask the Father and he will give you another Helper who will be with you forever. That Helper is the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him because it doesn't see or know him. You know him because he lives with you and will be in you. **John 14:15-17**

Those who love me will do what I say. The Father will love them, and we will go to them and make our home with them. A person who doesn't love me doesn't do what I say. I don't make up what you hear me say. What I say comes from the Father who sent me.

I have told you this while I'm still with you. However, the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything. He will remind you of everything that I have ever told you. **John 14:23-26**

The Holy Spirit reminds us constantly of Jesus' words. His words can provide us with direction and comfort as we live in a dark world where most people don't believe in Jesus. Jesus said to the Pharisees:

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have a life filled with light and never live in the dark **John 8:12**

The apostle John followed Jesus closely and remembered his life with him on earth and his words:

The Word of Life existed from the beginning. We have heard it. We have seen it. We observed and touched it. This life was revealed to us. We have seen it and we testify about it. We are reporting to you about this Eternal Life that was in the presence of the Father and was revealed to us.

This is the life we have seen and heard. We are reporting about it to you also that so that you can have a relationship with us. Our relationship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing this so that we can be completely filled with joy.

This is the message we heard from Christ and are reporting it to you. God is light and there isn't any darkness in him. If we say we have a relationship with God and yet live in the dark, we aren't being faithful. But if we live in the light in the same way that God is in the light, we have a relationship with each other. And the blood of Jesus cleanses us from every sin. **1 John 1:1-7**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. When Jesus says: I am the Light of the World, what does he mean?
2. When God said: Let there be light, what did Jesus create? Genesis 1:3; John 1:3.
3. When God brought his Chosen People out of captivity in Babylon and back to Jerusalem, were they a different people when they went into captivity 70 years before? Why or why not?
4. The captives in Babylon had both Ezekiel and Jeremiah prophesying to them as their ministries overlapped. So they were aware of Jeremiah's prophecy of the New Covenant:

The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a New Covenant to Israel and Judah. It will not be like the Covenant that I made

to their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of Egypt. They rejected that Covenant although I was a husband to them, declares the Lord.

But this is the Covenant that I will make to Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my teachings inside them and I will write those teachings on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will each person teach his neighbors or his relatives by saying: Know the Lord. All of them, from the least important to the most important, will know me, declares the Lord, because I will forgive their wickedness and I will no longer hold their sins against them. **Jeremiah 31:31-34.**

When did the captives think this Covenant would be inaugurated?

5. Jeremiah also made another prophecy:

The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will keep the Covenant I made to Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David. He will do what is fair and right in the Land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live securely. Jerusalem will be called The Lord Our Righteousness. This is what the Lord says: David will never fail to have a descendant sitting on the throne of Israel. **Jeremiah 33:14-17.** Read **Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 16:5; 59:20-21; Jeremiah 23:5-6.**

When did the captives think this would happen?

6. Jesus, the Messiah, did come 500 years later. When did he inaugurate the New Covenant? Identify the Scripture that says he did so.
7. Analyze each of these. Describe how God brings light into our lives.

O Lord, you light my lamp. My God turns my darkness into light. **Psalm 18:28**

The Lord is my light and my salvation. Who is there to fear? The Lord is my life's fortress. Who is there to be afraid of? **Psalm 27:1**

Indeed, the fountain of life is with you. In your light, we see light. **Psalm 36:9**

Send out your light and your truth. Let them guide me. Let them bring me to your holy mountain and to your dwelling place. Then let me go to the altar of God, my highest joy, and I will give thanks to you on the lyre, O God, my God. **Psalm 43:3-4**

Which is your favorite? Why?

## Part 8

# The Providence of God

We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God – those whom he has called according to his plan. This is true because he already knew his people and had already appointed them to have the same form as the image of his Son. Therefore, his Son is the firstborn among many children. He also called those whom he had already appointed. He approved of those whom he had called, and he gave glory to those whom he had approved of. **Romans 8:28-30**

In this part we will discuss the providence of God. For many, this is a difficult concept. God is sovereign. He has created Creation to extend his glory. Everyone and everything in Creation is to reflect God's glory back to him. A tree glorifies God by being a tree. A lion glorifies God by being a lion. Humans glorify God by being human.

God has a plan for each human's life. Yet God made humans in his image and has given them free will. They have the opportunity to follow God's plan for their lives and cooperate with him or to choose another way. Yet God is sovereign. He accomplishes what he has planned. So nothing happens by chance. God has developed laws to guide what happens in Creation. Science attempts to discover these laws so we understand what happens and why.

Many times we do not know why things happen as they do. The Bible confirms this in the story of Joseph, the patriarch Jacob's son. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and sold him to traders who took him to Egypt. But Joseph's ability to interpret dreams was recognized by the Pharaoh of Egypt. Joseph's ability enabled Egypt to produce food before a famine came. Jacob sent Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy food. Joseph recognized them, forgave them for their cruelty and invited them to bring their father Jacob and live in Egypt.

Joseph's brothers were afraid of their past cruelty, but Joseph said:

Don't be afraid. I can't take God's place. Even though you planned evil against me, God planned good to come out of it. This was to keep many people alive as he is doing now. Don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children. In this way he reassured them setting their minds at ease.  
**Genesis 50:19-21**

In a way we do not understand God accomplishes his purposes through us even though we may disobey him. Yet as we grow older, we soon learn that it is best to cooperate with God for he loves us with his great love the Bible calls *cheved* and only wants the very best for us. God's providence takes our free will into account and still enables God to accomplish his purposes.

Isaiah tells us how God used Cyrus the Persian King to conquer Babylon and issue a decree in 539 BC that allowed the Judeans to return to Jerusalem. Isaiah told this would happen during his ministry from 740-698 BC in advance of Cyrus even being born. Isaiah even identified Cyrus by name:

Who has raised up from the east someone to whom the Lord gives victory with every step? Nations are handed over to him. He defeats Kings. With his sword he turns them into dust. With his bow he turns them into straw blown by the wind. He chases them, marching by safely on a path his feet have never traveled before. Who has accomplished this? Who has determined the course of history from the beginning? I, the Lord, was there first and I will be there to the end. I am the one. **Isaiah 41:2-4**

I have raised up someone from the north and he has come. He will call on my name from the east. He will attack rulers as if they were mud, as if he were treading on clay like a potter. **Isaiah 41:25**

He says about Cyrus: He is my shepherd. He will do everything I want him to do. **Isaiah 44:28**

This is what the Lord says about Cyrus, his Anointed One. I have held him by his right hand so he could conquer nations ahead of him, strip Kings of their power and open doors ahead of him so that the gates would not be shut. I will go ahead of you Cyrus, and smooth out the rough places. I will break down the bronze doors and cut through iron bars. I will give you treasures from dark places and hidden stockpiles. Then you will know that I, the Lord God of Israel, have called you by name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, Israel my chosen one, I have called you by name. I have given you a title of honor although you don't know me. **Isaiah 45:1-4**

I prepared Cyrus for my righteous purpose. I will make all of his roads straight. He will build my city and let my exiles go free without any payment or reward, says the Lord of Armies. **Isaiah 45:13**

Remember the first events because I am God and there is no other. I am God and there's no one like me. From the beginning I revealed the end. From long ago I told you things that had not yet happened saying: My plan will stand and I'll do everything I intend to do. I will call a bird of prey from the east. I will call someone for my plan from a faraway land. I have spoken and I will bring it about. I have planned it and I will do it. **Isaiah 46:9-11**

Gather together all of you and listen. What idol has revealed such things? The Lord loves Cyrus. He will carry out the Lord's plan against Babylon. He will use his strength against the Babylonians. I alone have called him. I will bring him here and he will succeed. **Isaiah 48:14-15**

Cyrus the Great was born in 600 BC. After his father's death he inherited the throne in 559 BC. He rose quickly and conquered kingdom after kingdom. By the year 540 BC, he had captured Elam. In 539, he defeated the Babylonian army and captured the city of Babylon itself. His reign lasted 30 years. He died in 530 BC. He was succeeded by his son Cambyses II, who conquered Egypt. Cyrus respected the customs and religions of all the lands he conquered. He is recognized for his achievements in human rights, politics, and military strategy.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why are people so reluctant to believe that God can predict the future in the Bible?
2. Think about the **Covenant of Redemption** and the events that lead us to see it coming to fruition even before Jesus came to earth in 5 BC. List some of them.
3. What are miracles? Aren't these God's interventions into history? Do miracles happen today? How active is God today in the world?
4. Many scholars doubt the Isaiah was written by one man during his ministry from 740 BC to 698 BC because of his many prophecies especially those of Cyrus. Why are Cyrus' other achievements consistent with his allowing the Judeans to return home to Jerusalem.
5. If it were not for the province of God, how could God answer prayer?

## Week 31

### Why Do We Sin?

Sin is disobedience of God. God created Creation to extend his glory. God made all things and all creatures to reflect his glory back to him. But God made humans in the image of God and gave them the ability to choose to obey him or to disobey him. In the Book of Genesis, we learn that Adam and Eve, the first two humans God created, disobeyed God by eating fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and were driven out of the Garden of Eden.

There is no difference among people. Because all people have sinned, they have fallen short of God's glory. **Romans 3:23**

Through Adam, the inherent inclination to sin entered the human race and human beings became sinners by nature. When Adam sinned, his inner nature was transformed by his sin of rebellion bringing to him spiritual death and depravity which would be passed on to all who came after him. We are sinners not because we sin; rather, we sin because we are sinners. This passed-on depravity is known as inherited sin. Just as we inherit physical characteristics from our parents, we inherit our sinful natures from Adam

People sin therefore because they have inherited a sin nature. King David said:

Indeed, I was born guilty. I was a sinner when my mother conceived me.  
**Psalm 51:5**

God gives humans free will. Therefore, we can choose to sin or to not sin. God told Cain before he murdered his brother:

Sin is lying outside your door ready to attack. It wants to control you, but you must master it. **Genesis 4:6**

This is the challenge humans face. They can choose to do good or they can choose to do evil. God has given us a conscience. This conscience tells us what is right and what is wrong. But we have to choose to listen to our conscience. And we can override its advice.

God has also given us a moral law in the Ten Commandments he gave to Israel at Mount Sinai. If we disobey any of these commandments, we are rebelling against God.



## How Does Jesus Help Us to Avoid Sinning?

When we accept God's call to be a Christian, God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is our Helper, our *paraclete*, just as Jesus was a helper to his disciples.

He will come to convict the world of sin, to show the world what has God's approval, and to convince the world that God judges it. **John 16:8**

The Holy Spirit comes to live in us and becomes a louder conscience. When we pray to God the first thing in the morning, the Holy Spirit helps us plan our day. And if we listen to his quiet voice, he will tell us where we are in danger of disobeying God. At the very moment we are faced with a choice to sin or not to sin, the Holy Spirit speaks to us.

The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything. He will remind you of everything that I have ever told you. **John 14:36**

When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into the full truth. He won't speak on his own. He will speak what he hears and will tell you about things to come. He will give me glory because while tell you what I say. Everything the Father says is also what I say. That is why I said: He will take what I say and tell it to you. **John 16:13-15**

The Holy Spirit reminds us of the words of Jesus. And Jesus gave us instructions for pleasing God in very few words:

The most important commandment is: Listen Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. So love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second most important commandment is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these. **Mark 12:29-31**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Paul laments about his spiritual condition.

I know that nothing good lives in me. That is, nothing good lives in my corrupt nature. Although I have the desire to do what is right, I don't do it. I don't do the good I want to do. Instead, I do the evil that I don't want to do. Now, when I do what I don't want

to do I am no longer the one who is doing it. Sin that lives in me is doing it. **Romans 7:18-20**

Why is Paul so distressed? Doesn't he recognize the Holy Spirit is living in him?

2. Do we have to sin or do we have a choice?
3. Do Christians have to follow all the commands God gave to his Chosen People?
4. Why is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount **Matthew 5:1-7:27** considered Jesus' principal teaching on righteous living as God desires?
5. Why is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit considered an unforgivable sin? **Mark 3:29**
6. Why does God want us to confess our sins to him?

If we say: We aren't sinners, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. God is faithful and reliable. If we confess our sins, he forgives them and cleanses us from everything we've done wrong. **1 John 1:8-9**

## Week 32

### Why Does God Send Us into the Wilderness?

King Saul chased David out of his court by attempting to kill him with a spear. David fled to Nob, then to Gath, and then stayed in a cave at Adullam.

His family joined him and so did everyone who was in trouble, in debt, or bitter about life. He became their commander. There were about 400 men with him. **1 Samuel 22:2**

We have two psalms of David where the superscription says he was in the cave:

Have pity on me O God. Have pity on me because my soul takes refuge in you. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until destructive storms pass by. I call to God Most High to the God who does everything for me. He sends his help from Heaven and saves me. He disgraces the one who is harassing me. God sends his mercy and truth.

My soul is surrounded by lions. I must lie down with man-eating lions. Their teeth are spears and arrows. Their tongues are sharp swords. May you be honored above the Heavens, O God. Let your glory extend over the whole earth.

My enemies spread out a net to catch me. My soul is bowed low. They dug a pit to trap me but then they fell into it. My heart is confident, O God. My heart is confident. I want to sing and make music. Wake up my soul. Wake up harp and lyre. I want to wake up at dawn.

I want to give thanks to you among the people, O Lord. I want to make music to praise you among the nations because your mercy is as high as the Heavens. Your truth reaches the skies. May you be honored above the Heavens, O God. Let your glory extend over all the earth. **Psalms 57:1-11**.

Loudly I cry to the Lord. Loudly I plead with the Lord for mercy. I pour out my complaints in his presence and tell him my troubles. When I begin to lose hope you already know what I am experiencing.

My enemies have hidden a trap for me on the path where I walk. Look to my right and see that no one notices me. Escape is impossible for me. No one cares about me.

I call out to you, O Lord. I say: You are my refuge my inheritance in this world of the living. Pay attention to my cry for help because I am very weak. Rescue me from those who pursue me because they are too strong for me. Release my soul from prison so that I may give thanks to your name. Righteous people will surround me because you are good to me. **Psalm 142:1-7**

David must have asked God: Why are you allowing this to happen to me? You sent the prophet Samuel and he anointed me King of Israel. **1 Samuel 16:13**. Then you brought me to Saul's court as his musician and armor bearer. Then you allowed me to lead soldiers to defeat the Philistines. Now you allow King Saul to chase me into the desert. What am I supposed to learn from this?

James, the Lord's brother gives this advice:

My brothers and sisters, be very happy when you are tested in different ways. You know that such testing of your faith produces endurance. Endure until your testing is over. Then you will be mature and complete, and you won't need anything. **James 1:2-4**

The writer of To the Hebrews agrees with James:

You struggle against sin, but your struggles haven't killed you. You have forgotten the encouraging words that God speaks to you as his children.

My child pay attention when the Lord disciplines you. Don't give up when he corrects you. The Lord disciplines everyone he loves. He severely disciplines everyone he accepts as his child. **Proverbs 3:11-12**

Endure your discipline. God corrects you as a father corrects his children. All children are disciplined by their fathers. If you aren't disciplined like the other children, you aren't part of the family. On earth we have fathers who disciplined us, and we respect them. Shouldn't we place ourselves under the authority of God, the father of spirits, so that we will live?

For a short time our Fathers disciplined us as they thought best. Yet God disciplines us for our own good so that we can become holy like him. We don't enjoy being disciplined. It always seems to cause more pain than joy. But later on, those who learn from that discipline have peace that comes from doing what is right. **Hebrews 12:4-11**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Is there a difference between testing and discipline? How can you tell?
2. Certainly, overcoming an obstacle matures us and teaches us a skill. But many tests are simply painful, and we don't learn much. Yet why it always a good idea to always ask God: What am I supposed to learn from this?
3. Jeremiah, of all the prophets, seemed to have the worst life although Ezekiel came close. We have more record of Jeremiah's so-called confessions to God than any other prophet. He cried out to God:

Why is my pain unending and my wound incurable, refusing to heal? Will you disappoint me like a stream that dries up in summertime? **Jeremiah 15:18**

Isn't this close to blasphemy?

4. Another time Jeremiah said to God:

O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived. You overpowered me and won. I've been made fun of all day long. Everyone mocks me. Each time I speak, I have to cry out and shout: Violence and destruction. The Lord's Word has made me the object of insults and contempt all day long.

I think to myself: I can forget the Lord and no longer speak his name. But his Word is inside me like a burning fire shut up in my bones. I wear myself out holding it in, but I can't do it any longer. **Jeremiah 20:7-9**

How was Jeremiah supposed to survive this torture?

5. Ezekiel was given a terrible task by God:

Then the Lord spoke his Word to me. He said: Son of man, with one blow I'm going to take away the person you love the most. But you must not mourn cry, or let tears run down your face. Groan silently. Don't grieve

for the person who dies. Tie on your turban and put on your sandals. Don't cover your face or eat the food that mourners eat.

So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I was ordered. The people asked me: Tell us what do these things that you are doing mean to us? I told them:

The Lord spoke his Word to me. He said: Tell the nation of Israel: This is what the Almighty Lord says: I'm going to dishonor my Holy Place. You brag that My Holy Place give you strength. It's the thing that you love the most. It's your hearts' desire. So the sons and daughters you left behind in Jerusalem will die in battle. Then you must do what Ezekiel did. **Ezekiel 24:15-22**

What a terrible test to put the prophet through. What was God attempting to teach the captives about the fall of Jerusalem? God then said to Ezekiel:

You will be a sign to them. Then they will know that I am the Lord. **Ezekiel 24:27**

6. God called the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute and have children with her. **Hosea 1:1-3:5**. What was God teaching the people of Israel by this?
7. But the greatest test of all was that given to Jesus. Although he was the Son of God the Father sent him to earth with a second nature, that of a human being. He was to restrain himself and experience all of the temptations and weaknesses that a human experienced. List some of the temptations that Jesus experienced in his human form. How was Jesus able to do all that he did?

## Week 33

### How Does God Keep Our Pride in Check?

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of an oak tree in the middle of the earth. It was very tall and became strong enough to reach the sky. Then a holy being came down from Heaven and shouted: Cut the tree down and leave only the stump and its roots. Secure it with an iron and brass chain. Let its human mind be changed to that of an animal for seven time periods. Then he asked Daniel to interpret the dream.

Daniel gave the King the interpretation.

This is the meaning, Your Majesty. The Most High has decided to apply it to you, Your Majesty. You will be forced away from people and live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like cattle. The dew from the sky will make you wet. And seven time periods will pass until you realize that the Most High has power over human kingdoms and that he gives them to whoever he wishes. Since I said that the stump and the tree's roots were to be left, your kingdom will be restored to you as you realize that Heaven rules.

This is why, Your Majesty, my best advice is that you stop sinning and do what is right. Stop committing the same errors and have pity on the poor. Maybe you can prolong your prosperity.

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar for twelve months later the King was walking around the royal palace in Babylon. The King thought: Look how great Babylon is. I built the royal palace by my own impressive power and for my glorious honor. Before the words came out of my mouth, a voice from Heaven said: Listen to this: **Daniel 4:24-28**

So it happened. The King became a beast and ate grass.

At the end of seven time periods, I Nebuchadnezzar looked up to Heaven and my mind came back to me. I thanked the Most High, and I praised and honored the one who lives forever because his power lasts forever and his kingdom lasts from one generation to the next. Everyone who lives on earth is nothing compared to him. He does whatever he wishes with the army of

Heaven and with those who live on earth. There is no one who can oppose him or ask him: What are you doing?

Just then my mind came back to me. My royal honor and glory were also given back to me. My advisors and nobles wanted to meet with me again. I was given back my kingdom and made extraordinarily great. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, will praise, honor, and give glory to the King of Heaven. Everything he does is true, his ways are right, and he can humiliate those who act arrogantly. **Daniel 4:34-37**

We have no verification from history that this ever happened. But this action is consistent with that the prophets teach. Isaiah says:

People will be brought down. Everyone will be humbled. And the eyes of arrogant people will be humbled. The Lord of Armies will be honored when he judges. The holy God will show himself to be holy when he does what is right. **Isaiah 5:15-16**

How horrible it will be for those who call evil good and good evil, who turn darkness into light and light into darkness, turn what is bitter into something sweet and what is sweet into something bitter. How horrible it will be for those who think they are wise and consider themselves to be clever. **Isaiah 5:20-21**

God is especially angry with arrogant officials who abuse their office.

How horrible it will be for those who make unjust laws and who make oppressive regulations. They deprive the poor of justice. They take away the rights of the needy among my people. They prey on widows and rob orphans.

What will you do on the day you are called to account for these things, when the disaster comes from far away? Where will you run for help? Where will you leave your wealth? Nothing's left but to crouch among prisoners and to fall with those who are killed. **Isaiah 10:1-4**



## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. God punished the Northern Kingdom of Israel because they worshiped idols, abused the weak, and were arrogant about their wealth. He allowed the Assyrians to deport many of their people and destroy their kingdom finally deporting the King and his court from 735-722 BC. Why did God's people think they could get away with this?
2. God punished the Southern Kingdom of Judah because they desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem with pagan altars, images of pagan gods and worshiped YHWH with only lip service. Government officials and priests abused people and God's prophets. They also built pagan worship sites in their cities. The Babylonians killed thousands of people and Jeremiah reports only 4,600 men and their families were deported by the Babylonians in 605 BC, 597 BC, 586 BC and 582 BC. **Jeremiah 52:30**. Reading this history reflects nothing but pride on the part of the King on down. Again, why did God's people arrogantly think God would allow this in his Holy Land?
3. Although Nebuchadnezzar's story probably did not happen, many of the arrogant Kings of the past literally turned into animals by their atrocious behavior. Consider the excesses of the Roman Emperors such as Nero.
4. Jesus said: *Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 18:3*. What did Jesus mean?

## Week 34

### Why Should God Reward Us for Anything?

I, the Lord, search minds and test hearts. I will reward each person for what he has done. I will reward him for the results of his actions. **Jeremiah 17:10**

The decisions of the Lord are true. They are completely fair. They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even the drippings from a honeycomb. As your servant, I am warned by them. There is great reward in following them. **Psalms 19:4-11**

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, lie, and say all kinds of evil things about you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because you have great reward in Heaven. The prophets who lived before you were persecuted in these ways. **Matthew 5:11-12**

God promises the Israelites that if they live consistent with his Torah, he will bless them. Otherwise, he will curse them.

Today, I'm giving you the choice of a blessing or a curse. You'll be blessed if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I'm giving you today. You'll be cursed if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God, if you turn away from the way I'm commanding you to live today, and if you worship other gods you never knew. **Deuteronomy 11:26-28**

So obey the commands, laws, and rules I'm giving you today. If you listen to these rules and faithfully obey them, the Lord your God will keep his Covenant to you and be merciful to you, as he swore to your ancestors. He will love you, bless you, and increase the number of your descendants. He will bless you with children.

He will bless your land with produce: grain, new wine, and olive oil. He will bless your herds with calves, and your flocks with lambs and kids. This will happen in the land the Lord will give you, as he swore to your ancestors. You will be blessed more than any other people. Your men and women will be able to have children and your animals will be able to have offspring. The

Lord will keep you from have any kind of illness. He will not strike you with any of the terrible diseases you experienced in Egypt. Instead, he will strike all those who hate you. **Deuteronomy 7:11-15**

If you faithfully obey the commands that I'm giving you today, love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart and all your soul, I will send rain on your land at the right time, both in the fall and in the spring. Then you gather your own grain, new wine, and olive oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your animals, and you will be able to eat all you want. **Deuteronomy 11:13-15**

In deep contrast, Jesus only said that his disciples should obey his words. They should not look for rewards. Instead, he told a parable:

Suppose someone has a servant who is plowing fields or watching sheep. Does he tell his servant when he comes from the field: Have something to eat? No, instead he tells his servant: Get dinner ready for me. After you serve me my dinner, you may eat yours. He doesn't thank the servant for following orders. That's the way it's with you. When you've done everything you're ordered to do, say: We're worthless servants. We've only done our duty. **Luke 17:7-10**

Instead of offering his disciples a reward, Jesus offered his disciples a relationship.

Those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will go to them and make our home with them. **John 14:23**

Paul, however, speaks of an inheritance that the faithful disciples of Jesus will receive:

Whatever you do, do it wholeheartedly as though you were working for your real master and not merely for humans. You know that your real Master will give you an inheritance as your reward. It is Christ, your real Master, whom you are serving. **Colossians 3:24**

Jesus says:

I'm coming soon. I will bring my reward with me to pay all people based on what they have done. **Revelation 22:12**

In the New Testament, the writers speak of *inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven*. The young wealthy ruler asked Jesus:

Good Teacher what must I do to inherit Eternal Life? **Luke 18:18**

In Revelation, God says:

The one sitting on the throne said: I am making everything new. He said: Write this: It has happened. I am the A and the Z, the beginning and the end. I will give a drink from the fountain filled with the water of life to anyone who is thirsty. It won't cost anything. Everyone who wins the victory *nikao*-overcome will inherit these things. I will be their God and they will be my children. **Revelation 21:5-7**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What is the inheritance that God promises his sons and daughters?
2. What does it mean to inherit the Kingdom of God?
3. What reward will Jesus bring to pay all people for what they have done?
4. Some people do good works in order to earn their way into Heaven. What does the Bible say about this? See **Ephesians 2:8-10**
5. People may be led astray by the Ten Commandments into thinking that God only loves them if they do good works and obey him. What is of more importance to God than to do good works?
6. When Jesus says: *I will reward all people for what they have done* **Revelation 20:12**, what does he mean?
7. God promises his people blessings if they obey him and curses if they disobey them. How does this lead to wrong thinking?

## Part 9

# Walking by Faith and Not by Sight

Indeed, our lives are guided by faith, not by sight. **2 Corinthians 5:7**

Faith assures us of things we expect and convinces us of the existence of things we cannot see. God accepted our ancestors because of their faith. Faith convinces us that God created the world through his Word. This means what can be seen was made by something that could not be seen. **Hebrews 11:1-3**

Paul says:

I'm not ashamed of the Good News Gospel of Christ KJV. It is God's power to save everyone who believes, Jews first and Greeks as well. God's approval is revealed in this Good News. This approval begins and ends with faith as Scripture says: *The person who has God's approval will live by faith.* **Romans 1:17**

Look at the proud person. He is not right in himself. But the righteous person will live because of his faith. **Habakkuk 2:4**

When God gives a person the gift of faith in justification, the person believes in and trusts that Jesus will lead him to glory in salvation. That person then begins a journey of sanctification where the Holy Spirit begins working in their physical life to *conform them to the image of Jesus*. **Romans 8:29**. This is a lifelong journey. When God justifies a person, he gives them the Holy Spirit to work in their lives.

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. **Romans 8:16**

At the same time the Spirit also helps us in our weakness because we don't know how to pray for what we need. But the Spirit intercedes along with our groans that cannot be expressed in words. The one who searches our hearts knows what the Spirit has in mind. The Spirit intercedes for God's people the way God wants him to. **Romans 8:26-27**

The Holy Spirit speaks to us telling us God's plan for our lives. If we listen and obey his leading, we receive the best blessing that God has for us. We listen to God's Spirit because we love God and believe that he loves us.

If we hope for something we already see, it's not really hope. But if we hope for what we don't see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance [patient endurance].  
**Romans 8:24-25**

### **A Roman Centurion Demonstrates Living by Faith**

When Jesus had finished everything he wanted to say to the people, he went to Capernaum. There a Roman army officer's valuable slave was sick and near death. The officer heard about Jesus and sent some Jewish leaders to him. They were to ask Jesus to come and save the servant's life. They came to Jesus and begged: He deserves your help. He loves our people and built our synagogue at his own expense.

Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the officer sent friends to tell Jesus: Sir, don't bother. I don't deserve to have you come into my house. That's why I didn't come to you. But just give a command and let my servant be cured. As you know, I am in a chain of command and have soldiers at my command. I tell one of them: Go, and he goes. And another: Come, and he comes. I tell my servant: Do this, and he does it.

Jesus was amazed at the officer when he heard these words. He turns to the crowd following him and said: I can guarantee that I haven't found faith as great as this in Israel. When the men who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant healthy again. **Luke 7:1-10**

### **The Life of the Director of Taxes in Jericho Is Transformed**

Jesus was passing through Jericho. A man named Zacchaeus was there. He was the Director of Tax Collectors, and he was rich. He tried to see who Jesus was. But Zacchaeus was a small man, and he couldn't see Jesus because of the crowd. So Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a fig tree to see Jesus who was coming that way.

When Jesus came to tree, he looked up and said: Zacchaeus, come down. I must stay at your house today. Zacchaeus came down and was glad to welcome Jesus into his home. But the people who saw this began to express disapproval. They said: He went to be the guest of a sinner.

Later at dinner, Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord: Lord I'll give half of my property to the poor. I'll pay four times as much as I owe to those I have cheated in any way. Then Jesus said to Zacchaeus: You and your family have been saved today. You've shown that you, too, are one of Abraham's descendants. Indeed, the Son of Man has come to seek and to save people who are lost. **Luke 19:1-10**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. When God gives a person the gift of faith, their life is transformed. How does a person recognize this has happened to them?
2. How did Jesus know Zacchaeus was up in the tree waiting to see him?
3. What does the story of Zacchaeus teach us about the process of justification?
4. How did the Roman Centurion demonstrate what genuine faith is?
5. Is Christian hope simply wishful thinking or is it something more? Give an example.
6. Paul says: *I'm convinced that God, who began a good work in you, will carry it through to completion.* **Philippians 1:6.** Once God has given us the gift of faith, can we reject it?

## Week 35

### The Wisdom of God

My thoughts are not your thoughts, and my ways are not your ways, declares the Lord. Just as the Heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts. **Isaiah 55:8-9**

God's riches, wisdom, and knowledge are so deep that it is impossible to explain his decisions or to understand his ways. Who knows how the Lord thinks? Who can become his advisor? Who gave the Lord something that the Lord must pay back? Everything is from him and by him and for him. Glory belongs to him forever. Amen. **Romans 11:33**

#### **Paul Speaks the Gospel Not with Human Wisdom but with Spiritual Power**

I didn't speak my message with persuasive intellectual arguments. I spoke my message with a show of spiritual power so that your faith would not be based on human wisdom but on God's power. However, we do use wisdom to speak to those who are mature. It is a wisdom that doesn't belong to this world or to the rulers of this world who are in power today and gone tomorrow.

We speak about the mystery of God's wisdom. It is a wisdom that has been hidden which God planned for our glory before the world began. Not one of the rulers of this world has known it. If they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as Scripture says:

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love him.

No one has ever heard, no one has paid attention, and no one has seen any god except you. You help those who wait for you. **Isaiah 64:4**

God has revealed those things to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches everything, especially the deep things of God. After all who knows



everything about a person except that person's own spirit? In the same way no one has known everything about God, except God's Spirit. Now we didn't receive the spirit that belongs to this world. Instead, we received the Spirit who comes from God so that we could know the things which God has freely given us.

We don't speak about these things using teachings that are based on intellectual arguments like people do. Instead, we use the Spirit's teachings. We explain spiritual things to those who have the Spirit. A person isn't spiritual who doesn't accept the teachings of the Spirit. He thinks they're nonsense. He can't understand them because a person must be spiritual to evaluate them. Spiritual people evaluate everything but are subject to no one's evaluation.

Who has known the mind of the Lord so that he can teach him?

Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord or instructed him as his advisor? Whom did he consult? Who gave him understanding? Who taught him the right way? Who taught him knowledge? Who informed him about the way to understanding? **Isaiah 40:13-14**

However, we have the mind of Christ. **1 Corinthians 2:4-16**

I pray that the glorious Father, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Christ. Then you will have deeper insight. You will know the confidence that he calls you to have and the glorious wealth that God's people will inherit. You will also know the unlimited greatness of his power as it works with might and strength for us, the believer. **Ephesians 1:17-19**

For this reason, we have not stopped praying for you since the day we heard about you. We ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through every kind of spiritual wisdom and insight. We ask this so that you will live the kind of lives that prove you belong to the Lord. Then you will want to please him in every way as you grow in producing every kind of good work by this knowledge about God.

We ask him to strengthen you by his glorious might with the power you need to patiently endure everything with joy. You will also thank the Father who has made you able to share the light which is what God's people inherit. **Colossians 1:9-12**

If any of you needs wisdom to know what you should do, you should ask God and he will give it to you. God is generous to everyone and doesn't find fault with them. **James 1:5**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why should anyone think they more than God who created the Heavens and the earth?
2. How can we receive God's wisdom?
3. What is the difference between worldly intellectual wisdom and spiritual wisdom?
4. Who does God give his wisdom to? Why does he restrict his wisdom?
5. Why is it important to learn God's wisdom?
6. How can we have the mind of Christ? **Philippians 2:5**
7. What does Paul pray for Christians to have?

## Week 36

### Natural Disasters

One day Jesus and his disciples got into a boat. He said to them: Let's cross to the other side of the lake. So they started out. As they were sailing along, Jesus fell asleep.

A violent storm came across the lake. The boat was taking on water, and they were in danger. They went to him, woke him up and said: Master, Master, we're going to die.

Then he got up and ordered the wind and the waves to stop. The wind stopped and the sea became calm. He asked them: Where is your faith? Frightened and amazed they asked each other: Who is this man? He gives orders to the wind and the water, and they obey him. **Luke 8:22-25**

This story is told in all three Gospels. As Jesus and his disciples are going east across the Sea of Galilee from the Jewish side of the lake to the Gentile side, a vicious storm comes up. The veteran fishermen in the boat immediately realize the danger they are in. Storms on this lake can come up suddenly and do great damage.

The frightened disciples wake Jesus who is sleeping through all this. Surprisingly, they forget who he is, the Son of God, the second person of the Triune God who made Heaven and earth. And say: Master, we are going to die.

Jesus stands up and orders the wind and the waves to cease. Be still, he says. The wind and waves become calm. Jesus looks at them and says: Where is your faith? He is saying to them: Don't you realize who I am? And they ask each other: Who is he who can command the wind and the waves, and they obey him?

In this Gospel, the disciples have already seen Jesus cure a leper, declare he has the ability to forgive sins, heal a man with a paralyzed hand, teach a powerful sermon in a level place, heal a Roman Centurion's servant at a distance, and bring a widow's son back to life from death. You would think they would have more faith in his ability.

When the big what we call natural disasters strike, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and thunderstorms, we are frightened and feel quite helpless. Yet when we think of the power of God, we know he is in control. So we pray like the psalmist:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. That is why we are not afraid even when the earth quakes or the mountains topple into the depths of the sea. Water roars and foams, and mountains shake at the surging waves. *Selah.*

There is a river whose streams bring joy to the City of God, the Holy Place where the Most High lives. God is in that city. It cannot fall. God will help it at the break of dawn. Nations are in turmoil and kingdoms topple. The earth melts at the sound of God's voice. The Lord of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Come and see the works of the Lord, the devastation he has brought on the earth. He puts an end to wars all over the earth. He breaks an archer's bow. He cuts spears in two. He burns chariots. Let go of your concerns. Then you will know that I am God. I rule the nations. I rule the earth. The Lord of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our stronghold. **Psalm 46:1-11**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why didn't Jesus' disciples have the faith that Jesus would help them?
2. If we believe that God is in control of all history and all events, why are we so afraid when huge storms or earthquakes occur? Even if we die, shouldn't we be confident that we will also be with the Lord? Why is this so difficult?

## Week 37

### Spiritual Attacks

Turn all your anxiety over to God because he cares for you. Keep your mind clear and be alert. Your opponent the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion as he looks for someone to devour. Be firm in the faith and resist him knowing that other believers throughout the world are going through the same kind of suffering. God, who shows you his kindness and who has called you through Christ Jesus to his eternal glory, will restore you, strengthen you, make you strong and support you as you suffer for a little while. Power belongs to him forever. Amen. **1 Peter 5:7-11**

Finally, receive the power from the Lord and from his mighty strength. Put on all the armor that God supplies. In this way you can take a stand against the Devil's strategies. This is not a wrestling match against a human opponent. We are wrestling with rulers, authorities, the powers who govern this world of darkness, and spiritual forces that control evil in the Heavenly world.

For this reason, take up all the armor God supplies. Then you will be able to take a stand during these evil days. Once you have overcome all obstacles, you will be able to stand your ground. So then, take your stand. Fasten truth around your waist like a belt. Put on God's approval as your breastplate. Put on your shoes so that you are ready to spread the Good News that gives peace

In addition to all these, take the Christian faith as your shield. With it you can put out all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. Also, take salvation as your helmet and God's Word as your sword that the Spirit supplies. Pray in the Spirit in every situation. Use every kind of prayer and request there is. For the same reason be alert. Use every kind of effort and make every kind of request for all of God's people. **Ephesians 6:10-18**

## Jesus Called Satan the Ruler of This World

This world is being judged now. The Ruler of This World will be thrown out now. When I have been lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people toward me. **John 12:31**

The Ruler of This World has no power over me. But he's coming so I won't talk with you disciples much longer. However, I want the world to know that I love the Father, and that I am doing exactly what the Father commanded me to do. Get up. We have to leave. **John 14:30-31**

Jesus had been tempted by Satan in the wilderness right after his baptism and he had defeated him soundly against his temptations. **Matthew 4:1-11**. Jesus was not afraid of Satan although Satan pursued him throughout his ministry with his demons who knew exactly who Jesus was. But they were unable to defeat him and followed his orders exactly. **Mark 1:21-27; 3:1-6; 5:1-20; 9:17-27**.

## Jesus Faces a Man Possessed by 6,000 Demons

Jesus and his disciples arrived in the Gentile territory of the Gerasenes on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. As Jesus stepped out of the boat, a man came out of the tombs to meet him. The man was controlled by an evil spirit and lived among the tombs. No one could restrain him any longer, not even with a chain.

He had often been chained hand and foot. However, he snapped the chains off his hands and broke the chains with his feet. No one could control him. Night and day he was among the tombs and on the mountainsides screaming and cutting himself with stones.

The man saw Jesus at a distance. So he ran to Jesus, bowed down in front of him and shouted: Why are you bothering me now, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me. He shouted this because Jesus said: You evil spirit, come out of the man. Jesus asked him: What is your name? He told Jesus: My name is Legion [*meaning 6,000*] because there are many of us. He begged Jesus not to send them out of the territory.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on a mountainside nearby. The demons begged him: Send us into the pigs. Let us enter them. Jesus let them do this. The evil spirits came out of the man and went into the pigs. The herd of about 2,000 pigs rushed down the cliff into the sea and drowned.

Those who took care of the pigs ran away. In the city and countryside, they reported everything that had happened. So the people came to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons. The man was sitting there dressed and in his right mind. The people were frightened. Those who saw this told what had happened to the demon-possessed man and the pigs. The people began to beg Jesus to leave their territory.

As Jesus stepped into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged him: Let me stay with you. But Jesus would not allow it. Instead, he told the man: Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been to you

So the man left. He began to tell how much Jesus had done for him in the Ten Gentile Cities [Decapolis]. Everyone was amazed. **Mark 5:1-20**

These demons were very powerful. They numbered 6,000 – the number of soldiers in a Roman legion. Meeting Jesus, they begged him not to torture him in the fire that God had prepared for the Devil and his angels. **Matthew 25:41**. Instead, they were willing to inhabit pigs that would drown. So Jesus sent them into the pigs. The pigs ran over the cliff and were drowned.

When the crowd came out of the city to see what had happened, they saw the formerly possessed man sitting there with Jesus, clothed and peaceful. But they were frightened and begged Jesus to leave their city as their loss of income from the pigs was great.

The man then begged Jesus to go with him and his disciples. But Jesus appointed the man to be the first Gentile missionary spreading the Good News of Gospel.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why does God allow Satan and his demons to attack human beings?

2. Christians are given the power of the Holy Spirit to defeat demons if they pray to God to work through them. Why don't most Christians realize that God has given them this power of praying in the name of Jesus?
3. Satan can only tempt. He cannot force humans to do evil. What should a Christian do when they are tempted?
4. Paul gives us great encouragement:

There isn't any temptation that you have experienced which is unusual for humans. God, who faithfully keeps his promises, will not allow you to be tempted beyond your power to resist. But when you are tempted, he will also give you the ability to endure the temptation as your way of escape. 1  
**Corinthians 10:13**



## Week 38

### Physical Sickness

O Lord hear my prayer and let my cry for help come to you. Do not hide your face from me when I am in trouble. Turn your ear toward me. Answer me quickly when I call.

My days disappear like smoke. My bones burn like hot coals. My heart is beaten down and withered like grass because I have forgotten about eating. I am nothing but skin and bones because of my loud groans. I am like a desert owl, an owl living in the ruins. I lie awake. I am like a lonely bird on a rooftop.

My days are like a shadow that is getting longer, and I wither away like grass. But you O LORD remain forever. You are remembered throughout every generation. **Psalm 102:1-7, 11-12**

I will honor you highly O Lord because you have pulled me out of the Pit and have not let my enemies rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried out to you for help, and you healed me. O Lord, you brought me up from the grave. You called me back to life from among those who had gone down to the Pit. **Psalm 30:1-3**

The Lord will support him on his sickbed. You will restore this person to health when he is ill. **Psalm 41:4**

Praise the Lord my soul. Praise his holy name, all that is within me. Praise the Lord my soul and never forget all the good he has done. He is the one who forgives all your sins, the one who heals all your diseases, the one who rescues your life from the Pit, the one who crowns you with mercy and compassion, the one who fills your life with blessings so that you become young again like an eagle. **Psalm 103:1-5**

Heal me O Lord and I shall be healed. Rescue me and I will be rescued. You are the one I praise. **Jeremiah 17:14**

Now that we have God's approval by faith, we have peace with God because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done. Through Christ we can approach God and stand in his favor. So we brag because of our confidence that we will receive glory from God.

But that's not all. We also brag when we are suffering. We know that suffering creates endurance, endurance creates character, and character creates confidence. We're not ashamed to have this confidence because God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. **Romans 5:1-5**

Therefore, to keep me from being conceited, I am forced to deal with a recurring problem. That problem, Satan's messenger, torments me to keep me from being conceited. I begged the Lord three times to take it away from me. But he told me: My kindness is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak. So I will brag even more about my weaknesses in order that Christ's power will live in me. Therefore, I accept weakness, mistreatment, hardship, persecution and difficulties suffered for Christ. It's clear that when I'm weak, I'm strong. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**

If you are sick, call for the church leaders. Have them pray for you and anoint you with olive oil in the name of the Lord. Prayers offered in faith will save those who are sick, and the Lord will cure them. So admit your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you will be healed. **James 5:14-16**

Jesus healed many people in the Bible including Peter's mother-in-law. **Mark 1:29-31**. He healed lepers even though the Rabbis said leprosy could not be cured. **Mark 1:40-44**. He even brought a widow's son back from the dead. **Luke 7:11**

Matthew, commenting on Jesus' healing power, says:

So what the prophet Isaiah had said came true: He took away our weaknesses and removed our diseases. **Matthew 8:17** KJV quoting **Isaiah 53:4** in the Septuagint translation.

Prayer is powerful because God can do anything – even things that seem impossible to do. Doctors are often amazed at the results that occur because of prayer.

God had to remind Abraham of his power to do the impossible. **Genesis 18:13**. He had to remind Moses that he could do the impossible. **Numbers 11:23**. In Isaiah, God had to remind his Chosen People:

Why was no one here when I came? Why was no one here to answer when I called? Am I too weak to redeem you? Don't I have the power to rescue you?  
**Isaiah 50:2**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. God has made his Creation operate in certain ways. There are consistent ways things operate with cause and effect. Science then, once they learn these ways, can usually produce the desired effect. This is how doctors practice their skills. But God can also make these known causes produce different effects. We call these miracles. Why does God override his planned effects in response to prayer?
2. Physical diseases on our body can affect us more strongly than loss of possessions. Read **Job 2:4-5** where Satan challenged God to allow him to give Job diseases of the skin. Did Satan succeed in his challenge?
3. In **Psalm 39**, God has given David a terrible physical sickness as a discipline for an undisclosed fault. Listen to David's cry to God:

I said: I will watch my ways so that I do not sin with my tongue. I will bridle my mouth while wicked people are in my presence. I remained totally speechless. I kept silent although it did me no good. While I was deep in thought, my pain grew worse. My heart burned like a fire flaring up within me.

Then I spoke with my tongue: Teach me, O Lord about the end of my life. Teach me about the number of days I have left so that I may know how temporary my life is. Indeed, you have made the length of my days only a few inches. My life span is nothing compared to yours. Certainly, everyone alive is like a whisper in the wind. *Selah*.

Each person who walks around is like a shadow. They are busy for no reason. They accumulate riches without knowing who will get them.

And now, Lord, what am I waiting for? My hope is in you. Rescue me from all my rebellious acts. Do not disgrace me in front of godless fools. I remained speechless. I did not open my mouth because you are the one who has done this. Remove the sickness you have laid upon me. My life is over because you struck me with your hand. With stern warnings you discipline people for their crimes. Like a moth you eat away at what is dear to them. Certainly, everyone is like a whisper in the wind. *Selah*.

Listen to my prayer, O Lord. Open your ear to hear my cry for help. Do not be deaf to my tears for I am a foreign resident with you, a stranger like all my ancestors. **Leviticus 25:23** Look away from me so that I may smile again before I go away and am no more.

Can you determine an incident in David's life in **1 Samuel-2 Samuel** where this occurred? Is this a physical illness or a mental illness? What is David asking God to do? Compare line 10 with line 13. They seem to conflict. Why?

4. Why don't we always know why God healed some and did not heal other people?
5. Jesus healed thousands of people in Israel. Did he ask them questions before he healed them? Why or why not?
6. Is physical illness always a result of sin?
7. What does David mean by a whisper in the wind?

## Part 10

# The Invisible or Unseen World

Though outwardly we are wearing out, inwardly we are being renewed day by day. Our suffering is light and temporary and is producing for us an eternal glory that is greater than anything we can imagine. We don't look for things that can be seen but for things that can't be seen. Things that can be seen are only temporary. But things that can't be seen last forever. **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

Paul says that there are three contrasts.

First, a contrast between the visible world, where we are getting older, where our body is decaying, and the inner spiritual nature which has been transformed and is constantly being renewed day by day by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord is the Spirit. Wherever the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom. As all of us reflect the Lord's glory with faces that are not covered with veils, we are being changed into his image with ever-increasing glory. This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. **2 Corinthians 3:17-18**

We are his servants because the same God who said that light should shine out of darkness has given us light. For that reason, we bring to light the knowledge about God's glory which shines from Christ's face. **2 Corinthians 4:6**

Second, a contrast between the suffering we experience in this present physical world and the glory that we will experience in the world to come.

I consider our present sufferings insignificant compared to the glory that will soon be revealed to us. All creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal who his children are. We know that all creation is groaning with the pains of childbirth up to the present time.

However, not only Creation groans. We, who have the Spirit as the first of God's gifts, also groan inwardly. We groan as we wait for our adoption, the freeing of our bodies from sin. **Romans 8:18-19, 22-23**

Christ is your life. When he appears, then you too will appear with him in glory. **Colossians 3:4**

Third, a contrast between this physical world that will soon pass away and the present invisible world that we will experience after we physical die.

The day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day, Heaven will pass away with roaring sound. Everything that makes up the universe will burn and be destroyed. The earth and everything that people have done on it will be exposed.

All these things must be destroyed in this way. So think of the kind of holy and godly lives you must live as you look forward to the day of God and eagerly wait for it to come. When that day comes Heaven will be on fire and be destroyed. Everything that makes up the universe will burn and melt. But we look forward to what God has promised – a new Heaven and a new earth – a place where everything that has God's approval lives. **2 Peter 3:10-13**

We live in two worlds – a physical world that we see with our senses and experience in our physical bodies – and an invisible world that only Christians are aware of because the Holy Spirit illumines that world for us.

God is active in our physical world. When we discussed the Providence of God, we learned that God is in charge of human history.

I am the Lord and there is no other. I make light and create darkness. I make blessings and create disasters. I, the Lord, do all these things. **Isaiah 45:6-7**

Satan and his demons are fallen angels created by God. God allows them to operate in the physical world in which we live. And God allows them to attack humans.

## **THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

1. Why are only Christians aware that there are two worlds? What do non-Christians believe?

2. The Christian hope or confidence is that after we die, we go to be with Jesus in Paradise. On Resurrection Day, we will be given resurrection bodies and appear before Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment. Then we will be escorted by Jesus to the New Heavens, the New Earth, and the New Jerusalem. Why is it important to keep this constantly in mind as we live daily in this world?
3. How does the hope of living in the New Jerusalem help us have patient endurance when we suffer?
4. How does the knowledge that God is in charge of human history help us when we are concerned about events in our world?
5. Can asking the Holy Spirit each day what God has planned for us to do that day help us to live more confidently? Why don't more people do this?
6. As Christians live on earth with transformed bodies, the physical body is still decaying. Yet the soul is being constantly renewed by the Holy Spirit during this journey of sanctification as we are being conformed to the image of Jesus. **Romans 8:29**. What is the purpose of all this?
7. Paul says:

Through Christ we can approach God and stand in his favor. So we brag because of our confidence *elpsis*-hope that we will receive glory from God.  
**Romans 5:2**

Why is hope so important for living the Christian life?

## Week 39

### The One God Whose Name is YHWH

Moses was taking care of the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. As he led the sheep to the far side of the desert, he came to Horeb Sinai, the mountain of God. The Messenger of the Lord appeared to him there as flames of fire coming out of a bush. Moses looked, and although the bush was on fire, it was not burning up. So he thought: Why isn't this bush burning up? I must go over there and see this strange sight.

When the Lord saw that Moses had come over to see it, God called to him from the bush: Moses, Moses. Moses said: Here I am. God said: Don't come any closer. Take off your sandals because this place where you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

The Lord said: I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard them crying out because of the slave drivers. I have come to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them from that land to a good land with plenty of room for everyone. It is a land flowing with milk and honey where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites live.

I have heard the cry of the people of Israel. I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them. Now go. I'm sending you to Pharaoh so that you can bring my people Israel out of Egypt. But Moses said to God: Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the people of Israel out of Egypt? God answered: I will be with you. And this will be the proof that I sent you: When you bring the people out of Egypt, all of you will worship God on this mountain.

Then Moses replied to God: Suppose I go to the people of Israel and say to them: The God of your ancestors has sent me to you. And they ask me: What is his name? What should I tell them? God answered Moses: I Am *hayah*



Who I Am *hayah*. This is what you must say to the people of Israel: I Am *hayah* has sent me to you.

Again, God said to Moses: This is what you must say to the people of Israel. The God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has sent me to you. This is my name forever. This is my title throughout every generation. **Exodus 3:1-15**

God told Moses his personal name of **YHWH** so that Moses could have a personal relationship with him. The Hebrew word *hayah* simply means being or the self-existent one. Jews are very sensitive of using God's name in fear of misusing it so that simply call him *Adonay* meaning Lord. In the Bible, where God's personal name **YHWH** appears, **LORD** in capital letters is substituted. **LORD** appears in the Hebrew Bible in 6,668 verses. It will appear 694x in Psalms, 620x in Jeremiah, 436x in Deuteronomy, 411x in Isaiah, 400x in Ezekiel, 350x in Numbers and 340x in Exodus.

## **Isaiah Describes YHWH as Unique and as Creator, the Most of Any of the Prophets**

Who has measured the water of the sea with the palm of his hand or measured the sky with the length of his hand? Who has held the dust of the earth in a bushel basket or weighed the mountains on a scale and the hills on a balance? Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord or instructed him as his advisor? Whom did he consult? Who gave him understanding? Who taught him the right way? Who taught him knowledge? Who informed him about the way to understanding?

The nations are like a drop in a bucket and are considered to be like dust on a scale. The weight of the islands is like fine dust. All the trees in Lebanon are not enough to burn an offering. Its wild animals are not enough for a single burnt offering. All the nations amount to nothing in his presence. He considers them worth less than nothing and worthless. To whom then can you compare God? To what statue can you compare him? **Isaiah 40:12-18**

Don't you know? Haven't you heard? Haven't you been told from the beginning? Don't you understand from the foundations of the earth? God

is enthroned above the earth and those who live on it are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the sky like a canopy and spreads it out like a tent to live in.

He makes rulers unimportant and makes earthly judges worth nothing. They had hardly been planted. They have hardly been sown. They have hardly taken root in the ground. Then he blows on them and they wither, and a windstorm sweeps them away like straw. To whom then can you compare me? Who then is my equal? asks the Holy One.

Look at the sky and see. Who created these things? Who brings out the stars one by one? He calls them all by name. Because of the greatness of his might and the strength of his power, not one of them is missing. **Isaiah 40:21-26**

Don't you know? Haven't you heard? The eternal God the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth doesn't grow tired or become weary. His understanding is beyond reach. He gives strength to those who grow tired and increases the strength of those who grow weak. Even young people grow tired and become weary and young men will stumble and fall.

Yet the strength of those who wait with hope in the Lord will be renewed. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and won't become weary. They will walk and won't grow tired. **Isaiah 40:28-31**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. To have a personal relationship with someone, we need to call them by their name rather than by their title. But if we are addressing a King, we would never call them by their first name. How should we address God in our prayers?
2. Why did God command Moses to remove his shoes? As a result, while they served in the wilderness tabernacle, the priests never wore shoes.
3. This is the first time in the Bible God reveals his personal name. Abraham and the patriarchs called God El Shadday or God Almighty.

God spoke to Moses: I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty but I didn't make myself known to them by my name the LORD. **Exodus 6:3**

But see **Genesis 14:22**.

4. Moses attempted like Jeremiah to dissuade God from sending him. How did God overcome Moses' objections from sending him to Egypt?

## Week 40

### Elohiym

The word *'elohiym* as used in Hebrew simply means *God* or *god*. It can be used of **YHWH** or of angels and is used of pagan gods. The word *'elohiym* is used 2,606x in the Bible, the most in the Psalms 365x.

The first sentence in the Bible is:

In the beginning, God *'elohiym* created the Heavens and the earth. **Genesis 1:1**

Beginning in **Genesis 2:4**, God is described as *the LORD God*.

This is the account of Heaven and earth when they were created, at the time when the **LORD** God made Heaven and earth. **Genesis 2:4**

That title for God continues until **Genesis 3:1** after which *'elohiym* is used. But then in **Genesis 3:8**, **LORD** God is again used. In **Genesis 4:1**, **LORD** is used. When the narrator of the story speaks, **LORD** is used for God. Beginning in **Genesis 5:1**, the narrator uses *'elohiym* again.

This use of different names for **YHWH** has led some Biblical scholars to conclude that several different people wrote the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. I hold to the traditional view that Moses wrote and compiled Genesis from several traditions and the remainder of the Towrah from his own experience.

Isaiah gives us examples of the several uses of *'elohiym*:

The **LORD YHWH** God *'el* created the Heavens and stretched them out. He shaped the earth and all that comes from it. He gave life to the people who are on it and breath to those who walk on it. **Isaiah 42:5**

I am the **LORD YHWH**. That is my name. I will not give my glory to anyone else or the praise I deserve to idols *peciyl*. **Isaiah 42:8**

And behold, here comes a chariot of men with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said: Babylon is fallen and all the graven images of her gods *'elohiym* he has broken to the ground. **Isaiah 21:9** [KJV modernized]

## Isaiah Presents Arguments God Has with Israel Over Her Absurd Worship of Idols

Present your case, says the LORD. Bring forward your best arguments, says Jacob's King. Bring your idols so they can tell us what's going to happen. Explain past events so that your idols told you about so that we may consider them and know what their outcome will be. Tell us about future events.

Tell us what's going to happen so that we may know that you are gods *'elohiyim*. Yes, do something good or evil to intimidate us or make us afraid. You are nothing, you can't do anything, whoever chooses you is disgusting. **Isaiah 41:21-24**

You are my witnesses, declares the LORD. I have chosen you as my servant so that you can know and believe in me and understand that I am the one who did this. No god *el* was formed before me and there will be none after me. I alone am the LORD and there is no Savior except me. I have revealed it to you. I have saved you. And I have announced it to you. There was no foreign [strange] <god> among you. You are my witnesses that I am God, declares the LORD. **Isaiah 43:10-12**

Remember this and take courage. Recall your rebellious acts. Remember the first events because I am God *el* and there is no other. I am God *'elohiyim* and there's no one like me. From the beginning I revealed the end. From long ago I told you things that had not yet happened saying: My plan will stand, and I'll do everything I intend to do.

I will call a bird of prey [Cyrus] from the east. I will call someone for my plan from a faraway land. I have spoken and I will bring it about. I have planned it and I will do it. Listen to me, you stubborn people who are far from being righteous. I'll bring my righteousness near. It isn't far away. My salvation will not be delayed. I'll provide salvation for Zion and bring my glory to Israel. **Isaiah 46:8-13**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Israel uses the word *'elohiyim* as a generic word for *god* or *gods*. We differentiate between the genuine God **YHWH** by capitalizing God. Why are the Hebrews satisfied with the ambiguity of not differentiating a pagan god and the real God by using the same word?
2. Hebrews use the following words translated god: *'Adonay, 'el, 'elohiyim, 'elowahh, YHWH, el shadday, YHWH 'elohiyim*. Why are there many Hebrew words for God?
3. Sometimes **YHWH** is designated *God of Gods*. **Deuteronomy 10:17; Joshua 22:22; Psalm 136:2; Daniel 2:47, 11:36**. What does this title really mean? He is the only true God.
4. Isaiah reports God is really furious with Judah for chasing after strange gods or idols. Read his diatribe in **Isaiah 44:9-20**. What is the focus of his argument?
5. We readily see why God allowed the Babylonians to deport the Israelites 100 years after Isaiah. If they continued to worship the strange gods as Isaiah says, God would be fully justified in removing them from the land. Why were the Judeans like that? Why didn't they realize that God sent the Assyrians to wipe out the Northern Kingdom and the same would happen to them if they didn't change?
6. Asaph says: *God 'elohiyim takes his place in his own assembly. He pronounces judgment among the gods 'elohiyim*. **Psalm 82:1**. Who are these other gods?
7. Who is El Elyon, God Most High or the Most High God? **Psalm 57:2; Luke 8:28; Genesis 14:18-20, 22; Psalm 78:56; Daniel 3:26; 5:18,21; Matthew 5:7; Acts 16:17; Hebrews 7:1**.

I will call unto God *'elohiyim* Most High *'elyown*, to the God *el* who does everything for me. **Psalm 57:2**

They tested God *'elohiyim* Most High *'elyown* and rebelled against him. They did not obey his written instructions. **Psalm 78:56**

## Week 41

### Satan

The Lord spoke his Word to me. He said: Son of man, sing a funeral song for the King of Tyre. Tell him: This is what the Almighty Lord says:

You were the perfect example, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, God's garden. You were covered with every kind of precious stone: red quartz, topaz, crystal, beryl, onyx, gray quartz, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald. Your settings and your sockets were made of gold when you were created.

I appointed an angel to guard you. You were on God's holy mountain. You walked among fiery stones. Your behavior was perfect from the time you were created until evil was found in you. You traded far and wide. You learned to be violent, and you sinned. So I threw you down from God's mountain in disgrace. The guardian angel forced you out from the fiery stones.

You became too proud because of your beauty. You wasted your wisdom because of your greatness. So I threw you to the ground and left you in front of the Kings so that they could see you.

You dishonored your own holy places because of your many sins and dishonest trade. So I set fire to burn you up. I turned you into ashes on the ground in the presence of all who saw you. All the nations who knew you are horrified because of you. You have come to a terrible end, and you will never exist again. **Ezekiel 28:11-19**

How you have fallen from Heaven, you morning star, son of the dawn. How you have been cut down to the ground, you conqueror of nations.

You thought: I'll go up to Heaven and set my throne above God's stars. I'll sit on the mountain far away in the north where the gods assemble. I'll go above the top of the clouds. I'll be like the Most High.

But you've been brought down to Sheol, to the deepest part of the Pit. Those who stare at you and say: Is this the man that made the earth tremble, who shook the kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and tore down its cities, who didn't let his prisoners go home?

All the Kings of the nations, all of them, have been buried with honor, each in his own tomb. But you have been thrown out of your tomb like a rejected branch. You are covered with those who were killed in battle. You go down to the stones of the Pit like a trampled corpse.

You won't be joined by the Kings in the tomb because you have destroyed your land and killed your people. The descendants of the wicked will never be mentioned again. Prepare a place to slaughter their sons because of their ancestor's guilt. They won't be able to rise, possess the earth, and rebuild cities over it. **Isaiah 14:12-21**

These prophecies, while they seem written to describe two evil Kings, appear to also characterize the life of Satan. John the prophet describes how Satan rebelled against God and convinced one-third of God's angels to join him. Michael, the archangel fought against him and defeated him throwing him down to earth where he now wreaks havoc with his demons in every way he can.

Another sign appeared in the sky: a huge fiery red dragon with seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns on his heads. Its tail swept away one-third of the stars in the sky and threw them down to earth. The serpent stood in front of the woman who was going to give birth so that it could devour her child when it was born. She gave birth to a son, a body, who is to rule all the nations with an iron scepter.

The child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness where God had prepared a place for her so that she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

Then a war broke out in Heaven. Michael and his angels had to fight a war with the serpent. The serpent and its angels fought. But it was not strong enough and there was no longer any place for them in Heaven. The huge serpent was thrown down. That ancient snake named Devil and Satan, the



deceiver of the whole world was thrown down to earth. Its angels were thrown down with it. **Revelation 12:3-9**

The first mention of Satan is in Genesis:

The snake was more clever than all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He asked the woman: Did God really say: You must never eat the fruit of any tree in the Garden? The woman answered the snake: We're allowed to eat the fruit from any tree in the Garden except the tree in the middle of the Garden. God said: You must never eat it or touch it. If you do, you will die.

You certainly won't die, the snake told the woman. God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened. You'll be like God knowing good and evil. The woman saw that the tree had fruit that was good to eat, nice to look at, and desirable for making one wise. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it. Then their eyes were opened, and they both realized that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made clothes for themselves. **Genesis 3:1-7**

Then the LORD God asked the woman: What have you done? The snake deceived me and I ate, the woman answered. So the LORD God said to the snake: Because you have done this, you are more cursed than all the wild or domestic animals. You will crawl on your belly. You will be the lowest of animals as long as you live. I will make you and woman hostile toward each other. I will make your descendants and her descendant hostile toward each other. He will crush your head and you will bruise his heel. **Genesis 3:13-15**

Satan is mentioned by name in **1 Chronicles 12:1** where he provokes King David into taking a census of the warriors in Israel. He is mentioned in **Job 1:6-9, 12; 2:1-4, 6-7** where God allows him to attack Job. He is mentioned in **Psalms 109:6**. Finally, he is mentioned in **Zechariah 3:1-2** where he is standing at the right hand of Joshua the High Priest. They are standing before the angel of the Lord. The angel says to Satan: The Lord rebuke you.

Jesus believed in a figure named Satan. Satan's name appears in **Matthew 4:10, 12:26, 16:23; Mark 1:3; 3:23,26; 4:15;8:33; Luke 4:8; 10:18; 11:8, 13:16; 22:3, 31; John 13:27; Acts 5:3; 26:18;**

Romans 16:18; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 7:5; 2 Corinthians 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; 1 Timothy 1:20; 5:15; Revelation 2:9, 13, 24; 3:9; 12:9; 20:2, 7.

From comments in Scripture, I conclude that Satan was once a good angel created by God, perhaps the lead angel in Heaven. He became proud because of his beauty and rebelled against God gathering one-third of the angels in Heaven with him. They fought a war with Michael the archangel who defeated him and threw Satan and his angels down from Heaven where they are today.

As invisible spiritual beings, Satan and his demons incite humans to rebel against God. Satan is less powerful than God. He is not everywhere present so he must gather intelligence to know where to attack. He is defenseless against the attacks of the Holy Spirit who is called by believers for help. Yet he is powerful in tempting believers to rebel against God. He was active in inciting the Jewish religious leaders to have Jesus killed by the Roman Provincial Governor. He is active today

Satan's fate is described in **Revelation 20:10** where he is thrown into the Fiery Lake of Burning Sulfur where he will be tortured day and night forever and ever.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. There are many things we don't know about Satan. We know he is a created being, an angel. Angels were given free will by God, so they rebel. Satan was able to convince 1/3 of the angels to join him. But God's angels are more powerful than him. Since Satan knows he will always be defeated by God, why does he continue to attempt to attack believers?
2. What is the believers strongest defense against Satan's attacks?
3. Some people follow and give honor to Satan. Why do they do this?
4. Satan is known as the accuser or in Hebrew *ha Satan*. What does he accuse believers of?

One day when the sons of God came to stand in front of the Lord, Satan the Accuser came along with them. **Job 1:6**

5. Can believers be possessed by a demon?
6. Why did God create Satan? He said after the sixth day:

And God saw that everything that he had made and that it was very good. Then there was evening then morning – the sixth day. Heaven and earth and everything in them were finished. **Genesis 1:21-2:1**

## Week 42

### Hell

In the Hebrew Bible, when a person died, their body was placed in the grave or in the Pit and their soul went to Sheol, a dark place in the underworld where the soul was still alive but unaware of life in the world of the living or of God.

King David was one of the few who said:

Where can I do to get away from your Spirit? Where can I run to get away from you? If I go up to Heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. **Psalm 139:7-8**

Most Bible translations including the KJV mistranslate *She'owl* as Hell. Hell appears in 31 verses in the OT KJV and in 23 verses in the NT KJV, although Moses got it right describing Hell as a place of fire in one verse in his *Song of Testimony Against Israel*.

My anger has started a fire that will burn to the depths of Hell. It will consume the earth and its crops and set the foundations of the mountains on fire. **Deuteronomy 32:22**

The Jews also use the word *pit bowr* to describe Sheol. It appears 35x in the OT and 9x in the NT. They also talk of going down into the grave. The word *she'owl* is translated *grave* 64x in the OT and *mnemion* is translated *grave* 8x in the NT, but usually as tomb.

Jews believe that the wicked are punished during their lives. It was only in the Book of Daniel where it is mentioned the wicked would be raised to life after their death and judged:

Many sleeping in the ground will wake up. Some will wake up to live forever but others will wake up to be ashamed and disgraced forever. **Daniel 12:2**

### Jesus Spoke of a Last Day of Judgment and Outer Darkness

Jesus was amazed when he heard this. He said to those who were following him. I can guarantee this truth. I haven't found faith as this of anyone in Israel. I can guarantee that many will come from all over the world. They will eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. The citizens of that kingdom will be thrown outside in the darkness. People will cry and be in extreme pain there. **Matthew 8:10-12**

Jesus is saying that Jews who don't believe in Jesus will go to Hell or Gehenna where there is outer darkness. Jesus refers against to outer darkness in his parables in **Matthew 22:13** and **Matthew 25:30**. In the KJV, this a place where *there is weeping and gnashing of teeth*.

Jesus will also refer to "hellfire" in **Matthew 5:22; 18:9;** and **Mark 9:47**. This is a place of punishment for sinners, the opposite of the Kingdom of God. Instead of using hellfire, in **Mark 9:44, 46-48** the evangelist uses the expression Isaiah uses in the last verse of his Vision:

Then they will go out and look at the corpses of those who have rebelled against me. The worms that eat them will not die. The fire that burns them will not go out. All humanity will be disgusted by them. **Isaiah 66:24**

Jesus describes Hell as *everlasting fire that was prepared for the Devil and his angels*. **Matthew 25:41**. The prophet John describes Hell as *the Lake of Burning Sulfur*. **Revelation 20:10, 15**. He adds that *the Devil, the Beast, and the False Prophet will be thrown into the fiery lake of sulfur. They will be tortured day and night forever and ever*. **Revelation 20:10**

## The Steps Involved After We Physically Die

When we physically die as believers, our bodies are placed in the ground and our souls join Jesus in Paradise as did the thief on the cross. **Luke 23:43**. Unbelievers join the souls of the Jews in Sheol. Peter says of Jesus:

His body was put to death, but he was brought back to life by his spirit. In it he also went to proclaim his victory to the souls kept in prison. **1 Peter 3:18-19**

Many interpret this to say that after Jesus died on the cross, his soul went to Sheol where he preached the Gospel to the souls there. Those who believed in him joined Jesus then in Paradise.

On Resurrection Day, the souls of all humans will be given resurrection bodies.

That is how it will be when the dead come back to life. When the body is planted, it decays. When it comes back to life, it cannot decay. When the body is planted, it doesn't have any splendor and is weak. When it comes back to life, it has splendor and is strong. It is planted as a physical body. It comes back to life as a spiritual body. As there is a physical body, so there is a spiritual body. **1 Corinthians 15:42-44**

I'm telling you a mystery. Not all of us will die, but we will all be changed. It will happen in an instant, in a split second, at the sound of the last trumpet. Indeed, that trumpet will sound and then the dead will come back to life. They will be changed so that they live forever. **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**

## The Last Judgment

I saw a large, white throne and the one who was sitting on it. The earth and the sky fled from his presence, but no place was found for them. I saw the dead, both important and unimportant people, standing in front of the throne. Books were opened, including the Book of Life. The dead were judged on the basis of what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up its dead. Death and Hell gave up their dead. People were judged on what they had done. Death and Hell were thrown in the fiery lake. The fiery lake is the Second Death. Those whose names were not found in the Book of Life were thrown into the fiery lake. **Revelation 20:11-15**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. To Jesus, the worst thing that could happen to a human would be to be separated from God. This is why he spoke about Hell as Outer Darkness, to be separated from the Light. Why is this such an appropriate expression for Hell?
2. Jews believed that God would punish the wicked for their misdeeds during their earthly life.

I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their wrongdoing. I will put an end to arrogant people and humble the pride of tyrants. **Isaiah 13:11**

This is consistent with the teachings of Moses in Deuteronomy.

Today I'm giving you the choice of a blessing or a curse. You'll be blessed if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I'm giving you today. You'll be cursed if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God, if you turn from the way I'm commanding you to live today and if you worship other gods you never knew. **Deuteronomy 11:27-28**

But what did they think when the wicked prospered? How did they reconcile this teaching from Scripture? See **Psalm 73; Jeremiah 12:1.**

3. Jonah cried out to God from the belly of the whale:

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. Jonah prayed: I called to the Lord in my distress, and he answered me. From the depths of my watery grave *sheol* KJV I cried for help and you heard my cry. **Jonah 2:2**

How can Jonah contact God from Sheol? People in Sheol are only a vapor and are unaware of God. **Isaiah 38:18**

4. What is important in Jewish understanding is that souls are not annihilated. Once God creates a soul, that soul exists forever. This prepares us for the later understanding of life after death. Does Job actually anticipate that one day there will be life after death?

But I know that my Redeemer lives and afterwards he will rise on the earth. Even after the skin has been stripped off my body, I will see God in my own flesh. I will see him with my own eyes, not with someone else's. My heart fails within me. **Job 19:25-27**

Are there other anticipations? See **Psalm 49:15**

5. What is the purpose of everlasting torture in Hell?

Another angel, a third one, followed them and said in a loud voice: Whoever worships the beast or its statue, whoever is branded on his forehead or his hand, will drink the wine of God's fury that has been poured unmixed into the cup of God's anger. Then he will be tortured *basanizo* by fiery sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. **Revelation 14:9-10**

## Part II

# Thinking about Death and End Times

O Lord you have been our refuge throughout every generation. Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, you were God. You are God from everlasting to everlasting. You turn mortals back into dust and say: Return, descendants of Adam.

Indeed, in your sight a thousand years are like a single day, like yesterday – already past – like an hour in the night. You sweep mortals away. They are a dream. They sprout again in the morning like grass. In the morning they blossom and sprout. In the evening they wither and dry up.

The short time of a generation of humans is compared the eternity of God. See **Isaiah 40:6-8**

Indeed, your anger *'aph* consumes us. Your rage *chemah*-wrath terrifies us. You have set our sins in front of you. You have put our secret sins in the light of your presence. Indeed, all our days slip away because of your fury *'brah*-wrath.

God is furious at humans because of their sin and rebellion against him. It began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree God had told them not to eat:

You are free to eat from any tree in the garden. But you must never eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil because when you eat from it, you will certainly die. **Genesis 2:16**

We live out our lives like one long sigh. Each of us lives for 70 years – or even 80 if we are in good health. But the best of them bring trouble and misery. Indeed, they are soon gone, and we fly away.

Old age comes too soon upon us and soon life is not enjoyable because of our physical deterioration. **Ecclesiastes 12:1-7**

Who fully understands the power of your anger *'aph*? A person fears you more when he better understands your fury *'brah*.

Whoever understands the intensity of God's wrath against sin is able to fear God with that reverence which our safeguard against offending him. God says: *If only they would fear me and obey my commandments as long as they live. Then things would go well for them and their children forever.* **Deuteronomy 5:19**

Teach us to number each of our days so that we may grow in wisdom.

Help us to use the short time we have in life to acquire the wisdom to achieve genuine righteousness and godliness and so fear God and keep his commandments.

Return, Lord. How long ....? Change your plans about us your servants.

Turn from being angry with your servants to having mercy on us.

Satisfy us every morning with your mercy so that we may sing joyfully and rejoice all our days. Make us rejoice for as many days as you have made us suffer, for as many years as we have experienced evil. Let us your servants see what you can do. Let our children see your glorious power. Let the kindness of the Lord our God be with us. Make us successful in all we do. Yes, make us successful in all we do. **Psalm 90:1-17**

The superscription of the psalm says this was written by Moses, a man of God, so this may be the oldest psalm in the Book of Psalms. Moses may have written this to impress on the Israelites the value of making the most of every day we live on earth for we soon die. Remember that 599,998 Israelite warriors died during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

In this part, we will examine more closely the events that occur after we physically die.

Isaac Watts wrote a beautiful hymn based on this Psalm:

O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home;

Under the shadow of thy throne  
Thy saints have dwelt secure,  
Sufficient is thine arm alone,  
And our defense is sure.



Before the hills in order stood,  
Or earth received her frame,  
From everlasting thou art God,  
To endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight  
Are like an evening gone,  
Short as the watch that ends the night  
Before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away;  
They fly forgotten, as a dream  
Dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Be thou our guard while troubles last,  
And our eternal home.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Moses lived for 120 years. Joshua lived to be 110 years. Why then does Moses say God's life expectancy for us is only 70 or 80 years?
2. The psalm begins saying *God is our refuge, our dwelling place*. The Israelites were always physically aware of the presence of God. How did **YHWH** continually show himself to his Chosen People?
3. Why does God's perception of time and our perception of time affect our perspective on the way we look at things and events?
4. Why is God angry with humans? What is it that we simply don't fully appreciate?
5. Isaac Watts wrote three more stanzas to his hymn. But we never sing them. Why is that?  
I had trouble even finding them
6. What does Moses ask God to do for us in the psalm?
7. What are the plans God has for us that Moses speaks of in this psalm?

## Week 43

### How Do We Face the Future?

I have taken refuge in you O Lord. Never let me be put to shame. Rescue me and free me because of your righteousness. Turn your ear toward me and save me. Be a rock on which I may live, a place where I may always go. You gave the order to save me. Indeed, you are my Rock and my Fortress.

My God, free me from the hands of a wicked person, from the grasp of one who is cruel and unjust. You are my hope O Almighty Lord. You have been my confidence ever since I was young. I depended on you before I was born. You took me from my mother's womb. My songs of praise constantly speak about you.

I have become an example to many people, but you are my strong refuge. My mouth is filled with your praise, with your glory all day long. Do not reject me when I am old or abandon me when I lose my strength. My enemies talk about me. They watch me as they plot to take my life. They say: God has abandoned him. Pursue him and grab him because there is no one to rescue him.

O God, do not be so distant from me. O my God, come quickly to help me. Let those who accuse me come to a shameful end. Let those who want my downfall be covered with disgrace and humiliation.

But I will always have hope. I will praise you more and more. My mouth will tell about your righteousness, about your salvation all day long. Even then, it is more than I can understand. I will come with the mighty deeds of the Almighty Lord. I will praise your righteousness, yours alone.

O God, you have taught me ever since I was young, and I will still talk about the miracles you have done. Even when I am old and gray, do not abandon me O God. Let me live to tell the people of this age what your strength has accomplished, to tell about your power to all who will come.

Your righteousness reaches to the Heavens, O God. You have done great things. O God, who is like you? You have made me endure many terrible troubles. You restore me to life again. You bring me back from the depths of the earth. You comfort me and make me greater than ever.

Because of your faithfulness, O my God, even I will give thanks to you, as I play on a lyre. I will make music with a harp to praise you, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will sing with joy when I make music to praise you. My soul which you have rescued, also will sing joyfully. My tongue will tell about your righteousness all day long, because those who wanted my downfall have been disgraced and put to shame. **Psalm 71:1-24**

The psalmist realizes that he needs God's help more and more as he gets older. His strength weakens as he ages so he wants God to be step by step with him as he journeys towards death.

Turn all your anxiety over to God because he cares for you. **1 Peter 5:7**

Although the psalmist remembers his troubles, he also remembers how God has brought him through those troubles. So he ends his psalm with praises to God for his faithfulness. God has never let the psalmist down. The psalmist is so thankful for God's present gift of reassurance and gift of peacefulness and patient endurance. He will sing joyfully to **YHWH** with his harp and lyre.

He recalls the prophet Isaiah's great confidence in **YHWH**:

Listen to me, descendants of Judah, the few people left of the nation of Israel. I've carried you since your birth. I've taken care of you since the time you were born. Even when you're old, I'll take care of you.

Even when your hair turns gray, I'll support you. I made you and will continue to care for you. I'll support you and save you. **Isaiah 46:3-4**

## **We Are Being Renewed Day by Day**

He recalls the apostle Paul's encouraging words:

The following is written: I believed, therefore, I spoke. **2 Corinthians 4:13**

I kept my faith even when I said: I am suffering terribly. **Psalm 116:10**

We know that the one who brought the Lord Jesus back to life will also bring us back to life through Jesus. He will present us to God together with you.

All this is for your sake so that as God's kindness overflows in the lives of many people, it will produce even more thanksgiving to the glory of God. That is why we are not discouraged. Though outwardly we are wearing out, inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

Our suffering is light and temporary and is producing for us an eternal glory that is greater than anything we can imagine. We don't look for things that can be seen but for things that can't be seen. Things that can be seen are only temporary. But things that can't be seen last forever. **2 Corinthians 4:13-18**

For believers approaching physical death, God gives us renewed courage and hope anticipating our final coming to be with Jesus. Paul prays:

I pray that the glorious Father, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Christ better. Then you will have deeper insight. You will know that confidence that he calls you to have and the glorious wealth God's people will inherit. **Ephesians 1:17-18**

And then there is our primary hope:

At the same time, we can expect what we hope for – the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. **Titus 2:13**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. As we face the future, we can, like the apostle Peter, think continually on the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ for we will meet him soon.

Your faith is more precious than gold and by passing the test, it gives praise, glory, and honor to God. This will happen when Jesus Christ appears again. **1 Peter 1:7**

Therefore, your minds must be clear and ready for action. Place our confidence completely in what God's kindness will bring you when Jesus Christ appears again. **1 Peter 1:13**

Live decent lives among unbelievers. Then, although they ridicule you as if you were doing something wrong while they are watching you do good things, they will praise God on the day when he comes to help you. **1 Peter 2:12**

Don't feel as though something strange is happening to you but be happy as you share Christ's sufferings. Then you will be full of joy when he appears in his glory. **1 Peter 4:12-13**

Don't be rulers over the people entrusted to you but be examples for the flock to follow. Then, when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. **1 Peter 5:3**

What advantage do older believers have in thinking continually about the coming of Jesus to earth?

2. As mature believers, we become more and more familiar with the Bible. God's Word soaks into our life and we become renewed more and more in love for God and our Lord Jesus Christ. What should we do as a result?
3. Physical death doesn't mean an end to life for us. It is simply a new beginning. What does this mean?

## Week 44

### Your Last Days on Earth: The Second Coming of Christ

Then people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. He will send out his angels from every direction under the sky and they will gather those whom God has chosen. **Mark 13:26-27**

In all three synoptic Gospels, Jesus speaks of his coming to earth again. In Mark, the first Gospel written, Jesus says:

If people are ashamed of me and what I say in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of those people when he comes with the holy angels in his Father's glory. He said to them: I can guarantee this truth. Some people who are standing here will not die until they see God's Kingdom arrive with power. **Mark 8:38-9:1**

In this first primitive Gospel, According to Mark, there are only two instances where Jesus speaks of his second coming to earth. (1) **Mark 8:38-9:1**; (2) **Mark 13:26-27**

In the Gospel According to Matthew, Jesus says:

What good will it do for people to win the whole world and lose their lives? Or what will a person give in exchange for life? The Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory. Then he will pay back each person based on what that person has done. I can guarantee this truth: Some people standing here will not die until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom. **Matthew 16:26-28**

Jesus told his disciples that the Temple one day would be torn down. The disciples asked him:

Tell us when will this happen? When will be the sign that you are coming again, and when will the world come to an end? **Matthew 24:3**

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. All the people on earth will cry in agony **Zechariah 12:10-12** when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds in the sky with power and great glory. He will send out his

angels with a loud trumpet call and from every direction under the sky, they will gather those whom God has chosen. **Matthew 24:30**

I can guarantee this truth: This generation will not disappear until all these things take place. The earth and the Heavens will disappear, but my words will not disappear. No one knows when that day or hour will come. Even the angels in Heaven and the Son don't know. Only the Father knows.

When the Son of Man comes again, it will be exactly like the day of Noah. In the days before the flood, people were eating, drinking, and getting married until the day that Noah went into the ship. They were not aware of what was happening until the flood came and swept them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man comes again. At that time two men will be working in the field. One will be taken, and the other one will be left. Two women will be working at a mill. One will be taken, and the other one will be left.

Therefore, be alert, because you don't know on what day your Lord will return. You realize that if a homeowner had known at what time of the night a thief was coming, he would have stayed awake. He would not have let the thief break into his house. Therefore, you, too, must be ready because the Son of Man will return when you least expect him. **Matthew 24:34-44**

So in the Gospel of Matthew there are five instances where Jesus spoke of his second coming to earth: (1) **Matthew 16:26-28**; (2) **Matthew 24:3**; (3) **Matthew 24:30**; (4) **Matthew 24:34-44**; (5) **Matthew 26:31-32**.

In the Gospel According to Luke Jesus first talks about his second coming after he tells the commitments he requires of his disciples:

If people are ashamed of me and what I say, the Son of Man will be ashamed of those people when he comes in the glory that he shares with the Father and the holy angels. I can guarantee this truth: Some people who are standing here will not die until they see God's Kingdom. **Luke 9:26-27**

Be ready for action and have your lamps burning. Be like servants waiting to open the door at their master's knock when he returns from a wedding.

Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. I can guarantee this truth: He will change his clothes, make them sit down at the table, and serve them. They will be blessed if he comes in the middle of the night or toward morning and finds them awake.

Of course, you realize that if the homeowner had known what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let him into his house. Be ready, because the Son of Man will return when you least expect him. **Luke 12:35-40**

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets and stone to death those sent to you. How often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you were not willing. Your house will be abandoned. I can guarantee that you will not see me again until you say: Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. **Luke 13:34-35**

Jesus said to his disciples: The time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. People will say: There he is, or here he is. Don't run after those people. The day of the Son of Man will be like lightning that flashes from one end of the sky to the other. But first he must suffer and be rejected by the people of his day.

When the Son of Man comes again, the situation will be like the time of Noah. People were eating, drinking, and getting married until the day that Noah went into the ship. Then the flood destroyed all of them.

The situation will also be like the time of Lot. People were eating, drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But on the day that Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from the sky and destroyed all of them. The day when the Son of Man is revealed will be like that.

On that day those who are on the roof shouldn't come down to get their belongings out of their houses. Those who are in the field shouldn't turn back. Remember Lot's wife! Those who try to save their lives will lose them and those who lose their lives will save them.



I can guarantee that on that night if two people are in one bed, one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding corn together. One will be taken and the other one left. They asked him: Where Lord? Jesus told them: Vultures will gather wherever there is a dead body. **Luke 17:22-37**

Some of Jesus' disciples were admiring the Temple buildings. Jesus said: About these buildings that you see – the time will come when not one of these stones will be left on top of another. Each one will be torn down. The disciples asked him: When will this happen? What will be the sign when all this will occur? **Luke 21:5-7**

When you see armies camped around Jerusalem, realize that the time is near for it to be destroyed. Then those of you in Judea should flee to the mountains. Those of you in Jerusalem should leave it. Those of you in the fields shouldn't go back into them. This will be a time of vengeance. Everything that is written about it will come true.

How horrible it will be for women who are pregnant or who are nursing babies in those days. Indeed, the land will suffer hard times, and its people will be punished. Swords will cut them down and they will be carried off into all nations as prisoners. Nations will trample Jerusalem until the times allowed for the nations to do this are over.

Miraculous signs will occur in the sun, moon, and stars. The nations of the earth will be deeply troubled and confused because of the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint as they fearfully wait for what will happen to the world. Indeed, the powers of the universe will be shaken. Then people will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to happen, stand with confidence. The time when you will be set free is near. **Luke 21:20-28**

Make sure you don't become drunk, hung over, and worried about life. Then that day could suddenly catch you by surprise like a trap that catches a bird. That day will surprise all people who live on the earth. Be alert at all times.

Pray so that you have the power to escape everything that is about to happen and to stand in front of the Son of Man. **Luke 21:34-36**

So the Gospel According to Luke has seven pericopes of the Second Coming. (1) **Luke 9:26-27**; (2) **Luke 12:35-40**; (3) **Luke 13:34-35**; (4) **Luke 17:22-37**; (5) **Luke 21:5-7**; (6) **Luke 21:20-28**; (7) **Luke 21:34-36**.

In the Gospel According to John Jesus only spoke of his Second Coming to his disciples in the Upper Room:

Don't be troubled. Believe in God and believe in me. My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not true, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you. If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again. Then I will bring you into my presence so that you will be where I am. You know the place where I am going. **John 14:1-4**

I'm leaving you peace. I'm giving you my peace. I don't give you the kind of peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or cowardly. You heard me tell you: I'm going away but I'm coming back to you. If you loved me, you would be glad that I'm going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I am. **John 14:27-28**

In John there are two pericopes. (1) **John 14:1-4**; (2) **John 14:27-28**.

In this session, we have presented those Scriptures where Jesus has said he is coming again. Of course, the evangelists in the Epistles also will talk of Jesus' Second Coming. You will see many of these Scriptures in the following sessions.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. When Jesus talks about returning with the Holy Angels, his disciples should have recognized his identity immediately. This occurred about halfway through Jesus' 3 ½ year ministry just after Peter had identified Jesus as the Messiah. Then Peter, James, and John were taken up a mountain to see Jesus transfigured and talking with Moses and Elijah. How could they possibly not have known his identity by then? Yet, when Jesus gave his second passion prediction, Mark says:

The disciples didn't understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him. **Mark 9:32**

How is this possible?

2. Jesus wants his disciples to be alert and ready when he returns. What does he want them to do?
3. When Jesus and his disciples are sitting on the Mount of Olives across from the Temple, the disciples remark how beautiful the Temple is. Jesus says the Temple will be destroyed. The disciples ask when. Jesus then gives a seven-phase program of events. The seventh phase will be the appearance of Jesus as the Son of Man in glory and power. His angels will gather the believers and take them to Paradise to await their resurrection bodies. What happens to believers who die after this?
4. Why will Jesus appear like lightning? **Luke 17:24**
5. Jesus says: When I appear, stand with confidence for the time when you will be set free is near. What does he mean?
6. Jesus in the Gospel According to John only speaks of his going away in the Upper Room on the night of his arrest. How does he give his disciples confidence at his leaving them?
7. What happens on earth next after Jesus returns for a second time?

## Week 45

### Resurrection for All People

I'm telling you a mystery. Not all of us will die, but we will all be changed. It will happen in an instant, in a split second at the sound of the last trumpet. Indeed, that trumpet will sound and then the dead will come back to life. They will be changed so that they can live forever. **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**

If we have told you that Christ has been brought back to life, how can some of you say that coming back from the dead is impossible. If the dead can't be brought back to life, then Christ hasn't come back to life. If Christ hasn't been brought back to life, our message has no meaning and your faith also has no meaning.

In addition, we are obviously witnesses that lied about God because we testified that he brought Christ back to life. But if it's true that the dead don't come back to life, then God didn't bring Christ back to life. Certainly, if the dead don't come back to life, then Christ hasn't come back to life either. If Christ hasn't come back to life, your faith is worthless and sin still has you in its power. Then those who have died as believers in Christ no longer exist. If Christ is our hope in this life only, we deserve more pity than any other people. **1 Corinthians 15:12-19**

### However, Christ Did Come Back to Life

But now Christ has come back from the dead. He is the very first person of those who have died to come back to life. Since a man brought death, a man also brought life back from death. As everyone dies because of Adam, so also everyone will be made alive because of Christ. **1 Corinthians 15:20-22**

### God Will Give Us New Resurrection Bodies

But someone will ask; How do the dead come back to life? With what kind of body will they come back? You fool. The seed you plant doesn't come to life unless it dies first. When you plant, whether it's wheat or something else,

is only a seed. It doesn't have the form that the plant will have. Each kind of seed grows into its own form.

Not all flesh is the same. Humans have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds have another, and fish have still another. There are Heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. Heavenly bodies don't all have the same splendor, neither do earthly bodies. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon has another kind of splendor, and the stars have still another kind of splendor. Even one star differs in splendor from another star.

That is how it will be when the dead come back to life. When the body is planted, it decays. When it comes back to life, it cannot decay. When the body is planted, it doesn't have any splendor and is weak. When it comes back to life, it has splendor and is strong. It is planted as a physical body. It comes back to life as a spiritual body. As there is a physical body, so there is also a spiritual body. **1 Corinthians 15:35-44**

### **Scripture Says Man Became a Living Being**

This is what Scripture says: The first man Adam became a living being.

Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the earth and blew the breath of life into his nostrils. The man became a living being. **Genesis 2:7**

The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. The spiritual does not come first but the physical and then the spiritual. The first man was made from the dust of the earth. The second man came from Heaven. The people on earth are like the man who was made from the dust of the earth. The people in Heaven are like the man who came from Heaven.

As we have worn the likeness of the man who was made from the dust of the earth, we will also wear the likeness of the man who came from Heaven. Brothers and sisters, this is what I mean: Flesh and blood cannot inherit God's Kingdom. What decays cannot inherit what doesn't decay. **1 Corinthians 15:45-50**

## We Will Receive Resurrection Bodies That Will Not Decay

I'm telling you a mystery. Not all of us will die, but we will all be changed. It will happen in an instant, in a split second at the sound of the last trumpet. Indeed, that trumpet will sound, and the dead will come back to life. They will be changed so that they can live forever.

The body that decays must be changed into a body that cannot decay. This mortal body must be changed into a body that will live forever. When this body that decays is changed into a body that cannot decay, and this body is changed into a body that will live forever, then the teaching of Scripture will come true:

Death is turned into victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? **Hosea 13:14**

Sin gives death its sting and God's standards give sin its power. Thank God that he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, then, brothers and sisters, don't let anyone move you from the foundation of your faith. Always excel in the work you do for the Lord. You know that the hard work you do for the Lord is not pointless. **1 Corinthians 15:51-58**

Paul has told us all the believers who are alive on earth at Jesus' Second Coming will be raptured and join Jesus in Paradise with the good thief. **Luke 23:43**. On Resurrection Day, all humans in Paradise and those in Sheol will be given new resurrection bodies. Then we will all appear before Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

### I. Paul describes the rapture:

We believe that Jesus died and came back to life. We also believe that through Jesus God will bring back those who have died. They will come back with Jesus. We are telling you what the Lord taught. We who are still alive when the Lord comes will not go into the Kingdom ahead of those who have already died.

The Lord will come from Heaven with a command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the dead who believed in Christ will come back to life. Then, together with them, we who are still alive will be taken in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. In this way, we will always be with the Lord. So then comfort each other with these words. **1 Thessalonians 4:14-18**

Paul is saying that when Jesus comes a second time, he will bring all of his believers with him. This is the only time he says this. Why would Jesus bring all his believers in Paradise with him? See **1 Thessalonians 4:17**.

2. The prophet John describes the rapture:

Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and on the cloud sat someone like the Son of Man. He had a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Another angel came out of the Temple. He cried out in a loud voice to the one who sat on the cloud: Swing your sickle, and gather the harvest. The time has come to gather it, because the harvest on the earth is overripe. The one who sat on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth and the harvesting of the earth was completed. **Revelation 14:14-16**

John is saying the rapture occurs here before the seven bowl judgments occur on all unbelievers. During this period, some unbelievers come to faith but are killed by the unbelievers. These believers join Jesus in Heaven. Unbelievers still go to Sheol. Why do most readers miss this? Some say it is because an angel cannot command Jesus to do something.

3. After Jesus comes to earth in the rapture, then all people – those in Paradise and in Sheol – receive resurrection bodies and proceed to the Great White Throne Judgment we will cover in the next session.

4. At death our soul is separated from our physical body. This was also a belief of the Hebrews. They believed that in Sheol humans existed as a vapor with no knowledge of the events in the world above or of God. King Hezekiah reflecting on his potential death said:

Sheol doesn't thank you. Death doesn't praise you. Those who go down to the Pit cannot expect you to be faithful. **Isaiah 38:10**

Yet King David says:

Where can I go to get away from your Spirit? Where can I run to get away from you? If I go up to Heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Hell *Sheowl*, you are there. **Psalm 139:7-8**

Isn't God everywhere?

5. After physical death, all events exist in eternity so attempting to conceive of the timing of events is difficult. How soon will each occur? We can't conceive of it in our time. But we can see the order of events. Rapture >>> Resurrection Bodies >>>> Great White Throne Judgment >>>>> New Jerusalem or Hell - the Fiery Lake. How long will it be after we are raptured to Paradise before we receive our resurrection bodies?
6. Some believe after Jesus died on the cross, he went to Sheol and preached the Gospel. Those who believed then went to Paradise to be with Jesus. This is based on **1 Peter 3:19**. Why is this important?
7. Some don't like the thought of not having a body when we are with Jesus in Paradise before we receive our resurrection bodies. If we are with Jesus, why does this matter?



## Week 46

### The Last Judgment

The Father doesn't judge anyone. He has entrusted judgment entirely to the Son so that everyone will honor the Son as they honor the Father. Who doesn't honor the Son doesn't honor the Father who sent him. I can guarantee this truth: Those who listen to what I say and believe in the one who sent me have Eternal Life. They won't be judged because they have passed from death to life.

I can guarantee this truth: A time is coming and is now already here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who respond to it will live. The Father is the source of life, and he has enabled the Son to be the source of life too.

He has also given the Son authority to pass judgment because he is the Son of Man. Don't be surprised at what I've just said. A time is coming when all the dead will hear his voice and they will come out of their tombs. Those who have done good will come back to life and live. Those who have done evil will come back to life and be judged.

Many sleeping in the ground will wake up. Some will wake up to live forever. But others will wake up to be ashamed and disgraced forever.  
**Daniel 12:2**

I can't do anything on my own. As I listen to the Father, I make my judgments. My judgments are right because I don't try to do what I want but what the one who sent me wants. **John 5:22-30**

In the Book of Revelation, the Great White Throne Judgment follows the Millennial Kingdom. **Revelation 20:1-6**. Then there is a final battle between Satan and Jesus. **Revelation 20:7-10**. Because so little is known about this final battle and scholars' conclusions are so divided, I have chosen not to discuss it. It appears to me that here is where all Israel is saved **Zechariah 12-14**, as Paul says in **Romans 11:26**.

## The Great White Throne Judgment

I saw a great white throne and the one who was sitting on it. The earth and the sky fled from his presence, but no place was found for them. I saw the dead, both important and unimportant people, standing in front of the throne. Books were opened, including the Book of Life. The dead were judged on the basis of what they had done, as recorded in the books. The sea gave up its dead. Death and Hell gave up their dead. People were judged on what they had done.

Death and Hell were thrown in the fiery lake. The fiery lake is the Second Death. Those whose names were not found in the Book of Life were thrown in the fiery lake. **Revelation 20:11-15.**

## Paul Also Talks About the Last Judgment

All of us must appear before Christ's judgment seat *bema*. Then all people will receive what they deserve for the good or evil they have done while living in their bodies. **2 Corinthians 5:9**

Why do you criticize or despise other Christians? Everyone will stand in front of God to be judged. Scripture says:

As certainly as I live, says the Lord, everyone will worship me, and everyone will praise God.

[ For it is written: As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me and every tongue shall confess to God. **Romans 14:11** quoting **Isaiah 45:23.** KJV ]

All of us will have to give an account of ourselves to God. So let's stop criticizing each other. Instead, you should decide never to do anything that would make other Christians have doubts or lose their faith. **Romans 14:10-13**

## Paul Describes How Christ Will Judge Christians

We are God's co-workers. You are God's field. You are God's building. As a skilled and experienced builder, I used the gift that God gave me to lay the foundation for that building. However, someone else is building on it. Each person must be careful how he builds on it. After all, no one can lay any other foundation than the one that is already laid, and that foundation is Jesus Christ.

People may build on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw. The day will make what each one does clearly visible because fire will reveal it. That fire will determine what kind of work each person has done. If what a person builds survives, he will receive a reward. If his work is burned up, he will suffer the loss. However, he will be saved though it will be like going through a fire. **1 Corinthians 3:9-15**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. The Last Judgment is difficult to think about. All of us have done things in our lives that we are sorry for and feel guilty of doing. Some are small and some are large, but we all have them. We are far from being perfect. But Jesus knows our hearts better than we know our hearts ourselves. David told Solomon:

And you, my son Solomon, learn to know your father's God. Serve the Lord wholeheartedly and willingly because he searches every heart and understands every thought we have. **1 Chronicles 28:9**

Jesus therefore will be fair, and we should not worry. The real point is that from then on our lives will be completely transparent in a world where there is no temptation to sin.

2. How long will this judgment take? Each person who has ever lived will be judged. Will this judgment be simultaneous as each of us is judged at the same time as our entire life flashes before us in an instant? Or will it be the longest queue we've ever waited in?
3. What are Jesus' criteria for deciding if a person will go to the New Jerusalem or to Hell? Remember that God's *checced* or loving kindness is his greatest attribute? **Exodus 34:5-7**
4. After the Israelites had made a Golden Calf Idol, Moses went up the mountain to plead with God for the people. He said:

These people have committed such a serious sin. They made gods out of gold for themselves. But will you forgive their sin? If not please wipe me out of the book you have written. The Lord answered Moses: I will wipe out of my book whoever sins against me. **Exodus 32:31-33**

Is Moses referring here to the Book of Life?

5. What is the purpose of God giving the Christian a reward? Only Paul mentions this. **Romans 14:10; I Corinthians 3:10-15; I Corinthians 5:10**
6. Jesus doesn't talk much about the Last Judgment in the Gospels. Why not?
7. Jesus said:

Those who reject me by not accepting what I say have a judge appointed for them. The words that I have spoken will judge them on the Last Day. **John 12:48**

What did Jesus mean?

## Part 12

# The New Creation: The New Heaven and Earth

I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth, because the first Heaven and the earth had disappeared, and the sea was gone. Then I saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, dressed like a bride ready for her husband.

I heard a voice from the throne say: God lives with humans. God will make his home with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and be their God.

Tell the Israelites: I am the Lord. I will bring you out from under the oppression of the Egyptians and I will free you from slavery. I will rescue you with my powerful arm and with mighty acts of judgment. Then I will make you my people and I will be your God. You will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the forced labor of the Egyptians. **Exodus 6:6-7**

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There won't be any more death. There won't be any grief, crying, or pain because the first things have disappeared.

The one sitting on the throne said: Write this: These words are faithful and true. It has happened. I am the A and the Z, the beginning and the end. I will give a drink from the fountain filled with the water of life to anyone who is thirsty. It won't cost anything.

[ Listen. Whoever is thirsty, come to the water. Whoever has no money can come, buy, and eat. Come, buy wine and milk. You don't have to pay. It's free. Why do you spend your money on what cannot nourish you and your wages on what cannot satisfy you? Listen carefully to me: Eat what is good and enjoy the best foods. Open your ears and listen to me. Listen

so that you may live. I will make an everlasting Covenant with you – the blessings I promised to David. **Isaiah 55: 1-3** ]

Everyone who wins the victory *overcomes* will inherit these things. I will be their God and they will be my children. But cowardly, unfaithful, and detestable people, murderers, sexual sinners, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars will find themselves in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the Second Death. **Revelation 21:1-8**

### **The New Jerusalem Comes Down from Heaven**

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the last seven plagues came to me and said: Come. I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. He carried me by his power away to a large, high mountain.

He showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven. It had the glory of God. Its light was like a valuable gem, like gray quartz diamond, as clear as crystal.

It had a large high wall with twelve gates. Twelve angels were at the gates. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates. There were three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the west, and three gates on the south. The wall of the City had twelve foundations. The 12 names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb were written on them.

The angel who was talking to me had a gold measuring stick to measure the City, its gates, and its wall. The City was square. It was as wide as it was long. He measured the City with the stick. It was 12,000 stadia 1,380 miles long. Its length, width, and height were the same.

[ Solomon prepared the inner room of the Temple in order to put the Ark of the Lord's Covenant there. The inner room was 30 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 30 feet high. Solomon covered it and the cedar altar with pure gold. **1 Kings 6:19-20** ]

The City was the same configuration as the Holy of Holies in the Wilderness Tabernacle and in Solomon's Temple – a cube.

He measured its wall. According to human measurement, which the angel was using, it was 144 cubits <sup>216 feet</sup>. Its wall was made of gray quartz. The city was made of pure gold, as clear as glass.

The foundations of the city wall were beautifully decorated with all kinds of gems. The first foundation was gray quartz, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth red quartz, the seventh yellow quartz, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth green quartz, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.

The twelve gates were 12 pearls. Each gate was made of one pearl. The street of the city was made of pure gold, as clear as glass.

I did not see any temple in it because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city doesn't need any sun or moon to give it light because the glory of God gave it light. The Lamb was its lamp.

[ The sun will no longer be your light during the day, nor will the brightness of the moon give you light. But the Lord will be your everlasting light. Your God will be your glory. Your sun will no longer go down, nor will your moon disappear. The Lord will be your everlasting light and your day of sadness will be over. **Isaiah 60:19-20** ]

The nations will walk in its light and the Kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

[ Nations will come to your light and Kings will come to the brightness of your dawn. **Isaiah 60:3** ]

Its gates will be open all day. They will never close because there won't be any night there. They will bring the glory and wealth of the nations into the Holy City.

[ Your gates will always be open. They will never be closed day or night so that people may bring you the wealth of nations, with their Kings led as prisoners. **Isaiah 60:11** ]

Nothing unclean, no one who does anything detestable, and no liars will even enter it. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will enter it.

### **The River Flowing from the Throne of God**

The angel showed me a river filled with the water of life, as clear as crystal. It was flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. Between the street of the city and the river there was a tree visible from both sides. It produced 12 kinds of fruit. Each month had its own fruit. The leaves of the tree will heal the nations. **Revelation 21:27-22:2**

[ The man took me to the back door of the Temple. I saw water flowing from under the entrance to the Temple toward the east. The Temple faced east. The water was flowing under the south side of the Temple, south of the altar. Then, he led me through the north gate and around to the outer east gate. The water was flowing down the south side of the gate. **Ezekiel 47:1-2** ]

[ But the water had risen so much that it became a river which I couldn't cross. The river was too deep to cross except by swimming. Then he asked me: Son of man, do you see this?

Then the man led me back along the bank of the river. As I went back, I saw many trees on both sides of the river. Then the man said to me: The water flows through the land to the east, down into the Jordan Valley and into the Dead Sea. When the water flows into the Dead Sea, it will replace the salt water there with fresh water. Wherever the river flows, there will be many fish and animals. The river will make the water in the Dead Sea fresh. Wherever the river flows, it will bring life. **Ezekiel 47:5-9** ]

[ All kinds of fruit trees will grow on both sides of the river. Their leaves won't wither, and they won't fail to produce fruit. Each month they will produce fresh fruit because this water flows from the Holy Place. The fruit will be good food and the leaves will be used for healing. **Ezekiel 47:12** ]



## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. God says he will make a New Heaven and a New Earth and a New Jerusalem. Isaiah already said this during his ministry from 740-698 BC:

I will create a New Heaven and a New Earth. Past things will not be remembered. They will not come to mind. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I'm going to create because I'm going to create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people to be a joy. **Isaiah 65:17-18**

The New Heaven and Earth that I am about to make will continue in my presence, declares the Lord. So your descendants and your name will also continue in my presence. **Isaiah 66:22**

Many scholars conclude Isaiah is speaking of the Millennial Kingdom. But the prophet John took many characteristics of Isaiah's New Heaven and Earth into his picture. Why did he do this?

2. The New Jerusalem is a huge cube shaped City based on the Holy of Holies. People now live with God in the Holy of Holies. God now achieves his dream of dwelling among his people.

Then have them make a Holy Place for me and I will live among them. Make the Tent and all its furnishings exactly like the plans I am showing you. **Exodus 25:8**

How is God accomplishing his plan he has had from the beginning?

3. What is the purpose of making everything important of gold?
4. If there is a new earth, will people go in and out of the City to live?
5. The distance of each side of the New Jerusalem cube of 1,380 miles is the distance between Rome and Jerusalem, as the crow flies. Why is this significant?
6. What is the significance of having the names of the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles written on the gates?
7. Why are there still nations and Kings?

## Week 47

### The New Jerusalem: Living in the Holy of Holies with God

There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the City. His servants will worship him and see his face.

[ Then Moses said: Please let me see your glory. The Lord said: I will let all my goodness pass in front of you and there I will call out my name: The Lord. I will be kind to anyone I want to. I will be merciful to anyone I want to. I will be merciful to anyone I want to. But you can't see my face, because no one may see me and live.

Then the Lord said: Look there's a place near me. Stand by this rocky cliff. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a crevice in the cliff and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take my hand away, and you'll see my back, but my face must not be seen. **Exodus 33:18-21** ]

His name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night, and they will not need any light from lamps or the sun because the Lord God will shine on them. They will rule as Kings forever and ever. **Revelation 22:3-5**

### Jesus Speaks to John

He said to me: These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord God of the spirits of the prophets has sent his angel to show his servants the things that must happen soon. I'm coming soon. Blessed is the one who follows the words of the prophecies of this book. **Revelation 22:6-7**

### John Attempts to Worship an Angel

I, John, heard and saw these things. When I had heard and seen them, I bowed to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing me these things. He told me: Don't do that. I am your coworker. I work with other Christians, the prophets, and those who follow the words of this book. Worship God. **Revelation 22:8-9**

## The Angel Warns the Time of Eternal Blessing and Curse Is Near

Then the angel told me: Don't seal up the words of the prophecy in this book because the time is near.

Let those who don't have God's approval go without it, and let filthy people continue to be filthy. Let those who have God's approval continue to have it, and let holy people continue to be holy.

[ Then the Lord said to me: Even if Moses and Samuel were standing in front of me I would not feel sorry for these people. Send them away from me and let them go. When they ask you where they should go, say to them: This is what the Lord says: Those who are destined to die will die. Those who are destined to die in wars will die in wars. Those who are destined to die in famines will die in famines. Those who are destined to die in captivity will die in captivity. **Jeremiah 15:1-2** ]

I'm coming soon! I will bring my reward with me to pay all people based on what they have done. I am the A and the Z, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Blessed are those who wash their robes so that they may have the right to the Tree of Life and may go through the gates into the City. Outside are dogs, sorcerers, sexual sinners, murderers, idolators, and all who lie in what they say and do.

[ The New Heaven and Earth that I am about to make will continue in my presence, declares the Lord. So your descendants and your name will also continue in my presence. From one month to the next and from one day to the next all people will come to worship me, declares the Lord. Then they will go out and look at the corpses of those who have rebelled against me. The worms that eat them will not die. The fire that burns them will not go out. All humanity will be disgusted by them. **Isaiah 66:22-24** ]

I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give this testimony to you <sup>John</sup> for the churches. I am the root and descendant of David. I am the bright morning star.  
**Revelation 22:10-16**

[ They will not hurt or destroy anyone anywhere on my holy mountain. The world will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord like water covering the sea. At that time the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the people to gather around. The nations will come to him. His resting place will be glorious. **Isaiah 11:9-10** ]

### **An Invitation to Believe in Jesus**

The Spirit and the Bride say: Come. Let those who hear this say: Come. Let those who are thirsty come. Let those who want the water of life take it as a gift. **Revelation 22:17**

[ Listen! Whoever is thirsty, come to the water! Whoever has no money can come, buy, and eat! Come buy wine and milk. You don't have to pay. It's free! Why do you spend money on what cannot nourish you and your wages on what cannot satisfy you? Listen carefully to me: Eat what is good and enjoy the best foods. Open your ears, and come to me. Listen so that you may live! I will make an everlasting Covenant with you - the blessings I promised to David. I made him a witness to people a leader and a commander for people. **Isaiah 55:1-4** ]

### **A Warning Not to Change Holy Scripture**

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy in this book: If anyone adds anything to this, God will strike him with the plagues that are written in this book. If anyone takes away any words from this book of prophecy, God will take away his portion of the Tree of Life and the Holy City that are described in this book. **Revelation 22:18-19**

[ Never add anything to what I command you, or take away anything from it. Then you will be able to obey the commands of the Lord your God that I give you. **Deuteronomy 4:2** ]

[ Be sure to do everything I command you. Never add anything to it or take anything away from it. **Deuteronomy 12:32** ]

## The Final Words of Jesus in the Bible

The One who is testifying to these things says: Yes, I'm coming soon!  
**Revelation 22:20**

## John the Prophet Responds

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! **Revelation 22:20**

## John Gives Us a Benediction

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you. Amen. **Revelation 22:21**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. An amazing promise is made by John the prophet: People in the New Jerusalem will see God's face. Both in the OT and NT it is said: *No one has ever seen God.* **John 1:18** Yet, in the New Jerusalem, believers will see God's face. **Revelation 22:4** How is this possible?
2. John says believers will rule as Kings. Who will they rule over?
3. Jesus says three times: *I am coming soon.* What does he mean?
4. Jesus blesses those who wash their robes. How do we wash our robes?
5. As in Isaiah's Vision, unbelievers are prevented from going into the New Jerusalem. Where are unbelievers located? Will they ever be permitted to enter the New Jerusalem?
6. Jesus says he is the Davidic Messiah. He is also the bright morning star. What does he mean by this? **Revelation 2:28; 22:16**
7. Jesus offers *the water of life*. God offers this in Isaiah's Vision and Jesus offers it to the Samaritan woman and to those attending the Feast of Booths. What is the water of life?

## Week 48

### We Don't Have to Wait: Eternal Life Is Now

Jesus said to Nicodemus: I can guarantee this truth: No one can see God's Kingdom without being born from above. Jesus answered Nicodemus: I can guarantee this truth: No one can enter God's Kingdom without being born of water and the Spirit. Flesh and blood give birth to flesh and blood but the Spirit gives birth to things that are spiritual. **John 3:3, 5**

Nicodemus was a well-known teacher in Israel, a member of the 71-member Sanhedrin that ruled Judea, Samaria and Idumean under the eyes of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. He came to Jesus at night. Without Nicodemus asking him a question, Jesus spoke immediately to what was on Nicodemus' heart. Nicodemus wanted to come to *know* Jesus.

Nicodemus had heard *about* Jesus, about the miracles he had done **John 2:1-10** and how he had cleansed the Temple of merchants **John 2:13-16**. But now he wanted to *know* Jesus.

Jesus told him that God the Father must give Nicodemus the faith to believe in Jesus in a new birth of life. Since Nicodemus had come to see Jesus, Jesus knew that his heart was ready to accept Jesus as his Messiah, his Lord and Savior. But he needed the reassurance that Jesus was who he said he was. So Jesus told him:

No one has gone to Heaven, except the Son of Man who came from Heaven. As Moses lifted up the snake on the pole **Numbers 21:4-9**, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. Then everyone who believes in him will have **Eternal Life**.

God loved the world in this way. He gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not die but will have **Eternal Life**. God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world. Those who believe in him won't be condemned. But those who don't believe are already condemned because they don't believe in God's only Son. **John 3: 13-18**

Jesus gave Nicodemus the Gospel or Good News. God sent Jesus to earth to be lifted up on the cross and to sacrifice his life so that rebellious human beings can be reconciled to God. People who believe this Gospel, who are given the gift of faith by God, or who are born from above or born again, commit to follow God's plan for their lives and live in a close personal relationship with him. This is **Eternal Life**. People can have this new life immediately.

Later Jesus was talking with the Pharisees and Sadducees who studied the Hebrew Scriptures. He told them that they studied the Hebrew Scripture because they thought they would learn about **Eternal Life** in them. Jesus said that Moses in the Scriptures spoke about him. **John 5:39**

As Jesus had previously told Nicodemus, one of their famous teachers, Moses talked about how the faith in looking at the serpent lifted up on the pole produced healing. Jesus would be lifted up on the cross in the same way. People who saw this could receive healing faith in the same way. So what Jesus said to them should verify what they learned from the Hebrew Bible.

Jesus in Capernaum taught that by having a personal relationship with him, so intimate that it would be like eating his flesh and drinking his blood, they could receive **Eternal Life** and Jesus would bring them back to life on the Last Day. **John 6:59**. However, many of the Jews took Jesus literally rather than symbolically. They stopped following him saying his teaching was too hard to understand. But many did believe Jesus, especially his Twelve disciples. When Jesus asked them if they wanted to leave him too, Peter said:

Lord, to what person could we go. Your Words give Eternal Life. Besides, we believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. **John 6:68-69**

A little while later at the annual Festival of Booths, Jesus will talk about the living water God will give to believers to strengthen them in this new life – the Holy Spirit. **John 7:37-39**. This will be poured out on Jesus' disciples at the Feast of Pentecost. **Acts 2:1-12**

At another feast, the Feast of Hannukah, Jesus was confronted by the Jews demanding he tell them if he was the Davidic Messiah, the Warrior King the Scriptures said would set Israel free from their enemies. Jesus told them:

I've told you but you don't believe me. The things that I do on my Father's behalf testify on my behalf. However, you don't believe because you're not my sheep. My sheep respond to my voice, and I know who they are. They follow me and I give them Eternal Life. They will never be lost, and no one will tear them away from me. My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than everyone else, and no one can tear them away from my Father. The Father and I are one. **John 10:25-30**

At this, the Jews not wanting to show their ignorance of what Jesus meant by being the Good Shepherd, simply wanted to stone him to death because he was claiming to be God in violation of the Shema, the beginning of verses they said every day of their life:

Listen Israel: The Lord is our God. The Lord is the only God. **Deuteronomy 6:4.**

The last time Jesus speaks of Eternal Life is his High Priestly Prayer that he prays to God after he speaks to the disciples in the Upper Room the night of his arrest by the Sanhedrin. It is his final report to his Father of his earthly ministry:

Jesus looked up to Heaven and said: Father, the time is here. Give your Son glory so that your Son can give you glory. After all you've given him authority over all humanity so that he can give **Eternal Life** to all those you gave to him. This is **Eternal Life**: to know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you sent. On earth I have given you glory by finishing the work you gave me to do. Now Father, give me glory in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed. **John 17:1-5**

Eternal Life is the close, personal, intimate relationship God gives to believers when he gives the gift of faith in Jesus and the Holy Spirit. This is called justification. This gift we receive from God, as Paul tells us:

God saved you through faith as an act of kindness. You had nothing to do with it. Being saved is a gift of God. It's not the result of anything you've done so no one can brag about it. God has made us what we are. He has created us in Christ Jesus to live lives filled with good works that he has prepared for us to do. **Ephesians 2:8-10**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What is the difference between knowing *about* Jesus and *knowing* Jesus? How do you come to know Jesus?
2. Most people think Eternal Life is what we were talking about in the last two sessions – life after death. But Eternal Life happens right now when we believe in Jesus. Define Eternal Life in your own words.
3. When did you receive Eternal Life? How did you know?
4. Is Eternal Life the same as being born again? What does this mean and why is it important?
5. How do you become one of Jesus' sheep?



6. What did the Jews think the Davidic Messiah came to do in Israel?
7. State in your own words the reason the Gospel According to John was written. **John 20:30-31**

## Week 49

### Are You a New Creature?

Whoever is a believer in Christ is a new creation. The old way of living has disappeared. A new way of living has come into existence. God has done all this. He has restored our relationship with him through Christ and has given us this ministry of restoring relationships.

In other words, God was using Christ to restore his relationship with humanity. He didn't hold people's faults against them, and he has given us this message of restored relationships to tell others. Therefore, we are Christ's representatives, and through us Christ is calling you.

We beg you on behalf of Christ to become reunited *katallasso* -reconciled with God. God had Christ, who was sinless, take our sin so that we might receive God's approval through him. Since we are God's coworkers, we urge you not to let God's kindness <sup>grace</sup> be wasted on you. God says:

At the right time I heard you. On the day of salvation I helped you. **Isaiah 49:8.**

Listen, now is God's acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation!  
**2 Corinthians 5:17-6:2**

In the last session we talked about the time God gave you the faith to believe in Jesus. This was the time of your conversion – the time when God justified you and gave you the Holy Spirit. God saved you from spiritual death and gave you spiritual life in Jesus.

In this session we will talk about what you do after your conversion. This is called a journey of sanctification. We live our new transformed lives guided by the Holy Spirit in a way of holiness consistent with the plan that God has for our lives. In short, we live as God has always wanted us to live. We are able to do so now because the Holy Spirit constantly guides us in the way to life.

We have been set apart as holy because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do by sacrificing his body once and for all. **Hebrews 10:10**

In the Gospels, Jesus told his disciples how he wanted them to live. He began by saying what Moses told the Israelites:

The most important commandment is: Listen Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. So love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second most important commandment is this: Love your neighbor as you love yourself. **Mark 12:29-31**

Moses taught Israel how to live. He gave them 613 commandments. Jesus did not revoke any of this moral law. But the ceremonial law was only applicable to the Chosen People living in Israel. Instead, Jesus gave three basic requirements for his disciples:

Those who want to follow me must say no to the things they want, pick up their crosses, and follow me. Those who want to save their lives will lose them. But those who lose their lives for me and the Good News will save them. **Mark 8:34-35**

Jesus really meant these three commitments. His disciples must be willing to place allegiance to Jesus above everything and everyone – even their family **Matthew 10:37** and their own life and especially above any material possessions. **Luke 18:22**

Jesus' disciples must follow Jesus. The apostle John says:

Those who say they live in him must live the way he lived. **1 John 2:6**

The psalmist says:

Righteousness will go before him. And shall make his footsteps our pathway. **Psalm 85:13 KJV**

When God justifies someone, he transforms their life by giving them the heart to live in a new way. Paul says a Christian's transformed life is characterized by the fruits of the Holy Spirit:

The spiritual nature produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. **Galatians 5:22-23**

A person whose life is not characterized by these qualities has not genuinely been born again. But remember that sanctification is a period of gradual growth. It will not happen all at once. But immediately after conversion there will be a visible change and a desire to please God. And

an immediate way to do this is to learn more about God by studying the revelation of himself he gave us in the Holy Scriptures.

Use the truth to make them holy. Your Words are truth. I have sent them into the world the same way you sent me into the world. I'm dedicating myself to his holy work I'm doing for them so that they, too, will use the truth to be holy. **John 17:18-19**

We desire to be set apart by God as holy people because Jesus himself sanctified or set himself apart.

### **We Can Be Good Disciples of Jesus by Putting His Words into Our Lives**

If you love me, you will obey my commandments. **John 14:15**

Those who love me will do what I say. **John 14:23**

### **Complete Sanctification Is Glorification**

Paul prays:

May the God of peace sanctify you wholly. And I pray God your whole spirit and soul be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **1 Thessalonians 5:7 KJV**

## **THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

1. How does a person know if they are converted?
2. If a person doesn't think they are converted, what should they do?
3. How does a person learn what God's plan is for their life?
4. What is the best way to get to know Jesus?
5. Paul gives this advice to believers:

And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. **Romans 12:2 KJV**

How do we do this?

6. Define a disciple of Jesus.
7. How do you identify a person as a disciple of Jesus?

## Week 50

### What Should a Course in Discipleship Teach You?

We are sure that we know Christ if we obey his commandments. The person who says: I know him but doesn't obey his commandments is a liar. The truth isn't in that person. But whoever obeys what Christ says is the kind of person in whom God's love is perfected. That's how we know we are in Christ. Those who say that they live in him must live the same way he lived.

**1 John 2:3-6**

I taught my first discipleship course in 1994 at Saint John the Divine Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas. That really has been my focus for all my Bible teaching since then. The contents of a typical discipleship course I taught were as follows:

1. Meeting Jesus: Becoming a Believer
2. Committing to Following Jesus: Being Baptized
3. Learning to Walk with Jesus Following His Words
4. The Key Learning Tool: The Bible
5. Learning to Put the Bible Principles into Your Life
6. The Spiritual War We Face
7. Our Spiritual Journey
8. Putting the Practices of Jesus into Your Life
9. Entering into the Presence of God Through Prayer
10. Understanding the Lessons of Jesus' Death and Resurrection
11. Learning the Principles of the Holy Spirit
12. Following the Great Commission of Jesus

A disciple of Jesus is a learner and a follower. Jesus said:

A student is no better than his teacher. But everyone who is well-trained will be like his teacher. **Luke 6:40**

Jesus spent almost all of his time during his 3 ½ year ministry on earth training his disciples. After Jesus returned to Heaven, his disciples were expected to carry on the mission God had given Jesus to perform on earth. Jesus gave them the Great Commission:

All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father,

and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do everything I have commanded you. **Matthew 28:18-20**

Most discipleship courses take 12 weeks, the usual time for courses taken in a university. The course you are taking here is very different. It is spread out over an entire year. Why the difference?

Hopefully you will spend more time on each lesson. I hope you will be curious. I hope you will look up the Scripture references I give you and their context. The **THINGS TO THINK ABOUT** are designed to stimulate you to think, not to give stock answers. As the Bible translation of **GOD's WORD** may not be familiar to you, please have your favorite Bible translation available.

**GOD's WORD** was created to make the Bible easy to understand for those whose second language is English or American. It is written at the level of American newspaper language -- about 4th grade. It is a deliberate attempt to get away from the churchy language of the King James Version and make the words of the Bible understandable in familiar language.

The course has a lot of Scripture in it. This is because this is where the words of Jesus are to be found. Remember that Jesus told us again and again to obey his words. There are also a lot of Scriptures from the Hebrew Bible as Jesus quoted these words frequently. His favorite books were Deuteronomy and Isaiah.

Please also remember that the disciple of Jesus is on a journey. Many see it in four phases.

The first phase is *Come and See*.

The second phase is *Follow Me*.

The third phase is *Come and Be with Me*.

The fourth phase is *Come and Live in Me*.

As we follow Jesus, we become more proficient, just as his original Twelve did.

Reading the Gospels, we can see this progress, although Jesus' first five disciples in the Gospel According to John begin with remarkably insightful knowledge of Jesus' identity as some were formerly disciples of John the Baptist who taught them about Jesus.

But when we read According to Mark, the first Gospel, written based on the teaching of Peter, we find the disciples were agonizingly slow to recognize the true identity of Jesus. And we see at the Last Supper in the Upper Room near the very end of Jesus' earthly ministry, Jesus had to

perform a vivid visual sign act of washing his disciple's feet to teach humility and servant leadership. Even then see **Luke 21:22-27**.

The turning point in the disciples' training in the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is when Jesus tells them God wants him to be a suffering Messiah. He will go to Jerusalem, be rejected by the Jewish religious leaders, be killed, but then be raised by God to live again in three days. Read the reactions of the disciples to each of Jesus' three Passion Predictions in each of the Gospels. **Mark 8:31-32; 9:31-32; 10:33-34**

By the time they get to Jerusalem, it seems the disciples accept this, but they don't say much from then on. When do Jesus' disciples get to phase four? Most think it is not until he is raised back to life and talks with them. With us, this may be the same. Until we are born again, can we call ourselves Christians? As John Wesley says: We may be only *Almost Christians* and not *Altogether Christians*, as we only know *about* Jesus and do not *know* Jesus in an intimate personal relationship.

Many people become converted by God during a discipleship course. Remember, conversions are different for each person. God works with us in an individual way. And please remember having genuine faith in Jesus is a gift of God. **Ephesians 2:8-10**. You don't earn it. God graciously gives you this faith because he loves you.

In the next part, the apostle John will teach us about Jesus' heart.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What is missing from the 12 subjects listed in the discipleship course? What else would you like to see included?
2. What did Jesus command his disciples to do?
3. Jesus said:

I'm giving you a new commandment: Love each other in the same way that I have loved you. Everyone will know that you are my disciples because of your love for each other. **John 13:34-35**

How did Jesus love his disciples?

4. Locate the Scriptures that support the four phases of discipleship.
5. Why are there so many *Almost Christians* in American churches?



6. **John 15:1-8** are primary verses on discipleship. What happens when a disciple does not produce fruit for Jesus?
7. Read **John 15:10**. What happens if a disciple does not obey Jesus' commandments?

# Epilogue

## The Apostle John Helps Us Understand What Is in Jesus' Heart

The Word of Life existed from the beginning. We have heard it. We have seen it. We observed and touched it. This life was revealed to us. We have seen it and we testify about it. We are reporting to you about this **Eternal Life** that was in the presence of the Father and was revealed to us. This is the life we have seen and heard.

We are reporting about it to you so that you can have a relationship with us. Our relationship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing this so that we can be completely filled with joy. **1 John 1:1-4**

The apostle John, living at the end of the first century, was faced with two heresies that had arisen and attacked genuine Christianity. The first was that Jesus was not human. He was only an angel and only appeared to be human. This was called Docetism. John saw Jesus, he touched him, he heard him speak.

The other heresy was that Jesus was only a man. He was not the Son of God. John boldly disputes this. John will use the phrase *Son of God* seven times in **1 John 3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12, 13, 20.**

Who is a liar? Who else but the person who rejects Jesus as the Messiah? The person who rejects the Father and the Son is an anti-Christ. Everyone who rejects the Son doesn't have the Father either. The person who acknowledges the Son also has the Father. Make sure that the message you heard from the beginning lives in you. If that message lives in you, you will also live in the Son and in the Father. Christ has given us the promise of Eternal Life. **1 John 2:22-25**

Jesus had said:

Whoever doesn't honor the Son doesn't honor the Father who sent him. **John 5:23**

### **The Writer to the Hebrews Confirms Jesus' Humanity**

Therefore, Jesus had to become like his brothers and sisters so that he could be merciful. He became like them so he could serve as a faithful High Priest in God's presence and make peace with God for their sins. Because Jesus suffered temptation when he suffered, he is able to help others when they are tempted. **Hebrews 2:17-18**

We need to hold on to our declaration of faith. We have a superior High Priest who has gone through the Heavens. That person is Jesus, the Son of God. We have a High Priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way that we are, but he didn't sin. **Hebrews 4:14-15**

During his life on earth Jesus prayed to God who could save him from death. He prayed and pleaded with loud crying and tears, and he was heard because of his devotion to God. Although Jesus was the Son of God, he learned to be obedient through his sufferings. **Hebrews 5:7-8**

### **John Remembered Jesus' Principal Message: Love One Another**

The message that you have heard from the beginning is to love each other. **1 John 3:11**

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love other believers. The person who doesn't grow in love remains in death. Everyone who hates another believer is a murderer and you know that a murderer doesn't have Eternal Life.

We understand what love is when we realize that Christ gave his life for us. This means we must give our lives for other believers. Now suppose a person has enough to live on and notices another believer in need. How can God's love be in that person if he doesn't bother to help the other believer?

Dear children, we must show love through actions that are sincere, not through empty words. 1 John 3:14-18

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. How does John describe his relationship with Jesus so as to be a genuine witness of him?
2. Locate verses in the Gospels that would support a Docetist's claim that Jesus was not a human. For example:

You're from below. I'm from above. You're from this world. I'm not from this world. **John 8:23**

3. Locate verses in the Gospels that support the claim that Jesus was fully human.
4. Jesus claimed to be equal with the Father. Locate verses in the Gospels that support this claim.
5. Jesus was fully human, but he never sinned. This is remarkable. Locate verses in the Gospels that support this.
6. Many believe that the apostle John who wrote this letter also wrote the Gospel According to John. Find a verse from the Gospel According to John that is also in the First Letter of John.
7. John remembered Jesus' saying about *love one another*. Locate where Jesus said this twice in the Gospel According to John.

## Week 51

### Do You Know You Have Eternal Life?

Those who obey Christ's commandments live in God and God lives in them. We know that we live in him and he lives in us because he has given us his Spirit. **1 John 4:13**

This is how you can recognize God's Spirit. Every person who declares that Jesus Christ has come as a human has the Spirit that is from God. But every person who doesn't declare that Jesus Christ has come as a human has a spirit that isn't from God. This is the spirit of the Anti-Christ that you have heard is coming. This spirit is already in the world. **1 John 4:2-3**

This Son of God is Jesus Christ, who came by water and blood. He didn't come with water only but with water and blood. The Spirit is the one who verifies this because the Spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. These three witnesses agree. **1 John 5:6-8**

### Test People Who Say They Have the Spirit

Dear friends, don't believe all people who say that they have the Spirit. Instead test them. See whether the spirit they have is from God because there are many false prophets in the world.

This is how you can recognize God's Spirit. Every person who declares that Jesus Christ has come as a human has the Spirit that is from God. But every person who doesn't declare that Christ has come as a human has a spirit that isn't from God. This is the spirit of the Anti-Christ that you have heard is coming. That spirit is already in the world. **1 John 4:1-3**

One way you can know if you are converted is that you know you have the Holy Spirit living in you. Jesus has promised:

If you love me, you will obey my commandments. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper. That help is the Spirit of Truth. **John 14:15-16**

Those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will go to them and make our home with them. **John 14:23**

So if you have the Holy Spirit, then your life will reflect the fruit of the Holy Spirit:

But the spiritual nature produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. **Galatians 5:22**

If your life is exhibiting these fruits, you most probably have the Holy Spirit living in you and God has given you Eternal life.

Another way is to examine what God has said to you.

### **John is the Prophet of Love, but He Is Also the Prophet of Light**

Dear friends, it's not as though I'm writing to give you a new commandment. Rather I'm giving you an old commandment that you've heard from the beginning. It's the old commandment you've already heard. On the other hand, I'm writing to give you a new commandment. It's a truth that exists in Christ and in you. The darkness is fading, and the true light is already shining.

Those who say they are in the light but hate other believers are still in the dark. Those who love other believers live in the light. Nothing will destroy the faith of those who live in the light. Those who hate other believers are in the dark and live in the dark. They don't know where they're going because they can't see in the dark. **1 John 2:7-11**

Light and dark are also constant themes in the Gospel According to John.

He was the source of life, and that life was light for humanity. The light shines in the dark, and the dark has never extinguished it. **John 1:4-5**

Jesus spoke to the Pharisees again: I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will have a life filled with light and never live in the dark. **John 8:12**

Jesus answered: Aren't there twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day don't stumble because they see the light of this world.

However, those who walk at night stumble because they have no light in themselves. **John 11:9-10**

Jesus answered the crowd: The light will still be with you for a little while. Walk while you have light so that darkness won't defeat you. Those who walk in the dark don't know where they're going. While you have the light, believe in the light so that you will become people whose lives show light. **John 12:35-36**

Then Jesus said loudly: Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me. I am the light that has come into the world so that everyone who believes in me will not live in the dark. **John 12:44-46**

Jesus' use of light and dark is very Biblical. While Job uses the word *light* 31x, Psalms closely follows with 24x and Isaiah with 22x.

O Lord, you light my lamp. My God turns darkness into light. **Psalm 18:28**

The Lord is my light and my salvation. Who is there to fear? The Lord is my life's fortress. Who is there to be afraid of? **Psalm 27:1**

Indeed, the fountain of life is with you. In your light we see light. **Psalm 36:9**

Come descendants of Jacob. Let's live in the light of the Lord. **Isaiah 2:5**

The people who walk in darkness will see a bright light. The light will shine on those who live in the land of death's shadow. **Isaiah 9:2**

Now the Lord says: You are not just my servant who restores the tribes of Jacob and brings back those in Israel I have preserved. I have also made you a light to the nations so that you will save people all over the world. **Isaiah 49:6**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. How and when does a person receive Eternal Life? How can you tell?
2. John is emphatic that Jesus came as a genuine human being. He says that Jesus really died physically on the cross. The spirit, the water, and the blood are witnesses. Read **John 19:33-35**. How do these verses compliment John's claim?

3. Why is the activity of the Holy Spirit in your life such a valuable witness that you are truly a child of God? Paul says:

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.  
**Romans 8:16**

4. Some scholars say the Gospel According to John is a Gospel of life, light, and love. Can we say the same thing about John's first letter? Why?
5. The Gospel tells why people are condemned by God.

This is why people are condemned. The light came into the world. Yet, people loved the dark rather than the light because their deeds were evil. People who do wrong hate the light and don't come to the light. They don't want their actions to be exposed. But people who do what is true come to the light so that the things they do for God may be clearly seen.  
**John 3:19-21**

Is this the reason many people hate Christians? Explain.

6. Why was the first thing Jesus created in Creation the light?
7. Why does John say:

Don't love the world and what it offers. **1 John 2:15**



## Week 52

### The Son of God Has Come and Given Us Understanding

I've written this to those who believe in the Son of God so that they will *know* that they have Eternal Life.

We are confident that God listens to us if we ask for anything that has his approval. We *know* that he listens to our requests. So we *know* that we already have what we ask him for. **1 John 5:13-14**

We *know* that those who have born from God don't go on sinning. Rather the Son of God protects them and the Evil One can't harm them.

We *know* that we are from God and that the whole world is under the control of the Evil One.

We *know* that the Son of God has come and have given us understanding so that we *know* the real God. We are in the one who is real, his Son Jesus Christ. This Jesus Christ is the real God and Eternal Life. Dear children, guard yourself from false Gods. **John 5:18-21**

We have seen and testify to the fact that the Father sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God lives in those who declare that Jesus is the Son of God, and they live in God. **1 John 4:14-15**

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the **Messiah** has been born from God. Everyone who loves the Father also loves his children. **1 John 5:1**

Who wins the victory *nikao*-overcome over the world? Isn't it the person who believes that Jesus is the **Son of God**? **1 John 5:5**

John ends his letter telling Christians what they know for certain. See if you can locate verses in the Bible that support these assertions. I will attempt to help you.

The Gospel According to John ends with witnesses affirming the validity of the Gospel writer's testimony:

This disciple was an eyewitness of these things and wrote them down. We **know** that what he says is true. **John 21:24**

### **John Uses the Word *Witness* Many Times**

This life was reported to us. We have seen it and testify *martyreo* –witness about it. We are reporting to you about this Eternal Life that was in the presence of the Father and was revealed to us. **1 John 1:2**

This Son of God is Jesus Christ who came by water and blood. He didn't come with water only, but with water and with blood. The Spirit is the one who verifies *martyreo* this because the Spirit is the truth. **1 John 5:6**

There are three witnesses *martyreo*: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. These three witnesses agree. **1 John 5:7-8**

We accept human testimony *martyreo*. God's testimony *martyreo* is greater because of the testimony he has given about his Son. Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony *martyreo* of God in them. Those who don't believe God have made him a liar. They haven't believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

This is the Testimony. God has given us Eternal Life and this life is found in his Son. The person who has the Son has this [Eternal] Life. The person who doesn't have the Son doesn't have this life. **1 John 5:9-12**

God said to his Chosen People:

You are my witnesses, declares the Lord. I have chosen you as my servant so that you can know and believe in me and understand that I am the one who did this. No god was formed before me and there will be none after me. I alone am the Lord and there is no Savior except me.

I have revealed it to you. I have saved you. I have announced it to you. There was no foreign god among you. You are my witnesses that I am God, declares the Lord. **Isaiah 43:10-12**

Jesus said to his disciples:

The Helper whom I will send to you from the Father will come. This Helper, the Spirit of Truth who comes from the Father, will declare the truth about me. You will declare the truth, too, because you have been with me from the beginning. **John 15:26-27**

Disciples are to witness about Jesus and so make other disciples. **Matthew 28:19-20**. We are to help make true this promise of God:

The world will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord like water covering the sea. **Isaiah 11:9**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Is the Evil One and the Anti-Christ the same person?
2. Jesus is the Savior of the world. **John 4:14**. How would you explain this to a person?
3. John like Paul differentiates between the physical world and the spiritual invisible world. How can we know things about the spiritual world?
4. John says that *to love God is to obey his commandments*. **John 5:3**. Where does Jesus say the same thing?
5. John even uses the expression *born from God* **John 5:4** meaning the new birth from above or born again. What gifts does God give us when we are born again? Does John include all of them in his letter? If not, what gifts does he leave out? Remember his statement in **1 John 5:1** is his number one gift on the list.
6. Probably the last image the apostle John had of Jesus in his physical state was that of his cooking breakfast on the beach for the apostles. **John 21:1-23**. What happened there on the beach?
7. Explain the purpose of John's last command in his letter:

Little children, guard yourselves from false gods. **John 5:21**

## A Parting Word

Thank you for choosing to spend a year with me. I have enjoyed writing this as it has allowed me to think of the many subjects covered in the Bible classes I have taught since 1994. It is surprising how almost every book of the Bible seems to point to facets of discipleship of Jesus.

People have asked me for a favorite verse or pericope in the Bible. This is the one I choose:

Brothers and sisters, because of the blood of Jesus we can now go confidently into the Holy Place. Jesus has opened a new and living way for us to go through the curtain. The curtain is his body. We have a superior priest in charge of God's House. We have been sprinkled with his blood to free us from a guilty conscience and our bodies have been washed with clean water. So we must continue to come to him with a sincere heart and strong faith. We must continue to hold firmly to our declaration of faith. The one who made the promise is faithful. **Hebrews 10:19-23**

## Life Verses

Some people have life verses – verses they return to again and again to remind them of something God said they want to remember and never forget. Mine appeared to me early:

Brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers. You know that we who teach will be judged more severely. **James 3:1**

God sets an even higher standard for priests:

A priest's lips should preserve knowledge. Then, because he is a messenger for the Lord of Armies, people will seek instruction from his mouth. **Malachi 2:7**

Jesus sets a high standard for all his disciples:

Jesus told his disciples: Situations that cause people to lose their faith are certain to arise. But how horrible it will be for the person who causes someone to lose his faith! It would be best for that person to be thrown into the sea with a large stone hung around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to lose his faith. So watch yourselves! **Luke 17:1-3**

This is why I always attempt to locate a verse that supports what I am saying to my students.